INTRODUCTION

The Victorian Government is removing 50 dangerous and congested level crossings around Melbourne, including the level crossings at Edithvale and Bonbeach.

These projects involve removing the crossings using a trench solution and rebuilding the stations at both locations.

As part of ongoing consultation, the Level Crossing Removal Authority (LXRA) sought feedback on urban design elements and ways to mitigate construction by holding a community workshop at the Patterson River Golf Club on 14 September 2017 [7pm – 9pm].

The workshop was attended by 32 people.

The majority of people who attended the workshop were from Edithvale and Bonbeach, although there were also some from Carrum and Seaford.

Construction is expected to start at both locations in 2019.

METHODOLOGY

LXRA hosted a community workshop, with the objective being to capture local ideas and views about both the Edithvale and Bonbeach level crossing removal projects – both of which are subject to an Environment Effects Statement (EES).

LXRA also wanted to provide the community with an opportunity to openly discuss any issues, ask any questions about the project and provide context for the EES.

Two presentations were given on the night to provide information and context to the communities. The first was an overview of the current project design and EES process. The second focused on the construction impacts and their possible mitigation. The workshop was aimed at gathering information for urban design, and focused on the following key themes:

- Walking and cycling connections
- Look and feel of the station precinct
- Planning and managing disruption.

Full length roll plots were placed at each of the tables, and the community were encouraged to draw on them to mark routes or points of interest/ideas. In addition to the maps, there were sticky notes, which could be placed on the map to note ideas. A scribe at each table kept a record of the ideas and issues raised during the conversation.

In addition to the formal engagement activity, LXRA staff spoke with concerned residents to discuss the project design, solution, answer questions, hear concerns and capture views on the detailed aspects of the projects at both Edithvale and Bonbeach.
Walking and cycling connections

The questions we asked were:

- What trips do you commonly make across the railway line? Where are you going to/from?
- Do the existing/proposed new crossing points work well? Why or why not?
- Which pedestrian crossings are most valuable and why?

At both locations, most people were travelling by foot to the beach, and to and from the station. There were concerns that the current pedestrian crossings nearest to the station entrance were not safe, and lead to jaywalking across the Nepean Highway.

The crossings at The Glade, Bonbeach and Berry and Fraser Avenues, Edithvale were the most used, and the community were happy with them where they were. Adding a crossing at Brixton was also a popular suggestion.

Concerns were expressed that the shared walking and cycling path would not be used, since family riders used the Wetlands track, and more experienced cyclists stayed on the Nepean Highway. The community did not think that the path would be used by either category of rider, and said using that space for vegetation, or moving it to Station Street, rather than the Nepean Highway might work better.

Look and feel of the station precinct

The question we asked was:

- Looking at the key considerations for these sites, do you have ideas for how the station precinct could be improved?

Overwhelmingly, the community wanted to see a ‘beachy’, natural treatment of the stations, with soft tones, timber and the use of blues and greens to tie into the surrounding area. A low profile, subtle station that did not take away from the village feel of both Edithvale and Bonbeach was also mentioned.

The community said that adequate seating and lighting at the station were important. A feeling of visibility and safety was also paramount. A few tables mentioned having a kiosk for coffee and papers at the station, and more myki machines were also suggested. To deter graffiti inside the trench, the community mentioned murals, using either indigenous artwork, or coastal-themed screening.

In terms of landscaping, the community wanted to see hardy, native shrubs and other plants that would survive the beachside climate. Planter boxes and other landscaping in the car parking area were popular, as were sloping gardens to soften the look of the traffic barriers.

Other ideas included capturing rain water to use on the station gardens, including solar panels on the station and electronic signs to update travellers on train arrival times.

Key themes observed

- 'Beachy' theme, with natural treatment
- Subtle station that blends with the village feel
- A safe, well-lit and open station design
- Hardy plants to survive the seaside climate
- As much landscaping as possible.
Planning and managing disruption

The questions we asked were:
• Based on what you’ve heard about what’s typically involved in removing a level crossing, what are your main concerns?

Please share your ideas for minimising disruption/addressing your concerns.

The key concerns for both the Edithvale and Bonbeach communities were: increase in traffic congestion, noise, dust, access to property and having enough buses. There was also some concern around interruption of utilities (such as power, gas and water) during construction.

Community members were also concerned about the timing of the major occupation. Half the residents said that the summer season would be the best time, stating that there is less traffic over the holiday period. However, the other half said that summer was their busiest time as people headed to the beach, and many events (including a cycling event) were held then.

Staggering the works with other level crossing removal projects, such as Cheltenham and Mentone, was also mentioned.

In order to mitigate construction impacts, community members suggested the following:
• Regular updates on rail and road closures
• Controlled access to local roads to avoid overcrowding residential areas
• Free food and coffee sourced from local traders for those taking replacement bus services
• Relocation available for those closest to the works.

• Keeping two north-bound lanes on the Nepean Highway open in the morning peak, and two south-bound lanes open in the evening peak.

It was also suggested that more parking would need to be made available at the next active train station during rail closures, since many people said they would drive to up the line to the next station.

Key themes observed
• Concerns around an increase in traffic congestion during works
• Concerns around noise levels
• Conflicting suggestions about the best timing for the works
• Strong communication and plenty of warning before works required.

WHAT WE HEARD

The following were the key themes across the entire workshop:

• Pedestrian crossings at The Glade, Bonbeach and Berry and Fraser Avenue, Edithvale were the most used
• Having easy access to the beach was key for both sites
• Overwhelming support for a natural, ‘beachy’ vibe and a low-profile station design
• Community in favour of native plants for landscaping
• An increase in parking was unanimously popular
• Regular updates and plenty of notifications of closures
• Access to property to be maintained
• Traffic congestion to be mitigated as much as possible.
WORKSHOP FEEDBACK

At the end of the workshop, we asked for feedback from the community on how well we ran the workshop, and how beneficial they found the exercise.

Overall, the feedback was very positive, with the majority of the participants rating the workshop good or excellent (the rating scale ran: poor, fair, satisfactory, good, excellent). Below are some comments about the workshop from participants:

“I’m feeling more confident that the community is being consulted.”

“It was well organised and run.”

“I felt able to comment and be listened to which is very important. Well done.”

“This was one of the best workshops LXRA has run.”

Next steps

Community and stakeholder feedback will be used to refine the reference designs and feed into the EES process.

It will also be used during the project’s tender and detailed design phase to further shape the project and deliver positive outcomes for the Edithvale and Bonbeach communities. More information about the design will be available once a contractor is brought on board and as part of the EES exhibition process that will commence early 2018.