



30 January 2014

Yarra Climate Action Now (YCAN) wishes to make a submission to the Senate Committee inquiry into the Role of public transport in delivering productivity outcomes. YCAN is a community group of volunteers who are actively concerned about issues of climate change and sustainability in the City of Yarra and beyond.

As members of this group we wish to comment specifically on the second term of reference, “**the social and environmental benefits of public transport projects compared to road infrastructure projects such as Westconnex and the East-West Link**”.

### **Introduction**

Cities worldwide, even previously car-centric US metropolises such as Detroit and Los Angeles, recognise that promoting public transport, cycling and walking is essential in helping the planet tackle climate change. These cities are among those around the world who are closing down parts of their freeway networks and spending public money on public transport and bicycle infrastructure.

YCAN members live in a municipality that is relatively well provided with public transport, therefore we have first-hand experience of the benefits. The City of Yarra is an inner-suburban area with the highest rate of bicycle use in the Melbourne metropolitan area and a very high rate of walking to work. Car ownership is also very low, with 29% of households having no cars.<sup>1</sup>

### **Benefits of public transport projects**

Public transport usage is part of social connectivity, increasing sustainability, liveability and general wellbeing. Governments should be encouraging and facilitating the spread of public transport such as Doncaster Rail, which would cater for areas that have always been poorly served e.g. Whitehorse, Manningham, Wyndham. The massive cost of projects like the EW Link project will swallow all transport funding for decades, precluding any and all public transport development.

#### *Reducing congestion*

World-class public transport is a more cost-effective way of reducing congestion on the roads than building more and more freeways. With excellent public transport, people can better access jobs, schools, doctors and entertainment, freeing up space on

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<sup>1</sup> East West Link Comprehensive Impact Statement, p.19

existing roads for those who have no option but to use roads, e.g. trucks and tradesmen, and enabling them to better do their jobs.

A single train can take up to 800 cars off the road. This is a much more efficient way to reduce congestion on the roads. Spending the \$14 billion earmarked for the East West Link on public transport would mean that every single item on the public transport wish-list (Doncaster Rail, Airport Link, Metro Rail, signalling upgrades, railway crossing upgrades) can be completed. How many cars would that take off the road?

#### *Healthier lifestyle*

Building freeways encourages individual car use, which detracts from social connectivity, sustainability, liveability and general wellbeing. The culture of using public transport, cycling and walking leads to better general health from increased exercise and cleaner air. Encouraging car usage does not.

Improved public transport would encourage healthier lifestyles, where some walking to and from train stations would be incorporated into people's daily routines, and travel time could be spent reading, working or relaxing instead of enduring the tension of gridlocked traffic on a daily basis.

#### *Improving the Economy*

Anyone who has visited any of the major cities in the world with extensive public transport systems knows the benefits such a system brings, not only to its citizens, but also to visitors. Tourism would benefit greatly from a comprehensive rail system that would make it possible for visitors to travel around the city and suburbs easily and efficiently. Improved public transport would be good for the economy.

### **Detrimental aspects of major freeway projects**

#### *Loss of public open space*

Building new freeways eats up public space. Putting heavy freight into a high-density area, particularly when combined with the loss of open space and trees that help absorb carbon emissions, is a major concern.

The loss of sports grounds and passive recreation space will have a negative impact on community health and well being across the metropolitan area.

With the EW Link in particular, there will be adverse health impacts on the elderly and young. We have great concerns about the proximity of the construction and future usage of the EW Link to the Gold Street Primary School and nearby Sambell Lodge, the Brotherhood of St Laurence's aged-care accommodation which caters for elderly people with special needs.

Public open space such as Royal Park, Yarra Bend National Park and reserves along Moonee Ponds Creek are irreplaceable. The large-scale removal of mature trees and the removal of wetlands and open space in Royal Park, on the Merri Creek, as part of the construction of the EW Link, are unacceptable in terms of destruction of native vegetation and habitat, as well as biodiversity loss.

#### *Removal of vegetation*

Removing any vegetation decreases wildlife habitation and hinders flight and travel corridors for birds and other wildlife. Trees are essential for mitigating the effects of carbon pollution; removing trees simultaneously with increasing motor vehicle emissions makes no sense.

#### *Contribution to Climate Change*

As reported in the federal government's *Green Vehicle's Guide*

(<http://www.greenvehicleguide.gov.au/gvgpublicui/Information.aspx?type=VehicleEmissions>) there are "two major concerns associated with car exhaust emissions". One is that they contribute to urban air pollution with the emission of carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide etc. The other is the emission of the greenhouse gases carbon dioxide

and methane, which as is stated on this government website “contribute to climate change”. The long-term impacts of increased greenhouse gas emissions will add to the nation’s already unacceptable greenhouse footprint. As the *Green Vehicle Guide* states, motor vehicle emissions were responsible for 13.2% of Australia’s greenhouse emissions in 2009, and continue to increase.

Proposed mitigation responses will never prevent a further increase in greenhouse emissions from cars using freeways such as the East West link in the future.

## **Conclusion**

Our roads can no longer cope. But projects such as the East West Link that seek to facilitate increased car use can only encourage Melbourne’s already out-of-control urban sprawl, with its completely inadequate public transport provisions.

The public transport system in Melbourne is inadequate to cater for the current population, and unless it is expanded and renewed, it will totally fail to cater for the growth in population into the future. A world-class public transport system is the only way to cut traffic as it means that people can get out of their cars, freeing up road space.

Moving people by public transport is not only more efficient, it is also better for the environment, locally and globally. Building more and more freeways, and thus encouraging people to use polluting vehicles is only increasing Australia’s already unacceptable greenhouse footprint.

Experience has proved that the public wants improved public transport and will willingly take up the opportunity to use it whenever it is provided. When the South Morang rail extension opened in Melbourne in 2012, the service reached full capacity in two weeks.<sup>2</sup> When the Mandurah rail line opened in WA in 2007, the master plan predicted daily boardings of 25,000 per weekday. In its first year of operation there were over 50,000 boardings per weekday. By 2013, that had increased to 75,000.<sup>3</sup>

The passenger capacity for expanded public transport is there, as is the will to use it. We just need governments to have the will to provide the facilities.

Thank you for this opportunity to make this submission.

Carole Wilkinson

On behalf of YCAN

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/two-days-down-the-track-south-morang-is-still-a-missing-link-20120426-1xo1s.html>

<sup>3</sup> Public presentation by Allanah McTiernan, former WA Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, Fitzroy Town Hall, 13 June 2013