



**Merri-bek**  
City Council

# Brunswick Elevated Rail

## Issues & Opportunities Discussion Paper

December 2022



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Moreland City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Moreland. We pay respect to their Elders past, present, and emerging, as well as to all First Nations communities who significantly contribute to the life of the area.

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# Message from the Mayor



Mayor Cr Angelica  
Panopoulos

In September 2022, the Victorian Government announced plans to remove eight level crossings on the Upfield Rail Line between Park Street, Parkville and Albion Street, Brunswick by 2027, creating a new elevated train line. This line will join with the Bell to Moreland section to create over four kilometres of continuous elevated rail through the heart of the City of Merri-bek.

This is exciting news. Elevating the rail line will change how people experience our city, be it through enjoying new green open spaces, moving around the area more easily by bike or on foot, or intensifying the unique creative culture of Brunswick.

We know from experience that major projects bring major disruption. We want to make sure we learn from previous State Government infrastructure projects delivered in Merri-bek, about how best to minimise that disruption and how to support those who need it most throughout the process.

We also want to make sure that our community's voice is heard loud and clear by the decision makers. That is why Council is carrying out an extensive engagement program, to hear directly from the community about what matters most to them.

As a first step in this process, Council officers have captured some of the main issues and opportunities that we see from the Brunswick Elevated Rail. There will be a very broad range of impacts – including tree loss, road closures, heritage, noise, the Upfield Share User Path and many more. This is a starting point for a conversation with the community, and it is intended that through the engagement program community members will add to this with their own understanding of the places in which they live, work, visit, move through, care for, and use every day. Please look out for engagement activities happening on line and in person near you in the coming weeks and take part.

The community aspirations, concerns and priorities collected through this program will form the basis for an advocacy paper to be released in April 2023, that will capture what is most important for the State Government's Level Crossing Removal Project to be considering as it moves into the design phase of this once in a generation project. We invite you to add your voice.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Panopoulos'.

Cr Angelica Panopoulos  
Merri-bek City Council Mayor

## Purpose

This paper captures an initial scan of issues and opportunities presented by the State Government's announced project to remove 8 level crossings in Brunswick by elevating the rail line.

It is intended to be a starting point for a conversation with the local community, to identify in more detail local aspirations, concerns, ideas and priorities for the project. Whilst the project is delivered by the State Government through its Level Crossings Removal Project (LXRP), building a rich and detailed picture of local issues and opportunities will give Council the best chance to represent the community accurately and comprehensively in our feedback to the proposals as they evolve.

The feedback from this 'Issues and Opportunities' conversation will form the basis for a Council position paper on the project, likely to be adopted by Council in April 2023.

## What is the Brunswick Elevated Rail Project?

Elevated Rail Through Brunswick ('the project') is a project funded and delivered as part of the Victorian Government's Big Build program to remove dangerous and congested level crossings across metropolitan Melbourne.

It involves removing eight level crossings and building new train stations on the Upfield rail line. The works will happen between Park Street, Parkville and Albion Street, Brunswick. It is expected that this project will be declared under the Major Transport Projects Facilitation Act 2009, with all approvals considered by the State Government rather than by Council.

The new elevated section of the Upfield rail line will connect with the Coburg-to-Moreland elevated section that was completed in 2021. Once finished, there will be over four kilometres of elevated rail areas through Coburg and Brunswick. Elevating the railway line in Brunswick will unlock up to eight hectares of space underneath the railway line.

The State Government announcement outlined that construction is expected to commence in 2024 and finished by 2027.

## What is Merri-bek Council's Role?

This project will be funded and delivered by the State Government, however Merri-bek Council has an important role to play. We will act as a voice for our communities before, during and after delivery of this project.

This paper, and our engagement activities around these issues and opportunities, will help us to understand our communities' needs and aspirations and allow us to give clear, detailed and specific feedback for what we want to see from this project. This feedback will be captured in an advocacy position paper to be considered by Council in April 2023, as well as in ongoing feedback to the Level Crossing removals Project team throughout the design, development and delivery of the works.





Figure 1: Level crossings to be removed



## Timeline

The project was announced in September 2022. The LXRP team is in an early phase of site assessment and collation of information. Council is keen to build a picture of local issues, opportunities and ideas in order to have a strong influence before moving into the design phase of the project.

