

Push Notification System

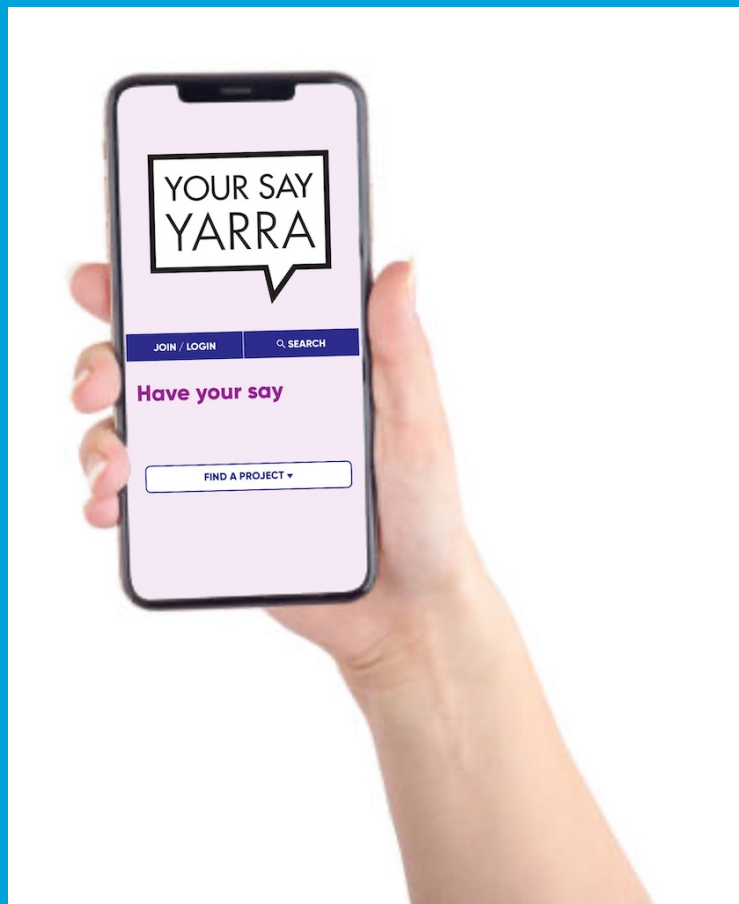


Image credit: Streets Alive Yarra, logo from City of Yarra



Prepared by: Streets Alive Yarra
streets-alive-yarra.org

Foreward

Streets Alive Yarra is a non-profit, volunteer, resident and ratepayer action group with a [vision](#) for more trees, wider footpaths and vibrant businesses in thriving [neighbourhoods](#). We see our streets being used by people from [all ages](#), irrespective of whether they choose to walk, cycle, use public transport or drive. Residents and shoppers are able to move safely, comfortably, and conveniently around Yarra; and can easily find a park near shops.



Image credit: OCULUS Landscape Architecture and Urban Design

Streets Alive Yarra was founded in 2017 and now has over 2,500 likes on Facebook. A network of local champions develops concepts and proposals for how to improve their local street or precinct. Streets Alive Yarra is also Yarra's Walkability Action Group (WAG) representative for Victoria Walks.

Further information is available at: streets-alive-yarra.org/about.

Support for Push Notification System

Streets Alive Yarra supports the motion to request a report on a possible push notification system, because this would help deliver effective community engagement.

Context

The City of Yarra has prepared a draft [Community Engagement Policy](#) which commits to community engagement that is:

- Representative
- Accessible
- Meaningful
- Transparent
- Accountable
- Respectful
- Flexible
- Supportive
- Prepared

A push notification system would support those principles, because it would significantly decrease the effort required by residents to stay informed and to offer feedback.

Your Say Yarra app

Most people in Yarra use smartphones. The most effective way of delivering push notifications is via a smartphone app, for example a 'Your Say Yarra' app for smartphones and tablets.

