INTRODUCTION

1. Since its establishment in 1967, La Trobe’s Melbourne Campus has played a crucial role in shaping the city’s north.

2. The relationship between our campus and the surrounding areas is extremely important. It forms the heart of our vision for the future, and these valuable connections will be vital in the next chapter of our story.

3. The role of La Trobe University has been recognised in successive Metropolitan Strategies including Melbourne 2030, Shaping Melbourne’s Future, and Plan Melbourne.

4. Globally, La Trobe University is ranked in the top 1.2% of universities. We offer a diverse range of educational options and we are leaders of global research across a number of fields. Our economic contribution is unmatched in Melbourne’s North.

5. La Trobe University has been long recognised as a key regional focus for the education and research sectors with a focus on health, sports, information technology and innovation.

6. Other institutions and companies are located within the campus including Agriculture Victoria, Victoria Police Forensic Services Centre, Rio Tinto, WEHI and City Football Group.

7. Most recently, La Trobe University has been recognised as a key part of the La Trobe National Employment and Innovation Cluster (NEIC), one of Melbourne’s seven recognised NEICs.

8. The La Trobe NEIC contains over 28,000 jobs (with over 7,000 of these at La Trobe University) and includes Heidelberg Activity Centre, the Austin and Heidelberg Repat Hospital, the Northland Urban Renewal Precinct and the West Heidelberg Industrial Precinct.

9. Melbourne’s northern suburbs have recently undergone rapid population growth. This is a region enlivened by new businesses and the promise of new transport infrastructure – changes that herald a bold new chapter for La Trobe.

10. Our vision is to create a University City of the Future at our 235-hectare campus where study, research, development and sharing of ideas to solve real-world regional and global challenges.

11. The central academic precinct, where purely academic activities have taken place, will be a thing of the past - there will be no boundaries to either location or activity.
12. We will create a world-class setting by becoming a ‘living laboratory’: a co-location and collaboration with industry and partners who will develop, test and adopt new technologies.

13. Our University City of the Future will have people at its core: a place where relationships are forged between young entrepreneurs, mentors, supporters, and funders. It will serve as a focal point for the University and the local community to connect with each other and the wider world.

14. The development and implementation of the University City of the Future is progressing and will help deliver significant jobs and residential growth and economic performance to successfully embed the La Trobe NEIC at the core of the economic development of Melbourne’s North and Victoria.

15. However, for our University and the Cluster to truly thrive we need greater support from the government in more accessible transport options.

THE ROLE OF TRANSPORT

16. Our position close to the M80 Northern Ring Freeway and this project, the planned North-East Link Project, means we can easily access Victoria’s regional transport and distribution network. Our vision is to integrate with both the existing and new transport infrastructure, connecting the precinct to the state and the nation.

17. It is clear to us that the number one issue for our University City of the Future is transport – in particular, improved universal access for all our stakeholders.

18. Enabling our students, staff, commercial partners and community genuine universal access to our University City of the Future is critical and is fundamental to our ongoing viability.

19. Our annual travel survey of staff, students and business partners revealed that 67% of people who travel to our Bundoora campus come by private vehicle. 24% come by public transport.

20. Compared with other Universities, this 24% travelling by public transport is significantly lower and the reliance on people to travel to campus by car is neither environmentally nor economically sustainable. As an example in contrast, Monash University’s Clayton campus (a suburban based campus similar La Trobe Bundoora) reports that they have 42% travelling by public transport.

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY SUPPORTS THE NEL

21. La Trobe University welcomes the North East Link (NEL) project as it improves car access to Melbourne’s Eastern and South-Eastern suburbs, a key catchment for workers and students at the University.

22. The State has identified a transport problem and proposed a project costing around $16B to fix it. However, we believe that to fix the problem requires more than a toll road.

23. It requires an integrated transport solution involving bus services and priority infrastructure improvements, cycling and pedestrian pathways as well as upgrades to existing roads.
24. Considered together, an integrated transport solution provides the way to manage and mitigate the environmental effects of the project.

25. However, a truly integrated transport response can’t wait until the NEL project is delivered – it needs to be implemented now, during construction, as well as for when the NEL project is up and running.

26. Unfortunately, the Environmental Effects Statement (EES) is silent on public transport improvements in the northern section of the NEL project - improvements that could remove thousands of vehicles from the corridor. They are not even identified or funded as a short-term, partial solution.

