Supplementary comments to Submission for Environmental Effects Statement for the North East Link (NEL) Submission to Planning Panels Victoria.

Blackburn Village Residents Group Inc.

Prepared by David Morrison.

Key points of Submission.

- Feeder roads south of eastern freeway are already near or exceeding capacity.
- About 17 lanes of arterial road are required to move 18200 people in an hour of the morning peak while the same number is moved on the Belgrave/Lilydale line.
- Vegetation loss is to be reinstated within the municipalities from which it is lost.
- Landscaping contracts for government projects has demonstrated a longer-term commitment (greater than 2 years) is required to ensure planting outcomes are achieved.
- Offset planting must commence ahead of vegetation clearing to enable early establishment of vegetation canopy to provide refuge for fauna displaced by habitat loss related to the project.
- A seed collection process must be enabled
- Compensation, for resumed public open space for the project, must be tied to direct land purchases for public open space.
- Integrate replacement sporting complexes into existing where possible such as those in Bulleen Park, rather than consume bushland and other open space parks.
- Stronger active transport infrastructure commitment is required in line with the Community Technical Discussion Group • CTDG • Walking & cycling report to bidders May 2019.
Supplementary Comments.

The case for better public transport options.

- The problem as we see it is twofold –
  - the completion of the ring road by filling the gap and
  - managing the ever-increasing number of commuters using the existing corridor.

This project will add the missing link to the ring road but does little to reduce the increasing number of commuters. Its existence will act as a magnet to traffic that may have chosen other modes or routes in its absence.

Before the NEL project is operational major upgrades to the bus network are required. In parallel to the project major public transport capability needs to be extended to relieve the current and future congestion and to also establish habits that will slow the time taken to clog the completed NEL.

Local expertise in sky rail could be directed to the long-promised service to the NE region to provide an alternative mass transit service to the city extending the usable life of the NEL. Sky rail has a small footprint and can be operated on a central median of a major road or freeway.

- Passengers per car could well decline to less than 1 as autonomous vehicles become accepted.
- Development in autonomous vehicles will be matched by those for mass transit transport such as buses, trains and trams and should be considered in this project. Already autonomous rail systems operate for example in Vancouver Canada for suburban commuter transport.
- Public transport has a smaller environmental footprint.
Local offset planting.

- Brown field sites should be utilised to return amenity back to the communities affected. If necessary, that would include land purchases. Examples of where sites offer such opportunities include the Box Hill quarry site, redundant golf courses,

Active transport deficiencies.

The reference design is deficient in its recognition of Active Transport trends and government policy for this Principal Bicycle Network corridor.

Principle objectives of the Victorian Cycling Strategy 2018-28 have not been adopted. Trends, evident overseas, in developing active transport infrastructure and the rapid growth in the take up of Electric bikes are ignored.

According to the Victorian Cycling Strategy 2018-28

‘Interested but concerned cyclists are the largest group (60%), and they vary in age and cycling ability. They are curious about cycling and like to ride but are afraid to do so and put off by the need to ride close to motor vehicles and pedestrians, especially on higher-speed, higher-volume roads or where conflicts are more likely. This indicates that investment in cycling infrastructure to make it safer and lower-stress is worthwhile, to encourage interested but concerned people to cycle.’
Broadly the reference design fails to provide the lower stress, high-level of service provided to road users for this project. It ignores the interested but concerned group by:

- Failing to minimise or eliminate at grade road crossings which increase stress and time taken for journeys and therefore adds disincentives
- Failing to recognise opportunities to meet the future active transport needs for the expected life of the freeway project. Opportunities to make improvements to grades, trail surfaces and linkages to communities. The reference design proposed works essentially reinstates what is already in place.
Appendix 1.

**Victorian Cycling Strategy 2018-28 Vision**

We will increase the number, frequency and diversity of Victorians cycling for transport by:

- investing in a safer, lower-stress, better-connected network, prioritising strategic cycling corridors
- making cycling a more inclusive experience.

