**SRL EES Submission from the Whitehorse Ratepayers’ and Residents’ Association**

*As the Suburban Rail Loop Project is the largest infrastructure project ever in Victoria, there should have been extensive community and stakeholder engagement and consultation from the project’s inception. Unfortunately this has been sadly lacking and there are still a significant number of residents, ratepayers and business owners along SRL East who have no idea how the Suburban Rail Loop will affect them now and into the future. In this EES Submission the Whitehorse Ratepayers’ and Residents’ Association aims to highlight areas of concern and also possible ways to improve and amend not only the EES, but also to create more favourable outcomes for residents and ratepayers in Whitehorse during construction and subsequent operation of the Suburban Rail Loop, as well as holding the SRLA more accountable and transparent. In Whitehorse, residents are feeling stressed and anxious about the SRL impact on themselves and their family, especially with the loss of green space, traffic and noise chaos and feared devaluation of their property.*

**Draft Planning Scheme Amendment (PSA)
Specific Controls Overlay SCO 14 and SCO 15 - Burwood to Box Hill Tunnels**The draft PSA map **Figure LF3.2 Location of Proposed Specific Controls Overlay 14 (SCO14) and 15 (SCO15)** is at <https://srleastees.vic.gov.au/#/legislative-framework/KeyState/PlanningAndEnvironment>. SCO14 is proposed to allow the use and development of SRL East in the Whitehorse Planning Scheme and other affected councils. SCO15 is to protect SRL East from future development that could harm the structural integrity of underground infrastructure such as the rail tunnels. It extends up to a couple of houses either side of tunnel-affected residents’ property.
Residents affected by the SCOs received a letter from the SRLA in November 2021, which has left many fearful of how this affects their property value. Nor did the letter state that these SCOs will only be triggered if the tunnels are up to 12 metres below the properties. Better and more regular communication to residents and ratepayers is required to allay anxiety, especially about their property value. Where the tunnel is deeper than 12 metres, a permit is only required where development is three stories or higher, which is in line with the maximum height in many of the residential zones. As the tunnel depth between Burwood and Box Hill stations is 20 – 70 metres underground, neither SCO14 nor SCO15 should be necessary at all and should be removed entirely from the draft PSA between Burwood and Box Hill.

Interestingly enough, applications for a 50 to 51-storey mixed use apartment building and 27 to 28-storey building mixed use commercial building at 17-21 Market Street, Box Hill, both within the SCO 15 area, are still going through the building permit application process. Even though we are not civil engineers, there is clearly the potential for great danger to both the SRL infrastructure and construction of these new towers. They would only be a few metres apart unless a different station location option was used, such as the east-west alignment of Option 5. It makes no sense to go ahead with tower construction whilst the SRL is being built as this would pose a danger, especially if the buildings were not planned to include any underground works for the SRL when first designed. If this was to go ahead whilst SRL was digging and drilling below the foundations, it could be another Beaconsfield mine disaster as a worst case or cracked and damaged walls and foundations as a best case scenario in our opinion.

**Traffic and Transport Chaos – Box Hill**

Many ratepayers, residents and business owners in Box Hill are very concerned about how the Box Hill retail and restaurant precinct will survive during the six years of SRL Box Hill construction, not to mention with other construction projects running simultaneously. Traffic chaos is virtually guaranteed with high volumes of vehicle movement, especially along Whitehorse Road, a major east-west arterial road for the eastern suburbs. Desktop modelling and assurances that construction traffic and transport impacts would be managed with implementation of mitigation measures in accordance with the EPRs (EPR T1, EPR T2, EPR T3, EPR T4 and EPR T5) are simply unbelievable. Anyone who already drives along Whitehorse Road and Station Street knows how congested these roads are.