27. This project is going to take around seven years to build. During this period, we will be welcoming approximately 64,000 new students and staff to our Bundoora campus.

28. It is imperative that our students’ and staff ability to access our campus is not made worse during and post the NEL project. We believe that east/west travel through the NEL alignment will be significantly impacted during construction and that this will impact many of our staff and students. This includes in excess of 5,000 staff and students who currently travel to La Trobe from Melbourne’s south-east.

29. We are confident that improvements in public transport access will be sufficiently successful that they will be retained long after the construction of NEL is over.

30. The University has been working with various government agencies since 2012 in developing a range of land use and transport strategies that support the economic development of the University and more recently the La Trobe NEIC.

31. Most recently we assisted the Department of Transport to develop a Future Transport Network plan for the NEIC in late 2018 in collaboration with:

   a) The Victorian Planning Authority;
   b) Public Transport Victoria;
   c) Vic Roads; and
   d) Darebin, Banyule, Whittlesea Councils.

32. From our review of the EES we have a number of concerns with the design of the NEL project.

33. We would like to propose a number of improvements that we believe would improve the environmental performance and mitigate the impacts of the project. In summary these improvements are:

   a) major redesign of Kingsbury Drive Bundoora to create a world class boulevard;
   b) improved public transport services to La Trobe University and the La Trobe National Employment and Innovation Cluster;
   c) improved public transport infrastructure around the North East Link alignment giving priority to public transport and improvement to the operation of bus routes in the region; and
   d) improved trail networks for cyclists & pedestrians.
La Trobe University has significant concerns about the heightened use of Kingsbury Drive for commuters to access NEL.

Kingsbury Drive is a significant regional road asset under the ownership of VicRoads. It runs from Plenty Road at the north western end of our campus through to Waiora Road to the east.

Currently Kingsbury Drive bisects the campus leaving the La Trobe Sports Park to the west disconnected from the main part of our campus to the east. We significant people movement across this road which will increase substantially into the future.

Occupying approximately 60 hectares in the south-west corner of the University’s Bundoora campus, the La Trobe Sports Park is a world-class regional asset used by residents of surrounding communities. The initial investment of $70m by the University has included an AFL oval and associated pavilion, a FIFA accredited all-weather soccer pitch as well as the upgrading of existing ovals and pavilions.

The new facilities, on a footprint comparable in size to the Melbourne Sports and Entertainment Precinct (Melbourne Park), will become a major attraction in Melbourne’s north.

In December 2019 Stage 1 of the Sports Park will be completed, providing access to the indoor high-court arena for over 10,000 participants and spectators each week from the local community. We have invested over $70m to date in these state-of-the-art facilities together with an additional $5m from Banyule Council for community access.

This is a much-needed sport and recreation asset for the region and becomes arguably more important with the decrease in available sport and recreation facilities due to the North East Link Project.

With its main car parking and public transport arrival points to the east (other side) of Kingsbury Drive, it is crucial that access across Kingsbury Drive be seamless and safe for pedestrians.

The severing impact of Kingsbury Drive will only become more acute as further developments occur on both sides of this road.

At present, traffic bound for the NEIC from the north will typically use Plenty Road, Kingsbury Drive and Waterdale Road. This contributes to congestion along Plenty Road, increasing journey times for through traffic from the north to destinations south of the precinct.

However, Kingsbury Drive plays a critical role in the connecting NEL to the Cluster, a fact that has been identified by the Victorian Planning Authority and the State Government.

The existing La Trobe University Campus Master Plan (2014) and the Victorian Planning Authority’s Draft Framework Plan for the La Trobe NEIC both identify the importance of planning and designing such a link to have a slower speed environment that fulfils a place-based function.
46. The 2014 University Master Plan centres on La Trobe’s transition from a campus to a vibrant and dynamic University City of the Future, created from a network of integrated University neighbourhoods.

47. The Master Plan is predicated on decreasing reliance on cars and more trips being made to and from the University on public and active transport.

48. Kingsbury Drive will be lined with buildings, health and hospital facilities, research facilities as well as the Sports Park. It will be alive with activity from early morning until late in the evening, seven days a week.

49. According to the La Trobe University Master Plan Kingsbury Drive corridor should have:
   a) a focus on creating a slower speed boulevard;
   b) an increase foot traffic necessitating a slowing of traffic;
   c) an increase in signalised crossing points;
   d) an upgraded pedestrian footpaths;
   e) on-road cycle lanes; and
   f) enough space for operating buses.

