

Whitehorse City Council appointed Pinnacle Group Australia to independently facilitate a range of community engagement activities regarding the Victorian Government's Suburban Rail Loop East (SRLE) project. Residents and visitors to Whitehorse were invited to provide comments about SRLE, so that Whitehorse City Council can tailor its advocacy priorities. This document summarises the outcomes of the following community engagement activities:

1. An **online survey** was open between 8 November 2021 and 21 November 2021. 114 responses were received.
2. An **online community forum** was hosted on 10 November 2021. The forum provided general information about the SRLE project within Whitehorse and invited comments from participants. 152 community members participated in the forum.
3. A **community panel** was established, comprising 23 representatives from the Whitehorse community. The panel participated in two online workshops on 11 November 2021 and 18 November 2021 to undertake a deeper dive into the issues and opportunities regarding SRL.

The key findings from across all engagement activities are:

**Participants believe that the key benefits of SRLE will be:**

- Easier and more convenient transport options
- Less traffic on our roads
- Faster travel times
- Better connectivity across Melbourne
- More sustainable and environmentally friendly methods of travelling

**The community support Whitehorse Council to advocate for the following matters:**

**Burwood:**

- Direct underground connection between the Burwood station and the northern side of Burwood Hwy
- Protect vegetation and open space
- Provide support to impacted businesses and residents

**Box Hill:**

- Direct underground connection between the existing Box Hill station and the new SRL station
- Protect vegetation and open space, particularly in Box Hill Gardens
- Provide support to impacted businesses and residents
- Connect the cycling path along Whitehorse Road to the existing Box Hill to Ringwood path and the proposed Box Hill to Hawthorn path

**Tunnels:**

- Protect the integrity of structures, open space and vegetation above the tunnels
- Limit noise and vibration from the tunnel's construction and operation

Each of Council's engagement activities included information about:

- How to access information regarding the SRLE Environmental Effects Statement (EES)
- Details of the Victorian Government's community information session on 4 December 2021
- How to make a submission regarding the EES, via the Engage Victoria website

# Online survey

The online survey was advertised via email, web, social media and letters mailed to property owners and occupiers in the vicinity of the SRLE alignment. The key survey results are outlined below.

## SRL benefits

Respondents were asked to rank a range of potential benefits of SRLE. The top three benefits identified by respondents were:

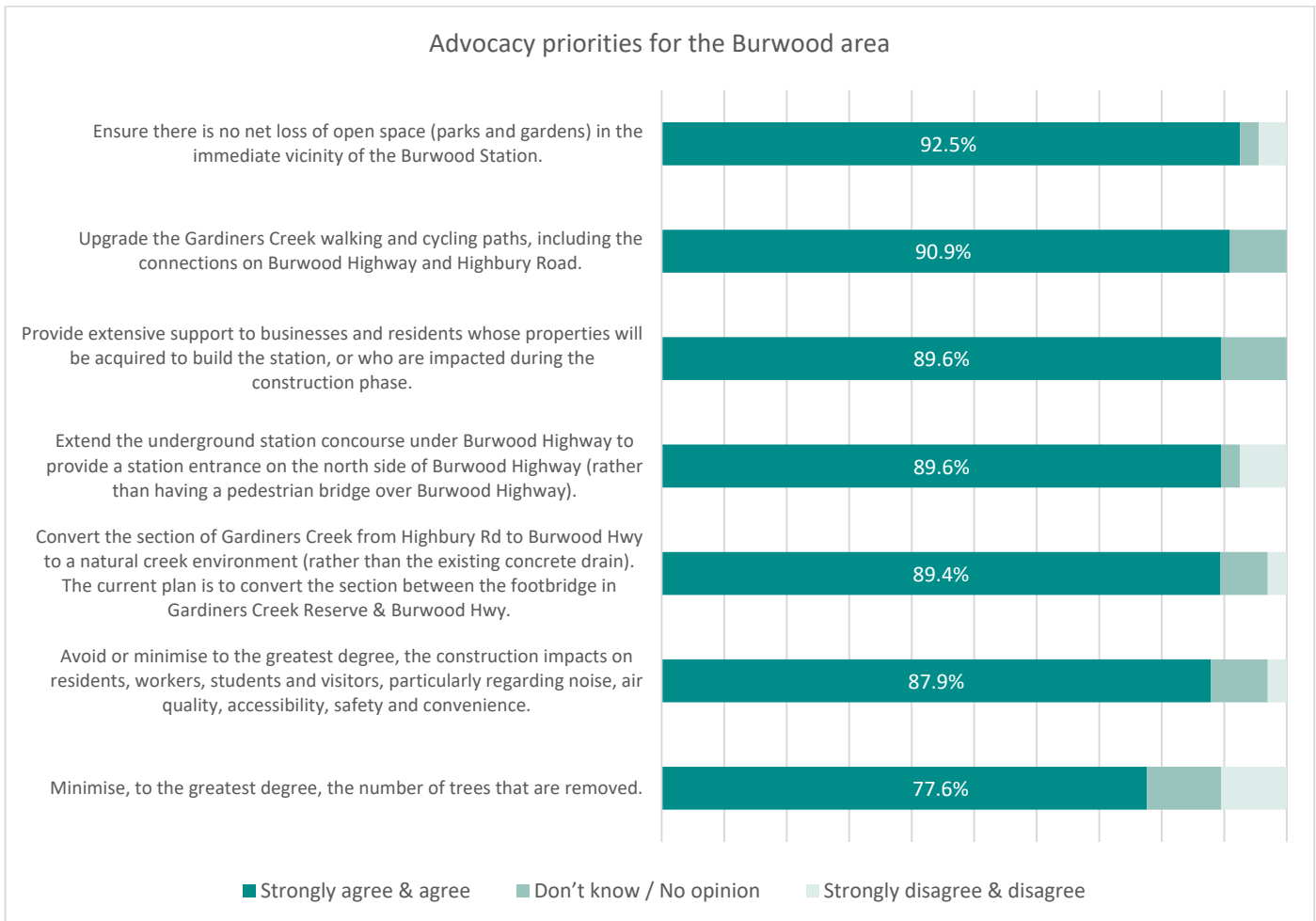
- Easier and more convenient transport options
- Less traffic on our roads
- Faster travel times

