

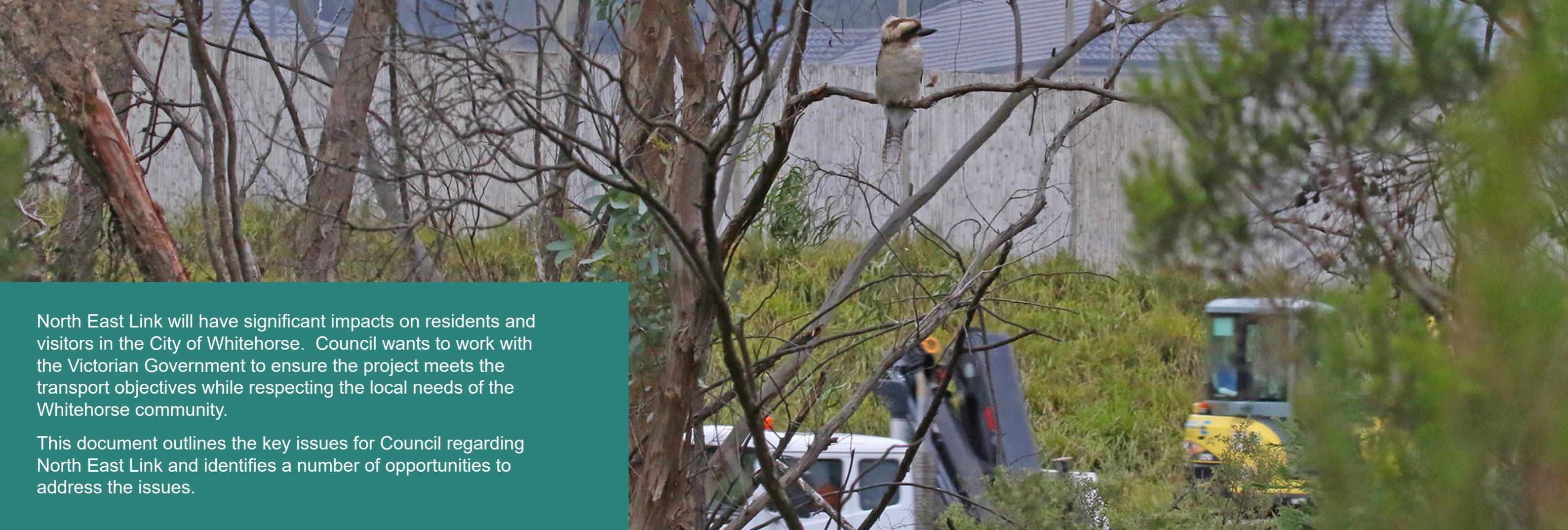


North East Link

Issues and Opportunities in Whitehorse

February 2023





North East Link will have significant impacts on residents and visitors in the City of Whitehorse. Council wants to work with the Victorian Government to ensure the project meets the transport objectives while respecting the local needs of the Whitehorse community.

This document outlines the key issues for Council regarding North East Link and identifies a number of opportunities to address the issues.

The key messages from Whitehorse Council are:

- 1

Balance the benefits and challenges of the project

- There are significant changes which should be made to the Reference Design to achieve a better match between the benefits which the project is said to deliver, and the cost that the Whitehorse community is asked to bear in the name of those benefits.
 - Examples of the dis-benefits that the Whitehorse community is asked to accept in order to achieve benefits in other areas of the project are:
 - Increased traffic volumes and decreased intersection performance on north-south arterial roads in Whitehorse, as opposed to improved traffic conditions in other areas of the project.
 - The Reference Design shows no investment in new walking and cycling routes in Whitehorse, compared to significant investment in other locations.
- 2

A smaller footprint for the Eastern Freeway is required to reduce the impact of the project

- Traffic function along the Eastern Freeway needs to be balanced with the environmental and social implications of widening the freeway into parkland, creeks and walking and cycling paths.
- 3

Council needs to have a meaningful role in developing the concept designs and the detailed designs

- A key concern for Council was the use of a Reference Design throughout the Environmental Effects Statement phase of the project.
 - Council needs certainty that our concerns have been addressed and this can only be done through extensive and open engagement through all phases of the design process.
 - Council and the Whitehorse community are key stakeholders that will inherit the North East Link interface legacy. Informing the designs and developing their content will enable Council to have meaningful input into the appearance and future maintenance of the project infrastructure.
- 4

A whole of Government approach is needed

- A coordinated approach to mitigating negative impacts on Whitehorse is essential.
 - There is significant Victorian Government activity within the City of Whitehorse, including 'Big Build' projects as well as other initiatives.
 - Cumulatively, North East Link, Suburban Rail Loop and the Mont Albert Road Level Crossing Removal projects will potentially impact around 5,000 trees in Whitehorse and will temporarily or permanently disrupt approximately 300,000m² of open space. Collaboration between all Victorian Government agencies to coordinate project outcomes, timelines, processes, impacts and disruptions across these projects is essential.



