Riverland Conservation Society of Heidelberg Inc.

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Introduction

Riverland Conservation Society of Heidelberg Inc. has been involved in the conservation of Yarra Flats Park and its environs for nearly 40 years and has a wealth of understanding of the area. I am presenting on behalf of the group, as its president, and also the residents adjacent to the park as a committee member of the YPPA - a local residents group.

In our submission we have outlined our concerns with the project that we feel impact on our side of the river. We have not mentioned the numerous other negative effects on the parklands of other sections of the Yarra Valley and its tributaries such as loss of parkland, removal of mature trees, effects on water, increased traffic flows and associated noise and air pollution.

Rather than rehash all this I would like to concentrate on some suggestions that could be implemented that would ameliorate or offset some of these adverse effects.

I will present these in two sections.

The first involves the southern section of the YFP and the adjacent housing area and they relate to the up-gradeing of the Eastern Freeway.

The second centres on the northern end of the park where important water issues effecting the Yarra River and its wetlands can be better addressed.

Southern end of the park and adjacent housing area

Noise pollution

We would like to see a noise barrier along the northern side of the Eastern Freeway east of Burke Road for 900m to reduce the quite intrusive noise levels in this end of the park and along the adjacent Guyere Cresent and The Boulevard. Noise travels from the freeway travels across the valley unimpeded especially with southerly winds or on still nights.

The upgrading of the Eastern Freeway will clearly make this worse.

Effects on Houses

Several of the residences there are only just over 400m from the freeway
The current noise levels there are quite significant and on our readings along Guyere Cres can exceed 63Db.
The freeway is only 50m from the southern tip of YFP.

The level of noise in the Southern section of Yarra Flats Park, by our readings, regularly exceeds 60Db and the EES studies confirm this. We consider that 60Db for passive recreational areas such as YFP is actually quite high.

The enjoyment of parkland such as Yarra Flats Park is significantly diminished due to freeway noise. People go to the park to escape from suburbia and noise. The health benefits of this green oases are now widely acknowledged.

As we pointed out in our submission the Victorian noise guidelines are in actual fact exposing people to significant health risks according to the WHO guidelines.

World Health Organisation 2018 Environmental noise guidelines for the European Region
Road traffic noise Recommendations
For average noise exposure, the GDG strongly recommends reducing noise levels produced by road traffic below 53 decibels (dB) Lden, as road traffic noise above this level is associated with adverse health effects.

For night noise exposure, the GDG strongly recommends reducing noise levels produced by road traffic during night time below 45 dB Lnight, as night-time road traffic noise above this level is associated with adverse effects on sleep.

To reduce health effects, the GDG strongly recommends that policy-makers implement suitable measures to reduce noise exposure from road traffic in the population exposed to levels above the guideline values for average and night noise exposure. For specific interventions, the GDG recommends reducing noise both at the source and on the route between the source and the affected population by changes in infrastructure.

We argue that there is around 10 hectares of parkland that would be significantly improved by this barrier on the north side of the Eastern Freeway. Currently it is so noisy there that few people walk around it.

Given that over 50 hectares of parkland appears to be lost with the project it seems reasonable to spend money to offset this by improve this area of YFP with the installation of less than 1 kilometre of sound barrier.

Air pollution

Air pollution from the Eastern freeway will be significantly increased which will regularly blow across our residences and parkland with the prevailing westerly winds. Consideration should be given to filtering the exhaust gasses of the ventilation structures of the NE link.
Northern end of Yarra Flats Park

Wetlands need water

The Annulus Billabong situated in the north of the park is one of Melbourne Water’s 11 key wetlands along the Yarra River.

It is only 250m across the Yarra from Bolin Bolin, which along with the Banyule flats are significant reasons that the the government wants to spend billions of dollars on tunnels for the NE link. This clearly indicates the importance of such areas to our community.

Riverlands are strong proponents of restoration of the Annulus Billabong and Melbourne Water is in the process of assessing this proposal.

We propose that The Annulus area is of a high enough community value to warrant incorporation of a restoration project into the NE link project.

This would also help to offset deleterious effects of the NE link project on groundwater and surface water quality in the area.

Figures 22-8 and 22-13 in the EES show that ground water in the Annulus area is likely to be drawn down during construction and post completion. This draw down will also be exacerbated by reduced rainfall with climate change and increases in paved surfaces in the surrounding area with increased development. These combined forces are a very real threat to this wetland area.

The large increase in runoff from the extra pavement from the NE Link appears to present significant risks to water quality in the Yarra River SW10,15,16,18 and 21. The amount of retarding basins etc proposed seems small compared to the large increase in hard surface.

There is the opportunity to help ameliorate these adverse effects from the NE link by diverting the large Banksia drain which presently flows directly into the Yarra at Banksia St across to an old billabong just south of Banksia Street and then into The Annulus Billabong.

This is being assessed by MW’s consultants and is our preferred option for re-watering the Annulus.

The amenity for people using the park would be greatly improved as water and associated wildlife are always powerful drawcards.

Back in the 1980’s the MMBW re-watered the Annulus with windmills producing a haven for waterbirds and visitors. This fell into disrepair due to lack of ongoing funding. The diversion of the Banksia drain would be a permanent answer.

There would also be the prospect of being able to plant hundreds of trees between Banksia St and these wetlands.

In summary there are some reasonably simple projects to minimise the deleterious effects of the NE Link on our valley and river, the cost of which is trivial compared to the costs already being made to protect other sections of it.
Northern end of Yarra Flats Park