

TRANSCRIPT

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Inquiry into infrastructure projects

Melbourne — 24 February 2016

Members

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Witnesses

Mr Scott Ellerton, Concerned Locals of Yarraville;

Mr Steve Wilson, President, Friends of Stony Creek; and

Mr Philip Dearman, Committee Member, and

Ms Narelle Wilson, Vice-President, Maribyrnong Truck Action Group.

The CHAIR — I will begin by declaring open this Standing Committee on the Economy and Infrastructure public hearing. I welcome everybody who is present here this evening. I will just begin by explaining that our committee is hearing evidence in relation to the infrastructure inquiry and the evidence is being recorded. This hearing is to inform the second of at least six reports into the infrastructure projects, and witnesses present may well be invited to attend future hearings as the inquiry continues.

All evidence today is protected by parliamentary privilege, therefore you are protected for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by the same privilege. I might begin by asking our witnesses — thank you for coming along this evening — to introduce themselves.

I assume we have an order in which we are going through our presentations this evening — MTAG is going first and then we will move forward through there. Mr Wilson, do you want to begin?

Mr WILSON — My name is Steve Wilson from the Friends of Stony Creek. I am president of the group, and I am here to represent them.

Mr ELLERTON — My name is Scott Ellerton, and I am here representing the Concerned Locals of Yarraville.

Mr DEARMAN — Philip Dearman. I am a committee member of MTAG and a resident of Yarraville.

Ms WILSON — And I am Narelle Wilson, the vice-president of MTAG.

The CHAIR — Ms Wilson, you are going to begin?

Ms WILSON — Yes, I will begin. Firstly, I would just like to thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. MTAG is a residents-based lobby group advocating for a reduction in truck numbers on residential streets in Melbourne's inner west.

Visual presentation.

Ms WILSON — Every day 22 000 trucks use our narrow residential streets, and up to 72 per cent of them are port trucks with no local business in the area. They go through countless school and pedestrian crossings. They drive just metres from childcare centres, schools and kinders, just metres from our homes as we are trying to sleep, centimetres from cyclists, and they get stuck in endless traffic congestion. The trucks are literally metres from children every single day of their primary school lives, exposing them to unsafe levels of carcinogenic air pollution. Around eight primary schools are affected, as well as many kinders and childcare centres.

The health impact on children is evident, with the City of Maribyrnong having the highest hospital admission rate for children for asthma and respiratory illness in Victoria, at 171 per cent of the Australian average. You can see on that map there that red dot in the middle is the City of Maribyrnong. That map is from 2009–10, but another study was released just a couple of months ago that had the same findings.

Last year the Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute highlighted the cancer risk to children in the City of Maribyrnong in a government submission on air quality. Environmental Justice Australia recently named Yarraville as one of Australia's top 10 air pollution hotspots, so we know we have got a serious problem. But air quality is not the only concern; safety and noise pollution are also serious issues, and you can read about that in more detail in the handouts.

Residents have been calling for a solution to this problem for over 15 years. During that time government after government has failed to address the problem, and truck numbers have grown substantially. We have been promised many solutions over the years, including increased freight on rail targets, WestLink, the truck action plan, east–west link, the West Gate distributor and now the western distributor. We have also had other roads promised to us as a solution, such as the completion of the Western Ring Road and CityLink. All that these roads did was make the problem worse as no measures were put into place to force the trucks to use them, and trucks started using our streets in much greater numbers to avoid the tolls. And this is our no. 1 concern with the western distributor: will it actually make the problem worse? Unfortunately the business case as it currently stands has us worried that this will be the case.

There are five residential streets in the inner west that are truck routes, which you can see marked red on the map. The western distributor business case only recommends a truck ban on two of these streets, which are Francis Street and Somerville Road, marked there in pink. Removing trucks from two of the five streets will not even half-solve the problem, which is fairly unbelievable seeing as fixing this problem was a key objective of the project. We know that truck numbers on these three roads will increase significantly as drivers find ways to avoid the tolls — not to mention the fact that truck traffic going to and from the port of Melbourne is expected to triple by 2050.

That is Williamstown Road circled there. It runs right through Yarraville, Seddon and Kingsville, meaning that those three suburbs will still have a major freight route running through them — that is Williamstown Road there — which will ensure that those suburbs will still be impacted greatly by the noise and pollution issues that they are impacted by now.

That is Buckley Street circled in the top right there. Buckley Street runs through Footscray and Seddon. It is slated for a large amount of medium and high-density development, some of which will start this year. Victoria University's Nicholson Street campus is located on it, meaning that a major freight route is running right through the middle of this education precinct. And it also has a railway bridge which is the most hit bridge by trucks in Melbourne.

Then we have got Moore Street, which is up in the top right-hand corner there, which is a single-lane residential street, again completely unsuitable to be a major freight route. Bizarrely, the main argument in the business case for not implementing 24-hour bans on all of these streets is that there would not be full compliance from truck drivers. Surely a solution to that is enforcement. There is never full compliance of any curfew, but that is hardly a reason not to have one.

We have also got major concerns around air quality. This tunnel will carry thousands of trucks a day, and as the port grows this number will easily be in the tens of thousands. This will easily be Australia's most polluted tunnel. We need this tunnel to incorporate world's best practice environmental controls, particularly to capture toxic, carcinogenic fine particle emissions. We need the air quality data to be publicly available and to be made online so that the community can see what they are exposed to, and we need continuous monitoring both in the tunnel and at the portals. This is really important for the residents that live in the vicinity of around a kilometre of the portals.

We also need this tunnel to be fitted with filtering technology that will filter dangerous fine particles. This is done overseas — for example, in Japan and Spain — in tunnels that carry a high number of diesel vehicles, and it is done purely to protect the surrounding residents. This community must be futureproofed as the port continues to grow.

We also have concerns around loss of open space. I am not going to talk too much about this seeing as the other groups will cover this in much greater detail, except to say that on paper the West Gate option looks like a much lower impact design that manages to remove placarded loads but without destroying valuable parkland and does not subject that residential pocket of Yarraville to noise and pollution issues for eternity.

