

Speaking Notes:

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Presentation to the EES Hearing - Westgate Tunnel Project

Thursday 14th September – 12.15pm (10 mins)

Good afternoon panel and thank you for the opportunity to make a presentation to this EES inquiry (***Distribute copies of the Melbourne's west map***)

About Western Melbourne Tourism

Western Melbourne Tourism Inc (WMT) is an urban regional tourism organisation incorporated for the purposes of promoting and developing the visitor economy and growing tourism within the western metropolitan region. This region embraces the municipal boundaries of Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton, Moonee Valley and Wyndham councils. (So this is the geographic area I will be referring when I talk about 'our region' or 'Melbourne's west')

Our organisation is overseen by an independent board comprising representation from the five of western metropolitan partner councils (not currently including Maribyrnong) as well as Parks Victoria, Victoria University and Leadwest (presented to the hearing yesterday - Craig Rowley, CEO) along with representatives from the visitor sector (current board members elected are from the Arts - The Substation Newport, Attractions - Zoos Victoria, and Accommodation - Quest Apartments) We have an independent Chair, Jan Jacklin.

I am employed as a part time Executive reporting to the Chair and board. The resources of the organisation are not substantial. More information about the organisation and its activities can be found at our website:

www.melbourneswest.com.au

As a network of local Council representation and other stakeholders Western Melbourne Tourism has a strong strategic interest in the profile and development of the visitor economy and the broad perception of Melbourne's west as a visitor destination.

Our submissions are relatively brief - with a simple focus on the opportunities and impacts of this project relating to the visitor economy of the region.

While recognising there is significant 'local visitation' from other parts Melbourne into the local region, visitors from outside of Melbourne and Victoria, will also be a significant user group of this roadway.

We can foresee how the project will enhance access to the region, relieve congestion and provide a much needed second crossing of the Maribyrnong River. It would be expected that it will lift the amenity of the inner west as a place to visit. We believe the development of a West Gate Tunnel will support the further development of the visitor economy of the region and Victoria.

In the terms of the benefits to the visitor economy of the region we offer broad support to the project. We qualify this support in saying that design of the project requires far more close assessment on local impacts on the key recreation and destination hubs, particularly the Maribyrnong River.

We appreciate there are trade-offs, but based on the material I have reviewed far more urban design rigour is needed, justification of the design outcomes, and the assessment of impacts and especially the opportunity to minimise visual impacts.

I have no further written material to submit and will just speak to the points the written submission already provided.

Key Points

The key points I would like to present the inquiry are:

- The opportunity afforded by the project to provide a key gateway landmark for the region and improve visual perception and identity of the region;
- To upgrade signage and wayfaring directions to ensure passing traffic are aware of the key attractions and events across the region;
- To ensure the opportunities to upgrade infrastructure for cycling and walking are maximised;
- That greater rigour is required to reduce impacts and improve layout and the design, particularly at crossings proposed at the Maribyrnong River; and
- To ensure the introduction of toll fees (assuming this funding model will apply) will not have a negative impact on visitors from interstate and overseas.

Visitor numbers using the Westgate/ Princes Freeway

It is hard to ascertain the precise number of visitors using the M1 and M80 Freeways. As a guide:

- In 2016, approximately 3.6 million people visited Melbourne's west comprising 2.7 million day trip visitors (74%); 789,000 domestic overnight visitors (22%) and 107,178 international visitors (4%)

- In terms of share of overall visits to Melbourne (approx. 25 million) , Melbourne’s West receives 17% of Metro Melbourne’s Day Trip visitors, 9% of domestic overnight visits and 6% of International visits
- The Geelong region receives approximately 5 million visitors each year
 - 3 million of these visits are day visitors
 - 85% of day visitors travel by car – so roughly “say 2.5-2.8 mill visitors travel to the Geelong region by car”
 - Some traffic moving to and from areas beyond Melbourne – eg Avalon Airport, Werribee other parts of regional Victoria, the majority will be sourced from Melbourne

Visitor definition - Visitors are defined by Tourism Research Australia as - travelling for at least 50 kms and staying away from home for a minimum of 4 hours (and not staying for more than 12 months)

Gateway entry

For many of millions of users of the M1 and M80 , including visitors to Melbourne and Victoria their judged perception of Melbourne’s west is formed by their ‘freeway view’ from the car enroute to and from Geelong and beyond to western Victoria . It is incredibly uninspiring currently and helps reinforces some prevailing negative perceptions of the western suburbs.

The proposed freeway upgrades offer significant opportunities to enhance the driver view and visual perception of the region, and sense of arrival to Melbourne. The tunnel entrance and new gateway offers a wonderful opportunity for a land mark identity element to define the entry and exit to the region – ‘a landmark for the region to known by’ for visitors to the local region or Melbourne and Victoria.

Melbourne has been building reputation for the quality of the urban design of its road infrastructure and we seek assurances that the equivalent quality of design will be invested in this project as has occurred in other parts of Melbourne such as on Eastlink and Tullamarine gateway. We do not want the west to be a poor cousin of other equivalent road projects.