What	Why	When
<i>Initial Issues and Opportunities Paper</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gives the community facts and prompts about the existing environment to assist understanding and feedback</li> <li>• Shares issues that are described in existing policies and plans and known to Council</li> <li>• Describes possible opportunities to address these issues through the project</li> </ul>	December 2022
<i>Community Engagement</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensures the community have a voice on what they want from the project</li> </ul>	December - February 2023
<i>Merri-bek Advocacy Position Paper</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describes what we want from the project as a council and a community</li> <li>• Helps us advocate the Victorian Government to get the best outcomes for our community</li> </ul>	March-April 2023

# Background to Level Crossing Removals

Elevating the railway line through Brunswick is a project funded, designed and delivered by the State Government, through their agency – the Level Crossing Removal Project .

In September 2022, the Victorian Government announced plans to remove 8 level crossings on the Upfield rail line between Park Street, Parkville and Albion Street, Brunswick by 2027.

The Upfield line (from North Melbourne to Coburg) opened in 1884 and for almost 140 years trains have serviced the line.

An elevated train line, with new train stations, will replace the existing train line. This new elevated section of the Upfield rail line will connect with the new Bell to Moreland station elevated section. Together they will create over four kilometres of continuous elevated rail through the heart of the City of Merri-bek.

Council supports this project and will play an important role in influencing and shaping how the project will be designed and delivered.

Elevating rail through Brunswick is a major urban renewal project which has the potential to significantly transform our city for the better. Officers have prepared this discussion document to encourage and guide community feedback and help inform Council's detailed advocacy position.

As a Council and community, we can reflect on what worked and what could be improved from the recent Bell to Moreland Level Crossing Removal Project to help improve outcomes from this project.



Figure 2: Elevated Rail and new station building at Coburg

# Initial Identified Opportunities

This is a major investment in local infrastructure and a transformational project for Brunswick. It will see new stations and station precincts developed, create substantial new areas of green and functional open space, improve local streets and paths, and reshape the heart of the area where the most significant creative and community facilities are located, connecting them in a new way.

Major potential benefits for the Merri-bek community include:

- Strengthen local character
- Improve Connectivity
- Promote sustainable forms of transport
- Create more open spaces and greening
- Lift the quality of the public realm
- Involve Brunswick's unique community in the process

## Strengthen local character

Brunswick is a unique and vibrant place, full of expression and character. The approach to this large-scale project should reflect this local character, find ways to celebrate and enhance it, and maximise opportunities for local creative expression.

The removal of the rail line will strengthen connections between key cultural facilities such as Council's cultural facility being redeveloped at 33 Saxon Street, RMIT's Brunswick campus and their new PlaceLab research facility, the Brunswick Town Hall and the new urban green space planned for 260 Sydney Road, building a sense of a stronger civic and cultural heart in Brunswick. The project can promote greater activity and investment along Sydney Road and in surrounding streets, creating more vibrancy.

Also central to Brunswick's unique character is the many stories that make up its past and present and how these play out in the place. There is the opportunity to tell the stories of Brunswick's First Nations history, and its contemporary First Nations presence typified by leading contemporary art gallery Blak Dot at 33 Saxon Street, and how these stories are reflected in the public realm through open space uses, gestures, landscaping, artworks, patterning, signage, etc. Also important is how the Upfield line's post-colonial history is protected and celebrated, especially the consideration of the heritage fabric of the Upfield line such as its railway stations, signal boxes and other rail corridor infrastructure.

## Improve Connectivity

The elevation of the rail line will remove a major barrier to moving around in Brunswick and create a more unified and connected place that is easier to move around. Improved access to the Sydney Road district will build on its competitive advantage as a location to invest and work with excellent access to the CBD, inner-city and middle ring labour markets.



## **Promote sustainable forms of transport**

Whilst the removal of level crossings benefits vehicle drivers by removing hold-up points at boom gates, there are also substantial benefits to pedestrians, cyclists, bus and tram users by the changed conditions. The Brunswick project has the potential to improve the quality of existing pedestrian pathways, broaden the capacity of the Upfield shared path, create more east-west linking paths for recreational bike riders and easy cross-suburb access, install new priority crossings, increase local bike parking facilities and improve connections between transport modes.

