

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations

Melbourne—Tuesday, 27 April 2021

(via videoconference)

MEMBERS

Ms Sarah Connolly—Chair

Mr David Morris—Deputy Chair

Mr Will Fowles

Ms Danielle Green

Mr Paul Hamer

Mr Tim McCurdy

Mr Tim Smith

WITNESSES

Mr Stuart Moseley, Chief Executive Officer,

Mr Peter Murrell, Sustainability Officer, and

Ms Filipina Moore, Director, Strategy, Victorian Planning Authority; and

Dr Jonathan Spear, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer,

Mr Charles Waingold, Director, Networks and Planning, and

Dr Kath Phelan, Principal Planner, Infrastructure Victoria.

The CHAIR: I advise that the sessions today are being broadcast live on the Parliament's website and rebroadcast of the hearing is only permitted in accordance with Legislative Assembly standing order 234. I just want to say thanks to everyone for joining us today at this public hearing for the Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations.

On behalf of the committee I acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of this land, and we pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future and elders from other communities who may be joining us today. I welcome back any members of the public and media who are also joining and watching us today.

This is one of several public hearings that the Environment and Planning Committee will be conducting to inform itself about the issues relevant to this inquiry. Before we begin, I need to point out a couple of things to you. All evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and is protected by parliamentary privilege. What this means is that you can speak freely without fear of legal action in relation to the evidence that you give. However, it is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to comments that you make outside this hearing, even if you are just simply restating what you said here today.

You will receive a draft transcript of your evidence in the next week or so to check and to approve. Corrected transcripts are published on the committee's website and may be quoted from in our final report.

Thanks again to all of our witnesses for joining us today. Can I just remind members and witnesses to mute their microphones when not speaking, to minimise interference. My name is Sarah Connolly, and I am the Chair of the committee. I am also the Member for Tarneit. I am now going to get my colleagues to introduce themselves.

Mr MORRIS: I am David Morris, the Deputy Chair of the committee, the Member for Mornington and also Shadow Minister for Local Government, for housing and for ageing.

Mr FOWLES: I am Will Fowles, the Member for Burwood.

Ms GREEN: I am Danielle Green in the dark here with my camera off because I have got low bandwidth. I am the Member for Yan Yean, which, like Sarah's area, is very much a growth area, as Stuart and the rest of you know at the VPA. A great amount of your work is being done in my electorate. I am also the Parliamentary Secretary for Sport and for regional Victoria.

Mr HAMER: And I am Paul Hamer. I am the Member for Box Hill, and it is good to see some of my former colleagues on this committee call.

The CHAIR: I am going to throw over to Stuart from the VPA to start. If you can introduce yourself, Stuart, and then we will jump to Infrastructure Victoria. I will come back to you for probably a 5- or 10-minute presentation, and then Infrastructure Victoria's, and then we will kick off.

Mr MOSELEY: Certainly. Thank you, Chair, and thank you, committee. My name is Stuart Moseley. I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Victorian Planning Authority. With me from the VPA are Filipina Moore, who is our Director for Policy Coordination, and Peter Murrell, who is our Sustainability Officer.

The CHAIR: Okay. Infrastructure Victoria.

Dr SPEAR: Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Jonathan Spear. I am the Deputy Chief Executive of Infrastructure Victoria. With me are Charles Waingold, who is our Director of Networks and Planning, and also Dr Kath Phelan, who is a Principal Planner with Infrastructure Victoria.

The CHAIR: Stuart, did you want to start with a no more than 10-minute presentation, and then, Infrastructure Victoria, you can do the same. Whether you have got a slide presentation or if you just want to make opening remarks, we are totally fine with either.

Mr MOSELEY: Thank you, Chair. With your leave I will share my screen and just very quickly run through some material.

Visual presentation.

Mr MOSELEY: Thank you for the opportunity. What we thought we would do is not repeat anything that we have put in our written submission but rather raise a few extra insights, particularly around our role in planning for the development of designated urban growth areas across Victoria.

As context, the VPA is a statutory authority reporting to the Minister for Planning. Minister Wynne sends us into a defined area to deliver place-based strategic planning and infrastructure coordination advice around urban growth and development. We are not a developer, so we do not develop land, we do not build things, we do not own infrastructure and we do not issue permits. Our role is very clearly at the planning stage. That said, we certainly try and make sure our plans come to life—that they are deliverable. But building what we plan is a job for others and requires many different jurisdictions and regulatory regimes to happen.

Most of our work, as was mentioned earlier, is in the growth corridors of Melbourne, where we have been active for about 12 years now, and planning for open space and biodiversity protection is front and centre in that work. You would be aware of the Melbourne Strategic Assessment and you would be aware of the network of open space and regional parks that is planned into those corridors and the way that we try and link recreational open space with water management open space and try to get shared amenity from that public purpose land.

Regional parks are a good example of how we can set the framework that we rely on others to deliver. So our structure plans will identify—

Mr FOWLES: Stuart, sorry to interrupt. I cannot speak for anyone else, but these slides are not advancing for me. I do not know whether there is a broadcast button you need to press or something.

Mr MOSELEY: Perhaps I will stop sharing and start again. Thank you for alerting me to that. Let us try again. Fantastic. Thank you. So what I spoke to there was the role of the VPA, which I have covered. This graphic was simply to illustrate by reference to the northern corridor how we start with a corridor growth plan and then work that down into precinct structure plans, following which there are the planning permits that councils issue, and then things get built.

Checking you have got the regional parks slide—yes. So our structure plan sets aside land for future regional parks and protects that by means of a public acquisition overlay, but the acquiring authority has to then follow through and acquire. In other words, it requires the acquisition of private land and then the investment of funding to make that land usable and useful for that purpose. That is not something we do or control, and that funding and the exercise of that discretion impacts on the timing with which regional parks are delivered.

A couple of examples of particular issues we are tackling in our work. So when we are planning urban renewal we do try very hard to design in a multifunction open space network that has biodiversity value. A lot of that is in the public realm, not just parks but also streets, but a lot of it we hope will end up being in the private realm, so we are thinking green roofs, green walls and shared-use communal spaces that might be held in association with commercial or residential buildings. So Arden, for example, will have a strong focus on climate resilience, carbon abatement, street tree canopy cover, a major new public open space, blue-green spaces and water management spaces, but the full delivery of that project will require commitments beyond what the planning system alone can compel. It will require, through the work of Melbourne Water, flood proofing, through the work of the council, managing of public spaces and streets, and government's role as a developer. So government owns 16 hectares of land in the heart of Arden, and we all assume that that land will be developed as an exemplary example of sustainable urban renewal.

Another example that I think will be raised with you by Infrastructure Victoria, because it aligns with their goals too, is our desire to lift sustainability outcomes in the greenfields. We are proceeding now through finalisation of a new set of what we call precinct structure planning guidelines. These set the guidance for the permits that developers lodge to create communities in our greenfields, and we are looking to target innovative approaches to open space provision, a broader approach to green infrastructure—not just public open spaces, integrated water management and increased street tree cover. But an example of the complexity we face is that much as we would like it to be otherwise, simply writing something into our precinct structure plan does not guarantee that it can happen.

