

LEADWEST'S NEWS SUMMARY FOR MELBOURNE'S WEST

24th JUNE 2011



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BRIMBANK

BRIMBANK UTILITY BILL COMPLAINTS TOP 700

Brimbank Leader – 24th June 2011

<http://brimbank-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/utility-bill-complaints-top-700-fbready/>

Brimbank residents made more than 700 complaints about their water and energy services in the second half of last year, Victorian Energy and Water Ombudsman data shows.

Billing issues accounted for more than half the 778 complaints made between July 1 and December 31.

There were 388 billing complaints, which included 148 customers worried about high charges, 46 about errors and 36 about estimated accounts.

But Energy and Water Ombudsman Fiona McLeod said her office noticed, in most cases, billing complaints were based on affordability.

“Customers will ring up and say they don’t think the bill is correct, but in most cases they can’t afford to pay the bill,” she said.

“Most people don’t have experiences of not being able to afford their bills, so they are ashamed and embarrassed.”

Ms McLeod warned customers to expect higher accounts as winter bills arrived.

“We all know this is an early winter and it’s cold early,” she said.

“It inevitably will have an impact on winter bills.”

Companies are required to offer customers who are struggling to pay a range of services including payment plans, energy or water efficiency advice, or place them on a hardship program.

The Ombudsman figures also showed 32 customers complained about misleading information from door-to-door marketers, telemarketers or material provided.

Two people complained about pressure from sales staff, and six about incorrect information.

The Ombudsman received 28 per cent more complaints than the previous year.

BRIMBANK STUDENTS WALKING IN OTHERS' SHOES

Brimbank Leader – 23rd June 2011

<http://brimbank-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/walking-in-someone-elses-shoes-fbready/>

Imagine losing all your qualifications because you have to move to another country.

It’s what liberal arts students from Victoria University TAFE have asked their audience to do as part of Gallery Sunshine Everywhere’s Little Did I Know exhibition.

The exhibition celebrates the diversity and examines the challenges of four educated people who have moved to Australia.

The stories come from Iraq, Chile, Lebanon and Fiji and are showcased through collage and text.

Teacher Karen Charman said it was an important issue about which to raise awareness.

“The (migrants) come with formidable knowledge but they’re never going to be able to actualise that,” she said.

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One of the case studies includes an Iraqi woman who had been a teacher, but her qualification was not recognised in Australia. She is now training as an educational aide.

The exhibition is showing at Sunshine's Granary Cafe and closes on Sunday, June 26.

PLAYTIME'S OVER

Sunshine Star – 21st June 2011

<http://www.starnewsgroup.com.au/star/sunshne-ardeer-albion/301/story/135592.html>

Brimbank MPs and residents are "outraged" by a council proposal to sell off land it claims is "surplus" to the city's needs.

A council report revealed 14 properties across the municipality had been recommended for consideration to sell. The properties include vacant blocks of land and small park land in West Sunshine, Sydenham, Keilor, Keilor Lodge, Deer Park, St Albans and Taylors Lakes.

Derrimut MP Telmo Languiller described the proposal as "unacceptable"

and claimed many children and families who used these recreational spaces would be disadvantaged if the sale went ahead.

"After speaking to many of the families that will be affected by this extraordinary decision, I call on the council to immediately reconsider their resolution to deprive children and families of much needed green spaces in Derrimut," Mr Languiller said.

Keilor resident and mother Virginia Tachos said she was "devastated" when she heard of the proposal.

"Smaller parks are easy prey," she said.

"We need to be very protective of our parkland; they are slowly starting to slip away, especially with the recent closure of Horseshoe Bend Farm."

Ms Tachos said the Patterson Ave park in Keilor, which is one site listed in the sale proposal, held fond memories for her and her son and had become a meeting place for local residents.

"I'm disappointed and sad," she said.

The determined resident said the community was prepared to "fight tooth and nail" to keep the parklands, but said if it were indeed a losing battle and council did eventually sell off the land, then it was imperative the money made would go back into community projects.

Keilor MP Natalie Hutchins described the proposal as "outrageous" and said it showed the council was not listening to the community.

Ms Hutchins said last year the council held listening posts with residents and the call to build more parks couldn't have been more convincing.

"Our open space is sacred.

"I understand it's just a proposal, but discussion hasn't happened on what guarantees the council can make that the money will go back into the community.

"If parkland in Keilor is sold off, then the money needs to be going into projects in the Keilor electorate."

Brimbank Council general manager of infrastructure and environment Paul Younis called for calm within the community, sighting there was a "strict process to the disposal of land" and the council was compelled to give residents an opportunity to have their say.

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"The council will only make a decision after we have heard the feedback from the community," Mr Younis said.

Brimbank CEO Nick Foa said the blocks were identified as surplus to the council's needs, particularly as there was a high quality park located within 100 to 300 metres from six of the properties nominated.

"There are also plans to spend over \$2 million on parks within the immediate area of the blocks," Mr Foa said.

"All council has done is agreed to commence the statutory process, signalling our intent to sell.

"To suggest that council is harming the community is wrong. Council has spent more than \$10 million on the development and upgrading of local parks, playgrounds and open spaces, guided by its Creating Better Parks plan over the past four years."

Mr Foa said the council had accelerated its commitment to deliver the parks plan which will see almost 50 reserves transformed into "modern, safe and exciting play spaces" by June this year.

A recent Metropolitan Melbourne Investigation conducted by the Victorian Environment Assessment Council revealed Brimbank has the second highest level of public open space of the 29 municipalities within the urban growth area.

The proposed sale comes as Council commenced work at Buckingham Reserve in West Sunshine where a new flagship park will be created.

VOLCANIC PLAINS A HIGHLIGHT OF IRAMOO OPEN DAY

Brimbank Weekly – 21st June 2011

<http://www.brimbankweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/volcanic-plains-a-highlight-of-iramoo-open-day/2200693.aspx>

The splendour of the Victorian volcanic plains has been recreated through a 'creative photo' project.

Volcano Dreaming, an environmental panorama depicting the grasslands of the plains, will be unveiled at the Iramoo Sustainable Community Centre's community open day this Saturday.

Created from more than 3000 photos, the 12-metre-long panorama depicts the wildflower grasslands that once stretched from the banks of the Yarra River and metropolitan Melbourne to the Grampians.

It celebrates the biodiversity of native plants and animals of the endangered ecosystem. Close inspection reveals the 'secrets' of the landscape, including bandicoots, sunshine donkey orchids and the legless lizard.

The panorama was created by artist group, Inherit Earth, whose members worked with community groups. The artwork will be displayed at local schools and community events.

Iramoo's Wendy Lang says the 'open day' will also give people the chance to learn about programs and volunteering activities at Iramoo.

"The open day will have gardening and planting demonstrations, grasslands tours, children's activities, music, bush food, demonstrations by beekeepers, lizard displays and a sausage sizzle."

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It's at Iramoo Sustainable Community Centre at St Albans from 11am-3pm and is being held in conjunction with Brimbank Council's wetlands planting day from 10am to 1pm at the adjacent Jones Creek Wetlands.

SPECIAL STUDENTS RANGE FROM AUDIO BOOKS TO COWS ON CANVAS

Brimbank Weekly – 21st June 2011

<http://www.brimbankweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/special-students-range-from-audio-books-to-cows-on-canvas/2200702.aspx>

Melton Specialist School students have trialled new disability services on offer at Caroline Springs library.

In an effort to make the library experience more enjoyable for people with a disability, Melton Council has introduced audio books, BigKeys computer keyboards and accessible computer mice at the Caroline Springs and Melton libraries.

Five students were given a tutorial on how to use the services during a visit to the library last Thursday.

The school's student welfare co-ordinator, Mark Worrell, said they were shown how to access their favourite books using the new technology.

"The keyboard with large buttons is great for people with visual disabilities, and the joystick-style mouse was a lot easier for the students to use," he said. "They looked up cartoons on the screen and went and found them in the book section. They really loved it."

Pupils also painted large cows on a canvas which will be put up outside the historic Morton Homestead site in Taylors Hill.

"The land around the homestead used to be farmland and Melton Council asked us to do some paintings of cows which will be placed around the homestead," Mr Worrell said.

SUNSHINE GETS 'THE RECOGNITION IT DESERVES'

Brimbank Weekly – 21st June 2011

<http://www.brimbankweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/sunshine-gets-the-recognition-it-deserves/2200701.aspx>

Akin to a large rock being thrown in to a still lake, the year-long celebrations of 150 years of local government in Sunshine have breathed new life into the suburb, generating a wave of new projects and ideas.

At tonight's Brimbank Council meeting, former Sunshine resident and film director Paul Murphy will present an almanac filled with articles documenting the year of celebrations that ended on May 28.

Last week, Mr Murphy met with council administrator Meredith Sussex and Sunshine Business Association president Bruce White to discuss highlights of the 12 months and plan future projects geared towards enhancing Sunshine's reputation.

Ms Sussex said the 150-year anniversary project had been a great success in boosting community pride.

"It's been a fantastic year and Sunshine has celebrated its rich history in many different ways," she said.

"Residents, council and the traders association have all worked as one to set a precedent for what can be achieved in this area, and we feel the suburb has entered a new period of optimism."

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Mr White said the Brimbank Festival was a highlight of the anniversary year, as was creation of the Sunshine – Junction to the World documentary, which screened at Village Cinemas in late March.

"There were so many great moments, including the Sunshine 150 anniversary logo competition and many community groups and residents accessing grants from council for celebratory projects," he said. "Once we finish the covers of the documentary DVD we will send copies to local schools. The project is ongoing."

Mr Murphy said his almanac would allow residents to access the many great stories revealed during the celebrations. "Sunshine was recognised nationally and internationally by being placed on show at the National Museum in Canberra," he said. "It's finally getting the recognition it deserves."

WIN FOR KEALBA RESIDENTS AS GARBAGE TIP DUMPED

Brimbank Leader – 21st June 2011

<http://brimbank-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/garbage-tip-dumped-fbready-fbready/>

A controversial proposal for a rubbish dump in Kealba has been binned.

VCAT upheld Brimbank council's decision to trash a proposal by the Barro Group to turn 20ha of land in the north-west corner of the former Sunshine Quarry site into landfill.

