



**BICYCLE
NETWORK®**

West Gate Tunnel Project

Environmental Effects Statement submission

Introduction

From the inception of what is now called the West Gate Tunnel Project, the proponents and the government communicated to Bicycle Network their intention that, as part of the project, every opportunity would be taken to deliver major enhancements to bicycle infrastructure along and intersecting with the project corridor.

The aim was to deliver facilities of high standard that would create an uplift in bike riding in Melbourne's west, and reverse the suppressive impact of the current suite of poor infrastructure.

Of particular importance was to recognise the risks that heavy truck traffic created for the residents and workers travelling to and from the west. Separation of bikes from this traffic was considered a key element from the outset.

There was an expectation that a project of this scale could set a benchmark for bike infrastructure in Melbourne.

Consultation

There was valuable consultation with Bicycle Network from the outset in the development of the initial reference design.

There were meetings and in-site visits with engineers and various consultants to test early design assumptions.

A key element was to ensure grade separation at key locations where bike traffic, particularly commuters on bikes, crossed paths with freight travelling to and from the port.

For example, at this early stage, designs showed extensive stretches of elevated bikeway along the Footscray Road corridor.

Later, during the bidding process, Bicycle Network was invited to comment on design iterations developed by bidders that departed from the original reference design.

At each stage the designs evolved in ways which resolved earlier concerns and moved closer to the goal of providing a safe and attractive riding experience.

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Impacts on cycling

In the impacts on bike riding of the West Gate Tunnel Project are net positive.

1. **Truck traffic reductions.** Freight movements associated with the port chokes many of the routes in and out of the city from the west, creating a major safety concern for riders. There have been slow, incremental improvements to the bike network to Footscray and beyond, and with each upgrade to safety and convenience, there is an associated uptick in bike traffic. But the high volume of heavy, fast trucks scares off all but the bravest riders. Reducing the volume of trucks on these streets is essential for the growth of sustainable bike and pedestrian traffic.
2. **Footscray Road.** This major artery to the city currently intersects with busy port entrances. By elevating this route from Shepherd Bridge to the Moonee Ponds Creek, major traffic risks are eliminated and a fast, direct route created. The original route remains for walkers and those bikes that prefer the ride along the port periphery.
3. **Moonee Ponds Creek Crossing.** The elevated bikeway will land on the city side of the Moonee Ponds Creek in E-Gate, thus eliminating the constricted crossing currently on Footscray Road.
4. **Docklands E-Gate connection.** Currently plans indicate the path again elevating, crossing Footscray Road and returning to grade in Docklands near the site of the future school. This avoids the use of an at-grade crossing of Footscray Road. Bicycle Network suggests that a path along the east side of Footscray Road to Dudley Street would be an advantageous addition.
5. **Moonee Ponds Creek Trail, Docklands.** The currently configuration of the junction of this trail with the Footscray Road Trail in Docklands is a mess. The new design replaces this problem with a new, superior intersection in E-Gate and avoids an at-grade crossing of Footscray Road.
6. **Dynon Road.** The project proposes to complete the Dynon Road bike path from Lloyd Street to the Moonee Ponds Creek. It will also build a new bike bridge across to the Spencer Street extension, thus giving riders an alternative to the existing Dynon Road bridge, which few riders feel safe using. With the future development of West Melbourne and the Arden McCauley precinct with a new Melbourne Metro rail station, Dynon Road will grow in importance as a bike route. There will be also be improvements made to the links from the Moonee Ponds Creek Trail in this precinct. These improvements, taken in conjunction with expected new bike facilities over Hopetoun Bridge at the west end of Dynon Road – delivered as part of another project – will create another option for people in the west, particularly in the rapidly developing residential areas in Footscray.
7. **Shepherd Bridge, Maribyrnong River.** In this location, with the recent completion of the new Shepherd foot and bike bridge, the difficult crossing at Sims Street/Mackenzie Road to Footscray Road on ramp will be eliminated as the new bridge will be elevated over the road to connect with the elevated Footscray road bikeway.
8. **Moreland Street, Footscray.** The project will create a new link from Harris Street at the Yarraville Gardens through to Maribyrnong Street. This is advantageous as it will eliminate the intersection of the current off road path along Moreland Street with Francis Street, as well as providing a grade separated crossing of truck-heavy Moreland Street.
9. **Federation Trail.** The Federation Trail will be completed and upgraded as part of the project. The missing section from Fogarty Avenue to Hyde Street will be placed in the West Gate corridor, crossing Williamstown Road and the rail line before descending toward Hyde Street. Further west, the trail along the widened West Gate will be moved to provide space for the additional traffic lane, and will be in a more confined space. Consideration will be needed at the design stage to ensure adequate width and

