



Age
10/12/2008
Page: 1
General News
Region: Melbourne
Circulation: 203800
Type: Capital City Daily
Size: 273.32 sq.cms
MTWTFSS-

Similar plans, but Brumby's costs billions more than Eddington's

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THE cost of several key projects in the Brumby Government's ambitious Victorian Transport Plan has blown out by billions of dollars on estimates its own staff made just nine months ago.

Sir Rod Eddington released a \$20 billion strategy in April, put together by some of VicRoads' and the Department of Transport's most senior officers.

It recommended several projects that were contained in the Brumby Government's plan, released on Monday.

Transport experts said they were shocked at the "absurd" price tags on some of the plan's highest-profile projects.

One key plan, the Melbourne Metro rail line running from Dynon Road in Footscray to St Kilda Road, is estimated to cost \$400 million more than Sir Rod's original estimate.

Budgeted by Sir Rod at \$4.5 billion, the project will now cost \$4.9 billion, the Government says. Other projects are

estimated to cost hundreds of millions of dollars more than Sir Rod's team predicted, including:

- The West Gate Bridge alternative, which Sir Rod said would cost \$2 billion; it is now costed at \$2.8 billion
- The Doncaster Area Rapid Transit bus system on the Eastern Freeway, costed at \$250 million to \$300 million; it will now cost \$360 million to deliver
- Electrifying the rail line to Sunbury was to cost \$220 million, Sir Rod said; it is now expected to cost \$270 million

In 2003, then transport minister Peter Batchelor said extending the Epping rail line to South Morang would cost \$348 million. This week the Government said the four-kilometre extension would come in at \$650 million.

Meanwhile, a 44-kilometre rail line from West Werribee to Southern Cross Station will cost more than \$4 billion, the Government says. The line includes a bridge over the Maribymong River, two platforms at Southern Cross and a station at Sunshine.

The West Australian govern-

ment built Perth's 72-kilometre Mandurah rail line — which has 11 stations, tunnels under Perth's CBD and bridges — for \$1.7 billion.

Public Transport Minister Lynne Kosky said the proposals in the \$38 billion Victorian Transport Plan would cost more than Sir Rod had estimated because they were far more substantial.

"For many of the projects, we have expanded on the original proposals," her spokesman, Stephen Moynihan, said.

The Werribee rail proposal made by Sir Rod went only from West Werribee to Sunshine.

The project has been substantially expanded so that two tracks go all the way to Southern Cross Station.

The Government spent \$5 million on the Eddington

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report, including \$2.9 million on consultants' reports.

But Mr Moynihan said the Victorian Transport Plan had been far more thorough. "By bringing together several Government departments, we have developed a comprehensive and integrated \$38 billion plan."

Opposition transport spokesman Terry Mulder disagreed. "John Brumby's transport plan has the myki curse," he said, referring to the smartcard project, originally

promised for \$300 million but now to cost \$1.4 billion.

"By the time these projects happen — if they happen — Mr Brumby will be sitting in a retirement village with a knitted rug on his knees."

In 2006, the Government promised to build a third track on the Dandenong line, and install four "orbital" bus routes around Melbourne. But in this week's plan, the third Dandenong track was abandoned and the bus routes downgraded.

The head of Melbourne University's transport research

centre, Nick Low, said the costings for the Werribee-to-Southern Cross rail link in particular were "absurd".

The Government was scared of being accused of a cost blow-out, he said, after the PR disaster of Fast Rail, estimated to cost \$80 million but coming in at \$750 million. As a result it had grossly exaggerated the cost of projects, he said.

RMIT transport planning academic Paul Mees said the abandonment of the Dandenong third track showed the transport plan was not credible.