The tribunal said the proposal would not provide any community benefit and its decision took into consideration factors including existing noise and dust, visual impact, environmental issues and the need for landfill to be above the regional watertable.

Residents Against Sunshine Kealba Quarry spokeswoman Marilyn Canet said the decision was a "historic win".

"We are absolutely ecstatic," Ms Canet said.

"The feeling among many residents was that it was a done deal, and it's been like a David and Goliath situation the whole way.

"It's a very good demonstration of what happens when the community stands up for what is right."

Brimbank chairman of administrators Peter Lewinsky said the council was concerned about the impact of the proposed landfill on residents and the environment.

"A landfill build below the groundwater table and with the potential of rising 15m has the potential to impact on the surrounding residents and their homes," Mr Lewinsky said.

But Barro Group executive director Peter Barro said the decision was an "opportunity missed".

"There has been a golden opportunity missed for a community benefit in the medium term, the big picture was not looked at," Mr Barro said. He said the group was unsure if it would appeal.

Council administrator and Sunshine Quarry community liaison committee chair Jo Anderson said the council would continue to work with the Barro Group and the community on the future use of the site.

The council first rejected the proposal in August last year after receiving more than 660 objections, including an objection from the Environment Protection Authority.

The hearing, which started in March, lasted 10 days and is estimated to have cost the council about \$300,000.

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BRIMBANK PARKS UP FOR THE CHOP

Brimbank Leader – 21st June 2011

<http://brimbank-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/local-parks-for-chop-fbready/>

A decision to sell 14 Brimbank Council-owned properties - many of them parks - has sparked outrage among residents.

The council last month announced it wants to sell the sites, identified as areas that would not be developed because of the closeness of other parks, poor access for the community and poor location.

The Tareque family is among many in Sunshine West unhappy about losing their local park in Marchant Cres. Masud Tareque, from nearby Carwood Drive, said the park was a meeting place for young families in the neighbourhood and that his family would feel "bad and deprived" to lose it.

The proposed sales have been criticised by local state MPs including Telmo Languiller, Marlene Kairouz and Natalie Hutchins.

Mr Languiller said a doorknock of surrounding homes revealed residents had not been consulted about the proposed sell-off.

"No one knew that those lands were up for sale and council intended to get rid of them," he said.

But council infrastructure and environment general manager Paul Younis said no sales would be made before community consultation.

"We intend to sell but will consider the issues raised by residents first," Mr Younis said.

"We've looked at single parcels where there have been other significant upgrades nearby.

"On initial inspection there seems to be no benefit but we will now ask the community."

The consultation will be broken into two phases, with seven properties analysed in each. Letters will be translated and sent to about 1400 residents who will be affected.

Submissions will close in August.

The properties, altogether worth about \$3 million, could go on the market within three years. Sale proceeds would go into improving other parks across the city.

THE HUB OF THE MATTER IN SUNSHINE

Brimbank Leader – 20th June 2011

<http://brimbank-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/the-hub-of-the-matter/>

The multi-million-dollar expansion of Sunshine's Visy Cares Hub will be one step closer if the Brimbank council draft budget is adopted this week.

Designs are under way for the \$5.8 million Sunshine Youth and Community Hub, a project undertaken in partnership between Brimbank council and The Youth Junction Inc.

The expansion, to be completed by August 2012, will include more integrated services, along with a community meeting space, foyer and exhibition space.

Visy Cares Hub general manager Karen Hart said it would be a wonderful project for Sunshine and the western suburbs.

"It's got a very clear focus on education, employment and training," she said. "That's the whole point of the funding, to try and generate long-term opportunities for young people."

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The hub is used by youths from all over the western suburbs and provides services from tenants such as Melbourne City Mission, Headspace and Brimbank Youth Services.

“Our philosophy is, if a group of youth services is joined together, the young person isn’t confused about which services they need to see,” Ms Hart said.

Brimbank council community wellbeing general manager Kelly Grigsby said the specific nature and type of new services and programs was yet to be confirmed, but there would be “an expanded range of youth services and a range of community programs provided from the redeveloped hub”.

Ms Grigsby said stage works were planned to cause little disruption to the operation of the existing hub.

Last year, the centre had about 34,600 contact inquires with young people from 136 postcodes.

The council draft budget includes \$2 million for the project and will be adopted on June 22.

BRIMBANK CHILDCARE FEE DEFAULT ON THE RISE

Brimbank Leader – 18th June 2011

<http://brimbank-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/childcare-fee-default-on-the-rise/>

Childcare providers in Brimbank are employing debt collectors to track unpaid fees.

Debt-collection agency Prushka is acting on behalf of 51 centres in Victoria, with almost 200 active files. This includes nine claims against parents across three centres in St Albans and Delahey.

Prushka chief executive Roger Mendelson said the number of unpaid fees was increasing, with many childcare centres forced to escalate debt-recovery activities.

He said the two biggest groups of debtors were single parents and low-income families.

“In some circumstances, rebates are paid directly to a parent’s bank account rather than to the childcare centre, and with families under intense financial pressure due to rising costs of living, the rebate sometimes fails to make it to the childcare centre, with parents spending it on more im Leg 1 mediate household bills,” he said.

Mr Mendelson said centres were in a difficult position.

“Childcare centres are generally more lenient when it comes to unpaid fees than other businesses, because they value the needs of the children and their parents,” he said.

Mr Mendelson recommends parents set up an annual budget for childcare costs, and that they see a financial counsellor if they were having problems with debts.

A Federal Government additional childcare rebate is available to families, and has been increased from 30 to 50 per cent, with an annual cap of \$7500 per child each year.

Minister for Child Care, Kate Ellis, said from next month families could receive the rebate fortnightly, or in some cases weekly.

Neither of the three centres with debt referred to Prushka were available to talk to Leader.

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MARIBRYNONG

EXPERT PLANNING UP FOR DISCUSSION IN FOOTSCRAY

Maribyrnong Leader – 23rd June 2011

<http://maribyrnong-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/experts-to-guide-planning/>

A newly-established expert advisory group will help overhaul the Victorian planning system but Footscray residents may not reap all the benefits.

The reform, the first since 1993, is aimed at restoring confidence and certainty in the planning system.

“The Victorian planning system needs to be more transparent in its decision-making, contain simpler planning processes, clearer rules and certainty in outcomes,” Planning Minister Matthew Guy said last week. “The advisory group will be seeking submissions from all interested people and groups on issues they have with planning controls and how they think they can be improved.”

Maribyrnong Mayor Sarah Carter welcomed the group, which is part of a raft of initiatives to reform the planning system, although she said she had not yet found out whether local areas designated as priority planning areas or as being within a central activity district would be affected, as those planning decisions were made by the minister.

Cr Carter said it was something she hoped to discuss at their July 26 meeting.

“A streamlined approach is definitely a good thing, and a broader scope; I think people get quite frustrated by the planning process,” she said. “And hopefully it leads to more clarity and consultation.”

A spokeswoman for the minister said “absolutely everything” was open for review by the group, but their work would be driven by the feedback about the biggest areas of concern.

The advisory group will make an initial report to the minister by November.

ROSAMOND SPECIAL SCHOOL OUTFIT GETS HIGH MARKS

Maribyrnong Weekly – 22nd June 2011

<http://www.maribyrnongweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/rosamond-special-school-outfit-gets-high-marks/2202456.aspx>

Students at Rosamond Special School in Maidstone will be taking the field in flash new sport uniforms as part of its association with the Maribyrnong Council.

The school offers individual education programs for students aged 5-18 who have a clinically diagnosed mild intellectual disability.

The council supports the school by giving students access to sporting opportunities outside school hours. Mayor Sarah Carter (pictured) enjoyed a marking contest with some of the students during a visit to the school to see their new uniforms.

HOPING TO MAKE A SMALL BUT REAL DIFFERENCE

Maribyrnong Leader – 22nd June 2011

<http://maribyrnong-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/hoping-to-make-a-small-but-real-difference/>

Even if it's just small, Seddon's Hugh Oates hopes his place on the Regional Rail Link Community Reference Group will make a difference.

Mr Oates, who lives on the south side of Buckley St opposite residents who will have their homes acquired for the billion-dollar project, said he'd applied for the role to help Fair Go for Footscray Rail Residents get more access to information.

“I don't think it'll be the key (to transparent communication), I'm cynical, but it'll help.”

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Mr Oates said he believed too many documents were being kept in confidence over the project.

"The rail line is a good idea, if it's done in the right way, not just cost-cutting," he said.

"I wasn't surprised by the EPA noise report. I was on a council committee on the Tottenham upgrade that woke me up to the dangers of diesel fumes.

"I think noise is the easy one at the moment. It should be fairly simple to fix with some mitigation and it wouldn't cost them the earth. Rubbish around the stations and diesel fumes, they're ongoing issues that concern me more."

Mr Oates encouraged residents to let him know of their concerns and questions so he could bring them to the table at group meetings.

REPORT SPIES OCEAN WAVES ON THE HORIZON

Maribyrnong Weekly – 22nd June 2011

<http://www.maribyrnongweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/report-spies-ocean-waves-on-the-horizon/2202447.aspx>

A new federal government report has labelled commercial buildings in Maribyrnong as the most at risk in Melbourne due to a rise in sea levels from climate change.

The report by the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency has indicated that between 242 and 347 commercial buildings in Maribyrnong will be at risk from a projected

1.1 metre rise in sea levels by the turn of the next century.

The figures place Maribyrnong as the third most at-risk local government area in the state.

Only the Surf Coast (between 347 and 417 buildings) and East Gippsland (between 374 and 384) face a riskier future.

The Climate Change Risks to Coastal Buildings and Infrastructure report also names Western Australia and Victoria as the states with the most commercial buildings exposed to the sea level rise.

The report estimates it could cost between \$8 billion and \$12 billion to replace assets in Victoria affected by rising sea levels. While Maribyrnong Council declined to comment on the issue, opposition spokesman on planning Brian Tee said councils, in particular Maribyrnong, wanted to protect residents and local jobs.

However it was receiving no support from the state government to prepare for climate change.

"What is becoming clear is that the Baillieu government does not care about the effect of rising sea levels on areas such as Melbourne's west, and is prepared to let locals suffer without any support," Mr Tee said.

