

TRANSCRIPT

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Inquiry into infrastructure projects

Melbourne — 22 March 2016

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Witnesses

Mr Stephen Wall, CEO, Maribyrnong City Council;

Mr Chris Eddy, CEO, Hobsons Bay City Council; and

Mr Richard Smithers, Transport Coordinator, City Strategy and Place Group, Melbourne City Council.

The CHAIR — I will begin by declaring open the Standing Committee on Economy and Infrastructure’s public hearing this morning. I would like to welcome everybody who is present. The committee is hearing evidence today in relation to the infrastructure inquiry, and evidence today is being recorded. This hearing is to inform the second of at least six reports into infrastructure projects, and witnesses who are present here today may be invited to future hearings as the inquiry continues. All evidence being taken today is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected for what you say in here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege.

Once again I welcome you all. I might get you to introduce yourselves. Thank you for providing us with some introductory remarks, which we have had the chance to peruse. Once you have had a chance to introduce yourselves, we might begin with some questions.

Mr EDDY — Thank you, Mr Chair. I am Chris Eddy, chief executive of Hobsons Bay City Council.

Mr WALL — I am Stephen Wall, chief executive of Maribyrnong City Council.

Mr SMITHERS — I am Richard Smithers, transport coordinator at the City of Melbourne. If I could just put on record apologies on behalf of our CEO, Ben Rimmer, and also our director of city strategy and place, Kate Vinot.

The CHAIR — Thank you, gentlemen, for all being present here with us today. We are particularly keen to ask some questions around the western distributor, which is a project affecting all of your municipalities in a variety of ways. We have heard from Transurban’s CEO, Scott Charlton. We have also heard from some community groups, which raised some concerns about the project, so we thought it might be timely to hear from you. Thank you for making yourselves available.

We might just move into some questions, and if there is further detail you would like to add as we move through, it would be appreciated. I thought I might just begin with something that has certainly been raised by many of the community groups, and that is the issue of consultation about this particular project. I would be keen to hear from each of you in terms of the way that you feel the consultation process has gone to this point and whether or not any of the remarks and initiatives that you have made known to Transurban have been taken on board in the evolution of this project as it has gone forward. Mr Eddy, did you want to begin?

Mr EDDY — Sure, Mr Chair. The consultation from my perspective, given that the project is yet to be completely defined, has been fairly adequate, I would say at this point. The community groups that have been engaged, from what I have sensed through Transurban, have certainly had opportunities, but I think the frustration, if there is one, is that the detail of the project is yet to be really known. So from the council perspective we have been engaged regularly, but it has been more about what the future process is going to be, and we are waiting to see the detail fall out in the next few weeks, I think. The formal consultation phase starts next month, so we would be very keen to see that ramp up somewhat at that time.

Mr WALL — Certainly from Maribyrnong’s perspective there has been plenty of endeavour by government and Transurban to keep the dialogue open, but again I would echo Mr Eddy’s comments around the lack of detail and the lack of a final proposal. There are some high-level proposals that have been given to council and the public. Maribyrnong City Council residents have some concerns with particularly one of the options put forward. Yes, the consultation has been fine to date, but we need more certainty and more detail going forward.

Mr SMITHERS — I think for the City of Melbourne it is quite similar. The consultation process really is yet to kick off, as Chris mentioned, so next month we are expecting some action. We have been working with the state and Transurban to make sure that when they do the consultation it is thorough, that we get to everybody who should be involved and that we engage many people as possible. But I think it is really in the early stages.

The CHAIR — Indeed. One of the issues in regard to consultation that we have heard has been with regard to the two options which seem live at this point in time, and I think Mr Wall made a passing reference to concerns about a particular option out of that. I understand that the West Gate option is something that Maribyrnong is particularly keen on, rather than the Hyde option. I was just wondering if you might like to make some further comment on why it is that one option is preferred over the other.

Mr WALL — I must clarify that Maribyrnong City Council does not have a resolved position on a preferred option at this stage, and again the main reason behind that is the lack of detail to date. But certainly the Hyde Street option, or the short option that we refer to, gets fairly close to our residents and there is a lot of concern from the community, so at this stage council would suggest the long tunnel has less impact on the community. But in the absence of the firm detail it is hard to put a formal position around that.

The CHAIR — Indeed. Would either of you gentlemen like to make comment on the two options and your council's views on those two options? Mr Eddy?

Mr EDDY — Our position is very similar to that of Maribyrnong in that we do not have a formal position on either of the two options. We have a formal position that is generally supportive of the proposal in that it provides a second river crossing, reduces pressure on the bridge et cetera, but there are matters that need to be further defined before we would be in a position to say whether it is the long or the short tunnel. On the surface the long tunnel is probably less attractive to our community for the same reasons that the short tunnel is perhaps less attractive to the Maribyrnong council. That detail is yet to be seen, of course.

The CHAIR — Mr Smithers, do you have anything to add?

Mr SMITHERS — As far as the City of Melbourne is concerned the tunnel issues are much more relevant to both the other municipalities. It is probably worth noting that the City of Melbourne has no position on the project at this point either. We are gathering more detail, trying to understand what the project's impact will be, and that will give us the opportunity to consider the thing in more detail.

The CHAIR — One of the concerns that we have heard from community groups is that throughout this period that we call initial consultation, without a firm plan of what is going to go forward, there has been a concern that this period of consultation may roll into the finalised plan with very little capacity then for the community to have input into what is the finalised plan, and with Transurban then perhaps saying, 'The consultation was done prior to the plan that has been developed'. So I think certainly hearing what you are saying from a council level is quite similar to what we are hearing from community groups in terms of it being difficult to give a point of view when you do not know what it is that is going to be occurring as it progresses. I thought it might be a good option now to hand over to you, Mr Eideh, if you have any questions for our councils.

