The Blackburn & District
Tree Preservation
Society Inc.

The North East Link Project

Presentation to the Inquiry and Advisory
Committee

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President BDTPS Inc.
The main objective of the Tree Society is to protect, preserve & enhance the trees & vegetation within the City of Whitehorse.

The society consists of ninety-five members with an Executive Committee of five and a Friends group of over one hundred people and affiliated community groups.
... And we’ve been active since 1959.

The Tree Society was formed 60 years ago for the following reasons:

❖ Accelerated tree & vegetation loss in Blackburn post-WW 2

❖ Little protection for the natural values of Blackburn Lake & the Blackburn Triangle

❖ Lopping of trees in Blackburn streets by the Box Hill Electricity Company

The Jeffery Street Bridge over Gardiners Creek, Blackburn, 1953
(Ref: Blackburn – A Picturesque History, Robyn Da Costa)
Eastern Metropolitan Melbourne – 2019
(A sea of grey with islands of green)
This satellite photo demonstrates that sustained community action and tree protection controls have worked in Whitehorse since 1986.
‘Tree canopy makes a vital contribution to the wellbeing and liveability of urban neighbourhoods by absorbing heat retained by roads and buildings, supporting cleaner air and water, insulating against noise pollution and providing local habitat.’

(Page 56 of the NEL Environmental Effects Statement Summary Report)
The Tree Society is Opposed to the North East Link

Reasons:

• The negative environmental effects of the proposed construction works on the natural landscape values abutting the Eastern Freeway

• The anticipated increased traffic congestion/gridlock in the main north-south roads in Whitehorse during construction and after completion of the project

• The massive loss of tree canopy & shrubs in the eastern suburbs with little space remaining for its replacement close to source

• The glaring lack of government interest in the exploration of ‘nimble’ public transport solutions e.g. a high frequency rapid transit radial bus network, support for light rail, investigation of a ‘trackless’ tramway network (similar to that in major Chinese & European cities and being rolled out in Perth, Australia), optically-guided electric buses, enhanced active transport networks etc.

The tree society is vitally interested in the mitigation of construction impacts on the natural landscape of these areas and the enhancement of parklands and open spaces adjoining the Eastern Freeway and associated major north-south feeder roads.
In car-dominated Australia, governments have struggled to reallocate road space away from inefficient private cars in favour of spatially efficient mass transit.

During peak periods cars carry an average of just over 1 person per vehicle!

Is this what the residents of eastern metropolitan Melbourne want or deserve?
Indeed there are many examples of cities around the world* de-commissioning freeways to make way for people-friendly urban environments

Examples include:

1974 – Harbor Drive, Portland Oregon USA
1991 – Embarcadero Freeway, San Francisco USA
1995 – Central Artery (locally called the ‘Distressway’) in Boston Mass. USA
2002 – Park East Freeway, Milwaukee USA
2003 – Cheonggyecheon, Seoul South Korea
2011 – Rio Madrid/M-30 Freeway, Madrid Spain
2012 – Pompidou Expressway, Paris France
2013 – The George Viaduct, Vancouver Canada

* But not yet in Australia!
Cheonggyecheon, Seoul - South Korea

This

To this
The Construction of the North East Link will result in massive Environmental Degradation.
Ecological Impacts

- 52 hectares of remnant bushland destroyed
- 300+ indigenous trees and tens of thousands indigenous shrubs, native grasses and ground-storey plants lost
- Hundreds of large, mature trees either cleared or will die due to lack of water
- Tree losses impacting the health of the Yarra River
- Threatened plant species even more threatened!
- Localized impacts on terrestrial fauna
- Negative ecological impacts on the culturally significant Bolin Bolin Billabong
Tree and Canopy Losses
(Tables 4 & 5, page 56, NEL EES Summary Report)

