

Submission on the East-West Link Needs Assessment Report (Eddington Report)

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Introduction

The core of the EWLNA Report contains major road and rail infrastructure proposals: a road tunnel linking the Ring Road and City Link with the Eastern Freeway, and a rail tunnel linking the Northern and Caulfield railway groups, together with a new rail path for Geelong trains to access the city through the Tarneit area. There are also proposals for new bicycle infrastructure.

It is the view of GAMUT that the road tunnel proposal should not be supported. The road tunnel cannot perform the task of relieving congestion in the transport system as a whole. It will merely add to congestion in the inner suburbs and central area, adversely affecting the living and working environment of those areas and leading to further demands for road infrastructure expenditure elsewhere.

The rail proposals should be supported. There are issues that remain to be clarified regarding the detail of capacity constraints, but the rail proposals will provide an immediate strategic boost to the capacity of the train system because they are targeted on the parts of the system where urban growth is driving patronage most heavily. They are also strategically sensible because the new metro style proposal will bring efficient transport to important trip attractors in central Melbourne, while speeding access from outer suburban growth areas. The proposals do not preclude the needed outer suburban extensions, but are a pre-requisite for them.

The bicycle infrastructure proposals will create attractive new bike paths between East and West. The paths will help build a culture of safer cycling for work and other functional purposes as well as recreational trips. The bicycle infrastructure proposals should be supported.

The road proposals

The road tunnel addresses the congestion on the Westgate Bridge caused by growth of and change in the residential population of Melbourne's western suburbs and their journeys to work in the central and inner city. Significant numbers of workers in the West now occupy business service jobs in the central business district (CBD) and inner suburbs, and drive their cars to work across the Westgate Bridge. There are enough city commuters to cause congestion on the most attractive route to the city.

Traffic flowing into the city from both East and West on the freeways spreads out to multiple destinations in and around the central area. Traffic moving across the city is concentrated on the freeways and then spreads out again to destinations in and around the central area. About 60 per cent of the traffic ends up in the inner city and 40 per cent moves on beyond.

An economic cost benefit analysis was conducted for the road tunnel by Meyrick and Associates and its conclusions are very clear. The costs of the road tunnel are considered to be \$7.1 billion and the benefits in time saved on the trips into and across town are projected to be \$3.2 billion, giving a benefit–cost ratio of 0.45. In other words the costs of construction heavily outweigh the benefits in aggregate time savings.

There are other ‘systemic’ benefits which Meyrick adds into the equation but they are relatively small and still only increase the benefit-cost ratio of the road tunnel to 0.73. The Meyrick figure for construction costs of the road tunnel (\$9.5 billion) differs from that in the main EWLNA Report and includes all the necessary ancillary road works. On the basis of past experience with tunnels, this is likely to be an underestimate.

There are other systemic *costs* which are not entered into the Meyrick calculations. Like all such benefit–cost analyses, no account is taken of induced traffic – increased car traffic flowing into and around the city encouraged by the new road. No account is taken of the costs of increased congestion in the CBD and inner suburbs. No account is taken of the less quantifiable aspects of social and environmental damage to communities in the path of the road works, or the damage to the city core pedestrian and retailing environment from increased traffic.

Especially important, no account is taken of the greenhouse cost of the increased traffic and longer journeys that the road tunnel will facilitate across the metropolitan system. The road tunnel militates against effective climate change policy adding to the release of greenhouse emissions both in construction and in use. The Draft Report of Professor Ross Garnaut acknowledges that a change of travel behaviour will be necessary to make more use of public transport. State governments need to assist the change. But as Garnaut observes (p. 475), when petrol prices rise, individual responses will be determined by the proximity and quality of public transport services. If there are suitable substitutes, people will switch demand away from private transport and fuel. However, he observes, ‘for many households public transport is not available’.

The rail package

The rail package as a whole moves Melbourne towards its future as a less car-dependent city, where jobs, education and leisure opportunities in a thriving service economy and vibrant central area can be readily accessed daily by hundreds of thousands of suburban and regional Victorians without recourse to freeway frustrations and car costs.

The addition of new capacity to the train system is a starting point. Over the past three years, train use in Melbourne has boomed, growing over 8 per cent a year and above 12 per cent in critical corridors like Watergardens. A system which had been operated below capacity for years has had to be pushed toward its capacity by re-timetabling, by adding extra services, and altering the paths of some trains. This has bought some time, but cannot realistically cope with a compound growth of 8 per cent, which will lead to a doubling of demand over 10 years. There is no prospect that this growth will decline. With CSIRO forecasts of petrol perhaps rising to \$8 a litre over the same period, the danger is that the current growth forecasts are too low.

The government and transport planners were caught by surprise when this growth started about three years ago: what they must do to respond is commit immediately to high capacity enhancement for the near future. Just as road space was added year after year in the period of modal shift towards the motorcar, we must now add more rail paths as people increasingly leave their cars in the garage and head out by public transport. The figures for modal shift in Melbourne are significant: apart from the massive growth in suburban and regional train usage, tram usage

has jumped too. And a recent survey showed 27 per cent of Melbournians were now choosing to use their car less.

