

North East Link. Potential loss of land use on the NE Link Route. Reckless irresponsibility, missed opportunities

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Unless action is taken to stop this disastrous project the community will be permanently affected by the loss of many important benefits for our local environment. Existing parkland and sporting facilities including a tennis club and sections of a public golf course will be buried under concrete, wildlife habitat will be destroyed, houses and dozens of existing businesses will be bulldozed, creeks will be barrel drained and communities will be divided.

Once these community assets and beneficial uses are destroyed, they will be gone forever to be replaced by a 'Los Angeles' style traffic sewer which will not solve congestion problems.

Trees and parkland

Most people would assume that public parkland was sacrosanct and is protected in perpetuity for future generations from development. It appears that the Andrews government has no such qualms in destroying parkland especially where it forms a convenient linear alignment such as the Koonung creek valley or Bulleen parklands and school playing fields.

Trees are essential for life on earth and their benefits include:

- Cooling and shading in summer
- Cleaner air and water
- Improved biodiversity and habitat for wildlife
- Reduced flooding and soil erosion
- Improved health and wellbeing
- Places to explore, rest, unwind and rejuvenate
- Carbon sequestration and the mitigation of climate change.

What right do the government and NELP (North East Link Project) have to destroy existing parkland and thousands of trees? In the northern section large chunks of the woodland on the western side of the Simpson Barracks are to be excised. On both sides of the Eastern Freeway between Mitcham and Kew NELP intends to widen the road by shifting sound barriers outwards and gobbling up parkland to make room for up to 20 traffic lanes in some cases.

This destructive project will result in the loss of at least 26,000 'amenity trees' and about 180 large (>80cm diameter) indigenous trees, including hollow-bearing examples. In addition to this, thousands of smaller indigenous trees and shrubs will be lost. Greenery replaced by hot concrete.

Despite NELP's assurances that tree loss will be "minimised", one only has to see the level of destruction which has already occurred to the Borlase Reserve in Yallambie. In 2018 in a hypocritical example of 'pork barrelling' Premier Daniel Andrews announced the development of 'pocket parks' in Melbourne's most

marginal seats. These were mostly in inner-city electorates where it appears it was hoped this would hold back the Greens vote.

Whilst trumpeting this announcement there was a deafening silence on the proposed destruction of existing parkland bordering the Eastern Freeway between Kew through to Mitcham and perhaps beyond. In addition to the permanent destruction of parkland, NELP proposes to use parks as lay down areas for the storage of plant and site sheds during construction including in Elgar Park and Junction Road Reserve in Nunawading. In Banyule, Trist Street Reserve, Sellars Street Reserve, Watsonia Station car park Reserve and Watsonia Road Reserve including the Watsonia Timber and Hardware store and council car parks are intended to be used as vast, muddy construction sites.

If anyone doubts NELP's intentions in relation to relocating 'noise barriers' *Stop NE Link Alliance* (SNEL) has obtained a copy of a standard letter given to a Blackburn North resident requesting permission to access her property near the Eastern Freeway for a cynical '*Landscape Visual Impact Assessment Investigation*'.

In their joint Submission to the NE Link Project Environment Effects Statement Inquiry which commenced on 25 July 2019 Banyule, Boroondara and Whitehorse Councils expressed their overarching position that the Project should not proceed. All the Councils objected strenuously to the loss of trees and parkland. For example: "Whitehorse Council strongly objects to the number of trees planned and at risk of removal within Whitehorse, particularly mature trees. The Council recommended "a significant reduction in the number of trees to be removed is to be achieved and vegetation at Elgar Park to be classified as native vegetation not amenity plantings".

- "The permanent loss of open space is a major concern for [Whitehorse] Council. The EES is dismissive of the significant social, environmental, visual and health impacts on our community from this loss of land".
- "Banyule Council objects to the potential loss of several very old large trees classified under Significant Tree and Vegetation Register ESO4".
- Banyule Council states that the "Studley Park Gum is an endangered species and is at risk of being lost. Efforts must be made to protect the species from extinction".
- Boroondara Council is concerned about the impact on the Koonung Creek Reserve stating that it is a critical community asset.

Barrel draining of creeks

In their joint submission to the NE Link Project Environment Effects Statement Inquiry the Councils' stated that, "it is unacceptable that sections of the Koonung Creek are proposed to be undergrounded. Koonung Creek should not be piped underground and there should be no detrimental impacts to these significant wetlands. The social impact of tree removal is dismissed in the EES and shows a lack of appreciation that our community places on a green, leafy environment". The same comments apply to Banyule Creek.

Endangered species

There are a number of endangered species of animals and plants which live in urban bush and parkland areas along the route of the proposed NE Link and the Eastern Freeway. These include the swift parrot, powerful owl, Studley Park gum and the matted flax-lily (*dianella amoena*).

Given the extinction crisis facing the planet and Australia having one of the worst environmental records in protecting vulnerable species it seems the Andrews government is more concerned with votes than protecting our environment.

Loss of Doncaster Rail

Roads take up massively more space to move people than public transport. The section of the Eastern Freeway between Hoddle Street and Bulleen Road was opened in 1977. The section from Bulleen Road to Doncaster Road was opened on 3 June 1982.

A wide central median strip was deliberately provided to accommodate a railway line from Hoddle Street to Bulleen Road and then via an easement to Doncaster East. Over the years there has been consistent public pressure exerted including by local government to build Doncaster Rail to alleviate road congestion and to provide for more sustainable public transport alternatives. NELP now intends to abandon this long established public transport measure and convert the central road reservation into yet more traffic lanes.

In the Kew / Bulleen area this will result in a road up to 20 lanes wide. A vast 'Los Angeles' style spaghetti junction at Bulleen will funnel traffic off the northern section of NE Link into the CBD or eastbound along the Eastern Freeway.

The \$16.5 billion plus NE Link catastrophe should be abandoned in order to fund sustainable public transport, public hospitals, public schools, aged care, public housing and a myriad of other more worthwhile causes.