Mr EIDEH — You have some concerns in respect of public consultation conducted by Transurban to date. Do you have any recommendations for improvements? What would you suggest?

Mr EDDY — I can start to tackle that. I do not think it is concerns about the consultation to date; I think the consultation to date has been appropriate for the stage of the project we are at. I think one of the challenges is for us and the community and all the stakeholders to understand this new market-led proposal way of doing things. It is pleasing to see that they have — Transurban, that is — just invited nominations for a community liaison group, which is clearly an extra step in the consultation phase, which will be very important once we have actual designs or proposals to consult on. So I would just be concerned about being misrepresented about the views on the consultation process to date. I certainly recognise that it has been an interim phase, and I certainly do not get the sense that there is a tendency to rely on that moving into later stages. The sense I get is that it is certainly going to ramp up, as appropriate.

Mr WALL — I would agree with Mr Eddy's comments. The dialogue to date has been open and flowing. I guess the way it could be improved, in answer to your question, is by really articulating to the community what the elements of each proposal are that are under consideration, what the pros and cons of each of the proposals are, and some real transparency around the detail in those proposals and what sorts of considerations are being made right at the moment. I think that would give the community and the council some confidence in the process.

I think there is a nervousness that there is a consultation process occurring in the absence of firm detail.

Mr SMITHERS — From the City of Melbourne's perspective, consultation is extremely important. We spend a lot of effort and energy making sure that we engage people in a really deep and meaningful way. Again, as Chris and Stephen have said, the consultation has not really kicked off in earnest. The council is currently doing some work in West Melbourne — the West Melbourne Structure Plan — and we will be running a

consultation around that. That is in an area that is relatively close to where the project is possibly to connect with the city. Our community engagement people are working with the community engagement people both from the department and from Transurban, so we will make sure that the consultation is integrated so that people do not suffer engagement exhaustion, if you like, but also so that any opportunities that arise for people to have a say about the project will be integrated into both of those consultation opportunities.

Mr EIDEH — The other thing I want to ask is: how has that council feedback been incorporated into the Transurban planning process?

Mr WALL — To date certainly Transurban has been open to receiving feedback from council, albeit at a high level. I would suggest the option 3 that has been fleshed out by Transurban is a direct result of community input and certainly the input from Maribyrnong City Council, so it would be fair to say input has been received and has been acted upon to a degree.

Mr EDDY — I would agree with that.

Ms HARTLAND — Could I start off by asking, on this issue of consultation it seems to me, as someone who has attended a number of the consultation processes, that they have been really poor in terms of what the community is being offered, because it feels like to me that it is all around outrage mitigation — ‘Just dampen it down. Give them a bit of information and not a lot’. It seems to me that possibly the consultation they have been having with council is entirely different and, as you have said, it is at a much higher level. I also understand that material has been offered to councils, especially in terms of mapping, that the community have asked for and has not been available. Do you have any idea about how those issues could be addressed?

Mr EDDY — I personally cannot really comment on that. I would just repeat the point that our engagement has been at a necessarily high level at this point. There is a genuine, I believe, attempt to understand the different viewpoints at this early stage while the options are fleshed out. I just repeat the earlier point that once we have something definitive to be consulted on and consult on with our own community, I would be more concerned then about ensuring that that consultation phase is at the appropriate level.

Mr WALL — I guess I would, again, echo those comments and suggest that I think the level of engagement with councils and the community has been at a similar level, as far as content. We are all looking at these high-level diagrams which effectively show a line on a piece of paper, and neither the council nor the community are seeing specific detail at this point in time. So I would suggest there has been a lot of dialogue. The content that has been shared with council and the community I would say is probably on par.

Ms HARTLAND — I have got four or five questions, so I will just get into them. In terms of Maribyrnong, Stephen, on the issue around Federation Trail, the government keeps saying that if the western distributor goes ahead, Federation Trail will be complete. Now it is our understanding that it does not actually need the western distributor to be completed. What is the opinion of council on that? And could you talk about what you would see as the route for Federation Trail without the western distributor?

Mr WALL — There is a section of the trail that needs to be completed, and obviously that will take funding. So if there is a major infrastructure project that can assist in the funding of the completion of the Federation Trail, the council would be very supportive of that. As far as specific routes that could be taken for Federation Trail, I am probably not the expert to be talking about that today. But you are exactly right: the Federation Trail can be completed without the western distributor works, but I guess from council’s perspective it is seen as a good opportunity to get the required funding to complete the infrastructure. It is a highly utilised piece of infrastructure at the moment, and it will only improve when that final connection is put in place.

Mr EDDY — Could I add to that? I agree with Stephen that the Federation Trail does not require the western distributor to be completed, but I would see it as an opportunity — one of the few opportunities, actually — that we would like to see addressed in tandem with the project. The section of the Federation Trail that runs adjacent to some of our strategic redevelopment areas — there is one to the south known as the Don site in Hobsons Bay and one to the north known as the Bradmill site in Maribyrnong — we see that as an opportunity to have a close look at how best to align the Federation Trail to take advantage of the growth that is going to occur in those areas. That may involve moving it to one side to pick up ours and then to the other side to pick up the area in Maribyrnong. I guess that just goes to my point about there being an opportunity to deliver a better result in terms of Federation Trail.

Also for us at the end of our municipality we have a major project planned over a number of years for the Kororoit Creek trail. Again, stage 1 of that is right smack bang where the western distributor would start, around Grieve Parade, and we see that — and we have said this obviously very clearly to Transurban and the government — as an opportunity to deliver some of those additional outcomes that need to be done. So let us use this as an opportunity to help deliver those.

Ms HARTLAND — Stephen, in terms of the truck bans on Francis Street and Somerville Road, Moore Street and Buckley Street, there is real concern in the community that unless the government does come up with those truck bans, the whole concept around the western distributor is not really going to work, because there are no guarantees that the big trucks will come off the road. Does council have a position or an opinion on that?