The traffic chaos from heavy haulage trucks will not be confined locally to just the eleven access gates to the construction site on Whitehorse Road and Station Street either, but will affect drivers on any of the main roads such as Elgar Road and Middleborough Road that lead to and from the Eastern Freeway, Eastlink and the Monash Freeway. Construction vehicle routes are illustrated in ***Figure TT12.9***. <https://srleastees.vic.gov.au/#/assessment-of-impacts/boxHill/traffic>

With 120 – 230 heavy vehicles entering and leaving the construction area per day, not to mention car parking for SRL construction workers and unrelated heavy vehicles associated with planned multiple high rise development constructions in the area, traffic is likely to be reduced to a crawl, especially during peak hours. Reducing three lanes to two lanes permanently either side of Whitehorse Road between Clisby Street and Station Street is not going to increase ‘active transport’, but rather will throw through traffic onto other already crowded main roads such as Canterbury Road or will create back street rat runs. (Ask residents of Canterbury Road if they feel it can easily take more cars in peak!) Box Hill is likely to become a no-go zone for those wishing to travel by car for shopping. Active transport is not suitable for everyone. For instance a mother with a couple of young children will not be giving up her car easily in favour of active transport. It will just push people out of the area to more convenient car-friendly places such as Forest Hill, Doncaster, Brickworks and Burwood One.

Box Hill already has rail, bus and tram connections, but these are poorly co-ordinated, outdated and involve significant walks between modes. The SRL Box Hill Station in its current form does not address this significant opportunity for improved public transport connectivity. An engineer described SRL Box Hill design as lacking sophistication for its lack of integration between the modes. At the very least there should be a direct underground link between the existing Box Hill railway station and SRL Box Hill. Other improvements would be relocating the very outdated bus interchange to be closer to both rail and tram. The current lack of public transport integration would negate any time benefits from a single journey on the SRL.

Daniel Bowen, spokesperson for the Public Transport Users Association, says, “You don’t want a long walk between platforms. Easy, quick, seamless is the key – and seamless includes not having to exit through fare gates and enter again to make a train to train connection … If people are going to use it en masse, the experience needs to be quick, easy, seamless, and as close to convenient as possible to hopping in the car.

The differences between bad outcomes and good outcomes may require more planning effort and higher cost. But some – like better feeder services – provide huge direct and indirect benefits for minimal extra cost compared to the overall project.”

**Traffic and Transport Chaos – Burwood Station**

Burwood Station will be pivotal as not only a new SRL station, but also the launching place for tunnel boring machines (TBMs) that will bore the twin tunnels towards Glen Waverley and then at a separate time towards Box Hill. There will also be a power substation constructed on the corner of Highbury Road and Sinnott Street. Over about 10 years this will result in of 837,000m3 of spoil (excavated waste) from the TBMs and an additional amount of 158,000m3 from the station box. With 370 heavy trucks per day peak and 190 on average, not to mention 240 SRL staff peak requiring at least 180 extra car parking spaces, there will be huge disruption to local residents and traffic in both Burwood Highway and Highbury Road. Relevant EPRs would need to be independently and regularly monitored for compliance and heavy pre-determined contractual fines imposed if they are not met.

<https://srleastees.vic.gov.au/#/assessment-of-impacts/burwood/traffic> “Predictive traffic modelling indicates that Burwood Highway is forecast to accommodate the additional truck movements, although some minor delays (approximately 12 seconds) are predicted.” This statement seems completely illogical and doesn’t allow for truck movement during morning peak when traffic along the Burwood Hwy is already very heavy. Desktop predictive modelling misses out on the real world experience of asking the locals for input.

More traffic lights are proposed for the Burwood Highway from the SRL Station, meaning that within the space of roughly 400 metres there would be three sets of traffic lights, including Deakin and Elgar Road lights. This needs to be addressed and all sets of traffic lights synchronised. The proposed Burwood Highway overpass would not only be ugly, but unusable by those with mobility issues. An underpass that links directly from the station to Bennettswood Reserve would be a far safer and user-friendly option, provided security cameras were installed at regular intervals.