Critical, for example, in determining street tree canopy cover is the engineering requirements that electrical and gas utilities place on the proximity of street trees to and the nature of drainage arrangements around services infrastructure. Sometimes those changes happen part way through a development process. So a developer may have approval for a certain configuration of street cross-section with a certain distribution of street trees, and part way through the process of getting that approved the gas and utility street tree clearance requirements can change, do change, making it not possible to achieve that approved planning outcome anymore. So the issue for the committee is that these regulatory regimes do not speak to each other and a change in one can make work directly contrary to what another requires.

Another example is local government street tree planting standards and guidelines, which are very strongly focused around maintenance and safety. Rule of thumb: anything that grows too tall, grows too wide or drops too many leaves or berries or fruit or nuts or twigs, local government does not like. And yet often those are precisely the sorts of street tree outcomes that give the best amenity value and that make a lot of our inner suburbs so desirable.

And then on arterial roads there are requirements that are competing as well around road safety, for example, and clearance of obstacles from trafficable carriageways. And an example of where this all comes together is that something as simple as putting a rain garden in a street watertable can be enormously difficult, if not impossible. So an issue, I guess, I wanted to put on the committee's radar is that achieving the outcomes we aspire to in the greenfields requires levers beyond those that the VPA has or the planning system has.

Thank you. I do not know whether I have used my 10 minutes. I hope you gave me some credit for the early botched PowerPoint. I am happy to now deal with any questions or commentary that the committee might want to take us up on, and I will stop sharing if that is all right. I am happy to make these slides available through your secretariat.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Stuart. I most certainly would love to see a copy of those slides, so if you can, send them through. I am conscious that you are with us, Stuart, until 3—so Infrastructure Victoria, if you have a 5- to 10-minute presentation, then we will have more of a group discussion because we have combined the two groups. But I would say: no more than 10 minutes please as Stuart has to leave by 3 and there are a lot of questions to get through.

Mr MOSELEY: Through you, Chair, I have moved my diary around. I can stay with you until 3.30.

The CHAIR: Oh, great. Fantastic. Done. Thanks.

Visual presentation.

Dr SPEAR: Thank you, Chair. This presentation is one that we have made available to your secretariat as well. I will move through this relatively quickly, however. I do want to thank the committee for the opportunity to appear today and to speak to our submission and highlight some elements of it. Kath, if you have the next slide, please.

A reminder about Infrastructure Victoria: we are the independent infrastructure adviser to the state government and state Parliament. We have three main functions: delivering a 30-year infrastructure strategy, providing independent advice and also undertaking research. This is very much done from an independent, evidence-based and collaborative perspective. The next slide please, Kath. We are currently updating our 30-year infrastructure strategy, and a draft of that has been out for consultation, and of course that is updating the 2016 inaugural 30-year strategy. Much of what we will talk to you about today is drawn from the strategy work we have done, looking at the role of infrastructure and what we define as 'green infrastructure'. We very much consider open space, trees, waterways and parks to be a form of infrastructure that well and truly deserves a focus.

If we go to the next slide, there are a number of reasons why we consider environmental infrastructure to be so important. It certainly has multiple functions from an environmental and ecological and human perspective. Open space has great health benefits both to physical and psychological health, and we know that during the COVID experience many people found the importance of open space to be magnified. As our cities, both metropolitan and regional, and peri-urban areas become more dense the importance of having good-quality open space is heightened. And of course the vegetation that comes with open space is critically important to reduce the urban heat island effect, to provide environmental diversity, to encourage people to be active. So they are very important. And we know this not just from research that has been done from an engineering or a scientific perspective, but from going out and speaking with a variety of communities in Victoria. We have done research on what that what they value, and we provided with our submission a full copy of that research. They told us that as there are increasing densities of population having more than the minimum green space and having connections to nature and open space is really very important.

Can we go to the next slide, please, Kath? What we did in late 2019 was get together a number of focus groups across diverse areas of Melbourne and diverse populations who have experienced increased density in their areas already—so they are not hypothesising about what might be the case; they have experienced density in their areas—and they are places in the west, the north and the east of Melbourne. They highlighted that density can be done really well. Quality urban design is really the number one thing that they are after, and that very much involves delivering more than the minimum of green space integrated with the urban design and a really good public environment with green, connected open space is very important to them as well. That is a very big opportunity for us as Melbourne continues to grow and our regional cities and peri-urban areas continue to grow—that we have got the formula for what people think is a good way of doing things. Green space and connected open space is a critical part of that if we are going to achieve the objectives set out in *Plan Melbourne*.

Thank you, Kath—next slide. There are certainly some challenges for environmental infrastructure. One of them is delivering enough open and green space to meet the needs of our growing population. There are slightly different nuances to this depending upon whether it is an established area or a new growth area. In established urban areas we see that open spaces are often not connected, and it is the connectivity of open spaces that actually makes them more valuable and usable to people—they can use them for active transport, they can use them for clear corridors through established urban areas. And there are pockets of publicly owned land that are not available to be used as open space that give us some opportunity. Some but not all government schools are open for the public to use, some but not all public golf courses are open for the public to use, and there is some opportunity there. The other part of it for established urban areas is we are seeing over time a reduction in the canopy cover on private property.

In new growth areas they are particularly vulnerable to heat. We see that they have generally much fewer trees, and that is critically important if we are to provide shade and support cooling for human health. But also actually if we can reduce those heat effects, it actually also reduces effects on our infrastructure—for example, the energy infrastructure we need to heat our homes. The land available for canopy trees has begun to dramatically reduce in the suburbs. Some of it is related to some of the factors that Stuart Moseley was just speaking about, and it is also to do with the size and types of buildings that we are constructing and crossovers on our streets, which reduce the opportunity for canopy trees.

In the next few slides I will show you some examples of what we are talking about here. This is the centre of Glen Waverley, and this draws on VPA data about open space. What it shows us is there are certainly some of those connected spaces—you can see those green connected spaces—but often they are disjointed, and there are areas, particularly those in red or orange, which could well serve to help connect up those open spaces but they have either closed or limited accessibility. So as we continue to grow our populations in places like Glen Waverley, which is planned to have a Suburban Rail Loop station and increased population, making sure that we have got open space as well as the other infrastructure to keep up with that will be very important.

If we go to the next slide, here there is some data around changes in tree canopy cover. What we are seeing is that over time we are reducing rather than increasing our tree canopy cover and that reduced tree canopy cover is often associated with places where there is new growth occurring. So there is a real opportunity and a necessity for us to pick up the pace with tree canopy cover in these growth areas if the residents in those places are to find them as livable as other parts of Melbourne, and the same applies also for other regional cities in Victoria that are experiencing growth.

