

Submission to the East-West Transport options review

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Richard Wynne MP
Member for Richmond

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This submission comments on the recommendations made in the **East West Link Needs Assessment (EWLNA)** provided to the Victorian Government by Sir Rod Eddington in March 2008.

Melbourne's population is growing by more than 1,000 people per week, and that rapid growth is placing great strain on Melbourne's transport system across the board. With strong residential, business and employment growth in the CBD and the inner-city, these pressures are felt acutely across the east-west corridor Sir Rod Eddington was asked to study, particularly in the inner-city. As Member for Richmond since 1999, I am well aware of the challenges posed by congestion.

As the EWLNA notes, maintaining Melbourne's amenity and liveability will be critical to attracting and keeping talented people – who in turn will increasingly drive Victoria's growth as our economic base continues to shift towards a services-oriented economy. Our ability to strengthen and sustain a viable transport network will be a major factor in determining how successful we are in preserving Melbourne's liveability.

The choices this Government makes about how we shape our transport system and which large-scale transport projects we prioritise and proceed with will have major, long-lasting impacts on the development of our city. In short, how we build our city will shape how the city grows. As we contemplate the transition to a low-carbon emission economy, the strong growth Victoria is currently experiencing provides an invaluable opportunity to restructure our capital city and its infrastructure in a sustainable manner. Meeting this challenge will require a comprehensive appraisal of the economic, environmental and social impacts of transport policies, with a full awareness of how Victoria's approach to transport connects with our efforts to tackle climate change.

In this context, the contribution that Sir Rod Eddington and his team have made through the EWLNA is to be welcomed and valued. The Government should consider the proposals put forward by the EWLNA as part of a broader effort to develop an integrated, long-term vision for Melbourne's transport system. This vision should set out a clear plan of action for reducing the contribution of our transport system to Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions, and bolster the Government's *Melbourne 2030* goal of creating a sustainable, contained and multi-centric city that retains its mantle as one of the best places in the world to live, work and raise a family. Importantly, to achieve these goals, the Government must address the structural disadvantage inadequate public transport options inflict on residents of Melbourne's outer suburbs.

It is fortunate that the Victorian Government is considering the EWLNA in an environment where the issues considered here – the critical need to invest in infrastructure that will boost the productive capacity of our economy, the necessity that we tackle climate change and achieve real abatement of greenhouse gas emissions, and the sustainability and future of our cities – are receiving the attention they deserve on the national stage. It is my hope that in seeking to respond to the EWLNA and foster

a broader transport strategy for Melbourne, the Victorian Government is able to work with both local government and the Commonwealth to break new ground in tackling these challenges.

This submission seeks to draw these strands together and contribute to the debate by providing comment on the following issues raised by the EWLNA:

1. A quantum leap in investment in public transport
2. A sustainable future for Melbourne
3. Maintaining the Port of Melbourne's viability and efficiency
4. Assessing the need for a new East-West road route
5. Prioritising and sequencing investments in transport

Broadly, the submission argues that the recommendations of the EWNLA should be considered by the Government as part of a broader effort to develop a long-term integrated transport strategy that bolsters the Government's *Melbourne 2030* ambitions of creating a sustainable city. Specific steps that are called for immediately include:

- Delivery of a massive investment in public transport, beginning with the implementation of a 'metro'-style rail tunnel, additional rail investments in Melbourne's west, investments in "Park and Ride" facilities, the DART project, bus and tram prioritisation throughout the metropolitan area, investment in cross-city cycle links, and steps to encourage drivers to take up car-pooling;
- Measures that strengthen the viability and efficiency of the Port of Melbourne and the transport system's freight capacity; and
- The construction of a new road connection between the inner-west and Port precinct to provide an alternative to the West Gate Bridge.

These projects should be delivered in partnership with the Commonwealth and local government and, where appropriate, the private sector. In order to ensure that an accurate assessment of the benefits and costs of an extended underground road route, as well as potential alternative road projects, can be made, proposals for the construction of an additional road route linking the Port to the Tullamarine and Eastern Freeways should be carefully re-examined **only after** the implementation of these steps.

In making these recommendations, I am providing comment from my perspective as an MP representing a constituency within the study area of the EWNLA. I welcome the opportunity to put forward my contribution, and look forward to the outcome of the Government's deliberations later in the year.

