

REASONS FOR DE-SCOPING THE WESTERN DISTRIBUTOR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Victorian Transport Action Group (VTAG) is an independent forum that addresses transport challenges in Victoria. This paper expresses its views on the **Western Distributor (WD)** proposal.

First, this paper gives background information comparing a smaller proposal of Government, the **West Gate Distributor (WGD)** with the WD. The paper then presents the results of VTAG's analysis of the WD proposal and gives 10 key reasons why the WD proposal should be turned into a smaller, more cost-effective, balanced solution for the whole community with appropriate funding and proper governance to ensure no conflicts between private and public interests.

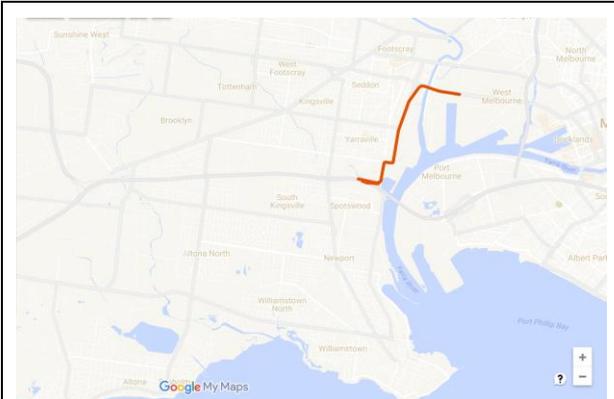
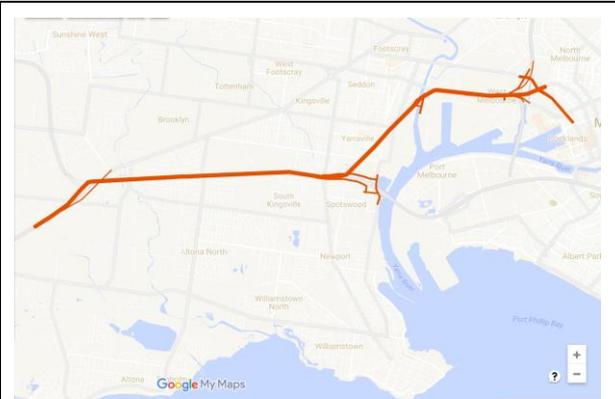
The final section of this paper then concludes with 10 recommendations. VTAG intends these recommendations to help improve the Environment Effects Statement (EES) process, and assist governments to transform what is shaping as the WD problem into a solution.

BACKGROUND

VTAG was pleased the Andrews Government was mandated at the 2014 election for an alternative package of works to the East West Link. This included a **West Gate Distributor (WGD)** designed to address longstanding freight issues in Melbourne.

For an estimated \$0.5 Billion cost the WGD aimed to widen the Footscray Road (Shepherd) Bridge over the Maribyrnong River and reconstruct the intersection at Whitehall Street (the northern section – now nearing completion) then improve the road link along Whitehall Street and build ramps between Hyde Street and West Gate Freeway (the second southern section).

Disappointingly, no funds have been allocated to complete the second section of the WGD that is necessary to move trucks between Swanson Dock and the West Gate Freeway without them going through local streets in the inner west. Instead the Government's focus has turned to Transurban's unsolicited WD bid, a much larger project (see comparative figures below).

	
West Gate Distributor (WGD) – a 4km 4-lane road connecting the West Gate Freeway to Footscray Road, allowing trucks to bypass residential areas of the inner west. Sections of the WGD would be elevated (Hyde St, Francis St & Whitehall St). Estimated cost: up to \$0.5 Billion	Western Distributor (WD) – a 14+km 12-lane road connecting the Princes Freeway to CityLink, Dynon Road, Wurundjeri Way, Footscray Road and Hyde Street. Sections of the WD would be tunneled (beneath Yarraville) and elevated (over the Maribyrnong River and Footscray Road). Estimated cost: \$5.5 Billion

The WD incorporates a version of the WGD ramps onto West Gate (southern section) but does not deliver it until between 2018 and 2022 with the rest of the WD. The WGD project is still needed for hazardous placarded trucks that are prohibited from using the WD tunnel.

After analysis of Government-Transurban WD proposal, VTAG is concerned that the WD is a mega project linking several freeways and arterials that has grown to be 11 times larger than what the ALP election policy platform originally proposed with the WGD. It seeks to embed the proposed future mega-road

network into Melbourne's arterials and CityLink Tollway in such a way as to maximise tolls and profits for Transurban by attracting additional truck and car traffic to the inner and western suburbs rather than reducing it.

It is not clear that this is the best infrastructure solution to the main community issues nor that its rushed community consultation, fast-tracked studies, massive over design, costly private funding will produce net community benefits and prove sound for the Victorian economy. The WD will be city-shaping for the worse by creating many problems and negative community impacts unless proper governance and objective appraisal processes are adopted to balance the conflicts between public and private interests.