New bike and pedestrian paths along the Rail Corridor will be created. The new paths will have increased carrying capacity and improved safety. Getting onto the paths, from adjoining streets will also be easier.

## **Create more open spaces and greening**

Elevated rail solutions typically create substantial new open space that can be designed for a variety of users, and the Brunswick project is projected to enable four MCGs worth of new open space. The range, quality and accessibility of public spaces in and around the rail corridor will be greatly improved.

This is great news for Brunswick where there are gaps in our existing open space network, and a growing population is increasing the need for more and better green open space locally.

In designing green open space there is the potential to increase native and indigenous planting and increase habitats for local wildlife, as well as increase tree canopy coverage to assist with combatting the urban heat island effect and increase the number of local water sensitive urban design treatments.

## **Lift the quality of the public realm**

As well as green open spaces, new civic spaces such as paths, nodes railway stations and station forecourts will be created, which have the opportunity to increase the quality and quality of public meeting spaces, and add new seating, resting places, lighting, and public art. The works could also make the train stations themselves more visible, and easier to find. The sheer amount of new improved space could lift the general presentation of Brunswick, acting as a catalyst for improvements to privately owned land and buildings.

## **Involve Brunswick's unique community in the process**

The Brunswick community is a highly knowledgeable one, with diverse perspectives and skills. Tapping into rich local knowledge, insights and passion is a key opportunity for the project.

# Initial Identified Issues

The following is a summary of initial issues that have been identified by Council in the Brunswick elevated rail project. Council is keen to hear from local community members what other issues they see and consider solutions and ideas that will form the basis of a Council Position Paper scheduled for adoption in April 2023.

## The works will be disruptive

Brunswick is an established area with a fairly dense urban form. This means it will be a complex and challenging project to deliver and a number of local buildings, streets, people, businesses and visitors will be directly affected.

21 streets interface directly with the project area and the works will require significant closures to the Upfield shared user path and the surrounding network. This will lead to more people using trams, buses, and footpaths locally, particularly along Sydney Road, as well as increased vehicle traffic and issues around car parking. There may also be issues around how people access train stations during works.

## Loss of trees

There are many trees in the area where the works will be taking place and this kind of project will inevitably lead to the loss of some existing trees. Many of these trees are significant, in terms of their size and age, and also in terms of the role they play in softening and greening local streets, contributing to local character and amenity, providing habitat for local wildlife and shading to combat the heat island effect. Proper consideration should be given to each impacted tree, and tree loss minimised to the greatest possible extent.

## Possible impacts of new elevated rail infrastructure

The density of Brunswick's urban form creates a real challenge over how the new viaducts to elevate the rail line will be realised. It's still unknown what impacts the new infrastructure will have on the amenity of existing apartment dwellers, businesses and other building users, as well as how sunlight into existing buildings or open spaces might be impacted.

## Heritage elements from the Upfield Rail Line

The Upfield rail corridor is a significant one from a heritage point of view, and contains many artefacts that are important to the story and character of the area. How these are protected through the works, and interpreted through the design should be key considerations. The future of any historic elements that are removed should be considered by heritage experts and local historical societies should be consulted throughout.

## Impact on local market conditions

Significant urban renewal projects such as this one can impact on local housing and other commercial conditions. There is a risk that the improvements of this project put further pressure on locals seeking affordable rental housing, a home to buy, or for local businesses and creatives seeking office or making spaces.

## Background and Context

The sections below capture more detail about the existing context, to inform the discussion about the issues and opportunities that the project will present.

In 2017, Council endorsed seven design principles for level crossings in our city, these remain relevant for this project:

- Enhance local identity
- Integration with surrounding places
- Increase activity
- Enhance greening and sustainability
- Connectivity between pedestrians, bikes and public transport
- Minimise impacts on adjoining properties
- Whole of life management and maintenance.

When considering issues and opportunities for this project, we are focussing on the Upfield Rail Corridor through Brunswick, including Sydney Road. The area is:

- A key strategic location in inner Melbourne, approximately five kilometres north of Melbourne's Central Business District (CBD)
- A location within the Brunswick Activity Centre, a centre for jobs, services, and higher-density housing.

