Transport in Melbourne’s North Eastern Suburbs:
North East Link is Not the Solution

Residents in Melbourne’s north eastern suburbs face a huge lack of transport options, leading thousands of commuters to rely upon their cars as the only reliable choice.

Our north eastern suburbs are a public transport black spot, with only buses serving the majority of the area. For instance, residents in Manningham Council are the only metropolitan Melbourne area to have no access to any trains or trams. Reliance on an under-resourced bus network is leading to falling levels of patronage and forcing more people into their cars, creating increasingly congested streets.

Melbourne is now growing faster than other Australian cities. By 2050 the city is projected to reach 8-11 million residents. We can’t expect that number of people to move on our road network every day. We must build better transport solutions. Decisions about our transport infrastructure which we make today will affect everyone in 10, 20 and 30 years’ time.

Instead of providing for our current transport needs, and planning for future public transport requirements, the Andrews government is currently racing to build a mega toll road project through north east Melbourne.
The proposed North East Link would tunnel under the Yarra River. Flyovers and spaghetti junctions will divide the local suburbs, from Watsonia, Rosanna and Ivanhoe to Greensborough, Templestowe and Bulleen. The biggest changes are to the Eastern Freeway, with plans for up to 20 lanes of traffic heading in and out of the city. This will only bottleneck at Hoddle St and Alexandra Parade, forcing a case to revive plans for yet another major road project, the East West Link. The East West is a toll road project which Labor stood by the community and opposed; an action which helped them win the 2014 election.

The creation of the North East Link would mean that many community facilities would be forever forced next to a dirty, noisy mega road. The area of impact includes 12 schools, more than 20 sports fields and ovals, 30 tennis courts, golf courses, and 30ha of precious open space. The project area is 900ha, upon completion the project footprint will span 190ha. Evidence of negative health impacts from living next to freeways is mounting.

In addition to all this long-term damage, the North East Link is wasting at least $16.5 billion of public money which should be spent on long term solutions to transport problems.

Proposals to solve the north eastern suburbs transport problems:

By reallocating the $16.5 billion price tag of the North East Link to a number of the projects outlined below, tax payer money will improve transport options and air quality, help protect open space, and reduce the greenhouse impacts of Victoria’s transport system.

Rethink the North East Link. Invest in public transport and safety.
Alternative Investment Opportunities

**Improving Safety and Comfort**

The Port of Melbourne is rapidly growing, and without rail freight alternatives it continues to depend on an ever-increasing number of trucks to move freight across the city and state. The north east needs:

1. **Rail freight not truck freight:** The Port Rail Shuttle will get more than 70,000 containers moved on rail instead of on local roads
   - This will connect the port to distribution hubs across Melbourne via rail. There is already $58 million committed from federal and state governments to start this vital project.
   - On 26 October 2018, Labor committed $25.7 million: $16.2 million at Austrak in Somerton, and $9.5 million at SCT Logistics in Altona¹.
   - Connections to the south eastern suburbs are not yet confirmed. Without priority for further links, trucks will continue to use our residential streets.

2. **Rosanna Road:** Real long-term solutions to ensure the safety of residents living on this road and the local area.
   A comprehensive plan needs to be developed in consultation with the residents, but could include investigation of:
   - Reducing speed limits
   - Overnight truck curfews
   - Removing B-Double and OD truck route
   - Truck bans on Jika Street
   - Moving power lines underground to prevent truck collisions
   - Containing freight to single lanes in each direction
   - Improving pedestrian and bike riding with traffic islands or median strip, widening nature strip, paths over or under Rosanna Rd
   - Road Safety cameras to monitor changes

3. **Safe bike routes across our suburbs.**
   - The health benefit savings far outweigh the cost of building new safe bike path infrastructure which will encourage more people to ride for local trips to the shops, school, or work
   - The direct gross cost of physical inactivity to the Australian health budget in 2006/07 was $1.49 billion, equating to nearly $200 per inactive person.
   - Bike infrastructure through our suburbs, as well as improved bike parking at destinations such as train stations, shopping centres, schools and more.

Improving Public Transport Linkages

   This rail tunnel would connect the north-eastern suburbs to the city and onto the western suburbs and provides double the capacity of any tollway.
   - A train line can carry 40,000 people per hour in both directions, while even a massive 12 lane freeway only manages 20,000 cars per hour.
   - MM2 provides a high-capacity direct link from Clifton Hill to Newport via the CBD and Fishermans’ Bend. It is the logical, much needed addition to Melbourne’s 21st century rail network. See Map 1.
   - Importantly it enables increased services on the Mernda and Hurstbridge lines, and the potential for Doncaster Rail. Just imagine how that would change Melbourne!
   - Construction and provision of MM2 will create local jobs; Melbourne Metro 1 is generating 7,000 jobs alone.

