



Surrey Hills Progress Association Inc.

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Hon Richard Wynne MP
Minister for Planning
1 Spring Street
Melbourne 3000

9 April 2021

Dear Minister,

MONT ALBERT – SURREY HILLS LEVEL CROSSING REMOVAL PROJECT (LXRP)

I write on behalf of the Surrey Hills Progress Association (SHPA) to advise you of a resolution unanimously adopted at our meeting on 29 March 2021, which sets out the Association's deep concerns with the plans put forward by the LXRP for the above project (see attachment to this letter).

I am also writing to express our dissatisfaction with the superficial and unprofessional community consultation process conducted by the LXRP to date. This specifically relates to the LXRP's lack of engagement with legitimate community concerns and proposals.

You should note that our Association has been a strong supporter of the LXRP project from when it was announced in early December 2020. However the unfolding process leaves us with no choice but to raise these matters directly with you and other responsible government ministers.

Overlaying our concerns is the extent to which the project plan appears to lack consistency with your Government's metropolitan planning strategy – **Plan Melbourne**.

We seriously question whether the project plans, in their present form, are consistent with your key metropolitan strategy, particularly with respect to accessibility and social inclusion around the new Premium station (including for people using wheelchairs, prams, motorised personal transport and the like), public transport integration (for school students and others), park and ride facilities (commuter car parking and bicycle storage), cycling separation from motor vehicles (at the main road crossings for the strategic Hawthorn-Box Hill shared user path), respect for and avoiding the loss of public open space (in this case, a park since 1910 known as Lorne Parade Reserve) and policies supporting vibrant and cohesive local shopping villages (in this case, the shopping villages that lose their railway stations).

We query whether the relaxation of statutory planning controls for this major infrastructure and urban renewal project has acted as a cue for the Level Crossing Removal Authority (LXRA), and their alliance partners, to step away from the government's major strategic planning policy for Melbourne.

We understand planning schemes were amended in January 2020 (Amendment VC170) so that almost all normal statutory planning requirements were effectively waived, although we note this did not extend to the government's strategic planning policies.

It would appear the effect of Amendment VC170 was to leave the LXRA with full responsibility:

- To prepare the plan for this project (without reference to any state or local government adopted urban design framework or overall guideline/plan);
- To undertake the public consultation;
- To sit in judgement on all public submissions (with little or no independent oversight of them);

The Surrey Hills Progress Association acknowledges the Wurundjeri people as the traditional custodians of the land in this area, and we pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

- To manage the Community Reference Group (CRG), to decide who sits on it, to decide how often it meets and what it discusses – and to sign up all members to confidentiality agreements; and
- To withhold any meaningful response to public submissions until release of a final plan, announced recently as being midyear, after the project design has been completed and signed off by the Government.

In regard to the public consultation process, we note the following:

- The one and only plan of the project is within a PR brochure released in December 2020, the plan described in the brochure as the ‘Project overview’.
- After a consultation process of online surveys, virtual information sessions, webinars and other forms of consultation, that plan (the ‘Project overview’) still remains as the only plan provided to the public. Further, no professional reports, surveys and the like on the project have been released by the LXRP;
- The Surrey Hills Progress Association made detailed and thoughtful submissions to the project by letters dated 18 December 2020, 13 February, 24 February and 28 February 2021. The Association received computer generated acknowledgments to each submission but no written response has been received from the LXRP to any of the submissions and no invitation made by the LXRP to discuss the submissions with them; and
- The Community Reference Group (CRG), originally due to meet in February, was only convened for two workshop sessions on 24 & 31 March, but is now in recess with no explanation, for 6-8 weeks.

In summary, the Association is not satisfied that the LXRP has conducted a genuine consultation process and that, in fact, there was never any intention to critically review the initial plan.

I reiterate that the submissions made by the Association have been constructive and always with a view to seeking positive outcomes for this major infrastructure and urban renewal project – one that is unique for metropolitan Melbourne with the closure of two railway stations (that have existed around their shopping villages since c1890) and the construction of a new Premium station within a residential precinct away from these activity centres.

We remain optimistic that the present design challenges can be resolved, with goodwill and a positive commitment and close coordination between the key parties – the LXRA and the Whitehorse and Boroondara Councils.

To conclude, I speak on behalf of our Association in saying we have been soured by the consultation process and project direction. However our commitment to the local community and to present and future civic amenity keeps us in the game.

We would appreciate your consideration of these matters and look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Greg Buchanan
President

Paul Hamer MP, Will Fowles MP, Steve Brown LXRP
Cr Andrew Munroe (Whitehorse Mayor), Cr Amanda McNeill,
Cr Garry Thompson (Boroondara Mayor), Cr Jane Addis
Simon McMillan (Whitehorse CEO)
Phillip Storer (Boroondara CEO)

ATTACHMENT TO

LETTER TO MINISTER FOR PLANNING 9 APRIL 2021

RESOLUTION OF THE SURREY HILLS PROGRESS ASSOCIATION

MEETING HELD ON 29 MARCH 2021

“(A) That the Association advise the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Hon Jacinta Allan MP, that it has serious concerns about the project in its present form. The concerns arise from several **fundamental flaws in the design** of the new station and other key elements of the project, specifically:

- **Integration & Connectivity**

- The lack of adequate, effective and suitable integration between the north and south sides of both the Surrey Hills Village and Mont Albert Village and residential areas along the rail corridor.
- At Surrey Hills the project will significantly exacerbate the existing sense of disconnection between the northern and southern sections of Surrey Hills Village.
- The proposed location of the new station entrance so far from Mont Albert Road is also an inferior outcome for rail patrons and for maintaining genuine and visible links to Mont Albert Village.
- The distance of the main station entrance, 100 metres down a narrow street (to be narrowed down further to the width of a laneway by this project) raises issue of security and safety for rail patrons, particularly at night, and potentially will discourage some people from using the public transport network. This goes to the question (see below) of accessibility and social inclusion where members of the community need to feel safe and welcomed to a modern public transport service.