## The Movement Network

The area has a rich concentration of transport options and is highly connected to Melbourne's CBD. Sydney Road is Merri-bek's premier main street and commercial spine. It runs parallel to the Upfield train line through Brunswick. Sydney Road contains tram, bus, bike, vehicle and pedestrian routes and the Upfield line contains pedestrian, bike and train routes.

Walking, defined as broadly and inclusively as possible, is the most fundamental means of transport, and the area contains a range of walking routes – both those that are on Council's Principal Pedestrian Network and those which are not. The Upfield shared bike and pedestrian path runs parallel with the railway line. This path was first built in the late 1980s and connects Royal Park as far north as Fawkner.

This path is also part of the Victorian Government's Principal Bicycle Network, classified as a Strategic Cycle Corridor. There are on-road bike lanes on Sydney Road and Brunswick Road, managed by VicRoads and Merri-bek's bike routes criss-cross the area. Public transport consists of trains, trams, and buses. Train services run north-south along the Upfield train line and include Jewell, Brunswick and Anstey Stations within the area. Tracking along Sydney Road is the number 19 North Coburg tram line. Bus services cover the area along six routes. They generally provide for east-west cross-suburb travel.

Sydney Road also connects traffic between Melbourne's Central Business District to the northern suburbs. It is classified as a Secondary Arterial Road and managed by VicRoads. Brunswick Road, also managed by VicRoads, is the primary arterial road crossing east-west. There is publicly available on-street and off-street parking in the project area. Parking demand is particularly high between Sydney Road and rail corridor.

While Merri-bek has large cohorts of residents who travel to work via public transport (25% compared to 15% in greater Melbourne), most people (51%) still travel to work by car.