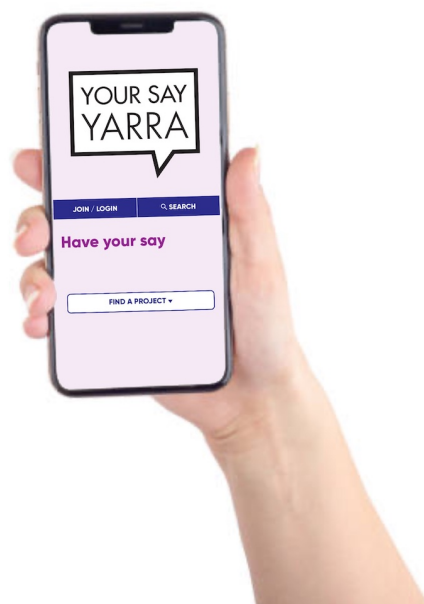


Image credit: Streets Alive Yarra, logo from City of Yarra

In contrast to other methods, such as email, or via a web page, push notifications to an app are proven to be effective. The ‘small red dot’ invites attention, as demonstrated by popular social media apps such as Facebook.

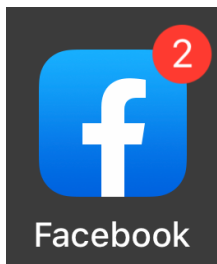


Image credit: Facebook

The underlying technology of pushing notifications to apps is also robust, in contrast to notifications delivered via a web page.

Features

Consider an app (and associated server side software) with the following features:

- Verified accounts for everyone on the City of Yarra electoral roll
- Verified subsidiary accounts for dependents
- Account profiles include age, location, gender, and preferred language
- Automatic multi-lingual interface based on machine translation
- Account profiles optionally include banking details
- Customisable push notifications such as “all planning applications in Yarra” or “any works within 1 km of my home”
- Automatic analysis of survey responses and collation into tables and charts

Benefits to residents

The app could offer the following benefits to residents and ratepayers:

- Push notifications for any issue that matches your personal settings
- Convenience to tap and complete surveys, or submit responses to applications for planning permits
- Transparency to view the results of the survey (don’t need an Officer to prepare charts or tables)
- Ability to pay rates, fees or fines
- Ability to request an issue to be escalated to a [citizens’ jury](#)
- Book Council services, e.g. green waste collection
- Read Council newsletters or public service alerts

Benefits to Councillors

The app could offer the following benefits to Councillors:

- Enable low-cost high-speed surveys, e.g. answers within 1 week, with automated delivery of tables and charts, or results displayed on a map of Yarra. At present, Councillors are required to balance the significant cost of conducting traditional community engagement with the value of obtaining the results. With an app, the barrier is removed. Councillors can request engagement on a much wider range of issues, and have the results available before the next Council meeting.
- Reduce the 'error in the feedback loop' between residents and Councillors, because the app would be easier to use, and thus increase the response rate for each survey, e.g. from < 1% of residents to > 10% of residents. This would greatly increase the confidence level in the representativeness of the result.
- Simple access (for those with 'Councillor' accounts) to the full text of all survey responses.
- Enable contentious issues to be rapidly identified and then escalated to a higher-cost form of community engagement, such as a [citizens' jury](#).