**Compulsory Acquisition – Box Hill and Burwood**

Of over 300 residential and commercial properties to be compulsorily acquired for SRL East, 181 of them, including heritage buildings, will be in Box Hill and a further 13 residential properties on the west side of McComas Grove in Burwood. This will be managed in accordance with the SRLA Residential and Business Support Guidelines, “which provide details on the acquisition process to be followed that would assist in further reducing stress and anxiety of households. These Guidelines do not:
(1) Create (nor should be interpreted as creating) an expectation or entitlement from businesses, community organisations and residents for any particular type of support set out in the Guidelines 4
(2) Consider or provide for any direct monetary support or financial assistance that is additional to and separate from the compensation payable under the Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986.” <https://srleastees.vic.gov.au/#/assessment-of-impacts/projectWide/human-health>

In other State Government projects where there has been compulsory acquisition of residential properties the property owners have generally found they received far less from the relevant Authority than the market value of the property. The SRLA intends to have the State Government Valuer General appoint an ‘independent’ valuer to assess market value of each property. This can hardly be classed as a legitimate independent valuation for the property owner. The timing of the valuation is also critical so property prices do not go up significantly between the time of the market valuation for compulsory acquisition and the need to purchase another property. Financial compensation that *also* needs to be paid to affected property owners should include all other costs associated with moving house, such as conveyancing fees, other solicitor’s fees, stamp duty, removalist costs and *also* a monetary amount specified in advance for stress and anxiety caused by the compulsory acquisition.

**Arboriculture and Loss of Green Space – Box Hill Gardens**

102 mature trees will be removed in total from precious parkland in a third of the Box Hill Gardens - a popular place for recreation and exercise - and from Box Hill Linear Reserve. As Box Hill Gardens will be used for construction over at least six years and then probably for at least another four years (if the second stage of the SRL is built) it is not OK to lose the amenity of the Gardens and to say the removed tree canopy will be doubled by the year 2050, nearly 30 years away! The trees not only add to overall amenity for locals and visitors, but also serve important functions such as soaking up greenhouse gases, biodiversity, shade, habitat for fauna and adding to the overall Whitehorse tree canopy. There are no comparable park areas for recreation, exercise and overall enjoyment close to Box Hill Gardens. Through COVID-19 lockdowns many more people have realised what an invaluable and precious asset our green spaces are for physical and mental health, especially for those living in high density, high-rise apartments.

Only the barest minimum of trees should be removed for the Project and these trees should be replaced by new trees in other areas *as soon as* construction is due to start, if not before. Community consultation has suggested that the Federation Street Brickworks site and surrounding open former landfill space would be a suitable area to plant new trees to re-establish the tree canopy as soon as possible. Unfortunately there haven’t been any suitable areas suggested close to the existing Box Hill Gardens.

**Arboriculture and Loss of Green Space – Burwood Station**

340 high and moderate value trees with an estimated canopy of 13,084m² are earmarked to be removed from the current Zinfra site and heritage Sinnott Street Reserve, with another possible 260 trees likely to go to create Burwood Station. Currently the EES indicates these trees will be replaced in about 2030 at the conclusion of the Burwood Station build. This is simply not acceptable and community and Whitehorse Council sentiment is that these trees should be replaced in local areas *as soon as* the station construction is due to start. Community and Council should be consulted and liaised with to identify local areas to replant trees that will eventually reach double the canopy of removed trees. For instance, the nearby Lundgren Chain Reserve would be a suitable area to plant more trees.

