

Good afternoon everyone

My name is Marion Ware

On behalf of Friends of Banyule I say it is so good to be here today amongst friends from right across Melbourne to make our voice heard about the deep decline in the natural and built environment. It is especially important today to tell the story of the threat faced by our vulnerable urban bushland and to demand changes in public policy to protect our valuable heritage for this and future generations.

The particular concern that galvanizes the Friends of Banyule is for the Banyule Flats, Warringal Swamplands and Bolin Bolin Billabong, a 81 ha area, which forms part of the ancient floodplains along the Yarra River, north east of here and located within the metropolitan suburbs of Heidelberg, Viewbank, Rosanna and Bulleen.

Banyule Flats and Warringal Swamplands are lowland riverine flood plains that are among the most threatened landscapes in Victoria. Banyule Swamp is the most intact and biologically significant shallow freshwater marsh in the Lower Yarra. Both are key wetland areas in maintaining the viability of populations of water birds and wetland ecosystems in the Lower Yarra. They contain a number of rare, vulnerable and threatened fauna, 23 species of water birds, 125 species of native birds, 11 species of native mammals and four bat species.

The Government is planning to build a freeway right through the middle of Banyule Flats and Warringal Swamplands and continues to refuse to consider public transport solutions for Banyule, a municipality which is chronically under-serviced.

This freeway, the so called North East Link, will not ease congestion but will destroy one of the most precious environmental and historical assets in the City of Banyule: the birthplace of the iconic Heidelberg School of painting, the first internationally recognised Australian art movement.

In 2002, the Victorian MP for Ivanhoe, Craig Langdon, got up in front of 1000 residents at Banyule Town Hall and swore there would be no freeway through Heidelberg and Bulleen as long as he was an MP. He claimed the support of then minister for transport, Peter Batchelor, who declared in Parliament: "There is a very wrong suggestion that the Government has a proposal to build a freeway through the Yarra Flats ... It is a tragic and

sleazy attempt by a conspiracy of the deluded to try to frighten people living and working in this area ... these people will have no basis for making the suggestions in the future."

If this proposed \$6 billion project were to go ahead we will have all been betrayed by the Brumby Government.

Ten years ago government spokesmen were saying that building more and more freeways cannot go on - but it is. State and federal governments have been facilitating more road freight and less by rail, while promising to do the opposite. We need to remind John Brumby that the Yarra Valley is not his to turn into an asphalt-covered tarmac, and that 90 per cent of traffic on roads is passenger traffic looking for the necessary public transport alternative. Superior public transport, cycling and walking options to overcome the car dependency currently dominant in Banyule and surrounding municipalities.

We need to remind John Brumby that we have it in our power to preserve what is valuable for us all.

The North East Link would go through the home of the Heidelberg School painters and an invaluable conservation area. It will also go through Heide, home of the Australian modernists, with little concern for our cultural history or the environment.

It would also dismiss the thousands of Melbournians who use the area for passive and active recreation, including the members of many sporting clubs.

We need a Premier, not a project manager. We need genuine and clear headed effort not complacency. We need a representative government, not a corporation. There is no reason to make the aesthetic and ecological separate from the urban, except if you wish to get rich quick on population growth and the decaying body of the environment.

Yes, there is a missing link. It's called public transport and sensible planning decisions. It is the responsibility of the major parties to provide public policy for the necessary public transport alternatives to protect our valuable heritage for this and future generations.

END