REASONS WHY THE WESTERN DISTRIBUTOR SHOULD BE DE-SCOPED

REASON 1 - The Government's electoral mandate was for a smaller road solution

In 2013 the Andrews Labor Opposition received public acceptance of its published "Project 10,000" alternative package to the East West Link which included a particular project important to inner and western suburbs: ***Build a \$0.5 Billion West Gate Distributor (WGD) to take 5,000 trucks a day off West Gate Bridge.***

This is not being delivered as promised. Only the first northern part of the WGD from the port to Footscray is under construction by VicRoads with no further funding set aside for the southern section past Yarraville to and from the West Gate Freeway. Instead Transurban's unsolicited \$5.5 Billion WD bid for a private tolled mega road is being developed on a larger scale in a legal 'partnership' with the Andrews Government. The huge cost of the WD proposal will syphon funds from the other equally important public transport parts of Labor's promised package as well as from justified community-enhancing land use/ transport solutions.

REASON 2 - Achieves wrong objectives

Instead of meeting the Government's objective to reduce port and West Gate truck traffic in an economical, socially-acceptable, and environmentally responsible manner, the WD has been designed essentially by Transurban to maximise truck and traffic volumes and its toll revenue. It has morphed from a freight bypass into a road traffic concentrator that will induce increased road traffic in general and funnel it in ways designed to capture toll revenue.

Despite its massive departure from the ALP's original WGD plan, the WD does not provide a second Yarra River crossing. It only crosses the Maribyrnong River. Critically, the proposal is not part of a multimodal metropolitan-wide transport plan. It fails to apply the Transport Integration Act objectives to achieve integrated triple bottom line solutions.

The WD creates more radial road arterials pointed at Melbourne's inner suburbs that will increase traffic congestion and undermine amenity and liveability. By contrast, circumferential arterials like the proposed Greensborough to Mitcham North East Link would alleviate inner congestion by attracting through traffic out and around the periphery of the metropolis.

REASON 3 - Deliberate over design to maximise toll revenue

The WD will cost 11 times the estimated cost of Labor's initial WGD proposal. Transurban's proposed WD design creates a mega-road cluster linking other major arterials extending out to the M80 Western Ring Road with the West Gate Freeway widened to 12 lanes to accommodate the additional traffic that will be induced.

The reference design now proposes the maximum number of road lanes that can fit into road reservations with minimal or no vegetation buffers. WD emergency stopping lanes will be made to be convertible into traffic lanes in future, including inside the WD tunnel. The proposed size of the West Gate Freeway, tunnel laneways and on-off ramps are all excessive and will attract unwanted additional road traffic to Melbourne CBD, Kensington, Flemington, North Melbourne, West Melbourne, Docklands, South Melbourne, Port Melbourne, Spotswood, Yarraville, South Kingsville, Altona North, Altona, Footscray, Brooklyn, etc.

This mega toll road cluster will be city shaping in a bad way due to redistribution of heavy freight trucks and other road traffic into the inner and western suburbs. Despite its over design, the WD proposal assumes that WestLink and East West Link will still be necessary to handle the future traffic the WD brings through the area including freight shifted off rail, people displaced from public transport and the traffic induced.

REASON 4 - Denies western suburbs residents proper public transport services

The massive cost of the WD at this time of federal budget deficits will divert the capital needed for proper development of train, tram and bus services for the western suburbs for several decades, locking in car-dependent futures for people in one of Melbourne's fastest growing regions.

Residents of the West are being tricked into thinking that existing public transport is adequate and that the WD with West Gate Freeway widened to 12 lanes will end traffic congestion. The WD does not include transit lanes so any future bus services and emergency vehicles will get stuck in traffic, as happens on CityLink Tullamarine, where the high occupancy vehicle/bus lanes were removed. The toll road owner wants to maximise vehicles to toll rather than have more efficient people movement with better public health outcomes.

Travel patterns currently and in future will require greatly improved people movement both within the west and into and out of the central city. Improvements planned for existing rail services including Melbourne Metro 1 (MM1) will cater only for some of these needs. The Government's Melbourne Metro 2 (MM2) proposal is needed to connect the west directly to the City Loop and other stations via Fishermans Bend, providing far more positive city-shaping effects in the long term than any of the mega-road projects currently planned. Funding for MM1 needs to be accelerated and MM2 needs to be raised in priority in the Government's infrastructure strategy.

Extensions of Melbourne's rail or light rail and Smart Bus services connecting Altona Meadows, Seabrooke, Sanctuary Lakes, Point Cook and the many new suburbs of the west should all feed into a high capacity passenger rail system as part of the solution rather than entrenching car dependency and forcing people and businesses to pay road tolls. Expanding bus, tram and train services, coordinating their timetables, and making them run on time are long overdue but additional WD traffic is likely to worsen bus and tram service delays.

