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Submission title: Doncaster Rail Line
Author(s): City of Melbourne, City of Yarra, City of Manningham
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14 October 2008

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Dear Sir/Madam

Submission to Infrastructure Australia – Feasibility Study for Doncaster Rail Line

This is a combined submission from the Cities of Manningham, Melbourne and Yarra, to Infrastructure Australia's Discussion Paper, '*Australia's Future Infrastructure Requirements*'.

Our Councils consider the liveability and creative future of Melbourne as an expanding capital city, relies on building a world class public transport network that provides access and mobility across the metropolitan area.

Gap in the rail network for the eastern growth corridor

A significant gap in Melbourne's rail network exists along the Eastern corridor through Doncaster which lacks rail (heavy rail) or tram (light rail) access. Accordingly, our Councils seek support from Infrastructure Australia for a feasibility study for rail transit to serve this Eastern corridor through Balwyn, Bulleen and Doncaster linked to the Ringwood rail line.

Action is needed to deal with congestion and commuting times on the Eastern Freeway in the morning and evening peaks, particularly now that it has been exacerbated by the opening of Eastlink. These congestion levels also apply for much of the weekend. The volumes of road based traffic along this corridor have considerable adverse impacts for Melbourne and inner city locations extending from the Freeway.

The Doncaster eastern corridor has been a growth corridor for many decades. The corridor extends from the City of Melbourne through the Cities of Yarra, Boroondara, Banyule, Manningham, Maroondah, Nillumbik and Whitehorse.

The Hurstbridge and Ringwood rail lines serve some eastern corridor areas towards the north and south of the eastern corridor respectively. Many commuters drive to these stations in preference to catching the bus to the Central Activity District (CAD) from Doncaster given the speed advantage rail transit has over the bus. Patronage on these lines already exceeds peak

load and constraints in patronage expansion on these lines would need to be remedied by significant investment to achieve additional capacity. Moreover, given the distance from these lines for much of the corridor, there is a broad catchment for a Doncaster rail service covering the above municipalities; the estimated catchment being some 500,000, plus.

As indicated below, a Department of Infrastructure Study in 2001, estimated that a rail line would attract a patronage of 50,000 passengers per day. It is considered this would be an underestimate with the impetus of greater mode shift to public transport related to rising fuel prices, peak oil, measures to restrict greenhouse gas emissions and social changes. A world class rail line matching the average speed of the Perth - Mandurah rail system at 90km/h, offering a travel time of 12-15 minutes for the 12 kms from Doncaster East to the CAD or up to 20 minutes, further along the corridor, could be expected to attract large numbers of commuters given the costs of car commuting and inability to match rail travel time.

History of proposals for rail to serve the eastern corridor

Anticipating substantial residential expansion along the eastern corridor, it was always intended that a rail line be extended into this growth area. Indeed, plans for a line to the Doncaster area date as far back as 1890, when it was proposed to extend the Kew line across the Outer Circle Line to Warrandyte, with a branch line to Templestowe.

The 1969 Metropolitan Transportation Study¹, recommended construction of a rail line along the median of the proposed Eastern Freeway from Clifton Hill to Bulleen, then on its own right of way to East Doncaster. Five stations were proposed beyond Victoria Park to Doncaster East (Balwyn North, Bulleen, Doncaster, Koonara and Doncaster East) with modal interchanges at Doncaster and Doncaster East. Initially the line was intended to be connected to the Clifton Hill line at Victoria Park, but ultimately, it was proposed in the 1969 Plan, to have a separate direct route to link to the underground loop via Fitzroy. This was to also provide a direct route to the City for trains from the Epping and Hurstbridge lines. In 1971, the State Parliament passed the Eastern Railway Construction Act setting the route for the rail line, with Minister Wilcox stating that the "rapidly growing" communities in the eastern suburbs needed a rail network:

"The line must be built to provide a much-needed rapid commuter service from this developing area and reduce the work load placed on our road system ...fixed track rapid transport is a vital factor in maintaining a viable city the size of Melbourne, and that this form of transport will become increasingly important as Melbourne grows."

This 1971 assessment is even more apt for the present circumstances.

Works in fact, commenced on the rail line as part of the Eastern Freeway development; bridges were constructed to allow for the rail line below and a tunnel was built for trains to exit the central median of the Freeway under the city bound vehicle lanes, to link to Victoria Park station. Although this tunnel was later filled in and the rail line did not proceed, the State Labour Party 1979 election platform committed to the Doncaster line extending to North Ringwood. Again in 1981 and 1982, the State Labour policy called for a rail line to Doncaster East. However, these moves were abandoned when in November 1982, legislation was introduced to repeal the Eastern Railway Construction Act.