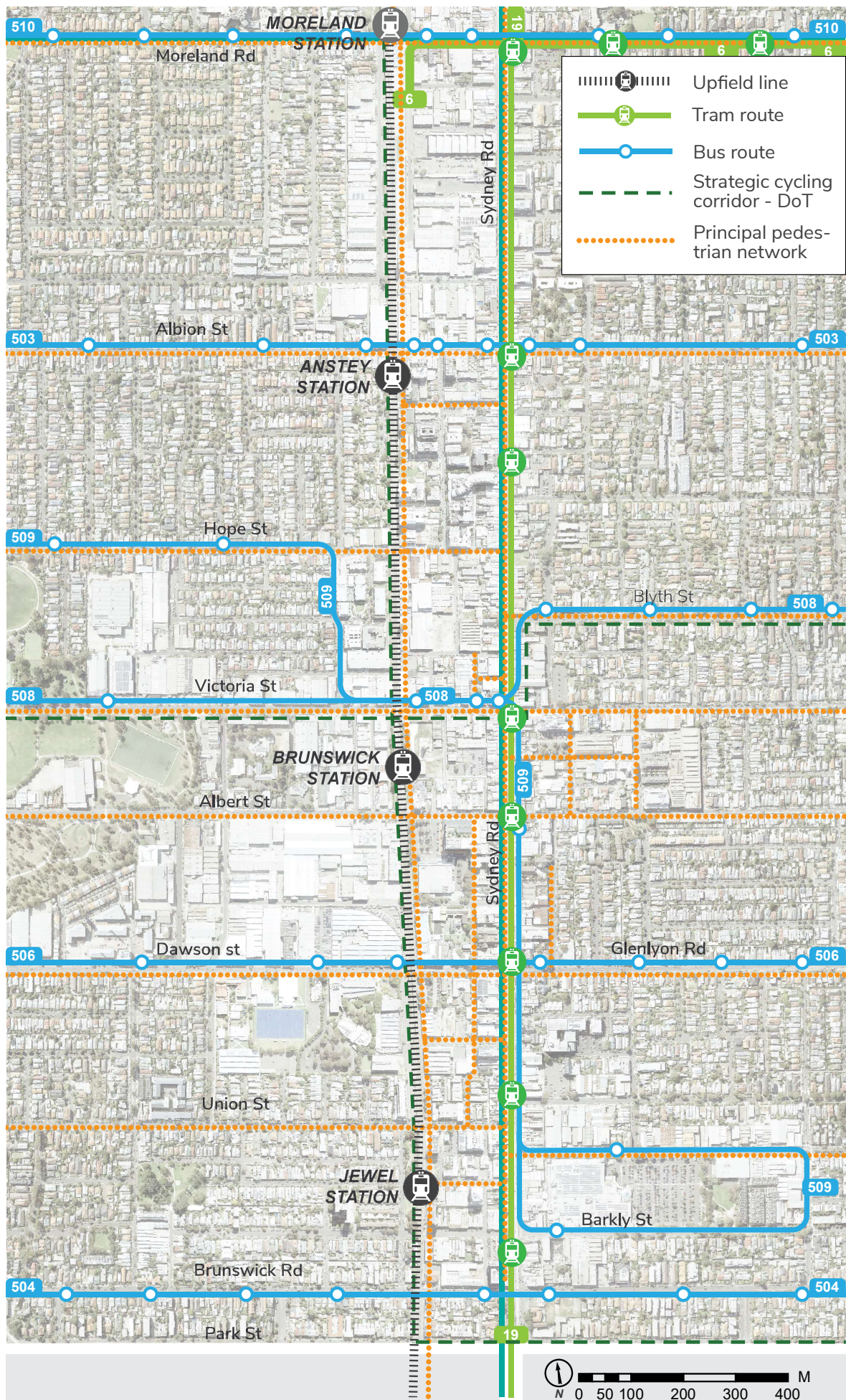


Figure 3: Movement network



## Shared and Green Spaces

Shared and green public spaces are critical to the health of our city and our communities. Public spaces include green parks, hard landscaped areas, drainage infrastructure (like water sensitive urban design treatments), paths and streets. These spaces enhance our physical and mental health, increase the attractiveness of our neighbourhoods, provide habitat for wildlife, and offer many ecosystem functions such as collecting stormwater run-off, regulating temperature, and improving air quality.

Along the Rail Corridor, there are locally significant trees. However, there are not enough street trees in residential and industrial area and more are needed to meet Council's tree canopy cover goal. Some new trees have been planted along the Rail Corridor by local community groups, making it shadier and more attractive for people and wildlife. The Upfield corridor could be enhanced as north-south habitat link between Royal Park and Princes Park and Fawkner Cemetery and Memorial Park, each with high conservation values.

Existing parks within the Upfield Corridor include Jewell Station Reserve, Lux Way Reserve, Wilson Avenue Pocket Park and the recently opened Bulleke-bek Park and Garrong Park. Council has taken a proactive position and acquired land for new parks being planned at land purchased at 14 Frith Street and 260 Sydney Road under our A Park Close to Home program. A broader range of space for recreation and sport is available at the Brunswick Central Parklands, 500 metres west of the Upfield Corridor. This area is 19 hectares in area and includes a series of parks, sporting fields and facilities. To the south, within the City of Melbourne, is the expansive Royal Park. It is known as a State Open Space.

Local population and housing growth has increased the need for public spaces that serve a range of functions. Streets and bluestone lanes make up most of shared public spaces in the project area. They vary in size and are often narrow, not well connected and in average to poor condition. Significant sections of the Rail Corridor are faced with blank walls, uninteresting buildings, and car parks.

The project area is home to a large number of significant cultural and heritage places, landscapes, and buildings. They include sites of Aboriginal cultural heritage value and post-contact heritage value. The Upfield Railway Precinct is recognised in the Merri-bek (Moreland) Planning Scheme (as Heritage Overlay 180) for its heritage values. It makes special mention of Jewell Station and Brunswick Stations as buildings of particular importance. The Upfield Railway Precinct is also listed on the Victorian Heritage Register, giving its heritage values special protections.

