

8 March 2013

Emailed to: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Submission to Inquiry: Impacts on Health of Air Quality in Australia

My submission is a parochial one. While the comments in it may well be pertinent to other areas of Australia, they relate specifically to the Regional Rail Link (RRL) and the way it is currently being rolled out in West Melbourne, Victoria.

Not until June 2012 were households and businesses in Railway Place, West Melbourne, officially told that the North Melbourne rail-over-rail flyover would be upgraded to enable the number of diesel trains using it to increase about ninefold. This information came in the form of a notice in which a little red line in the accompanying diagram highlighted the flyover and the tracks next to Railway Place for the first time. All previous flyers had concentrated on the new tracks being laid on the far (Docklands) side of the rail network.

This rail flyover leads into two tracks that run parallel with Railway Place, West Melbourne, between 10 and 13 metres from residents' properties.

There are currently up to 20 train movements per day adjacent to Railway Place consisting of scheduled Sydney, Adelaide and Albury services using the standard gauge line and locomotives 'shunting' into the railway yards for maintenance and refuelling. These frequently idle next to Railway Place for 20 minutes and more, often with two locos together. These are the older N-class and P-class, not the less polluting VLocity trains.

The Regional Rail Link plans to re-route all Bendigo and Ballarat trains onto the flyover and alongside Railway Place. Although it is not envisaged that Seymour trains will use this route, they will have the capability to do so if necessary.

Conservatively, this will mean 187 diesel train movements adjacent to Railway Place per day when the RRL is commissioned in 2016. A Frequently Asked Questions document provided last year by the RRL Authority (RRLA) at the insistence of local residents quoted 150 trains plus 25% additional movements ($150 + 37.5 = 187.5$). A higher figure was given in the RRL Air Quality Report, recently reviewed by the Environment Protection Authority (EPA). This study based its findings on an estimated 244 trains with unspecified additional movements.

Whatever the final figure, it is a huge increase on the current number of trains, which already produce extremely unpleasant diesel fumes.

Local people find it extraordinary, therefore, that the pollution level is actually forecast to decrease by 2016. An explanation given by the EPA during a community information session on 20 February was that, although car numbers were increasing, motor vehicle technology was improving, resulting in a gradual improvement in air quality over recent years. The EPA representative endorsed the Air Quality Report's conclusion that "predicted concentrations will be well within air-quality criteria".

The problem appears to be with the way air quality is measured. While I have no scientific background, I understand that measurements are averaged over a one-square-kilometre grid. This type of analysis is never going to reveal the true nature of pollution at a specific site, in this case Railway Place, West Melbourne.

What my neighbours and I need is air quality measurements next to the railway line. Only this will tell us the amounts of nitrogen dioxide, PM 10 and PM 2.5 that we are breathing in daily now and the levels that we will inspire after 2016 if the West Melbourne section of the RRL project goes ahead as planned.

Preliminary construction work at the junction of Railway Place and Dudley Street is due to begin next week, on Wednesday 13 March. This is to add a new section to the Dudley Street bridge (to the north-east) and two railway tracks that will run — unbelievably — within 450 millimetres of Festival Hall, an icon of Melbourne's music industry.

In my submission, Australian air quality standards are totally inadequate and provide misleading results. This is probably compounded by reliance on the *Environment Protection Act* of 1970 with its various updates and add-ons, surely outdated and impractical legislation.

The State Government's possibly negligent attitude towards West Melbourne seems to have come about because in 2010 the RRLA relied on old maps that showed Railway Place as industrial. It has never been entirely industrial since the nine surviving terrace houses were built over a century ago to accommodate railway workers. However, with most of the commercial buildings now converted to apartments (some of them built after the announcement of the RRL project), there are at least 200 people living along Railway Place or at the railway end of Rosslyn, Stanley, Roden, Hawke, Abbotsford and Dryburgh streets who are affected by noise and pollution from the railway. Also, hundreds of commuters from North Melbourne Station walk along Railway Place.

The then planning minister, Justin Madden, approved the RRL project and exempted the section between Moonee Ponds Creek and Southern Cross Station from the requirement for an environmental effects statement, thus removing any protection for Railway Place, West Melbourne. Current Planning Minister Matthew Guy rubber-stamped this decision when the Liberal Government came into power.

As an example of the typical response members of Fair Go For West Melbourne get from government ministers to the many letters written over the past six months, a letter I wrote to Planning Minister Guy on 25 January this year, with copies to Transport Minister Mulder and Health Minister Davis, has not even been acknowledged by the first two. The Office of the Minister for Health and Ageing did respond by letter on 31 January. It concluded: "The Minister has asked me to thank you for the information provided and advise that the issue you raised has been noted."

We are all too familiar with the catch-phrase "has been noted" used by government representatives and the RRLA alike. It means "We will do nothing". This is not good enough from our State Health Minister.

While I applaud the construction of new railways in general, unfortunately the RRL has been designed with absolutely no regard for the impacts on local people's health, not just in West Melbourne but also in Footscray and, no doubt, other sections along the route. We need help urgently. Thank you for allowing me to take part in this discussion.

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(Member, Fair Go For West Melbourne)