Then if we go to the next slide, this is just illustrating again the very close connection between presence or absence of tree canopy cover and areas that are subject to heat vulnerability, where the residents there are more vulnerable to the adverse effects of heat, and it illustrates the health effects and importance of us delivering additional tree canopy cover for those residents.

So there are certainly some opportunities that we have, and they are highlighted in our submission. We can improve the quality of our existing open space, we can open up some of those publicly owned areas of land that are appropriate and suitable for public access, especially to help deliver connectivity or meet the needs of growing populations, and we can consider adding new spaces. That can be done either through planning, like the work that the VPA does in new areas or regenerating existing urban areas. It can also be delivered in established areas although it does get quite expensive to do so. So we think that if additional connectivity is going to be delivered, targeting the open space that gives that connectivity is the area to focus on—so paying extra attention to what the opportunities are where we can connect our open spaces up and also using additional tree coverage on streets to help provide both connectivity but also shade. If we do that, that encourages active transport.

What you can see here are a couple of examples of what we think are good opportunities and examples of open space connectivity. The Fishermans Bend planning is a really good example of a number of public open spaces that are deliberately planned to be connected with green corridors that are also active transport corridors. On the right you can see a more diagrammatic example of the ways in which a variety of green spaces can be connected up so that they form a network.

We have identified in our submission a few opportunities to improve delivery of environmental infrastructure. There are open space contributions made by developers. We think that the manner in which those contributions contribute to delivering open space could do with a review and in particular that delivering connectivity with those open space contributions could be an explicit objective for the use of those contributions. We think that when consideration is given to offsetting of vegetation that is removed, existing trees that are retained during land development should be credited towards achieving tree canopy targets on private land so that there are incentives to retain mature, existing trees.

When it comes to Victorian government funding and where local governments target their budgets, carefully analysing the open space that they have got and strategies to connect them up and further develop them along the lines we have described is something we would encourage. We think that there can be state government contributions to tree planting on public land and also upgrading of water supplies to keep them healthy. And in some, probably limited, instances there are opportunities to have commercial uses of open spaces—cafes and events that both activate those open spaces but also can help fund the improvements to them and any land purchases that are needed to deliver key connectivity.

So as I said earlier, we have a 30-year strategy that we are updating at the moment and we have released draft recommendations that we have been consulting on for several months. Two of the recommendations we want to bring to the committee's attention are that, one, that there be a target of 30 per cent tree canopy coverage in new growth areas that is done by mandating that coverage during precinct development and that it be supported by funding from Victorian government agencies and local government to plant and replace and maintain those canopy trees so the residents in those growth areas can experience the benefits that we described earlier and have at least some equivalence to that in other areas of more established parts of Melbourne and regional cities. We also have a draft recommendation in the strategy to develop an interconnected open space network, that funding be provided that is directed towards achieving that and that the developer open space contribution scheme is reformed so it is explicitly helping to deliver the interconnections of that network and extending Melbourne's urban tree canopy.

More information regarding the 30-year strategy can be found on our website, and we are really looking forward to tabling a final version of that strategy in Parliament for all members of Parliament to see in the middle of this year. Then the Victorian government will be required to respond to that strategy within 12 months of it being tabled. Thank you very much. We are looking forward to any questions or comments that the committee has.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Look, I am going to kick off with the first question. They were great presentations. I am really interested in the tree canopy and urban shade. As you would know, in Tarneit there is not enough. I want to open this question up to you all. Stuart, you talked about lifting the bar and how there are a lot of, I guess, key stakeholders involved. I really want to hear from you: how do we fix this problem? In

areas like mine the nature strips—and we have heard from many, many councils, not just Wyndham city—are this big and cannot take trees that can provide any kind of canopy and shade cover, so people just end up parking their cars in these nature strips. I am keen to hear from you on that. Do you think that developers' open space contributions should be able to include these types of nature strips that really nothing can grow on besides a few shrubs, which add nothing to the local community?

Mr MOSELEY: Open space contributions do not include street verges and street trees at the moment. One could debate whether they should. I think there are two, probably, categories of stuff. I would take the public open space improvement agenda as a separate group of issues, because there is a separate way of providing that. Typically through a PSP and an accompanying infrastructure contributions plan developers are required to make land available, which is then acquired by the utility if it is drainage land, or is vested in the council if it is other public purpose land. Then contributions come from development not just to cover the cost of that land but also its embellishment. I think that is a scheme that IV are suggesting could be looked at and worked harder, and I am sure they are right.

In relation to streets I think it requires a joined-up connection of all of the regulatory instruments that give us the streets we have got. I think we can all say we would like better design outcomes in many of our streets in our growth areas, but to do that would require changes under the *Planning and Environment Act*, the *Local Government Act* and the Acts that regulate utilities and in particular give them power. Utilities have the power regardless of any other legislative regime to regulate the placement of street trees in streets, and they do. They do not typically consult widely when they do that, and it is not uncommon for us to hear from developers: 'I had a permit to build this, and now I can't, and it means that my street tree provision rate has been driven down by this exogenous and unexpected development'. I guess, as with anything—any change you want—it is a combination of the right sticks and carrots. So I would suggest a review of all of the legislation that is giving us the streets we are getting and figuring out what policy outcome we actually want, and if we want 30 per cent street tree cover, then let us make all the regulatory instruments line up.

There is no point in the VPA saying, 'We want 30 per cent' if the utilities do not share that goal, or rather they would place maintenance costs for their utilities above that goal. So it may be that we do need to look again at street cross-sections. The VPA publishes a thing called the Engineering Design and Construction Manual, which was intended to give growth area councils a consistent point of reference for the design of infrastructure, including streets. In practice, we rely on the councils, each of them, to decide whether or not they will adopt that manual. Some of them do, some of them do not. Again, if there is a view that for the public good we should have a consistent approach to the design cross-section of our streets, which makes it easy to provide street tree canopy, which makes it easy to provide rain gardens and street water tables, then perhaps we should look at requiring a consistent approach to that. So I guess my answer to your question is: first understand the blockages and then remove them and try and get all these different regimes joined up better than they are. I hope that is helpful.

The CHAIR: Thank you. So just on the back of that, it would be helpful if there was an actual target that was in place to help lead. Okay.

Mr MOSELEY: Yes, and we firmly believe that you set the target and then work back from that. I might just add too that there are other policy forces at play here, of course. The reason that street widths have been squeezed over the last decade is in part because land has become much more valuable and therefore that is a way you can help keep prices down for home buyers. Obviously you need to debate that. There is no point in having affordability if it is not the right environment, but equally if one were to legislate tomorrow that all streets must be X metres wider than they currently are, the immediate and direct impact of that would be a hike in house prices, which would have other issues.

The CHAIR: Okay. Infrastructure Victoria?