Richard Wynne MP
Member for Richmond

1. A quantum leap in investment in public transport

The most pressing challenge facing Melbourne's transport system is the stress on the city's rail network being experienced as Melburnians return to the city's train services in historic numbers – a challenge the EWLNA documents in some detail. In the last three years, patronage across the rail network has grown by 30 per cent, with even stronger growth along Melbourne's growth corridors, particularly along the 'northern group' of suburban rail lines (Craigieburn, Upfield, Williamstown, Werribee and Sydenham).

To tackle these problems, a quantum leap in Government investment in public transport is required. **Recommendations 1 and 2** in the EWLNA report set out a clear plan for achieving such a shift. By embracing the proposal to build a 17km 'metro' style rail tunnel linking Melbourne's western, north-western and south-eastern suburbs, the Victorian Government can double the rail network's capacity to move passengers to and from the fastest growing areas of Melbourne, and take a major step in laying the foundation for future extensions of the network. Beyond this, the 'Tarneit link' will achieve significant localised benefits in the west by ending the conflict between Geelong regional trains and Werribee suburban trains, with the twin benefits of improving the number and reliability of services to Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo, and allowing for a significant increase in the frequency of suburban services along the Werribee line.

The extension of the suburban network to Sunbury outlined in **recommendation 3** represents a short-to-medium term project which could complement these steps, and deliver significant benefits to Melbourne's west and north-west. The Government should adopt **recommendation 3** as a priority, and supplement this investment by adopting **recommendation 9** of the EWLNA – the call to establish a dedicated fund to facilitate the development of "Park and Ride" facilities to support the take-up of public transport patronage in growth areas.

In my view, the most critical aspect of these proposals – beyond the localised benefits they will bring to the communities they target – is the opportunity such a massive investment in public transport creates to bolster the Government's *Melbourne 2030* agenda. As the EWLNA overview notes, Melbourne's strong population growth must be managed in an equitable and sustainable manner. The investments outlined here provide the Government with the opportunity to do so by stimulating and supporting the development of vibrant suburban hubs in Melbourne's west, providing strong transport links between these hubs and Footscray, Parkville, the CBD and the south-eastern suburbs, and providing commuters with greater choice and more opportunities to reduce their reliance on cars.

While the public transport recommendations contained in the EWLNA are to be embraced, it's important to recognise that the EWLNA's specific focus on the East-West corridor limited the study's capacity to focus on other challenges facing Melbourne's transport system. The Government's development of an integrated transport strategy provides an opportunity to redress this by tackling questions the EWLNA did not. Among the most pressing of these is the need for a rapid increase in

public transport provision in Melbourne's outer suburbs. As a Labor Government, we can't forget the needs of those who live in transport-poor areas. In responding to the EWLNA, the Government should invest in public transport solutions in transport-disadvantaged areas as part of the continuing implementation of *Melbourne 2030*.

2. A sustainable future for Melbourne

As the Government recently noted in its response to the *Melbourne 2030* audit, *Planning for all of Melbourne*, the strong growth Melbourne is currently experiencing provides an opportunity to restructure the city and its infrastructure in ways that make it more sustainable, while also maintaining the liveability and amenity that is one of Melbourne's greatest strengths. In approaching this challenge, the Government must continue to implement its urban density framework, *Melbourne 2030*, and pursue the significant economic, environmental and social benefits that will be realised by its success. In view of this, the Government's response to the EWLNA should be framed by recognition of the need to take stronger action in support of *Melbourne 2030*, particularly through the creation of high- and medium-density suburban activity centres as advocated in EWLNA **recommendation 14**.

The EWLNA has provided the Government with a range of proposals that tackle these questions in relation to the East-West corridor. The most interesting are those with the potential for broader applicability across Melbourne, such as the Doncaster Area Rapid Transit (DART) project outlined in **recommendation 6**. By providing a rail-like bus service with peak hour frequencies of around 5 minutes, maximum daytime and evening coverage on weekends, with associated support infrastructure such as the Victoria Park interchange and modifications to the Eastern Freeway, Hoddle Street, and Johnson Street or Alexandria Parade, the successful implementation of the DART project will elevate bus travel to a service level similar to existing tram and heavy rail services. The flexible and efficient service that the DART project offers has the advantage of being able to deliver a major improvement to public transport services along the Doncaster corridor far sooner than heavy- or light-rail investment would, emulating the successful implementation of the Route 401 bus from North Melbourne station to the University of Melbourne introduced earlier this year. The DART proposal also provides maximum flexibility to commuters by allowing a shift in either mode (to train) or direction at the Victoria Park interchange, with commuters able to travel to the inner-city, the University of Melbourne or the northern suburbs while avoiding the CBD.