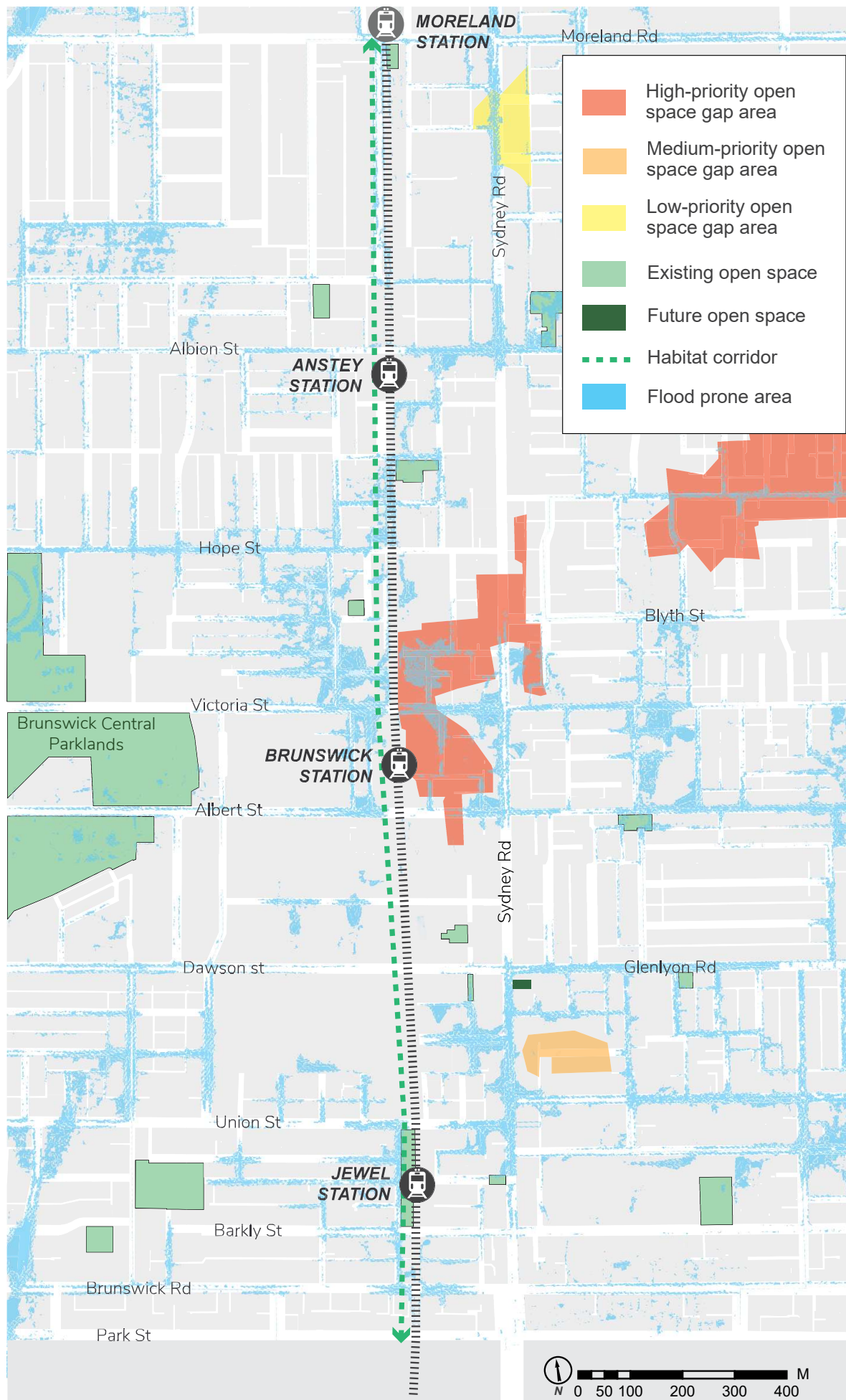


Figure 4: Open space provision

## Activity and Culture

Brunswick has been shaped by numerous waves of migration, creating a proudly diverse population and a mix of enterprise and opportunity. It is valued for its culture: its people and places, neighbourhoods and open spaces, studios, music venues and galleries, cafes and bars, events and festivals, and its boundless creative energy. Reinforcing Brunswick as a hub for creatives and design excellence, is the partnership between Merri-bek City Council, Creative Victoria and RMIT, known as the Brunswick Design District<sup>1</sup>.

Brunswick is at an important point in its evolution. The extent and pace of change and development over the past decade is without precedent in its long and colourful history. The population of the of Brunswick (suburb) grew by almost 3,000 persons over the 2011-2021 period, just short of 3,000 new dwellings were built, giving a population of almost 25,000 living within 13,000 dwellings<sup>2</sup>.