**Noise, Air Quality and Vibration – Box Hill and Burwood**

Reading through the EES, it becomes increasingly clear that desktop application modelling has been used to assess the impacts and to develop the required Environment Protection Requirements (EPRs) rather than through thorough community and Council consultation. The impacts are often described as being ‘negligible’ after the EPRs (EPR NV1, NV2, NV3, NV4, NV6, NV7 and NV8) are in place. One gets the feeling this is a case of ‘She’ll be right Mate!’ Anyone who has personally been subjected to construction work next door or in close proximity to their home knows that even when there is compliance with EPA regulations for power tool use, there are still the additional noises of banging metal gates, heavy trucks delivering construction materials, shouting, concert volume radios and other noises pretty much constantly from about 6am. This cacophony of noises becomes torturous for those trying to work or study from home, who have young families or who work night-shift and are trying to sleep. Mental and physical health will suffer after only a few days of this. Imagine the effects on mental and physical health of those living or working near SRL Station construction works that can last upward of six years…

The other phrase repeated many times in the EES about meeting the EPRs is ‘reasonably practicable’. This terminology is so vague that it gives a loophole for contractors to say they met the EPRs when they were actually quite some way off meeting them ... and the local residents’ wellbeing and emotional and physical health suffer as a direct consequence.

The Independent Environmental Auditor (IEA) needs to do regular inspections of the construction zones and make sure that every attempt really is being made by contractors to comply with the ERPs and not just using the cop-out of meeting the EPRs as ‘reasonably practicable’. Repeated failure to do so should incur hefty predetermined fines written into the contracts for the contractors as a disincentive to being slack. Naturally there would be the undesirable tendency to use contractor mates who give the government a cheaper price by cutting corners with quality, materials and reaching the EPRs. Alternatives to the use of the hydraulic hammer should be used wherever possible. There also needs to be clearly-stated and ongoing open communication channels for the affected residents, ratepayers, business owners and employees to express their concerns. How to lodge a complaint needs to be clearly communicated in writing by the SRLA to people likely to be affected. Where it is known in advance that there is likely to be a lot of noise, poor air quality or contaminated soil removal etc., perhaps text messages or visual boards similar to the CFA fire danger ones or roadworks notification light boards could be used to warn people as well?

The emphasis in the EES documentation is that there won’t be any monetary compensation for stress and other issues directly caused by high noise levels or such things as dust and poor air quality and ground-borne vibration. It is insulting to people to offer them respite by throwing them a couple of crumbs of pre-paid movie tickets, especially when it seems the government has access to endless supplies of money for the $34.5 billion price tag of SRL East. Apparently offers of acoustic treatment will be based on pre-construction modelling of air-borne noise emissions from construction activities, not measured noise, so this will not reflect the circumstances during station construction. At the upper end of noise mitigation measures for affected people is temporary, unspecified, alternative accommodation. Clearly this is not practical for everyone.

Elderly residents at the Uniting Agewell aged care facility that backs onto the north-eastern part of Box Hill Gardens will have noise, dust and extensive construction and other intrusive activities for at least six years. Effects on these residents will need to be closely monitored or they may need to be relocated to other aged care facilities so their remaining precious years are not tortured by SRL construction. This facility would potentially also be exposed to predicted noise levels above 75 dB LAeq,30min albeit only for a limited period of the site establishment phase.

Residents living on the east side of McComas Grove in Burwood will be subjected to at least seven years of noise, dust and heavy haulage trucks with spoil and equipment as the Burwood SRL Station is constructed and the tunnel boring machines are launched and later retrieved. These unfortunate people will not be able to sell their houses during that time, unless it is for a substantial loss and - in addition to any other SRLA assistance offered to them - they will need access to free mental health services, such as counselling and support networks, to help them cope through that challenging period.

**Tunnel Vibration and Ground-Borne Noise**

Ratepayers with properties directly above the tunnels should be offered a no-cost independent Dilapidation Report prior to any tunnelling works commencing under those properties, so if cracks or structural damage appear during tunnel construction or operation they have visual proof for seeking compensation for damages. A no-cost Dilapidation Report should be mandatory SRLA practice where properties also have a cross passage that will be constructed with a 900kg hydraulic hammer during the day over several weeks. “North of Deakin University up to the SRL station at Box Hill, sections of AF4 Anderson Formation (hard weathered rock) will provide **less** attenuation of vibration compared to the soft/weathered rock in other areas of the alignment” so there is more potential for property damage. There also needs to be ongoing vibration and ground-borne noise monitoring both during and after the tunnel construction. The Communications and Stakeholder Management Plan (EPR SC2) needs to include a ‘complaints hotline’ with a 1800 number and a dedicated email address to receive noise and vibration complaints so that quick action can be taken, rather than letting residents suffer unnecessarily.