Mr WALL — Council does have a firm and longstanding position around anything that alleviates the impacts of truck traffic on residential streets being a good thing. Council was pleased that when the western distributor was announced there was reference made to total truck bans, but council does have concern in relation to the tolling of new roads that toll avoidance may actually encourage unscrupulous operators to use rat runs through Maribyrnong city. That is not acceptable to council at all. Council would be seeking some firmer confirmation that total truck bans can be achieved at the conclusion of the project. It is a concern.

Ms HARTLAND — That moves neatly into my next question. You actually spoke about in your notes that there was a need for a review of traffic signals throughout the municipality to deter toll avoidance and to promote public transport, walking and cycling. Can you expand on that, or is that something you would actually need to take on notice?

Mr WALL — For specific detail I would probably need to take it on notice. Trucks are difficult vehicles to manoeuvre, so there needs to be plenty of warning and plenty of indication around when truck bans are being enforced so that we do not have a situation of trucks finding they are too far down a route before they can make an alternative choice. Maribyrnong City Council struggles every day with the issues around enforcement of current trucks curfews. It is a big challenge for authorities to enforce restrictions on unscrupulous operators. I think it will be necessary once additional curfews come into play that there is a heightened level of signage so that truck drivers are informed.

Ms HARTLAND — In the business plan there is the talk of the northern portal which would run adjacent to the Yarraville Gardens on the river side. Obviously that would impact the gardens and the amenity loss, and as you know, that is an incredibly well used garden. Does the council have any thoughts on how this impact can be mitigated? I know when we have gone back to Transurban and to the government and asked them about this they said it was a typo, but you usually do not get a typo that is a whole paragraph, so I think someone let that slip through. What is your opinion about Yarraville Gardens?

Mr WALL — Certainly the advice we have been given to date is that the impact on Yarraville Gardens is minimal. In saying that, a project of this magnitude will disrupt open space, and it is so important that council can have some assurance that the project will deliver good community amenity outcomes and protect the existing amenity that our community has come to expect. At this stage council is not of the belief that Yarraville Gardens will be adversely impacted by the project.

Ms HARTLAND — If it was to be impacted or if, as we see it, there is a possibility of a slice of the gardens being taken, what do you think council's position would be on that?

Mr WALL — As you are all probably aware, Maribyrnong City Council is short on public open space, so any loss of public open space would be absolutely something that council would be actively against.

Ms HARTLAND — I know this is outside the realm of what councils can do, but regarding that issue about, if this project goes ahead, the construction phase and the disruption to the city, what kind of role would you see council having in that in terms of advocating for the residents? We saw it when regional rail happened, and there was a massive amount of construction happening in the CBD of Footscray, and it was incredibly disruptive. A project like this would be even worse.

Mr WALL — I agree. We are currently experiencing heightened levels of traffic through the city as a result of other roadworks that are happening around the greater Melbourne district at the moment. Council's role again would be an advocacy role and a communications role. The vast majority of the time when community

members feel aggrieved about anything, council seems to be the first port of call, so we would want to make sure that council had all the information at hand to advise our community of when and if disruptions are likely to occur and for how long those disruptions are likely to be affecting our city and working with agencies to make sure that any disruption is minimised. I guess we all understand that to make an omelette you have got to crack a few eggs.

Ms HARTLAND — I have got some other questions, but I will come back to those.

Mr FINN — Gentlemen, welcome. Thank you for your time today. I am just wondering if you would be kind enough to give us a precis, if you like, of the impact of traffic on your respective cities just at the moment. I have a couple of staff members who live in Hobsons Bay and go into the City of Maribyrnong every day. Williamstown Road, for example, is a road that has for quite some time now, but particularly over the last week, been almost impassable during peak hour. I have received a number of calls from constituents and people approaching me in the street expressing their anger about what has been happening on roads in the western suburbs for quite some time but, as I say, particularly over the last week or so. What impacts on your city could you tell us about in particular?

Mr EDDY — From this project, from this proposal?

Mr FINN — Just traffic generally at the moment and what it is doing to Maribyrnong and to Hobsons Bay?

Mr EDDY — From a Hobsons Bay perspective I think it is exactly as you describe at various times to different levels. Two days in particular last week are probably what you are thinking of, where there were the immediate impacts from the commencement of the CityLink-Tulla widening, the two breakdowns and a vehicle roll-over et cetera. It only takes, from my observation, one event to back the system up. It goes to my point earlier about the reliance or the pressure on the West Gate Bridge and the need for a second river crossing.

We are concerned about the impact that the construction phase would have over a long period of time. I am trying to get my head around how you would put portals in the middle of a freeway that is in use and not have those impacts felt back into Hobsons Bay and into Maribyrnong and perhaps even back into Wyndham. It would need to be very carefully managed. To answer your question, it is all very finely balanced now, and it does not take very much to upset the balance.

Mr WALL — I would add to that that certainly in peak times there is absolute congestion through our streets. Maribyrnong City Council has the added pressure from freight and truck traffic. We know we are going to experience significant population growth — a doubling of population in the next 25 to 30 years — that is just going to further exacerbate the pressure on the road network. It is a challenging situation at the moment, and it does not look like it is going to alleviate in the short term.

Mr FINN — Going back 18 months or so the then Leader of the Opposition told us about his West Gate distributor, which he said was shovel ready. I assume that if you are shovel ready that means that you have planned and you have got the whole thing ready to go. Do either of you gentlemen know anything about that?

Mr WALL — Stage 1 of the West Gate distributor is currently in progress, which is the widening of Shepherds Bridge and some improvements to some of the other parts of the road network. Yes, council was informed of the West Gate distributor program and project and understands that stage 1 will be completed within the next couple of years.

