

More Rail not Roads

Cynthia Pilli

At the forthcoming State Election, I will seek to be a candidate in the Warrandyte electorate, standing for 'More Rail not Roads'. My late husband, Tonu Pilli and I have lived in the Warrandyte District electorate since 1966 and raised four children, now adults. I have consequently witnessed many changes in our community, including those impacting our environment and the health of its community.

In 2010 as a member of the Manningham Council's Doncaster Rail Advocacy Committee, my understanding of the need for improved public transport increased. By standing as a candidate, my passion for this important issue continues. I consistently seek to do things that benefit the planet and recover energy for a better future in this electorate and others.

The median strip of the Eastern Freeway was always intended in the original plan to be used for a future train line. Rail along the median strip of the Eastern Freeway has a capacity to take 600 cars off the freeway, every trip, every 10 minutes. Conversely, the mega road project, the North East Link, proposes to remove the median strip and instead add up to 24 car and truck lanes at points of Interchange.

The North East Link proposal is the most environmentally destroying project in this decade, in this state. Twenty six thousand mature trees will go, replaced by saplings in a 2 to 1 ratio.

I understand that a mature tree may absorb 50kg per annum of carbon and replace with oxygen in the process, whereas a sapling may absorb only 3 to 6 kg carbon per annum. Other native habitat and the wetland is about to be destroyed, including smaller plants, grasses, active soil organisms, not to mention the fauna and invertebrates. This represents a prodigious loss right along the Eastern Freeway corridor.

Road projects are space expensive, much more so than public transport projects. Without effective public transport alternatives, more residents must drive, households need to buy more cars and battle more congestion. Those who have to drive, trade persons in particular, must battle more congestion on a daily basis. For many, the Eastern Freeway is only part of the journey. Congestion migrates to North and South arterial roads and will get much worse, much busier because of the North East Link project.

There is also increasing concerns about the impact of air pollution on community health. One of Australia's leading dementia epidemiologists says she would no longer live on a busy road after watching the science linking air pollution and dementia strengthen over the past two decades. (The Age - 17th September 2022) Observational studies keep showing a cognitive decline associated with high levels of air pollution.

We are regularly seeing evidence of the dramatic impact of climate change. Pre-election campaigning in Warrandyte District will be a means to both empower electors with information about the scope and damaging impact of this mega road project, as well as demand an open and urgent public review by the Victorian Government.

Every day, we are experiencing more debilitating consequences of the climate crisis. We have a responsibility to protect what can never be replaced. We have the opportunity to be a clever country, standing with a progressive electorate, looking at the big picture, the smart aspects of forward planning which were already in place long ago.

Hop on the train, I'll be happy to ride alongside you when I stand for Warrandyte and a positive future.