## Advocacy priorities

The survey outlined a number of draft advocacy actions identified by Whitehorse City Council and asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with each of these advocacy priorities.

### Burwood

All seven draft advocacy priorities for the Burwood station area received high levels of support. The highest support was to ensure that there is no net loss of open space in the immediate vicinity of the Burwood Station (strongly agreed or agreed to by 92.5% of the respondents).



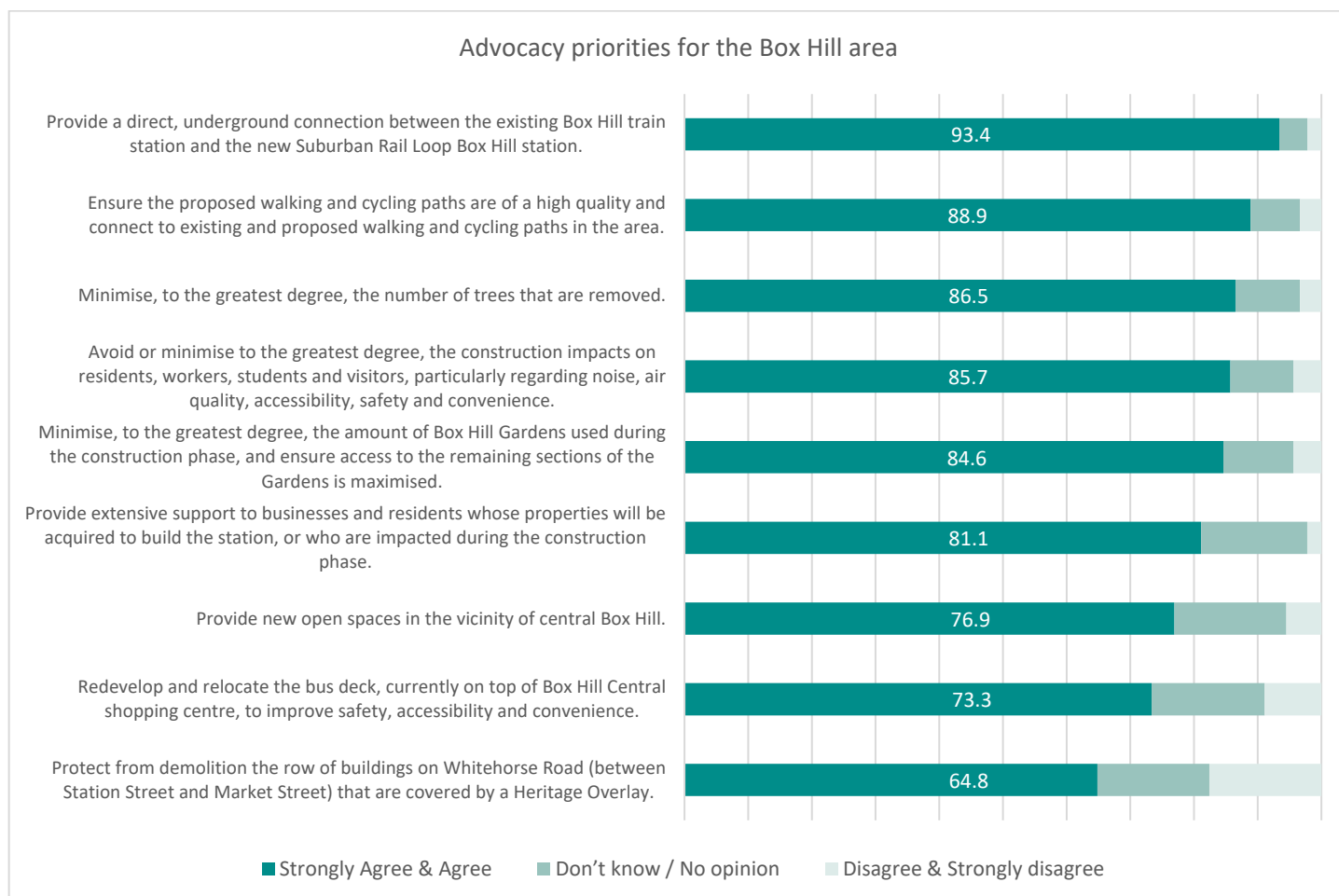
Respondents were asked if they had other suggestions for advocacy priorities.