MTAG sees this as a once in a generation opportunity to remove heavy freight, excessive noise and carcinogenic pollution off the streets where we live. It is essential that this project succeeds at this by protecting our valuable parkland. We know that with political will it is possible. This community has borne the brunt of bad planning and political neglect for decades. It is time to finally fix the problem once and for all, because if this \$5.5 billion project does not do this, then what will? Thank you.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Ms Wilson, for your presentation. It is very detailed. We will go on to the Concerned Locals of Yarraville, so that would be you Mr Ellerton. You have got your clicker, and you are all set and ready to go — fabulous.

Mr ELLERTON — As some background we formed our group in direct response to Transurban's amended proposal for the western distributor, which was released to the public in September 2015. We achieved our group initially by conducting a letter drop of the area that would be immediately affected by the proposed southern portal location in Hyde Street Reserve — the area bounded by Francis Street, then Hyde Street to the east and the railway line to the west and of course Hyde Street Reserve.

Before we get onto our key concerns I would just like to say that, as a resident of Yarraville, we do want a solution. We want trucks off residential streets. That is not the point that we are arguing here or the point that we are trying to make. The initial western distributor proposal generally received broader support. There were no key objections. Certainly comments were made regarding small input, but the general concept was well received. And specifically for me and the residents that I have spoken to in the vicinity of the Hyde Street Reserve, it was well received.

In contrast, the Hyde Street option as presented shifts the problem with trucks from our residential streets. Where at the moment Francis Street itself, in the latest truck survey, has approximately 4500 trucks a day, what we are talking about is an increase going through the Hyde Street portal of up to 10 000 trucks a day. That is based upon Transurban's claim of a 50 per cent reduction in trucks through residential streets, and at the moment the latest truck survey had 21 000 trucks moving through the City of Maribyrnong. With this option obviously there are significant profits at stake as well in dealing with a \$5.5 billion project, so the long-term impacts must not be borne by the community.

I would just like to paint a picture of the southern portal, as represented in the Hyde Street option. As you can see, the tunnel entrance as indicated on the image there is at the southern end of a block of land that is referred to as the SP AusNet site, and it is actually at the northern border of the Hyde Street Reserve as it stands. You can see the pathways and that southern part there. They are currently walking tracks. You also have the indication of Francis Street to the north, the railway line obviously to the west and Hyde Street to the east.

The red ring on that image is a 500-metre radius from that portal location. Throughout the whole consultation that has occurred so far Transurban has indicated it is 150 metres to the nearest residence. Using my line that we have done on there it is 106 metres. So we have concerns that the distances that have been spruiked in the consultation information have been greatly exaggerated.

In terms of other local significant facilities, obviously moving beyond homes, the Yarraville Community Centre is 250 metres away and the Yarraville Community Kindergarten is approximately 400 metres away. If we use the image included in attachment D of the business case, page 14, the technical report options, it actually shows a portal location further north in that SP AusNet site. The worst-case scenario that we see is within 55 metres to the nearest homes on Stephen Street, 110 metres to the Yarraville Community Centre and 260 metres to the Yarraville Community Kindergarten. Now, this is a lot of information and a lot of speculation; however, given the lack of detail that is out there at the moment, we have to take the worst-case scenario, and with the gradients from the road we actually do not think that that would be totally inconceivable.

Our key objections to the Hyde Street option: number 1 is the unnecessary proximity to residents. I have put up 150 metres there, but as I just graphically showed you, it is much closer. Pollution: we have concerns about pollution, as detailed by MTAG — the particulate matter associated with trucks. We also have concerns regarding the contaminated SP AusNet site. Anecdotally it houses the former rubbish tip, and it houses polychlorinated biphenyls — PCBs — from the old transformers that were used in the area. They are a source — a carcinogen, so we are concerned about any excavation in that area for tunnelling and creation of a portal.

I would also like to raise that the New South Wales chief scientist stated that model studies have shown that the detectable impact of portal emissions on local air quality is highly localised to an area within 100 to 200 metres of portals, so given that the nearest house, best case, is 150 metres and the community centre is 200-odd metres, it is very close and very concerning.

In terms of noise, the latest EPA report regarding noise indicates an average reading of 70 decibels on Francis Street. That is with 4500 trucks a day. So we have concerns, if the portal is moved to the Hyde Street Reserve, that we will end up with more than double that in terms of truck movements, and we are concerned about the localised impacts and noise for residents in that pocket.

Finally, in terms of its proximity to residents, a statement that was provided to me as part of the last consultation by Transurban was that for either option, the option or the West Gate option, the cost is comparable. This was based on us pressing them, saying, 'Tell me, is this just a cost-saving manoeuvre, or is it something else?', and they indicated that it was comparable. So we say to that, if it is comparable, then there is no decision to be made. Then it must be the long tunnel, the West Gate option.

Our next key objection, number 2, is the loss of green space. The Hyde Street Reserve is used by our community. A number of people who are here tonight have visited, and they will know that it is used regularly by dog walkers, by runners, by kids and by families. It is a well-used area in our community. I would just like to say I commend the Friends of Stony Creek in particular for the work that they have done in improving that area as well.

In terms of Maribyrnong City Council, we already have one of the lowest ratios of public open spaces as a proportion of municipality in Melbourne at 9.9 per cent. As a comparison, Hobsons Bay, which is obviously on the other side of the bridge from us, has a proportion of 24.1 per cent. So Maribyrnong City Council is leading the way in Melbourne in terms of the lowest proportion of public open space.

Finally, in terms of the limited green space, we have all read the business case and know the economic value that has been assigned to this project, but we would just like to point out too that the value of green space, whilst difficult to recognise, should not be disregarded in the business case.

Our key concerns to date — we have a number of concerns. My most significant one at this point in time is the lack of community consultation report from the September–October period. Transurban conducted their own consultation period. We were invited to provide feedback and we did. My opinion is that the feedback was overwhelmingly opposed to the Hyde Street option. However, there is nothing formally recorded to date or formally produced.

