Opening Remarks on Behalf of NELP

Group 2: Transport Modelling and Traffic

Relevant evaluation objectives

1 The evaluation objective relevant to Group 2 topics, as set out at section 4.2 of the scoping requirements, is reproduced below:

To increase transport capacity and improve connectivity to, from and through the northeast of Melbourne, particularly freight movement via the freeway network instead of local and arterial roads, while managing the effects of the project on the broader and local road, public transport, cycling and pedestrian transport networks.

EES

2 The following chapters of the EES, and associated technical reports, are relevant to Group 2 topics:

(a) EES Chapter 2 – Project rationale;
(b) EES Chapter 6 – Project development;
(c) EES Chapter 9 – Traffic and transport; and
(d) Technical Report A – Traffic and transport, which in turn included the following appendices:
   (i) A – GTA Peer Review;
   (ii) B – VLC Modelling Reports;
   (iii) C – Risk Assessment;
   (iv) D – Forecast Traffic Volumes;
   (v) E – Microsimulation Modelling Results.

3 Following publication of the EES Mr Willumsen’s peer review was included as an information update on the project website.

EPRs

4 The following EPRs are directly relevant to Group 2 topics:

(a) T1 – Optimise design performance;
(b) T2 – Transport Management Plans;
(c) T3 – Transport Management Liaison Group;
(d) T4 – Road Safety Design;
(e) T5 – Traffic Monitoring;

5 Mr Kiriakidis has made recommendations in respect of specific aspects of EPRs T1 and T3. Neither Mr Veitch nor Mr Willumsen made recommendations in respect of the EPRs. NELP is not yet in receipt of all of the expert meetings conducted in respect of traffic and transport and will update the EPRs in response to those documents when in a position to do so.

Witnesses

6 The following witnesses will give evidence relevant to Group 2 topics:

(a) Mr Veitch, Mr Willumsen and Mr Kiriakidis on behalf of NELP;
(b) Mr McDougall, Mr Dunn, and Mr O’Brien on behalf of Banyule, Boroondara, and Whitehorse City Councils;
(c) Ms Marshall on behalf of Manningham City Council;
(d) Ms Dunstan on behalf of Marcellin College;
(e) Mr Gnanakone on behalf of ALH Group Property Holdings Pty Ltd;
(f) Mr Young on behalf of Carey Baptist Grammar School;
(g) Mr Tivendale on behalf of La Trobe University; and
(h) Dr Stone on behalf of Friends of Banyule.

7 A joint report dated 28 July 2019 was prepared following the expert meeting conducted in respect of strategic transport modelling.
The following reports have been prepared following meetings between Mr Kiriakidis and experts to be called in respect of traffic and transport:

(a) Mr Young on behalf of Carey Grammar School dated 24 July 2019;10
(b) Ms Dunstan on behalf of Marcellin College dated 24 July 2019;11 and
(c) Mr Gnanakone on behalf of ALH Property Pty Ltd.

Technical Notes

To date, the following technical notes concern Group 2 topics:

(a) TN5 – Traffic – Road Geometry – Additional cross sections of Eastern Freeway;12
(b) TN12 – Traffic and Transport – Existing and proposed road reservation;13
(c) TN13 – Traffic and Transport – Mapping of changes or connectivity;14
(d) TN22 – Traffic – Management of Interchange Development;15
(e) TNR32 – Watsonia Potential Modification;16
(f) TNR33 – Lower Plenty Road Potential Modification;17 and
(g) TNR34 – Bulleen Road Potential Modification.18

Issues

Strategic Transport Modelling

The strategic transport modelling that informed the EES was undertaken by Veitch Lister Consulting utilising its proprietary Zenith model. This model has been adopted in recent times to assess the environmental effects of other major transport projects (including the West Gate Tunnel Project and the East West Link Project). It has also been applied to many other projects by the Victorian Government (including CityLink,
EastLink, and the CityLink-Tullamarine Freeway widening) and has been demonstrated to produce credible traffic forecasts in respect of toll road projects in Australia.19

11 Taking heed of the observations made by the IAC convened in respect of the West Gate Tunnel Project,20 the strategic transport modelling undertaken in respect of the North East Link was the subject of a peer review prepared by Mr Willumsen (a leading international expert in strategic transport modelling). Mr Willumsen’s review confirmed the appropriateness of the modelling and resulted in additional sensitivity testing and scenario analyses that improved the quality of the analysis.

