

Brunswick Resident Network Skyrail Zoom, 5 December 2022

Brunswick Residents Network (BRN) held an online meeting on 5 December to gather community views and concerns related to the proposed LXR project in Brunswick, which will see the removal of eight level crossings along the Upfield Rail Line by 2027.

A formal consultation process will begin in early 2023, but 56 attendees began flagging issues that can be raised with the State Government, the LXR authority, and Merri-bek Council.

At the end of the report, there are a number of links to information sources, and contact details for local groups, LXR, Merri-bek councillors and a new Facebook Group for information and updates.

Notes of proceedings

(These notes are combined into themes, including notes submitted in the chat box as well as points made by speakers. We haven't included names, the meeting was not recorded – excepting for those who offered their contacts)

Chair: Nic Maclellan. Present 56+ people, including Councillors Sue Bolton and Monica Harte
Apologies Dan Ziffer, Mike Williams, Tim Read (represented by Timothy Burn)

QUESTIONS NEEDING URGENT ANSWERS

Gradient up from Royal Park to Park Street:

Residents had heard different and contradictory stories on the practicality of a train rising from the Royal Park trench and crossing Park Street, including:

- The removal of Park St/Brunswick Rd crossing not feasible due to the steep incline from Royal Park
- Park St could be closed to allow the rise
- Steeper inclines can be built where unavoidable

Are alternatives to Skyrail under consideration/practicable?

- There was discussion of tunnels (cut and cover) or trenches being used for part of the line but most present thought that this would be rejected as impractical.

Station removal or relocation:

The following issues need to be clarified:

- The possibility of combining stations has been raised in other forums, with just two instead of three stations. One participant had been told that LXR intend to replace Brunswick and Jewell stations with a new station near Dawson Street (using the Howler carpark)
- Are there any other proposals to change station locations?
- Participant raised concern about distances from station for elderly, people with disabilities etc if stations were spread out (question of equity and accessibility)

Road closures:

Can closures be considered to avoid smaller E-W streets becoming traffic sewers (e.g. Union Street, Albert Street, Victoria Street, Hope Street)?

Tram depot upgrade:

How will this project (Moreland Depot, behind Sydney Road) intersect with the upgrade to the Brunswick tram depot?

MORE QUESTIONS**RATIONALE FOR LXRA**

Does the rationale stack up?

Traffic congestion:

- Are the level crossings a major cause of congestion? Should there be a broader traffic study, for example to find whether Sydney Road and Lygon Street are the major bottlenecks, as many suggested?
- Will the project encourage more traffic using our suburbs as a thoroughfare, especially on streets not designated as major roads?

Pedestrian, bike, driver and train driver safety:

- What will be the safety impact of removing trains at ground level?

PRACTICALITIES DURING CONSTRUCTION

- If all 8 roads were closed at once, how does traffic move east to west.
- Bike paths took 12 months to open after the Coburg section of Skyrail was completed. Can this delay be avoided?
- Can a good safe bike route be provided on Sydney Road during construction, as there is no other practical local alternative running the length of the Brunswick railway?
- Disability access is crucial, currently trains provide accessible public transport, so can Sydney Road trams immediately be upgraded for disability access (eg through construction of disability appropriate tram stops)?.
- There are a lot of lessons that we can learn from the level crossing removals in Coburg
- Some residences will be unliveable during construction (issues of cost and suitability of relocation to be raised with LXRP)

EFFECTS ON NEARBY RESIDENTS

- The land along the Brunswick section is much narrower than at Coburg, and houses/apartments are closer
- Overshadowing, blocking views, blocking light, are issues, also lighting at night
- What are details of planned compulsory and optional acquisitions/relocations?

BROADER ISSUES – WHAT KIND OF BRUNSWICK DO WE WANT?

- The project must be benefit overall. Is it?
- Framing of this project should be as an “open space+active/public transport” project, not a “get through these intersections faster in a car” project

Sense of place:

- The project should stimulate a broader discussion about what our streets and community should look and feel like. The question of 'sense of place' is worth exploring. Greenery and historical buildings help create that sense
- “I love the vista of the Railway Hotel and Millers Ropeworks”.
- Liveability must be included, the project must increase liveability

Brunswick transport future:

Merri-bek has committed to “a community where everyone can get around by active or zero emissions transport” <https://morelandzerocarbon.org.au/travel-smart/>

- Pedestrians and bikes need to be made the priority
- Project will increase car dominance – this needs to be addressed
- Need to plan the pedestrian/bike crossings of E-W roads.
- E-W road closures? (See Questions above)
- Make sure that parking around stations is not increased (currently for late night station staff only)
- Disability parking could be useful
- Traffic calming, separated bike lanes, pedestrian crossings
- Slower speed limits around station streets

Removing a station?