I have been in touch with Transurban. I emailed them requesting information on when the reports would be released. They provided a generic email reply. I replied back specifically citing that after the last consultation period they had an individual, or a contractor, named Nature do the consultation for the previous period, and they produced a report. That report was dated 30 July 2015. And then Transurban subsequently released a summary of community and stakeholder feedback 30 April to 31 July 2015, dated September 15. They used those reports as the premise for changing from the long tunnel option to the short tunnel. Since then, given the feedback that we provided to the Hyde Street option, there has been no formal response.

Since then we have also spoken to Transurban on 8 December. We were speaking about a business case. I expressed my concerns regarding the lack of release of the consultation report, citing that I felt that it was important to have this report released so that we are not covering the same old ground again as we produced in the September–October consultation period.

I was told that it had been handed to government and it was their property, so Transurban were no longer in a position to release this report. We have subsequently conducted a freedom of information request with the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, and it has replied that it does not have it. So I have concerns regarding the transparency of this whole process and specifically the recording of community feedback to date. Everyone is saying that the community feedback is very important; however, if it has not been documented, then obviously it is not taking on board or it is not formally reporting the feedback that is being provided. I would like to know who has this report. Does Transurban have it? The government is saying it does not have it, so it is somewhere out there.

In conclusion, the negative impacts to residents are unacceptable. As a group we collectively reject any proposal that will put a portal in the Hyde Street Reserve. We require a long-term vision that will produce greater benefits to all and not short-term benefits for ease of construction or for any other reason. We want protection against unnecessary long-term localised impacts to residents, and we want protection of our already limited green space.

I would like to close by saying that in the business case, page 113, it says that ‘a tunnelled option is superior’. We agree.

Mr WILSON — I guess I will start by saying that the Friends of Stony Creek have been working on Stony Creek now for about 25 years. In this area of the Hyde Street Reserve or Stony Creek Reserve we have been working there for the last 20 years. We were founded in 1993, of course, and we have been planting along the creek and doing lots of community activities down there. In the last 20 years we have been concentrating on the Hyde Street site to develop the urban part with a bit of a rural feel to it, and I think we have succeeded in doing that. Our main concern with this new plan is about the integrity of the reserve. The shorter tunnel actually leads to a cutting up of the whole reserve. I will get back to that later.

That is one of our early plantings down there. I am just going to try to give you guys a feel for the area. It is very difficult to do, because unless you go down there, you cannot feel the topography of the area and the whole aspect of the area. I would actually like to invite people to come down there. I am quite happy to take people down there and walk around that area.

The CHAIR — I think we might be quite interested in that, yes.

Mr WILSON — Okay. Thank you. Different plantings, of course. Different community groups. That is one of earlier plantings for the group. That is a VU group. I take VU groups down there on their community days, and we do plantings down there. The whole structure of plantings down there is actually a mixture of the Friends of Stony Creek, community groups, schools, disabled students and that type of thing going down there and planting. It is a real mixture of people who have been involved over the years down there.

That is on the hill there. That is one of the VU students trying to thread his way through a jungle.

The friends group knows that there has got to be a solution to the trucks on the roads, but we feel that any solution that is involved with such a massive change to that area, as far as the park goes, is not really the one to go for. We would like to see minimum impact, if we can, down there, and the earlier truck action plan with just the ramps — we went through a process on that — was fairly minimal. We did not like it, but we were okay with it. The initial tunnel, well, yes, that was good, but as Scott said, when they brought the shorter tunnel in, that changed the whole project. The next option now with a longer tunnel and the ramps — as I say, the group is not 100 per cent with it, but it is going to be the best we are going to get out of it, I reckon. It looks like it will minimise the impact on Hyde Street Reserve.

As you can see there, it is one tick for the one we like. You can see the size of the area there on the right of the railway line. It is about 10 hectares, and we have done a huge amount of planting on that site. I need my glasses to read this.

Mr ONDARCHIE — We can read it.

Mr WILSON — Yes. So the point we were making about the shorter tunnel was that it actually divided the park up into little chunks. It destroyed the bulk of the environment of the park. There is trucking on the West Gate of course, but compared to what is going to happen down there, if they go for this plan of the shorter tunnel, it is going to be horrendous, and the bike path is actually trying to thread its way through under all sorts of off ramps and on ramps. The access to Hyde Street through the park itself, that plan was cutting the park by about a third along one side. It basically just destroyed the whole environment of the park, and all the amenities of the park as well.

Then there is basically the overshadowing of the trees and all of that sort of thing, and there is the digging up around the soil up the top end, looking to the southern portal. There are pollution aspects that Scott has talked about. There are about half a dozen different factors that would impact greatly on that reserve if they were to go ahead with the shorter tunnel.

At the moment that is the existing space. As Scott has reminded people, Maribyrnong Council is very low on open space. That is the only open space that people have got in the Yarraville area. The next big open space is probably the Yarraville Gardens, which is further up near the river. Traditionally that area was a very low socio-economic area; it was workers cottages. Lately it has become a bit of a yuppieville, but I will not say that about some people. But expectations are rising in that area. We have got to have a public open space; we have got to enjoy our public open space; we have got to take our kids down there and remind them what it is all about. That is why we are building that park down there.

As you say, we are creating open space. We are helping different disadvantaged groups go down there and plant. As Scott has reminded you guys, people use it now. They go down there on their bicycles. They walk their dogs down there now. It is becoming more and more a very private but residential park, isn't it?

As for native habitat, originally that area would have been a very significant site for Aboriginal culture. It was right on the river. It was she-oak forest that had access to the river. It has been badly chewed up, but it has that significance. With us returning to planting native plants down there, it is starting to take on that aspect again. It is almost a celebration of what was there originally. That is our preferred option. I cannot really see it from here!

Okay, so our summary is that we prefer the longer tunnel option. It has minimal impact to the site. The ramps along the side of the West Gate — I could argue that they could actually put those on the southern side, but at least it is minimal impact coming up from Hyde Street there. I will be putting that into the community feedback when it happens.

That is the group. People go down and have their barbecues. We had our break-up barbecue down there. Scott was there, and everybody enjoyed a great day. It is a lovely space if you want to go down there and actually have a day out, and I would think I would keep it at that.

The CHAIR — Fabulous.

