

Yarra Bicycle Users Group – Submission to the East-West Link Needs Assessment – July 2008



This submission concerns Recommendation 4 and Recommendation 7 and is intended to be an overview of those recommendations in the EWLNA.

Recommendation 4: East-West Road Connection

Yarra Bicycle Users Group Inc. (YarraBUG) is a community voluntary organisation located in the inner suburbs of Abbotsford, Alphington, Burnley, Carlton North, Clifton Hill, Cremorne, Collingwood, Fairfield, Fitzroy, Fitzroy North, Princes Hill and Richmond. The BUG advocates on behalf of cyclists for improved cycling conditions for cyclist within and travelling through the Yarra area.

YarraBUG strongly objects to the proposed East-West road connection for the following concerns; Melbourne's transport requirements are based greatly on an overstretched road transport system. Despite incrementally rising oil prices, supply issues and a looming environmental crisis in the form of climate change, successive Victorian Governments have relied too much upon the easy availability of fossil fuels, which has acted as a major disincentive for investment for rail freight and public transport infrastructure over several decades.

Further reliance upon road transport should not be encouraged. Instead options for providing more sustainable freight logistics and personal mobility should be an immediate priority for all levels of government, in the light of Ross Garnaut's report to the Federal Government on climate change and recent CSIRO predictions of petrol reaching \$8 per litre within ten years.

Taking a local perspective of the proposed road tunnels impact in the Yarra area, Alexandra Parade will become a main carrier for traffic both into the tunnel and into the CBD. This will lead in turn to Queens Parade traffic sharply increasing, especially for trucks using the tunnel. This directly conflicts with VicRoads plans to redevelop Queens Parade from Merri Creek to Smith Street. There will be further pressure upon scarce public space in the inner suburbs, such as Smiths Reserve in Fitzroy, 'The Island' at North Fitzroy and remnant reserves along Alexandra Parade, which will all be impacted the need for further road space for the planned construction process and then multiple entrances required for the road tunnel.

Motor vehicle pollution has been proved to cause almost 400 premature deaths each year in Melbourne and Sydney. The City of Yarra already has higher rates of respiratory disease than the metropolitan average; the tunnel and the vent stacks will add to fine particle pollution rates in an already polluted inner city area. Unfortunately many people's homes maybe subject to compulsory acquisition near the construction area and future tunnel route. The remaining property owners' will most likely find their quality of life and local community amenity severely impacted upon by increased noise, both during and after tunnel construction. Also the road tunnels planned through the suburbs of Fitzroy, Collingwood, Carlton, Kensington and Sunshine will be of little or no benefit to local residents and will probably not even divert congestion from existing local roads.

For the 18 kms of proposed road tunnel through Melbourne inner suburbs, an estimated \$10 billion has been possibly allocated in the EWLNA budget via funding partnerships. This huge financial investment would be better invested for long-term, not short-term benefit, by allocating it towards train extensions for outer suburbs, such as Doncaster, Rowville, South Morang, East Cranbourne and Wyndham Vale. In taking a narrow scope of attempting to provide an alternative to the Westgate Bridge, the EWLNA has inadvertently fallen in to a trap of attempting to play off inner and outer Melbourne residents against each other, when in reality all of Melbourne will be worse off by the continual marginalising of sustainable, practical transport solutions.

Almost daily the media is reporting upon the massive increases in public transport patronage on all metropolitan and rural lines and the State Government do not seem to be actively facing the challenge of providing for Victoria's transport future.

The State Government itself seems conflicted over road traffic and vehicle use, as illustrated in its continually changing policies and strategies. For example, the Northern Central City Corridor Study (2003) ruled out further discussion of an inner north road tunnel, while recently Roads Minister Tim Pallas made this statement when launching TravelSmart and Local Assess Grant Program (June 2008)

“The Brumby Government is taking action to deal with congestion and this program was established to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport to get around,” Mr Pallas said.

“TravelSmart and Local Area Access Grants assist councils and other organisations to deliver projects that improve access and liveability.

“Ultimately, it’s about changing people’s behaviour by reducing our dependence on cars.

“Funding will be provided to projects that improve pedestrian and bike access to public transport, education and employment facilities and other community services.

“This year, we are particularly interested in projects that encourage existing car users to switch to sustainable transport modes, and converting short car trips into walking, cycling or public transport travel.

“The benefits are numerous, including less traffic congestion, reduced greenhouse gas emissions and a more physically fit community.”

Recommendation 7: Cross City Cycle Links

The seven recommended cycle projects read like a hastily researched inclusion into the EWLNA to stay within the study’s brief for east-west relevancy for transport requirements. Although the hard questions must be asked: how do these projects plan to overlay or compliment the existing work planned by the City of Melbourne, City of Yarra and City of Darebin and the State Government?

Other concerns about Recommendation 7 relate to recent State Government bicycle infrastructure, namely:

- Ongoing projects allocated from VicRoads annual bicycle budget
- Transport & Liveability Statement (May 2006) \$72m allocated over 10 years
- TravelSmart and Local Assess Grant Program (June 2008) \$5.2m allocated to 52 local projects.

Questions must be asked of how Recommendation 7 will compliment, or even supersede the Inner Melbourne Action Plan (IMAP) in regards to Action 2.3: Bicycle Network Legibility which included two parts: bicycle network gap analysis and a bicycle network signage strategy.

This clearly illustrates one important point made in Recommendation 8: that cycling infrastructure across Melbourne has a suffered from a systematic and fragmented approach from too many conflicting agencies, agendas and a lack of true consultation with community stakeholders.

For example: YarraBUG consulted with the then Department of Infrastructure during 2006-2007 in regards to getting a shared pedestrian/cyclist bridge included in the Clifton Hill Rail Duplication Project, now being constructed between Westgarth and Clifton Hill Stations.

Despite intensive consultation with Dol project management and support from the City of Yarra, we were bluntly told this valuable missing link on Melbourne’s bicycle network was not seen as a priority as other stakeholders were consulted prior to the public consultations and the BUG’s involvement, and they had duly provided feedback to Dol that the shared bridge was viewed as unnecessary.

YarraBUG must also strongly make the point that providing safe, well-connected bicycle infrastructure is as vital as improving road user awareness and education, although the latter is outside the EWLNA scope. Both infrastructure and behavioural awareness are important factors in contributing towards more people viewing cycling as a safe, sustainable and accessible form of travel, especially in the current climate of uncertainly with rising oil demand issues, community health issues and climate change. Also ensuring cycling is compatible with other transport modes, such as buses, trams and trains are overdue but vital links in ensuring peoples personal mobility.