

Public Transport Meeting 10 Sep 2012

I am a resident from the Aurora Estate in Epping North. Epping North's major transport problems are increasing road congestion and lack of public transport.

The Aurora Estate started around 6 years ago with the aim of completion in 20 years and a total of 8000 homes. It was planned to be a model estate adequately serviced by public transport. Bus stops were promised to be no more than 400 metres from most homes. Currently there are no functioning bus stops for the route 575 bus on an estate with about 900 occupied homes. Most residents are much more than 400 metres from their nearest bus stop.

The Aurora Estate's narrow streets and medium density housing are designed around a train line which does not exist. Without the train line, extra cars are needed which results in excessive street parking; this makes it difficult or impossible for buses to use those streets. The absence of a train line has thus resulted in an inadequate bus service.

Peak morning road congestion can repeatedly halt the 575 bus in Epping Road and High Street so that passengers miss the scheduled connecting train. In evening peak times it is not uncommon for a train to stop at Epping too late for a scheduled connection to the Epping North bus. This can mean waiting for up to about 40 minutes for the next bus – the average time between 575 buses.

Road congestion is increasing in Epping North at an accelerating rate. The congestion is becoming more apparent at the new intersection of Miller Street and O'Herns Road which has traffic lights. This intersection was meant to ease congestion at a nearby roundabout in Epping Road close to the Epping fire station. Peak morning vehicles travelling south towards O'Hern's Road may soon find insufficient road space to the south or east of the traffic lights because of banked up vehicles ahead.

There are obstacles to improving public transport in Epping North.

1. Some have suggested further community consultation is required and that it is not enough to have the opinions of only a few individuals. In reality a lot more than a few individuals are involved. In 2008 more than 200 Aurora residents signed a petition requesting a railway line extension to Epping North. A pt4me2 transport survey in 2010 showed 263 out of 421 respondents regarded a train extension to Epping North as important or more than important. Consultation could be very much assisted by more and more sophisticated traffic surveys and traffic monitoring from the Government. How about using car registration plates recorded by speed cameras to determine the travel origin of cars in congested traffic and to plan travel alternatives for them? On Wednesday 19th September this month there will be a residents' association meeting with a presentation and discussion on advocacy for public transport.
2. Prioritising public transport in Melbourne's outer suburbs can put Epping North well down the list. A more justifiable alternative could be to give priority overall to public transport in the outer suburbs rather than to road development elsewhere. If more people are travelling from the outer suburbs by public transport, there may be less need for more road development elsewhere.
3. No Government funds are available for public transport in the outer suburbs in a time of balanced budgets and austerity measures. This is despite home buyers spending lots of money on stamp duty and GST for the home and paying for land reclassified as residential.

4. Governments and the Commonwealth authority, Infrastructure Australia, are giving priority to road developers. Surely more cost-benefit analysis would be appropriate when prioritising road and public transport projects? Does \$5-10 billion have to be spent on an East-West road tunnel just to please residents from the East and South East of Melbourne who wish to travel quickly to and from the Tullamarine airport? How about banning donations from road developers to political parties and election campaigns?

5. Government decisions are being made on the assumption that trains and buses are inter-changeable. This is not the case. A bus covers a lot more bus stops than a train covers train stops over the same distance. 50 to 100 people can quickly board a train with 12 or 18 wide doorways to choose from. Bus passengers typically walk to bus stops. Train travellers from the outer suburbs typically park their cars at station car parks. Such differences may explain public opposition to a rapid transit bus service as an alternative to a train line.

6. If the proposed railway line extension to Doncaster is built, its operation may use up all of the remaining train line capacity between Clifton Hill and Flinders St - leaving no room for an extension to either Epping North or Mernda. This problem needs to be addressed urgently or other possible railway line extensions are likely to be deferred indefinitely. We especially need to know if the Doncaster rail extension is viable.

7. There is a failure to recognise the costs of not providing public transport. The cost of time wasted and lost from increasingly congested traffic is becoming more unacceptable. High debt levels are made worse by the purchase of one or more extra cars. High debt levels can very much increase family stress. This stress may lead to behaviour problems and family breakdown. Such stress can substantially reduce the liveability of Epping North for many residents.

Tony Francis

10 September 2012