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Putting RV Tourism on the Council Agenda

How elected members and executives can turn RV visitation into a measurable economic priority.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary

> Council decisions shape whether travellers stop, stay and spend.

Many councils recognise that caravan and RV tourism is growing, yet relatively few have elevated it from an operational issue to a strategic economic development priority.

Discussions about dump points, parking bays or overnight stays are often delegated to engineering, compliance or parks teams. While these functions are important, they rarely have responsibility for regional economic growth.

This creates a disconnect.

RV tourism is not fundamentally an infrastructure issue.

It is an economic development opportunity.

The councils achieving the strongest outcomes are those that frame RV tourism as an investment in local prosperity rather than simply another asset requiring maintenance.

For elected members and executive teams, the business case is not about caravans.

It is about jobs, local businesses, investment, community vitality and economic resilience.

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Why Governance Matters

Every successful regional tourism initiative begins with leadership.

Without executive sponsorship, even well designed projects struggle to gain momentum.

A successful RV tourism strategy requires alignment between:

- Economic development.
- Tourism and destination management.
- Planning and infrastructure.
- Community engagement.
- Finance and grant funding.

RV tourism sits across every one of these functions.

That makes governance essential.

The Wrong Conversation

Too often, council reports focus on questions such as:

- Should we install another dump point?
- Can caravans park overnight?
- Who will empty the bins?
- Will maintenance costs increase?

These are operational questions.

Executive leaders think differently.

Their questions are:

- How does this support economic development?
- Will this increase visitation?
- Will local businesses benefit?
- Does it align with our Community Strategic Plan?
- Can it attract grant funding?
- Will it improve regional competitiveness?

The language used determines whether a proposal receives strategic attention.

Speak the Language of Executives

When presenting to a CEO or General Manager, avoid describing projects as tourism infrastructure.

Instead, frame them as:

- Economic development initiatives.
- Investments in the visitor economy.
- Contributions to the Community Strategic Plan.
- Enablers of local business turnover and employment.
- Levers that improve regional competitiveness.

This positions the proposal within broader council priorities.

What Mayors Want to Know

Elected representatives are often interested in community outcomes.

They typically ask:

- Will local businesses benefit?
- Will this create employment?
- Will residents support the project?
- Will it strengthen our town?
- Will visitors return?

Demonstrating visible community benefit builds confidence and political support.

What Treasurers Want to Know

Finance leaders rarely oppose good projects.

They oppose weak business cases.

Strong proposals clearly explain:

- Capital cost and operating cost over the asset’s life.
- Estimated visitor numbers and expected length of stay.
- Projected visitor expenditure in local businesses.
- Return on investment against comparable council assets.
- Alignment with existing budgets or grant funding pathways.

Simple economic modelling is often more persuasive than lengthy narrative.

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Building the Business Case

A compelling business case should answer four questions.

Why now?

Australia’s caravan and RV market continues to grow.

Travellers increasingly seek regional destinations offering authentic experiences and practical infrastructure.

Communities that invest today position themselves to capture future economic activity.

Why here?

Explain why your community has competitive advantages.

Examples include:

- Position on a major touring route.
- Proximity to iconic natural or heritage attractions.
- A walkable town centre with a strong hospitality offer.
- Local produce, cellar door or festival experiences.
- An established reputation for warm regional hospitality.

Infrastructure succeeds when connected to destination strengths.

What is the economic opportunity?

Estimate:

- Number of RV parties visiting each week.
- Average length of stay.
- Average daily spend per party.
- Total annual visitor expenditure in the town.
- Flow on impact for local employment and business turnover.

Economic outcomes should remain the central focus.

How will success be measured?

Include practical indicators such as:

- Visitor nights recorded in the precinct.
- Retail and hospitality turnover in the surrounding streets.
- Traveller reviews and destination sentiment.

- Repeat visitation and referrals.
- Grant funding secured against the project.

These measures demonstrate accountability and ongoing value.

Align With Existing Council Strategies

Projects gain greater support when they reinforce existing priorities.

Consider linking proposals to:

- The Community Strategic Plan.
- The Economic Development Strategy.
- The Destination Management Plan.
- Placemaking and main street revitalisation programs.
- Regional plans led by state government or Regional Development Australia.

RV tourism should never appear isolated from broader council objectives.

Working Across Departments

Successful projects rarely belong to one team.

Typical responsibilities include:

- Economic Development — leads the business case and industry engagement.
- Tourism — shapes the visitor experience and destination narrative.
- Engineering — delivers the physical infrastructure.
- Planning — manages approvals, land use and integration with the town.
- Finance — supports funding pathways and long term asset management.

Clear governance improves collaboration.

Learning from Regional Australia

Communities such as Langhorne Creek, Warrnambool and Coober Pedy demonstrate that practical visitor infrastructure becomes significantly more valuable when supported by coordinated planning, destination development and strong partnerships with local businesses.

The infrastructure itself is only one component.

Leadership delivers the outcomes.

Funding Opportunities

Many councils overlook external funding.

Projects may align with:

- Australian Government regional and community grants.
- State tourism and destination development programs.
- Regional Development Australia funding rounds.
- Local roads and community infrastructure programs.
- Industry partnerships with tourism, retail and hospitality operators.

Well prepared business cases improve competitiveness for funding.

Five Questions Every Council Should Ask

1. Does our Community Strategic Plan recognise the visitor economy?
2. Are we measuring visitor spending or simply visitor numbers?
3. Do executive leaders receive regular visitor economy reporting?
4. Are tourism, planning and economic development working together?
5. Is RV tourism viewed as infrastructure or as economic development?

The answers often reveal opportunities for improvement.

Recommendations

1. Position RV tourism within the Economic Development portfolio.
2. Develop a whole of council visitor economy strategy.
3. Use economic impact modelling to support investment decisions.
4. Engage local businesses early.
5. Report outcomes using measurable economic indicators.

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Looking Ahead

Australia's regional visitor economy will continue to evolve.

Communities that embed RV tourism within strategic planning rather than operational discussions will be better positioned to attract investment, secure grant funding and strengthen local economies.

Leadership will increasingly determine competitive advantage.

Conclusion

The strongest business case for RV tourism is not built around caravans.

It is built around people.

People who visit regional communities.

People who support local businesses.

People who create employment.

People who strengthen regional economies.

When councils frame RV tourism as an economic development strategy rather than an infrastructure project, conversations change.

Executive support grows.

Investment becomes easier to justify.

Communities become more competitive.

Ultimately, successful governance is not about approving another parking area.

It is about recognising that visitor infrastructure, thoughtfully planned and strategically governed, can become one of the most effective investments a regional council makes in its future prosperity.

WHERE THIS LEADS NEXT

Turning insight into action.

Every regional community has the potential to strengthen its visitor economy. The difference lies in leadership, planning and a willingness to think beyond individual assets and towards the whole visitor experience.

If you would like to discuss how these principles apply to your council, tourism organisation or region, Argo Advisory & Consulting works with regional leaders across Australia to translate insight into practical, measurable outcomes.

CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

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About the Author

Founder and Principal Consultant, Argo Advisory & Consulting. David advises regional councils, tourism organisations and economic development agencies on visitor economy strategy, RV tourism and regional growth. Drawing on deep marketing expertise, Australian authenticity and extensive travel throughout regional Australia, he helps communities develop practical, evidence based strategies that increase visitation, strengthen local businesses and create more resilient regional economies.