Dr SPEAR: Thank you. Building on top of what Stuart has said, our draft recommendation has been absolutely that the setting of a target is something that we should be aspiring to, and we have suggested a 30 per cent tree canopy coverage target in new growth areas. The detail of that, at least as we have sketched out in the draft strategy, is that it is a mix of public and private land to achieve that outcome. So you look across the whole of the growth area and try to achieve a mix of both private land and public, and that there probably should be at least some elements carved out for different players to contribute. We have suggested that at least 30 per cent of that tree canopy coverage should be on private land rather than all being parks and so forth, so that you are not getting, I suppose, it all being delivered through public open space but no private open space,

no tree shading on the footpaths and close to houses, because that mix of tree canopy cover in both private and residential areas as well as public space is going to achieve better results. That is also part of the connectivity—that you can get the benefits of tree canopy coverage in the street, in connected parks and in people's private residences. So we certainly think that the state and local government departments and agencies have a role to play in delivering and funding some of this, but that permit requirements and developer contributions should also be part of achieving at least that 30 per cent contribution.

So that is really what we found, and the figure that we have had very much reflects what Stuart has described in terms of some of the challenges and trade-offs with the role of utilities and the role of some of those other economic factors. So we think picking that target and focusing it on new growth areas, because they are the ones where we have a relatively clean slate to start with and they are the ones that have the greatest need for increased tree canopy.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I am going to throw over now to David.

Mr MORRIS: Thanks, Sarah. I am interested in pursuing this a little bit because I am just really thinking about the practicality. The 30 per cent target is a starting point as far as I am concerned. I am certainly in favour of the approach, but I am just wondering, particularly in newer areas, how it is actually going to work in a practical sense. The conflation of public open space contribution and road reserves first arose in a conversation we had with Greater Bendigo. They were talking about an area where a particular developer was trying to get sufficient width into the road reserve to enable paving and footpaths and an area big enough to grow decent-sized trees. I am paraphrasing their evidence, but basically the developer said, 'Well, that's fine. As long as you take that as a public open space contribution, then I'm happy with that', which of course was not what the council was trying to achieve. I am just sort of thinking about that and Stuart's comments about the impact on affordability, so the contraction of road reserve width, and I am also thinking about the average lot size. IV is talking about a proportion of canopy cover on private land. The average lot in a new subdivision is not going to be able to accommodate a decent-sized tree, and as you rightly observed, if we are setting aside more space for trees, then that is going to impact on housing affordability. You know, how can we make it work? I guess that is the question. I am not going to direct it. I am interested in comments from both, if I may.

Mr MOSELEY: I am happy to lead off, Chair, if that is acceptable, and simply comment that you have hit on exactly the dilemma—that there are competing community interests and policy objectives at play here. One of the things the VPA is very keen on pursuing, but which is quite a difficult nut to crack, is making the step change into new urban form, where we can sustain it. Without commenting on Greater Bendigo, which is in a different context, in Melbourne's greenfields I think we have pretty much gone as far as we can in fitting a lot of house onto a little bit of land. You know, people are getting more floor space in their house than they ever have, although that has stabilised recently, but lot sizes are smaller than they ever have been, although they are not as small in Melbourne as they are now in some other cities, but nevertheless. Whereas what many designers will demonstrate is that if you adopt a different housing form—be that row housing, terrace housing or low-rise apartments—you can fit more house, more people and more open space on the same amount of land.

The problem is our development industry is not tooled up to deliver that. They say, and I defer to their expertise, that it does not work economically in Melbourne's housing market. They would also say to build at that density you need amenity in place. That really means transport, and transport lags behind in most of our growth areas. Whereas in some other places, if you go to the north-western corridor of Sydney, the transport is in there first, and that enables investment in density earlier. I guess, in a physical sense, it is a design challenge that a designer can solve. In an economic sense and in a market behaviour sense, it is a lot harder. And as you say, if you legislate to require more space on each block for a tree, which you can certainly do, that will have an impact on housing affordability.

And I also want to acknowledge your point about the greater road reserve width being credited as open space. I am certain that is a discussion that could be had in Bendigo. It does not happen in Melbourne's greenfields because there is a different system for setting it aside, but the compromise is essentially the same one. So I hope those observations are relevant, but it is a difficult issue.

Mr MORRIS: Yes. Thanks, Stuart. Any comment from IV?

Dr SPEAR: Yes. If I could add to that, thank you, Mr Morris: interestingly, Stuart's initial response is exactly my initial response as well, which is that better design can coexist with tree canopy cover and can actually have better amenity—that they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. And they are not necessarily

even more expensive to deliver—well-designed homes that also have at least a proportion of tree canopy cover. When we are talking about costs, of course these are costs to the developer and to the consumer, to the household—the purchaser. We probably also need to think about the long-run costs beyond the initial developer and initial purchaser—the future purchasers and future occupants of both that house and that area, and also the other costs in terms of health and transport and other costs that we know that we incur as a society and as governments if we do not set this right from the start, and we are already seeing some of that.

Maybe the other comment I would make: Stuart referred to transport, and rightly so. Of course better connected green space in growth areas does at least give the start of a viable active transport option—to walk or cycle—where there is tree canopy cover and connectivity, which might not otherwise happen. So they are some things I would probably add to Stuart's comments.

Mr MORRIS: Jonathan, given what Stuart said about the development industry's reaction, which is probably reflecting the market, it seems that if that change is going to be achieved, it is a matter of changing expectations and changing desires, which is a fairly complex exercise to undertake.

Dr SPEAR: Yes, that is right. There is a real chicken-and-egg dilemma here about what people desire and what people are offered. That is something that I think could be assisted by the state very clearly setting a target for the tree canopy cover that we are going to have in growth areas and the amenity we are going to experience in growth areas and then what that means for the design of those precincts—the sort of work the VPA do, but also the requirements for developers. So if there is a clear requirement and everyone has to accord with that requirement that there be a degree of tree canopy cover on private open space, then they will get that signal and they will need to adapt. I think it is unreasonable for us to expect that they will behave otherwise in the absence of such a clear signal.

Mr MORRIS: If you do not give them any choice, they have got to go that way. Yes.

Dr SPEAR: Yes, that is right.

Mr MOSELEY: If I could just add to that to put in a plug for the chicken-and-egg argument, I think it needs to be sticks and carrots, if I am not mixing my metaphors here. I think government has a role in making it possible for leading development players to show people—they will not buy it unless they can see it, so someone needs to take the first risk. That might be an agency like Development Victoria or it might be a joint venture. I do not know if committee is aware of Aquarevo, down in the south-east, which was a joint venture between SE water and Villawood, which has achieved exemplary standards of integrated water management, and not because they were required to—in fact they had to fight hard against multiple restrictive regulatory regimes to be able to build what they have built. But they were committed to showing leadership, and for every party who shows that leadership it makes it easier for the next person to say, 'That's what I want'. I think in addition to the setting of the target and to the removal of regulatory barriers to achieving that target, a demonstration project or ideally more than one would be very powerful in showing how this new and better design can actually, as Jonathan said, be a win-win-win. It need not be more expensive, it will get better outcomes and people will want to live in it, but we need to show them.

