

Epping hell: estate residents 'betrayed' by promises

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Aurora residents Tony Francis, Cara Horner and daughter Amber, and Angela Barbaro were told they would have a good public transport system. *Photo: Michael Clayton-Jones*

THE Aurora estate in Epping North was designed to be a flagship sustainable housing development for the outer suburbs, with six-star energy-rated homes for all and a bus stop a short walk from every front door.

But a failure of communication between government departments might have killed the green dream, with the estate's streets dotted with bus shelters that might never see a bus.

The Department of Transport yesterday blamed Aurora's developer, the state government development agency Places Victoria (formerly VicUrban), saying: "New shelters in Epping North were installed without consultation with the Department of Transport and don't necessarily reflect future public transport routes."

But a spokeswoman for Places Victoria yesterday insisted its public transport plan for Aurora was "signed off by the Department of Transport".

"The development plan included a map which showed an extended bus route designed to service the bus stops that have been built," she said.

Several bus shelters went up around the estate earlier this year, in accordance with Places Victoria's plan that 80 per cent of homes in Aurora be within 400 metres of a public transport connection.

But an upgraded bus service for Aurora is "subject to additional funding", the department says, and it has no funds set aside for one.

Residents, who started moving to Aurora five years ago on a promise of good public transport, feel betrayed.

"Promises of living in a sustainable estate are wonderful but it's not just about the homes, it's about getting in and out of home sustainably," says Cara Horner, president of the Aurora Community Association.

Another resident, Tony Francis, who moved to the estate four years ago and lives about a kilometre from the nearest bus stop, says Places Victoria "haven't lived up to their promise". The retired public servant blames "mean, narrow, arrogant budgeting by a bureaucracy that gets credit for saving money, not spending it, on public transport, even though there are all these other costs that go with not having public transport".

The Aurora estate also has a rail corridor that might never have a train line. It branches off from the Epping line, and Aurora's original master plan from 2006 includes train stations at Epping Plaza, Aurora and Epping North. But the plan to extend the rail line was frozen under Labor and the Baillieu government has said it has no plan to build it either. "The government does not plan to extend the rail network to Epping North at this time," Minister for Public Transport Terry Mulder told residents in August.

Aurora is one-third finished and is expected to be complete - "subject to market conditions" - in 2020, when it will have more than 8000 houses, five schools and two town centres.

There is one active bus stop in Aurora, on the edge of the estate. The service runs every 40 minutes for most of the day, but residents say delays mean they often miss train connections.

"The current timetable is a real deterrent for residents to commit to public transport and pressures many to stick to cars," Ms Horner says.

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/domain/real-estate-news/epping-hell-estate-residents-betrayed-by-promises-20111214-1ouyb.html>