FRI 06TH SEP 2.05pm  Representing John Donohue Auto Repairs  Lani Donohue  Sub no: 283

Firstly I'd like to thank Manningham council for the use of the video footage of the Bulleen Business Precinct on the screen today.

I am here today to voice my opinions on the NORTH EAST LINK Project. I am not an expert, nor am I here to speak on a professional/technical level (I am sure you would have heard ample on a professional/technical level anyway.) I am here on a human level and would like to advise on the thoughts many of us carry. I feel as many other people involved with this NELP situation, anger and frustration

*Through my story today there are three things I'd like to share with you:*

1. *The impacts on us*
2. *Our experience of the process and how it has contributed to those impacts*
3. *What we hope this Panel will do to help us*

I'd like you to take a moment please to view a picture of my family, and there are up to 1,000 families within our business precinct that this project will affect. Once you count the number of people in each family, it would equate to the thousands. Directly affected are blue collared and most prominently middle aged men.

It has been stated that this situation is as large as the Ford closure.

The loss of businesses and services to the local community will be huge.

I hold this issue close to my heart as I have been actively involved on the BIZ committee. I have also spoken with most business and property owners. The sadness and stories are amazing.

Human nature can be sad in a lot of cases, however if you are not directly involved or disadvantaged due to a situation, then you just don't care.

No disrespect to parklands, schools or sporting venues, however this is affecting up to 1000 ++ LIVELIHOODS.

The thoughts and questions that run through my head continuously are:

The human cost due to this project is just so high. Why has the routing now been changed so much from the 1972 Melways map? It showed no interchanges and taking out a less developed area being the Banyule Flats and not what it is today the Bulleen Flats? How can a project be confirmed without INITIAL assessments on the impacts to land holders, business holders and their staff.

How can such a developed area be disrupted and destroyed by this road project? When has there ever been any alternative designs discussed? This design needs to be rejected until an assessment throughout is achieved for an alternative option to lower the impacts and costs. There needs to be a lower impact option at the interchange or preferably the interchange located elsewhere. Unless you have the funds to tunnel the whole way, well this should not
be allowed. Why are we told the soil is not strong enough to support tunnelling in our area? Isn’t anything possible in today’s day and age? Well how come they can tunnel under the English Channel? Why do you need this interchange? How necessary is it? Is it all about tunnelling costs and recouping the build cost through tolls? Without the interchange, travellers could use the NE Link, enter onto the Eastern Freeway and get off at Doncaster Road in order to reach the Doncaster Hub. As the roads will be quieter due to the NE Link why can’t travellers just drive another route in order to reach Heidelberg from Greensborough or vice versa.

From the very beginning a pamphlet was released showing 4 route options (A,B,C,D) and in my opinion as well as many others I have spoken to believe the pamphlet was designed with option A to be the favourite. It was pretty much decided upon prior to the pamphlets release.

Is this option really going to fix the real issues and be the cheapest option? In the long run a lot of other roads will need upgrading as they become more and more congested and the costs will be huge. If a ring road was achieved it would have probably fixed a lot of road issues.

As the project developed, brochures and advertising were released however there was not much awareness (due to lack of advertising exposure) on our business precinct. We have come this far now with a lot of locals unaware of what was happening. Once the EES was released and our situation hit the media people finally became aware.

The not knowing over the past 2 years has not been easy to absorb. I think this has been the hardest part to deal with. The frustration, stress and lack of direction is ridiculous for all concerned. This situation in my opinion as well as many others is a disgrace.

NELP needed to research and identify a relocation area for all of the businesses concerned. Without this level of prior planning, they should never have been allowed to choose this area. We needed the council and NELP to become more proactive from the very beginning. This far in and we have no offset location that is 100% confirmed to relocate. Maybe one possible area being Webster’s Road in Templestowe, however it is definitely not like for like, especially for service businesses. Where possible, a location with better exposure needs to be sourced within Manningham, then re zoning needs to be achieved prior to building. This could all take several years to approve!!!! It worries me as we don’t have the luxury to sit back and wait for our new location!!!!

We don’t wish to close or lose our business and why should we??

On the evening the EES was released, NELP had an information session on where we could relocate to. They had researched areas and stated Greensborough is more expensive than Bulleen. After the presentation in question time my husband asks the question - You have researched all these different suburbs however what have you found in your research when it comes to Bulleen? The comment then made was we haven’t looked at historical commercial sales data in Bulleen. I question what have they ever researched thoroughly?
Hypothetically I would like you to step out of your life just for one moment and think how it would be living in our situation at present as a business owner or an employee. Really how would you feel?

You own or work in a great business (some businesses have been running for well over 40 to 50 years,) out of the blue you are advised a road link will be going right through your business whether you like it or not. How you must feel emotionally and physically about this? Will I be employable again? What is my future?

As a business owner you decide to form or join a committee or several committees trying to provide a better outcome for all involved. The time factor involved is huge and not only that, your committee self-funds. The background support from both council and government barely exists and is quite often surface deep.

Your employees ask questions all the time about what is happening, you have real estate agents cold calling in business hours in front of your staff. Other businesses not involved in the committee all start asking you questions.

You try and run your home life as normal, however thoughts sit in the back of your mind or you never stop discussing your future or the what if ‘s?

Your children or extended family aren’t immune to the situation either worrying about their loved ones who this is directly impacting at present.

By now 2 years in are you worried sick about your future and livelihood? Would you become quite exhausted? Your business is most probably suffering because you’re spending so much time trying to achieve a better outcome with NELP. You could also become a bit cynical and lose belief. Really sad to feel this way.

These are just a few thoughts and situations we have dealt with up to now.

If you come back to the room now and I’d like to ask you to please really try and understand our situation and take it into great consideration.

There are 4 options that need to be considered here, and they are:

Total re-design saving all businesses.

A re-design to lower the impact and save some or most businesses.

If we need to relocate the period needs to be much greater than 2 years.

Relocation within Manningham and no more than a 5km radius from where we are located now. Especially for service businesses. LIKE FOR LIKE!!!!

If our businesses face total closure, then the compensation must not just be fair, however great. We are not closing by choice as we are being forced to leave!!!!

On a personal basis, if we are acquired, we will be ruined. Our livelihood and all we have worked for just gone and the sad part is that this has been forced upon us.
It destroys me to think we have such a great business and now my husband who has worked 12 to 14 hour days 5 days a week and has 1 week year off at Christmas for 30 years may lose everything he has worked so hard for. Our family has really felt the effects of this situation in our general day to day living. My youngest child commented to his music teacher “I am so worried about my Mum and Dad when it comes to this NE Link situation and I just hope they will be okay.”

One of Daniel Andrew’s slogans is “delivering to all Victorians” and he mentions in a lot of situations about “giving people a fair go” however in our instance and my opinion this seems to be a joke.

In closing I would like to thank you all for your time today and hope this is just not ticking boxes or just a process. It would make me happy to think that all of our situations are listened to and given great consideration.