

# TRANSCRIPT

## STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

### Inquiry into infrastructure projects

Melbourne — 20 April 2016

#### Members

Mr Joshua Morris — Chair

Ms Colleen Hartland

Mr Khalil Eideh — Deputy Chair

Mr Craig Ondarchie

Mr Nazih Elasmr

Ms Gayle Tierney

Mr Bernie Finn

#### Staff

Secretary: Dr Christopher Gribbin

#### Witnesses

Ms Christine McCall, CEO, and

Ms Tina Soumbassis, Chairperson, Committee of Management, Yarraville Community Centre.

**The CHAIR** — We might get underway, so I will reopen our Standing Committee on the Economy and Infrastructure public hearing. I will just begin by explaining that we are hearing evidence today in relation to the infrastructure inquiry and the evidence today is being recorded. This hearing is to inform the second of at least six reports into the infrastructure projects. Witnesses present may well be invited to attend future hearings as the inquiry continues. All evidence taken 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 this privilege.

I welcome you both here today. I ask you to state your name and the capacity in which you appear before us today, then I will ask you to make any introductory comments. Then we will follow with some questions from the committee. Over to you.

**Ms McCALL** — I am Christine McCall. I am the CEO of Yarraville Community Centre.

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — I am Tina Soumbassis, and I am the chairperson of Yarraville Community Centre committee of management.

**Ms McCALL** — Thank you for inviting us here today to the public hearing on the western truck distributor route.

I will just give a little background. YCC is located on the eastern end of Francis Street, and we have been in that building for 40 years. The building is of considerable importance to the local community. It is a prominent historical landmark in the western suburbs of Melbourne. It was built in 1889, so it has been there a long time — long before any trucks went down Francis Street or any other industry and infrastructure around us. It has been a focal point in the community for 130 years, with a long-established history of action to ensure the building is retained for community use. Eight years ago the Francis Street building underwent a \$5 million renovation, with funding from the federal, state and local governments. This is a testament to the recognition and importance of both the building and the community centre to the local and broader community.

We are a registered training organisation. We are registered as an adult and community further education and Learn Local provider. We are a neighbourhood house. We are registered to provide occasional care, and we provide training for the skills for employment program. Last year we received \$1.5 million in federal and state government funding to deliver education and training and community programs.

We engage with our community in a number of ways to create opportunities to build and enrich and build resilience. We are open seven days a week, seven evenings a week. We enable 2000 people to access our programs and services a week. We run programs for people of all ages, from babies right through to older adults. In fact one of our oldest adults is 91 years old, and she is learning computers — and she is really enjoying it.

The programs and services are delivered to a broad cross-section of the community, as I have explained. We have a strong emphasis on disadvantaged families and new and emerging communities. We have over 300 students learning English. We have four days a week of programs for people with a disability. One hundred and fifty families use the centre each week for child care. We have a ballet school with 170 students. We deliver children's drama groups. We provide a base for people and groups to meet, at really low cost or no cost, who are active in wanting to improve and make change in the community and at a personal level.

We employ 42 staff, with 25 subcontractors. We are not going into the detail about the health effects or the loss of Stony Creek parklands — you have already heard that previously from MTAG, Friends of Stony Creek and Concerned Locals of Yarraville. However, we believe the reduction of truck traffic on the streets of Maribyrnong is critical for the health and wellbeing of the community. In particular, the sheer volume of truck traffic just metres from our entrance on Francis Street is enormous. The increase over the last few years is notable.

We have approximately 4500 trucks per day going down Francis Street right past our front door. They are a hazard not only for our health but for people accessing our centre and for the apartments that are built behind us. As an example of this, our students went out and counted trucks as a numeracy exercise. They counted 95 trucks in 15 minutes. They came back into the centre, shocked at the sheer volume of the trucks. They came back in coughing, and they complained about their breathing a bit later. So we will not be doing that exercise

again; it will be done through a window. They said they cannot understand why so many trucks are allowed to go down a residential street.

I am going to hand over to Tina now, who is going to talk a little bit more.

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — As you have heard, we are located on Francis Street. We are approximately 250 metres from Hyde Street. We have many concerns with the short tunnel option, and our proximity to Hyde Street is a huge concern, obviously. First of all, the short tunnel is too close to our historic building. We are concerned about the visual impact that the short tunnel is going to have on our community. Those ramps are quite unsightly and there is going to be an impact on the Hyde Street Reserve as well, and that concerns not only our community but our centre as well, as our users often go down there.

The Yarraville Community Centre is concerned about the disruption to our services and to our participants, with the physical works, the dust and the noise during the construction. We are also very concerned for our staff being able to do their work effectively during the construction phase. All of our concerns are big concerns, but any damage or impact to our building is certainly a big concern, because as you have heard we have spent a lot of time and a lot of money restoring our building. It is an iconic building of the west, and we really need to take care of our historic buildings and preserve them.

