

Friends of Banyule

PO Box 577
Heidelberg VIC 3084
Email: info@friendsofbanyule.org
Web: www.friendsofbanyule.org

Warringal Conservation Society

PO Box 64
Rosanna VIC 3084
Email: warringal3084@gmail.com

Meeting 11 May 2011

Edward O'Donohue MLC
Parliamentary Secretary for Transport

Friends of Banyule
and Warringal Conservation Society

Overview and Background – Lower Yarra Corridor

Site of Flora and Fauna Significance

Banyule Flats Reserve and Warringal Parklands have important environmental significance.

In 1986 the former North East Regional Organisation of Councils (NEROC) commissioned a study of significant faunal sites and habitats for North East Melbourne. The 1997 NEROC Report stated that: "Banyule Swamp contains the largest, most diverse and intact stands of seasonal and permanent wetland in the Lower Yarra. At Banyule Swamp and the fringing River Red Gums emergent and mudflat herb fields and open water of the Banyule Billabong are key wetland areas in maintaining the viability of populations of water birds and wetland ecosystems in the Lower Yarra". Banyule Flats Reserve, including Banyule and Warringal swamplands, are sites of State and Regional Faunal significance. These sites are examples of lowland riverine floodplains, one of the most threatened landscapes in Victoria (Beardsell, 1997 p.140). Banyule Flats & Warringal Parklands are part of a major wildlife corridor in the region and support the following fauna:

- rare and threatened fauna
- the highest avifauna in the lower Yarra
 - 125 species of native birds including, Powerful Owl, Great Egret, Cattle Egret, Latham's snipe, & Grey Goshawk.
- 14 species of bats
- 11 species of mammals including, Eastern Grey Kangaroo, Echidna, Wombat and Koala
- 17 species of Herpetofauna

Site of Cultural Significance

These areas are also home to the Heidelberg School painters, Streeton, McCubbin, Conder etc, as well as nearby at Heide Gallery at Bulleen, the Australian Modernists, Nolan, Tucker etc, these being two of Australia's most important internationally recognised art movements.

Site of Social Significance

These areas are appreciated by a wide cross-section of the community, including Naturalists, environmentalists, artists, recreational users and families. The area is also used extensively for recreation by the community, the region and wider Melbourne.

Warringal Conservation Society Background & Position on NE Link

The *Warringal Conservation Society* (WCS) was founded in 1970, and is a local not-for-profit community-based organisation caring for the Environment in Banyule. The Society has actively campaigned and worked to protect, rehabilitate and restore habitat for wildlife in Banyule Flats, Warringal Parklands and surrounds for over 40 years. As a consequence, the Society has actively opposed several previous incarnations of the NE Link since 1970 in order to preserve this invaluable wildlife habitat and corridor that the local community treasures.

The Society believes that the proposed NE Link poses a direct threat to the long term viability of Banyule Flats Reserve, Greensborough Woodlands Reserve, Warringal Parklands and Bolin Bolin Billabong and the wildlife corridor they create. It believes there are other more cost-effective and environmentally sustainable transport options than the proposed NE Link freeway.

Friends of Banyule – background and position on the NE Link Freeway

Friends of Banyule are a non-profit community group formed in 2008 to help protect and conserve conservation areas along the Lower Yarra corridor. *Friends of Banyule* advocates for the protection of key environmental assets in Banyule and surrounding areas such as Banyule Flats, Warringal Parklands, Bolin Bolin Billabong and the environs of Heide Gallery of Modern Art. These areas being of major cultural, historic, recreational and conservation significance - home of the Heidelberg School of painting and at Heide Gallery, the home of the Modernists - Nolan, Tucker, Boyd etc.

Friends of Banyule believe the proposed NE Link Freeway would negatively impact, degrade and potentially destroy this environmentally, culturally and historically significant green wedge parkland area within the lower Yarra corridor. The potential \$6 billion cost of the proposed viaduct/tunnel/freeway, which has been refused funding by the Federal Government, would impose an unnecessary burden on the Victorian tax payer. Associated project costs could be much more efficiently deployed elsewhere.