50. Kingsbury Drive is one of many arterial roads outside the project boundary that is profoundly impacted by the NEL – during construction and post-completion with changes in traffic movements expected.

51. The EES documentation is absent of any discussion regarding mitigating treatments for these externally-impacted roads.

52. In the case of Kingsbury Drive, the NEL EES (Chapter 9 Traffic and Transport, p.78) forecasts a total reduction of approximately 2,600 vehicles per day in both directions in 2036 ‘with project’ versus the 2036 ‘no project’ case.

53. While the NEL will assist the vision for Kingsbury Drive in reducing the growth in forecast traffic volumes to 2036, the project provides no further assistance to ensure that these benefits are more permanently realised. La Trobe is concerned that these improvements will be lost as traffic volumes continue to grow beyond the 2036 date.

54. We believe that we have a window of opportunity before NEL is completed to formalise the function and look of the road and avoid exacerbating the disconnection of our campus to a more significant degree.

55. Our discussions with the Department of Transport reveal that there is no current or planned funding commitment in place for improvements or upgrades to Kingsbury Drive.

56. We request that the IAC Panel recommend that the road owner (State Government) work with La Trobe University on developing the Kingsbury Drive boulevard strategy so that the ultimate concept is designed, funded and constructed prior to the opening of the NEL project.

57. This will give us the confidence to continue to develop the La Trobe University City of the Future as a key focus for Melbourne’s North, with the knowledge that Kingsbury Drive will serve a supportive role and not detract from our efforts.
The EES document is a major disappointment for the university in relation to public transport – both during the construction period and after the project is delivered.

The current NEL design takes for granted that current public transport options are fit for purpose, and there is no provision for any real improvement to public transport services for movement into the northern region of the alignment.

Public transport services into the La Trobe Cluster from the eastern and south-eastern suburbs are already poor and our review of the EES documentation makes us concerned that construction of the project will exacerbate this already poor service.

While many of our students and staff would prefer to catch public transport to the university, particularly those who live south of the Yarra River, they presently find themselves unable to do so efficiently, if at all. (Refer to actual case studies in Appendix 1 below).

In essence, no new public transport services are offered that are relevant to LTU (indeed the only improvement is the Doncaster Busway to the CBD). This makes it hard to see how the NEL project is part of an integrated transport strategy – something we advocate strongly for.

What’s more, it is unclear how much public transport services will be impacted by construction activities across the seven-year period and we are extremely concerned about this.

Our students are facing seven years of disruption and if the performance of public transport services declines further, they will be more adversely impacted than any other commuter type.

This will significantly impact thousands of our students and staff every day. This is not an acceptable outcome.

There needs to be investment in improved public transport services to La Trobe University and the La Trobe National Employment and Innovation Cluster and these should include:

a) improved public transport infrastructure around the North East Link alignment giving priority to public transport and improvement to the operation of bus routes in the region. This should include bus-queue jump infrastructure at traffic lights and bus priority lanes along key major roads, including Bell Street, Manningham Road and Bulleen Road.

b) a new high-capacity and high-speed bus that links La Trobe University and Doncaster and Box Hill (train station);

c) a new high-capacity and high-speed bus that links La Trobe University and Swinburne University (at Glenferrie Train Station);

BIKE RIDER & PEDESTRIAN TRAIL NETWORKS SHOULD BE IMPROVED

There needs to be much more information regarding the trail networks in the region and how they can be leveraged to reduce congestion.
At present, the NEL EES documents provide for a new north-south cycling corridor between Banyule and Greensborough and the M80 trail. While the new trail is welcomed, connections onto it are generally of local scale and confined to connecting east-west across the project. These works provide for few improvements beyond the Project boundary.

There appears to be very little for commuters to LTU or other major destinations more distant from the project, nor are there significant improvements to important breaks in regional connections, especially south of Plenty Road to the Main Yarra Trail in the Banyule Flats.

LTU has put forward a number of new suggestions to improve connections to the new north-south path, including:

a) between Watsonia and the La Trobe university campus – a connection that will ultimately provide a link between the Plenty River Trail and the Darebin Creek trail; and

b) shared paths along Kingsbury Drive linking the campus to Macleod Train Station (supplementing works proposed by NEL).

While the NEL proposes a major new north-south trail, it could be improved substantially by providing for better links and lateral connections to major destinations to the east and west of the alignment, including the University. In our view these can assist in minimising the disruption during construction.