A major concern as well is the ventilation systems. First of all we need to know exactly where they are located and their proximity to the Yarraville Community Centre. We are concerned about the air, the pollution, and we have also just heard that the air quality monitoring system is 3.5 kilometres away from Francis Street. How is the air quality going to be monitored in that area right near where we are, not only for the residents but for the users of our centre? That is something that we would like some detailed information on.

We are concerned about the impact of the significant increase in trucks going down Hyde Street. Obviously there are going to be many more trucks getting off at that Hyde Street ramp and turning left and turning right, but as soon as they turn left they are going to hit Hyde Street and go straight up to Francis Street. That is going to be a significant increase, and that is certainly going to affect our community and of course our users.

We are concerned about the potential environmental risk from the works that are going to be taking place on the contaminated land, which is located behind the centre. Stony Creek is a valuable green space to us all. The local community use it, and the users of YCC use it. They use it to take a walk, relax and go to the park, so that is a huge concern for us, especially with that short tunnel option.

Our preferred option is the long tunnel, although we are also concerned because we do not have any documentation about the tolling system with the tunnel. Are trucks going to once again avoid tolls and come straight down Francis Street? Are they going to avoid the Hyde Street option because there are various tolls there and go down a different way? We would like to see some guarantees, perhaps, that the tolling is going to be equitable so trucks will want to go down that Hyde Street option rather than coming through our streets. As we know, currently trucks have been using Francis Street to avoid the tolls on the Bolte Bridge. We would like to have some assurances that these roads are going to be used — these tunnels and these ramps are going to be used — and we are not going to be in a worse position than we already currently are. We are quite pleased that there have been some more options put on the table rather than just one short and one long option. We are keen to see the development there and what is going to happen.

A final question: will this development really change the impact of trucks or will it just be the emergence of another issue for the community — which we do not need and which we have had enough of — and the Yarraville Community Centre if trucks continue to use Francis Street and other local roads? I think that is huge — and the environmental impact, for me, is just huge.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you for that, and there are certainly some questions I had that you have covered off in there in terms of the two proposed tunnel options. The longer tunnel is certainly your preferred option, I have heard through your evidence today. With regard to consultation with regard to this project, do you have a view on how the consultation process has gone on? Has it been a positive process? Has it been one that you feel has been closed? What is your view on the consultation that has gone on to this point?

**Ms McCALL** — I know there have been a few consultation sessions. We attended one last year, and I know you had questions that were unanswered.

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — Yes.

**Ms McCALL** — The mapping process the images of where these tunnels and off ramps are going to go are not very clear. We met with Transurban last night, so we had a much better view of the potential options. So that was a little bit easier, but I think it raises more questions than answers up to this point.

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — And I think there has been a lack of detail in the information and even the imagery they have shown us. We have had these sketchy little maps, and we do not really know where exactly the tunnel is going to be and the exact proximity of where it is in reference to our building. Also, last night we did meet with them and they did have large maps, which is great.

**The CHAIR** — Sorry, who did you meet with last night? Transurban?

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — Transurban, and they did have large maps, which is terrific. They are presenting to the community, and I think they are presuming that everyone knows what they are thinking even with their large maps. They had a map of one ramp and one tunnel, not all the ramps. Then I would say, 'That's pretty good, because there's not much impact on the visual environment mentally'. Then they said, 'But these ramps are going to be there'. So there is no overlay to show the community where the ramps are. They show you one, and you sort of think that is not too bad, without knowing that there are going to be ramps. So I actually said to them, 'Perhaps if you had some overlays showing. We can't read your mind; the maps aren't very clear'. So they took that on board and they said that perhaps they might do that. I do not know, but there needs to be more detail and people really need to understand. Not everyone can look at a map.

**Ms McCALL** — Visually interpret what is on a map.

**The CHAIR** — Indeed, that is a very good point.

**Ms TIERNEY** — So the information you got last night was more detailed than what you have had in the past?

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — Yes.

**Ms TIERNEY** — And they have said that they will take on board trying to provide a visual that is a lot more realistic, more sort of 3D layered. Are they going to do that fairly quickly?

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — They did not commit to any time frame, and yet there is a meeting this Thursday. So I am not quite sure if they are organised enough to do that. They said it was a lot of work to get what they had. However, that is their job.

**Ms TIERNEY** — Because it is my understanding that there are six consultations scheduled. One is starting tonight in Altona North.

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — Yes, correct.

**Ms TIERNEY** — And on the 21st in Yarraville, then Footscray on the 23rd, North Melbourne on the 27th, Scienceworks on the 28th and Docklands on the 3rd.

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — Yes.

**Ms TIERNEY** — And were they giving you an indication last night that the type of consultation they will be doing this time versus what has happened previously, that it will be different?

