

EW Link Panel Hearing: Carlton Residents Association Inc. (173)

Ian Bird: Traffic & Transport Spokesperson (speaking notes 2 April 14)

1. I've spent considerable time here over the past month and have listened to the extensive evidence and cross-examinations around the EWL and its Reference Project CIS. From a community viewpoint, much evidence from the LMA has been truly shocking. It seems no impact is so horrendous or disgraceful as to be unacceptable for this project of claimed State Significance.
2. The LMA enjoys a very privileged status at this Hearing; it is backed by the full sovereign force of the State. As such, we would expect it to be a 'model litigant'. In reality it appears to act as any other voracious developer would under the imperative 'whatever it takes'.
3. Mr Morris QC proclaimed on Day 1 that the Govt. has approved this controversial \$8 billion Link project. Only commentary around the edges is permissible. There is to be no discussion about economics or alternatives to the Reference Project. The elusive Business Case will remain a State secret, reconfirmed yesterday. The Link's 'net community benefit' is stated to be irrelevant. Its threadbare justifications have been exposed at this Hearing for all to contemplate. Let's remember this is the most costly infrastructure project in Victoria's history.
4. The community and the Govt. have parted company in a spectacular way over this project for which it has no electoral mandate. We simply cannot accept unreasonable, irrational and dictatorial Govt. policies around the Link and its CIS. These matters have become major political issues which may be resolved at the State election in November.
5. The Carlton Residents Association (CRA) has been active for almost 50 years. Over the past 15 years we've regularly participated in Community Reference Groups associated with major roads investigations in our area. These include the Northern Central City Corridor Study, the City of Melbourne's Transport Strategy and Eddington's EW Link Needs Assessment.

6. Community input on all these major investigations was encouraged and expected. We felt part of the planning process. But not for the EWL. This project was never part of any known transport plan. It simply fell out of the sky onto an unsuspecting public. We fully expected public transport projects to proceed as promised by the Govt. in 2010. Raw partisan politics, not rational evidence, has driven the inflammatory Link decision.
7. Mr Morris reminded us the Link grew out of the Eddington Report of 2008. As with much LMA evidence, he extolled the virtues but ignored the negatives. The reason Eddington was consigned to history was its miserable economics of 50cents benefit for every dollar invested and just 15% of Freeway traffic would use it. Rather inconvenient truths!
8. It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the taxpayer funded high profile legal and expert witness firepower assembled by the LMA to defend and justify its EWL CIS. No expense has been spared. Such support is unimaginable for we Community Groups and individuals to represent our viewpoints on the Link. The term 'procedural unfairness' readily comes to mind.
9. For the 1430 submissions to this Panel, around 99.9% oppose the Link and its questionable CIS. It has comprehensively failed the popularity stakes. More generally across the State, we note at least 80% of the population do not rate it as the top priority project the Govt. claims.
10. The Govt. recently picked up on this widespread backlash against the Link, and is now back talking up public transport and fare reductions, as a diversion. Just as it did in 2010. But its transport credibility is shot. We note the ALP and Greens oppose the Link; reconfirmed here on Monday. What will its future be following the State Election?
11. Over the decades CRA has actively supported public transport, cycling and walking and opposed major new inner urban roads north of the CBD. In the few minutes I have to represent the views of several hundred CRA members, I will highlight just a few matters from our more extensive submission you have before you.

12. The EWL is extolled as ‘congestion busting’. From evidence across the globe it is impossible to remove congestion by building more roads. This outdated roads-centric thinking has dominated Melbourne’s transport policies for the past 50 years. Why should we believe yet more road building will now solve congestion, as claimed in the CIS?
13. Yet LMA would have us believe this myth. History confirms: build a road and traffic will fill it, induced or not. As Mr Wren so aptly put it, just like a drain for water. The Link will further entrench car dependency at a time when we should be prioritising sustainable transport modes.
14. Eastern Freeway peak period traffic is around 95% driver only: just 1 in 20 vehicles have passengers additional to the driver. It is a hopelessly inefficient transport mode being pandered to by this project and proudly proclaimed as a ‘vote winner’ by the Govt. under a ‘right-to-drive’ mantra. Much of this largely commuter based driver only traffic could be mode shifted to public transport, such as the long-sought rail line to Doncaster. Each train could take up to 800 cars off the Freeway. The important matter of vehicle occupancy levels has attracted remarkably little attention here amid the extensive debate on traffic modelling.
15. LMA is enamoured with the textbook *Triumph of the City* by Edward Glaeser. Perhaps the works of world renowned local transport academic, the late Professor Paul Mees, *Transport for Suburbia – beyond the automobile age*, might be much more relevant. This is the innovative thinking that should be informing Melbourne’s transport policies in 2014, not the 1960’s car-centric ideas peddled by the LMA at this Hearing.
16. Professor Mees on his deathbed in mid-2013 described the Link as a ‘mad’ project. Many of us would concur with that frank assessment.
17. EWL is being planned ‘on-the-run’ which is why it’s so distressing and traumatic to the community. New and ever more alarming revelations have been regularly released by LMA over the past year. No doubt we’ve not heard the end of it yet, including associated ‘ancillary’ aspects outside the project boundary and beyond the scope of the Reference CIS.
18. The \$90 million EVO apartment scandal is a prime example of chaotic planning, also the guide dog training facility saga, and there are many others.

19. We have much sympathy for LMA staff who have been saddled with this questionable project and tasked with bringing it to reality under crisis conditions. The manifold failings of the CIS are a consequence of a rushed project for which the Govt. states it will sign contracts and commence construction prior to the State Election in November.
20. What a ridiculous and artificially short time-scale for this mega-project with first round tenders closing on 28 April; a month before this Panel reports. The Govt. plans to force its Link decision onto the community. Draconian legislation recently passed by State Parliament aims to shut down debate and empower the police force to ensure construction proceeds without impediment. Premier Napthine simply dismisses objectors as 'rabble rousing professional agitators'. This blinkered sovereign view driving the Link project is unacceptable to the community. Do we now live under a dictatorship?
21. In any meaningful transport planning process, the problem would first be identified then options canvassed to address it. But not for the EW Link. This costly monstrosity was simply selected by the Govt. as a politically opportune vote winner, although it seems to have failed that test too! Logic, good sense, economics, rational planning and business justification are all out the window for the Link.
22. May I conclude with brief reference to iconic Royal Park. This park has been handed down to us from previous generations and is much used and valued by Carlton residents. With Melbourne's on-going population explosion, it is more important than ever that public parkland and sportsgrounds be protected and enhanced, not destroyed.
23. Parkland is not there to be freely exploited at Govt. whim as *terra nullius*. Where else in any comparable city would scarce inner urban parkland be devastated for a roads project? Has the Govt. lost touch with reality?
24. Our generation is the current custodian of Royal Park. Let us respect it for the jewel that it is and for the peace and solitude it provides. May we resolve to pass it on in even better shape than we found it.
25. And finally, we contend the EWL CIS is a flawed and inadequate document. It should not be supported.