Eastern Freeway

A narrower footprint of the Eastern Freeway will have enormous benefits in Whitehorse regarding vegetation, open space, recreation, ecology, noise, air quality, surface water and amenity.

The Minister for Planning's assessment of environmental effects identifies that traffic function can't be the sole consideration when designing the Eastern Freeway.

His assessment states on pages 22-23:

"....I accept the IAC's conclusion that the traffic performance and functionality of the project needs to be balanced against the environmental effects of the built form. A detailed design that balances these occasionally competing objectives is the appropriate outcome".

The Minister continues this theme by stating on page 33:

"I consider that the implementation of the IAC's recommended changes to EPR LP1 (IAC Recommendation 18) will likely assist in achieving a narrowing of the ultimate road alignment to provide improved visual, landscape and urban design outcomes. This EPR applies to the entire project alignment, but it is particularly important that consideration is given to the key interfaces identified by the IAC, including along the Eastern Freeway where it is adjacent to residential properties and valued open space, and the proposed locations for construction compounds".

The benefits for the Whitehorse community of a smaller footprint along the Eastern Freeway include:



- The environmental impact upon the Koonung Creek could be truly minimised, especially negating the need to barrel the creek.



- The human and wildlife community will benefit from the retention of mature vegetation that will continue to thrive.



- Negative impacts to the outlook of adjacent residents would be minimised by not installing new noise walls within metres of their back fences.



- There will be fewer surface water attenuation requirements.



- The impacts of construction and operation on for pedestrians and cyclists would be lessened.



- Reduced visual, noise and air amenity impacts to residents and users of adjacent sporting and open space facilities.



Open Space and Environment

Open spaces, recreation facilities and the Koonung Creek will be heavily impacted by the widening of the Eastern Freeway. It is essential that the footprint of the freeway be minimised to protect and enhance these highly valued and well used community facilities within the City of Whitehorse.

Environmental matters remain a concern for community members and measures to reduce noise and air quality impacts are essential.

As an acknowledgement of the disturbance and inconvenience caused during construction and operation of North East Link, the Victorian Government is called upon to incorporate the following projects into the NEL designs.

Environment

- 1 Ensure the design of noise walls adequately protect community members adjacent to the Freeway, and that noise on arterial and local roads is managed where there is increased traffic volumes due to NEL.
- 2 Take proactive measures to ensure air quality does not deteriorate as a result of construction activities as well as due to the predicted increase in traffic volumes within Whitehorse.
- 3 Design the project to ensure tree retention is maximised to the greatest possible extent.
- 4 Upgrade degraded sections of Koonung Creek to improve the ecological, habitat and aesthetic value.
- 5 If as a last resort, sections of the Koonung Creek are to be piped underground, divert the creek to newly created wetlands at locations that are appropriate and which do not substantially impact on usable open space (being cautious of former landfill sites).
- 6 Restore the depth of the Valda Avenue Wetlands to design levels and provide for the supply and installation of erosion management and riparian vegetation where removed as part of the desilting works. If original design plans are not available, reset the wetland to be consistent with the design principals and, where provided, specifications within the Constructed Wetland Design Manual (Melbourne Water).

Koonung Creek Trail

Upgrade the Koonung Creek Trail (KCT), including:

- 7 Make walking and cycling along the KCT more comfortable through the installation of additional lighting, toilets, drinking fountains, seating and shelter.
- 8 Improve visibility and safety through creative lighting and line marking in all underpasses.
- 9 Improve wayfinding and signage along the entire KCT, including under/ over arterial roads.
- 10 Install bike maintenance stations along KCT (particularly in Elgar Park).
- 11 Grade separate the KCT on the south side of the Eastern Freeway at Middleborough Road, Surrey Road and Springvale Road.
- 12 Improve the connectivity of the KCT on the east side of Middleborough Road, Blackburn North.
- 13 Construct a new walking and cycling crossing across Koonung Creek within Eram Park to improve access to Tram Road Reserve.
- 14 Duplicate the KCT where practical to separate cyclists from pedestrians.
- 15 Improve cycling and walking links between the KCT and the nearest bus stops on arterial and local roads and provide convenient bike parking at these bus stops.

