



PIC OMITTED

TRANSPORT BLUEPRINT Bold plan to ease train, traffic bedlam, but can the money be better spent?

\$18bn to link east and west

Motorists, rail users to face new tolls and higher fares for an easier commute

By **ROYCE MILLAR, CLAY LUCAS, DAVID ROOD** and **ADAM MORTON**

VICTORIANS will be asked to pay new road tolls, new levies on public transport and maybe even more taxes if the Brumby Government acts on Sir Rod Eddington's \$18 billion plan to improve links between Melbourne's eastern and western suburbs.

The much-anticipated plan, unveiled yesterday, proposes an 18-kilometre road tunnel linking the Eastern Freeway with the west, a 17-kilometre rail tunnel between Footscray and Caulfield, and a rail line running between Werribee and Tarneit in the west.

Releasing the plan, Sir Rod said he was confident he had identified the core problems in Melbourne's transport networks, and declared that the city could not afford to do nothing about it.

"The evidence is clear: doing nothing is not an option," he said. "The evidence is also clear that failing to take action will undermine Melbourne's future prosperity and reduce the benefits being generated by the city's growth and development.

"Yes, the cost of improving these transport connections is

substantial — but the cost of inaction is far greater."

But such costs are likely to prove politically problematic for the Government. Included in Sir Rod's longer-term ideas is a rethink on road pricing, including the possible introduction of tolls on existing roads, and a road congestion levy — ideas at odds with existing Labor policies.

While Premier John Brumby has previously ruled out a congestion tax, he said yesterday "it would be completely wrong to rule in or rule out any specifics from his report".

The Eddington report also concludes that funding may have to include a special levy on business and public transport users for the rail tunnel. And he says federal money may be required.

Mr Brumby conceded some of the report's recommendations would be controversial and issued a challenge to the Rudd Government to do more of the "heavy lifting" in paying for infrastructure projects.

Sir Rod described his scheme as a necessary "generational step-up in transport", which would cater for Melbourne's booming population and

expected growth in car and public transport use.

His proposals received a mixed reaction, with business strongly supportive and public transport advocates critical.

The Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry said the proposals would make a "transformational difference" to transport congestion problems. "We are particularly pleased with the fact that Sir Rod Eddington's proposal gives strong weighting to public transport as well as roads," said chamber chief executive Wayne Kayler-Thomson. "Efficient roads and public transport are not an either-or proposition — we need both," he said.

Victorian Greens MP Greg Barber said Sir Rod's report was not a transport plan but simply a shopping list for projects. "It's a case of ask a stupid question, get a stupid answer," he said. "Sir Rod has just said a (road) tunnel is the solution because that is the brief he was given."

The Greens have vowed to make a proposed road tunnel their top campaign issue at the

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next federal and state elections, especially in Labor's increasingly marginal inner northern seats.

The most controversial of Sir Rod's proposals is the road tunnel to link the Eastern Freeway at Clifton Hill with CityLink at Flemington and beyond to the west.

Critics were surprised to learn yesterday that Sir Rod had recommended no exits from the tunnel between Hoddle Street and CityLink, a plan that would minimise the likely impact in suburbs like North Carlton and North Fitzroy.

Sir Rod stressed the tunnel should be for east-west traffic. Public transport, he said, should be the focus for commuters into the city.

But speaking to *The Age* later, Sir Rod said he would not be sur-

prised if the Brumby Government accepted the idea of city exits if a reasonable engineering solution was found.

Mark Birrell, chairman of Infrastructure Partnerships Australia, said the road proposal would work as a public-private partnership, even without exit points into the city centre.

"I believe the road proposal can work and should," he said.

Melbourne University transport expert Nick Low said Sir Rod had "called the private road operators' bluff" by not recommending city exits. But he said he was concerned that the Government may give in to pressure from road builders and financiers who would press for exits.

Transport academic Graham Currie, of Monash University, welcomed the idea of a rail tunnel, but said a new road may just encourage more car traffic. "His

rail proposals are right on the money, but the road tunnel is not," he said. He also described the idea of increasing public transport fares to pay for a rail tunnel as "highly inappropriate".

State Opposition leader Ted Baillieu said Labor had wasted eight years of power by neglecting to invest in Melbourne's transport infrastructure. "We now know that Victorians face more taxes, more tolls, more traffic more debt and more chaos in our streets for the next 10 years at least," he said.

Nationals leader Peter Ryan said that while major investment was needed in Melbourne, the Government should honour transport promises already made to country Victorians. "The most outstanding example of where the money should be spent is fixing the shambolic state of our rail freight system," Mr Ryan said.

EDDINGTON'S FIX

1 Road tunnel from western suburbs to Eastern Freeway: **\$9 billion**

2 Rail tunnel from Footscray to Caulfield: **\$7 billion**

3 New rail from Werribee to Deer Park: **\$1.5 billion**

4 Truck reduction plan in inner west: **\$500 million**

5 Rapid bus service to Doncaster region: **\$300 million**

6 Better linking of cycle paths: **\$60 million**

7 Electricification of train network to Sunbury: **\$216 million**