Mr MORRIS: Jonathan, can I just ask: to achieve the proportion of canopy on private land that you are seeking, in terms of coming to that target did you do any work around what is actually being achieved at the moment and what sort of a lift is required to get to where you are stressing we need to go?

Dr SPEAR: Yes, we have looked at that. I am not sure, Kath, if you have the numbers on hand, but it is a significant uplift for growth areas compared to that which currently exists. Thirty per cent is getting to or even slightly exceeding that which we have in what we call the leafy eastern suburbs of Melbourne. But I might allow Kath to perhaps add to that, if you would like to, Kath.

Dr PHELAN: Yes. Look, I think RMIT, who I know you have met with previously, have done a lot of work with CSIRO through the clean air and urban landscapes hub to actually look at tree canopy cover change over time. DELWP are the custodians of that data, and we drew on that for our work. At the moment they have the 2014 and 2018 data which shows those changes. The change is particularly noticeable, though, in established areas of Melbourne, and in fact the map that we had as part of our presentation shows there are actually increases in the growth areas, because they are coming off a very, very low base. It is really important also to note that the growth areas, particularly in the north and the west, are traditionally grasslands. They had not been heavy bush areas that were then cleared for agriculture but rather had been those really important managed

grass landscapes. But we have really come to the position where we see those landscapes are so dramatically changing as urban development comes that there is a really strong imperative to actually plant more trees in those places. I hope that clarifies.

Mr MORRIS: Yes. Thank you both. That has been helpful. Thanks, Sarah.

The CHAIR: Thanks, David. I am just going to throw to Danielle. I know she had a question off the back of David's.

Ms GREEN: Thank you all. With the discussion around the nature strips and also the idea of the carrot and stick for changing what is offered to the market—Stuart, firstly to you—I suppose I blanched a little bit when you said that public transport always lags. I think that comes from a place where public transport is only considered to be on metal rails, not on pneumatic tyres. I have seen examples in my electorate that show you can get buses in early. Part of Epping North—it is no longer in my electorate—had its first bus in there when there were six households there. So you can actually do it.

But I wondered in terms of trying to deliver more trees and saying to developers, 'Well, okay, you could do the nature strips', what about the way Barcelona does its nature strips in that they are the centre of the boulevards? The services are underneath. They have got the trees there. Everyone walks along the middle. You have got cycleways. The only vehicle traffic that is allowed through there is service vehicles to shops. Then the alternate streets are where the buses and cars go. I mean, it is all very well for all of us to lecture the development industry and say, 'Well, you need to lead with better design'. How about the VPA with its precinct structure plans mandating that some of those developments, if we are delivering a 20-minute city, actually have those wide medians in the middle to encourage cycleways and walking and have buses in alternate streets?

Mr MOSELEY: Thanks for the question, and yes, I would like to correct the record. I was referring to heavy rail. My language was not precise on that, but the context was to invest in density, and typically it is fixed transit that has that effect. But your point about buses being able to be in much earlier—and in some cases they do go in much earlier—is absolutely right. So thank you for correcting me on that.

Ms GREEN: Thank you for clarifying there, but I think if we are also talking about the 20-minute city, and now with people working closer to home, it might mean we do not need to have as much investment in heavy rail and other things because people will be able to work closer to home and to walk or cycle under trees to a local job.

Mr MOSELEY: Yes. I think where we are making the same point is that if the development sector can see that amenity coming, they are more inclined to invest in putting more people around it.

Moving on, though, to the substance of your question, yes, a green median can be a fantastic way of getting tree canopy, amenity, active recreation and active transport into release areas, but much as I would love it to be otherwise, the VPA cannot mandate that design response. We do not control the levers. The planning system does not control the levers over that. It comes down to the council who will be the owner of that road accepting its design as one that they will be the custodian of.

If I can give you a real-life example—and this is not in your electorate, Danielle, but it is in a growth area—our PSP required a green corridor to link a neighbourhood open space with an activity centre. A proponent came forward with a really innovative design response, which was pretty much exactly as you described: a wide median with generous-height street trees, a walking path and some public art—what would have been an attractive movement corridor with biodiversity value and amenity value. The council would not have a bar of it because—and I am not kidding here—'How would they get the mowers onto it? You'd have to take them across the carriageway. It would encourage people to cross the street just anywhere, when really they should only be crossing at signalised points. The trees would drop leaves onto the road, and that would create a safety hazard', and on it went. We had to get involved. So that was coming from the engineering staff. We had to bring the council's design staff into the discussion and escalate it to the director level before that council actually did agree to consider that design response.

When you make it hard for people to do the right thing they eventually will stop trying, and I think that is my point: make all of these regimes work together to make it easy to do the right thing and hard to do the wrong thing. If it is hard to do the right thing, well, how can we expect people to do it? I would love to see and be empowered to do this or be charged with pushing more of these solutions, but it takes a number of different stakeholders to come to the table.

Ms GREEN: That could be a recommendation that might come from our committee—that the VPA either be empowered in that design way or that it be inserted in council planning schemes in order to deliver more environmental infrastructure and deal with the heat island effect, as well as the health impacts of walking and cycling more.

Mr MOSELEY: Well, without putting words in the mouth of the committee, there is certainly a need to align the regulatory signals to achieve the outcome you want. If it is a tree cover target, that is a great thing, but we must align all the regimes to make it possible. There is no point having a target which then regulations actually make it impossible to achieve.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Danielle. I am going to throw to Will.

Mr FOWLES: Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you, everyone, for your presentations. They have certainly been thought provoking. I guess I am keen to understand, given the much longer term remit that you have than perhaps other entities that we have heard evidence from, just what you consider to be the biggest challenge in delivering environmental infrastructure over the much longer term—let us say the next 50 years. Perhaps we will start with the VPA.

Mr MOSELEY: Wow, that is a great question. I would say it starts at the very highest level with the identification and protection of those biodiversity banks or corridors that really must be protected in situ. Melbourne has the Melbourne Strategic Assessment, but Geelong does not, Bendigo does not and Ballarat does not. The growth we are seeing there now is very significant. And then I think even in Melbourne—and I am not an expert on this—the implementation of that strategic assessment and the funding collected for the purpose of acquiring land has not quite worked out as planned, so I would say that is the first thing to get right.

I would then say a lot of the ideas that Infrastructure Victoria are feeding in are some really good ones to, you know, rethink how we can do things better in what is going to be a denser urban environment. Anywhere you go we are going to be wanting to make better use of urban land and have more people in 20-minute neighbourhoods close to the jobs and services they need. Then related to that is the design question. I think the old days were of thinking of environmental infrastructure as being basically a park or your backyard; I think we need to be more sophisticated. Backyards are under pressure, and with parks there are only a certain number you can afford to have. What about streets, laneways, medians, transport corridors? What about green roofs, green walls? What about communal spaces? So I think a broader and more sophisticated understanding of how green infrastructure, a connected network of environmental assets, includes but is bigger than your park or your backyard. Jonathan mentioned schools, institutions, cemeteries, water management lands; all these things have biodiversity value.

