

Darren Lewin-Hill

T 8060 6714
M 0404 526 555

darren@lewin-hill.net
<http://northcote-independent.blogspot.com>

Tuesday 14 April 2009

Mr Daniel Kollmorgen
Manager, Transport Management and Planning
City of Darebin
PO Box 91, Preston, 3072

Email submission via route86@darebin.vic.gov.au

Dear Mr Kollmorgen

Submission on Westgarth section of Tram Route 86 Corridor Project

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on this proposal, and welcome Council's efforts to improve the consultation process through the extended deadline for submissions and the addition of further consultation measures outlined on your [website](#).

This project will potentially deliver strong benefits to High Street – notably improved accessibility of trams, shortened travel times, speed reduction, and improved amenity on High Street. However, as you will be aware, successful implementation of the project requires the balancing of a number of community interests, a position towards which I am hopeful Council is now moving.

The following comments relate to the Westgarth section of the project, and are offered to assist the further development of existing options as part of your consideration of community submissions.

Design of Westgarth–High Street intersection

I understand the rationale for Council's plan to redesign this [intersection](#) to allow entry further south to a lane ultimately turning left into Merri Parade. In addition, a north-bound High Street lane and a right-turning lane into Westgarth Street must be accommodated. I was pleased to note in this regard that Council has heeded strong community concern and rejected its initial plans to use the service road on the western side of High Street as a left-turning sliplane with entry at Cunningham Street. This presents two main options for the treatment of the intersection.

Preferred option

First, my preferred option is for a re-alignment of the tram track south of the intersection slightly to the east, so that the three required lanes on the western side could be accommodated without encroaching on the strip separating the service road on that side from High Street proper (see slide show at <http://northcote-independent.blogspot.com/2009/03/council-must-consider-westgarth.html>).

Two constraints on this are the possible location of a central north-and-south-bound tram stop south of the intersection at this location, and the VicRoads requirement for two lanes heading south from the intersection along High Street.

The location of the tram stop is discussed below. Regarding the VicRoads requirement, I would ask Council to note that there is a strong argument for a single lane south of the intersection, as the road rapidly converges from two lanes to one only a short distance south anyway. A single south-bound lane would allow some eastward re-alignment of the tram tracks, and therefore help to accommodate the preferred option above, possibly with the tram stop included.

Fallback option

Should the preferred option not be possible via the re-alignment of the tram tracks, Council will need to consider partial use of the strip separating High Street from the service road on the western side for use as a left-turning sliplane.

As the strip is quite wide, this would still allow a substantial buffer between heavy traffic and the service road residents, and could be augmented by design to provide screening, preferably by trees. This option would result in the loss of some of the mature trees currently in the strip, and if these cannot be transplanted (as has been done with mature trees in some cases), then replacement with appropriate native plantings should be considered.

Again, the possible central positioning of a north-and-south-bound tram stop at this location is a constraint that is considered below.

Under both these options, as acknowledged by Council, an additional estimated 200–300 cars would turn left into Merri Parade during peak hour, especially in the evening. In the context of Council's reassurance that no widening of Merri Parade is being contemplated, Council should consider traffic management measures between this intersection and the St Georges Road round-about to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety, and to facilitate residential vehicle access from McLachlan Street.

While this is further discussed below, under 'Integration of cycling', such measures should include reducing speed to 40kmh, a crossing at [McLachlan Street](#) (probably light-controlled), and enhancement of bike lanes along Merri Parade with suitable advice from cycling organisations. As per discussions at the Westgarth issues meeting, Copenhagen bike lanes might be considered.

Regarding vehicle access generally from the residential pocket south-west of the High Street–Westgarth Street intersection, Council will no doubt receive extensive submissions from residents in the area. In addition to the McLachlan Street suggestion above, I will only note that any increase of traffic at the [intersection of McLachlan and Walker Streets](#) must

be very carefully considered due to possible accidents involving cars and the bike traffic turning onto the bridge near Rushall Station. This will be an increasingly important point should Council adopt my suggestion for the better integration of cycling as described below.