**Victorian Cycling Strategy 2018-28 - extract - Page 20.**

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**Strategic approaches**

We will implement the level of traffic stress approach to provide a safer, lower-stress cycling experience on strategic cycling corridors and more generally to guide decision-making for and investment in cycling infrastructure. We will draw on the experiences of Amsterdam, Copenhagen, London, San Francisco, Portland and other cities that have built safer, lower-stress and better-connected networks to increase cycling for transport.

As interested but concerned people are deterred by any high-stress section of a corridor, we will evaluate whole routes and prioritise high-stress sections for improvement. Other government agencies that develop proposals which affect a strategic cycling corridor will also adopt this approach.

An integrated transport network seeks to make the best use of limited road space by prioritising particular modes of transport on particular sections of road to maximise the efficiency of the network.

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**Strategic cycling corridors**

Strategic cycling corridors are the main routes of the bicycle network, like arterials are the main routes of the road network.

They are a subset of the *Principal Bicycle Network* (PBN) which is a high-level plan for some 3500km of existing and proposed on-and off-road cycling routes.

Strategic cycling corridors are the most important routes for people cycling for transport as they link up important destinations: the central city, national employment and innovation clusters, major activity centres and other destinations of metropolitan or state significance.

Appendix 2.

Opportunities for Bidders.

The Community Technical Discussion Group was established to provide cycling, walking and disability feedback to NEL authority by way of a report on opportunities and issues.

The introductory pages of the Walking and Cycling Report to Bidders are detailed below.

The NEL Inquiry and Advisory Committee (IAC) is encouraged to give weight to the opportunities suggested in the Walking and Cycling Report to Bidders so that the NEL project, when complete will not only benefit the motorist but will provide a high level of accessible service to all users including pedestrians and cyclists whether using shared paths for commuting, recreating or connecting to education, business or sporting activities.

The higher the standard of active transport infrastructure the greater the use and the more sustainable.

The terms of reference for the committee were:

1. PURPOSE
As part of community and stakeholder engagement for the North East Link Environment Effects Statement (EES), North East Link Authority will invite members of the community with a deeper interest and level of technical understanding to form two discussion groups. These groups aim to:

- Provide another level of engagement for North East Link, allowing more opportunities for NELA to understand ideas, for innovation or refining design
- Provide interested community members with access to staff to provide their time and relevant information available
- Provide insight into issues for consideration in the EES
- Provide insight for potential bidders
- Help NELA to gain a better understanding of motivations and answer questions appropriately

1. A Message to Bidders

Bidners have the opportunity to deliver world class cycling and walking infrastructure as part of the North East Link Project.

The key is to provide low stress, high quality routes that are:

- Safe and comfortable for riders and walkers — regardless of age and ability
- Convenient — connecting to schools, shops, transit stations, and places of employment
This report by the North East Link (NEL) Walking and Cycling Community Technical Discussion Group (CTDG) acknowledges significant improvements proposed to the walking and cycling networks as part of North East Link.

Noting that bidders have the opportunity to improve the NEL Reference Design and that walking and cycling improvements are well received by local communities and the general public, the CTDG has prepared this report. It proposes improvements which are not in NEL’s Reference Design, but which will enhance walking and cycling in the NEL and Eastern Freeway Corridors.

The CTDG Report has prioritised proposals that:

- Better integrate the proposed NEL works to the existing walking and cycling network
- Improve access and provides seamless integration to a well-connected network
- Provide accessible infrastructure for all walkers and cyclists, regardless of age or ability
- Separate motor vehicles, cyclists and walkers at every opportunity
- Maximise the safety and security of walkers and riders
- Provide lower stress and more inclusive commuter and local transport outcomes to the community, in line with the Victorian Cycling Strategy 2018-2028 and Plan Melbourne 2017-2050

These proposals will significantly enhance cycling and walking networks, in line with existing strategies for cycling and walking.