**Business and Retail – Box Hill**

With the current Option 3 Box Hill SRL station design there will be a number of small retail businesses that will not be compulsorily acquired, but which will suffer from ongoing effects of noise, dust and difficult access. This could be the final nail in the coffin for small businesses already struggling to survive after two years of on and off lockdowns. It is also likely that Box Hill Central will be redeveloped at the same time as the SRL Station construction. The SRLA states that, “Where impacts do occur, implementation of the Business Disruption Mitigation Plan and ongoing engagement with businesses would assist in managing amenity impacts during construction works (EPR B3 and EPR B4)”, although this seems like it would be too little, too late <https://srleastees.vic.gov.au/#/assessment-of-impacts/boxHill/business-retail> . No amount of business coaching and signage or free coffee vouchers will make up for the lack of amenity for potential customers. Even though the Box Hill retail precinct has a distinctly Asian influence and has been a hub for Asian restaurants and shops, there are plenty more surrounding suburbs that have also developed a strong Asian influence and dining culture, so people are likely to simply shop and dine in those areas rather than struggle with reduced parking, construction work, noise and dust for the next six or more years. Effectively the soul of the current shopping centre will die.

**Heritage Buildings – Box Hill**

In Whitehorse Road between Station Street and Market Street there are four Heritage Overlay buildings that are due to be demolished. Only the former Railway Hotel on the corner of Whitehorse Road and Station Street will be retained. The large block bounded by Whitehorse Road, Market Street, Main Street and Station Street will become a large construction site. It seems such a waste to demolish Heritage Overlay buildings for a construction site. Where at all feasible, the overall land size required for that construction site should be reduced as much as possible in order to maintain the heritage buildings. In consultation with the local community and Whitehorse Council, at the very least, the distinctive facades of the heritage buildings should be maintained and incorporated into new buildings.

**Contaminated Waste – Box Hill and Burwood**

Removal of spoil (excavated waste) from both the Box Hill and Burwood SRL Stations will be substantial, especially from the Burwood site where not only will 158,000m3 be excavated from thestation box, but 837,000m3 will be removed back through the tunnels from Box Hill and Glen Waverley. There are known and suspected contamination risks from the former Bennettswood Landfill (now Bennettswood Reserve), the Zinfra site and areas in Box Hill including a former petrol station, other landfill areas and from former buildings. EPR C1, EPR C2, EPR C3 would need to be rigorously applied to avoid issues to human health and groundwater migration. Although it is the contractor’s responsibility to transport contaminated spoil to recognized facilities that manage it, there are so many Big Build projects running concurrently that there is the very real concern that existing contaminated waste facilities may run out of room … and then where will the contaminated waste be dumped? If the Government isn't transparent on where this contaminated waste is going to be dumped, it will cause major problems and protests, just like the West Gate Tunnel waste being dumped near Bacchus Marsh where the community are furious at this decision.

**Sinnott Street Reserve and Gardiner’s Creek - Burwood**

Residents have expressed concern about the loss of green space in the Sinnott Street Reserve both during the build as well as after completion because the SRLA intends to maintain part of the Reserve for as-yet unspecified future development. Consideration should be given to maintaining original elements of the historical Burwood Skyline Drive-In, the first of its kind in Australia.

The SRLA intends to naturalise Gardiner’s Creek by removing the concrete drain the creek that is currently running along south of Burwood Highway. Local residents stress the removal of the ugly concrete drain by the SRLA should be extended from Burwood Highway right through to Highbury Road, rather than stopping at the Sinnott Street footbridge, so there will be improved visual amenity and usability of the area.