See Questions section above. Speakers commented that:

- Stations are currently ideally spaced for pedestrians and the project should not reduce walkability
- Removing a station would increase average walking distance
- Anstey station is already very busy.
- Women’s safety is an issue (one participant had bought next to Jewell specifically for a safe walk home)

Heritage and design:

- Yes to keeping stations and heritage buildings.
- The Upfield line is the oldest and most intact line in Victoria. It was also the last line to have manually operated boom gates.
- What will happen to the unique railway heritage structures, in addition to the stations, which dot the line from Park St northwards ? Will they be demolished during construction?

- More sympathetic integration of existing heritage station buildings is important, rather than being dominated by an overbearing modern structure
- Cr Bolton noted that we were only able to save the railway features from pre-1900 during Coburg level crossing removal. Heritage Victoria allowed heritage features from 1926 to be demolished.
- The fact this is the oldest rail line in Victoria is reflected in this being a very narrow line with extremely high proximal density.
- Sympathetic location of the elevated platforms must minimise overlooking into existing residences.

CONSULTATION AND LOBBYING

- To engage with LXP and Merri-bek Council, we are in a better situation than Coburg, as we are getting in early
- Consultation is not truly consultation if it's an exercise in box ticking.
- Public meetings are important to allow people to hear different/contrasting information and opinions
- Need to clarify who is responsible – LXP is responsible to Premier and Cabinet; other issues, DoT
- Need to speak to Minister – Now is a great time to be engaging the Minister, right after appointment
- Ben Carroll is minister for public transport, but this project will be under transport infrastructure minister Jacinta Allen.
- During the Coburg project LXP had a 'community hub' office which was meant to be a community access point. Presumably they'll do the same with this project. There were also a team of 'Communications/ community liaison' people, so look out for them!
- See "Contacts" and "Links" section at foot of this report.

Possible campaign allies

North Melbourne Association re Royal Park

What is the City of Melbourne view re the proposal?

What is the view of Sydney Road Traders re the proposal?

Link up with groups involved with disability services, heritage, history and open space

INFO LINKS

Posted by Nic Maclellan of BRN:

1) Victoria's Big Build - Brunswick level crossing removals

<https://bigbuild.vic.gov.au/projects/level-crossing-removal-project/projects/brunswick>

2) Brunswick and Parkville community update – September 2022

<https://bigbuild.vic.gov.au/library/level-crossing-removal-project/upfield/brunswick/community-updates-fact-sheets/brunswick-and-parkville-community-update-september-2022>

3) Conversations Moreland

<https://conversations.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/brunswick-level-crossing-removals>

Posted by Cr Bolton

The council report re this project for the December 2022 council meeting is at Page 6 of the council agenda: <https://www.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/globalassets/website-merri-bek/areas/my-council/council-and-committee-meetings/council-and-parm-meetings/agendas/2022-agendas/council-agenda-2022-12-7-december---pdf-with-attachments.pdf>

Posted by Timothy Burn, for Tim Read

Official project costings were not released in the government's election costings. May be in the forward estimates (4 year projections) in May 2023 budget. Tim Read did a PBO (Parliamentary Budget Office) costing last year. Likely to be substantially understated by time this project starts. <https://contattafiles.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/tnt34836/AxTBCL6pXFNGNqI/CR-LXR%20combined%20-%20rail%20over%20-%20unit%20costs%20%28signed%29.pdf>

1990 History of Upfield line

<https://archive.moreland.vic.gov.au/globalassets/areas/heritagelib-7504/upfield-railway-heritage-study-bell-street.pdf>

Andrea Bunting has set up Facebook public group to share resources and updates.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/brunswickskyrail/>

CONTACTS

Submit questions and comments to LXP at email: contact@levelcrossings.vic.gov.au

Subscribe to LXP project updates (select Upfield line):

<https://bigbuild.vic.gov.au/projects/level-crossing-removal-project/subscribe>

Subscribe to BRN newsletter: <http://eepurl.com/VX4a9>

(Continued over)

Posted by Timothy Burn for Tim Read

Tim Read, Brunswick MP contact: tim.read@parliament.vic.gov.au

Tim's Skyrail piece : https://www.timread.org.au/brunswick_skyrail

Posted by Nic Maclellan

Contact South Ward Merri-bek councillors to flag concerns:

James Conlan - 0409 279 335

Lambros Tapinos - 0433 419 075

Mark Riley - 0499 807 044

(Cr Bolton and Cr Harte, from northern wards, were in attendance as noted)

Faith Hunter: for issues affecting people using bicycles, to get involved and stay up to date, get in touch with Merri-bek BUG: committee@morelandbug.org

Phil Cleary: philcleary@bigpond.com for those who might want to share ideas re the 'sense of place' question.

PLUS

From Mark Phillips (Brunswick Voice editor)

If you live in an apartment overlooking the Upfield line, I'd be interested in talking to you for an article on Brunswick Voice: editor@brunswickvoice.com.au