

Melburnians want a better rail system. Let's make it happen

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It is essential and possible to meet growing transport needs.

THE Federal Government has given the travelling public and State Government infrastructure planners just five years to adapt before a carbon price for transport kicks in fully. So infrastructure decisions to mitigate climate change must be made now.

Of the two main infrastructure proposals from the Eddington report, the road tunnel does not support the aims of the carbon pollution reduction scheme green paper. The rail tunnel does. The road tunnel, in its outdated obsession with a "missing link" between motorways, will increase greenhouse emissions and add to traffic congestion in inner Melbourne. The rail tunnel, provided that it is contained within a transport plan for the whole of metropolitan Melbourne, including the outer suburbs, will lead to a reduction of emissions and congestion.

There are major benefits from the Eddington proposals for public transport:

- They will provide an immediate strategic boost to the capacity of the train system.
- They are targeted at the parts of the system where urban growth is driving patronage most heavily.
- The new "metro" style rail tunnel proposal will bring efficient transport to important destinations in inner Melbourne, while speeding access from outer suburban growth areas.

The Government asserts that sufficient additional train services to meet the growth of demand cannot be provided unless new infrastructure is built. We have not yet seen the detailed reasoning behind this claim, and to conceal it is harming the case for the tunnel. Nevertheless, just as VicRoads adds road space year after year

in the period of a shift towards the car, now more rail paths must be added as people increasingly use public transport. A recent survey showed 27% of Melburnians were choosing to use their cars less. By contrast, over the past three years, train use in Melbourne has boomed, growing over 8% a year and above 12% in critical corridors such as Watergardens. Tram use has grown too.

The Eddington rail tunnel is correctly placed to provide additional paths for the very crowded services from rapidly growing areas such as Altona, Werribee, Tarneit, Melton, Caroline Springs and Roxburgh Park. The extra capacity will also mean that the booming V/Line regional fast rail services will not need to be caught behind stopping trains.

The full benefit of the successful regional rail improvements will be received when the 160 km/h regional trains can continue into central Melbourne at high speed.

Where does this leave the urgently needed outer-suburban connections — serving areas beyond Cranbourne, Rowville, Doncaster and Mernda, as well as the needed electrification of the Sunbury and Melton lines? In a nutshell, expansion of the core capacity is prerequisite. When the Rowville feasibility study was undertaken several years ago by a team led by one of the authors, there was capacity on the Dandenong line to add the extra trains. This

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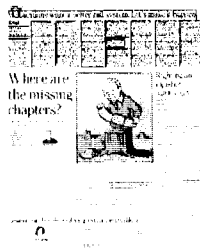
capacity is rapidly disappearing, but the addition of space for 25 trains an hour via the Eddington tunnel will mean that Rowville can be built.

To provide a suburban level of service to Sunbury and

Melton will also mean extra capacity, as will any alleviation of the existing overcrowding on the Watergardens line. Again, the Eddington proposals will meet this need. For the moment, Doncaster is being provided with Doncaster Area Rapid Transit, a smartened up bus system. Though a second-best alternative to rail, it provides some improvement for Doncaster residents. Because Doncaster does not have a massive suburban growth area beyond it, a Doncaster rail link doesn't have the same urgency as the areas where Eddington proposes the initial investment should be made. Finally, there is the Mernda extension (and the related extension of the No. 86 tram to Doreen). These should be in final planning now, since once the new bridge at Clifton Hill is completed there is no technical obstacle to extending adequate public transport to this critical growth corridor.

How should these proposals be financed? This is the place for a public-public-public partnership. In other words, while the State Government, as the owner of the system, should be central and bear the largest financial burden, both the Commonwealth and local government have roles to play. We suggest that the Federal Government contribute \$4 billion from the Building Australia Fund, with the remaining \$4 billion to be provided by the State Government. We think that local government should design and finance (or manage private developers to finance) new stations and their surrounds. While slightly reducing the burden on state finance (at the rate of about \$25 million a time), we think local government is best placed to integrate stations into surrounding urban design, making them safe, accessible and lively places. In the case of the





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new station proposed for Parkville, the university could use the project as a showcase for its architectural and planning expertise.

The community is saying very clearly that it wants the option of car-free access to jobs,

education and leisure. An efficient rail system is the path to this goal, and the Eddington rail proposals the best entry we are likely to get soon. Let's support them.

Professors Nick Low and Bill Russell are

the directors of the Australasian Centre for the Governance and Management of Urban Transport at the University of Melbourne. Russell wrote the report recommending the construction of rail services to Doncaster in 1991, and headed the feasibility team for the Rowville railway in 2004.