The NE link has the potential to split Banyule in half and will make it very difficult for residents to access local services such as schools, shops, hospitals and general infrastructure. There are much more immediate, cost-effective and environmentally responsible means of dealing with mobility/ transport challenges which face the region and Melbourne generally.

Friends of Banyule would also resist any short term or "staged" measures which could effectively amount to a "freeway by stealth." i.e. commencing feasibility/exploratory work for a tunnel, which if proceeded with, would require \$6b of Commonwealth (or substituted) funding which so far has been refused, leading to a viaduct or above ground freeway being built instead.

Allowing congestion to continue to worsen (i.e. on Rosanna Road) makes the building of a freeway seem to some, as inevitable. VicRoads are not assisting this situation. It should be noted that there is a minimum timeline of seven years for the freeway project to commence.

We note that there are a number of transport initiatives announced by the Baillieu government that have addressed some of the issues, leading to a refocusing of capital spending towards public transport. *Friends of Banyule* support these initiatives and advocate a number of additional measures, which we believe would be capable of implementation within the seven year time frame and most of them well before this time and at a lower cost.

Friends of Banyule Summary Outline:

Better Public Transport solutions for Banyule & the North East including:

- Strong Support for Doncaster Rail link which will help reduce vehicle congestion in the North East
- Duplication and improved services on the Hurstbridge line, assisting in getting cars off the road by providing a more efficient public transport solution
- Upgraded, more efficient and frequent bus services, connecting with rail time tables. Helping to provide integration between public transport modes.
- Strong support for Melb. Airport Rail link also helping reduce congestion through the North East
- Traffic management measures on Rosanna Road and road prioritisation to reduce heavy vehicle congestion
- A review on government provided employee car incentives including parking
- Development of green travel plans for public and private sectors
- A review of the planning scheme including transport and parking in planning legislation
- Reinstate the Melbourne container rail freight study and integrate and expand rail freight capability to help reduce heavy vehicle congestion on arterial and residential roads.

A more detailed outline is provided as per the following:

Discussion Points – Key Issues

1. Current trends in transport behaviour and capability in and around Banyule

There is a steady increase in road traffic on arterial and local roads in Banyule, including Rosanna Road, Bell Street and Lower Plenty Road. The data we have on Rosanna Road suggests that normal weekday loads were about 42,500 in 2005 and 47,500 in 2010, about a 2% per annum increase over the period. This pattern is true of all the northern suburbs, and is largely a function of poor quality public transport and related measures. Urban expansion further west and north with the recent expansion of the Urban Growth Boundary will exacerbate these problems in the absence of good quality public transport and associated measures.

Much of the popular focus on road congestion on these roads relates to heavy truck use but the fact remains that cars make up much of the traffic and much of the growth.

We recognise the transport task also involves longer haul freight activity, including by road. The previous government's decision to proceed with preliminary work for a new container port at Hastings is questionable in the light of the fact that most population and industrial growth over the next 30 years is planned for the north and west of Melbourne.

We are also particularly concerned that the Melbourne Rail Freight Study commenced by the previous government has been put on hold.

Much of the pressure on the road system in Banyule is due to travel within Banyule and travel between Banyule and neighbouring municipalities. Much of this travel could and should be relocated to sustainable transport modes (public transport including rail, bus, cycling and walking). Some illustrations below provide examples. These are illustrative of the scope for positive change in Banyule:

In 2006 (Census) of the 13,701 Banyule residents who travelled to work in Banyule that day only 439 took public transport (3.2%). Of the 35,203 people (Banyule and non-Banyule residents) who travelled to work in Banyule only 1,351 (3.8%) took public transport. This is clearly not sustainable.

Austin Health in Heidelberg is significantly expanding. It has 6,400 employees, and is growing. Most of these employees drive to work, mostly in peak hours despite a significant shift work component.

There are 55 primary and secondary schools in Banyule with an aggregate 19,708 students. It is estimated that car travel to and from school comprises about 13% of the morning peak. The previous government was not serious about getting more kids to walk or take public transport to and from school each day.

Whilst there are weaknesses in current transport capability there are also strengths that indicate in some areas there is immediate scope to affect modal shift from motor car to public transport.

