

Friends of Banyule – North East Link Public Meeting – 6 October 2010

Dr Paul Mees

Dr Mees opened with the observation that his train from the city to Ivanhoe for the public meeting ran on time. However, he noticed the “connecting” bus disappearing around the corner as he disembarked from the train. Said he then took the laneway walk up to Upper Heidelberg Road from the station. It was unlit at night for most of its length until walkers are greeted by the lighting of the car dealer showrooms at the other end.

Mediocre public transport planning in Melbourne

Recounted the story of the redevelopment of the property at Museum station in the city. As a consequence, the walk for commuters to the trains was extended by four minutes as they are now required to take a more circuitous route past shops etc. to enter the station. A mistaken sense of priority by the transport planners.

The quality of the management responsible for planning and managing Victorian transport is very poor and they make bad decisions. The decision to reverse the direction of travel in the City Loop is a particularly relevant example. The audience was asked for a show of hands on who took the train to the city (quite a few) and whether they believed the change improved the service (none).

We live in a world of political spin on transport in Melbourne: Everything is “part of The Plan.” The outpourings of 70 media advisers promote a disjunction between what we are told by officialdom is being provided in transport and what is actually being achieved.

The head of the well-performed Zurich Cantonal Public Transport Authority is currently visiting Melbourne and is interested in speaking to Department of Transport officials in Melbourne. They are resisting meeting him.

Misplaced expenditure on road projects

Whilst the Victorian government justifies very expensive road projects simply on the basis of the savings in travel time, decisions such as these in PT militate against performance standards.

In this regard, Rosanna Road residents are being told by the government that the expenditure of \$6 billion will solve the problem of congestion, noise and heavy truck traffic on Rosanna Road. The government appears to imply Rosanna Road will be transformed into a quiet cul-de-sac as a consequence. Similar predictions about traffic reductions on local roads were made when EastLink was opened. However, recent reports indicate that roads like Springvale Road are suffering increases in traffic again, notwithstanding the less than expected growth in traffic on EastLink.

EastLink is a genuinely private project in that it was funded by risk capital the return to which is primarily determined by the volume of paying customers. However, usage has been below projections. Other toll road projects have been disappointing to investors as well. As a consequence investors have gone off

them and are therefore unlikely to be a source of funds for future such projects, including the north-east link.

Further, there is no money left in the Commonwealth's Building Australia Fund. As a consequence of the squeeze on funding the Victorian government has reneged on an undertaking to put the Regional Rail Link underground in Footscray. Compulsory acquisition and demolition of private residences has been the consequence. These funding constraints may see government pushing short versus long distance tunnel options.

The Victorian government submission to Infrastructure Australia seeking funding for the North East Link was not made a public document but it has subsequently been released under FOI to Greg Barber against the resistance of the Victorian government. Much of the document that has been released has been blanked out.

The Zurich model of public transport

The State of Zurich in Switzerland has shown how to run a good public transport system. Three months ago, the Zurich Cantonal Public Transport Authority released their three year plan for the period 2012 to 2015.

The population of Zurich is about 1.3 million. The public subsidy for the service is about \$350 million per which is about one-third of the subsidy required by Melbourne public transport.

The Zurich authority plans and operates their transport with far fewer staff than the Department of Transport and other agencies in Melbourne. For instance, the Victorian Transport Ticketing Authority, whose responsibility is to contract manage the introduction of MYKI, has 123 staff alone.

Rates of public transport use are much higher in Zurich. For instance, only 2% of children are driven to school.

Public campaigning essential

The fundamental reason why Zurich has good public transport is because citizens took things into their own hands- a citizens uprising through town hall meetings. This is a message for all transport advocates. Change is never effected through bureaucracies. These are typically averse to positive change. They and elected officials need to be forced to promise they will not build new freeways. They will not do it of their own volition.

Rosanna Road is not central to truck movements in Melbourne and the main reason trucks are using Rosanna Road is to avoid the toll on EastLink. Most cities ban trucks from residential streets.