Mr FINN — Richard, the western distributor has been described as the world's most expensive T-intersection. Would it be fair to say that the western distributor will do for the west of Melbourne what Hoddle Street and the Eastern Freeway have done for the other side of Melbourne? If so, how indeed are you going to cope with that T-intersection with obviously a great number of cars and trucks in particular coming down somewhere around Etihad Stadium somewhere? Where are they going to go?

Mr SMITHERS — First of all, the City of Melbourne does not have a position on the project at this point. I think the second thing to say is that the current conception of the ramps is something that the council will be discussing in great detail and has begun some of that discussion with the proponent, which is of course Transurban, and the department. The business case that was published late last year shows an arrangement of ramps and explains how those ramps would work, and our challenge is now to work with Transurban and the

government to understand that fully and to see if that has impacts on the local road network and then what we might do to ameliorate those impacts if there are any.

Mr FINN — A few times — and I think other members of the committee will back me up on this — we have heard senior members of the government speak as if the deal has already been done, that in fact the whole thing has been agreed to. That leads me to raise the issue of consultation once again, because whilst there does seem to have been a little bit of information — not much, but a little bit of information — it does not matter where I go, whether it be speaking to local residents in the western suburbs or businesspeople or indeed councillors of your respective councils, nobody seems to know what is going on. Do you have concern that you are just going to turn on the radio one day and hear a minister or the Premier announcing that the deal is done and it is all happening?

Mr EDDY — No, I do not have that particular concern.

Mr FINN — You are a brave man.

Mr EDDY — The conversations that I have been involved in have made it very clear from the outset that it is a staged process, and I think we are at about stage 4 or 5, so I would be very surprised to hear that announcement at this point in time.

Mr WALL — And certainly in the conversations that we have been involved in — or I have been involved in — we have continually stressed the need for more detail and a greater understanding of time lines and process, and we have been given the assurance that this will come.

Mr FINN — This process has now been going for some months. When do you think it might come? Christmas? Grand final day?

Mr ONDARCHIE — Just after they cut the ribbon.

Mr EDDY — My understanding is there will be some definitive proposals to be consulted on in April, and I think that is probably the next milestone that we are waiting to see.

Mr FINN — But that is next week.

Mr EDDY — Correct.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Probably April Fool's Day.

Mr FINN — Then we will look forward to next week. Will that mean that we will have all the answers to our questions then?

Mr WALL — I am sure there will be lots more questions than answers during April.

Mr FINN — So they will hopefully have some answers in April, but nowhere near the number that you would want.

Mr WALL — Certainly the assurance that we have been given is that this is a complex project which will involve lengthy consultation and lengthy consideration and deliberation, so we are not expecting this project to take shape overnight, but certainly the councils sitting around this table are actively involved in dialogue and will continue to be until we get to a point of some certainty around what the project will actually look like at the end of the day.

Mr FINN — Speaking of time frames, has Transurban or the government given you any indication of when traffic might actually be using this new road?

Mr WALL — There has been a suggestion that to go through all of the process of consultation, design, planning and construction, it would be in or about the year 2022 when the final project would be finished.

Mr FINN — Six years; yes, okay. The issue of trucks is not a new one, particularly to you, Stephen, but as was mentioned earlier, this has potential to put a whole fleet of new vehicles through your municipality. What

sorts of guarantees are you going to seek from the government that they will not allow that to happen, and how in fact do you believe they could guarantee that?

Mr WALL — Certainly council would be seeking total truck bans of non-local trucks once the project is completed, and obviously council would be seeking that the relevant authorities enforce those truck bans, and certainly council would be actively involved in advising agencies if there were any breaches of that enforcement. I think council has been pretty clear on that. If this project is completed, making sure that the trucks use the new infrastructure is an essential and necessary part of the project.

Mr FINN — So do you see this project as an answer to a prayer, as it were, to remove trucks largely from your municipality?

Mr WALL — It will certainly help. As I said previously, any new infrastructure that alleviates pressures on residential streets and the amenity of the community of the City of Maribyrnong is a good thing. This will certainly go some of the way to removing trucks from local streets, as long as the enforcement and as long as the truck bans follow.

Mr FINN — Now, the issue of ventilation and exhaust systems is always a concern, and we have seen on similar projects concerns expressed by residents. Do you have any information at all as to where ventilation stacks may be or where the intention of Transurban is to put them?

Mr WALL — Not specific detail. There have been assurances around the aesthetics and the treatment of exhausts and gases through these stacks, but I am personally still waiting for more specific detail in that regard.

Mr EDDY — Correct. Yes, I agree with that. We know there need to be ventilation shafts. We do not know exactly where they are going to be, but I think previous examples show that they can coexist if the appropriate methods are used. That is obviously an issue for Hobsons Bay, given the long tunnel option and the fact that some of our community, particularly Brooklyn, has the lowest air quality in the country, some would suggest. So it is one of those issues that we want to see very carefully managed.

Mr FINN — Now, 2022 is the 'expected' finishing date. How long are they suggesting it will take to build this project; do either of you know? In other words, when will it begin? Have they given you a starting point?

Mr WALL — There have been suggestions that late 2017 we would start to see some action.

Mr EDDY — Yes, or 2018. I think the EES process itself is expected to take 12 to 18 months, so you would not expect to see construction begin until that process is complete.

Mr FINN — So we are looking at late 2017 sometime or 2018.

Mr EDDY — Ballpark.

Mr FINN — So in fact we would probably be looking at a blowout, depending on when it began, on the finishing date.

Mr WALL — These projects are complex, I guess.

Mr ONDARCHIE — We are the politicians here.

Mr FINN — You would hope that Transurban would have a fair idea of what they are doing before they went into it. We are not talking about the Andrews government here.