We struggle with that in the growth areas where land is categorised as ‘encumbered’ or ‘unencumbered’ open space. Encumbered open space means it gets wet every now and again and has a drainage function, notwithstanding that for most of the year you might be able to walk on it, kick a footy on it, ride on it. Still, it is encumbered. And then we have unencumbered land. One is looked after by Melbourne Water and one is looked after by the council, and there is sort of somehow this magic line, whereas in fact they are all part of—or should be part of an interconnected, green, environmental network. So I guess that is the third thing I would offer: the need to look at that in totality and make it easier to look at it as an integrated network of environmental values.

Mr FOWLES: Thank you. Jonathan, your team?

Dr SPEAR: I actually have very similar responses to Stuart’s. I entirely agree that setting a plan for the network of open space, both in Melbourne but also in regional cities and peri-urban areas, is really important and then just relentlessly and persistently over time delivering it. And where we have to make a call about what we are focusing on, we need to make sure that we are focusing on the high-quality, connected open space and achieving that through the combination of development contributions, direct funding by governments, value capture sometimes in some of these areas where there is redevelopment, particularly in established areas, and better using state-owned lands. That is only one.

On the design point that we have been talking about a bit, the really interesting feedback that we had when we did this deliberative engagement with community members—and we will provide this report to the committee—was they were very clear with us that the old quarter-acre block kind of aspiration is not one that is universally held and the expectation that open space is private open space in the backyard is not one that is

universally held. There were some really interesting discussions amongst members of the community that we were with, where they were debating with each other about this change. So that really underlines, I think, the importance of us thinking about open space as being a real mix of public and private open space.

The design responses that we see that are really good give some private open space and also in some ways give back through design in the public realm with public space and blend public and private open space so people are getting that sense of greenness, of openness, of connectivity. I think that is just underscored, especially, in established areas where we want to actually deliver greater degrees of density, because it is a much better use of existing and planned infrastructure, especially some of that heavy rail that Ms Green was referring to before. We have done modelling that shows that there are really much better outcomes in transport accessibility if we can have greater density in areas where there is good heavy rail, and it is between two and four times more expensive to deliver the same infrastructure in a greenfields context than in established areas. So we really want to be delivering this really good design response for public and private land and connectivity, especially in established areas, and that is the one we know from what the public has told us that they really highly value.

Mr FOWLES: Can I take you to, I guess, an intersection point of environmental and transport infrastructure, which is bike paths. Unlike rail—heavy or light—and unlike roads there is no single coordinating entity. Bike paths have the additional complication not just of jurisdictional interface but then interfacing with a whole bunch of other transport modes. So in my patch Gardiners Creek crosses roads, it crosses rail. In the process of getting from the top of Gardiners Creek to the Yarra River the bike trail crosses Crown land, council land—three different councils—some private land, some easement-type land. There is enormous complexity with all of that. Is there a better way for us to plan and deliver what is a mode of transport that is clearly increasing in popularity and one would think will continue to do so?

Dr SPEAR: Well, Mr Fowles, I am intimately familiar with the Gardiners Creek trail. I have ridden it for several decades now, and I know every turn and every one of those crossings that you are referring to.

Mr FOWLES: Well, fix it then!

Dr SPEAR: It actually is a really highly used corridor. In Infrastructure Victoria's work we have identified a few opportunities, especially the opportunity to substitute motorised transport with active transport, with cycling, and that is both for Melbourne CBD but also into activity centres like Monash, for example, which is closely related to Gardiners Creek, and Box Hill as well. So what we have recommended is that—we cannot necessarily upgrade all the bike paths and connections immediately, so some prioritisation needs to be done and there should be prioritisation for safe, separated cycling corridors that connect people to those sorts of activity centres in the first place, so Melbourne CBD but also activity centres like Box Hill and Monash, for example, and similarly in regional cities. And there is a role for the state to contribute to that, and I think that is a key part of the change. You have observed the collection of different responsibilities here. If we want to get the level of active transport and the safety delivered in a timely way, it is likely that the state is going to need to step up and contribute to the prioritisation and co-funding some of those priority corridor deliveries.

Mr FOWLES: I will give Stuart an opportunity to comment on that, but perhaps just shape the question this way: in providing in PSPs and other planning mechanisms for active transport, are you seeing much evidence of innovation away from just ever widening road reserves to provide additional lanes for pedestrians and cyclists and actually moving to genuine grade separation, like true differentiation of those modes into quite separate transport paths, corridors or roads as required?

Mr MOSELEY: Yes, we are. I have got to say probably driven more by the developers, who genuinely want to design some of these good things into their estates. They see it as a real marketing advantage. We are immensely encouraged by some of what we see developers doing but also by the link-and-place theory that is coming more strongly out of transport now. I do not know whether the committee has been briefed on this. It is basically a way of looking at roads as sitting somewhere on a spectrum of are they predominantly a linking function or are they a place? Without going into the detail, a freeway is entirely a linking function, and nobody in their right mind would treat it as a place. Whereas a laneway in South Melbourne is almost entirely a place—it is not much used as a link at all, but people do use them for various other purposes. And we push hard trying to think that through for how it works in growth areas. If you want these road reserves to be useful for active transport and to have high amenity value, then do not design them as six lanes of 80-kilometre-an-hour traffic, design them for a lower design speed with narrower carriageways.

That is all encouraging stuff, but it is still an arm wrestle to get it to land in an actual environment. I do not know whether the committee is familiar with Williams Landing, but in the town centre there there is a real ongoing struggle between should the road through the town centre be designed to get cars through it as quickly as possible or should it be designed to actually facilitate shared use and pedestrianisation and retail activity and kerbside dining? Obviously the landowners in the centre want more of that, but the roads authority has got an arterial network that it has to design and build and keep functioning.

I hope that has answered your question. Yes, we are encouraged but there is still long way to go, and I suppose the further factor is cycling itself. Being a cyclist, I know it falls into two camps: there are the commuters, or the people with purpose, who want to get as fast as they can from point A to point B, and then there are the recreational people who want to be out with the family, meandering at low speed. And group A are not always compatible with group B. But this is really important, and I think we are seeing better outcomes, but there is still long way to go.

Mr FOWLES: Yes. Well, thank you. I have some funding questions, Chair, but I will wait until everyone else has gone if you like.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Will. We might throw to Paul and then I will come back around the table, Will. Paul.

Mr HAMER: Thanks, Sarah. I have got a couple of questions. This is a question probably primarily to Stuart about some of the tensions that you might find in a PSP where you are trying to develop a larger parkland. My understanding is that most PSPs will have multiple owners—multiple developers will have parcels of land within the PSP. That would indicate to me that there will be some developers whose land may almost entirely be earmarked as the future open space area. Now, that might be because they have particular conservation values or perhaps it is the low point of the whole area so there is less you can do with that land. But how are those, I guess, trade-offs balanced? I mean, you are still purchasing the land but it obviously becomes less valuable for the developer to develop their particular parcel. So I was just wondering: what sort of approaches and mechanisms are in place to actually achieve those outcomes, and are there any barriers that you have found in the process that from I guess a regulatory or legislative point of view could be improved?