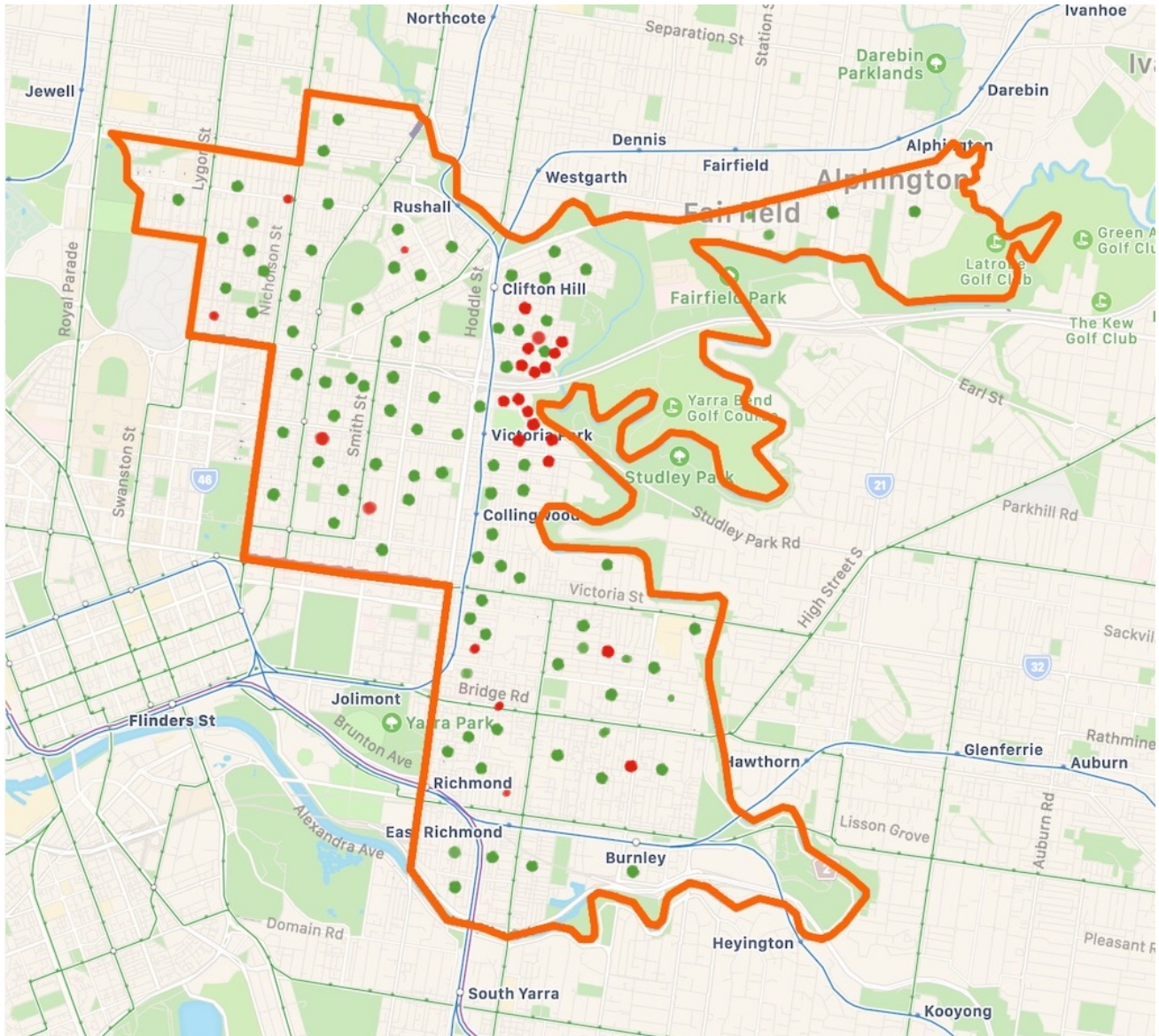
Benefits to Council Officers

The app could offer the following benefits to Council Officers:

- Reduce cost and effort to deliver a much wider range of surveys
- Automated, rapid and low cost analytics, such as displaying responses by age, location, gender or spoken language, or displaying results on a map of Yarra
- Reduce cost and effort to deliver invoices and receive payments for, a wide range of fees, fines and permits.
- Reduce the 'error and delay in the feedback loop' between residents and Officers. For example, the 'error in the loop' can be reduced because the app would be easier to use, and thus increase the response rate for each survey. Similarly, the 'delay in the loop' can be reduced because surveys could deliver tabulated results within 1 week.

Example output

The app could automatically generate output, such as the results of a survey, available to residents, Councillors and Council Officers alike, such as for/against responses displayed over a map of Yarra. To de-identify responses, the app could automatically include a random location displacement for each response, of up to 200 metres in any direction.



Example of a possible automatically generated chart, showing location of respondents who are for or against a proposal. Image credit: Streets Alive Yarra, Apple Maps.

Business case

Yarra's 2020/2021 adopted budget shows a cost of \$7.7m for advocacy, engagement and communications:

- Advocacy, engagement and communications – \$7.7m (4% of the budget)

Source: <https://www.yarracity.vic.gov.au/about-us/council-information/council-budget>

A push notification system, such as a smartphone app and associated server side software, would reduce these costs, because it would save the costs of printing and distributing paper materials, as well as reducing the labour cost of analysing survey response data.

It would also deliver clear value - a core function of local government is to engage with the community - and a push notification system, linked to verified account holders, would enable a much greater breadth and depth of community engagement.

We expect that developing and maintaining such software would have a clear positive business case, with a payback time of less than one year.

Concluding remarks

Streets Alive Yarra would be delighted to provide further detail or explanation of the themes raised in this document.

info@streets-alive-yarra.org
streets-alive-yarra.org