5. Doncaster-CBD connection: A high capacity public transport connection is long overdue for the north eastern suburbs.
   - Doncaster Rail along the Eastern Freeway median rail reservation is vital for providing commuters options to get to the city and beyond. This reservation must be maintained for this purpose.²
   - In the meantime immediate improvements to Doncaster Area Rapid Transit (DART) should be of highest priority.³ This popular service indicates strong demand for improving the services and in the future increasing capacity with a rail connection (See more: Information box, page 5).
   - Buses need very frequent services, and priority treatment to reduce delays and provide a reliable level of service. Key to realising the full potential of DART is providing a dedicated busway along the Eastern Freeway, Hoddle Street, Alexandra Parade, and Lonsdale Street.

Between 2009 and 2012, weekday patronage of Doncaster Area Rapid Transit (DART) services increased by 47 per cent, Saturday patronage increased by 212 per cent and Sunday patronage by 149 per cent, with the four DART routes now carrying in excess of 3 million passengers per year. These figures illustrate the demand for reliable and efficient public transport services in the region, and the need to enhance the bus service with increasing service capacity, frequency and priority for buses on the road network along the entire routes of each of the four DART services.

6. Airport link
   - Better public transport connections to Melbourne Airport mean less traffic from the south and south-eastern suburbs through the north-east.
   - The Suburban Rail loop concept is a game changer for tackling trips to the airport and between suburbs. It allows trips from these suburbs to other suburbs without the need to travel through the CBD, replacing many suburban car trips with a more efficient and sustainable transport option. It is vital the project is commenced as quickly as possible to realise the benefits, waiting 30 years is vastly inadequate.
   - The Suburban Rail Loop concept plans appear to create a public transport route from Box Hill to Bundoora via Doncaster. This is the direct equivalent of the proposed North East Link. Competing tunnel infrastructure and works will create difficulties with work plans, costings and practicalities. Duplicating a vital public transport connection with an expensive toll road seems counterintuitive. We urge the two projects be assessed together to first determine the best long-term outcomes, before locking in projects.

7. Increasing frequency and capacity of passenger trains:
   - Public transport infrastructure in the north and eastern suburbs needs to be upgraded to be fit for purpose for the 21st century. Existing infrastructure has not kept up with population growth, pushing ever more commuters onto already congested roads.
   - One option would be to ensure we get the best possible use of existing transport infrastructure by removing bottlenecks. Duplication of railway lines would help to ensure all stations are serviced reliably. For example, the 6.7km section of the Hurstbridge line from Greensborough to Eltham. Recent duplication of the Hurstbridge line (1.2 km) from Heidelberg to Rosanna occurred during level crossing removals and station upgrades. It cost $140

---

4 http://www.etc.org.au/doncaster-bus-improvement-dart/
million and will enable 2 extra services in morning and evening peak, and increased reliability and punctuality of train running times. Track duplication is required along the entire Hurstbridge line.

- More trains need to be added to the system, so that services are running every 10 minutes, 6am-midnight 7-days a week. More frequent services are a real solution to congestion, and will reduce travel times, stress and economic losses for those who do need to travel by car.
- Upgrading to high capacity signalling, allowing for more trains in peak hour.
- High capacity trains need to be brought online – 65 new High Capacity Metro Trains for the Pakenham corridor are already being built here in Victoria, resulting in more than 1,100 highly skilled local jobs. Let’s continue these winning projects for other lines.

8. Tram/light rail lines for cross-town centre travel: filling missing infrastructure links within and across the north and eastern suburbs.

- Limited public transport operates between suburbs. Obvious extensions of tram lines to connect to shopping, education, and transport hubs include:
  - Route 48 extension to Doncaster Hill
  - Route 86 extension to South Morang
- In contrast to a freeway such as the proposed North East Link the cost of rolling out tram or bus infrastructure is very modest. A 2014 estimate found that tram lines should cost in the region of $15 million per kilometre, with additional costs for platform stops ($1.7m each), works for major intersections ($2.8m each), substations (for extensions over 5 kilometres $5m each) and terminus works ($5m each).
- New light-rail lines just like this are already being built in suburban Australia, such as the Gold Coast.

9. Bus routes: improving and expanding services on bus routes is good value for money in terms of reducing congestion. Options include:

- Using an electric bus fleet will provide a quiet smooth ride, and reduce pollution in our city just as Brisbane and other cities have done.
- Expanding the Smart bus network with more routes.
- Dedicated bus lanes, turning lanes, and traffic light signalling to get buses moving faster.
- Smart bus routes every 10 minutes during the day, 7 days a week.
- Better connections to meet trains and activity hubs.

Compiled 28th February 2019
by Rachel Lynskey and
Friends of the Earth and Public Transport Users’ Association ‘Sustainable Cities’ team

---

8 https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t6VsvSK4qvu9mEYGfVqdVQqHbdQv-UDT/view