Brunswick has a long history as a place of employment and production. There are over 12,500 jobs within the project area, approximately one quarter of jobs in Merri-bek, with Business Services, Retail / Hospitality (Accommodation and Food), Healthcare, and Industry being the four largest employing industries. Professional services and creative industries are also growing sectors within Brunswick<sup>3</sup>.

Commercial space and activities generally follow the length of Sydney Road and can also be found spread throughout the streets connecting Sydney Road to the Upfield Corridor. The Sydney Road shopping strip functions as a set of smaller, overlapping centres each with a distinct role and function. One of Merri-bek's most significant employment areas is within the Brunswick project area on the western side of the Upfield Train Line. This area contains over half a million square metres of commercial space (more than twice the size of Chadstone) and is valued as a major employment and economic generator for the region. In 2020, the Brunswick Activity Centre generated \$1.3 billion of economic output, equating to 29 per cent of the municipality's outputs.

There is a long history of community activism and engagement in Brunswick, and today there are many advocacy and action groups and engaged individuals. Council recognises the need to engage with our diverse communities and listen to their perspectives, particularly on a transformational project such as elevation of the rail line through Brunswick.

The local culture prevalent in Brunswick is one of its greatest strengths, Brunswick is place where cultural, economic, design and social experimentation flourishes and contribute to the unique character and vibrancy of Brunswick. The Upfield Corridor has acted as a barrier, separating different land uses and activities, and the project will change these circumstances.

There are several key sites near the project site in the control of Government or education providers. These include significant sites at 420 Victoria Street (formerly the Brunswick Business Incubator), 33 Saxon Street (currently known as Siteworks arts and cultural hub), 20 Dawson Street (currently a Victoria Police Depot), the Brunswick Town Hall campus and the RMIT Brunswick campus. These sites are at different stages of renewal and elevated rail will enhance the attractiveness of these sites as places of production, education and employment.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://bdd.org.au/about/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://profile.id.com.au/merri-bek>

<sup>3</sup> <https://economy.id.com.au/merri-bek/employment-locations> & 'A Job In Moreland' (2021)