- 16 Improve the walking and cycling links to connecting paths, eg Bushy Creek Trail.
- 17 Create a new shared path connection from the KCT adjacent to the car park in Frank Sedgman Reserve through to Elizabeth Street.

Other open space actions

- 18 Incorporate art within impacted and reinstated public spaces and as part of road infrastructure along the Eastern Freeway corridor.
- 19 Work with Council to determine if a modest mountain bike facility is appropriate in a location such as Eram Park.
- 20 Create dedicated spaces for dog play, eg dog agility equipment.
- 21 Create dedicated spaces within open spaces along the project corridor for outdoor fitness, eg outdoor exercise equipment for adults and children.
- 22 Liaise with Council to identify opportunities for improvements to play spaces along the project corridor.





Arterial and local roads

The NEL Environmental Effects Statement outlines predicted increases in traffic volumes in Whitehorse as a result of North East Link, particularly along north-south arterial roads.

While congestion may ease in the northern suburbs as a result of the project, roads in Whitehorse such as Elgar Road, Middleborough Road, Surrey Road, Springvale Road, as well as intersecting local roads, will carry higher vehicle volumes (see adjacent map). Council is strongly opposed to the disadvantages of the project being borne by the Whitehorse community.

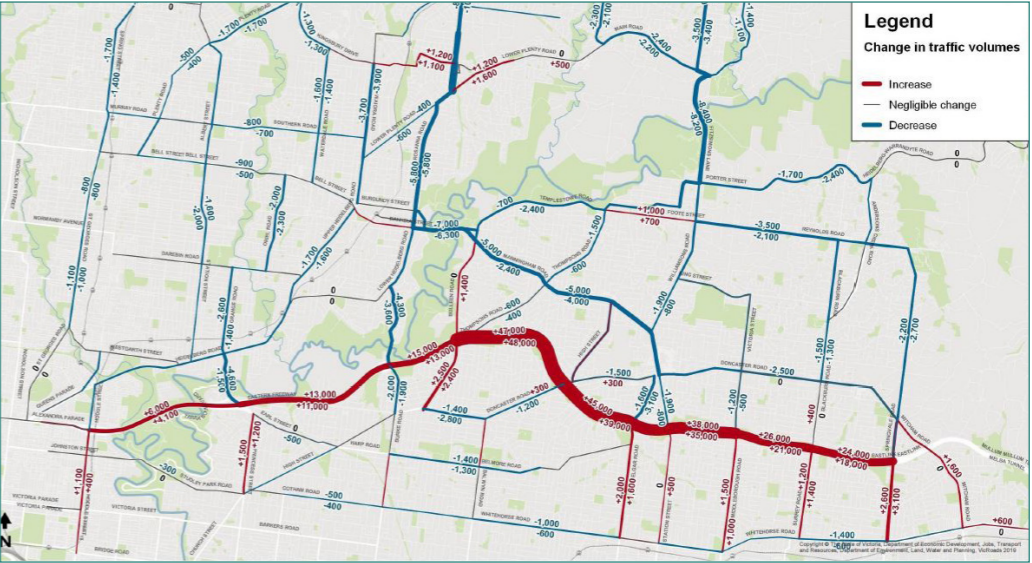
Council is seeking a commitment from the Victorian Government that the impacted locations will be fully investigated, scoped and improvement works progressively implemented.

- 7 Some of these locations have been modelled by NELP and show a lower than acceptable Level of Service (see adjacent 'level of traffic service' map).
- 8 There are opportunities to investigate treatments at the impacted locations, such as:
 - Extending turn lanes
 - Re-phasing traffic light sequences
 - Installing traffic light detector loops on intersecting local roads
 - Installing traffic lights
 - Introducing turn bans
 - Introducing Clearways and No Stopping prohibitions
 - Prioritising public transport
 - Local Area Traffic Management in local streets where rat-running is a consequence of congested arterial roads
 - Work with Council to implement actions in the Box Hill Integrated Transport Strategy

It is important that works at these locations do not cause traffic impacts at other locations throughout the road network.

