

# Projects that don't make a strategy

Megaprojects, particularly a road tunnel, may not be the answer to transport needs, writes **Bill Russell**.

IR Rod Eddington's report *Investing in Transport* offers much insight into Melbourne's future transport needs, and provides much data and some refreshing ideas.

The four projects it proposes will be at the centre of much of the discussion — a Clifton Hill-to-Footscray road tunnel, a Footscray-to-Caulfield rail tunnel, a rail line from Werribee to Deer Park and more buses to Doncaster. Let's look at each in turn.

In some ways, the most anticipated recommendation is the much-debated proposal for an east-west road tunnel from Clifton Hill to Footscray. Eddington's version is notable for its omission of five off-ramps into Carlton and Fitzroy that the roads lobby sought, and that would have devastated the livability of those suburbs and the electability of some Labor MPs.

It's a shrewd move to make a recommendation without those off-ramps, but sceptics might wonder how long

the State Government would resist the combined pressure of public-private partnership financiers and influential roads lobby figures. The financiers might say they need the off-ramps to make the business model work. Would the State Government resist? If, however, shrinkage of PPP capital meant federal money was involved, perhaps the feds could impose "no off-ramps" as a precondition.

In the proposal for a new rail line from Werribee to Deer Park — the "Tarnait link" — we have a more modest but extremely worthwhile link offering many advantages.

First, it's proposed that this line be constructed before most of the surrounding land has been built up. This is how our growth corridors should have been provided with rail lines.

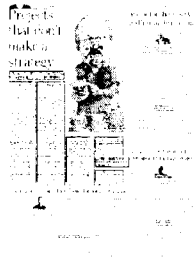
Werribee to Deer Park will give residents of the new suburbs a transport choice other than the multiple cars per household that are now mandatory in most outer suburbs. Second, the link will allow travel times and reliability on the Geelong line to

be greatly improved. Regional expresses will no longer have to dawdle behind stopping trains between Newport and Footscray.

However, this proposal does underline the importance of the rail corridor between Sunshine and the city, which will need to provide the high-speed access necessary for all the rail routes that converge at Sunshine — those from Sunbury and Bendigo, Melton and Ballarat, those proposed from Werribee and Geelong, the north-east routes from Shepparton and Albury as they are standardised, and from the airport, should it ever be built.

Stage 1 of the proposed Eddington tunnel would serve this need, although \$4.5 billion is a formidable price tag.

The full rail tunnel that has been proposed is from West Footscray to Caulfield at a cost of \$8.5 billion. Described as a "Melbourne Metro", this is an interesting, though expensive, proposal. It is certainly an east-west link, and if, as Eddington has suggested, it is built with capacity for freight trains, it could provide the



missing high-capacity freight rail link from the port of Hastings to the national standard gauge network.

Eddington has made out a good case for this project, but how does it compare with other possible approaches to rail infrastructure? How does it compare, for example, with a more modest north-south "metro" connecting the inner end of a new Doncaster line, with say, the office strip of St Kilda Road? Would such an expensive project not crowd out rail links to the growth corridors?

Sydney has committed to its first metro line (high capacity; no junctions, high acceleration; rapid braking trains) and Eddington's report refers to the possibility of metro-style features being possible with the new rail link. But his proposal does not appear to be a separate metro so much as a means of adding capacity to the existing suburban network. And will the Government really deliver it?

Regarding public transport for Doncaster, Eddington proposes DART (Doncaster Area Rapid Transit).

DART is arguably not rapid transit, just more buses. Will adding more buses to serve Doncaster/Manningham, a suburb with a population two-

thirds that of Hobart, ease congestion on the freeway? Where will the buses travel? The answer is on the freeway. Will people gain a great travel time advantage over car travel if buses are the transit solution? Will they gain a comfort advantage? The answers are that the proposals will provide some benefit but are less than ideal.

Buses do play a critical role in Melbourne as feeders, but they are not well suited to trunk routes such as Doncaster to Melbourne unless, as in Brisbane, a massive investment is made in busways, dedicated tunnels and other infrastructure. Thankfully, this is not proposed. A rail line to Doncaster would be more far-sighted. A rail line would take travellers off the road system, reduce their travel time, and would have the effect of removing two freeway lanes of traffic. A rail line to Doncaster should have been the first recommendation of the report.

The past 20 years have seen billions invested in freeways. Each augmentation has come with a promise that congestion would be cured, ignoring the tendency of new freeways to attract traffic and undermine public transport.

As the greenhouse clock ticks, do we really want to commit another

\$10 billion to this illusion? Wouldn't it be better to build the Doncaster line, introduce some time-based road pricing on the untolled part of the Eastern Freeway and try to manage road congestion without new megaprojects?

As to the rail tunnel, we should also go back to first principles and ask what we would do to improve the rail system if we had \$8.5 billion to spare. Perhaps it would be the project proposed, perhaps not.

Eddington's four projects don't quite fit together as a strategy, but they do provide a good framework for focused consultation. In this discussion, greenhouse gases, outer suburban needs and our social and transport priorities and choices need to be the currency. Megaprojects, road or rail, may not be the answer.

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