

## Reclaiming suburban streets – traffic and the inner north

For some time, residents and community groups in Melbourne's inner northern suburbs have been expressing concerns about the impact of heavy traffic flows on neighbourhood amenity in the region.

In its submission, the North & West Melbourne Association observed that major transport routes passing through the inner suburbs "have impeded connectivity, movement and amenity within our community".<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the Carlton Residents Association pointed out that "excessive traffic levels have substantial negative impacts on community life and health".<sup>8</sup>

The City of Yarra also noted that local streets in the municipality "currently experience much higher levels of traffic than their function as local streets would suggest. The impacts of these high traffic levels are significant – as well as pollution, noise and community separation, high traffic levels have significant economic and social impacts."<sup>9</sup>

Amenity issues in the inner-north are largely the result of high traffic volumes (mostly cars) through these suburbs during peak periods, the congestion that results from large volumes of north-south traffic intersecting with large volumes of east-west traffic and 'rat running' through suburban streets to escape this congestion.

The current east-west road link between Flemington Road and Nicholson Street that runs across Melbourne's inner north is already at capacity during peak periods and there is little opportunity to increase capacity without major incursions into Royal Park and other properties abutting the route. The lack of alternative east-west routes across the northern CBD also compounds the concentration of traffic on the Elliot/Macarthur/Cemetery/Princes/Alexandra Parade route.

Over time, the high traffic levels on this east-west route have led to an increase in the 'green' traffic signal time given to the route at the expense of north-south routes. In turn, this has led to increasing delays to tram and bus services operating along north-south routes such as Royal Parade and Lygon, Nicholson, Brunswick and Smith Streets. Pedestrians, cyclists and motorists using these routes are also penalised.

As well as the impact on residents, commuters and visitors to the region also experience difficulties caused by the high traffic flows through the area. These difficulties include problems with parking, the shortage of safe pedestrian connections between the University and hospital campuses, and delays in moving through or around the area by car or bus as a result of traffic congestion.

While a number of submissions spoke of the need for amenity improvements in this area, many did not see a new road link as offering benefits in this regard. The Study Team believes that this is not the case: a road project that removes large amounts of traffic from passing through this area has the potential to deliver very substantial amenity benefits, particularly if accompanied by imaginative urban planning, improvements in public transport and more walking and cycling options. The Team notes that other cities around the world are exploring the option of directing more traffic into tunnels to improve the surface environment, provide better conditions for walking and cycling, and free up new urban space for residential development.

As congestion on cross city routes grows, a new road link will also reduce the volume of traffic 'rat running' through inner suburban streets to avoid congested routes and intersections.

As noted elsewhere in this report, the 2003 NCCC draft strategy found that an east-west road tunnel would deliver significant benefits to the inner-north, including removing traffic from Royal Park, reducing traffic levels and delivering positive environmental benefits. The Scenario Appraisal conducted for the NCCC recognised that the tunnel could deliver opportunities for traffic relief and improved amenity. The appraisal noted that measures such as "lane reductions, exclusive public transport lanes and/or resetting of traffic signals to favour north-south public transport and traffic" could ensure that spare road space created by the tunnel would not be used by additionally generated or re-routed road traffic.<sup>10</sup>

In exploring potential new east-west road links, the Team has been particularly conscious of the need to ensure that these options also include measures that will significantly improve amenity in the inner-north – over and above removing traffic from suburban streets.

7. North & West Melbourne Association Inc submission to the EWLNA (2007), p.1

8. The Carlton Residents Association Inc submission to the EWLNA (2007), p.2

9. City of Yarra submission to the EWLNA (2007), p.26

10. DOI (August 2003), NCCC Scenario Appraisal Report, p.33