The material included within the EES documentation did not appear to include much back ground about how the current form of the design was arrived at and the merits of this? Was there any competitive process to arrive at the final design? Are there other options beyond the “Foot in Footscray”? Is there more detail possible to show the visual articulation of the driver view?

Signage and Wayfinding

We also foresee the opportunity of improving wayfaring to ensure signage is integrated into the urban design planning to enable strengthened directional information to local attractions and features in the region; as well as broader

sources of visitor information such as current event information or even displaying website URLs, or directions to the local visitor centre services.

Generally speaking the region has less mainstream profile as a tourism destination when compared with some other parts of Melbourne or Victoria. Awareness of the many great attractions in the region, (**see Map**) particularly along the west bay coast line, could be significantly enhanced with a relatively simple program of signage and some more elegant branding.

If you refer to your visitor maps there is significant amount of great visitor experience in the region not currently captured.

Cycling and Walking Trails

An important potential legacy of the project is further development of cycling and walking trails. Cycling is a key means for visitors to access the region. One competitive advantage of the region is it predominantly flat!

There are a significant number of trails – that link the west back to Docklands and other parts of Melbourne such as:

- Federation Trail (Yarraville to Werribee)
- Coastal Trail or Bay Trail West (Punt at Scienceworks to Cheatham Wetlands),
- Maribyrnong River Trail
- Kororoit Creek Trail (is sections from Altona Coastal Park to Mt Kororoit near Melton).

There are a number of key sections of the trail network not fully developed, and with a relatively small investment in some strategic connections, will open up a much fuller and more comprehensive network of trails through the region. A comprehensive review of this cycling infrastructure has been completed in *West Trails, a Western Metropolitan Region Trails Strategic Plan*. (A Strategy report is now finalised and currently being presented to Councils across the region for adoption)

As flagged in our written submission, some sections of trail have been identified in the Westgate Tunnel EES align with the priorities of the West Trails project and these are strongly supported:

- Extensions to the Federation Creek Trail
- Completing a gap in the Kororoit Creek Trail (Geelong Road to Grieve Parade)

There are other key sections not included which we would like to see added that would further enhance the network. Specifically:

- Extensions to the **Stony Creek Trail** (North west to Sunshine Rd/ Somerville Rd to Cala Street)

- A small section of the **Coastal Trail** near Newport Power station
- Extension of the **Koroit Creek Trail** from Princes Highway to Millers Road and link to the Coastal Trail at Altona

We would not support the concept of the Velo which appears to be designed as a speed tube for commuter cyclists. For visitors experiencing the region by bike we would promote the experience of a ground level journey linking from the city or via Docklands – many crossing the Maribyrnong River at the popular cycle punt crossing at Scienceworks at Spotswood; or, linking into trails further north up the Maribyrnong River valley.

It is acknowledged the Westgate Tunnel project has a goal of a net improvement of local amenity – cycling will be safer and more attractive if there are fewer trucks and fewer cars traversing through the inner west. This will be enhanced with investment in the trail network - as an offset benefit of the broader impacts of project.

Maribyrnong River Crossing

An area of major concern is the proposed elevated road infrastructure crossing of the Maribyrnong River. This section of the river is evolving as a vibrant local precinct and destination for visitors.

After your many days of attending this hearing here at FCAC you will be becoming aware of the delights of the precinct and can see the potential of how it will develop further! This is a cool spot! (Refer emerging hub for creative workers – eg. in the Dream Factory)

The proposals to include expansive overhead bridging and road flyovers will have a major visual impact. Can this road be kept underground and connect to Footscray Road on the east side of the river? (*refer Herald Sun yesterday?*) Or failing this at least reduce scale, the expansive and visual blockage of the structure can be a much more sympathetic bridging treatment – we would support the proposals Maribyrnong's Council's Urban designer (Document no 186 has presented by Aspect Studios / Kirsten Bauer).

I am expecting this aspect of the project design will be covered in detail via other submitters, however I would strongly implore the panel to preserve the amenity of this section of the river – emerging as a significant destination precinct, not just for local residents, but for the city more broadly.

Tollway fees for interstate and international visitors to the region

Tollway fees have been proven to be a significant issue for tourist visitors using both CityLink and Eastlink. Visitors from outside of Melbourne are often unaware that charges apply.

This has been a significant issue in the past and I understand Transurban and Eastlink have worked at improving arrangements for visitors, such as partnership arrangements with car hire companies. We would hope it is stipulated that the equivalent arrangements be put in place and adequately promoted to ensure visitors are fully aware of any road charges to avoid negative impacts of travelling and being unknowingly charged.

To conclude and reinforce what has been submitted :

- We want to see the design of hallmark gateway entry and clearer articulation and presentation of this view – to be a landmark piece of urban design that will enhance the image and add value to our region
- We want to ensure the project includes the signage and navigation of the visitor assets in the region traversed by the M1 and M80
- Ensure the cycling infrastructure is developed according to the plans included in The West Trails Strategy
- We request the panel to the treatment of the Maribyrnong River crossing warrants major revision to protect the precinct character and amenity of the Maribyrnong Riverside precinct
- Ensure any road toll system will be appropriately implemented having regard to tourist visitors

Thank you for the opportunity to present to the panel.

I would be happy to follow up with any information that may further assist in your EES assessment.