Mr MOSELEY: So at the high level of the hierarchy, like the regional park example that I put on screen earlier, there is an acquisition process. There is a public acquisition overlay that goes on and an acquiring authority is obliged then at a time of their choosing to come along and purchase it at a reasonable price, and whilst it is not usually the same returns you would get from urban development, the landowners usually are fairly compensated.

The trouble there tends to be getting certainty. Landowners want to know, ‘Well, when are you going to take my land? I’m sitting here now and the development frontier is coming out towards me’, and so the main challenge there is for the acquiring authority to have the money, be in a position to make an offer and to reach a landing at a timing and at a value that the owner—but there are processes, so the *Land Acquisition and Compensation Act* gives the owners a process to resolve that. That is the higher order regional parks really.

Within a PSP—that was the second slide I showed, the Donnybrook-Woodstock slide—the way the regime works is, broadly speaking, simplifying it, there is what is called a land equalisation arrangement. So if 15 per cent of the land across the PSP is open space, then in theory every owner is responsible for giving 15 per cent of their land. But it is recognised that is not a logical outcome, so if you are overproviding, let us say you have to give away—give away; you do not give it away—let us say you have to make available 30 per cent of your land, you get a compensation payment to compensate you for the extra 15 per cent. Equally, if you do not have to make any of your land available, if your land is all for urban development, you have to compensate everybody else to the tune of 15 per cent. The way that works is a council runs a land bank and an equalisation fund, and that is given effect through the infrastructure contributions plan. It is quite a recent regime and it seems to work quite well. Councils are concerned about price escalation and how that is managed, because obviously land valued in a certain way one year will be worth more in a couple of years time, and owners are still concerned about when they will get compensated if they are providing in excess of the amount they are required to provide. Then there is the challenge of joining it all up. If you have somebody developing over here and somebody developing over here and the person in the middle waits, then obviously these things are not going to connect for some time. But there has been a lot of effort gone into getting that regime right for local open spaces. It is too early to tell really, but it seems to be working reasonably well. That is my take. Fil or Pete, would you add anything to that?

Ms MOORE: No, nothing. I think you have explained the tensions quite well there, Stuart.

Mr MOSELEY: I hope that answers the question.

Mr HAMER: Yes. That makes sense, Stuart. That is good. Now, I have got a question on a different matter, and this is probably more to IV. I was just wondering whether you had done any research, particularly into the quantitative benefits of various types of open space. I think there is quite a lot of research in relation to the general benefits of open spaces and why we deliver them. There is some scientific research particularly about the urban heat island effect, which we spoke about earlier. But in particular down to that local level and the benefit of providing a certain size of park or providing parks within a certain distance per 1000 residents or whatever that number might be, I am just wondering whether you have done any research on that. I would be interested to know and to receive that.

Dr SPEAR: I will start and then maybe Kath will like to add to it. We have done some research. It may not be quite what you are suggesting. Several years ago Infrastructure Victoria did some econometric work looking at the value that people place on the amenity of some of especially the larger scale parks that might be within several hundred metres or a kilometre or further from their homes, and we did that by looking at relative land values that you see on properties. That is a research paper that has been published, and we would be happy to provide it to the committee for information. Kath, would you like to add anything to that?

Dr PHELAN: Yes, I could add a couple of things. Billie Giles-Corti at RMIT is probably the leading researcher in this space. I know she has some very firm ideas about minimum sizes of open spaces, particularly with physical activity. But also in addition to that, what you want to see in open spaces really depends on the characteristics of your local community. I think there is a real argument to be made that a lot of these decisions around sizes of spaces need to be done through open space planning—so that strategic planning process at a local government level. We at Infrastructure Victoria are very cautious around applying benchmarks to the particular provision of any kind of infrastructure, particularly outside of the growth areas. In the growth areas it is a little bit easier because you have brand new communities, but when you are looking in established areas you really need to consider what are your existing assets, what are their functions and how can they be upgraded to perhaps, for example, take on different functions. So there is no easy way of doing this, unfortunately.

One gap that we have identified in some of the work we have done post COVID is that there is a lack of collection of data on the use of open space, and so we made some suggestions in our submission that perhaps some more data could actually be more systematically collected on how people use open space. One example of this is the City of Melbourne are running a session as part of their knowledge week later this week at Argyle Square to actually look at some new technology around looking at people and animal use of spaces. So there is some quantification there too, which I think is very interesting.

I think one other gap also that we have noticed is that while we argue very strongly for the benefits of a connected open space network, as planners we do not have many good tools to really measure that connectivity too. We know from the research that connectivity definitely brings benefits, but that comes more out of ecological literature. So I think there is a bit of a gap from the urban planning side to really try and assess where are those gaps, what is the value of actually filling them and how we will do them.

Mr HAMER: Thanks for that. Other than that, I guess, is there value in extending any of that research beyond what you have just suggested in those two gaps? Are there other areas, do you think, that need further understanding?

Dr PHELAN: Well, I would actually just put in a plug for what DELWP has been doing on the tree canopy cover. I hope the committee might consider a recommendation that there should be regular funding provided for continued collection of that canopy data, because the interesting thing about that data is it is not just about trees, it also collects data on grass and shrubs as well, so we get the whole vegetation spectrum there. Actually having data that you can analyse over time is really important to then being able to make recommendations about what we might do in the future. So I would strongly support more of that kind of research, absolutely.

Dr SPEAR: I think maybe the other thing I would add to that goes back to the earlier discussion we were having about the costs for developers and initial homebuilders that Mr Morris was raising. Of course we were then talking about, 'Well, okay, but what are the broader long-run costs and benefits of having good green space—costs to both state and local government about having it and not having it but also to the community,

the health system and so forth?'. I think continuing to gather and integrate those costs and benefits together would be of some utility to shed some further light on this trade-off we are making not just at the point of property development but through the multidecade life of any particular area. This goes a bit to Mr Fowles's point about when you think medium to long term. So continuing to collect data about costs and benefits overall I think would contribute to the quality of this discussion.

Mr HAMER: Yes. Thanks very much for that.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Paul. I am just mindful of time, members. I know that Will and Danielle had another question. David, I just want to ask you first: did you have any further—no? Will.

Mr FOWLES: Yes, for my one the question is short; the answer might be longer. I am happy for you to take it on notice. But what do you consider to be the most successful funding mechanisms for long-term infrastructure?

Dr SPEAR: Would you like to start, Stuart?