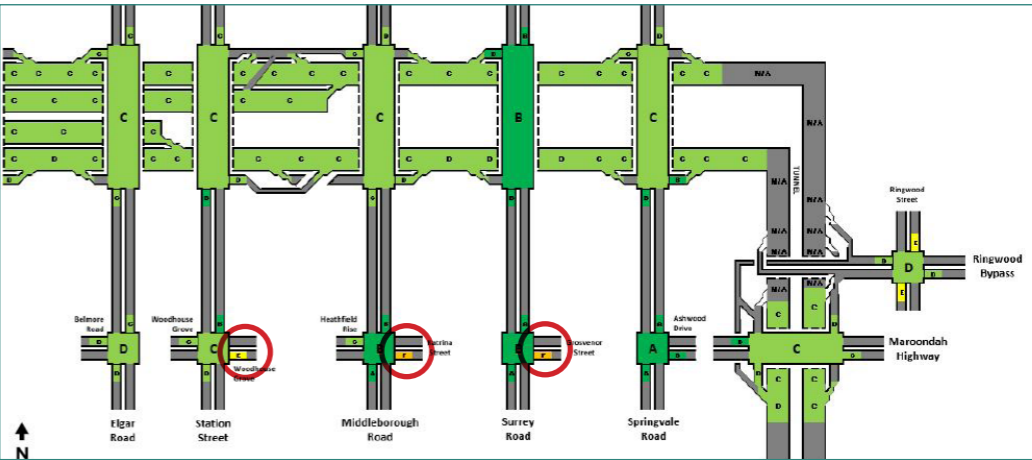
Some of the locations predicted to be negatively impacted include:

- 1 Middleborough Road at Katrina Street
- 2 Station Street at Woodhouse Grove
- 3 Surrey Road at Grosvenor Street
- 4 Elgar Road southbound at Belmore Road
- 5 Surrey Road at Junction Road
- 6 Middleborough Road at Joseph Street



Predicted change in traffic volumes as a result of North East Link

Source: North East Link Environmental Effects Statement, Technical Report A - Traffic and Transport, page 293



Predicted Level of traffic service at local road intersections

Source: North East Link Environmental Effects Statement, Technical Report A - Traffic and Transport, page 375



Public transport

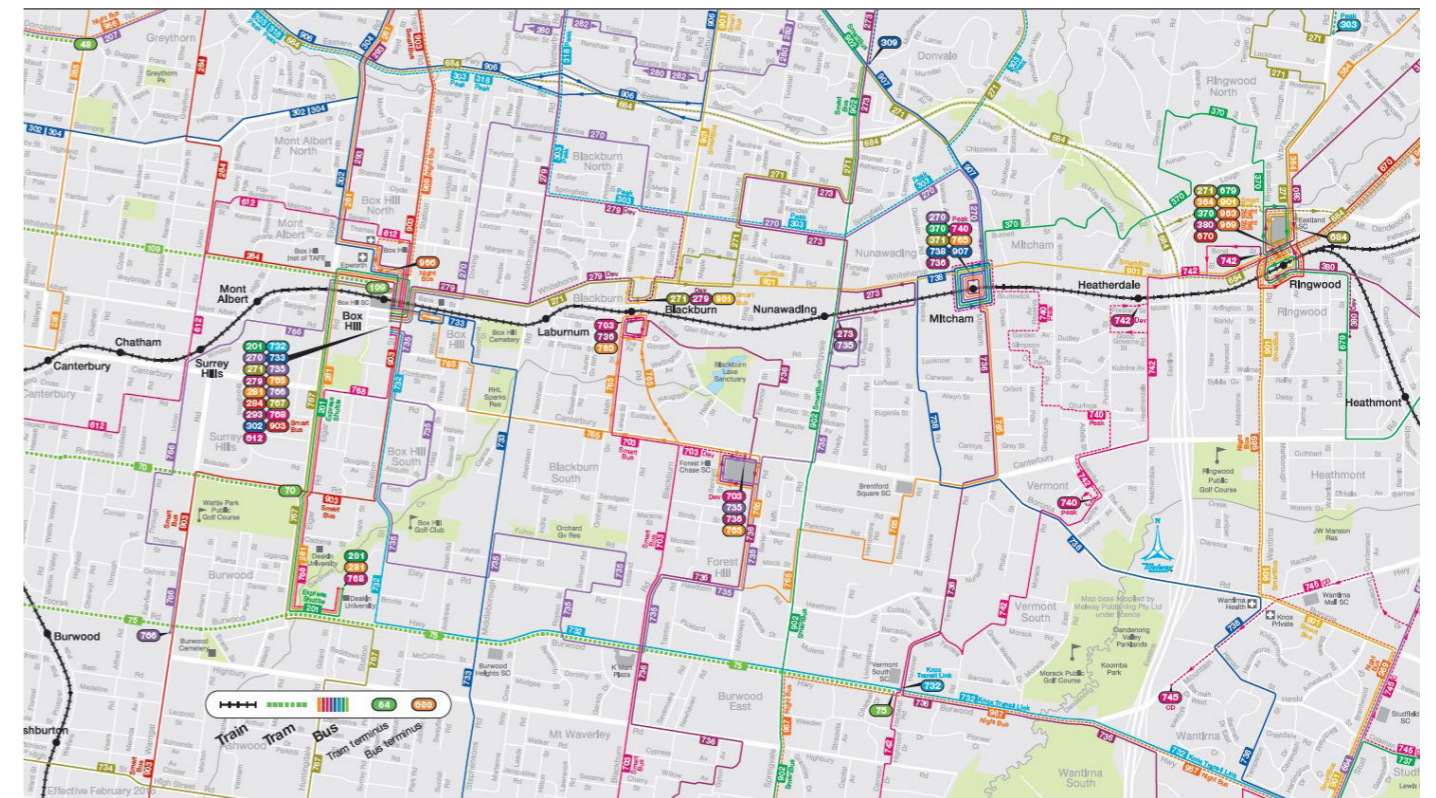
Bus services are key to north-south movements within and between the Cities of Whitehorse and Manningham.