Mr WALL — We are optimistic.

Mr FINN — You are optimistic; there are no two ways about that. I will leave that for the moment, Mr Chair, and I will come back to it shortly.

Mr ELASMAR — I am glad, Mr Finn. I do not know where you get the [inaudible] from, but anyway, I am optimistic and I am happy to listen.

Gentlemen, thanks for coming. My concern always is the consultation between you and the distributor or the government and between you and the residents. You mentioned that, Stephen. Do you believe that so far — and I understand that none of you has agreed with anything yet and it is not clear yet because you have some more details coming, which is fair — the consultation was fair and up to date between the residents and you or between you and the residents, when you hear some concerns that have gone back to them? How have you dealt with it?

Mr WALL — On face value, yes, I believe the community and council have been receiving regular updates and the same information, so the dialogue has been certainly happening. I am hopeful that all the information is being shared with council and the community. Obviously I do not know what I do not know.

Mr EDDY — I could not add anything to that. I agree.

Mr ELASMAR — They are all my concerns. Thank you very much.

The CHAIR — I just might follow up with a couple of other questions, if I could, specifically, Mr Wall, in regard to the responses that you provided to some of our questions. I note this is something that Ms Hartland raised earlier about the Federation Trail. In your responses to questions you state that the design of the Federation Trail with the on-road option was not acceptable — the one that was based in the business case. I was just hoping you might have been able to expand on why it is that the on-road option that was used in the business case was not viewed favourably by the council.

Mr WALL — I am sorry, Mr Chair, could I take that question on notice?

The CHAIR — Certainly, indeed. The next question relates to where you state that:

Council needs access to the detailed traffic modelling for the project to determine the extent of secondary infrastructure and regulation required.

I was just wondering: have you requested detailed modelling from anybody with regard to either of the options that have been proposed, or what is council's view on how to go about getting that information?

Mr WALL — We have not formally requested the information, but certainly the consultation and the dialogue to date has suggested that it will be necessary for council before it resolves a formal position in regard to either of the options.

The CHAIR — If you do get that detailed modelling, the committee would love to see it as well. That would be fabulous. You spoke about the non-local trucks being banned from the roads. If the appropriate measures were not put in place to ensure truck bans and the like, is there a possibility that truck congestion could actually get worse in your council? If those bans were not put in place and you saw tolls on roads, is there a possibility that more trucks could actually enter these roads, rather than less?

Mr WALL — Absolutely, and this is council's deepest concern. We know that activity in the port is likely to increase considerably in the short- to mid- to long-term future. Toll avoidance is a very real phenomenon that happens even today, so without some good restrictions and good enforcement there is absolutely a risk that more truck traffic and congestion will happen in residential streets of Maribyrnong City Council, and this is a non-negotiable outcome from council's perspective.

The CHAIR — We are certainly pleased to hear that. Mr Eddy, with regard to your submission, there is a discussion about the proposed Hyde Street ramps and the impact that they may have on the road network as well as recreational cycling routes and the like. I am just interested in your views on the two different ramp options for Hyde Street, with the Hyde option obviously being further to the north and the West Gate option being further to the south. I am just interested in any further comments you might be able to make about council's views on whether one is more preferred than the other and the impact that either or both might have on your community.

Mr EDDY — Again, I would preface this by saying that council does not have a formal preference for either of those until we know more — and the devil is in the detail, as we know. The Hyde Street option is in an area that has already been described as being sensitive, I guess, in terms of traffic volumes now. We would need to have some comfort around the impact on those current commuter routes and the cycling routes. There is some open space for both of our councils in that general area that we would need some assurances on around the impacts. They are questions that we have. Regarding the West Gate option, again, as I mentioned earlier, what impacts would that have on current traffic volumes? What would that push back into the streets of Hobsons Bay and Maribyrnong? What are the impacts on air quality? Regarding sounds, noise walls need to be upgraded to current standards. We have pedestrian overpasses in those areas that would need to be upgraded to current standards. There are a whole range of issues that flow out of both of those options that we need to understand better before we could reach a formal position. Neither of them appears more attractive than the other, let me put it that way, at this point.

The CHAIR — You also in your submission make some reference to the planning process thus far placing emphasis on the economic aspects of the proposal, and your submission says there has been ‘insufficient recognition of the social and environmental objectives’. I think it is a very valid point to make, that obviously there is the need for a road to stack up economically but it is also incredibly important, particularly for local communities, that the social and environmental impacts upon those communities are taken into account as well. Is there a view of the council on how to impress upon the government and Transurban the need for those social and environmental impacts to be taken into account?

Mr EDDY — My view is that we have various channels available to us that we are using. We are in regular dialogue with the proponents, there is the EES process that we are represented on and there is the upcoming community liaison group. We would use all of those avenues to prosecute the issues that I have described earlier and ensure that the social and environmental aspects are given appropriate weighting alongside economic aspects. I am not suggesting that they are not being considered at all, but we want to ensure that they are given appropriate weight, so we will take every opportunity to impress that as our view.

The CHAIR — Mr Smithers, I thought I might ask you a question with regard to tolling concessions and CityLink. Obviously with this proposal, as it has progressed, there is the view that tolls on CityLink will be extended for a number of years. I am just curious to hear whether Melbourne council has had a look at that and formed a position or has a view on the possible impacts of those tolling concessions into the future.

Mr SMITHERS — I can answer that very clearly: the City of Melbourne has no position in relation to the tolling at this point.

The CHAIR — Certainly. Thank you for that. Mr Eideh, did you have any further questions?

Mr EIDEH — Just a quick one. Is there any suggestion that should be considered to ensure that the western distributor is more attractive than the West Gate Bridge or the Yarraville and Footscray streets for trucks? Is there any other suggestion? What is your view?