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clearances are maintained. Again, the crossings at Millers Road are complex and will need careful planning to ensure there are no undue delays for riders. The project as undertaken to upgrade the existing section of the Federation Trail from Millers Road to Little Boundary Road, currently in poor condition.

10. **Kororoit Creek Trail.** The project has undertaken to build new sections of trail on Kororoit Creek that will further extend the trail to the south, and better utilise the nearby connection with the Federation Trail.

Impacts on inner Melbourne traffic

It is official policy to give pedestrians, bikes, public transport and local logistics vehicles priority on most of the road system in inner Melbourne.

As bike use accelerates in Melbourne's close-in suburbs, displacing private car commuting, bikes will require more road space, adding to the parallel demand for more road space from the growth in road-based public transport. Cars, because they are so inefficient at moving people in these environments, will cede this road space.

There is potential that the West Gate Tunnel Project could lure more drivers into attempting to make more discretionary trips into the very areas where their presence has been in long term decline.

Traffic projections for the project predict that this may occur, with modest increases in traffic in West Melbourne for example.

If true, this would be of concern to bike riders who are relying on policy settings that prioritise the moving of people over the moving of vehicles.

The Planning Panel should take the opportunity to emphasise that the possibility of traffic leaking from the West Gate Tunnel and associated roads into inner Melbourne should be addressed by continuing the policies of prioritising public transport and active transport, and de-prioritising motor traffic, in the inner suburbs.

Road pricing

There is a risk that transport projects that have the potential to benefit freight, and in turn benefit the communities that suffer from poorly located truck routes, can be undone because the new truck routes are crowded out by increased private motor vehicle use.

There is a strong economic case for the development of efficient routes to the Port of Melbourne, routes that prioritise trucks over other users.

Merely building a road does not prioritise the preferred users, nor guarantee the outcome promised by the investment.

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The user pricing of this facility will have a considerable influence over its use, and whether the impacts of the project align with the expectations of the EES.

Pollution impacts

Generally, providing facilities that lead to increased levels of travel by bike, creates the conditions for mode switch from pollution creating transport to pollution free. The facilities created in this project will lead to more active travel.

Because these new routes are along a major road corridor, it is arguable that bike riders themselves may be exposed to pollution created by the project. However, bike routes already exist along these corridors.

Until detailed designs are completed, the precise distance between emission sources and those riding bikes on nearby paths, is not known. However, at this stage it appears that those distances will be greater than those already existing on many Melbourne roads.

Health impact statement

Projects that increase the amount of driving in the community, and the amount of time people drive, increase the extent and amount of sedentary behaviour – sitting behind the wheel.

It is belatedly being recognised that driving for extended periods on a regular basis is a major contributor to the diseases associated with sedentary behaviour.

Any project – such as the West Gate Tunnel – that increases the convenience of driving will inevitably increase the risk of sedentary diseases, and the financial and social burden of ill-health on the community.

The Planning Panel should deliberate upon whether a Health Impact Statement that documents all the costs and benefits of this and similar road projects would be a valuable tool for assessing total community impacts.

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