

Submission Cover Sheet

North East Link Project EES IAC

586

Request to be heard?: yes

Full Name: HESHAM MOBAREK

Organisation: Pharmacy 4 Less Watsonia

Affected property:

Attachment 1: EES_Submission_

Attachment 2:

Attachment 3:

Comments: Submission is greater than 500 words. Please see attached pdf titled EES Submission Hesham Mobarek June 2019

North East Link EES submission

Submission by Hesham Mobarek

Owner Pharmacy 4 Less Watsonia and Property owner Watsonia Road Shopping Strip.

I'm writing to you as a long-standing advocate and member of the Banyule Community to express my concern over the current North East Link Reference Design. I have been the business owner of Pharmacy 4 Less Watsonia since 1994 and am a commercial property owner in the Watsonia Road shopping strip. I have also been a Banyule Resident for many years.

I have served the local community on the Watsonia Traders Association Committee of Management in various capacities since 2006 and am passionate and committed to ensure that our community is prosperous for many years to come.

I am gravely concerned with the current North East Link Reference design proposal and the lack of transparency and state of consultation with the North East Link Authority. I strongly believe that the implementation and construction of the NEL Reference Design will have a detrimental impact on my business and my long-term financial viability.

I'd like to outline my concerns in several key areas which include; the lack of proper consultation with NELA, the business and economic impacts, the lack of care consideration for appropriate urban design and finally some of the environmental effects on human health and society.

North East Link Authority's flawed consultation strategy

As a business owner and property owner, I've actively and enthusiastically embraced the consultation with NELA representatives. I've done this alongside NEL Community Liaison Group (CLG) member, and Watsonia Traders Association President, Jeremy Richards.

From the first meeting with NELA representatives we were encouraged to "think big" and have been reminded that this is the time for generational change for our suburb and we couldn't agree more. This was an important statement to us, and we were hopeful this would enable a collaborative and consultative environment. Unfortunately, this has been far from reality.

The Reference Design and subsequent Alternate Design for Watsonia, supposedly produced after consultation with us, has completely ignored all our key concerns about the project. Several additional data points and alternate design options are available, such as the SMART Taxpayer Design (also known as Community Design) and Banyule City Council BabEng A2 option, yet representatives from NELA have completely ignored and refused to engage in a conversation to discuss and thoroughly investigate these options.

NELA have suppressed conversation and access to information and have purposefully side stepped every alternate suggestion as they are placing more importance on budgets and timelines than they are to what's in the community's best interests. My expectation hasn't ever been that every concern can feasibly be addressed, but when every single option is ignored, it demonstrates loud and clear the mockery that NELA have made of the consultation process.

Business Impacts

Watsonia Road Shopping Strip is a bustling business hub that houses 76 businesses and provides employment for over 800 local jobs. As you can imagine it is of great concern, as one of the owners and employers in Watsonia for over 25 years, that the current proposed Reference Design will further amplify the already poor connectivity in Watsonia. This extends from the Watsonia Road Shopping Village, the areas east of Greensborough Hwy, Elder Street, and south of Lower Plenty Road. To ensure the liveability of Watsonia and the wider area isn't drastically impacted, the barriers to connectivity are a key challenge that needs to be overcome.

To quantify the cumulative impact on my business, I've conducted a spatial distribution of my clientele. The data demonstrates that approximately 30% of my Pharmacy's clients originate from the east side of Greensborough Hwy and/or south of Lower Plenty Road and in some cases for other businesses in the strip the spatial distribution demonstrates this number increases to 50%. Seven years of road works and disruption would force many customers from the east side to shop elsewhere such as in Diamond Village Shopping Strip (Located in Nepean St Watsonia) and Greensborough Shopping Precinct. This would render my business unviable, along with many others and no doubt we will see livelihood's shattered and many businesses close.

Economic impacts

Based on the detail presented in Technical Report F pertaining to Business, when assessing the business-related social impacts (Chapter 17 of the EES), NELA estimate that approximately 80 jobs will be lost in the City of Banyule, specifying Watsonia and Greensborough as the suburbs that will be affected.

The businesses within the Watsonia Village are not special businesses and are surviving in this strip because they complement each other so as to provide the variety of businesses and services required to meet community needs, essentially because of their "convenience".

Based on this analysis, it is reasonable to conclude that the NEL development will cause massive disruption to the client base of Watsonia Road Shops not only during but also after the construction process.

Specifically, changes in shopping habits over the seven-year construction period will mean huge loss in turnover which is unsustainable. If on average, 40% of visitation and turnover is lost, the effect will be greater than the predicted loss of 80 jobs. During the construction phase, businesses that are not tailored to benefit from passing trade but rely on meeting local service needs. My Pharmacy and many other businesses in the strip will be placed under increasing and unnecessary fiscal pressure.

I also have grave concerns about the multi-level car park proposed in proximity to the Watsonia Railway Station in the southern precinct of the Village. If this complex supports retail businesses at the base it may impact negatively on the turnover of existing businesses that provide the same or similar services and exacerbate the aforementioned impacts.

Urban design

NELA have outlined several key directions in their urban design strategy, that are critical to ensuring that the community remains cohesive and isn't fragmented due to poorly thought out design.

