



**Optimism:** Gippsland Circular Economy chief executive officer Scott McArdle (right) outlines plans for hydrogen vehicle manufacturing in the region with Nationals Leader Peter Walsh.

photograph michelle slater

# Valley at heart of hydrogen plan

By MICHELLE SLATER

THE Latrobe Valley could become a hydrogen heavy vehicle and airplane manufacturing and fuel-hub, according to a consortium of Gippsland businesses investing in new technology in the region.

Gippsland Circular Economy chief executive officer Scott McArdle was at the Latrobe Regional Airport last week, making the announcement that could lead to 5000 new Gippsland jobs in the next five years.

"This is established technology operating globally, really, this is about introducing and scaling up but with a local manufacturing flavour," Mr McArdle said.

"It's a huge opportunity in terms of manufacturing jobs, regional investments and a new economy."

The Gippsland Circular Economy precinct would develop a network of manufacturing sites for hydrogen fuel cell heavy vehicles and aircraft, as well as hydrogen production sites.

The project would convert existing internal combustion engines to hydrogen as well as making new vehicles.

The hydrogen would be created from a range of resources such as electrolysis, agricultural or industrial waste, or from diverting non-recyclables from landfill.

Mr McArdle stressed the consortium was not looking at creating hydrogen from extractive industries like coal or gas.

He said the consortium had identified a range of sites but was not ready to announce where they were.

"We are not talking five or 10 years down the track, we are talking production starting next year in terms of manufacturing opportunities, and production of the hydrogen in the next year-to-two years," he said.

"We are hopeful in the next year we can get in the order of 100 to 150 new vehicles on the road and integrate new vehicles in the region. Some of these vehicles will be going internationally.

"It's a start, but this will rapidly scale up to tens of thousands of units and all the different components that go into manufacturing a new vehicle."

Mr McArdle pointed out opportunities to train workers in hydrogen manufacturing and production, with jobs for skilled workers in the Valley and for those "locked out of the workforce".

He said the consortium had spoken to the state and federal government about the project.

State Nationals Leader Peter Walsh met with Mr McArdle in Morwell to discuss the precinct, which could help meet the federal government's target of net zero emissions by 2050.

"It's about utilising the existing skills base to make sure we have a next generation of careers, jobs and keeping the economy going and stimulating it further once brown coal power generation is phased out," Mr Walsh said.

"I think this is a really exciting announcement for the region, state and the nation. You have a group of people coming together with some serious money to put on the table and make this happen."