Mr WILSON — I would just reiterate that I am quite happy to take any group down there to have a look around this place —

The CHAIR — That would be great.

Mr WILSON — and get it into your head what the actual topography of it is and what we have done down there.

The CHAIR — We appreciate that. I am sure some committee members would be keen to come down and have a look and perhaps have a further conversation with members of the group as well.

Mr WILSON — No worries.

The CHAIR — Mr Dearman, were there any introductory remarks you would like to make, or are you happy to make a contribution when we come to questions?

Mr DEARMAN — No, I am happy to wait for questions.

The CHAIR — That would be great. Very good, fabulous. Thank you for your presentations. We might now move into some questions from the committee. I might just begin with a question. Perhaps you, Mr Ellerton. Can you please outline how you first became aware that your properties would be impacted by the proposed western distributor project?

Mr ELLERTON — Yes, specifically the amended western distributor proposal. We were notified by a letter drop. It was late September, and there was a note in our letterbox claiming that people had been around doorknocking to try to notify. Obviously we received the notification by the post. At that point I rang up Transurban directly, and they talked about community consultation sessions, with the first one during school holidays. That was poorly attended by all accounts due to the timing there. It was late September.

The CHAIR — Thank you. Mr Wilson, I might ask you. Obviously there is a lot of parkland that is running through the area, the Stony Creek Reserve being a very notable area of open space.

Mr WILSON — I was going to say it is the largest space on Stony Creek itself, except for Cruickshank Park — those two spaces. All the rest is so tightly built in with housing and industry. It is very tight.

The CHAIR — In terms of the impact to the environment, what are the specific concerns that you have with regard to this project?

Mr WILSON — Well, the initial impact of digging around the soil there. Then there is the actual loading up the ramps if they do go for the older option. There is going to be a lot of disturbance down there. That area is an old quarry. Apart from the SPC site, this is also part of the backwash quarry. It has been deeply quarried out for bluestone, and God knows what is in there. We had a fire down there in about 2003. We had been planning for about three or four years and got it going, and the fire just went straight through the whole site. On top of the hill it burnt for two days underground, so you can imagine what is down there. So if they start digging around there, if they start impacting on that site, God knows what is going to be released into the creek, because there are heavy metals. There is arsenic, petrochemicals are in there as well. So there is that initial impact.

Then there is just cutting down of trees. They have to take out a huge swathe of trees if they go for that option. So there is a loss of bird habitat that has built up over the years. Then on the creek itself, it is overshadowing the

creek. It will be overshadowing the creek, and God knows what that is going to do. There is some native vegetation still there, so they have to be very hard to get to avoid damaging it. It is just a loss of community effort over the years to actually create a park in that aspect of the park.

The CHAIR — That answer leads me on to my next question, which I am happy for any and all of our witnesses to make comment on. Are you aware of any studies that the government has undertaken in regard to the impact of this project? Is anybody aware of any?

Mr WILSON — No, we are not.

The CHAIR — No?

Mr ELLERTON — Environmental?

The CHAIR — Yes, from an environmental perspective.

Mr DEARMAN — No. That is the next stage.

Mr WILSON — Yes, that is what I said. I assume that is the next stage as well.

The CHAIR — Okay, very good.

Ms TIERNEY — I understand the minister did actually put out a media release this week on the western distributor planning process. Have you seen that?

Ms WILSON — About the scoping requirements for the environment effects statement?

Ms TIERNEY — Yes. I actually saw some of the ads in yesterday's *Herald Sun* and the *Age*. I am not sure where else it was advertised. Are any of your organisations going to be putting a submission into the scoping exercise for this?

Ms WILSON — Yes, I am pretty sure we will put in a submission.

Mr WILSON — We will be putting something in.

Mr ELLERTON — Yes, we will be putting something in as well.

Mr DEARMAN — It is a pretty short time frame, but we are happy — —

Ms TIERNEY — Yes, sort of like 11 March.

Mr WILSON — It is a pretty general statement, so you never get your heads around it.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Can I seek clarification, Chair? When was it placed in the newspaper? What was the day of that?

Ms TIERNEY — Yesterday.

Mr ONDARCHIE — And the response is by 11 March?

Ms WILSON — It was announced two days ago.

Mr WILSON — Twenty days or something it is. It is something like that.

Mr DEARMAN — Fifteen days.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Fifteen days for volunteer groups to get their submissions in? Is that what is being asked?

Mr WILSON — Yes, and the others meet once a month.

Ms TIERNEY — And it then goes on. I think it talks about further community consultation in April, so you are aware of that.

Mr DEARMAN — Yes. I think we understand the stages.

Ms TIERNEY — I would be really interested in getting your feedback about what you would like to see in that community consultation.

Mr DEARMAN — There is a 30-page document which we have to go through, which is asking us what we want to go into the environmental assessment phase. So we have to get our heads around the language of that document to begin with and understand the legalese that it is couched in to work out, ‘Is there any point at this point arguing for something else to be included?’. We have to very quickly make that decision about whether there is or whether we go to the next stage — default to the next stage — which is the community consultation.

Ms TIERNEY — Okay.

Ms WILSON — It certainly is not a very easy process for community groups to submit to and get our heads around.

Ms TIERNEY — And in terms of the actual proposed consultation in April, though, are there some specific things? Given that you clearly have been so heavily engaged in this whole issue for some time, you are pretty well experienced in community consultation. What are some key themes that you would be really looking for in terms of the process of that community consultation?

Mr DEARMAN — I think, personally, going along with the community consultation is a commitment to baseline monitoring on the key streets that we have all outlined in the submissions today so that we know what this problem is either solving or making worse. If we do not have that baseline monitoring along Francis Street, for example, for both noise and particulates, then we actually do not know. We can have all the commitments in the world to better practice or best practice, but we need to know what we are actually starting with.

Ms WILSON — The one thing that MTAG are particularly is concerned about is that the EES has to really take air quality issues into account, but also health into account. It is really important to us that there are improvements in health and air quality from this project. That needs to be really comprehensively looked at.