In particular, I'd like to call out two key directions of the NEL Urban Design Strategy:

- key direction one states that NELA are to "Develop an integrated design...to ensure a sensitive design response that avoids superfluous visual statements."
- key direction two states that NELA are to "support a natural and connected corridor stitching communities together, supporting open space systems".

It is clear that neither of these key directions will be achieved by the reference design and that the current proposal will disconnect communities by:

- creating a physical chasm with open trenches spanned in sections by 'green' bridges, between east and west that fails to improve open space connectivity
- customers will be disconnected from my business and the businesses of my neighbours from the east side of Greensborough Hwy
- the creation of a barren landscape with minimal large trees to provide ecosystem services to a socially disadvantaged community

NELA have completely ignored a glaringly obvious design flaw in the proposed intersection layout for the Elder Street connection. Not only is it dysfunctional, it will exacerbate, both mentally and physically, the current disconnect between the east and west sides of Watsonia. The destination of the shared path overpass from the east is the Library car park and Watsonia Road - a stark environment, obstructed by pylons and devoid of visual amenity.

When one considers the Watsonia Village as a shopping destination, the Reference Design forces shoppers to drive or walk out of their way to reach the

central part of Watsonia Village comprising the railway station, petrol station, bakery, post office, library, Maternal Childcare Health Centre, IGA, church, RSL and critical health services such as the optometrist and my pharmacy. This is likely to deter pedestrian visitors from the east side of Greensborough Rd.

The Reference Design also proposes to connect a new shared use path between Service Road Reserve and the footpath that runs along the front of the shops in the southern precinct of the village. It also has failed to incorporate traffic calming treatments at the southern end of the Watsonia Village precinct to support a more relaxed, safe atmosphere for pedestrians around the stores and along footpaths (this is just one of the many elements NELA have chosen to ignore from the Picture Watsonia document).

Environmental effects on human health and society

There are several data points that clearly demonstrate the need for intervention by the panel due to the significant impacts of the reference design on human health and society.

Chapter 18 of the EES outlines that many of the affected suburbs are at the highest decile '10' in the ABS IRSAD, however Bundoora and Watsonia were the lowest ranking of the identified suburbs, with a value of six (Section 18.3.1).

Population statistics presented in Table 6.1 within Technical report J suggest that the Watsonia Village supports local communities that comprise 17.4% of people aged over 65 and 23.7% under 19 years. This indicates that 41.1% of the community we serve would be considered vulnerable.

The Reference Design proposes open cut or cut and cover techniques be employed through Watsonia, Macleod and Yallambie with permanent removal of some sections of the existing railway reserve, Greensborough Hwy road reserve, Simpson Barracks and Borlase reserve. The highest environmental, visual, landscape, social and health impacts are proposed to occur in the suburb of Watsonia. In contrast, the Reference Design also proposes that a tunnel be bored through suburbs that are in a position of relative social advantage. On the basis of these facts, I contend that the distribution of beneficial and adverse effects associated with the NEL project are inequitable.

EPR improvements required

The current detail provided in the relevant EPRs are insufficient to address our concerns. EPRs B1, B2, B3, B4, B6, and T2 do not have enough detail in them to mitigate the risks to the sustainability of my business and the business of my neighbours. These EPRs are inadequate and do not provide the necessary protections for my business. NELA must provide detail regarding how it intends to ensure that convenience is maintained for our most vulnerable clientele and address all concerns as they relate to the inadequate detail provided.

In these tight economic times, enforced, or prescribed business downturn in Watsonia Village is unacceptable both to my business and the community I serve. The main threat from this project is the unprecedented size of the project, the unprecedented disruption it will cause during construction, and the extended length of time of the project. NELA's poor and inadequate design choices exacerbate this huge threat.

I endorse the EPR Improvements detailed by The Watsonia Traders Association President Jeremy Richards EES submission.

Unfortunately, NELA has failed to take the learnings from previous projects, and implement an approach to apply solid and sustainable urban design principles. Rather, they have needed "band-aid" fixes to work around flawed design choices. NELA has access to class leading urban design concepts yet are completely ignored it, in the interest of time, money and politics.

With all the above in mind, I formally request that panel require the North East Link Authority to:

- Fully, transparently and thoroughly investigate the improvement of the reference design to incorporate an extended tunnel (e.g. hybrid of Banyule Council's BabEng A2 Design and SMART taxpayer design).
- Review the urban design outcomes of the reference design and develop them to provide a demonstrably superior outcome for the suburbs of Watsonia, Bundoora and Greensborough.
- Require review of EPRs B1, B2, B3, B4, B6 and T2 to ensure there is enough detail in them to mitigate the risks to the viability and sustainability of Watsonia Shopping Centre businesses (as detailed in Watsonia Traders association EES submission)

I look forward to the panel's favourable response from my submission, and hope that it helps achieve what we all want – ***a better result for our whole community.***

Warm regards

Hesham Mobarek

Pharmacist Proprietor Pharmacy 4 Less Watsonia

1. Supporting documentation and plans will be presented to EES hearing
2. References
 - SMART TAX PAYER DESIGN (also known Community Design by Fred Buono)
 - BabEng report as released by Banyule Council (2019)
 - Picture Watsonia, released by Banyule Council (2014)