Heidelberg as a key transport node is one such case: For example, the 903 SmartBus provides 188 east-west services a day through Heidelberg from about 5 am until midnight (8,500 seats); the 513 route bus service with approximately 110 services per day between approx. 6.30 am and 9.30 pm (approximately 5,000 seats), and the Hurstbridge line train with 147 services a day between approx. 5.30 am and midnight (117,600 capacity).

Doncaster Rail, which the government says it will now pursue, will significantly enhance mode shift and assist easing congestion with effective linkages with bus services in and around Banyule. The building of a rail service to Melbourne Airport, again with effective linking services, would significantly reduce through traffic in Banyule. We welcome announcements on these projects.

2. Reforms to break down current travel patterns, reduce road traffic load and enhance sustainable transport

Reforms do not necessarily have to include immediate big ticket engineering items. They are primarily focussed on behaviour change, with improvements to bus services in particular. Many are not location-specific and encompass principles that should be applied right across Melbourne to provide significant metropolitan wide benefits and major household and government cost savings:

- Improve connectivity and frequency of local bus services with rail services;
- Address the recommendations in the Department of Transport Bus Services Review, completed in 2010 and ignored by the previous government. This should include improved north-south bus services for Banyule residents;
- Initiatives to transfer public employee travel to and from work from the motor car to public transport. The current Victorian government provided incentives favouring car use (tax subsidised parking and salary packages with in-kind car use benefits). Austin Health is a particular instance in Banyule. There is scope to transfer several thousand car journeys to public transport every day. Note that we were very disappointed with the response we received on this issue from Daniel Andrews when he was Health Minister in the Brumby government;
- Develop a strategy for Green Travel plans for public and private sector employers/ employees
- Revitalise the TravelSmart programme including an effective strategy to for more kids to walk and catch public transport to school. N.B. The objective of the West Australian government's recently announced 'Choose Active Transport' program is to reduce childhood obesity as well as traffic congestion.

- In concert with local government authorities develop a strategy for the provision and pricing of public car parking to help suppress traffic congestion and effect modal shift
- Upgrade and Increase the quality of Hurstbridge rail line services on a staged basis, especially:
 - progressive duplication north of Heidelberg to Eltham (currently 20 minutes between trains during peak hour at stations beyond Greensborough)
 - increase currently unsatisfactory service frequency
- Reform planning law to detach the purchase of car parking from dwellings in multi-occupancy developments. Support meritorious integrated transport development applications, both residential and commercial
- Address car parking availability and pricing and public transport accessibility in large stand alone shopping centres as an integral element of transport system performance
- Reinstate the Melbourne Container Freight Rail study commenced by the previous government
- Lobby the Commonwealth to abolish tax advantaged employment related incentives for car use and to establish a scheme that encourages travel by public transport
- Apply SmartRoads principles to all major roads in Banyule
- Apply short to medium term traffic management measures to Rosanna Road as proposed longer term measures are implemented (see below)

3. Implement traffic management measures on Rosanna Rd

Request VicRoads to implement immediate measures to lessen the impact of heavy truck traffic (ie. Semi-articulated including B-doubles and vehicles over 10 tonne) on Rosanna Rd between Lower Plenty Road and Burgundy Street/Manningham Road (which has notably increased since completion of East Link). Suggested measures include:

- time of day & night restrictions eg. during peak hour (viz. 7.30 am– 9.30am & 4.30pm – 6.30pm)
- speed restriction on heavy vehicles eg. to 50kph
- inside-lane restrictions for heavy vehicles (similar to those now being utilised elsewhere)
- a ban on exhaust brakes at night (eg. between 6.00 pm & 6.00 am)
- VicRoads to advise transport operators of preferred heavy vehicle route from the North & North West to the South East ie. Tullamarine Freeway/City Link/Monash Freeway.

4. Requests for information and handouts

To include a request for VicRoads to:

- consent to our written request made in April 2010 for traffic count numbers for selected roads in and around Banyule;
- be more responsive to future data requests we make; and
- be required to publish detailed traffic count and road performance data for public access and review on their website free of charge, as it is public data essential to an informed debate on transport and planning in Victoria.