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — No, no. Because there are more options on the table, I am presuming they are doing much of what they have done in the past. Now when I did point out that the maps were not detailed one of the fellows pointed this out. He said, 'You have them right in front of you'. I said, 'Have a look at that'. They are the five options, and that is what he presumed that I could make ends of or what the community could make ends of. So really, as I said, it is their job. I just think they really need to give more detail and be a little bit more thorough in what they are presenting to the community, because they are presenting to a broad range of people and there really needs to be a good level of understanding.

**Ms TIERNEY** — Will you be providing some follow-up from the conversations you had last night, given your experience being a community centre, about a clearer communication strategy? On the one hand, we are arguing for more detail, more detail. Yet then detail is provided, but you were arguing that that is too confusing.

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — Not sufficient.

**Ms TIERNEY** — And not sufficient. So is there a way of interacting with Transurban to try to get an agreement as to the preferred way of doing the consultation so that we can get some genuine traction on the issue?

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — We told them what we thought yesterday. I do not believe it is our job to have to. I mean, if we have already given them our opinions and said that, I do not know how clearer we can make it. They should take things on board — I mean, if they really, genuinely want to consult with the community.

**Ms McCALL** — One thing they alluded to was that there were translated materials, with the throwaway line, ‘We don’t know if it’s correct or not’.

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — Yes.

**Ms McCALL** — My response was, ‘You need to bring them to every community centre, and we can work with our local communities to go through the process and explain’. Because 39 per cent or 49 per cent — sorry, I know data changes significantly over time — a large proportion of residents of Maribyrnong are from a non-English-speaking background. The way we work with our local communities is to bring material around a whole range of issues into the classroom and allow them to unpick it and unpack it all and explain what is happening, so my concern for our residents in Maribyrnong is there is a large proportion of people for whom this material is not accessible and they will not understand what is happening.

**Ms TIERNEY** — I think also with translated material that the translation is often done by people who are professionals in that area and it is not necessarily the adjectives or the nouns that are used in community discussion.

**Ms McCALL** — That is right.

**Ms TIERNEY** — So it might be worth also engaging directly with the leadership of the different ethnic communities.

**Ms HARTLAND** — Just before I ask a couple of questions I need to state for the record that Chris McCall and I have known each other for longer than either of us is now prepared to admit. A community group I belonged to was a tenant in the building. I go to functions there all the time, so I have a very strong relationship with the centre.

If I could just answer Ms Tierney’s question too. I attended another one of the consultations in Spotswood on Saturday, and it was as poor as any of the others have been. They have not improved the mapping. As you have described it, it is still a major issue. We just do not know. So the other thing is I was speaking in the last presentation about air quality, and previously there had been an air quality monitoring unit on site. It was a caravan; I remember it. I cannot quite remember when it was there, but the centre would be very happy to host something like that again?

**Ms McCALL** — Yes, definitely.

**Ms HARTLAND** — Yes.

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — In fact I think it is imperative that there is one right near our site.

**Ms HARTLAND** — Also the centre has actually had to double glaze all its windows in the front of the building because of noise, because people could not actually hear otherwise.

**Ms McCALL** — We have airlocks coming into the building. It is not double glazing because we could not retrofit that, but it is 12 or 14-millimetre laminated glass. And no windows open to the front. They are all locked shut because we do not want that pollution coming into the building. Since the renovation, inside has been a lot

better, both noisewise but also in terms of pollution. We do not get the dust through. We are extremely concerned about diesel particles in that area.

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — Not to mention the lack of fresh air — not being able to open a window. Even if you want some fresh air and you want to go outside — —

**Ms McCALL** — You go to the back of the building. You do not go to the front.

**Ms HARTLAND** — Could you give an opinion on this project without a truck curfew? What would happen?

**Ms McCALL** — I am really concerned — and I know everybody else is — about trucks continuing to go down Francis Street. As we have pointed out, it is 4500 trucks per day. Ninety-five trucks in 15 minutes is a huge amount of trucks going down, and it is not going to improve anything in Francis Street if curfews are not implemented.

**Ms HARTLAND** — Just to clarify, when we talk about trucks, we are not talking about small delivery vans going to the supermarket. We are talking about container vehicles, and now the heavy vehicles have also been approved.

**Ms McCALL** — That is also a concern this week, wondering how many more trucks are going to be going down Francis Street because they cannot use the West Gate Bridge anymore.

**Mr FINN** — I too have been to the community centre. I can attest to its value to the community and also to what a damn fine place it is! Thank you for your time in coming in today. Now ventilation and exhaust systems are always a concern with the sort of tunnels we are talking about. Has Transurban or the government or anybody given you any indication of what impact ventilation units are going to be having on the centre or local residents?

**Ms McCALL** — No, we asked the question last night, and the response was that — —

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — That it is a thing for the EPA.