Mr WALL — I am sorry, if I understand your question correctly, you are asking me: will the new tunnel be more attractive than the other options that exist today?

Mr EIDEH — Yes.

Mr WALL — I would like to think so. Again, the issue around tolling is a level of, I guess, complication that may impact on the attractiveness of the western distributor. Certainly from Maribyrnong City Council’s perspective, council has been advocating for a further north–south connector down Ashley Street–Paramount Road to make it easier for trucks to get onto the freeway and access the new western distributor. In answer to your question, yes, it should be much more attractive than residential streets and the freeway, but it will be important that restrictions are put in place so that tolling does not impact that attractiveness.

The CHAIR — In my eagerness to ask a few more questions, I passed over my good colleague Mr Ondarchie.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Thank you, Chair, how nice it is to be with you today. Gentlemen, welcome to the economy and infrastructure committee. My question is much more around the economy, and seeing we have you in the room I am interested to know, particularly from you, Chris, and you, Stephen, given an

announcement today that a municipality is reviewing its garbage collection, what likely services are under review or could be cut at your councils as a result of rate capping?

Mr WALL — That is a great question. Certainly rate capping is going to have an impact on Maribyrnong City Council to the tune of about \$86 million over the next 10 years, we believe. All councils across the state are currently looking at efficiency measures and reviewing service levels and service plans for all the multitude of services that local government is currently involved in.

At this stage the Maribyrnong City council has not resolved any formal position around any services that may be in jeopardy. As CEO of the council I am doing my utmost to make sure that we can continue to deliver all the services that we can, but clearly there are going to be some financial challenges before council over the next number of years. We will be doing our very best to find efficiencies, but there will be a necessary questioning of the services that we are involved in now and making sure that the services we deliver meet the community's expectations.

Mr EDDY — I have a very similar answer to that of Stephen. We have known this has been coming for some time. The impact on Hobsons Bay is \$60 million cumulative over 10 years. We expect that to really start to bite in terms of our financial plan in about two or three years. We have identified significant internal efficiencies at this point in time so we have not had to cut services and, as with Stephen, my hope is that we will find ways to continue to deliver services. But what we have flagged is that we will have to have mature conversations with our community around what that service mix should be.

It would be folly to think that things do not change and that the nature of the services that we provide will not change over time as well. I would not say that is as a direct result of rate capping; it should be happening anyway. Perhaps the timetable has been impressed upon us a bit more urgently due to the Fair Go rates scheme.

Mr ONDARCHIE — If any business took \$86 million out of its revenue line over a 10-year period, that is a significant shock. You can only do so much in the revenue line to try to find that somewhere else so you have to turn to the cost line. Stephen, what would you say are the services currently delivered by Maribyrnong City Council that you would regard as non-core?

Mr WALL — Again, that is a good question. Core services of council in my mind are the services that are required by legislation, and there is a range of services that council is involved in where there is a piece of legislation that says, 'Council, you must deliver this service'. It is interesting. The suite of services that councils are involved in today has developed over many, many years and decades of consultation with communities suggesting to the councils of the day the services they believe their local government should provide. I could go on, chapter and verse, around local government service delivery — —

Mr ONDARCHIE — Why don't you?

Mr WALL — There is a range of services that are discrete to individual councils as well. Currently we are having conversations around school crossing supervisors. We have services in the aged-care space. Again, our council particularly has a number of services that it is very passionate about in public art. Our council is fairly active in the gender equity space and the social services space, I guess. They would be a start of the list of the non-core or discretionary services. There are a lot of them. I think most councils on average are delivering between 80 and 120 discrete services depending on how you define what the service is. There is a large range of services that would be considered discretionary, but in saying that are considered important to our community.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Indeed. Thank you. Chris, my elderly mother gets 30 minutes once a fortnight home help in her local municipality — perhaps something her son should be helping her a bit more with, but nonetheless. So that happens twice a month. She has been advised they are cutting it back from 30 minutes to 15 minutes twice a month, but now has had further advice that it is only going to be 15 minutes once a month help, so clearly her son has got to step up. What is your view about that in terms of home help services? They are saying that rate capping has driven their costs up and they have to review these things. What is your view on that?

Mr EDDY — I imagine every council is reviewing these things. My view would be that that is one of the services that I would like to see impacted at the very end of the list. I think there are other things that perhaps we could be targeting before we target those human services.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Like what?

Mr EDDY — I am probably not prepared today to name anything because we have not had that, as I mentioned earlier, mature conversation with our community. I think it is how you define ‘core’. Every council is different. To me it is not the roads, rates and rubbish it used to be called many years ago; it is now, ‘What does our community think are the core services we should be providing?’. I think what rate capping is bringing on is a requirement or a necessity to have those more mature conversations with our community. Let the community decide what are the core services it wants its council to be delivering. I would imagine home help is one of them. Again, depending on the council you are looking at, it can be heavily subsidised, so there needs to be a very serious discussion around to what level should each council be subsidising and what is the community expectation in that.

Mr ONDARCHIE — So the elderly citizens of Hobsons Bay need not worry?

Mr EDDY — Not at this point I would not think, but like many areas it is changing on a regular basis, so I am not going to make any prognostications sitting here today about what the impact may or may not be.

The CHAIR — Any further questions, Ms Hartland?

Ms HARTLAND — Yes, I have several. Stephen, can I just come back to you for just a minute on, again, the issue of truck curfews and truck bans on Francis Street, Moore Street and Somerville Road. You said the council would advocate, but if those bans do not occur, do you think that would make the council change its position on the western distributor?

Mr WALL — Again, I cannot speak on behalf of council, as I am sure you can appreciate, but in the conversations that I have had with the councillors at the City of Maribyrnong, it is not seen as an either or an either; it is a non-negotiable. If this infrastructure is coming, it is all about alleviating truck pressures on residential streets, so I certainly have not contemplated that further truck bans would not be the result of this infrastructure. It would seem to me that it would be a superfluous exercise to put the infrastructure in but then not insist that the truck traffic use that infrastructure.