Planning Minister Matthew Guy disputed the opposition's claims.

"The state government has been working with councils around Victoria on the issue of sea level rise, and in the recent budget we committed funding to support detailed coastal mapping

of Victoria's coastline in preparation for storm surges and probable sea-level rise," Mr Guy said.

"I am interested to see what the federal government is going to do with this information, since it is their report."

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DECADE OF COMPASSION FOR NEEDLE USERS

Maribyrnong Weekly – 22nd June 2011

<http://www.maribyrnongweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/decade-of-compassion-for-needle-users/2202444.aspx>

The recently departed program manager of Health Works, Jacqui Brown, remembers when the pioneering needle exchange program was set up in an empty little office.

Last week, the Western Region Health Centre service celebrated its 10th anniversary, but in more fitting surroundings in Barkly Street, Footscray.

"It's amazing how much the program has grown over the years, and it's great to have it operating from a purpose-built facility," Ms Brown said.

After starting out as a small outreach clinic, Health Works has evolved to include services such as a primary needle and syringe program, a broad-based primary healthcare clinic and general health education for people who inject drugs.

"We started the service very organically.

"We would just walk up to someone in the mall that we thought could have used our services - we were pretty naive in the beginning."

Last week's anniversary celebrations also doubled as a farewell for Ms Brown as she moves on to new challenges after 10 years with the service.

"Even though there have been lots of other people involved over the years, it really felt like my baby," she said.

The work presented many challenges over the years, but Ms Brown took time to remember some of the success stories.

"A young man was carried into the service many years ago by his friends because of an infection in his legs.

"We worked with him on and off for many years. I bumped into him recently at a local shopping centre, after not seeing him for a few years, and he had turned his life around. He is married with two beautiful kids. It was really great to see him, and it is an example of how Health Works can and does make a real difference."

Incoming Health Works program manager Bernadette Suter said the aim was still to offer clients everything a GP would provide, except the services were designed for people who injected drugs.

RAIL LINK HEALTH CONCERNS

Footscray Star – 21st June 2011

<http://www.starnewsgroup.com.au/star/footscray-yarraville/301/story/135568.html/>

The Fair Go for Footscray Rail Residents group has called on Maribyrnong City Council to boost their advocacy efforts following the release of noise and vibration impact assessments for the Regional Rail Link.

Spokesperson Nick Fahey last week urged the council to strengthen their public and behind-the-scenes advocacy to ensure the protection of residents and traders affected by the Regional Rail Link.

"The council has yet to pass a formal motion in respect of this matter, leaving council officers without a clear mandate for more robust advocacy," he said.

The call comes after the Environment Protection Authority released a technical review Regional Rail Link noise and vibration assessment at the request of the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD).

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The EPA identified severe health impacts for a large number of Footscray residents and said the report provided no actual assessment of the impact on the community.

"In Footscray, for the most exposed residents, a vast majority of the population will experience chronic noise-induced sleep disturbance, with significant proportions 'highly disturbed'," the EPA report read.

"For the most exposed residents in other areas, almost half the community will experience chronic noise-induced sleep disturbance... the proposed avoidance and mitigation measures will not be effective at addressing the adverse environment effects of noise from rail operations.

"Significant adverse community reaction may be expected, associated with high degrees of sleep and other domestic interference from noise."

CALL FOR FOOTSCRAY RAIL NOISE ACTION

Maribyrnong Leader – 21st June 2011

<http://maribyrnong-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/call-for-footscray-rail-noise-action/>

MARIBYRNONG Council hopes to push the Federal Government for national rail standards after being shocked by noise readings.

The council, and residents group Fair Go For Footscray Rail Residents, say they are fed up with getting the runaround between ministers and departments over the billion-dollar Regional Rail Link project.

Mayor Sarah Carter, who viewed a damning Noise Analysis EPA report on the project after being given a copy by the group, said she had requested to be among the first to receive a copy of a more extensive noise report and a briefing on its findings.

With letters to Public Transport Minister Terry Mulder and Planning Minister Matthew Guy unanswered for more than five weeks, she is planning to move a motion that the council call on Premier Ted Baillieu to intervene.

"We're looking to the State and Federal governments to ensure noise abatement measures, as we're worried those will come secondary because of Budget black holes," she said.

Cr Carter said that while she'd had briefings with the Regional Rail Link Authority, they did not address topical issues.

Travelling to Canberra for the Australian Local Government Association conference on the weekend, Cr Carter hoped to have support from the western councils to move an urgent motion to start work on national rail standards.

Group spokesman Nick Fahey (pictured) said that despite assurances from Mr Mulder that he would keep them informed, it took him 41 days to respond to a list of residents' questions, and his answers were "thin" on detail.

Mr Mulder has never responded to requests for comment from the Leader.

Mr Fahey said he had referred the group back to the Regional Rail Link Authority and Mr Guy, who then referred to both their departments and Mr Mulder.

ALL ABOARD THE SHIP OF SCHOOLS

Maribyrnong Leader – 19th June 2011

<http://maribyrnong-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/all-aboard-the-ship-of-schools/>

The mother ship has landed at St Margaret's Primary School with students and parents scrambling to hop on board.

LEADWEST'S NEWS SUMMARY FOR MELBOURNE'S WEST

24th JUNE 2011



Funded through the Building the Education Revolution program, the complex - nicknamed "the mother ship" for its modern, angular architecture - was officially opened and blessed last week.

Principal Tony Lawless said the \$2 million building included four classrooms, offices and a multi-purpose area.

"Maribyrnong is a growing suburb," he said.

"We've added an extra class a year for the past five years and it will continue and then go through the roof with the (Maribyrnong Defence Site) estate.

"We needed this building to keep up with demand. So far space is still manageable.

"We like to think of ourselves as a country school with lots of area to play."

Inside the mother ship, a blue swirl representing the nearby Maribyrnong River winds around the ceiling.

"We got to have a lot of say in the design," Mr Lawless said.

"It went down really well with the students and parents."

SKY EYES SCHOOL SITE

Maribyrnong Leader – 17th June 2011

<http://maribyrnong-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/sky-eyes-school-site/>

Annecto David House is being investigated as a possible high school site for SKY.

The David House site on Williamstown Rd has recently been refurbished and plans to redevelop three homes, owned by Annecto, at the front of the site are in the pipeline.

SKY High Working Group spokeswoman Janine Lloyd said a meeting was scheduled with the not-for-profit disability support and training provider Annecto about the idea. "I haven't seen the site but I understand it's quite big," she said.

"I understand Annecto are looking more broadly (at community services) and it supports our all-inclusive idea, we have the same goals.

"This wasn't a potential solution from our stakeholder meeting last year but it's something SKY High have actively pursued."

Annecto chief executive Estelle Fyffe said any new development would be a couple of years away, but a multipurpose building was being considered for the front of the site.

"You couldn't have the school here, but you could have shared facilities and a school curriculum designed around involvement," she said.

"The council have asked us to consider discussions with (SKY High). We're testing ideas at this stage and working with the council to find out what works and what needs there are in the community and whether to incorporate any special aspects into the multipurpose building."

Acting Maribyrnong mayor Martin Zakharov said there was "so much potential" for the school and disability services to run together.

"It's a good position, with the oval across the road and the sinking village site providing play areas," he said.

SKY High Working Group will meet Education Minister Martin Dixon on June 23, and will take a letter of support from Maribyrnong Council.

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MELTON

OUR DOZEN MELTON SHIRE DRAWCARDS

Melton Leader – 23rd June 2011

<http://melton-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/our-dozen-melton-shire-drawcards/>

Melton Shire is one of the fastest-growing local government areas in Australia boasting an inclusive, welcoming, and vibrant community of more than 100,000 people.

But what makes Melton Shire unique and sets us apart from the rest?

Is it our city style or country feel with a rural/urban mix, offering varied lifestyle choices?

Maybe it's our state of the art library in Caroline Springs and soon Melton?

Or our award-winning restaurants and wineries producing wines which match the best in the world?

Maybe it's the shire's rich heritage including Eynesbury, Morton Homestead and our well-preserved dry-stone walls?

Today, the Melton Leader highlights what we believe are 12 iconic symbols of Melton Shire, which, put together, help make our shire one of the most unique places to live in Australia.

We asked our community leaders to consider their favourite Melton shire icons before finalising our top 12 list.

But we understand the answer to this question would probably differ if we asked 100 Meltonians the same question.

Do you agree with our list or have we missed any important icons?

We want our readers to decide on Melton Shire's most defining icon.

MELTON AMONG WORST FOR LOAN ARREARS

Melton Weekly – 21st June 2011

<http://www.meltonweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/melton-among-worst-for-loan-arrears/2201905.aspx>

Melton has among the highest number of people in the state battling to repay their home loans.

A report released last week by international ratings agency Fitch found the pain was particularly felt across Melbourne's north and west, where borrowers were defaulting on home loan repayments.

As interest rates hover round 7 per cent, the report revealed delinquency rates in Melton and Toolern Vale - measured by the portion of borrowers who were at least 30 days behind on repayments - is 1.99 per cent.

This contrasts with a statewide delinquency rate of 1.34 per cent. One in 80 mortgage holders in the area is falling behind in repayments.

Co-ordinator of Melton Combined Churches foodbank, Denise Morris, said the service had experienced an increase in people seeking help.

Rising interest rates and changing work conditions were a major factor, she said.

"There have been many people in the last eight months getting letters with an increase of \$50 a week due to interest rate rises, on top of \$600 a week repayments.

"This has significantly diminished their capacity to provide for their family."

Mrs Morris said family breakdown also played a role.

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"People are left with one income and it comes as a shock when they've had a good income.

"A sole-parent pension doesn't cater for those sort of high-capacity lives which they used to have.

"We [Melton Combined Churches] can try to encourage people to budget on a better scale, to increase their ability to support themselves and be self-sustaining."

Mortgage broker John Maynard, who has been dealing with Melton clients for more than 10 years, said the problem often wasn't the mortgage itself, but rather lifestyle changes after people had been granted a home loan.

"Some people then get a car and a new plasma TV and increase their credit card limits," he said.

Mr Maynard said the practice of granting interest-free loans to people who could not afford to repay them had been a problem in the past.

He said legislation introduced last year requiring all mortgage brokers to be licensed was a good move.

