

Submission to East West Link Panel

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I want to talk to you about the impact of the EWL on Victoria's carbon pollution.

I've been involved in transport planning and advocacy for over 20 years. I have been a Councillor and Mayor of City of Maribyrnong, Chair of Metropolitan Transport Forum; Strategic Transport Planner at Hume Council; actively involved in community and Greens transport policy and advocacy, and now Senator-elect for Victoria.

My passion about transport stems from many things, but the role of transport in adding to or reducing our carbon emissions is my number one motivation. I believe protecting humanity and the rest of life on our planet from dangerous climate change is the biggest issue facing us today.

To do this all sectors of our economy and society need to be transformed to reduce their carbon emissions to zero or as close to zero as quickly as possible. Transport is not immune. GHG emissions from transport are the second largest contributor (15.7 per cent) to Victoria's net greenhouse gas emissions. And they are growing. Emissions from this subsector grew by 4.7 per cent between 2000 and 2009.

The importance of considering carbon emissions is considered somewhat obliquely in your terms of reference which states that you must consider the impacts of the EWL on air quality.

I presume that EWL also needs to be consistent with the Transport Integration Act. Otherwise it's a perversion of our legal system. The Act states in Section 10 that 'The transport system should actively contribute to environmental sustainability by [inter alia]

- avoiding, minimising and offsetting harm to the local and global environment, including through transport-related emissions and pollutants and the loss of biodiversity;
- promoting forms of transport and the use of forms of energy and transport technologies which have the least impact on the natural environment;

My contention is that consideration of the likely impact of EWL on our carbon emissions has been appallingly considered in the CIS, in three ways.

Firstly the performance objective for GHG emissions set out in the Environmental Management Framework (Chapter 17 of the CIS) is not consistent with the Transport Integration Act to begin with.

'To protect the beneficial uses of the air environment in relation to greenhouse gas emissions is a long way from 'promoting forms of transport and the use of forms of energy and transport technologies which have the least impact on the natural environment'.

I contend that to be consistent with the TIA the CIS should have had to show how the EWL was a form of transport which had the least impact on the natural environment. I suggest that you as a Panel should require this of Linking Melbourne Authority.

Secondly, the performance requirement to

"Integrate sustainable design practices into the design process to identify, implement and monitor measures that will reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions ...".

Is in itself manifestly inadequate as a performance requirement to assess whether 'the beneficial uses of the air environment in relation to greenhouse gas emissions were indeed being protected.

I suggest that you as a Panel should require LMA to replace this performance requirement with a requirement that considers the broader impacts on emissions of building a large new tunnel and freeway, and whether this is indeed likely to be consistent with 'protecting the beneficial uses of the air environment'

And thirdly the assessment of the likely impact of EWL on Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions is profoundly inadequate. This is what I want to focus the rest of my presentation on.

The GHG case put forward in the CIS is summarised in the GHD technical report as 'the project has the potential to positively impact traffic flow, thus helping reduce emissions from Victoria's vehicle fleet.'

This is completely at odds with what I understand international research to be with regard to the likelihood of induced traffic from building such a road, including the potential of shifting trips from public transport onto the road.

I attended the session a few weeks ago when Dr Michelle Zeibots presented to you on the issue of induced traffic, and have read her expert witness statement.

I know that there is conflict between what the Veitch Lister Zenith model predicts with regard to induced traffic and what Dr Zeibots contended was likely to be the case.

I am not a transport modeller. However history and common sense and the transport literature are on Michelle's side, and conclude that induced traffic from projects like these is real and significant.

I suggest there is an important way that the Panel could gain some more information on this issue, to help it assess whether the Zenith modelling or Dr Zeibots backed up by the literature is more likely to be accurate.

The Victorian Integrated Transport Model has been used within the Department of Transport for around a decade now. It has modelled all major options and proposed changes to Melbourne's transport network and is the model that has been used to assess most potential investments in transport in Victoria, both road and public transport projects.

I understand there was extensive modelling using VITM of the previous version of the EWL when the Westlink option was being considered. Has the panel looked at these modelling results? If not, I suggest that you should.

Finally I want to conclude with what I think needs to occur in Melbourne's transport systems if we are to have any hope of reducing Victoria's transport related carbon emissions to zero or close to zero, which is essential if the Government is to operate consistently with the Transport Integration Act aim of avoiding, minimising and offsetting harm to the local and global environment.

A realistic scenario of how to achieve this with regard to passenger trips would be to change our transport and land-use over time so that we shift from current domination by private car trips to a more balanced mode share of around one third of trips to be made by active transport – walking and cycling, one third by zero emissions public transport and one third by zero emissions vehicles.

No existing transport model comes close to modelling this as a potential outcome for trip mode share. The inputs into these models that presume people are going to just keep driving their cars preclude it as an outcome. But there are all sorts of ways that governments could facilitate this occurring.

If we set ourselves an aim of achieving this as an outcome a number of things become clear. The first is that we need to invest in increasing our public transport capacity, not our road capacity for private vehicles. The second is that such a mode share would result in a significant reduction in private vehicle trips, even with population growth, so that new road capacity would not in fact be required.

These are the sorts of scenarios which LMA and the Victorian Government should be considering if they take their job seriously of being consistent with the Act.

I suggest to you as a Panel that it's your job to ask them to do this work.

I want to finish with some history. The Panel report into Peninsula Link (Townsend, Banon and Turnbull, 2009) acknowledged that PeninsulaLink would encourage more people to travel by road and to travel further. However, their response to looking at their carbon emissions reference was limited:

“We have broader concerns because we don't think that a project by project approach to greenhouse gas emissions is appropriate with respect to transport infrastructure. Sustainability issues of land use and transport need to be addressed at the broad metropolitan scale. Melbourne @ 5 million and the Victorian Transport Plan recognise sustainability issues. We do not think it is appropriate to single out specific capital works programs for off-setting in the absence of a broader process. “

They avoided the question of course as to what actual mechanisms were outlined in the Victoria Transport Plan and Melbourne @ 5 million that would actually result in a reduction in emissions. The reality is the mechanisms just weren't there.

The panel report for the Scoresby Freeway / EastLink EES ((DOI, 1999) said very similar things a decade earlier:

However, these issues are of a much broader regional scale and depend on overall government initiatives if a reduction in Greenhouse gases is to be achieved. The Panel would strongly support such initiatives ..and considers that these should be given considerable attention as soon as possible if the objectives of the reduction of Greenhouse gases are to be achieved. (DOI, 1999)

Unfortunately we haven't seen much progress in giving these initiatives 'considerable attention' in the last decade and a half. We can't continue this approach to assessing GHG emissions from major road projects now.

Time is ticking with regard to carbon pollution. You as a Panel are now operating in an environment with an Act which states that 'the transport system should actively contribute to environmental sustainability by avoiding, minimising and offsetting harm to the local and global environment, including through transport-related emissions and pollutants.

I ask you to use the power of this Act to request LMA to go back and do a lot more work to try and justify how on earth EWL is consistent with this aim.

References

DOI (1999) Scoresby Transport Corridor Environment Effects Statement, Report of the Inquiry Panel, April 1999. Melbourne: Department of Infrastructure, State Government of Victoria.

Townsend, Lester, Banon, Chris and Henry Turnbull (2009). Frankston Bypass Independent Inquiry Report. April 2009. Department of Planning and Community Development, Victoria