

## **WITH WEST GATE TUNNEL LIKELY TO DELIVER A DISASTER FOR WILLIAMSTOWN ROAD, PROTECTIONS FOR RESIDENTS EVAPORATE**

The Andrews Government continues to walk away from protections for Williamstown Road and the inner west when the West Gate Tunnel opens.

In a response to a list of questions from Save Willy Road and the Maribyrnong Truck Action Group, the West Gate Tunnel Project has revealed that little or no action has been taken on a range of mitigation measures recommended by both the Planning Minister at the time of his approval of the \$11 billion project, and the independent panel that reviewed the project's Environment Effects Statement (EES).

Nor has it given any indication that it will ever implement most of those recommendations.

When the Planning Minister approved the massive West Gate Tunnel project in late 2017, he cautioned that though it would broadly benefit the inner west, both Williamstown Road and Millers Roads would suffer a massive increase in truck volumes. Those trucks will inevitably produce higher levels of toxic pollution, more noise and a degradation of neighbourhood amenity.

The project's completion date has now been pushed back to late 2025, but given that it was originally meant to be operational in late 2022, we thought it perfect timing to seek a progress report on what action has been taken on the recommendations from the Minister and review panel — measures that were intended to protect residents where truck numbers will dramatically rise.

Here's how the West Gate Tunnel Project responded to our questions on:

### **AIR QUALITY**

**Recommendation:** Undertake more air quality modelling and develop and fund an air quality mitigation response for both Williamstown and Millers Roads.

**Response:** Modelling for the EES showed air quality will not deteriorate on Williamstown Road when the tunnel opens. New air monitoring will be carried out on Millers Road (but none on Williamstown Road), which may lead to an air quality mitigation strategy once the tunnel is open. A "Low Emission Initiative Priority Zone" to be established in the inner west. Deliver the Port Rail Shuttle Network, which will shift containers from trucks to rail.

**Our verdict:** The EES air quality modelling for Williamstown Road was a fraud: after placing a pair of air monitors near Officeworks, where truck numbers will plummet, the EES consultant claimed air quality will improve on the full length of Willy Road when the tunnel opens — a ludicrous claim given truck numbers north of Somerville Road will double. With no new air

quality monitors to be placed on Willy Road, it's unlikely we will be included in any future mitigation strategy. The "Low Emission Initiative Priority Zone" is nothing more than pixie dust: it has never been defined, is unlikely to be delivered and it has no means by which its success can be measured. The Port Rail Shuttle may be effective in removing some container trucks, but until it is in operation there is no way to project its success. The Port of Melbourne claims that by 2050 an astonishing 30 percent of all containers build be transported to and from the port, but has not revealed the basis of its claim.

## **SMOKY VEHICLES**

Recommendation: Develop and fund a smoky vehicle enforcement program in the inner west to identify smoky vehicles for enforcement and rectification.

Response: No action. Though the EPA will continue to accept reports via an online form from the public on vehicles of up to 4.5 tonnes, complaints about smoky trucks must still be made by phone to the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR).

Our verdict: A complete failure. Requiring complaints to be made by phone to an unsympathetic agency makes it unlikely the public will bother.

## **NOISY VEHICLES**

Recommendation: Extra traffic noise on local roads as a result of the tunnel project is unacceptable. Targeted compliance for noisy vehicles is required. A review of Vicroads' Traffic Noise Reduction Policy, begun several years ago but never finalised, should be completed.

Response: The noise reduction policy was reviewed in 2016. The public can report noisy vehicles to Victoria Police or NHVR.

Our verdict: This is nonsense. The 2016 review appears to be the very process the Minister stated (in late 2017) had never been finalised. There are no plans for targeted compliance and it is unlikely police would act on a complaint from the public about the noise from a passing truck.

## **HIGHER TRAFFIC VOLUMES**

Recommendation: Because truck bans on other streets will divert more trucks on to two residential streets (Williamstown Road and Millers Road), a corridor study should be conducted to devise mitigation measures.

Response: Initiatives identified in the Millers Road-Williamstown Road Corridor Study are still being explored to weigh up costs and road network implications.

Our verdict: A complete cop-out with no action expected. The Department of Transport refused to release the final report of the corridor study until being forced to through the Freedom of

Information process. Although some of the study recommendations could be effective in reducing trucks on Willy Road, the government has not committed to implementing any.

## **TRUCK BAN ENFORCEMENT**

Recommendation: Future truck bans on Somerville Road, and Francis, Buckley and Moore streets must be properly enforced to realise their full benefits, using measures beyond physical surveillance.

Response: A three-year trial of heavy vehicle monitoring cameras has begun to capture data on curfew compliance, with the aim of developing a monitoring and compliance response strategy.

Our verdict: It's a start, but considering work on the tunnel project — with its promises of legislated truck bans on some roads — began back in 2018, it is extraordinary that this trial has only just begun. Devising a means of enforcement is clearly not a high priority.

## **FUTURE TRUCK TRAFFIC GROWTH**

Recommendation: There is a limit to the amount of truck traffic Millers and Williamstown Roads can handle. Planning should begin for a northern traffic corridor on an east-west alignment to complement the West Gate Freeway and tunnel project.

Response: Options are still being explored.

Our verdict: A complete lack of forward planning and denial of the obvious. The northern corridor was proposed in the 2008 Eddington Transport Report and would have formed the western end of the now-abandoned East West Link. Fourteen years later, and with port freight growing rapidly, still no action has begun on that corridor.

In summary, after ramming through its \$11 billion tunnel project with a rushed (and often factually flawed) EES the Andrews Government is quietly walking away from the protection measures the entire EES inquiry and approval process proposed. Although the Port Rail Shuttle may eventually carry a significant level of containers to and from Altona, taking some trucks off the roads, residents and users of Williamstown Road will inevitably suffer as thousands of extra trucks, hoping to dodge high tolls, storm past our homes day and night. It'll be a disaster for our health, safety and amenity. Though the minister who approved the project recommended a series of protections to lessen the harm, the Government has simply shrugged them off, leaving residents to suffer the cost on their own.