He urged anyone facing financial difficulties to contact their lender or broker at the first sign of trouble.

"That is a good time to fix any issues. Tell them you are having trouble and ask what can you can do ... don't leave it until the creditors are knocking on your door."

MELTON FORUM LINKS SUDANESE

Melton Weekly – 21st June 2011

<http://www.meltonweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/melton-forum-links-sudanese/2201907.aspx>

As sunset hits Rockbank, Melton resident Ambrose Mareng sees a little bit of Africa, with the mountains and open space framing what has been his home for the past six years.

When Mr Mareng first arrived in Melton there were just six Sudanese families in the area, compared to more than 200 families today.

While some refugees have experienced difficulties settling into the community, Mr Mareng was thrilled with the dialogue at an African community forum that focused on the big issues facing Melton's Sudanese.

Recommendations made at the forum will be used to aid the integration process and address local issues.

"The reason for the forum was to get an understanding and build relationships between the services available in the community," Mr Mareng said.

More than 200 people attended the forum, which Mr Mareng and an organising committee staged with the help of Melton's Senior Constable Richard Dove and Inspector Mario Fiorentino.

"Richard, Moses Lado [police new and emerging communities liaison officer] and I knocked on every door of Sudanese family in Melton until they all knew the forum was on."

Senior Constable Dove said the forum was launched following the success of a similar program in neighbouring Wyndham.

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"What we were hearing about the Sudanese in Wyndham was exactly the same in Melton," the multicultural liaison officer said.

"The Sudanese feel as though their voice is not heard and they are feeling alone."

Senior Constable Dove said faced with this disconnection from the community, refugee families could turn on themselves.

"When people feel connected it prevents family breakdown and violence."

The forum was told many Sudanese youth in Melton feared for their safety.

Discrimination and racism were also raised as major issues, with several residents telling of deliberate damage caused to their homes.

"We really wanted to get the info from their community, from their voice, not from what we are saying," Senior Constable Dove said.

MELTON WINS RIGHTS TO HOST RIDABILITY TITLES

Melton Leader – 20th June 2011

<http://melton-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/melton-wins-rights-to-host-ridability-titles/>

Melton will host the 2012 Ridability Victoria state games after a successful competition in Bendigo.

Six Melton District Riding for the Disabled members competed and won six events.

The group took out the championship plus the rights to host next year's competition.

Co-ordinator and head coach Margaret Behan said the competition, which includes pony club-type events as well as timed events, started in Melton almost 15 years ago.

Ms Behan said the winning team each year chose to either host the championship the next year or choose another venue.

The Melton District RDA has been running for almost 20 years after starting in Bacchus Marsh.

For the past 12 years, it has been based in Melton with riders coming from Bacchus Marsh, Sunbury, Melton and Werribee.

The club has 24 riders of varying abilities aged from five to 18 who use the Melton Equestrian Grounds once a fortnight on a Saturday from 10am to 3.30pm.

Ms Behan said the 2012 competition would be held in April or May and would coincide with an open day.

PUSH FOR AUTISM SCHOOL IN THE WEST

Melton Leader – 19th June 2011

<http://melton-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/push-for-autism-school-in-the-west/>

Action for Autism Education is campaigning for the establishment of a Prep to Year 12 autism school servicing Melbourne's western region, including Melton.

The sole autism school in the region, Western Autistic School, located at campuses in Niddrie and Laverton, provides a Prep to Year 3 program for seven local government areas, including Melton.

All the other education department regions of Melbourne provide an autism specific Prep to Year 12 school, giving parents wider education choices.

AAE spokesman Danny Sorbello said parents of autistic children in the west were left "devastated" after the State Government reneged on its commitment to fund a \$4 million expansion of the Western Autistic School to bring it into line with similar schools.

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He said AAE was advised by Bernie Finn (state member for Western Metropolitan Region) that the Government would be adopting a “much better program” for autistic kids in the western region.

But Mr Sorbello questioned why the Government committed \$8 million to construct the Prep to Year 12 Eastern Autistic School on top of funding the continuing redevelopment of the Northern Autistic School, which also offers a Prep to Year 12 program.

“The AAE welcomes any new program that benefits the kids, but we want the same level of services to be provided to autistic kids in the western region as in the other regions of Melbourne,” he said.

BUS STEERS STUDENTS TOWARDS DREAM JOB

Melton Leader – 19th June 2011

<http://melton-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/bus-steers-students-towards-dream-job/>

Melton Shire students are getting an insight into their futures with an education trailer rolling into town.

The Victoria University mobile gateway vehicle has hit the shire, with Mowbray College marking the first stop. The school’s VET/careers adviser, Diane Bouras, said the bus would visit every school in Melton Shire, giving Year 9 students some sound career advice.

“It’s all about giving the students some direction,” she said.

“It gets them starting to think about their future, a career, and how to go about it.”

Two staff members from the university work on the bus, giving students information and advice on everything from law to fashion design, hairdressing and veterinary science.

BURGLARY BOOM IN MELTON SHIRE

Melton Leader – 17th June 2011

<http://melton-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/burglary-boom-in-melton-shire/>

Crime is on the rise in Melton, new figures show.

The Melton Police Service Area recorded a 8.8 per cent yearly increase in reported crime, up from 5964 offences to 6486.

The crime statistics, which compared crime between April 2009 to March 2010 and April 2010 to March 2011 show burglaries (other) recorded the biggest increase of 29.2 per cent (up from 161 offences to 208).

Crimes against the person were not far behind, with a 28.2 per cent rise (up from 781 offences to 1001).

Other increases included thefts of motor vehicles, up 24.5 per cent (from 269 offences to 335); robbery up 20 per cent (35 offences to 42); assaults up 17.9 per cent (661 offences to 779); drug offences up 16 per cent (238 offences to 276); and assaults, excluding family violence, up 9.4 per cent (545 offences to 596).

Melton police Inspector Mario Fiorentino said reducing burglaries, robberies, assaults, family violence incidents and motor vehicle thefts were priorities.

“Police are targeting crime ‘hot-spot’ areas such as railway stations and shopping centres to provide a highly visible and deterrent police presence to target would-be offenders,” he said.

Insp Fiorentino said more family violence victims were reporting incidents as victims had more confidence in police to seek help.

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Home burglaries had the biggest decrease of 5.8 per cent (from 855 offences to 805), while property damage fell 4.8 per cent (980 offences to 933). Reported road fatalities dropped from 8 to 6 while injuries fell from 256 to 254.

Insp Fiorentino said the Melton PSA was one of the top 10 in Victoria experiencing large rises in population and demand for police services was rising.

TOP MELTON SOUTH TRAFFIC CONCERNS IDENTIFIED

Melton Leader – 17th June 2011

<http://melton-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/top-melton-south-traffic-concerns-identified-fbready/>

Traffic concerns in Melton South are to be addressed with a new Local Area Traffic Management Study.

Adopted by Melton council at its June 2 meeting, the aim of the study, prepared by Traffix Group, was to identify local traffic issues, review traffic complaints and collect traffic volume and speed information from Melton South.

It recommended that speed cushions be installed at Staughton St, Wilson Rd, Hume Avenue and Mitchell Rd.

On Wilson Rd, the plan also suggested that the bus stop be relocated to east of the school-crossing and that the speed limit be reduced to 50km/h.

Line marking was recommended for Rees Rd, Bridge Rd and Brennan St; while splitter islands were suggested for the intersections of Hume Ave/Moss St, Mitchell Rd/Exford Rd and Bridge Rd/Blamey Dve.

The traffic study said the Wentworth Rd/Hume Ave roundabout should be modified and also that the 60km/h speed zone on Exford Rd should be extended south.

Other recommendations included installing a T-deviation at Wilson Rd/Stafford St; and that the egress arrangement at the Melton South shops should be modified.

Consultation for the study included questionnaire surveys, circulars and the formation of a Traffic Study Group.

Melton council, which agreed to adopt the final report, said they would refer the projects to its capital works program for funding consideration.

A full copy of the report is available on the council's website at melton.vic.gov.au as an agenda attachment to the June 2 council meeting.

MOONEE VALLEY

WATER PROMISE

Moonee Valley Leader – 21st June 2011

<http://moonee-valley-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/water-promise/>

Moonee Valley Council has vowed to be more water-wise after the release of a new report.

The council's water strategy report revealed the municipality receives 17,341 megalitres (ml) of rain a year and 7423ml of that ended up in waterways, but the council manages to treat and reuse only 458ml of that each year.

The scheme, developed through community consultation, aims to harvest water, use it efficiently and reduce the amount of pollution entering waterways, bays and groundwater.

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Cr Shirley Cornish, the council's environment and conservation portfolio spokeswoman, said the strategy was vital to ensure locals could continue to enjoy their parks, reserves and gardens, even in drought.

"Water is vital to support a healthy community and, through the strategy, we aim to find alternative water sources to irrigate open spaces, improve the quality of our local waterways for community use and enjoyment," Cr Cornish said.

The council said the water scheme would help reduce its mains water use by 50 per cent. Mayor John Sipek said he had already reduced its water use by 43 per cent in the past 10 years, while residents reduced theirs by 32 per cent.

"This strategy sets more ambitious targets, not only to continue saving water but also to improve the health of local waterways," Cr Sipek said.

"We aim to manage floods and better capture alternative water sources, such as roof-water and stormwater."

Council is also encouraging residents and developers to consider rainwater tanks, grey water systems, rain gardens, wetlands, swales and porous paving.

These are all designed to prevent pollution from entering local waterways.

FOR LOVE NOT MONEY

Moonee Valley Weekly— 21st June 2011

<http://www.mooneevalleyweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/for-love-not-money/2200980.aspx>

Youth worker Sam Giacomini says he isn't as young or cool as he used to be, but it hasn't stopped the 30-year-old continuing to make a difference in young people's lives.

"I'm starting to get to the age now where I'm not that cool of a person anymore. Before it was more that I could speak their language and do their handshakes. Now I'm losing that and I'm getting called daggy."

A youth worker with Moonee Valley Council, Sam knew from a young age he wanted to work with people.

He concedes a 'rough' upbringing in Melbourne's northern suburbs had an impact on him choosing his future career.

