Submission to North East Link Project Environmental Effects Hearing

Wednesday 4th September 2019

Carolyn J. Ebdon - resident of Narre Warren.

Thankyou for the opportunity to appear at this Hearing and to speak on the Environmental Impacts of the Proposed North East Link Project.

I live in the south eastern suburbs, I am a road user, and I have been driving on Melbourne's roads for more than 49 years. Therefore, I feel I am well qualified to speak from a motorists' point of view. I am also an environmentalist and have a great appreciation of the importance of Melbourne's beautiful parks, gardens and nature reserves, and the value of the fauna and flora these parks and gardens contain. I also wish to mention I'm a member of the Save the Dandenongs League and the Dandenong Ranges Branch of the National Trust, and I have many family, friends and contacts who I know feel the same way I do.

In responding to this proposal, I have a number of questions that I believe this Committee needs to address:

- How can we justify the enormous loss of open space? Precious open space is essential for the health and wellbeing of people/families living busy lives in densely populated suburbs as is well documented scientifically.

  With the increase in townhouse and apartment living, these open spaces are being used and enjoyed more and more, and making up for the loss of the traditional "backyard" of the past.

  Passive recreation is just as important as active recreation. So I am concerned not only with the potential loss of open space but the effects of noise and vehicle pollution on these open spaces. And this new road with its expected increased vehicle usage, will substantially increase these deleterious effects.

- What of the loss of our trees? More than 25,000 mature trees are estimated to be removed, and many more likely to be impacted. Melbourne used to be famous for its parks and gardens and open spaces. How can the removal of so many established trees be sanctioned in order to build a road? We are all shocked to think the amazing old River Red Gum - National Trust Tree of the Year - has been targetted for removal, but this project will impact on so much more, such as Yarra floodplain, the Banksia Wetlands, Koonung Creek, Bulleen Park, Bolin Bolin Billabong - these are parklands and reserves we should be doing everything we can to preserve and protect.

- How will the whole eastern region of Melbourne cope with the traffic chaos, particularly on the Eastern Freeway, during the seven-ten years construction period? Can this be fully assessed in advance? Surely not, as nothing like the scale of this project has ever been undertaken before.

  I can attest to the two years of congestion, delays, stoppages and upheaval along the Monash freeway while it was upgraded and widened. Roadworks, lane closures, changes to road conditions etc. causes drivers to become stressed and impatient, and in my opinion this leads to poor judgement and increased risk of accident.
• How do we estimate the effect on a whole generation of school children who will attend the several schools in the immediate vicinity of the project. They will be subjected to the turmoil, the upheaval, noise, and loss of amenity and precious recreation space and sporting facilities. Will they be distressed and will this hamper their educational progress? How will the long term affects of this be quantified, and will they need to be compensated at some future time?

• What about the effects on the happiness, health and mental wellbeing of untold numbers of the public residing within the scope of the project who may be upset and distressed at seeing the damage to their neighbourhood environment. And even worse, for all the properties that have to be acquired along the route... people/families having to find somewhere else to live, businesses being closed down, or transplanted to other areas and having to start all over again...! In fact how can the effects on any of this be measured in order to realise the full extent of the mental anxiety that may be inflicted during the construction of this project?

• How many other people like me feel saddened, shocked, appalled, overwhelmed, helpless and defeated by this whole process that is employing so many highly skilled and intelligent planners, designers, architects, and entire government departments, and yet has completely missed the essential design element of completing Melbourne's Ring Road.

• Why wasn't the full cost of the project which is now estimated to be in excess of $16 Billion disclosed before Option A was selected? If the true cost had been disclosed, would another route for the North East Link have been chosen instead?

According to information provided at an earlier date in this Hearing, the population growth in the outer south eastern and outer north western suburbs is expected to be greater than other areas of Melbourne. However, this road is being designed to primarily provide for vehicles travelling from north eastern suburbs to the city via the Eastern Freeway...why?

Why were the terms of reference for this project so limited as to ignore the needs of vehicles travelling between the outer south eastern and the outer north western suburbs? This is particularly relevant considering Melbourne's international airport is located in an outer north western suburb. Why are motorists who wish to travel back and forth to the airport from the south-east expected to funnel onto the Eastern Freeway heading towards the city, requiring all the costly upgrades to this important traffic link?

What of the effects of the proposed increase in noise and vehicle exhaust pollution on already busy and heavily populated suburbs within the project zone and why is this considered acceptable when a simple and logical solution would have been to route this important and much needed roadway through a less populated area?

And finally, though it's probably outside the scope of this Hearing, what happens in 15-20 years when Melbourne's population is approaching the predicted eight million if we still don't have an outer ring road? Are city planners planning for that eventuality? Are they setting aside land now for future roads through outer suburban areas, or will we all have to go through another process just like this one?

It would be appreciated if the Committee are able to find answers to any of the above questions.

In closing I'd like to thank the Veneto Club for having us here. This has been an excellent choice of venue for this Hearing.

Carolyn Ebdon