Pressures on the arterial road network due to North East Link will create further problems with these vital bus services.

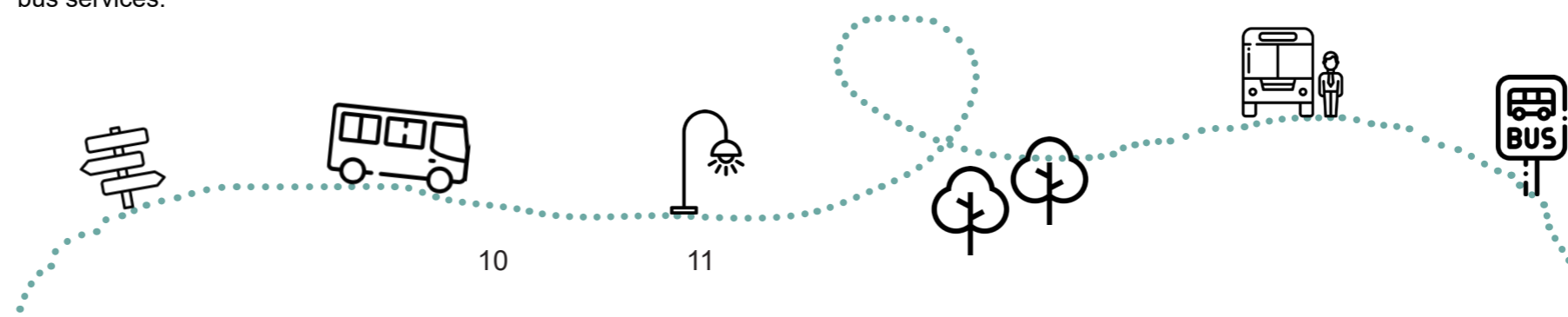
The upgrade of bus services and infrastructure along the Eastern Freeway from Doncaster to Hoddle Street is welcome, however does not provide relief for Whitehorse residents.

Council calls upon the Victorian Government to undertake the following actions.

- ① Improve bus services and infrastructure to the Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre and other activity centres within Whitehorse, including giving bus priority along arterial roads.
- ② Focus on the bus routes that travel along north-south arterial roads in Whitehorse.
- ③ Improve access to and shelter for patrons at key bus stops.
- ④ Include bike parking along the bus routes to encourage cycling to bus stops, particularly bus stops that connect to the Koonung Creek Trail.
- ⑤ Upgrades to bus services and infrastructure along the Eastern Freeway to operate and function as part of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system from the CBD to Mitcham.
- ⑥ Refer to the Manningham Bus Network Review for detailed analysis of bus services along the Eastern Freeway and appropriate actions.
- ⑦ Look for opportunities for additional Park and Ride facilities to address the parking pressures in local roads in Whitehorse that are close to the Eastern Freeway bus services.



PTV map of public transport in the City of Whitehorse





ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Whitehorse City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the Kulin Nation as the traditional owners of the land. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging

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