"In the area I grew up in there was a lot of bad influences. Some of the people I used to associate with have ended up in jail or drug-overdosed.

"The want to help people has definitely come from being in situations where I can relate to some young people and what they're going through."

Sam has a background in recreation and has always incorporated sport into his job.

Asked to describe what's involved in the role, he says youth work is a broad term that covers many facets, but mainly involves working with young people aged 12-25 and offering support in any way needed.

His favourite part of the job is getting out and talking to people.

"Encouraging change and motivation within young people" he lists as the most rewarding aspect.

"Some of them have difficult lives at home and on top of that added pressures of just being an adolescent... my main goal for those people is to make it a big energy, safe and fun time while they're with me. " Sam says most issues facing young people today are the same as when he was a kid.

"Obviously bullying happened in the schoolyard when I was young and it's still happening, but I guess what's changed from then to now is social media.

LEADWEST'S NEWS SUMMARY FOR MELBOURNE'S WEST

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"[Now] They get bullied in the schoolyard and then they come home after school and they're still being bullied. They're not escaping it."

He is also involved in the Choices Program, an initiative which uses sporting identities to talk to young males about making the right choices.

While being a youth worker is demanding, Sam says he's made the right choice.

"This job's not like any other job, it's a lifestyle. You're not doing it for financial gain. It's definitely something you do because of the love for it."

SHED COMING IN HANDY

Moonee Valley Leader— 21st June 2011

<http://moonee-valley-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/shed-coming-in-handy/>

Ray Dobson says the Moonee Valley Men's Shed helped him "remain sane" after he retired.

The Brunswick man had been employed in various maintenance roles all his working life, where he was always using his hands.

Mr Dobson, 76, said he felt "shattered" when he retired from Moreland City Council last year, after more than 20 years in the job.

"I didn't know what to do with myself; I sat at home for three months and would argue with my wife," he said. "I tried helping her out with the cleaning and cooking at home but I'd only get in her way and I was driving her and myself crazy."

His wife, Cathleen, 76, told him to take up a hobby.

"I began going for walks, but that just wasn't adequate," he said.

'Nothing mentally stimulating was going on. You need to keep using your brain because that's what keeps you going.'

Mr Dobson found out about the Moonee Valley Men's Shed eight months ago and signed up straight away.

"I go twice a week. We make useful things for the community, like bird and possum cages, plaques with numbers on them for houses," he said.

"It feels good to feel useful again."

The program involves men coming together to work on projects in a fully equipped workshop, specified for the Men's Shed program.

Along with helping men with time on their hands, Moonee Valley Mayor John Sipek said the project was also about giving blokes a regular meeting place when it was needed most.

"The aim of the shed is to provide support and assistance to those men in our community who are vulnerable or at risk," he said. "Men, especially those experiencing difficulties, are often a hard-to-reach group."

The shed had its official launch last Thursday at Bruce St, Moonee Ponds, behind the council depot.

The free program runs every Tuesday and Thursday 10am-noon and on Saturdays 11am-1pm.

MOONEE VALLEY COUNCIL BACK IN GOOD BOOK

Moonee Valley Weekly— 21st June 2011

<http://www.mooneevalleyweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/moonee-valley-council-back-in-good-book/2200970.aspx>

Almost one in four Victorians are unsatisfied with their local council's performance, according to a statewide survey.

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The 2011 Community Satisfaction Survey of 28,000 residents found a 2 per cent drop - to 77 per cent - of respondents who rate their council as adequate, good or excellent.

Inner metro councils which include Moonee Valley got the tick from 85 per cent of residents, but only 78 per cent of people in outer metro areas agreed their council was up to scratch.

Local Government Victoria, which commissioned the 2011 Community Satisfaction Survey, has provided each council with confidential survey results specifically for their area.

Local government minister Jeanette Powell said the results should be used by each council to make informed strategies for better service delivery.

On the topic of community engagement 71 per cent of survey respondents said their council was excellent, good or adequate. This was slightly down from 73 per cent in 2009.

Eighty per cent said inner council's level of customer contact was excellent, good or adequate.

ARCHITECT CREATES BEAUTY IN SUBURBIA

Moonee Valley Weekly— 21st June 2011

<http://www.mooneevalleyweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/architect-creates-beauty-in-suburbia/2200976.aspx>

Most Australians live in the multicultural wonderland of suburbia, yet it is part of this country not usually recognised in art.

The work of artist Howard Arkley was an exception with a significant aspect of his career inspired by bold suburban imagery.

Arkley's work was the inspiration behind the Avondale Heights Library and Learning Centre which opened last year.

The unique, eye-catching design has been nominated for the William Wardell Award for Public Architecture at the Victorian Architecture Awards.

Designed by Collingwood-based H2O architects, the Military Road building features three main parts, an existing gym, learning spaces and library.

Principal architect Tim Hurburgh said the building's exaggerated, bold and acrylic colours were important to give it presence in the heart of suburbia.

"It's inspired by the idea of finding beauty in suburbia which hasn't had much attention in terms of public building in the area for many years.

"We have been delighted it has had such community support, library use has even gone up and the response we have had since it has opened has been, frankly, quite amazing.

"We were doing something that was quite 'out there' but everybody was comfortable with it because it was a very co-operative process."

Mr Hurburgh said from conception to completion the project took 15 months.

On a prominent corner site in Avondale Heights, the building is amid the quintessential Australian suburb famously celebrated by Barry Humphries.

Moonee Valley mayor John Sipek said he was proud to see the building recognised.

"Our librarians receive a lot of positive comments about the building's design and membership of the new library continues to grow."

An enlarged and extruded silhouette of a Federation Home, which is the PEGS junior boys school years 5 and 6 building is also nominated for an award.

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Almost 200 projects are competing for awards in 11 categories at the Victorian Architecture Awards which will be announced at Crown Palladium on Friday.

TINKERING WITH TOYS

Moonee Valley Weekly – 21st June 2011

<http://www.mooneevalleyweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/tinkering-with-toys/2200979.aspx>

Moonee Valley's Toy Library is one step closer with a new home and a website.

The library will be based at the Salvation Army Hall at Mount Alexander Road, Essendon, when it opens later this year.

While the library committee is waiting for the hall to be refurbished it is building a stockpile of toys for when the doors are finally opened. The Rotary Club of Moonee Valley recently held a sausage sizzle which raised more than \$1000 to purchase new toys.

Library committee member Fiona Ward said she was inspired by the community support for the scheme.

Moonee Valley is one of only two municipalities in Melbourne which does not have a toy-swapping program.

In May, the council committed \$20,000 to establish the library after months of lobbying from parents.

AID BID FOR RESIDENTS

Moonee Valley Leader – 20th June 2011

<http://moonee-valley-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/aid-bid-for-residents/>

Feedback is being sought on a project that helps disadvantaged Flemington residents get back on their feet.

Moonee Valley council will seek opinions, thoughts and criticisms on the Flemington Neighbourhood Renewal Plan, a blueprint for government and community groups trying to rejuvenate the Housing Commission area.

The goal of the action plan is to improve access to jobs, quality of housing, personal safety and health in Housing Commission areas.

A key driver of the latest feedback is a survey of more than 250 residents of the Flemington Housing Estate. It provides an insight into the perceptions and experiences of life on the estate.

The survey findings will be released on Wednesday.

Flemington Neighbourhood Renewal board member Cr James Rankin said feedback needed to come from different groups, not only government.

“With the introduction of Flemington Neighbourhood Renewal in May 2009, resident participation has continued to grow,” Cr Rankin said.

“We now have over 50 per cent of board members being from the estate.

“We are keen to hear what the community has to say. Feedback received will help us to finalise the action plan and set priorities.”.

Moonee Valley Mayor John Sipek said the action plan was an important document, which would drive development of the Flemington area.

“The residents of the Flemington estate face many challenges,” Cr Sipek said.

“This action plan seeks to capitalise on the positive aspects of the community and deliver solutions.”

The council will seek input on the plan from today until July 22.

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A community forum will be held on Wednesday at Flemington Community Centre, 25 Mt Alexander Rd. Starts 10.30am. Details: 9243 8888.

WYNDHAM

ENERGY AND WATER ISSUES IN WYNDHAM

Wyndham Leader – 24th June 2011

<http://wyndham-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/energy-and-water-issues/>

The Victorian Energy and Water Ombudsman received 553 complaints from Wyndham customers in the second half of 2010.

Billing issues accounted for more than half of the complaints, including 85 for high bills and 54 for billing errors.

There were 38 complaints about debt collection, 32 from customers experiencing payment difficulties and 19 complaints about misleading information from door-to-door sellers or telemarketers.

There were 30 complaints about existing connections, for example, costs involved in upgrading, and 33 complaints about contract terms.

Energy and Water Ombudsman Fiona McLeod said the statistics, 28 per cent higher across Victoria than the previous year, were "extremely worrying".

"It's simply not acceptable that inadequate responses to complaints - from energy companies in particular - mean that more customers are finding themselves needing help to bring about a fair and reasonable resolution," Ms McLeod said.

LAVERTON COMMUTERS DENIED REZONING

Wyndham Leader – 23rd June 2011

<http://wyndham-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/laverton-commuters-denied-rezoning/>

The State Government has rejected a request by Hobsons Bay Council to extend zone 1 on the train network beyond Laverton to help relieve parking pressure at the station.

Many Wyndham commuters choose to travel to Laverton to catch the train because it is in zone 1, while nearby Aircraft station is in zone 2.

And Metro's latest estimates show 4500 people get on the train at Laverton station on an average weekday, but there are only 580 available car parks.

Commuters claim the station's car parks fill up by 7.30am, forcing them to park up to 1.5km away and often illegally or unsafely.

On a visit to the station last week, Leader observed cars parked in garden beds, on footpaths, on the side of a roundabout obscuring traffic signs, bogged in muddy ground and double-parked, blocking other vehicles in.

Williams Landing resident Steve, who did not want his surname used, said commuters were left with nowhere to park.

Steve has been parking, along with hundreds of others, on a muddy verge between Maher Rd and rail line.

"It's turning into a quagmire," he said.

But a Transport Department spokesman said there were "no plans to extend zone 1 on the Werribee line".

Laverton, 21km from Melbourne, is the farthest zone 1 station from the CBD.