Successfully demonstrating that bus transit can provide state-of-the-art public transport services across the city should be seen as the first step in escalating the implementation and enforcement of bus and tram prioritisation, as outlined in EWLNA **recommendation 8**, and providing a rapid increase in public transport options in Melbourne's outer suburbs. In the long-term, by expanding the provision of public transport options to provide real choice to commuters across the metropolitan area, the Victorian Government can provide public transport options to those who presently do not have any alternatives to commuting to the central city by car.

The specific cross-city cycle links outlined in **recommendation 7** are also to be welcomed. The boom in cycling currently taking place needs to be translated into a ‘cycling culture’ – and the best contribution the Victorian Government can make to that is to treat cycling as a distinct category of transport, improve cross-city cycling connections through the specific projects recommended in the EWLNA, and ensure that walking and cycling opportunities are enhanced by the major infrastructure projects the Government pursues as part of its vision for Melbourne’s transport system.

Finally, the Government should complement the EWLNA recommendations discussed here by instituting greater incentives for car-pooling, particularly for journeys to work. A few simple measures designed to encourage car-pooling can have an immediate impact, and help drivers living in areas with limited public transport options reduce their exposure to rising petrol prices. Immediate steps should include instituting and enforcing priority access lanes for car-pooling drivers, working with the CityLink and EastLink toll operators to develop discount tolling schemes for car-pooling drivers, and ensuring the future roll-out of “Park and Ride” facilities encourages the uptake of car-pooling.

3. Maintaining the Port of Melbourne’s viability and efficiency

Any effort to develop an integrated transport strategy for Melbourne must look both the movement of people and the movement of freight, particularly in relation to the Port of Melbourne – Australia’s largest and most efficient container port. The movement of freight and the Port’s interaction with the transport system goes well beyond the east-west corridor investigated by the EWLNA, and the proposals outlined in the EWLNA recommendations should be considered as part of the ongoing development of Victoria’s freight network.

The strongest contribution the Victorian Government can make to relieving the impact of freight traffic on congestion in the east-west corridor and securing the economic and environmental viability of the Port is to increase rail’s share of freight movements across the state. The EWLNA recommendations set out a clear plan of action for doing so. By implementing the ‘metro’-style rail tunnel and moving passenger lines underground as set out **recommendation 1**, the Government can create the potential for a standard gauge rail freight network in Melbourne that connects key metropolitan hubs at the Port, and in Melbourne’s west, north and south-east. The EWLNA sets out a plan for such action in **recommendation 11**, which also calls for the establishment of an intermodal freight terminal located on the national standard gauge rail network (ideally north of the city on the Melbourne to Sydney corridor). While, as the EWLNA points out that, most freight in Melbourne will continue to be carried by road, the actions set out in **recommendation 11** can position rail to win a greater market share of the Melbourne to Sydney freight market.

The Truck Action Plan proposal set out in **recommendation 5** can complement these steps by addressing several long-standing problems created by freight traffic in and around the Port. Again, the benefits offered by the Truck Action Plan proposal will be enhanced if it is implemented as part of a

broader effort to stimulating urban renewal and economic growth in the inner-west as part of *Melbourne 2030*.

4. Assessing the need for a new East-West road route

As I noted above, even with an integrated investment in Melbourne's transport system that takes account of the movement of both people and freight, the total amount of port freight carried by rail is unlikely to exceed that carried by road. As the EWLNA points out, while providing a regular service between two fixed points is one of rail's strengths, this trait is unsuited to the nature of most metropolitan freight, which consists of relatively short journeys from production sites to retail outlets or households. Rail can best play a role in metropolitan freight when used to distribute freight to inter-modal freight hubs around the city, minimising (though not eliminating) the role of trucks and light-commercial vehicles. The Victorian Government should pursue this approach.

With road freight likely to remain the most competitive means of distributing metropolitan freight across the city, Melbourne's transport network will remain heavily over-reliant on the West Gate Bridge. Originally built to handle 40,000 vehicles per day, around 160,000 vehicles cross the bridge every day currently, and the EWLNA estimates this figure will grow to 235,000 per day by 2031. The EWLNA has outlined the pressing need for a long-term alternative to the West Gate Bridge, in the form of a freeway-standard river crossing that connects Melbourne's inner-west to the Port, facilitates cross city freight movements and improves connections between the west, the central city and Port precinct.