NB: 15,000 trees will be removed or ‘potentially impacted’ to make way for the Eastern Freeway expansion alone.
• **Parkland and Open Space Impacts**
  – 182,300 square metres of parklands and recreational spaces lost
  – Linear reserves along existing freeways gone
  – No compensation for loss of open space
  – Increases in noise and air/particulate pollution

• **Koorie Cultural and Historical Impacts**
  – Bolin Bolin Billabong threatened
  – Significant River Red Gum chopped down
  – Koorie sites of significance impacted

• **Amenity & Well-Being Impacts**
  – Air quality compromised
  – Traffic disruption, noise and dust emissions, changes to access and connectivity
• **Groundwater & Surface Water Impacts**
  – Diversion and barreling of creeks (1.4 km for Banyule Creek & 1.6 km for Koonung Creek)
  – Wetland habitat destruction
  – Native fauna losses e.g. waterbirds

• **Landscape & Visual Impacts**
  – Insufficient space for vegetation buffers to screen views of noise walls and other elevated structures

• **Social, Business & Community Impacts**
  – 36 residential properties compulsorily acquired
  – 102 businesses either permanently acquired or the properties temporarily occupied during NEL construction
Transport: Impacts During & After NEL Construction

The construction of the North East Link and associated works on the Eastern Freeway will:

• **Double the width of the Eastern Freeway**
  The NEL will negatively impact the Eastern Freeway from Bulleen Road to the Ringwood tunnels – there will be at least double the number of lanes. Trees and shrubs in the freeway reserve will make way for bitumen surfaces

• **Destroy adjacent Parks and Open Spaces**
  All linear parks, open spaces, waterways and shared use paths abutting the freeway are in imminent danger. Increasing freeway width will require the destruction of adjacent parklands and open space on both sides of the freeway from Bulleen Road through Mont Albert North, Box Hill North, Blackburn North, Nunawading and Mitcham

• **Cause gridlock on our major North-South Roads**
  The main north-south roads in Whitehorse are ALL currently at or near ‘over-capacity’ at peak periods. Major road-widening will be needed to cope with the projected increase in traffic volumes on Elgar Road, Station Street, Middleborough Road, Surrey/Blackburn Road and Springvale Road.
Traffic Situation in Whitehorse (2017)

By the definition of AM Peak traffic ‘over capacity’ for arterial roads (i.e. over 800-900 vehicles per lane per hour), the map below shows Elgar, Middleborough and Surrey Roads are already over capacity and Springvale Rd. and Station St. are borderline over capacity. See also Bulleen Rd. (South) and Doncaster Rd. (South).

Source: NEL Business Case Document, Chapter 2, Page 17, Figure 2-11 (Excerpt)
North East Link traffic distribution

As discussed previously, the majority of traffic from North East Link travels to and from the eastern end of the Eastern Freeway. Approximately 75 percent of vehicles travelling southbound on North East Link head east when joining the Eastern Freeway as presented in Figure 16.

Approximately 30 percent of North East Link traffic also travels through the EastLink tunnels; this means that 45 percent of traffic on North East Link either enter or exit the Eastern Freeway between Doncaster Road and Springvale Road. Only five percent of traffic on North East Link is destined for Hoddle Street.

Figure 16  Distribution of southbound North East Link traffic using the Eastern Freeway (2036)
Predicted changes in daily truck volumes (2036) with North East Link focusing on Whitehorse municipality and surrounds

Red = ↑; Blue = ↓
Environmental Reparation Initiatives IF Construction of the NEL Occurs

The ‘Age’ article: ‘Green alert as city sheds leafy suburbs’ by Adam Carey, 29 July 2019
Melbourne’s Tree Canopy is in Sharp Decline

According to an RMIT research study, *Urban Vegetation Cover Change 2014-2018* (July 2019), authored by Associate Professor Joe Hurley *et al* from RMIT’s Centre for Urban Research:

- Whitehorse lost 2.3% tree canopy cover within a 5-year period from 2014 to 2018
- Manningham lost 2.5%, Boroondara lost 1.3% & to the north, Banyule and Nillumbik lost 1% each
- Melbourne has lost 2,000 hectares of tree cover (2014-2018)
- The eastern suburbs have experienced the greatest loss

Major causes of Tree Canopy Losses in Metropolitan Melbourne include:

- Large scale infrastructure projects on public land such as level crossing removals, recently at Blackburn and Heatherdale and massive projects like the NEL.