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The spokesman said improvement to the high demand for parking was being looked at.

DUNCANS ROAD: TIME TO BREAK GRIDLOCK

Wyndham Weekly – 22nd June 2011

<http://www.wyndhamweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/duncans-road-time-to-break-gridlock/2202400.aspx>

Wyndham mayor John Menegazzo has renewed the city's push for the state government to fund the long-awaited Duncans Road diamond interchange.

Cr Menegazzo said the project was crucial and would alleviate traffic congestion at the notorious Werribee and Cottrell streets intersection.

In the lead-up to last November's state election, Tarneit MP Tim Pallas announced Labor, if it won another term, would set aside \$18million to build two new western ramps, which would provide direct Geelong-bound access to the Maltby Bypass and to Duncans Road from the bypass for Melbourne-bound drivers. The Liberals indicated preliminary support for the project through deputy leader Louise Asher.

Cr Menegazzo last week called on the government to commit to the construction of the interchange and provide certainty for the city's residents.

"While there was some indication from the Baillieu government regarding its willingness to progress with this vital project during the election, what we really need is details including a timeline and a commitment to funding the interchange," he said.

"Due to the rapid growth in this city, it's fundamental the state government purchase the land required for the interchange before the opportunity is lost.

"Any motorist who has been stuck in the traffic snarl created along Cottrell Street when the boom gates come down knows that something must be done to resolve this gridlock as soon as possible."

Cr Menegazzo said that for every week the government delayed construction of the interchange, almost 200 more residents would move to Wyndham, putting further pressure on existing infrastructure.

The project was listed as one of the key objectives in council's advocacy strategy for the city, along with additional mental health services and police resources. In State Parliament last month, Mr Pallas questioned whether the government had any intention of delivering the project.

"In this year's budget the Baillieu government has committed not one new dollar and not one new road project for my electorate," he said.

Committee for Wyndham executive director Nik Tsardakis has previously stated a full diamond interchange was well overdue. "It would benefit not only the tourism precinct but everything south of the interchange," he said.

Western Metropolitan Liberal MP Bernie Finn told Parliament the government should sit down with the council and devise a traffic management plan that would provide a significant injection of funding to upgrade the city's arterial roads.

The government did not respond before the Weekly went to print.

Submissions on the advocacy strategy can be made until July 4.

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LET'S FIX THE WERRIBEE JAM NOW, MAYOR SAYS

Wyndham Leader – 22nd June 2011

<http://wyndham-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/lets-fix-the-werribee-jam-now-mayor-says/>

One of Wyndham's most notorious traffic snarls should be fixed by the State Government as soon as possible, Wyndham Mayor John Menegazzo says.

The mayor urged the Government last week to commit to the construction of the Duncans Rd interchange to ease pressure on the Werribee and Cottrell streets intersection and level crossing.

The interchange would include on and off ramps between Princes Freeway and Duncans Rd in Werribee South.

"While there was some indication from the Baillieu Government regarding its willingness to progress with this vital project during the election, what we really need is details, including a timeline and a commitment to funding the interchange," Cr Menegazzo said.

"Due to the rapid growth in this city, it is fundamental the State Government purchase the land required for the interchange before the opportunity is lost.

"Any motorist who has been stuck in the traffic snarl created along Cottrell St when the boom gates come down knows something must be done to resolve this gridlock as soon as possible.

"Creating the full diamond interchange will provide motorists with an alternative route to get to the freeway heading to and from the city and Geelong."

The council is seeking feedback on its advocacy strategy until Monday, July 4.

WATER CHARGES UP 14 PER CENT

Wyndham Weekly – 22nd June 2011

<http://www.wyndhamweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/water-charges-up-14-per-cent/2202411.aspx>

Average annual household water bills in Wyndham will rise by \$104 under a new City West Water pricing structure coming into effect next month.

The Essential Services Commission has given state-owned water companies approval to increase their prices by between 5 and 15 per cent in the new financial year to cover inflation and the cost of new infrastructure.

From July 1, water usage charges will rise by 15.7 per cent, sewage disposal by 9.5 per cent and trade waste by 15 per cent. A typical yearly household water bill will increase to around \$860 per year, a weekly increase of just over \$2.

Across Victoria, Yarra Valley Water customers will be hardest hit with a 15 per cent rise in typical household bills, followed by City West Water and South East Water, whose customers face a 14 per cent hike.

City West Water managing director Anne Barker said price hikes were necessary to enable the government and water companies to plan for the city's long-term needs.

"With the increasing variability of rainfall over the catchments, we need to look to alternative supplies of water for Melbourne, including water recycling, desalinated water and stormwater harvesting.

"Traditional catchments will continue to provide the bulk of our water supplies in years when there is good rainfall. Alternative supplies of water come with increased costs which need be paid for by all users."

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Water Minister Peter Walsh said the government would look to ease the burden on the most vulnerable residents by boosting concessions for low-income households

TRAINEES LEARN TO BE HELPERS OF FIRST RESORT

Wyndham Weekly – 22nd June 2011

<http://www.wyndhamweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/trainees-learn-to-be-helpers-of-first-resort/2202412.aspx?storypage=0>

A Wyndham-based course is teaching people to support those going through a mental health crisis.

The 12-hour course, usually run over four sessions, shows how to provide initial help to someone who is developing a mental disorder.

Mental health problems are the third-biggest health issue in Australia after heart disease and cancer.

Whether it's depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, psychosis or schizophrenia, one in five Australians will experience a mental illness in their lifetime.

A national survey found many people lack the skills required to help someone going through a crisis.

It was this need for training which led two Australians to develop the world's first mental health first aid program and it has since spread to

13 countries and been translated into several languages.

Werribee Mercy Mental Health crisis assessment and treatment team senior clinician, and course instructor, Stephen Kent, said the program didn't qualify a person to become a doctor or a nurse, but was instead aimed at providing the initial assistance before professional help was sought.

Mr Kent said if someone was depressed, the first-aider would initially assess if they were suicidal.

If they were not, the first-aider would listen to them, then provide appropriate reassurance, support and information.

"We emphasise the need for early intervention. The course provides general knowledge about the symptoms of mental illnesses, what to say to people if they're having an episode and an awareness of the causes and available treatments."

It also addresses the possible crisis situations arising from mental health problems. Participants learn ways to help if a person is having a panic attack, has overdosed or is acutely psychotic and perceived to be threatening.

Mr Kent said the course was another way of helping to break down the stigma attached to mental health problems. "We teach people to listen non-judgmentally," he said.

"By providing reassurance, support and information, it may help the person in need to know they have a real health problem which is common and help is out there.

"Another important step is to encourage the person to use some self-help strategies, such as exercise, relaxation and breathing techniques."

In Australia, depression is the leading cause of non-fatal disability and costs more than \$2.5 billion annually in absenteeism with six million working days lost each year.

Fifty per cent of people with a mental health problem have their first episode by the age of 18, and 75 per cent by 25. However, only 35 per cent seek help.

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"There's now greater understanding in the community about mental health problems, but there's still plenty of work to be done," Mr Kent said.

FINDING REAL REFUGE IN NEWFOUND FREEDOM

Wyndham Weekly – 22nd June 2011

<http://www.wyndhamweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/finding-real-refuge-in-newfound-freedom/2202406.aspx>

'We hope that it will help newly arrived people in their transition into education and work'

Having spent more than 20 years in a Thai refugee camp after fleeing Burma, Bee Htoo is settling into his new life in Australia.

Mr Htoo arrived in 2009 and is now taking part in a new careers resource program for Burmese refugees through Victoria University.

Coinciding with Refugee Week, which finishes on Saturday, the program is being launched at the Wyndham Community and Education Centre today.

It consists of a DVD, available in English, Burmese, Sgaw Karen and Hakha Chin, and a career planning booklet outlining various education options and career paths for Burmese refugees like Mr Htoo.

The Werribee resident, and father of six is a Karen refugee, a Burmese ethnic minority persecuted by the country's government.

Most Karen people in Burma live in rural eastern villages, but many have fled to refugee camps in Thailand and Malaysia to avoid killings, torture, rape, and forced labour by the military regime.

Kathy Brunton is a community strengthening manager at the Wyndham centre and works with newly arrived migrants. She said there were about 2000 migrants of Burmese origin in the area, most of Karen ethnicity.

"We work on case management and resettlement, providing lots of programs and information to help people resettle," she said.

"For the last 18 months we've been working with VU to produce this program, and it really assists with the work we already do."

VU Careers Education team leader Rob Vague said the program had been guided by local organisations working with the Burmese community.

"We hope that it will help newly arrived people in their transition into education and work in Australia," he said.

The program was based on a similar project within the Horn of Africa community in Melbourne, for which 3500 DVDs and booklets were distributed.

WERRIBEE PLAZA DECISION SOON

Wyndham Leader – 21th June 2011

<http://wyndham-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/werribee-plaza-decision-soon/>

Werribee Plaza will soon be given the nod to start work on its much anticipated expansion.

Wyndham Council says it will decide within weeks on issuing a planning permit required before works can start.

The plaza's expansion plans were announced back in September 2009.

Council chief executive Kerry Thompson said the council was in the final stages of considering the planning permit application.

It follows the council approving development plans late last year, subject to conditions.

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The \$250 million plans more than double the plaza's retail floor space and include a new two-level Myer store in Derrimut-Heaths roads, five-level carparks in Heaths Rd and two-level mall with 100 shops.

Ms Thompson said the time taken to decide on the permit was not unusual.

"Planning applications for major commercial redevelopments will take significantly longer, given the complexity and scale of the project," Ms Thompson said.

Last month, a reader at thewyndhamleader.com.au posted: "I thought Werribee Plaza was meant to be redeveloped a year or two ago? What has taken them so long to get started?"

A church neighbouring the plaza has already made way and it will be followed by a public library.

Hoppers Crossing Uniting Church sold land where its place of worship stood in Derrimut Rd to plaza owner Pacific Shopping Centres.

The church is rebuilding on a second block of land it owns, next to the one it has sold.

A building the council leases for a library is to be demolished.

The plaza will pay to move the library to a new building on its site.

BMDA Development Advisory principal Bernard McNamara, for Pacific Shopping Centres, did not return Leader's phone calls.