**SUMMARY OF ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In summary, La Trobe University seeks the following improvements to the NEL design in order to create a truly integrated transport solution:

Major redesign of Kingsbury Drive Bundoora to create a boulevard by developing a “place-based” slow-speed environment and regular pedestrian connections across the road to unite both sides of the La Trobe University campus.

Improved public transport services to La Trobe University and the La Trobe National Employment and Innovation Cluster. These should include:

a) improved public transport infrastructure around the North East Link alignment giving priority to public transport and improvement to the operation of bus routes in the region. This should include bus-queue jump infrastructure at traffic lights and bus priority lanes along key major roads, including Bell Street, Manningham Road and Bulleen Road.

b) a new high-capacity and high-speed bus that links La Trobe University and Doncaster and Box Hill (train station);

c) a new high-capacity and high-speed bus that links La Trobe University and Swinburne University (at Glenferrie Train Station);

d) Improved trail networks for cyclists & pedestrians, including:

1) an improved cycle-priority link between La Trobe University and Macleod Train Station and to the east of the NEL;
2) a new link between La Trobe University and Watsonia town centre; and

3) improved links south of Plenty Road to the Main Yarra Trail.

Natalie MacDonald
Vice-President (Strategy & Development) La Trobe University

30 August 2019
APPENDIX 1

Case Study 1

Jessica, 21 is a La Trobe University Student who lives in Box Hill.

Jessica secured entry to start a Psychology course at La Trobe University this year. She chose La Trobe based not only on her marks, but on the outstanding reputation of the course amongst similar courses available at Melbourne based universities.

Since starting at La Trobe, Jessica has really enjoyed the course, particularly the hands-on practical experience that La Trobe is renowned for. She is thriving but is finding the travel to and from University very challenging.

Despite living near Box Hill Train Station, Jessica has rarely caught public transport because it takes her just over an hour to complete the 17 km journey on two buses: the 903 Smart bus to Heidelberg Train Station and the 551 bus to La Trobe University.

Jessica’s father has been driving her when he can find the time, but his availability doesn’t always coordinate with her classes and often means that Jessica has to get public transport home afterwards. As a result, Jessica has frequently skipped classes and tried to study from home instead. While this has meant she can keep up with lectures, she feels that she is missing out on the benefits of learning hands-on in tutorials and in prac classes. If Jessica were to buy a car, she would need to re-prioritise her study/work balance and is concerned this may adversely impact on her study/research outcomes.

Jessica is now seriously considering whether she continues to study at La Trobe. She has inquired and discovered that she might be able to get second-year entry at a number of other universities. These unis are all easier to get to by public transport.

While Jessica would rather stay at La Trobe because of its reputation and the teaching quality, the travel situation is really getting her down. If she does decide to continue at La Trobe, she sees no option but to save to buy a car.
Tim, 45, lives in Nunawading. He has just started at La Trobe as a Project Manager at the Melbourne (Bundoora) campus with the Infrastructure & Operations Division.

Prior to working at La Trobe, Tim held a job as a Project Manager with the State Government. In that time, he used to catch public transport to work, using a local bus that linked to the local train station and the Lilydale/Belgrave Train to Parliament Train Station. In the morning peak, the journey from home to work took less than 50 minutes thanks to express trains. The return trip was closer to an hour, with a ten-minute wait at the bus stop. About once a fortnight, Tim, a casual cyclist, rode to work along the Main Yarra Trail, a journey of about 1 hour 20 minutes.

Since joining La Trobe, Tim has attempted to commute to work on public transport on several occasions. While a similar commute length as to the city, the journey to La Trobe is far more complex: Tim has to catch four different public transport services: the local bus to the nearby train station, the train to Box Hill Train Station, the 903 Bus from Box Hill to Heidelberg and the 551 bus from Heidelberg Train Station to the campus bus terminal.

On each occasion, the journey from has taken well over 1 ½ hours. On several occasions, the journey has taken over 2 hours because of poor connections between the services.

The experience has left Tim feeling that there is little alternative but to drive, so he recently bought a new car. By comparison with public transport, the car trip is relatively straightforward: using Springvale Road, the Eastern Freeway, Rosanna Road and Waiora Road takes between 35 to 50 minutes depending on congestion at the Banksia Street, Manningham Road and Bulleen Roads.

Tim recently attempted the ride but found the 1 ½ hour ride too gruelling because of poor connections between the Main Yarra Trail and Banyule Creek trail and having to cross very busy roads.