Ms HARTLAND — The term ‘local trucks’, I know what this means, but could you actually explain that because there is a lot of confusion, I think, in the general community that we are talking about every truck?

Mr WALL — Yes. That is a pretty common misconception, but there are local trucks that are either based locally, so their depot is locally based — Mr Eddy mentioned that in the Brooklyn area we have a lot of trucks that are locally based — but also there is truck traffic that is used to service local business, so the supermarkets have a truck delivery and the other commercial operations have truck delivery, so obviously that has got to continue. But the truck traffic we are more focused on is the truck traffic coming directly out of the port, and it is going to grow in time.

Ms HARTLAND — I have got quite a few questions for Richard as well. Richard, the City of Melbourne’s transport strategy outlines decreasing car trips to the City of Melbourne on weekdays by 130 000 vehicles by 2030, from 374 000 trips today to 248 000 trips in 2030. In contrast, the western distributor business case assumes an increase in car traffic coming into the CBD from the west by 30 000 vehicles from Footscray Road and Dynon Road alone by 2030. It also projects an increase in demand on the West Gate Bridge by 50 000 trips, some of which would be destined for the City of Melbourne. Can you comment on the difference in the assumptions between what the City of Melbourne wants and is quite logical in your plan and what in fact the western distributor will do to that strategy?

Mr SMITHERS — I think at this stage we do not know enough about how traffic will be distributed. We intend to speak in a detailed manner with the proponents. There is some information in the business case about the concept that traffic in the central part of the city will decrease in amount, so vehicle kilometres driven will reduce, and that some of that traffic is traffic which travels east–west along the M1 and then proceeds in some cases in a northerly direction through the city, and the business case outlines that some of that traffic may be able to use the western distributor. So in the centre part of the city there might be a reduction in VKT.

So, yes, council’s transport strategy is focused strongly on increasing access to the city through increasing public transport service, through cycling, through walking. And also it is closely allied with a land use strategy

that involves development in the central part of the city. Our MSS lays out a picture of areas close to the centre of the city that will develop, and the vision for transport is that the people living and working in those places will be close to the destinations that they want to travel to and they will be able to use, to a large degree, the modes of public transport, cycling and walking.

Ms HARTLAND — That is fantastic, but I think the problem for me is what the western distributor business case is saying will actually happen in terms of traffic coming in: 5000 extra daily trips on Dynon Road east of CityLink, 4000 additional daily trips on Wurundjeri Way, 3000 additional daily trips on Hawke Street, 9000 additional daily trips on CityLink northward bound, 3000 additional daily trips on Montague Street, and an obvious increase in traffic in Victoria Parade, in Carlton, in the CBD, on the CityLink east of Montague Street. These are indicated, but they are not obviously at this stage qualified. So it seems to me that with what the City of Melbourne is trying to achieve — and it looks good in comparison to the effect that the western distributor could have — there is quite a serious conflict. How do you think the City of Melbourne is going to manage that?

Mr SMITHERS — I think that we are very keen to sit down with the project proponents and understand exactly how the numbers come out, understand what the benefits might be in terms of reduced traffic in the central part of the city and then we will put that information in front of the council and the council will consider it and come to a view on it.

Ms HARTLAND — With those figures that Transurban is supplying, parking in the city is already quite difficult and quite tight. If all those extra numbers were coming into the city, how do you think the City of Melbourne would manage that?

Mr SMITHERS — I think the City of Melbourne has had a parking reduction policy in place for many, many years. There has been no plan spoken of to change that. It is quite clear that if you add parking capacity to the centre of a city, then you are adding the capacity for extra motor vehicle trips, and our transport strategy quite clearly says that most of the growth is expected to be in the other modes. Over the 10 years between the last two censuses, commuting to work in Melbourne has grown strongly on train, tram and by bicycle. Also, walking has grown strongly and access by motor vehicle has fallen quite significantly.

We see those trends continuing. The intensification of the city, the development of Melbourne Metro, the arrangements that the government is working on in relation to surface public transport, particularly trams, will continue those trends. What the business case outlines is that some of that traffic is not directed towards the central city but to jobs that are to the north of the city. When I say ‘the city’, I guess I am talking about the Hoddle grid — the very central part of the city. As I said, we want to understand all those numbers, and we have not come to a view on all that at this point.

Ms HARTLAND — Just one final question. It is really clear — and I think this is a problem for the community as well — that we do not know a defined plan as yet. If I could make a suggestion to the committee, when we do have more than squiggly lines on a map, if we could ask councils to come back and talk to us again when we have a lot more detail.

Mr WALL — We would be very pleased to do that, because we are all waiting for that finer detail.

Mr FINN — Stephen, I am very interested in this proposed ban of trucks once the western distributor is in operation. Given the reports that we have seen of recent times — as late as this week in fact — that there is a significant shortage of police and there is a great deal of concern in the community about law and order, how do you anticipate that such a ban would be enforced?

Mr WALL — Currently truck bans are enforced by VicRoads. Again, from council’s perspective, we would be advocating firmly that that agency enforces as appropriate, as we do now.

Mr FINN — Have they been effective to this point in getting trucks off the roads?

Mr WALL — There have been elements of success. Certainly there has been a good partnership in recent years between council, VicRoads, EPA and other agencies — the VTA and community groups — looking at ways of reducing truck traffic on certain streets. Some truck bans have been implemented in recent times quite effectively, but enforcement is a continual battle.

Mr FINN — I am just trying to think of the wonderful gathering of the EPA and VicRoads together. I am not sure if I would ever recover from that.

