EES Submission on behalf of Watsonia Traders Association, from Jeremy Richards, President of Watsonia Traders Association.

Watsonia Traders Association represents over 75 businesses in the Watsonia Shopping Centre. We are half funded by Banyule City Council and the other half by a Special Rates Scheme from each Business.

Our Shopping Centre is bound by Greensborough Road, Watsonia Train Station and the Hurstbridge Rail line. Major car access is via Grimshaw Street onto Watsonia Road from the North, Greensborough Road onto what becomes Watsonia Road from the South – all to be affected by changes in the current North East Link proposal.

Watsonia Road serves access to our shops as well as being a bypass from Greensborough Bypass – We have noticed a big increase in peak hour traffic in recent years.

We are a shopping centre of convenience. We have key attractors of a Library, Train Station, IGA Supermarket, petrol station and RSL as well as 75 small businesses.

We know something needs to be done to help transport in our area. We support that there needs to be a “big solution”. For disruption reasons we’d prefer it to not be in our back yard, but understand it probably has to be in someone’s back yard

What’s at stake – small business – individual shops

But who am I really representing?

All our businesses are individuals, all with their own stories to tell. But they’re often too busy working to do this. They have an uncanny belief in their products and services. But we are largely there because of the convenience and accessibility we can offer our customers.

NELP’s own research suggests we will lose one third of our shoppers due to construction of the reference design. This would destroy our shopping centre. NELP is still publicly stating we won’t be directly affected. What’s most devastating is the length of the disruption. 3 to 5 years is too long for major disruption.

This disruption will cause downturn which we’ll be unable to recover from unless we receive substantial assistance PRIOR TO AND DURING the disruption.

The amount and duration of disruption is unprecedented. We know Bulleen is going to be directly affected, but the end result for each business area may be the same, and we need to take action to prevent this now. There is no quick fix, we need a well thought out, well resourced long term strategy starting now.

Watsonia Traders Association
president@watsoniashops.com.au
Request for help

NELP approached us to give them our time to discuss potential opportunities for the centre. They encouraged us to "think big" and submit what we want for our centre. Our requests have fallen on deaf ears though.

Our requests for help since then have been consistent, and consistently refused. We have not seen as a big enough or urgent enough problem. We’ve spoken to NELP, our sitting Member of State Parliament and even the Treasurer.

We now need to change our marketing strategy to one centred around survival.

Our current marketing budget is being spent on dealing with NELP, and we have to reduce marketing to do this at exactly the time we should be increasing our marketing.

We are only surviving because of unreasonable amounts of time being supplied by very few Trader volunteers. We need dedicated funds to spend on consultation/education time with our diverse Traders.

Biggest concern is trench vs extended tunnel. NELP has been focussed on dismissing our concerns/suggestions rather than trying to incorporate them into a better design.

We strongly endorse Fred Buono’s “SMART” extended tunnel design. It is sourced and improved by effective community consultation.

Urban Design

This project fails NELP’s own Good Urban Design principles.

NELP has refused to incorporate (or even discuss) “Ethos Urban’s Future Precinct Plan” JOINTLY conceived, planned, developed and funded by NELP AND Banyule City Council. We most strongly request that the Panel DEMAND a copy of this report from NELP, our State Government politicians and/or Banyule Council and ask why this $100000 piece of work hasn’t been robustly acknowledged, discussed and used in improving this project for the very community which is going to be most disrupted by this project.

Key improvements suggested by this report (and agreed to by community and Traders):

- replace ugly electricity transmission towers with higher, slimmer “monopoles” as used in other recent projects.
- Improved access and INTEGRATION of shopping centre with train station
- Creation of improved “experience” in shopping centre with development of Town Square/meeting places. Needs to be done BEFORE major construction works start.

Watsonia Traders Association
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Presentation in support of EES Submission from **Watsonia Traders Association 6 September 2019**
North East Link EES Public Hearing

Need to much more clearly integrate the NELP project changes with the activity centre. Combination of Vicroads and PTV into Department of Transport has NOT delivered any demonstrable efficiencies. Perfect example is refusal to link NELP project with obviously necessary Train Station improvements. Claim that that can’t be achieved with this project because different departments. Yet expensive electricity towers CAN be moved? Seems they can get clear inter-departmental cooperation when it suits them.

Could be aligned with planned near-future Hurtstbridge rail line works to minimise further disruption for commuters.

Take opportunity to INCREASE east-west connectivity (also a stated NELP aim) with extra road crossing (eg approx Elder Street to Morwell Avenue or similar). Would help reconnect a split community, rather than just deepen the divide.

Good Urban Design has taken a backseat to just “building a road”. It cannot be retrofitted later. It has to be a foundational concept the project is built around.

Ethos Urban Report was based on a trenched road being a given. They have introduced concepts that greatly improve on NELP’s reference design. This could obviously be improved upon even further if the trenched road was replaced with our often requested extended tunnel.

Ethos Urban report was released to NELP and Banyule Council in May this year. Why hasn’t it been utilised to improve this major project.

**EPRs**

Watsonia Traders Association strongly supports Banyule Council’s suggested amendments to the Business and Traffic EPRs. – please see those for reference.

B1 - In particular providing business support programs to businesses affected and disrupted by construction, not just relocation. And for this support to begin from approval of the project. And for it to include a regular one-on-one component for support for each business, as all businesses are so individual.

B4 – No reduction of shopper, trader and resident car parking in the vicinity of our shopping centre. Customer parking is not to be used or disrupted by construction workers who are not accessing our businesses.

B6 – Business liaison groups must continue to meet for at least 2 years into the operation period of the project.

T2 – Traffic plan – needs to include that shopping centre parking for Traders, Shoppers and residents needs to be protected from construction activities. We in particular object to the phrase “where practicable” as this is too wishy washy and too malleable in its potential interpretation by various interested parties.

**Watsonia Traders Association**  
[president@watsoniashops.com.au](mailto:president@watsoniashops.com.au)
Key recommendations/requests:

The Panel obtains the Ethos Urban Watsonia Future Precinct Report from either NELP, Banyule Council or State Government and makes sure NELP Urban Design robustly and satisfactorily uses this report in current design work and makes this report available to all potential constructors. The improvements suggested in the report include electricity monopoles, improving the town centre experience, proper integration of train station into the shopping centre/NELP project and increase east-west connectivity as early parts of the project.

The Panel requests NELP investigates the extended tunnel to Watsonia option (eg Buono “SMART Design”) with the same level of diligence that it has investigated other options. We believe the extended tunnel option fixes so many of the shortcomings (and risk to our viability) and unites many diverse elements of our community.

We request that tendering process is set up to not preclude a longer tunnel option from being feasible when competing with other tenderers

The Panel requests amendments to the EPRs as suggested which will provide our businesses with more protection from the inevitable disruption.

The Panel recommends NELP provide real assistance to protect our businesses, commencing as soon as approval is given to the project. This includes repeated one-on-one consultation with each Trader.

Most importantly we want the Panel to find and instruct NELP to recognise that construction of the North East Link Project threatens the viability of our shopping centre and as such will require protection. In many ways our shopping centre is facing the same future as the Bulleen zone, in that we fear many businesses will be forced to close and therefore won’t survive to see the benefits that the Project will undoubtedly bring to our area into the future.