**Ms McCALL** — That is right — it is an EPA thing.

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — They passed it over to the EPA.

**Mr FINN** — God help us. That is the end of the show, then!

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — Yes, correct. That is a thing for the EPA. I did ask about standards, and I said our standards, Australian standards, do not seem to be the same as other standards around the world. So I asked, ‘Are we different? Are we made differently biologically in Australia that our standards do not have to be as high as other standards?’, and they just kept saying, ‘That’s something for the EPA’. So there was no answer given about the ventilation. They actually did say that the ventilation would be at the entrance and the exits of the tunnels. They said something about as trucks and cars go through the tunnel they push the air and then they go out through the ventilation stacks.

**Mr FINN** — So are they suggesting to you that there will be no ventilation in the tunnel?

**Ms McCALL** — At the end. At the beginning and the end of each tunnel is what they suggested. So if it is a short tunnel, it will be quite close to the community centre at Francis Street. The other end, I think, is Youell Street, which is past Yarraville Gardens — a bit further past. But their response that cars push the air through, I mean, I drive through the Burnley Tunnel quite often, and you have to turn your external air off, because the fumes are quite significant.

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — But once again, that is a lack of detail. We should probably have that information. Everyone should have that information. It is such a huge environmental impact.

**Mr FINN** — And if they have that information, they should be prepared to share it with you.

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — Exactly, and palming it off to the EPA. Well, the EPA was not there to speak to us about it. I think that the EPA — —

**Mr FINN** — You probably would have been none the wiser anyway.

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — Correct. However, there should be input. If they are being referred to, there should be some input from them. There is not enough detail. We just do not know.

**Mr FINN** — So Transurban is saying that this is a matter for the EPA —

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — Yes, correct.

**Mr FINN** — and if you have had the same experiences with the EPA that most other people have had with the EPA —

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — I have had numerous.

**Mr FINN** — you would be at this point throwing your hands in the air and saying, ‘God help us all’, I assume.

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — Correct. They know me by name, but yes. I do not know. We are very concerned.

**Mr FINN** — I can understand that. I also share your concern about the number of trucks, because Francis Street is a nightmare, and it does concern me that the number of trucks could actually increase as a result of this project, despite what some may have said. Have there been any guarantees given to you as to what may happen or will happen as a result of this project going ahead, with regard to the number of trucks, that is?

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — We have asked for guarantees. They have given us no guarantees in regard to anything. What they said last night specifically is that of course it is a no-brainer, they are going to use the Hyde Street ramp, and they are going to go through the tunnel, because they will be the best options for them. I did ask them, ‘Is your tolling system going to be equitable?’. Will they choose to use one part in preference to the other because it is cheaper?’. There was no guarantee that that would be the case, and they could not tell us exactly where the tolls will be. They have not given us any guarantees whatsoever. I mean, how are they going to guarantee that trucks are not going to avoid the tolls on the tunnels as they do now?

**Mr FINN** — So you believe we could well have a situation where it is worse after the opening of the tunnel than it is now?

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — Well, it could be, because we do not have any other information that guarantees otherwise. Until we find something out. I mean, you know, are they going to ban trucks on Francis Street?

**Mr FINN** — Have you had any discussions with the Maribyrnong council about this? Have they been given any information more than what you have already been given?

**Ms McCALL** — Not that we are aware of, but they did say that they were meeting with Maribyrnong council last night, so there could very well be more information coming from council from today onwards if we contact them.

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — But there has not been any public commitment from the council, so basically we do not know where they stand at this stage. Perhaps we will know something today.

**Ms HARTLAND** — To clarify, I met with council yesterday on a range of issues, and they said after their meeting last night they would be able to put an informed position forward, but they also raised the issue that they are not getting a lot of information as well.

**Mr FINN** — That is certainly the information they have given me too — that they are just not getting what they need to know in order to make a decision, so it is all up in the air, and if the council does not know it and the residents do not know it, it is very, very hard for anybody to make a decision, I am assuming.

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — That is right, and many residents rely on council’s opinion and what their stance is and their views are, because they figure they are in a position to make informed decisions, so if your council is

not letting you know anything because they do not have the information, the residents are certainly in a quandary as to what is going on. I think the information and lack of information in detail is the key issue here.

**The CHAIR** — No further? Ms Tierney?

**Ms TIERNEY** — At this point I am satisfied by a lot of the information you have provided in your answers and in your introductory comments. Again, thank you for your work.

**The CHAIR** — Indeed, and I think you have detailed quite well some of the feelings of the community, so we can provide the transcript of your evidence today to Transurban to help inform their consultation processes into the future, which might hopefully improve them. At that point I thank you for your evidence today.

**Ms SOUMBASSIS** — Thank you very much.

**Ms McCALL** — Thank you for allowing us to speak.

**Witnesses withdrew.**