



COMMENT

**Psst, Sir Rod:
 Heard about
 greenhouse?**

By **ROYCE MILLAR**

I'M CONFUSED. And I reckon I may not be the only one.

Yesterday, after a 12-month study, Sir Rod Eddington tabled his blueprint for improving transport links between Melbourne's east and west, including a mega road tunnel from the end of the Eastern Freeway to Sunshine, and a rail tunnel from Footscray to Caulfield.

At a total cost nearing \$20 billion, Eddington's scheme is hugely expensive and would require Melburnians, and other Victorians and Australians, to stump up money for new tolls, special levies and federal funds to pay for it all.

But where did these ideas come from? Are these mega tunnels really needed? Will it really relieve traffic congestion and help the environment?

Some respected experts say no. Melbourne University's Nick Low, for instance, points out that twice as many people used our passenger train system in 1927 as do now. So why do we need to spend \$8 billion on extra capacity on the existing system when we could spend it on new lines to the suburbs?

▶ Continued **PAGE 4**

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

◀ From **PAGE 1**

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 surprised 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.

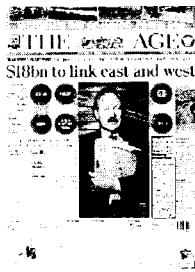
Melbourne University trans-

port 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.



REACTION

Paul Mees,
senior lecturer in transport planning,
University of Melbourne

Not one of the three "centre-piece proposals" is needed. We don't need the Tarneit rail link because we don't need to provide rail services to farmland. We don't need a road tunnel to connect Sunshine to Kew because no one wants to travel between those two places. And we don't need a rail system because the rail system is currently carrying about half of what it was designed to carry. Meanwhile people in the outer suburbs who actually need rail extensions have been told to get stuffed. They'll never find the money to build Eddington's proposals, but if they find even a part of it, no other major transport project will be built in Melbourne in my lifetime.

Brian Negus,
RACV public policy manager:

We support the balanced approach reflected in Sir Rod's recommendations, especially the rail and road tunnels and other specific improvements to public transport and roads. However, we are disappointed that there is not a recommendation regarding the completion of the Metropolitan Ring Road and we call on the State Government to immediately initiate the planning of this key link from Greensborough to the Eastern Freeway and EastLink. The RACV is disappointed that

the Government has con-

strained the terms of reference to preclude consideration of the wider transport issues.

Daniel Bowen,
Public Transport Users Association:

We have intense scepticism about both tunnel projects recommended by Sir Rod. It is far from clear such projects are warranted. We know from earlier studies that there is little car traffic along this east-west route; the vast majority of car and truck traffic is headed for the inner city, so it makes no sense to spend billions of dollars for a tunnel. It just seems like another 1960s-style predict-and-provide exercise from the road lobby. Likewise, the rail plans for the existing city loop envisaged 50% more trains running through the city area than

we have now, so it is unclear why we need to spend billions more on a rail tunnel when the infrastructure we have is not being used effectively. Spending billions on a rail tunnel would effectively preclude extending the rail network into suburbs currently out of reach of trains: Doncaster, Rowville, South Morang and Mernda will continue to be neglected.

Mark Wakeham,
Environment Victoria:

Roads don't solve congestion. A new freeway would add millions of tonnes of greenhouse pollution every year for decades to come and would not be contemplated by any Government seriously committed to tackling climate change. A new inner

city rail line must be accompanied by extension of

train services to the outer suburbs and growth areas that are currently without any services whatsoever. Many people in places like Doncaster, Rowville and South Morang will be bitterly disappointed by Sir Rod Eddington's recommendations.

Mark Birrell, chairman,
Infrastructure Partnerships Australia:

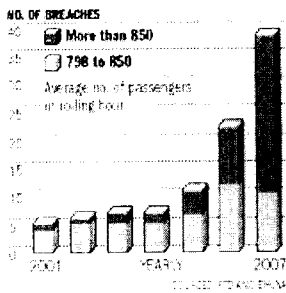
It's the long-term vision Melbourne needs. I have no doubt it will be good for both commuters and commercial road vehicles, as well as people who need vastly improved public transport. (Without CBD exit points) I believe the road (tunnel) proposal can work and should. There is no doubt though that the road project will need some State Government funding and that it should get some Federal Government funding.

Graham Currie,
transport academic,
Monash University:

Sir Rod's emphasis on building a road connection as well as the rail connection has the distinct danger of just encouraging more traffic. His rail proposals are right on the money, but the road tunnel is not. They say it won't have any CBD exits, but CityLink was built as a bypass too — and as they were constructing it, at the last minute, they built exit ramps into the city. More urban roads into the city isn't the solution.

TRAIN OVERCROWDING

Load breaches on morning peak trains



Commuters struggle to board trains during last night's disruption.