The EWLNA addresses this need through the proposal set out in **recommendation 4** for a new east-west road connection consisting of an 18 kilometre tunnel extending from the western suburbs to the Eastern Freeway. This project will be split into three stages:

- i) a connection from the inner-west to the Port, in the form of either a tunnel under the Maribyrnong River connecting Geelong Road and Sunshine Road to the port area, or an elevated road over the Maribyrnong River connecting the West Gate Freeway near Williamstown Road to the Port area;
- ii) an 8.9km tunnel connecting West Melbourne (i.e. the Port area) with the Eastern Freeway, with an exit to CityLink for north-bound traffic in the Flemington/Parkville area, and
- iii) the extension of the western end of Stage 1 to the Western Ring Road, either at the Deer Park Bypass or via a widened Western Gate Freeway.

The Victorian Government should address the need for a long-term alternative to the West Gate Bridge by moving to implement stage 1 of the new east-west road route set out in the EWLNA as part of its transport strategy. By providing a second freeway-standard link between the inner-west and the Port, the Government can relieve the pressure on the West Gate Bridge, improve the connection of the Port to Melbourne's freeway network, and facilitate more efficient cross-city freight movements. In the long term, complementary road investments either in the form of the road tunnel advocated by the

EWLNA as part of Stage 2 of a new east-west road route, or through a link between the Northern Ring Road and the Eastern Freeway or EastLink have the potential to 'complete' Melbourne's road network by providing a "full ring road" connecting Melbourne's western, northern, eastern and south-eastern suburbs.

However, the profound economic, environmental and social disruption that the construction of an 8.9km road tunnel from the Port to the Eastern Freeway will cause over a number of years will have a significant impact on affected communities, which requires a careful assessment of the viability, need for and efficacy of the extended road link advocated by the EWNLA. Given that, as the EWLNA sets out, it is unlikely that any work on stage 2 of a new road link would begin for some years, it is more appropriate that the Government conduct a detailed examination of the need for an extended tunnel **only after** implementation of the other investments called for here. This approach will also allow for an accurate assessment of the benefits and costs of an extended underground road route, as well as potential alternative road projects, to avoid current uncertainty about the future price path of oil, the impact of an emissions trading scheme (ETS) on petrol prices and the consequences of tightening capital markets.

There is a powerful case, set out in the EWNLA, for a second freeway-standard road crossing of the Maribyrnong River and the immediate focus of the Government should on be providing an alternative to the West Gate Bridge and identifying the optimum solution to the complex economic, environmental and social issues that a new connection between the inner-west and Port will open up. This will require extensive community consultation, and rigorous design and engineering work.

5. Conclusion – Prioritising and sequencing transport investments

The recommendations of the EWNLA should be considered by the Victorian Government as part of a broader effort to develop a long-term integrated transport strategy that bolsters the Government's *Melbourne 2030* goal of creating a sustainable, contained and multi-centric city, sets out a clear plan of action for reducing the contribution of our transport system to Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions, and improves the economic efficiency of the Port of Melbourne and the transport network's capacity for freight movement. Specific steps that are called for immediately include:

- Delivery of a massive investment in public transport, beginning with the implementation of a 'metro'-style rail tunnel, additional rail investments in Melbourne's west, investments in "Park and Ride" facilities, the DART project, bus and tram prioritisation throughout the metropolitan area, and investment in cross-city cycle links;
- Measures that strengthen the viability and efficiency of the Port of Melbourne and the transport system's freight capacity; and
- The construction of a new road connection between the inner-west and Port precinct.

In order to ensure that an accurate assessment of the benefits and costs of an extended underground road route, as well as potential alternative road projects, can be made, proposals for the construction of an additional road route linking the Port to the Tullamarine and Eastern Freeways should be carefully re-examined **only after** the implementation of these projects.

The size and significance of these undertakings should not be underestimated, and will require partnerships with the Commonwealth and local government, as well as the potential involvement of the private sector. The EWNLA sets out some clear options for the pursuit of these opportunities in **recommendations 17** (Commonwealth Government contribution), **18** (optimum funding structure for the proposed Metro rail tunnel) and **19** (re-evaluating road tolling policy). To facilitate the involvement of project partners, the Victorian Government should set out a clearly prioritised work plan as part of an integrated strategy for improving Melbourne's transport network.