I am wondering once again about the environmental impacts and any information that you may have had passed on to you, particularly once the digging and the construction begins because that is, as you said before, going to be quite close to a number of your residents and maybe, Chris, even some of your residents might be impacted by that. What sort of information have you had, if any, from Transurban or the government on the environmental impacts on residents of the construction itself?

Mr WALL — At this stage it would be fair to say there has not been a lot of information specifically coming to Maribyrnong City Council. Certainly, as did Hobsons council, we submitted to the high-level EES process in recent times and flagged that issues around noise, dust and traffic are of paramount concern to council and our community. So we wait for further details around how those issues will be managed during construction, but we have not had that information to date.

Mr FINN — I have one final question, and that is: is it fair to say that each of the three councils represented here today does not have an official position of either support or opposition to the western distributor?

Mr SMITHERS — That is correct. The City of Melbourne does not have an official position on the project yet.

Mr WALL — Council does not have a resolved position on the western distributor project but has a longstanding resolved position that any infrastructure that alleviates the impact of truck traffic on residential streets is a positive.

Mr EDDY — Very similarly, we do not have a formal position on the specifics of the project, because we do not have specifics on the project. We as a council are generally supportive of the concept of a second river crossing, and as the others have said, we await further details to be able to have a more specific position.

The CHAIR — Are there any final questions from the committee?

Mr ONDARCHIE — Yes. Stephen, particularly given that Daniel Andrews announced this as his great project for the west — not even his project, it is Transurban's — that will be completed by 2022, with construction to start in 2018, according to the statement that came out, 2018 is not a long way away, so there is a lot of work that needs to be done prior to that, not just in community consultation, but in design and tenders for the construction and everything. We chatted with Narelle Wilson from the Maribyrnong Truck Action Group. I am sure you know who she is. Is it of any concern to council that this window is closing in terms of the consultation period when you add all the other things that need to be done prior to construction and we have people like Narelle going, 'Well, we don't actually know what's going on here', and you are telling us the same today? Is that a concern to council because it is running too close to the wire?

Mr WALL — Again, council does not have a formal, resolved position on this, but certainly — —

Mr ONDARCHIE — You have done these projects before; you know what infrastructure is like.

Mr WALL — We have certainly expressed and I have certainly expressed to the proponent and to the government that the importance of getting accurate and current information to council as soon as it comes to hand is absolutely imperative, and council wants to share that information with the community as quickly as it comes to hand. These processes do take time. You are right, the window is closing, but again the assurance that I am being given by Transurban and government is that it is adequate time for the planning processes that need to be worked through. I guess I have got to take that on face value.

Mr ONDARCHIE — And given your experience, do you think that is adequate time?

Mr WALL — Look, it is a complex project. I am not sure what level of resources are being dedicated to the project, and certainly in my experience working in local government I have never been involved in a project of that magnitude, so I am probably not in a position to form an opinion on that.

Mr ONDARCHIE — So you are confident everything is going to be okay, are you?

Mr WALL — I am assured that everything will be per the time lines that are being articulated at the moment.

Mr ONDARCHIE — How are you feeling right now, Chris? Are you confident as well?

Mr EDDY — I would say that we have probably got the better part of two years before construction would commence and that the process to align the planning considerations in tandem with the other considerations, to my untrained eye, would appear to give sufficient time for those issues to be dealt with, so I do not have any great concerns at this point in time.

Mr ONDARCHIE — I have one follow-up question to Stephen particularly — do not feel singled out today at all, do not feel rejected at all, Richard. Stephen, the government — after the coalition were able to secure a good outcome for Victoria — were able to pass the port of Melbourne bill last week. One of the issues is around infrastructure and what we call the last mile. I am sure you know what that is about — that rail infrastructure. The legislation says that it requires the lessee to develop a strategy plan in the first five years around that rail infrastructure around the port; it does not actually say they are going to build it. What is Maribyrnong's view about that last mile and how critical that bit of infrastructure is?

Mr WALL — Again, council has had this longstanding position that anything that moves trucks off local roads is a good thing. Obviously rail infrastructure supporting the port is a widely considered appropriate method to help reduce the level of container trucks in residential streets. Council is always happy to be involved in conversations that consider other alternatives to trucks on our residential streets. Given that the projections around capacity of the port are growth, I personally believe it is an important conversation to have and an important piece of infrastructure to be looked at.

Mr ONDARCHIE — I guess just like the consultation for this project, you would like them to get on with it.

Mr WALL — Again, Maribyrnong City Council submitted to the port inquiry, and the main part of our submission was that whatever happens with the port, council needs to be front and centre in any engagement and consultation with either a new proprietor or government as things start to happen, because there are big impacts on our community.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Indeed. Well, rest assured they will consult with you at some time line in the future.

Ms HARTLAND — Just one final question for Richard. On the issue of the roads leading into the City of Melbourne, do you consider any of those to be at capacity now, such as Dynon or Hawke or Montague Street — any of those feeder roads? Does the City of Melbourne see them as being at capacity now or in the near future?

Mr SMITHERS — I think it is fair to say that both of the roads you mentioned are sometimes congested significantly, yes.

Ms HARTLAND — Again, given the numbers that are in the business case from Transurban, that would clearly make it much worse.

Mr SMITHERS — I think we need to sit down and understand exactly what the impacts are of the project before we would come to a conclusion like that.

Mr FINN — Like Mr Chairman, I am tempted to think that nobody quite knows much about this project at all at the moment.

The CHAIR — I am beginning to feel that. Very good. Thank you, Mr Finn. Thank you very much, gentlemen, for your time today. I know you are all very busy. We certainly appreciate you coming in. If there is a further opportunity to meet with you, that will be great. I will just remind you that you will each receive a copy of today's transcript for proofreading, and the transcripts will ultimately be made public on the committee's website. Once again, thank you for your attendance.

Committee adjourned.