Mr DEARMAN — Yes, we would hope that the rationale for this is indeed to improve the lot of the inner western suburbs and not simply to make it easier for trucks to get in and out of the port.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Chair, can I just clarify something with Ms Tierney. I just want to work out what she said. She might be able to answer this for us. Is the request for submissions around the scoping for the EES or for the project itself?

Ms TIERNEY — For the EES.

Mr DEARMAN — For the EES.

Ms WILSON — The EES.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Just for the EES, not for the actual project?

Ms TIERNEY — Yes.

Mr ONDARCHIE — So the consultation is about the EES, not about the actual project itself.

Mr WILSON — No, they still have to design it.

Mr ELLERTON — It is about the terms of the EES.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Okay, rather than the project itself. Right.

Mr ELLERTON — In terms of the consultation period, what I would like to see — from members of my group, we want to see detail. We want to see detail about where roads will go. We want to see detail regarding

alignment issues. We want to see detail regarding elevations. We would like to know how roads, ramps, tunnels will be connecting with the existing traffic system. It is all, for my mind, at this stage for us, it is a lot of unknowns, and detail is something that we are very keen to hear about. Without that detail it is difficult to provide specific feedback, because it is just general. So many times we have been told, 'Oh, this is just an overview. It is just an indication'. So I can give you a general indication that I do not like it, but you cannot address my concerns because there are no specifics.

Mr FINN — Have they given any indication of when they will get into specifics?

Mr WILSON — No.

Mr ELLERTON — I have spoken to the project manager at the department of economic development and he indicated that we can expect some more detail about the alignment and the roads at this upcoming consultation session, but we will wait to see.

Ms TIERNEY — In April?

Mr ELLERTON — That is right.

Ms HARTLAND — Before I ask questions I do need to indicate that I know all of these people and I actively work with them on a range of issues, and especially with Friends of Stony Creek and MTAG, for probably a decade or more. Scott is a more recent person I have been working with. Steve, I would like you to describe just a little bit about what Stony Creek was like 25 years ago.

Mr DEARMAN — Twenty-five years ago?

Mr ONDARCHIE — He does not look old enough to know.

The CHAIR — No, how would he know?

Mr WILSON — I can tell you what it was like in 1846 if you like.

Ms TIERNEY — He was only three at the time.

Mr WILSON — It has been altered greatly. It was actually a large backwash and it has been filled in gradually over the years. Twenty-five years ago they were basically building the West Gate Bridge around about that time so it was just a wasteland of mud. Some of the fill from the West Gate went into it. I think they had just finished topping off the old quarry that was there. They had a fire in the quarry in 75, I think it was. A famous councillor, I cannot remember his name now — Matt Harris — he was involved down there trying to get the fire stopped. He was also involved with rescuing people off the West Gate. But there was a fire down there, the quarry was really badly managed. It was full of oil, so it was a huge fire. And that basically started the environment movement in Footscray itself, with the council and everything. After that it was still vacant for a long time. It was just a flat land, probably a few Scottish thistles around the place, not used at all except for maybe a few adventurous kids going down there.

So it really did not start picking up as a park till probably around about the early 80s when the Footscray council at the time planted some trees along there. The friends group got started and started off there as a general friends of Footscray — Greening Footscray, I think it was initially called — and we concentrated on Stony Creek. So it has gradually become more like an urban park.

It has always been the halfway point between Hobsons Bay and Maribyrnong council and it suffered for it, but now it is not because the council appreciates what they have got down there, like the people do appreciate what they have got down there now. So it has turned 90 degrees from what it would have been originally in about 1848 before they started quarrying down there to what it is now. It has gone in a complete circle, and I do not want to see it go. Sorry.

Ms HARTLAND — I suppose this is a question for everyone on the issue of consultation. I have been to some of the Transurban consultation — what they call consultation sessions, which I would call information sessions. I have some ideas about the way this should be done, but Transurban have always rejected it. How would you feel about a public meeting-style or a forum-style event where a range of people in the audience

were able to ask questions of a panel, not political speeches but actual questions of a panel rather than this individual, off-in-a-corner kind of what they call consultation?

Mr ELLERTON — I think that would be excellent. I think the key benefit behind that is that it is transparent in terms of individuals asking a question. One thing that I observed at the last community consultation session, we had quite a turnout there but we would end up with someone asking a question and other people standing around listening, and then that would sort of get the cogs turning on something else that perhaps they had not thought of previously. But in terms of that consultation session too, that is a lot of people sitting around or standing around talking. From what I saw, there was not much note-taking. There were some forms to fill in — rate this or what do you think about this or what is your no. 1 concern?

But my issue with that consultation, or information, session, was that you did not see members of Transurban being asked questions or nothing being recorded or no notes being taken down by the individuals about what people were actually asking. People were getting the party lines in terms of responses, which comes out in the detail. Then, following on again, there has been no consultation report released from that consultation session, or that round of consultation.

Mr ONDARCHIE — You think it was a done deal before you got there, do you?

Mr ELLERTON — Possibly. It does beg the question of how much of the community consultation do they really want to hear? Is it appearances, or is it true community consultation? The absence of recording and absence of a report leads me to believe that it is the appearance rather than true consultation. But returning to Colleen's question, I think the ability for people to come along to a session and ask questions of a panel and of individuals in the know would be very valuable.

Ms WILSON — I agree. I think that is absolutely the way to go. I think the majority of the community do not actually know what questions to ask in that situation. They are worried about the impacts, but they do not really understand them. We are having enough trouble getting our heads around the scoping requirements for the EES, and we have all been doing this for a long time. So, yes, I think that would be a much more valuable thing for the community, but also, obviously, there is going to be a lot more transparency from that.

Mr FINN — Do you feel you are being bulldozed by these people, if you will pardon my pun?

Mr DEARMAN — It is more like a slow process. It is not bulldozed, because that implies some sort of quick tumult. This is more a kind of shifting sands, where you are not actually quite certain who is responsible for making decisions. Is it the department? Is it Transurban? Is it someone else? I agree with the idea that more real community consultation is required. I think also what is required is more community education about what the questions could be, without walking into a meeting and all of a sudden those who are nimble-footed enough to work their way through it will essentially win out through that consultation process. We actually need some more certainty about where are the portals going to be? We have got a community consultation process, we have got an EES being embarked upon, but we do not actually know which tunnel entry we are dealing with.