Additional works will cost more but that will be outweighed by the benefits of increased participation in cycling and walking.

Your consortium has the opportunity to deliver legacy projects that will be welcomed by all in the community for many years ahead.

2. Introduction

The North East Link Authority facilitated the establishment of a group of community advocates to advise on walking and cycling, the Cycling and Walking Community Technical Discussion Group (CTDG). See Appendix A for further information on the CTDG, including membership.

Recognising that Bidders have opportunities to further improve the North East Link design and acknowledging that walking and cycling improvements are well received by the broader public, we have prepared this report, which provides details on improvements that will enhance the legacy of the project.

The CTDG supports many of the significant improvements proposed to the walking and cycling networks as part of North East Link. However, the group has identified additional opportunities and ideas to enhance walking and cycling throughout the project.³

Plan Melbourne 2017-2050 emphasises the need to plan for ‘20-minute neighbourhoods’ by creating a network of cycling links for local trips. The 20-minute neighbourhood is simple: it’s
about people being able to meet most of their daily needs through a 20-minute walking, cycling or public transport trip from their own home.

The CTDG recognises that this objective will not be achieved on many parts of the proposed shared path network. The CTDG has identified a number of opportunities and alternatives to improve walking and cycling along the Eastern Freeway corridor and North East Link corridor (between Eastern Freeway and M80, Greensborough) that will address this. It also proposes another category of projects that will enhance walking and cycling in the Eastern Freeway and NEL corridors.

In preparing this report, the CTDG did not have access to the Reference Design other than the publicly available document: ‘Early Design Schematics and Artist Impressions — September 2018’. The group is only able to base its comments on that document and may be unaware of other proposed bicycle infrastructure or elements of NEL that could impact adversely on proposed bicycle infrastructure (e.g. details of the Manningham Road Interchange and associated roadworks). Hence an absence of comment should not be perceived as implicit support.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this report are the overall views of the NEL Walking and Cycling CTDG members only and may not be the views of individual members or other organisations.

3. Principles and Objectives.

The CTDG have determined the following principles and objectives that must be considered by bidders when developing their concept designs for North East Link and associated works.

to increasing

Walking and Cycling Principles

- Minimising grades - Providing grades that are suitable for all ages and abilities.
- Providing safety and security - Ensuring the safety of walkers and riders is maximised and that all users can feel safe and secure day or night.
- Minimising travel times
- Providing direct connections with a high level of service along routes.
- Separating walking and transport cycle paths at every opportunity.
- Improving connections - Improving access and providing seamless integration to a well-connected network
- Providing accessible infrastructure - Optimising the amenity and usability for all users regardless of active transport mode, ability, impairment and type of human & electric powered vehicle
Walking and Cycling Objectives

The primary objective for the CTDG in respect to walking is to develop and enhance a network of shared paths and trails that are safe and accessible and, where possible, are separate.

The primary objective for CTDG in respect to cycling is to significantly increase the amount of cycling in the Eastern Freeway and NEL corridors, consistent with the principle objective of the Victorian Cycling Strategy 2018-28.

Reducing Traffic Stress to Increase Cycling Numbers

Increasing the amount of cycling in the Eastern Freeway and NEL corridors requires the upgrade of existing and the development of new bicycle infrastructure that meets the needs of the ‘60% interested but concerned group of cyclists’.

There are four types of cyclists, based on people’s propensity to ride. This categorisation of cyclists in a community underpins the Victorian Cycling Strategy 2018-28.

The level of traffic stress is the key to cyclists making a decision to ride a particular route. A high stress section on a route is likely to deter cyclists from riding that route – particularly the 60% ‘interested but concerned.’

The CTDG have recognised the importance of having consistent Low Traffic Stress Routes along and across the Eastern Freeway Corridor and the North East Link Corridor. Low Traffic Stress routes are fundamental to increasing cycling numbers.

Four types of Cyclist.

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4 Principle objective of the Victorian Cycling Strategy 2018-28