The top three themes were:

1. More and/or improved cycling paths, connections and bike parking
2. Improved access for people of all abilities
3. Reduce the size of the proposed precinct around the station.

## Box Hill

Respondents were asked if they agree or disagree with advocating for nine items relating to the SRL Box Hill station area. Six out of the nine items received 80% support or greater, with the top item supported being advocacy for a direct underground connection between the existing Box Hill train station and the new SRL station (93.4% support).



Respondents were asked if they had other suggestions for advocacy priorities for Box Hill.

The top three themes were:

1. Improve public transport services and integration
2. Traffic management during construction and operation
3. Protect access to existing properties and services

## Tunnels

When asked to provide comments regarding the SRLE tunnels within Whitehorse, the top three themes were:

1. Concerns about the integrity of structures, open space and vegetation above the tunnels
2. Concerns about noise and vibration from the tunnel's construction and operation
3. Requests for information about:
  - a) the alignment and depth of the tunnels
  - b) impacts on above ground properties
  - c) the Planning Scheme Amendment and what it means for the respondent's property.

## Community Forum

The online community forum aimed to provide general information regarding SRLE and to identify participant's issues and opportunities. The forum was advertised via email, website and social media channels, and letters mailed to property owners and occupiers along the SRLE alignment.

During the forum, a number of web polls were taken to gain feedback. The first question posed to participants was *"What does the Suburban Rail Loop project mean to you, your family and your community?"* Some of the key themes that emerged were:

### Pros

1. An exciting advancement to increase connectivity through Melbourne
2. Important addition to sustainable transport options to get to shops, the airport and universities

### Cons

1. Environmental concerns regarding noise, vibration, loss of trees and impacts to open space
2. Concerns about disruption during construction
3. Fear about tunnels under properties
4. Concerns about project cost and planning

### Traffic and Transport

Participants heard some general information about the proposed transport elements of the project and were then asked *"Following the information provided on traffic and transport, please ponder: What are your top 3 priorities?"* The top five themes that emerged were:

1. Congestion - Community members were concerned about congestion at both Box Hill and Burwood sites.
2. Parking - Concerns were raised about not enough car parking (including parking for people with a disability and electric charging spaces) that may result in overflow into local streets.
3. Connectivity - Ensuring connectivity between the stations and other modes of transport including active transport, and the Belgrave and Lilydale train line.
4. Construction - Community members are concerned about the traffic disruption during the construction process, particularly trucks accessing the construction sites.
5. Safe and convenient access – Including enough security around the stations for safety; safely separating pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles; and ensuring people of all abilities can have convenient and safe access to the station and within the station.