Location of tram stops

The redesign of tram stops to ensure greater accessibility, including DDA compliance, lies at the heart of this project. As such, this must be the guiding principle in the location of stops. That said, I believe this can be accomplished while minimising the loss of parking in the Westgarth strip.

Preferred option

Subject to an assessment of safety for all user groups – especially children, the elderly and those with mobility challenges, and considering viability in terms of the redesign of the High Street–Westgarth Street intersection – my preferred option is for a central north-and-south-bound stop located to the south of the intersection (as in Council's [Option 2](#)). This would have at least two benefits:

- The stop could serve as both a tram stop and a stop for buses on the 246, 250 and 251 routes. This would connect these modes of public transport very effectively, and streamline the south-bound route by allowing the bus to stop after turning left at the intersection.
- Location of the stop south of the intersection would minimise the loss of parking within the Westgarth strip itself.

Under this option, I would also prefer to see the pair of kerbside stops proposed for south of Union Street moved [just north of it](#). This, too, would have a number of benefits:

- It would help to maximise parking within the strip – especially if the current light-controlled pedestrian crossing were moved to connect the eastern and western sections of Union Street (see discussion under cycling).
- A south-bound stop positioned north of Union Street would be somewhat closer to the proposed elderly persons' development at Roberts Street, partly compensating for the loss of the south-bound stop further up the hill, should that prove strictly necessary. The north-bound stop and pedestrian crossing would also be closer to this public housing redevelopment if the positioning north of Union Street were adopted.

Fallback option

Should the central stop south of the intersection prove unviable due to the requirements of the redesign of the intersection, north- and south-bound stops could be placed immediately north of the High Street–Westgarth Street intersection. The loss of car-parking would be compensated for by the suggested placement north of Union Street of the next set of kerbside stops, thereby freeing parking within the strip compared to the current arrangement.

I note here that some concerns over the southern location of the central stop were raised when use of the service road as a sliplane was still thought to be an option. If there is no

conflict with the redesign of the intersection to avoid this, concerns over the southern location of the stop may well diminish, though a safety assessment for all user groups is needed.

Integration of cycling

As Council will be aware, concerns have been expressed regarding the integration of cycling in the project. My suggestion in this regard is that Council continue to work with Bicycle Victoria and DBUG to optimise cycling along High Street, and to minimise the potential for accidents as cyclists traverse tram stops where passengers will be waiting and potentially vulnerable to serious collisions. Consideration should be given to dedicated lanes behind the stops, and to clear delineation of cycling paths along the whole of High Street.

Further, I strongly believe that the relocation of the pedestrian crossing to Union Street would have strong benefits for cyclists and others. The immediate value lies in connecting the areas east and west of High Street with a safe crossing that aligns directly with the road cyclists take to connect with the crossing of Merri Parade at McLachlan Street.

With a potentially light-controlled intersection at High Street–Union Street, and an improved crossing of Merri Parade at McLachlan Street, the path would fully and safely integrate with the bike paths accessed via the footbridge at Rushall Station. This would have the additional benefit of drawing some cycling traffic away from the busy High Street–Westgarth Street intersection.

It should also be noted that an improved crossing at McLachlan Street would enhance safety for pedestrians, and allow better vehicle access for residents living south of Westgarth Street and west of High Street.

Parking

If the recommendations above were adopted, the primary threat to parking under the proposal would not be tram stops, but the loss of an estimated 78 parking spaces from [Ruckers Hill](#). As it serves a discrete shopping strip with no dedicated parking to the rear of shops, the wholesale loss of parking from this location would have a devastating impact on local businesses, as the petition to be put forward by traders will attest.

My understanding is that the loss of parking on Ruckers Hill results from the proposal for a dedicated tram reserve to speed the service along this section. I would note first that, though the impact on parking would be great, the section is relatively short and therefore the time benefit for the tram may not be worth the trade-off in terms of the impact on businesses.