¹ The Transportation Plan, by the Metropolitan Transportation Committee, chaired by Vernon Wilcox, Minister of Transport, (December 1969)

Severe road congestion

Road congestion has continued to grow along the Doncaster corridor without effective public transport to meet transit needs. Private car use is high, being the dominant mode of transport with 150,000 vehicles per day using the Eastern Freeway seeking access to the Central Activities District (CAD) and surrounding areas. Severe congestion arises on all key roads at the end of the Eastern Freeway – Hoddle Street, Alexandra Parade, Princes Street, Wellington Street, Smith Street, Brunswick Street, Nicholson Street, Lygon Street, Swanston Street, Victoria Parade Elgin Street, Johnson Street and Gertrude Street.

The level of congestion has major adverse impacts for all of the eastern access points to the CAD in terms of travel time, noise, pollution, loss of amenity, and accidents. All of these adversely impact on the viability and livability of Melbourne as a city.

The economic costs of congestion in Melbourne were estimated by the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission (VCEC) in 2006 as \$1.3-2.6 billion per annum.²

Employment and Development

The corridor links a number of key activity centres from the Central Activities District (CAD) in Melbourne (more than 350,000 people are employed in the city's 14,000 business locations, of which almost 200,000 are employed in the CBD) and the City of Yarra (whose 8,720 businesses provide 57,000 jobs, 78% filled by commuters), to the expanding Westfield major activity centre that would attract increases in visitation and employee numbers.

The EWLNA noted a reduction in city workers from the Doncaster region.³ This is seen to reflect transit access problems in terms of congestion, time and cost. However, effective public transit links are vital to optimize movement of people to and from their place of employment.

In addition, there are key development sites along the corridor, including in the vicinity of Hoddle Street, Alexandra Parade East, the Amcor site on the Chandler exit from the Eastern Freeway, the Wilsmere redevelopment on the Kew exit, and 47 hectares of the Eastern Golf Club at Doncaster. The expansion of Westfield as an Activity Centre as both a retail and commercial centre, should be supported by a rail link and take advantage of counter peak travel from inner areas to Westfield

The link between public transit and development opportunities to support urban density and land value capture needs to be factored into any feasibility study for transit on the corridor. The additional residential population and employment generated through growth along the corridor requires further study.

From consideration of triple bottom line impacts, it has been estimated that for every dollar invested in rail, returns at least \$1.80 to the economy.

It should be noted that over the last five years, 69% of all settlement in the Eastern Region of Melbourne has been skilled migration. This has constituted 52% of all skilled settlement in

² Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission (VCEC), *Making the Right Choices: options for managing transport congestion*, VCEC Final Report, September 2006.

³ Investing in Transport, East West Link Needs Assessment, A Study by Sir Rod Eddington (Melbourne 2008), page 168

Victoria.⁴ Continuation of federal policies to encourage skilled migration is likely to contribute to greater than expected demand for public transport to key CAD and inner city destinations.

A barrier to utilization of these skilled workers is the limited public transport access from the Eastern corridor to the central city employment areas including the research and hospital precincts in Carlton Parkville.

High level of car use on the Doncaster corridor

The City of Melbourne has assessed that 54% of morning peak travel to the CAD in Melbourne is by public transport, about double that by private car. Within the Doncaster corridor, those municipalities with poorer access to fixed rail services have a much higher proportion of workers travelling to the CAD by car compared to Public Transport. In Manningham and Nillumbik respectively, 60% and 52% of work trips to the CAD are by car. In contrast in Yarra and Whitehorse respectively 25% and 39% of CAD work trips are by car.

The car bias is even more dramatic if “mixed mode” (i.e. park and ride) work trips to the CAD are included, increasing to 70% in Manningham and 69% in Nillumbik.

Overall journey to work by car is 85.5% for Manningham compared to 78% for the Melbourne Statistical Division.

Residents who access services are forced into high costs of car ownership and transit, with families featuring multiple car ownership. For example, in Manningham, 22% of households own 3 or more vehicles compared with 14.2% for the Melbourne Statistical Division.

Estimates for Manningham based on 2006 data, show that a reduction in car ownership to the level of the Melbourne Statistical Division, would result in an annual total saving of \$118M or an average of \$3,065 per household per year. Similar estimates apply to other municipalities which would benefit from the Doncaster rail proposal. Residents in the Doncaster area with limited public transport options will be further disadvantaged by ongoing rising fuel costs and the passing on of costs of the pending Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS).

Low public transport use in the Doncaster corridor

The recent East West Link Needs Assessment (EWLNA) report confirms that the percentage of commuters from the Doncaster corridor using public transport falls far short of the percentages observed from corridors with a commuter rail service. Census Journey to Work data records 37% public transport use from Manningham for city bound work trips, while 56% is recorded in nearby Whitehorse and Maroondah. The EWLNA report stated that:

*“These figures suggest that the public transport options do not meet the transport needs of many residents (and) that the provision of better and more frequent public transport services to the region could significantly increase the use of public transport”.*⁵

⁴ Migrant Information Centre, Eastern Region, *Demographic Profile of the Eastern Region of Melbourne, September 2007*

⁵ Investing in Transport, East West Link Needs Assessment, A Study by Sir Rod Eddington (Melbourne 2008), page 168

Equity and access

The limitations in public transport for the Doncaster corridor create significant barriers for residents in this area in accessing jobs, education and services.