WYNDHAM HOUSES HOLD VALUES

Wyndham Leader – 21th June 2011

<http://wyndham-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/wyndham-houses-hold-values/>

House prices in Wyndham continue to climb or hold steady, except in the new suburb of Williams Landing where the median house price dropped 27 per cent over the December quarter.

The latest report on property prices from the Valuer General's office shows Williams Landing had the largest metropolitan Melbourne median house price decrease in a suburb with 10 or more sales.

Williams Landing had 16 house sales and its median house price decreased from \$558,100 to \$407,500 over the December quarter.

But the suburb's median house price rose 13.2 per cent over the previous year.

Glen Orden Real Estate director Anthony Ferraro said median house prices in Williams Landing had probably fallen as the suburb's market shifted from new to less expensive established houses.

Werribee (118) and Hoppers Crossing (113) were among eight suburbs to record more than 100 sales over the quarter.

Median house prices in Point Cook increased 17.9 per cent in the year to December 2010, with a 4.7 per cent increase in the December quarter alone (\$483,500).

Mr Ferraro said Point Cook's proximity to the city retained its appeal, particularly to buyers from the south-eastern suburbs.

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“To get that close to the city and still buy something for under \$600,000 is quite good, plus there is a lot of new construction going on, which is good for first-home buyers,” he said.

Hoppers Crossing (\$335,000) experienced an increase of 11.7 per cent in the year to December 2010 with a 1.5 per cent December quarter increase.

Werribee median house prices rose 12.9 per cent over the year to December 2010 but dropped 1.7 per cent in the December quarter (\$310,000).

Truganina median house prices rose 6.2 per cent (with 41 sales) - the same increase over the previous year (\$361,000).

Median house prices in Tarneit held steady over the quarter with 81 sales (\$368,000), but increased 9.9 per cent over the previous year.

WYNDHAM POOL IN LINE FOR UPGRADE

Wyndham Leader – 21th June 2011

<http://wyndham-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/wyndham-pool-in-line-for-upgrade/>

Plans to upgrade Wyndham’s only indoor public pool are being floated by Wyndham Council.

There will be “major renovations” at Wyndham Leisure and Events Centre, draft Budget papers for 2011-12 state.

However, the council could not provide details of the works, how much they would cost or how they would disrupt the centre.

Council chief executive Kerry Thompson said: “The details of required works and costs will not be determined until after the draft (aquatic) strategy is approved for public exhibition by council, a community consultation phase is undertaken and the final strategy is adopted”.

The draft aquatic strategy - a review of the city’s public pools - is to be considered by councillors this month. If approved, it will be released for comment.

The proposed Budget states the renovations will be during the centre’s next contract period, which starts in July next year.

The operation of the pool has been contracted to Belgravia Leisure.

The indoor pools were last closed for maintenance works earlier this year.

Meanwhile, the proposed budget includes \$1.8 million to look at how to make better use of the leisure and events centre site.

This could include redeveloping the events centre and moving the Heaths Rd Library from Werribee Plaza to the site as part of a new learning centre.

A master plan would be developed during the next financial year.

Go to wyndham.vic.gov.au

GREEN GYM PLAN FOR WERRIBEE RIVER PARK

Wyndham Leader – 19th June 2011

<http://wyndham-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/green-gym-plan-for-werribee-river-park/>

WYNDHAM residents are being encouraged to hit the gym for some exercise of a different nature.

They are being asked to join a Green Gym volunteer group at the Werribee River Regional Park.

Project officer Jade Fogarty said Green Gym was a great way to contribute to the new park along the Werribee River, which opened to the public just last month.

She said volunteers could enjoy wetlands, coastal salt marsh and views of spectacular escarpments.

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The park will also provide important wetland habitat for birds.

Green Gym volunteers include retirees, students and job seekers who help plant trees, pick up rubbish, weed, maintain tracks and survey flora and fauna.

Green Gym is run by Parks Victoria and is on at Werribee River Regional Park 9am-1pm, Wednesdays and 9am-2.30pm, Thursdays, until August.

HOSTILITIES RESUMED IN WYNDHAM'S RABBIT WAR

Wyndham Leader – 18th June 2011

<http://wyndham-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/hostilities-resumed-in-wyndhams-rabbit-war/>

ALTHOUGH floods and mosquitoes have helped keep rabbit numbers down in Wyndham recently, seasonal baiting has begun.

Wyndham Council's autumn rabbit-control program is in full swing with dog owners advised not to walk their dogs in some areas for the next month.

Baits of chopped carrot, treated with the poison, pindone, are being laid by a licensed contractor in Point Cook, Werribee, Werribee South and Mt Cottrell.

Vitamin K1 is the antidote for pindone, an anti-coagulant poison available from local vets notified of the baiting.

The council has warned residents not to handle carrot pieces or rabbits found in baited areas.

Warning signs were to be placed at all reserve entrances.

Council chief executive officer Kerry Thompson said rabbit populations had fallen in Wyndham due to recent floods and the subsequent increase in mosquitoes, which transmit myxomatosis - lethal to rabbits.

But the council was still required under state legislation to keep rabbit populations under control, she said, hence the continuation of the council's rabbit eradication program.

"If not controlled, a single pair of rabbits can breed to more than 184 individuals in just 18 months," she said.

Areas being baited until this Friday are the northern side of Skeleton Creek, between Boardwalk Blvd and Palmers Rd, and Alamanda Wetland Reserve, Point Cook; both sides of the Werribee River from Chirside Park to the Maltby Bypass, Werribee; Grahams Reserve and K Rd Cliffs, Werribee South; and Cobbledicks Reserve, Mt Cottrell.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN WYNDHAM

Wyndham Leader – 17th June 2011

<http://wyndham-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/making-a-difference-in-wyndham/>

It is a sobering sight - people queuing for food, something most of us have seen only on the television news.

But for Lam Tran, it is a sight he sees several times a week in supposedly prosperous Melbourne.

Mr Tran is director of Agesture - a company dedicated to ensuring good food does not go to waste.

From warehouses in Laverton North and Campbellfield, Agesture staff collect and distribute food to several charities in Wyndham and Brimbank to give to people who cannot afford to feed themselves.

"We collect food that's otherwise wasted from Woolworths, Coles and Victoria Markets," Mr Tran said.

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"People on site at the warehouses sort through the food, make it into hampers and distribute it to charities. It's all done for free. There are no charges involved."

Mr Tran said Agesture carried out about 28 "charity drops" a week.

"We see people lining up to get food, which is a bit sad," he said.

"We go to organisations preparing meals for the elderly and see them sitting there waiting for their meals. It's an eye-opener. The problem does exist. It is out there.

"Our staff will sit and talk to them and try to boost morale a bit rather than just focusing on the food side of things."

He described the wastage of tonnes of good food as "ridiculous" and "horrible".

"We probably make the smallest dent you can imagine. So much more still goes to waste and there is nothing we can do about it because we can't collect and move it all," he said.

Agesture also provides training to jobseekers, giving them the opportunity to gain practical experience running a warehouse and new skills.

About 370,000 Victorians are going hungry.

At the same time, 700,000 tonnes of food end up as landfill each year.

Food charities need your help to rescue and process some of this food and distribute it to those doing it tough.

The Feed Melbourne campaign raises money for food charities to help them collect and store food and distribute it to people in need.

ACROSS THE REGION

BAILLIEU REVIEWS GREEN WEDGES

The Age – 24th June 2011

<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/baillieu-reviews-green-wedges-20110623-1ghkz.html>

The Baillieu government will consider expanding development in Melbourne's "green wedge" zones as part of a big overhaul of the planning system.

Premier Ted Baillieu is developing a new planning blueprint that will direct billions of dollars of infrastructure investment and new housing in Victoria for decades to come.

An audit of green wedges has already begun, and could lead to tourist hostels, wineries and "religious facilities" approved on smaller lot sizes than now permitted. Establishing school facilities in green wedge areas could also become easier.

Melbourne has 12 designated green wedges - non-urban zones between the transport corridors - that were set aside more than 40 years ago.

While limited development is allowed inside the zones, any move to expand the type and extent of development in them could be highly contentious.

The government's "metropolitan planning strategy" will map out where new jobs will be created, when and where new roads and rail links will be built, and how services such as hospitals and schools are delivered with population increases.

It will define how quickly the city expands, which suburbs will take more people and which planning rules should change to allow new, affordable housing.

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Planning expert David Vorchheimer has been head-hunted to help craft the strategy.

The plan, to be released early in 2013, will supersede Labor's Melbourne 2030 document and influence planning decisions from multi-unit developments in existing areas to new suburbs.

It will indicate where the next big rail project should be after the Regional Rail Link and the next freeway after Peninsula Link.

Mr Baillieu, a qualified architect and former Liberal planning spokesman, is taking "a close interest" in the plan and his office has confirmed a community consultation process will begin later this year.

"We have got to get it right," Planning Minister Matthew Guy told *The Age*. "It is not about trashing everything in the past, it is about creating a document that has broad community input, and not sham input ... about how Melbourne is going to change.

"Melburnians accept urban change but they don't want the whole city to be one great development area, they want it to occur in specific areas."

The Property Council's Victorian executive director, Jennifer Cunich, said the new strategy must emphasise job opportunities with new housing. And she said the community had to be involved.

Opposition planning spokesman Brian Tee said the problem with declaring Melbourne 2030 dead was it left a vacuum where "anything goes" until the new strategy was in place.

RMIT planning expert Michael Buxton said the process for developing the new strategy was flawed - a technocratic exercise without community input. "The

development industry thinks it's on clover with this government already - that's a bad sign," he said.

Mary Drost from Planning Backlash said community groups should be able to help draw up the plan.

Municipal Association of Victoria president Bill McArthur said it required a "genuine state-local government partnership, community ownership of the vision, plus the technical and operational capacity to deliver it."

TRANSPORT CONFIDENCE PLUNGES SINCE POLL

The Herald Sun –23rd June 2011

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/more-news/transport-confidence-plunges-since-poll/story-fn7x8me2-1226080286280>

Confidence in public transport has plunged since the election of the Baillieu Government.

The quarterly national transport survey by the University of Sydney found 34 per cent of respondents reported a decline in confidence in the past year.

Those surveyed are more pessimistic, with 30 per cent thinking it will get worse over the next year.