My suggestion is that the requirement for a dedicated tram reserve either be rejected, or that time-restrictions apply (such as around peak hours) that are directly negotiated with traders to reach a compromise solution that benefits both tram travellers and businesses alike. A similar possibility was raised at the Tuesday 31 March [Westgarth issues meeting](#), and should be vigorously pursued in the next phase of consultation and refinement of the proposal.

With regard to parking generally, research is needed into the parking capacity of the strip across a broad range of times, in addition to a comprehensive survey of how customers travel to the strip to do their shopping, access restaurants, the cinema, and other services.

Research previously undertaken for Northcote should not be automatically applied to Westgarth, as it may well not be relevant. A Westgarth-specific survey should also gather traders' views on the specific mix of parking along the strip itself. Most traders I have spoken to have indicated that shorter-term parking (1 hour) should be located along the strip, together with better provision of short duration spaces of perhaps fifteen minutes in the mix to assist drive-by custom. Longer parking could continue to be accommodated on Ruckers Hill. The impact of clearways should also be part of this discussion.

Should the parking equation not be satisfactorily solved, businesses and residents will suffer, with an unproductive conflict between their parking needs the possible result. Council would do well to review current parking controls in nearby residential streets to ensure that they consistently and fairly bear an appropriate share of both the business parking burden and the residential parking capacity. Similar streets must receive similar treatment as part of any solution for the whole precinct.

Finally, should Council have the opportunity and funds, sites should be acquired at either end of the strip as they become available (for example, Armstrong's furniture). As suggested at the [Westgarth issues meeting](#), these could be developed as open space with underground parking provision.

Footpath works and public space

A very positive aspect of this proposal is the scope for improvements through widened footpaths, including the addition of street plantings and outdoor seating for cafés and restaurants. As the plans are refined through further consultation, it will be important to value public access and use of increased space in balance with the needs of business.

In particular, increased outdoor seating should favour cafés and restaurants currently with low seating capacity and narrow frontages, in preference to venues whose capacity is already large. This will have the benefit of broadening the mix of viable businesses within the strip, rather than encouraging further concentration within a few large establishments.

Consultation

The key point regarding consultation is that the lessons learnt in this project should inform the review of Council's broader consultation policy. The points captured in [notes by Daniel Neaves](#) at the Westgarth issues meeting offer useful suggestions in this regard.

Summary and conclusion

My preferred outcomes for the Westgarth section of the Route 86 Project include the following:

- A central stop for trams and buses south of the High Street–Westgarth Street intersection (see also fallback option if this renders a redesign of the intersection unviable).

- The re-alignment of the tram tracks south of Westgarth Street slightly to the east to accommodate the required three lanes on the western side – left-turning, north-bound and right-turning – without the use either of the service road or, ideally, of the intervening strip separating the service road from High Street (again, see fallback option if unviable).
- Placement of a pair of north- and south-bound kerbside stops just north of Union Street, with the intersection of High and Union Streets controlled by traffic lights to facilitate local traffic, especially bikes, and pedestrian access.
- Articulation of the Union Street crossing with an improved crossing of Merri Parade at McLachlan Street to connect the bicycle network, improve pedestrian safety, and enhance local vehicle access for residents south of Merri Parade and west of High Street.
- As described above, enhancement of traffic management measures along Merri Parade to cater for the projected increase of traffic turning left from High Street.
- A comprehensive approach to parking that optimises the availability and number of spaces on Ruckers Hill, and configures parking within the strip and surrounds to the identified needs of residents, customers and businesses.

In conclusion, I look forward to Council's further refinement of this project, including the next stage of consultation. Community coverage of the project will continue at:

[http://northcote-independent.blogspot.com/search/label/Tram Route 86 Corridor Project](http://northcote-independent.blogspot.com/search/label/Tram+Route+86+Corridor+Project)

Sincerely,

Darren Lewin-Hill