- **Commuter Car Parking**

- The inadequate supply of commuter car spaces will fail to meet the increased and rising demand
- This issue is magnified by the consolidation of the two stations into one, with a concentration of car parking at Surrey Hills and the failure to provide additional car parking spaces by covering part of the railway line.

- **Public Open Space**

- The loss of existing public open space at Lorne Parade Reserve due to encroachment of the new station building and related infrastructure, the height and visual bulk of the building and associated shadowing effects on the park and the removal of mature canopy trees in the reserve.
- Inadequate consideration has been given to the preservation of existing public open space and adding new open space in a neighbourhood where there is a well documented shortfall.

- **Accessibility for All & Social Inclusion**

- The LXRP lacks a clear plan for ‘Public Transport’ integration’ with a key aspect being the movement of school children between buses to trains and for many other members of the public who rely on transport interchange in their journey.

- Pedestrian access for all rail users is compromised under current plans for this project. For example the length of circuitous ramp and the number of steps at the Surrey Hills entrance to the new station when accessing the station from Bedford Avenue and Blackburn Street is excessive and would be alarming to many rail patrons.
- While the ‘grade’ of the ramp may be compliant with regulations, its length and winding nature will be a challenge. In contrast, crossing the rail corridor under and through the present Surrey Hills Station is relatively easy and undemanding.
- Pedestrian access issues also arise at the eastern or Mont Albert end of the new station. Locating the entrance so far from Mont Albert Road means people with mobility issues will have to navigate some 80- 100 metres of narrow exposed path from the proposed drop off area, before they arrive at the station entrance.
- **Residential Amenity**
 - The LXRP plans for the new station will severely impact on the residential streets – Lorne Parade and Beresford Street. Residents will suffer significant loss of amenity and will lose all on street car parking, and no existing vegetation or space for new vegetation on the railway side of their street.
 - The location of the station adjacent to dwellings in these streets will, in the absence of appropriate measures to mitigate impacts, adversely affect the long term use and enjoyment of these properties. This will especially be the case for those dwellings in close proximity to the actual station building, station entrances and associated infrastructure.

(B) That the Association calls on the Victorian Government to direct the LXRP to address these significant design flaws and issues **and bring forward solutions** through the Government expanding the scope and budget of the project:

- **Integration & Connectivity (SOLUTIONS)**

Incorporate significant cover over the rail trench at Mont Albert Village and Surrey Hills Village as well as at the eastern entrance of the new station to Mont Albert Road.

- **Commuter Car Parking (SOLUTIONS)**

Provide increased parking spaces (including through the potential exploitation of the rail corridor itself) for the projected future demand at the new station, resulting from the consolidation of two stations into one, the removal of on street parking and the imbalance that will arise from the concentration of car parking at one location

- **Public Open Space (SOLUTIONS)**

Ensure the preservation of existing public open space through more sensitive design and provide additional open space by strategically covering sections of the rail corridor.

The Association notes that the benefits of community access to local parks and open space have become more appreciated in recent years, especially during the Covid pandemic.

Further, an Environment and Planning Standing Committee of the Victorian Parliament is currently conducting an inquiry on this subject.

Having regard to the above, the Association seeks a detailed review of the impact of the project on Lorne Parade Reserve, to ensure the amenity, character and size of this public park is broadly retained intact with any building encroachment (in height, scale and footprint) very much minimised.

- **Accessibility for All & Social Inclusion (SOLUTIONS)**

Lower the entrance at the Surrey Hills end of the new station to enable improved pedestrian access for all, including the provision of escalators.

Reduce the building encroachment and overshadowing impacts on Lorne Parade Reserve.

Move the station entrance closer to Mont Albert Road to avoid issues associated with security and anxiety for patrons who are deterred from travelling at night because of the isolation of the station entrance down a narrow side street.

Across the Mont Albert Road frontage, provide a 'porte-cochere' or hotel style drop off that is much closer to the station entrance as part of an integrated garden/plaza cover over the railway line.

Re-examine arrangements for public transport integration for the new station so that users are no worse off in terms of time/distance to travel connecting between all modes of public transport available in the area

It is well recognised that improving people's mobility including having safe, clear and easy access to a public transport service can reduce the risk of social exclusion. Elements of the project design suggest that safety, security and ease of access have not been given the priority expected of a modern Premium railway station.

- **Residential Amenity (SOLUTIONS)**

Provide significant cover over the trench (including the possible cantilever of the bicycle path) along Lorne Parade and Beresford Street adjacent to the station, to allow for on street parking on one side of the street and landscaping (within a setback area) on the station side of the street.

Ensure that the design of the station sufficiently responds to the site context, particularly having regard to the close proximity of both the station and associated railway infrastructure to nearby dwellings – including effective noise mitigation, appropriate building design interface with dwellings, light spillage controls and cover of the trench to enhance connections across the railway, manage environmental impacts and enhanced landscaping opportunities to 'green' up the corridor.

(C) That the Association confirms its intention to convene a public meeting on 29 April 2021 to canvass the Association's concerns with the project and outline proposed solutions; and

(D) That the above resolutions also be forwarded to the Minister for Planning (Hon Richard Wynne MP), Paul Hamer MP, Will Fowles MP, the LXR and Whitehorse and Boroondara Councils."