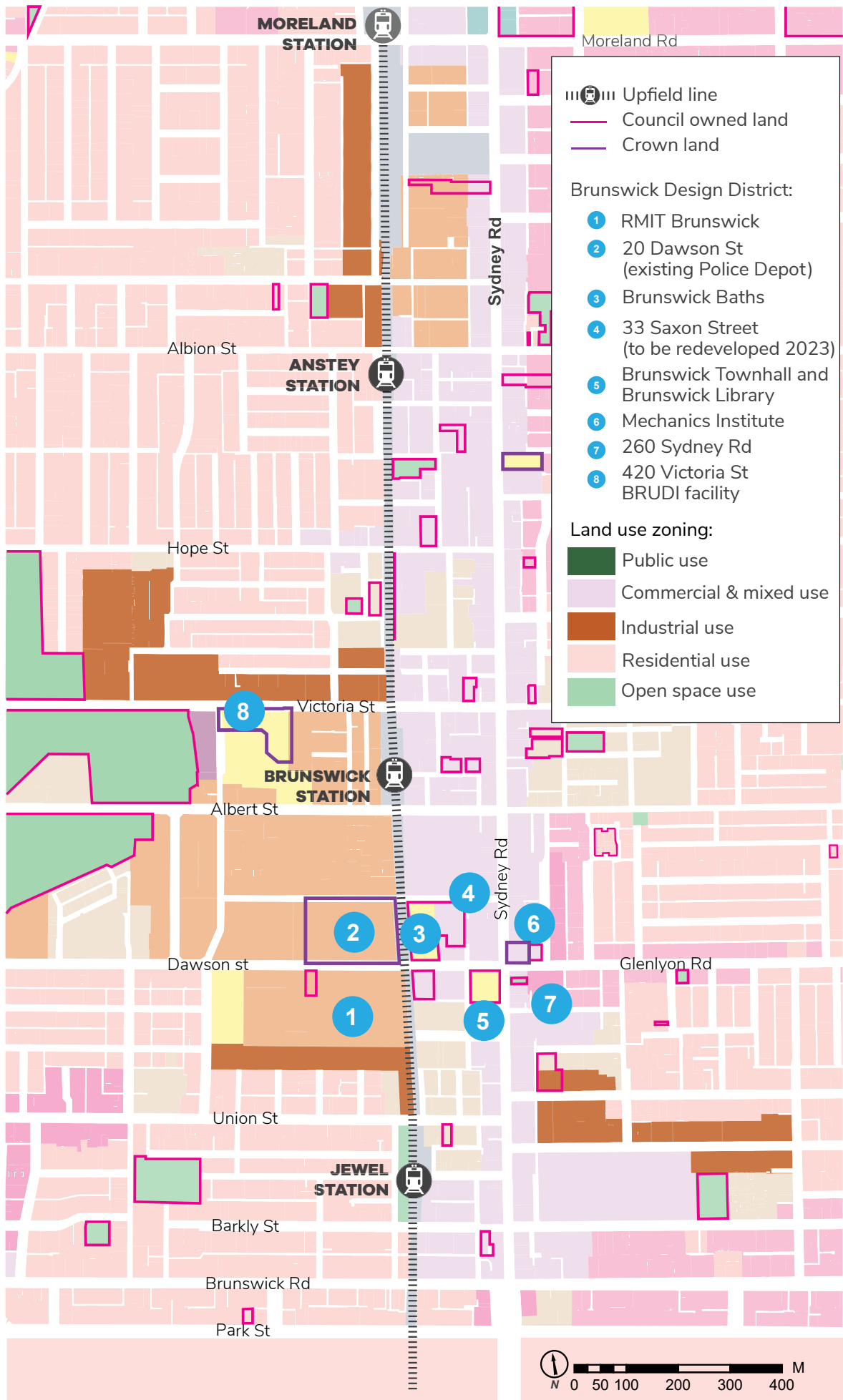


Figure 5: Activity and Planning Context

## Key Reference Documents

Below are the key documents that have been used to consider the context of the Brunswick elevated rail project.

### State Government

- Integrated Water Management Framework, 2019
- Living Melbourne: Our Metropolitan Urban Forest, 2019
- Movement and Place in Victoria, 2019
- Network Development Plan - Metro Rail, 2012
- Open Space for Everyone, 2021
- Plan Melbourne, 2017-2050
- Strategic Cycling Corridors Network Overview, 2020
- Trees for Cooler and Greener Landscapes, 2019
- Victoria's Bus Plan, 2021
- Victoria's Cycling Strategy, 2018-2028

### Merri-bek Council

- Arts and Cultural Plan, 2017-2022
- Arts Infrastructure Plan, 2018-2023
- Bicycle Strategy, 2011-2021
- Brunswick Major Activity Centre Integrated Transport Strategy, 2013
- Brunswick Place Action Plan, 2017
- Brunswick Structure Plan Reference Document, 2016
- Brunswick Structure Plan, 2010
- Capital Works Plan, 2022-2026
- Community Infrastructure Plan, 2022-2032
- Community Vision 2021-2025
- Cooling the Upfield Corridor Action Plan 2018 – 2029
- Council Plan 2021-2025
- Food Systems Strategy, 2020-2024
- Habitat Corridor Map, 2020
- Imagine Moreland Economy and the Arts
- Industrial Land Use Strategy, 2016
- Integrated Transport Strategy, 2019
- Integrated Water Management Strategy, 2020

- Merri-bek City Council Advocacy Priorities, 2022
- Moreland Planning Scheme
- Nature Plan, 2020
- Open Space Strategy, 2012-2022
- Park Close to Home: A Framework to Fill Open Space Gaps and Background Report, 2017
- Parking Implementation Plan, 2019
- Play Strategy, 2016-2021
- Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study, 2010
- Post-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study, 2010
- Statement of Commitment to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities, 2021
- Sydney Road and Upfield Corridor Strategic Framework Plan, final draft Oct 2014
- Urban Forest Strategy, 2017-2027
- Urban Heat Island Effect Action Plan 2016-2026
- Vibrant Brunswick – draft Activity Centre Zone, 2
- Sydney Road and Upfield Corridor Strategic Framework Plan, final draft Oct 2014
- Urban Forest Strategy, 2017-2027
- Urban Heat Island Effect Action Plan 2016-2026
- Vibrant Brunswick – draft Activity Centre Zone, 2