12 Whilst there are necessarily limitations in strategic transport modelling undertaken over a 20 year horizon, the IAC should be satisfied that those limitations have been appropriately identified and tested as part of the modelling undertaken in respect of the Project, and that the VLC’s modelling has been undertaken in accordance with best practice.

13 A number of criticisms have been made concerning aspects of the strategic traffic modelling in submissions and in evidence. Many of these criticisms will be familiar to members of the IAC having been raised in the context of the West Gate Tunnel Project. The report prepared following the expert meeting held in respect of strategic transport modelling was successful in substantially limiting the issues in dispute between the experts. NELP relies on the evidence of Mr Veitch and Mr Willumsen in respect of those matters that remain in dispute.

Traffic Impacts

14 The TTIA builds on the strategic transport modelling undertaken by VLC and provides a comprehensive description of current and future traffic conditions in and around the project corridor. The assessment was prepared by Smedley Technical & Strategic, being the firm that prepared the traffic and transport impact assessments for the West Gate Tunnel Project (and that peer-reviewed the TTIA prepared in respect of the Melbourne Metro Rail Project), and was the subject of a peer review undertaken by GTA Consultants (which included a specific peer review undertaken in respect of the microsimulation modelling).21

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19 See, for instance, Part 1.3.2 of the Appendix B to the TTIA.
20 At section 4.3.2 its report.
21 Appendix A to the GTA Peer Review Report.
There appears to be a relatively high level of consensus that the Project, with the proposed connections, will result in the type and extent of transport and traffic benefits described in the TTIA. These include key transport outcomes for Melbourne’s north east, including in respect of:

(a) Improved movement of freight;
(b) The redistribution of traffic away from local and arterial roads and onto the North East Link and the broader freeway network;
(c) The reduction of congestion on the local road network and at existing bottlenecks within that network;
(d) An improvement in travel times (including in respect of Doncaster Area Rapid Transit movements);
(e) A reduction of truck volumes on local and arterial roads; and
(f) A substantial upgrade in active travel infrastructure.

Whilst many of these benefits will accrue to various parts of metropolitan Melbourne, significant benefits accrue to communities concentrated along and in close proximity to the Project’s alignment.

The rationale adopted in selecting Corridor A, and the basis of the Project’s design as a connected (as opposed to a bypass) freeway, have been outlined in NELP’s Part A submission and are integral to an understanding of the role and function of the Project. Contentions that road projects are intrinsically incompatible with the Transport Integration Act, or that investment should instead be directed toward projects other than road projects, should be dismissed by the IAC as being misconceived and beyond scope.

Mr Kiriakidis’ witness statement contains a detailed list of issues raised in submissions and a thorough response to those issues. They can be usefully grouped into the following six broad categories:

(a) The scope and robustness of the analysis;
(b) Suggested design modifications to elements of the Project, including proposals to reduce the footprint of different Project components;
(c) The impacts on traffic movements during construction;
(d) The localised impacts associated with the redistribution of traffic on the road network during operation;

(e) The Project’s impact upon, and proposed additional enhancements to, the public transport network; and

(f) Proposals to further enhance the active travel components of the Project.

19 Conclave reports continue to be prepared at the time of these opening remarks. Some of the expert evidence filed on behalf of other submitters is directed toward the impacts of the Project on particular institutions (such as Carey Baptist Grammar School and Marcellin College) and is targeted in its scope. Other witness statements consider broader impacts of the Project (such as Mr O’Brien’s statement filed on behalf of the BBW councils) and is considerably broader in scope. The nature of the issues raised in evidence can also be characterised according to the broad categories identified in paragraph 18 above.

20 EPR T3 provides for the formation of a Transport Management Liaison Group in respect of the Project. The broad purpose of the TMLG is to function as a forum for the exchange of information and the discussion of issues arising in respect of the Project (including in respect of the Transport Management Plans to be prepared in respect of the Project). Draft terms of reference have been prepared in respect of the TMLG and circulated to potential participants. An initial meeting was conducted on 25 June 2019 and was attended by representatives of NELP, the Department of Transport, the BBW councils, Manningham City Council, the MFB, Victoria Police, and Ambulance Victoria.

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30 July 2019