Mr MOSELEY: Yes, and I would prefer not to take it on notice, because I think I would never leave it alone if I took it on notice. Infrastructure funding: you will be able to see the reviews. Every state has looked at this and every jurisdiction ends up having some quite strong and clear principles on how infrastructure funding regimes should work, and every state is mired in bureaucratic wrangling thereafter. They are always complex, they are always protracted, and it is a very vexed area because it is continually caught in policy tension that is very hard to resolve. I would say the best models are the ones that have a specified, transparent base rate that is only exceeded in really rare circumstances. So everybody knows what they are dealing with. It is not bespoke on a case-by-case basis. It is not argued on a case-by-case basis. It does not have to be arm wrestled through VCAT or whatever every time, but it is clear: this is how much per dwelling, hectare, square metre you have to pay. That is consistent and everybody has to pay based on your setting. Developers put that into their feasons, and after the initial shock they get used to it, and if they are getting something back—if they can see that money being spent on infrastructure—then they kind of can see that that is delivering them something. They never like paying money, but they like seeing stuff invested. Councils know what they are getting, and everybody can proceed with certainty. I think the problems start when a system is so complex and it costs so much to administer on a case-by-case basis and nobody really knows what they are up for. So that is my gross generalisation of what is a very complicated area.

I think in Melbourne we have the problem that the growth areas have a well-established regime. It is very complex and difficult to administer, but at least it is there. Established Melbourne does not have one, so if you are buying a house in greenfields Melbourne, you are paying—pick a number—10 grand-ish towards the state as a contribution to state infrastructure, and you are paying a much bigger number—\$40 000 or \$50 000—to the council for local infrastructure, and you know what you are dealing with. If you are buying an apartment in suburban Melbourne, with some very rare exceptions, you are not paying either of those charges, and I think there is plenty of room for debate about a consistent, predictable, transparent infrastructure funding regime that will help make some of the ideas IV are having more reliably and clearly delivered. So I hope that is helpful at a very high level. I am happy to come back for your next inquiry into infrastructure funding.

Mr FOWLES: No worries, thanks, Stuart. IV?

Dr SPEAR: Yes, I certainly agree with many of Stuart's points. So the predictability, relative simplicity and collecting funding to contribute to infrastructure in a timely way as well, rather than being a perfect yet overly sophisticated regime, is something I think we need to be very mindful of, and avoiding some of those arbitrary boundaries that Stuart was just identifying. We have seen the same thing. You cross one line and you are paying a contribution but you cross another and you are not.

Probably a couple of other considerations that are sort of fundamental to good funding regimes are a fair assignment of private versus public benefit, so taking into account that in many instances when infrastructure is delivered there is a degree of private benefit, either to the developer or to the unit residents, but there is often also a broader public benefit. A good example of that actually sometimes is utilities and public transport, where there are private benefits to individuals but there is also a broader network effect that it is fair that a broader range of users contribute to. So setting that up from the start as a relatively simple way of assigning the weight of the costs is important. Those, I think, are the key elements to an enduring, predictable, successful infrastructure funding regime.

Mr FOWLES: Great. Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Will. Danielle.

Ms GREEN: Thanks, everyone. It is just a really interesting conversation. A bit like Stuart, we could go on with this stuff for hours. This is a question that I have asked other witnesses, and, Stuart, you would be very aware of this. The City of Whittlesea has great planning controls around protecting its river red gums, and I think that the slide that showed that the amount of tree cover—I mean, it is still not enough in the north but it actually has not fallen; it has increased slightly.

It disturbed me when I asked DELWP before lunch about, ‘Well, how do we get other councils to be as vigilant about their vegetation so we are not having this loss?’, and—I might have been misunderstanding their response—it was kind of like they said that, you know, there are some councils that are better than others and the others will catch up. From seeing that slide from you and what we know is happening with urban heat islands—it is just catastrophic, I think, for Sarah’s area in the west—and the fact that we have got climate change, are we getting to the tipping point where we cannot actually say ‘Councils, it’s okay for you to catch up in 10 or 20 years time’ when we have had all this growth occur without the proper environmental infrastructure and tree cover?

We have also heard that we have got a shortage of planners. No little boy or girl ever said, ‘I want to be a planner when I grow up’—and what you have said about the regions as well. And it is so hard for them to get planning. Should we as a state be saying we have got to the point, particularly environmentally, that we need to be taking back some of the planning powers and relieving the burden on local government and either investing it in a body like the VPA or having regional planning authorities so we can get more consistency, like the City of Whittlesea?

And just before you answer that—Will, I was going to say, to get a bike path perpendicular to the Mernda rail I got Minister Allan to get me to chair a meeting to deliver it, and I think it was about 3 kilometres long. There were 17 different entities and 50 people at the first meeting that I chaired, so I think we urgently need to do something around that.

The final thing I wanted to say is that we have great monitoring in terms of usage of public transport and other things, so I really agree we need that monitoring of open space, and I just wanted to draw to everyone’s attention that Mirvac, who are the developers of the Olivine development, are working with academics—and I forget which universities, excuse me—and they are trying to have an ongoing tool that will measure community strength, community health and their contact with the environment. I just think they are really, really to be commended and that work should be adopted more broadly and would be of interest to IV and VPA.

Mr MOSELEY: It is a great question. I am conscious of time. I would just observe that planning systems in every Australian jurisdiction have to decide what matters are left to councils—home rule is fine with us—and what matters are influenced or controlled by the state because they are of state or regional significance. Victoria’s planning system is not strong on identifying and protecting state and regional interests; it is a very dispersed, localised system generally. It is entirely appropriate for state governments to decide, based on good evidence, when a matter requires greater central control or guidance, and I would imagine recommendations from committees such as yours are influential to state governments in deciding whether they should be stepping in, whether it is in fact not something that should any longer be left to councils to invent their own future on—but there is a benchmark and we will set the floor beneath which people cannot go. I hope that is helpful, but it sounds to me like your committee is appraised of that issue and will be making recommendations, and that is the way policy gets made.

Ms GREEN: Thank you, Stuart.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Danielle. Look, I just want to say to Stuart and Jonathan and your team there, Jonathan, thank you—

Dr SPEAR: We are going to tree canopy now, and that is really why—

The CHAIR: Sorry, Jonathan, I have interrupted.

Dr SPEAR: No, that is okay. I was just finishing; I am conscious of time. I was just observing that the reason why we have made this recommendation around 30 per cent tree canopy coverage is in part that the evidence, like Ms Green has said, is something we do feel makes it compelling to move with some urgency to set those targets so that we can all, at the state level, local government level, developers and utilities and others, be pushing in the same direction with some clarity.

The CHAIR: Stuart, I just want to say to you and your team, and Jonathan and your team sitting there, thank you so much for joining the discussion and coming and talking to us this afternoon. We have heard from a lot of groups right across the state, and it is fantastic to get you guys—I would like to say in the room together—in the Zoom together to talk about some of these things and for us be able to ask you questions that have been playing on our minds. So on behalf of the committee, thank you.

Mr MOSELEY: It is a pleasure. Thank you for the opportunity.

Dr SPEAR: Yes, thank you. It is absolutely a pleasure.

Witnesses withdrew.