The CHAIR — Mr Wilson, did you have a comment? Then we might go to Ms Tierney, who had a follow-on question.

Mr WILSON — Yes, just a small comment. I agree with Scott that the feedback was — —

They did not take any notice of any of the questions people asked. The feedback was dependent on what people wrote on the forms as they went out. So there were a lot of questions, a lot of questions repeated, and I think there is still a general confusion about some of the details of the plan because they would answer one person's question but nobody else would hear it or get any feedback about it. So there was that. But also I felt there was a bit of a sleight of hand about the whole process, because some of the diagrams and pictures they put on the boards were taken at very nice angles for them. They did not really show the huge impact it would have on the site. You would see a sketch of a road up on the horizon. They were very poorly executed.

Ms WILSON — I was going to say that there was a photo that was shown of the Hyde Street Reserve, of the portal, and it was taken from quite a distance and it was — I do not know — a very, very small photo. We said to them, 'If you want to allay the community fears, make it bigger and show us more detail about how it is going to look'. They gave us a heap of reasons why they could not do that, but then it turned out a more detailed

photo was shown at an information session for council. So there is definitely a bit of a lack of transparency. When that kind of thing happens, it does make it hard to trust them.

The CHAIR — Trust — —

Mr ONDARCHIE — So first this community group finds things going underground, and now they are going over your homes — —

The CHAIR — Mr Ondarchie, Ms Tierney had a follow-up question from Ms Hartland.

Ms TIERNEY — I just want to be really clear about the report that you mentioned, and you do not know where it is, what table it may or may not be in. That was a report that the community understood was going to be provided to whom? What was the contract of engagement in terms of that report?

Mr DEARMAN — Sorry, I do not understand — —

Mr ELLERTON — No, I have got this one. To gain the community feedback report, so there was a general level of expectation — I will step back, sorry. In April to July there was community consultation regarding the western distributor. At the conclusion of that, an independent company, Nature, produced a community feedback report.

Ms TIERNEY — Who were they?

Mr ELLERTON — I believe they are an independent company contracted to Transurban and accountable for the collation of community feedback. Now, based upon that community feedback, Transurban subsequently produced an additional report entitled *Summary of community and stakeholder feedback 30 April to 31 July 2015*. They used that report as the basis for amending the portal location from the West Gate Freeway to the Hyde Street Reserve, claiming that 600 people had been consulted and X number of percentage wanted more done to get trucks off residential streets. So they are saying, ‘By doing this, we are getting more trucks off residential streets’.

Based upon those reports being produced, I am under the impression that a similar arrangement would have been in place for the September-October period. However, to date there has been no report released by Transurban, and I would not expect Nature to release it, if they were the existing contractor or the continued contractor. However, I do believe that Transurban would have had some sort of report created based upon this consultation period. It is further supported by the conversation that I had with representatives from Transurban who claimed that that community consultation report had been handed to the government, so it was no longer their property.

The CHAIR — Ms Hartland, do you have any further questions?

Ms HARTLAND — Yes. Narelle, you have been doing this now for — —

Ms WILSON — About three years.

Ms HARTLAND — Yes, and the group has been going for about 10 years?

Ms WILSON — Yes. MTAG has been going for 10, but there have been other groups before MTAG.

Ms HARTLAND — So you have seen various shades of consultation over the years. For me, having seen various shades of consultation, and especially over the last 10 years, there seems to now be this pattern of all governments giving people as little information as possible, doing these strange one-on-one consultation processes. What would your message be to all parties about the way they should actually consult with communities?

Ms WILSON — I guess we feel like they are just ticking their community consultation box. We do not necessarily feel like our views are being properly listened to or properly evaluated. I think what you suggested before would be a really valuable thing to do. Yes, I mean this is the first big road project that I have been involved with, so it is hard to say what should be done, I think. I do not know if Philip can answer that — assurances that what we are saying is actually being evaluated and looked at seriously.

Mr DEARMAN — I think the problem is that we are all so used to this style of non-consultation, this style of information rather than consultation. A meaningful consultation would have clear decisions already made about preferred options, giving people time to formulate questions. That is not what we have.

Mr FINN — No doubt you would have spoken to the Maribyrnong council and your local councillors about the — is it a proposal or suggestion? I am not sure what you would call it.

Mr ONDARCHIE — It's a done deal.

Mr FINN — Well, yes, it seems like a done deal; it does. What is the feedback that they are giving you about the input that they are having into this process?

Mr ELLERTON — I have spoken to councillors, and I have been told that Transurban are engaging with the executive of the Maribyrnong City Council, so there is that line of communication open at the moment, and the councillors have been involved in that.

Mr FINN — Do they feel that they are getting any worthwhile information?

Mr ELLERTON — I am not sure of specifics. I have been told that the detail that they have been getting seems to address the questions that they have in the broader context in terms of trying to gain detail about how this will affect residents and what sort of alignment will occur. But having said that, it is, as far as I am aware, nothing above and beyond what has been produced in the community consultation sessions, apart from that individual image.

Mr FINN — Yes, it sounds like they are telling you exactly what they were telling me as well, that they are not getting too much information from anybody. Have you had any direct contact at all from government, from a department, or is this all just Transurban that is doing this?

Ms WILSON — MTAG have met with Tim Pallas, Luke Donnellan and the western distributor project team.

Mr FINN — Were they able to help you at all in terms of providing the information that you are after?

Ms WILSON — Not really. It was more probably them hearing our concerns but also explaining the whole process to us.

Mr FINN — I am very concerned that this project is going to take trucks off the West Gate Bridge, which of course we all want, but is going to redirect them through Yarraville in particular and maybe Footscray as well. As you would be aware, I am pretty familiar with Francis Street and Yarraville and those areas, but I would just like you to give other members of the committee, apart from Ms Hartland and me, the idea of what that would do to your way of life, to your homes and to your living standards and what you would face with an increase in the number of trucks going through as a result of this project.

