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East-West Link Needs Assessment

This submission from the Carlton Residents Association (CRA) is a response to an invitation from the Member for Melbourne, Hon. Bronwyn Pike, for community input to the above study being undertaken by Sir Rod Eddington. Recommendations from the study will assist the State Government to develop sustainable policies to move people and freight around the Melbourne metropolitan area; the need for a new East-West link will be assessed.

1. Overview

Liveability and sustainability are vital to daily life in Melbourne; transport is critical to this goal. For inner northern suburbs such as Carlton, CRA and its predecessors have long argued that excessive traffic levels have substantial negative impacts on community life and health. Successive Governments have followed a policy that more roads, freeways and tunnels will solve traffic woes; this is now well proven to be a false hope. An underlying assumption in the current study is that congestion is bad and something should be done about it. The alternative view is that congestion is the only current constraint to unfettered traffic growth.

CRA contends it is a myth to believe that congestion can somehow be built out of the roads network. Each costly new piece of roads infrastructure is claimed to be the vital 'missing link' in the network. Any brief congestion respite is soon lost as traffic expands to fill the newly available road space and new bottlenecks develop. Over the past 50 years untold \$billions have been committed to roads projects while public transport has been neglected. Car usage by commuters has spiralled out of control. Current State and Federal financial policies (funding, subsidies and tax) which have encouraged this unsustainable situation must be urgently confronted. Eastern Freeway traffic is 90% driver only commuters. Most of this traffic heads South through Fitzroy and Carlton to the CBD; just 10% is destined for the Tullamarine Freeway (NCCCS). The long sought rail line to Doncaster and beyond to provide a viable transport alternative for commuters from the East is no longer even on the long-term agenda.

A widely held view in Carlton is that the present study focus is predicated on the belief of the roads lobby that a \$multi-billion East-West tunnel will provide an ultimate solution to traffic flow around the North of the City. Previous reviews which have rejected tunnel options in favour of modest and more cost effective and sustainable solutions have been ignored by Government. The projected opening of Eastlink in 2008 has focussed the Bracks Government on its lack of plans to deal with the consequential significant traffic growth North of the CBD. Freight congestion continues to be a major issue.

2. Recent Transport Studies

Much of the territory being canvassed in the present study was covered by the DOI *Northern Central City Corridor Study* (2001-03) and more recently, the MCC *Melbourne Transport Strategy* (2005-06). CRA was heavily involved with these extensive studies. The *NCCCS* included detailed assessment and modelling of traffic growth and flows which might profitably be included in the present study. The diverse and practical recommendations which arose from both these studies were largely ignored by the State Government, seemingly because of the negative influence of the roads lobby (Vicroads, RACV, Infrastructure Council, motor industry etc) which has become obsessed with an East-West tunnel. Powerful vested interests rather than evidence based arguments appear to set Government transport policies. In May 2006 the State Government released a policy document *Meeting Our Transport Challenges* which claimed to provide a transport vision for the future. This document has been widely rejected by the community as 'more of the same' with its primary emphasis on roads. It failed to address the major issues of excessive commuter traffic, sustainable transport, urban air and noise pollution, peak oil and global warming. Cars seem sacrosanct to the Government.

3. Freight Movement

A specific aspect of the current study relates to freight and the associated costs of freight traffic congestion. It is assumed that sea freight through the Port of Melbourne will double over the next 15 years and that this will necessitate major enhancements to the roads network for freight distribution. Heavy freight tends to follow fixed routes which are ideal for rail. CRA urges the present study to fully consider rail options to service the Port, along with measures to discourage commuters from the roads network so as to free it up for freight movements unsuitable for rail.

4. Sustainable Transport

The Bracks Government continually talks about 'sustainable' transport but directs funding priority to roads infrastructure. Over the past 50 years roads have enjoyed ten times the funding level of that allocated to public transport. The Government has provided no leadership towards a new and sustainable transport vision for Melbourne. A heavy rail line to Doncaster and further East, and a North-South extension of the City Rail Loop, as envisaged by the earlier studies above, should attract priority funding. The suburban rail network currently carries only 60% of the passengers it did in the 1950's. Public transport inefficiencies require urgent attention, particularly those associated with privatisation of the network, shortage of rolling stock and congestion in the City Loop. Commuter incentives such as free or very low cost public transport and improved services require critical examination. Such actions would provide attractive public transport alternatives for many car dependent commuters and represent a first step towards transport sustainability into the future. Federal tax laws (FBT, GST, Salary Packaging etc) which massively favour commuter motoring over public transport options require urgent review. A congestion tax on freeway commuter traffic should be considered.

CRA trusts the present East-West Needs Assessment will contribute to a sustainable transport vision for Melbourne for the next 50 years, rather than to just the next election.

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Transport Spokesperson