- The preference for quantity infill development to house Melbourne’s burgeoning population at the expense of maintaining and enhancing the quality of the natural landscape. (NB - the objectives of higher density living within a high quality natural environment are not mutually exclusive with the application of world-class urban design principles)

- Consequently the built form dominates the residential block such that true canopy (or shade) trees can never again grow and thrive on much of the privately owned land in Melbourne.
• The Tree Canopy in Whitehorse has declined by 2.3% over the five years (2014-2018) and now stands at around 20%.

• This makes Whitehorse one of the most tree canopy-impoverished municipalities within the middle-ring of metropolitan councils in Melbourne.

• The worst offenders* for tree losses in Whitehorse are (in order):
  – State government & semi-government authorities
  – Local government
  – Developers
  – Residents

  (*Refer to examples on page 8 of the presentation document)
Local Government Attempts to Reverse Tree Canopy Decline

• The Whitehorse Municipal Wide Tree Strategy (2017)
  – The application of permanent citywide tree protection provisions in the Whitehorse Planning Scheme

• The Whitehorse Urban Forest Strategy (2018)
  – A guide to tree management in the Whitehorse urban environment on all land
  – Objective is to increase the Whitehorse tree canopy cover from 20-22% currently to at least 30% by 2030
Whitehorse LXRA Offset Planting (2017) – A case study

• The recent Level Crossing Removals at Blackburn & Heatherdale Roads in Whitehorse resulted in the removal of over 600 trees and thousands of shrubs.

• Community-led negotiations resulted in the State Govt. & LXRA committing to an offset planting initiative of 24,000 indigenous plants on two sites in Whitehorse.

• The plan included 1250 indigenous trees (Eucalypts and Acacias).

• This is an excellent case study that should be replicated in Whitehorse and elsewhere if the NEL project goes ahead.
Offset Planting Proposal for Whitehorse

• The objective is to compensate for tree and vegetation losses along the northern boundary of Whitehorse

• NEL construction will mean the removal of 15,000 trees along the Eastern Freeway (Source page 56, NEL EES Summary Report)

• The Whitehorse ‘share’ for the tree removals is approx. 5,000

• Using the LXR Offset planting as a guide:
  – >10,000 indigenous trees to be planted in Whitehorse (NOT along the freeway reserve because there will be insufficient space)
  – In addition 204,000 indigenous shrubs/lower storey plants to be planted (i.e. 20 times the tree number)
  – Plant as close to the freeway as possible in parks* NOT affected by the NEL works (including during the construction phase)
  – Start planting asap
  – NEL to fully fund the offset planting program for the first two years
  – Similar offset planting programs will occur in other municipalities affected by the North East Link

* See Appendix for a list of suitable parks in Whitehorse
CONCLUSION

- Massive, ongoing and insufferable disruption during the construction and operational stages of NEL
- The environmental and amenity impacts much worse than stated
- Any beneficial effects of the NEL on Melbourne’s traffic minimal
- Politicians need to sanction and create a world-class public transport network and stop building expensive, useless freeways.
- NEL is one of the most important and potentially destructive issues facing the Whitehorse civic and urban environment
- NEL will not alleviate motor traffic issues in Whitehorse but will only exacerbate current traffic congestion & gridlock for major north-south roads
- Proactive offset plantings need to be initiated as soon as possible in Boroondara, Manningham and Whitehorse to help reverse the drastic tree canopy decline in the eastern suburbs caused by NEL if it goes ahead.
• The Ultimate Freeway Interchange!
A prediction of what the world will look like if we continue to promote automobile dependence

Source: Preservation Institute Blog
Thank you.

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