Ms WILSON — We recently had a new curfew introduced on Somerville Road that removed trucks for an hour and a half in the morning and an hour and a half in the afternoon while children were travelling to and from school. We had people telling us that that in itself was life-changing. That was only 3 hours less trucks a day. People were crying when that got announced. I mean people cannot sleep at night. People are worried about their children. The health impacts are huge.

Note: The comments by Ms Wilson in the above paragraph have been changed in accordance with her request for amendment and this is an exceptional circumstance.

Mr DEARMAN — But correspondingly, people were really angry because another street over when those curfews were introduced on Somerville Road, because the rat-running trucks went down Francis Street, past the primary school. What is the street?

Ms WILSON — Francis Street, Wembley Primary School.

Mr DEARMAN — Wembley Primary School. All of a sudden they were suffering, which indicates to us that curfews on single streets at just particular times are nothing more than a bandaid.

Ms WILSON — Wembley primary recently did a survey and found that they had a 20 per cent asthma rate at the school.

Mr FINN — A 20 per cent asthma rate.

Ms WILSON — Twenty per cent; so that is twice the national average. I mean it is pretty serious. And parents get really stressed, and people leave the area. They live there for a few years, and then they leave, so it has created quite a disjointed community in a way. People love living there, but people cannot necessarily stay there.

Mr ELLERTON — I live approximately halfway between Francis Street and where the proposed southern portal will be, so 130 metres. If the portal goes into the Hyde Street Reserve, then that will have a significant impact, certainly to me. Concerns regarding the extra trucks will be the noise, the pollution and the visual impact. We have concerns during the actual operation, but there are also concerns during the construction as well. If this Hyde Street option gets approved, everyone that lives in that pocket — and as I showed you before, with the distances — it will impact residents, but it will also impact the community centre. It will impact the community kindergarten. It will have a significant negative impact to residents and to our community.

And I would just like to add too that in terms of noise, we know exactly where we live. We bought into the area, knowing the West Gate Bridge is south, and we know Francis Street is there, but this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do something that has no unnecessary impacts to residents. The Hyde Street option has unnecessary impacts to residents. With the West Gate option, the trucks are going through that corridor anyway, so if the portal is over there, then we see no unnecessary impacts to residents.

Mr ELASMAR — Can I follow up on this? You mentioned the pollution, and I am aware of the projection that there would be about 22 000 vehicles a day removed from the West Gate, including 6000 trucks.

Mr ELLERTON — Yes.

Mr ELASMAR — Will that not reduce the pollution? Can you explain to me more about that?

Mr ELLERTON — What will that do to pollution, is that what you are asking?

Mr ELASMAR — That will reduce the pollution, will it not?

Mr ELLERTON — Reduce pollution?

Mr ELASMAR — Yes.

Mr ELLERTON — But it is removing that traffic from the West Gate Bridge which is hundreds of metres south of where we live to a location within 150 metres of where we live. It is concentrating that traffic, plus additional traffic that I would reasonably expect would use other roads in Yarraville, being Somerville and Francis streets. Trucks from there will also use this distributor, so what we are talking about is a concentration of these trucks — and the traffic as well, cars as well — using the tunnel and using the portal. So we are concerned also with the pollution, the acceleration, the particulate matter that occurs when trucks are accelerating up the incline to rejoin the West Gate Bridge going west. But there are also noise concerns regarding the amount of traffic that is going towards the port as well. They will be going downhill. I am sure all of you are familiar with the Burnley — the noise and just the pollution in the air using that tunnel. I think it is clearly noticeable, regardless of the science behind it.

Mr DEARMAN — Also I think it is important to take a step back and not assume that 22 000 trucks a day will be removed from the West Gate. As we said before, there are only two roads in the plan at the moment that are guaranteed of having a 24-hour curfew on them. So the option still exists for trucks that are open to being charged up to \$80 a day to use the tunnel to go elsewhere.

Mr FINN — I am just wondering at the moment about the impact of a pending decision, the uncertainty. What level of anxiety is that causing among local residents?

Ms WILSON — I think from MTAG's point of view a lot of residents are feeling really despondent about this project. I think when it was first announced we felt that this is a solution that could work. It is becoming

more and more clear that it is a solution that will work for some but certainly not the whole inner west, which is really disappointing because it is possibly our only opportunity.

Mr WILSON — I would also say on behalf of the members of Friends of Stony Creek that it is impacting on them as well, because they have done all this work down there and now we do not know where it is going. Are we going to lose it? Is the group going to slowly twiddle away because there is so great an impact that we cannot do anything down there anymore? People lose sleep over it; I lose a bit of sleep over it.

Mr FINN — So have you stopped working down there already?

Mr WILSON — We still work down there. We have continued planting, but the part where we are planting at the moment will probably have the greatest impact. There is a worry about that.

Mr ELLERTON — It is having an impact. In terms of residents, we have a membership base of 35, but we talked to many more people who live in the immediate area. A common question we are asked is what is going to happen with this road, because apparently we are in the know. ‘What is going to happen with this road, because I am looking at renovating’, and, ‘I am looking at doing something with my house’, or, ‘I am looking at having a family and we are concerned about will happen if we raise our kids in this house.’ These are the questions that I am being asked and unfortunately I clearly do not have the answer. The mandate of our group is to express these concerns. To a tee, so far, most reasonable people that we talk to — when you talk about the two options — are seeing that the West Gate option does have the least localised impact on residents. But likewise, people can also see the significant impacts to residents in that pocket of Yarraville. We just want to make sure that they are not forgotten about.

Ms WILSON — People make life decisions based on this kind of thing. I sent my daughter to the local school thinking that the truck action plan was going to go ahead, and clearly that did not happen. So there is a lot of uncertainty.

Mr ONDARCHIE — I have a couple of things I want to talk about, but firstly, I want to touch on Narelle’s comment about the hope that what you are saying is being evaluated and listened to. I have had the privilege of listening to Narelle present from MTAG to the port of Melbourne inquiry, and I can tell you that has happened because the committee recommended to the government that it include the last mile, the rail last mile, as part of the sale of the port of Melbourne. So you are being listened to.

Ms WILSON — Great.