For young people and others unable to drive, there are considerable restrictions in public transport access to jobs, schools, tertiary institutions, recreation and other services. This applies for normal commuting but even more so in the evenings and weekends. The Bill Russell study of the corridor in 1991, identified access issues for children attending schools in the area such as MLC, Xavier, Genazzano, Trinity, Marcellan College, Carrey and others.⁶ Children more so than in other areas, rely on parents to drive them to school, often far afield. Another barrier for young people without a car is accessing tertiary institutions in inner areas of Carlton, Parkville and the CAD from the eastern corridor.

The elderly and people with disabilities are even more disadvantaged given greater restrictions in personal mobility. For the 10% of households without a car, living in the corridor, is especially isolating.

Options for public transport on the Corridor

While the EWLNA examined options to increase public transport use on the corridor and recommended a bus, its review has been overtaken by far greater expansion of public transport and higher fuel costs than envisaged in the report. The EWLNA recommended an improved bus Doncaster Area Rapid Transit (DART), potentially carrying 20,000 daily trips by 2021, as opposed to light or heavy rail which was forecast to carry potential passenger loads of 24,500 or 25,500 respectively by 2021. The EWLNA argued that the additional costs and construction difficulties for rail reduced the value of capturing the extra 4,500 to 5,500 trips.

However, our Councils believe that the EWLNA travel demand model used a conservative growth rate for public transport, (2.1%), though it acknowledged a higher Public Transport Division (PTD) rate (6.6%) based on patronage increases in the past 3 years and a continuation of the supporting societal factors.

Applying the higher 6.6% growth rate estimated by the PTD, and considering actual rail patronage growth rates of 12% per annum in recent years, would indicate a significant latent demand for public transport in the Doncaster corridor.

Our three Councils support the immediate implementation of a bus DART system as an interim measure until a rail DART is constructed. We note the reference in the EWLNA, that if an equivalent percentage of Manningham residents used public transport for the city bound work trips, that would be an extra 1,600 trips a day, requiring 31 extra buses, over and above the present bus patronage.

We are however concerned that the number of buses required for the corridor and difficulties in locating dedicated busways at the beginning and end of the Eastern Freeway on congested roads, will have adverse impacts on road capacity as a whole. This is particularly so when added road capacity is required for bicycle lanes.

⁶ *On the Right Track: Freeways or Better Public Transport for Melbourne's East*, Report to the Victorian Minister of Transport on the Eastern Corridor Transport Options Study, by Professor E W Russell, Melbourne, July 1991, page 45

Moreover, taking into account both the broader population catchments on the Eastern corridor, and high expected growth rates in public transport, our Councils consider there must come a point where the number of buses required to meet the public transport demand becomes un-operational and bus services give way to the higher capacity light or heavy rail. After all, one train can remove 8 kms of cars and do the work of 25-30 buses.

A study for the Department of Infrastructure in 2001, estimated that if the Doncaster rail line were built, the number of public transport trips to the CAD would increase to 50,000 per day. In this context, reference is made to the vast increase in passenger transit from 14,000 by bus to 50,000 when the Perth-Mandurah rail line was opened in 2007. In terms of cost of construction of a rail line, a Study by Sinclair Knight Mertz in 2002, estimated the cost of rail at \$1.9 billion,⁷ while that by the EWLNA, estimated \$1.7- \$2 billion.⁸

Conclusion

Given the significant factors identified above in terms of the transport disadvantage impacting on the Doncaster corridor and the impact on central Melbourne, of congestion arising from this corridor, the Cities of Manningham, Melbourne and Yarra request funding of \$5 million for a feasibility study into the provision of a rail line (light rail – heavy rail) along this corridor. The feasibility study should examine a heavy rail line from the Melbourne CAD, to the University of Melbourne and Hospital Research precinct, east to Doncaster, and linked to the existing Ringwood rail line. The study should also examine a light rail option extension along the corridor.

This line is considered to be essential to service the corridor and deal with a range of adverse effects as discussed above.

We look forward to further consideration of our request for funding such a feasibility study for the rail line to Doncaster to be undertaken.

We would be pleased to meet with you or your officers for further discussion.

Yours sincerely



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⁷ Sinclair, Knight Mertz, Northern Central City Corridor Study: Strategy Elements Cost Estimate Validation, Department of Infrastructure, November 2002, page 5.

⁸ Investing in Transport, East West Link Needs Assessment, A Study by Sir Rod Eddington (Melbourne 2008), page 177