The Eddington rail tunnel is correctly placed to serve the need for trunk capacity. In the west, it will commence near Footscray and provide additional paths for the very crowded services from rapidly growing areas such as Altona, Werribee, Tarneit, Melton, Caroline Springs, and Roxburgh Park. The extra capacity will also mean that the booming V-Line regional fast rail services from Geelong and Marshall; Ballarat and Ararat; Woodend, Kyneton, Castlemaine and Bendigo will not need to be caught behind stopping trains.

This objective is particularly supported by Eddington's prescient proposal for a link from Tarneit to Sunshine, which will allow the very frequent fast trains from Geelong to bypass the congested route from Newport to Footscray, which is fully committed to suburban trains from Werribee, Altona and Williamstown. Regional Fast Rail has been an extremely successful development, with very frequent and currently crowded services from the regional cities. The full benefit will be received when these 160kmh trains can continue into central Melbourne at high speed, delivering very rapid journey times for travellers from Geelong and beyond. The Ballarat and Bendigo services will enjoy the same rapid paths through the suburbs. But the Tarneit connection has an added benefit: it will be a pilot example of providing a rail route through future suburbs before houses are built, allowing better design of suburban centres for a world where fewer journeys are by car.

Where does this leave the urgently needed outer suburban connections – serving areas beyond Cranbourne, Rowville, Doncaster, and Mernda, as well as the needed electrification of the Sunbury and Melton lines? In a nutshell, the core capacity expansion is the pre-requisite. When the Rowville feasibility study was undertaken several years ago by a team led by one of the authors, there was capacity on the Dandenong line to add the extra trains. This capacity is rapidly disappearing, but the addition of space for 25 trains an hour via the Eddington tunnel will mean that Rowville can be built. To provide a suburban level of service to Sunbury and Melton will also mean extra capacity, as will any alleviation of the existing overcrowding on the Watergardens line. Again, the Eddington proposals will meet this need. For the moment, Doncaster is being provided with Doncaster Area Rapid Transit, a smartened up bus system. Though a second best alternative to rail, it provides some improvement for Doncaster residents. Because Doncaster does not have a massive suburban growth area beyond it, a Doncaster rail link doesn't have the same urgency as the areas where Eddington proposes the initial investment should be made. Finally, there is the Mernda extension – and the related extension of the 86 tram to Doreen. These should be in final planning now, since once the new bridge at Clifton Hill is completed there is no technical obstacle to extending adequate public transport to this critical growth corridor.

Finally, how should these proposals be financed? Our view is that this is the place for a public-public-public partnership. In other words, while state government as the owner of the system should be central and bear the largest financial burden, both the Commonwealth and local government have roles to play. We suggest that the federal government contribute \$4 billion from the Building Australia fund, with the remaining \$4 billion provided by state government. However, we also think there is an opportunity and need for local government to play a larger role. We think that local government should design and finance – or manage private developers to finance – new stations and their surrounds. While slightly reducing the burden on state finance – at the rate of about \$25 million a time – we think local government is best placed to integrate stations into surrounding urban design, making them safe, accessible and lively places within their suburban contexts. As we move away from car dependence, stations will once again be

community focal points. Councils are the right level of government to manage this locally. And where the state is lagging in providing a station due to shortage of capital – as was for many years the case at Roxburgh Park and is now the case at Caroline Springs – a local government role of this kind will meet community demands and interests sooner and better. In the case of the new station proposed for Parkville, the University could use the project as a showcase for its architectural and planning expertise.

The community is speaking very clearly that it wants the option of car-free access to jobs, education and leisure across the metropolis. An efficient rail system is the path to this goal, and the Eddington rail proposals the best entry point we are likely to get soon.

The cycling package

Metropolitan Melbourne needs a fully separated bicycle infrastructure, and a new approach to bicycle infrastructure planning. There are four reasons for this:

- 1 Greatly increasing bicycle use is the quickest and surest way of reducing greenhouse emissions from urban transport.
- 2 A big increase in bicycle use will substantially reduce traffic congestion on the roads.
- 3 Separating bicycle paths provides the safety cyclists need. People will not get back on their bikes in large numbers until they feel safe from death and injury from motor vehicle collisions.
- 4 Increasing bicycle use for routine trips will improve health and reduce the incidence of obesity in the population.

Cycling is growing in Melbourne, mostly in the inner city, but from a very low base. Most cycling activity remains recreational, no doubt because of the provision of a network of superb recreational trails across Melbourne.

Now the Eddington Report argues for a ‘new whole of government approach to cycling policy and infrastructure that treats cycling as a separate distinct traffic category with the aim of making cycling competitive with cars and buses for commuting and shorter trips’ (p. 81). This approach is very welcome and is strongly supported by GAMUT. The seven cycle path projects represent a major step towards meeting the special infrastructure needs of functional cycling.

Conclusion

The Eddington Report contains some important proposals. Some, like the rail and cycling proposals, are prescient and anticipate the needs of a less car-dependent city of the future, a city that is equipped to deal effectively with the economic challenges of peak oil and climate change. Other proposals like the road tunnel are a hangover of twentieth century thinking when the car was considered to be the transport mode of the future.

We therefore believe that the Government of Victoria should not feel bound to accept all of the Eddington proposals, but should discriminate carefully between those that look clearly to the future, and those that stem from the past.