Mr ONDARCHIE — We will just cross our fingers that the government will listen. I want to talk about the consultation report, Scott. You touched on that and my understanding was that there was a consultation report up until 31 July last year.

Mr ELLERTON — Yes.

Mr ONDARCHIE — And has there been a subsequent one to that?

Mr ELLERTON — No.

Mr ONDARCHIE — So it has not been done, or does it exist, or we do not know?

Mr ELLERTON — Well, as I stated before, I am under the impression that there is a report based upon a conversation that I had with a representative from Transurban saying that the government had the report and it was no longer their property.

Mr ONDARCHIE — But you have not seen it?

Mr ELLERTON — Oh no. That has not been released publicly. But having said that, as I stated before, the FOI request came up short, saying the department did not have a consultation report from the last period, so it is either missing or it is —

Mr ONDARCHIE — Somebody has got it and they are not saying.

Mr ELLERTON — Someone's got it or it has not been passed on. I am not sure. But regardless, as I said before, and I restate it, we are concerned that our concerns are not being recorded and listened to appropriately.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Thank you. So if it does exist — and there is some suggestion by Transurban that it might exist but they do not hold it, they have given it to somebody else, or they might have given it to somebody else so it is hidden in someone's cupboard — is your call on the government to release that report in terms of consultation and in good faith?

Mr ELLERTON — Absolutely. We want to see that report.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Okay. Thank you. The second thing is that it seems to me there are a whole lot of unanswered questions here. There are groups that are reportedly doing consultation, sending you letters when they claim they might have knocked on your door. There is a whole lot of stuff that is unanswered here. So is your advice to us, in trying to determine what is going on out there, to invite people like the local council, like the EPA, like VicRoads, like Transurban and other interested parties that are involved in this to come in and present to us? Is that something you would recommend to us?

Mr ELLERTON — I think anyone involved in this process, if they have information and they have detail, then that would be worthwhile to present to the committee, yes.

Ms WILSON — But I also think government coming into the community and listening to the community is really important.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Yes, but, Narelle, they will not come to you. We have to capacity to actually call them in and find out on your behalf what is going on. So would you suggest that we do that?

Mr ELLERTON — I would like to see that, but specifically to find out the detail. The devil is in the detail, and that is what we would like to know. If you have the power to achieve that, then that would be fantastic and it would be very well received by the community.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Alright, so I mentioned groups like the EPA and VicRoads and the local council and maybe the department of planning as well. Maybe the minister can come in and talk to us. If there is anybody else you think the committee should call to get some more detail about what is going on — not the superficial stuff, but right in the detail — please let us know through our secretariat about who we should see as well.

My final point, by way of thanking them all for giving up their Wednesday night, Chair, and for the coming in to see us, is: I reckon it was about this time last year — maybe a bit later — when the *Herald Sun* ran a report on the obesity rate in the western suburbs, which has a significant, growing obesity rate compared to the rest of Melbourne and Victoria. Given that, are you telling me that this project will take away open space? Is that what you are telling me?

Mr DEARMAN — It appears to be the case.

Mr ELLERTON — The Hyde Street option will take away open space.

Mr WILSON — If the short tunnel goes ahead, yes.

Mr DEARMAN — Can I just add in that there is some uncertainty in my mind also, because of the lack of clarity about the alignment, about what is going to happen to Yarraville Gardens. There were geotech surveyors there two days ago taking measurements in the bottom oval, just adjacent to Whitehall Street. There were drilling stations there some weeks back on both the top corner of the park, next to Hyde Street, and the bottom corner of the park next to — what is that place down there?

Ms WILSON — Kindred Studios.

Mr DEARMAN — Kindred Studios. We were given assurances, I was given assurances, by the drilling people that, you know, they were just checking out the lay of the land. It would be great, apart from getting people to come and compel them to answer questions to give you clarity, also to just help educate the community about what actually is happening.

There is a community barbecue in Grimes Reserve on the Maribyrnong this coming weekend, which is about the West Gate distributor stage 1. They have been talking to the community about what is happening with the strengthening of Shepherd Bridge. A lot of people are confusing that with the western distributor.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Yes, I get that.

Ms HARTLAND — This is probably a comment as well as a question. I just want it to be really clear in the transcript that when we are talking about trucks we are talking about B-doubles, we are talking about container trucks, we are talking about fuel trucks. We are not talking about small delivery vans. So we are talking about trucks that have major impact. They are mainly diesel, and diesel is now a known carcinogen. One of the things that has disturbed me over the last 10 years of working on this is the general refusal of governments in that 10 years — and I have asked repeated questions about long-term health studies, and I asked this of the previous health minister, David Davis — to do these long-term health studies in the community. How do you think that would assist if we could actually get that going?

Ms WILSON — Yes, we have been trying to get the government as well to acknowledge that we have a health problem in our community. They never have, and any curfew that we have gotten has been on grounds of noise pollution or safety impacts. It is something that the government is always skirting around for some reason. We see the health impacts in our community.

Just to add to Colleen's point about the size of the trucks, we also know that 50 per cent of the trucks that drive through our area are pre-1995. They have no engine emission standards. Other countries, like the US, have had programs for well over a decade now to phase out those trucks. These are the most highly polluting trucks. Some of them are over 30 years old, and they make up half the trucks on our road. That is why we have a health problem. And it is stop-start, stop-start traffic. They are not running at their most efficient. So even the trucks that do have the latest engine emission standards, they do not run at those engine emission standards in that kind of suburban street.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Just one comment for us, Chair. The government with great fanfare released a business case for a project it may or may not build around Metro rail, but maybe we could ask it for the business case for this as part of the project too so we could see what is going on.

The CHAIR — If there are no further questions, I thank you all very much for your attendance here this evening. I appreciate that you have taken the time out to come and present to us. Mr Wilson, we might take that opportunity to come along and have a look at Stony Creek so the committee gets a better understanding of what it is like.

Mr WILSON — I can be very flexible about times.

Mr ONDARCHIE — We could do a helicopter flight over the top or something, maybe.

The CHAIR — We could. Once again I thank you all for your attendance here this evening and close our hearing. Thank you.

Committee adjourned.