The findings of the survey, conducted during May, represent a significant drop in confidence compared to previous studies.

Victorians were the biggest supporters of public transport in the nation, with 64 per cent believing it should have a higher priority than roads.

Professor David Hensher said the drop in confidence reflected concerns about projects like Regional Rail Link and the Footscray to Caulfield rail tunnel.

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"The Victorian result shows how difficult it can be for new governments to meet community expectations for improvements in transport," Prof Hensher said.

Public Transport Minister Terry Mulder said the Government had made a number of promises, including planning for new rail lines and better rail maintenance.

"We didn't say that we could fix the problems immediately," Mr Mulder said.

"What we said is that we would work on the problems, and address them as we go forward."

ACONEX CATCHES TRAIN CONTRACT

The It Wire Website –22nd June 2011

<http://www.itwire.com/it-industry-news/deals/48028-aconex-catches-train-contract>

Melbourne-based, global online collaboration solutions provider, Aconex, has won a contract to service Victoria's multi-million dollar regional rail link project, with its web-based system to be used to manage communication and documentation across the project.

Aconex general manager Australia, Steve Brant said the reason for implementing a single collaboration and document control system on the rail project is to "mitigate potential risks to project objectives caused through inadequate information management process."

Brant said this includes the "inability to ensure that all information provided is accurate and authoritative; time wasted following up on documents issued for review and approval; fragmentation of information across multiple systems; and inefficient use of project resources to manage and track information."

"On complex projects such as this, participants need a comprehensive information record—and a single source of truth—to prevent disputes. By providing a neutral

collaboration platform that maintains an audit trail of every transaction, Aconex will support efficiency, transparency and accountability on the project."

The Victorian Government's regional rail link is a major new rail line that the government says will provide capacity for enough extra trains for thousands more passengers across the Melbourne and country rail networks in the peak period. It will separate regional trains from metropolitan trains, for the first time giving Geelong, Bendigo and Ballarat trains their own dedicated tracks through the suburban system from Sunshine to Southern Cross Station, increasing capacity and reliability.

Brant said that during the project's design and construction phases, it's anticipated that hundreds of thousands of drawings, documents and correspondence items will be generated and exchanged between stakeholders, with Aconex enabling the Regional Rail Link Authority and its contractors to access, distribute, track and archive their information in real time, using one central system.

CITY BOUND FOR COMMUTER HELL

The Age –19th June 2011

<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/city-bound-for-commuter-hell-20110618-1g97z.html>

Within a decade, Melbourne's already bursting train services will have to accommodate an extra 1 million passenger trips a day.

The forecast, contained in Transport Department documents obtained by The Sunday Age under freedom of information, reveals that average weekday travel on trains will rise from about 800,000 trips to 1.8 million by 2021-22.

This will put unprecedented pressure on the city's beleaguered rail network, which is already costing Melbourne's central business district \$80 million a year in lost productivity, according to economic modelling and research by Monash University.

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Petrol prices, population growth and environmental concerns have been cited as the key reasons for the surge in patronage in the documents, which detail the 2009 funding proposal for the \$5 billion Footscray-Caulfield rail tunnel. The tunnel project - designed to improve cross-town train travel - gained federal planning funding, but has been all but abandoned by the state government.

Future Melbourne Committee chairman, Cr Kevin Louey, last week called for the tunnel to go ahead, warning that if Melbourne's overcrowding problem was not addressed, the city's prosperity would suffer.

Transport Minister Terry Mulder said the Coalition was committed to tackling the problem by funding the Regional Rail Link - which will free up more space in the metropolitan timetable for city train services - despite a \$1 billion cost blowout inherited from the previous Labor government.

He said the government was also buying 45 six-carriage trains a term, seven more than the previous Labor government, to help alleviate overcrowding. "We are driving ourselves out of congestion," Mr Mulder said.

The documents obtained by The Sunday Age show that the next decade will see a surge in the use of all modes of public transport: not only will train patronage rise at all times of the day and on weekends, bus travel is expected to double and tram use is predicted to rise by one third.

Mr Mulder said more recent estimates suggested train patronage would grow by about 4.5 per cent a year, slightly less than predicted in 2009.

But rough calculations on current patronage figures would still put the increase at more than a million trips a day by 2021.

Watergardens and Werribee lines are expected to grow the most, by about 6.8 per cent a year, because of population growth. The Alamein, Glen Waverley, Lilydale and Belgrave lines will experience the least growth, at only 2.5 per cent a year.

The predicted rise in train use will exacerbate the overcrowding crisis and ramp up the already substantial cost to the CBD in lost productivity, according to the Monash University research.

If overcrowding on trains continues, it will drive business out of the CBD because more people will look for work in the suburbs so they don't have to negotiate the public transport crush, the research warns.

Monash University's professor of public transport Graham Currie said getting workers to retail and business districts efficiently was critical to a city's operation and the Coalition's plan for an extra 45 trains a term would not alleviate the problem of overcrowding.

"Cities are very efficient places to do business because the railway is there. If the railway does not work effectively there is an economic cost," he said.

"Workers get very frustrated on public transport: it is late; they cannot get a seat. Eventually, there is a portion of the workforce that will take a job outside the city, so their journey to work can be less stressful."

Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry spokesman Chris James agreed overcrowded public transport caused reduced productivity and was affecting businesses.

"If it gets much worse it will make the CBD a much less attractive place to invest," Mr James said.

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IMPROVING BIODIVERSITY IN MELBOURNE'S GROWTH AREAS

Property Oz Website –16th June 2011

<http://www.propertyoz.com.au/Article/NewsDetail.aspx?p=16&id=4467>

Biodiversity requirements and the management of native vegetation in Melbourne's growth areas are having an unyielding and severely negative impact on the Precinct Structure Plan (PSP) and Development Contribution Plan (DCP) processes.

They have emerged as increasingly complex issues, particularly with respect to the implementation of mechanisms which are intended to facilitate both conservation and development.

Prior to 2009, the management of biodiversity in Victoria, like all other states and territories, was governed by the Commonwealth Government. In October 2009 the Victorian Government entered into an agreement with the Commonwealth Government under section 146 of the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) to implement a coordinated approach to the assessment of protected matters of national environmental significance (MNES) in Melbourne's growth areas.

The implementation tool of this agreement, the Strategic Impact Assessment Report (SIAR) assesses the impacts on MNES arising from expansion of the UGB, the Regional Rail Link and the Outer Metropolitan Ring/E6 Transport Corridor on matters covered by the EPBC Act. The SIAR sets out a strategic framework for dealing with issues that arise in association with land use and development within Melbourne's growth areas.

This strategic approach includes the establishment of grassland reserves of approximately 15,000 hectares immediately west of Melbourne and a new 1,200 hectare grassy woodland reserve north-east of Melbourne. These reserves are

intended to provide enhanced environmental protection for nationally listed grassland and woodland communities and several listed threatened species.

As part of this process prescriptions were developed to provide guidance when dealing with MNES as part of PSP processes. Prescriptions have been prepared for a range of MNES including Natural Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain, and the Golden Sun Moth.

The Property Council supports and applauds the intent of the SIAR as a positive initiative to smooth the passage of the Regional Rail Outer Metropolitan Ring and improve land supply with the adjustment to the UGB. However, we realise that there are serious shortcomings with the implementation of the SIAR that are leading to a loss of confidence in this approach.

Victoria has reached a critical point in time, as demonstrated through examples such as the Truganina South PSP, where matters of biodiversity and native vegetation are severely delaying and prohibiting the ability for land to be provided to the market.

The Property Council has recently completed a research exercise titled Improving Biodiversity in Melbourne's Growth Areas, to present the extent of on-the-ground knowledge accessible to identify:

- how much land can be developed without an offset charge;
- how much land can be developed with an offset charge and how much that charge will be; and
- how much land will need to be set aside for conservation purposes and what requirements will be imposed on the management of that land for conservation.

LEADWEST'S NEWS SUMMARY FOR MELBOURNE'S WEST

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Currently, there is insufficient knowledge of biodiversity matters to make investment decisions with confidence. As a consequence the strategic approach to biodiversity management envisaged by the SIAR is not occurring in practice on the ground where instead, an ad hoc site-by-site approach is being applied.

It is imperative that immediate action be taken to restore confidence in what is fundamentally a good system.

The Property Council recommends this be done through the following actions:

- the Victorian Government must resource the Growth Areas Authority to complete the mapping which the Property Council has already begun through its research project;
- the Victorian Government must ensure that the outcomes and information is available to the industry; and
- the Victorian Government must ensure a strategic approach to biodiversity and vegetation management through the:
 - development and implement of a 5 – 10 year strategy for the management of biodiversity in Melbourne's growth areas;
 - establishment of a system of reserves to protect grasslands in and around Melbourne;
 - increased collaboration and cooperation between Victorian Government agencies; and
 - reform of native vegetation offsets.

We support the strategic intent of the bilateral agreement between the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments and the Victorian property industry believes the SIAR is an excellent initiative which provides developers with certainty.

However, the mechanics of the operation do not match its strategic intention.

DELAYS ON RAIL RESPONSE

Star – 14th June 2011

<http://www.starnewsgroup.com.au/star/footscray-yarraville/300/story/135152.html>

The Fair Go For Footscray Rail Residents are demanding answers after the State Government failed to respond to a list of concerns over the Regional Rail Link project.

The residents sent through 14 questions to Transport Minister Terry Mulder and Planning Minister Matthew Guy nearly six weeks ago after the State Government announced in April that the Regional Rail Link would go ahead in its original form.

Residents called on the Government to release details of the RRL review and the noise and vibration reports, and asked for timelines around the project, which is expected to take two years longer than originally planned.

Resident and Burning Books owner Nick Fahey said affected residents and traders had experienced a surfeit of "tick-box" consultation, branding the State Government "constipated in its ability" to answer questions.

"Mr Mulder told our delegation that we could put as many questions and have access to as much information as we needed, as well as meet with the minister as many times as we felt we needed to," Mr Fahey wrote.

"The questions we put to the Minister are not frivolous – these are questions of serious importance to the affected residents who framed them.

Ilsa Colson from the Regional Rail Link Authority said answers to the residents' questions were currently being signed off and would be sent to Mr Fahey soon.

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