### Open space and environment

After hearing general information about open space and environmental elements of the project, participants were asked *"Following the information provided on open space and environment, please ponder: What are your top 3 priorities."* The top five themes that emerged were:

1. Loss of trees and open spaces - Community members were particularly concerned by the size of space being required for construction; loss of mature trees; and the Gardiners Creek and Box Hill Garden spaces.
2. Noise - Community members were concerned by the amount of noise during construction and operation.
3. Useability - Community members expressed they would like the green space to be well designed, safe, usable, attractive, maintainable, and consider long-term biodiversity.
4. Vibrations - Community members were concerned by the potential for vibration during construction of the tunnels, as well as ongoing vibrations caused by trains once the tunnel is operational.
5. Disruption during construction - Community members raised concerns about the loss of green space during the lengthy construction period; disruption in the vicinity of the adjacent Box Hill aged care facility, and raised questions about how the construction space will be reinstated after construction.

## Land use planning and support for businesses and residents

Participants heard some general information about land use planning and the proposed support for businesses and residents. They were then asked *“Following the information provided on land use planning and support for business and residents, please ponder: What are your top 3 priorities?”* The top five themes that emerged were:

1. Community rights – Community members perceive that the Victorian Government is overusing its power, particularly regarding property acquisition and regarding the planning of future precincts.
2. Loss of heritage - Community members would like the heritage buildings and structures in Box Hill and Burwood retained.
3. Lack of transparency - Community members felt more information about the project would be beneficial, particularly relating to acquisitions and impacts on the value of properties. It was not clear to community members that SRLA had been in contact with potentially impacted land owners/ occupiers, and this caused fear that other properties were at risk. There was concern about the lack of transparency relating to the planning of future precincts.
4. Minimising the size of precincts - Community members felt the specified radius of up to 1.6km is too large for each precinct area, particularly considering the power SRLA would have within the radius.
5. Environmental impacts - Community members were concerned about the environmental impacts when asked about land use and planning. These included loss of biodiversity, tree cover, maintaining and minimizing impact on green spaces and the noise and vibration impacts of the tunnel.

## Community panel

Expressions of interest were invited from community members to join a small group to discuss SRLE in further detail. Applications were received from 35 people, and 23 were selected as a sample of the community. The inclusion criteria was based on representation of five key demographics: age, gender, background (CALD), location (Burwood/ Box Hill/ other), and community involvement (business owner, student, volunteer group etc). The panel met online twice to participate in workshops on 11 November 2021 and 18 November 2021.

In workshop 1, panel members heard general information about SRLE and then broke into groups to discuss elements of the project. Between workshop 1 and workshop 2, panel members were asked to reflect on the project and respond to the two questions listed below. In workshop 2, time was spent discussing the responses and refining key priorities. The resultant priorities for panel members are listed below.

1. *“What does this project mean to you, your family and your community?”*
  - An opportunity for connectivity across Melbourne
  - More sustainable and environmentally friendly methods of travelling
  - Congestion in the Box Hill and Burwood areas
  - Considerable stress around devaluation and acquisition of property
  - The panel would like SRLE to be accessible to people of all abilities
  - Members of the panel are feeling stressed by the potential impacts of this project
  - Some panel members feel there has not been enough communication from SRLA to allow them to fully understand the impacts.
2. *“What are your top priorities for this project?”* The responses have been grouped by theme:

### Traffic and transport connectivity and flow

- Direct connection between the existing and new Box Hill train stations
- Redevelopment/ relocation of the Box Hill bus deck
- Cycling connections to enable access to SRLA’s new path along Whitehorse Road - connection at Thurston/ Nelson Road to connect to the Box Hill to Hawthorn strategic cycling corridor and a connection at Linsley Street to the Box Hill to Ringwood strategic cycling corridor
- Review bus services to Burwood and integrate them with tram and train services, to improve access and flow to Deakin University and Presbyterian Ladies College
- Direct underground connection from the Burwood station to the north side of Burwood Highway
- Well resolved drop off and pick up areas

### **Holistic open space and environment planning**

- Protect open space and minimise the time that open space is impacted
- Identification of other open space areas that can be used during construction, including spaces for displaced community events and festivals
- Protection of tree canopy and other environmental impacts of the project
- Holistic consideration of types and uses of open space, eg not just green spaces, but also footpaths and the Box Hill pedestrian malls

### **Appropriate location and use of land**

- Many panel members prefer option 4 for the location of Box Hill station, rather than option 3. Members felt that option 4 would have fewer impacts on residents and open space, allow for connection under Station Street to the existing station and provide for a redeveloped bus deck over the existing Belgrave/Lilydale train line east of Station Street.
- Panel members would like the Burwood main station entry to be located on the north side of Burwood Highway to reduce impact on south side buildings.
- Greater emphasis needed to identify places and features that the community values, including those expressed in Council's draft Box Hill Structure Plan and the draft Urban Design Strategy.