REASON 5 - Truck problems in the western and inner suburbs will be exacerbated

Transurban's proposal risks attracting more (port) road cartage contractors into the western suburbs from the north, east and south thereby increasing truck traffic congestion, road trauma, and community health problems particularly due to truck noise and diesel emissions.

Additional secondary truck trips will then be needed to double-handle containers from the western suburbs container yards to end users in the north, east and south. Many trucks are over 30 years old, poorly maintained, noisy, polluting, defective-mechanically, un-roadworthy, accident-prone and susceptible to breakdowns as evidenced by the high rates of infringements detected at random roadside checks. There is negligible enforcement of laws by VicRoads, the EPA and Police.

Victorians have been waiting for 3 years for the Government's release of VicRoads' revised road traffic noise maximum limits with night-time protection like those in New South Wales and maximum noise levels as low as overseas best practice. The WD's heavy truck traffic will cause health problems due to noise and exhaust pollutants, especially on gradients from tunnel portals near Seddon and Maribyrnong, and ramps in Spotswood, West Melbourne, Kensington and Flemington. It is problematic that no noise barriers are proposed to address night-time noise, especially due to truck engine brakes. VTAG urges the Government to adopt international best practice for mitigating noise and air pollution. By failing to update Victoria's obsolete road traffic noise levels with lower maximum standards, any future mitigation of road traffic noise and/or public health costs will be at the expense of future governments.

As the WD tunnel will prohibit oversize trucks and tankers carrying hazardous chemicals and fuels, these will continue to use public roads close to schools, residences and public places. Therefore, it is vital that existing or new truck curfews are enforced to eliminate the longstanding truck impacts on residents' safety and health.

From consultant's modelling of truck traffic, it is concerning that associated accidents, noise and pollution are forecast to increase in Ballarat Road, Moore Street, Smithfield Road, Racecourse Road, Flemington Junction, Dynon Road, Spencer Street, Dudley Street, Wurundjeri Way, Williamstown Road, Millers Road, Simcock Avenue, Grieve Parade, Dohertys Road, etc.

Passenger delays on trams and buses will increase on these and related routes due to additional traffic congestion. Residents in Melbourne's west will find themselves commuting on a more congested West Gate Freeway linked to other tollways and freeways, all carrying bigger trucks and loads.

REASON 6 - Shifts freight from rail to road

While the largest port trucks (B-doubles¹) can be up to 30 metres long and carry 3 containers weighing up to 64 tonnes, Transurban has over-engineered the WD to ISO1600 Standard to carry monster trucks up to 160 tonnes that are currently illegal in Australian cities. This is to facilitate such trucks rather than trains to shuttle to and from container depots in Altona and Brooklyn. This over design, as well as the proposed discounting of WD tolls for continuous 24/7 truck operations, will undermine the economics of rail for carrying heavy freight, minimising road trauma, and minimising truck social impacts.

Previous governments and port managers have all failed to promote freight on rail or to modernise the outdated port rail systems. Consequently Melbourne has become a truck dominant port with 92% of freight on road, only 8% on rail. The Government has recently sold the port lease, allowing the new port manager 3 years to devise a rail strategy that could be implemented over the next 5 years (without committing any funds) for shifting a significant portion of metropolitan imports and exports onto rail. This will be too little, too late for rail further increasing Transurban's toll revenue and undermining the potential of port rail operations.

Thousands of trucks a day will choke the docks and get stuck in truck queues instead of batches of 50+ containers efficiently being moved by a single train with one driver and without road congestion or community impacts. The WD will undermine the case for future port rail shuttles. Much of the \$126 Million Federal-State funds already spent since 2008 towards the development of suburban rail-road intermodal terminals will be redundant. Industry economists, importers and exporters are very concerned that the lack of efficient port-rail systems compared with Adelaide, Botany, and Brisbane is causing leakage of Melbourne's sea trade and jobs and shrinking Melbourne's trade hinterland catchment.

The Government without having a future master plan for on-dock rail tracks and systems has no basis for guaranteeing that the WD design will allow access of port trains of the future (which could operate faster or be double stacked) and will not encroach into vital stevedoring-port land and access corridors. Pylons supporting the elevated WD road could inhibit new access track alignments needed for direct on-dock rail.

Although the Andrews Labor Opposition campaigned prior to the 2014 election for decentralising the port to Bay West instead of the Liberal Government's Hastings port development proposal, the Government has effectively delegated the new port owner to make decisions for the next 50 years regarding further expansion of Webb Dock without any commitment to restore the former rail link that was disconnected by the Kennett Government in favour of Docklands development. That delegation may lead to even more huge Super B-doubles and even larger trucks using the area instead of rail.

The Federal and State Governments have failed to provide Webb Dock with its own Container Examination Facility (CEF) which will mean that all containers subjected to anti-terrorist, anti-contraband X-ray scanning will have to be trucked from Webb Dock to the Appleton Dock CEF and back (i.e. some 800 containers a day either over West Gate Bridge or along Wurundjeri Way). Any governments placing more reliance on road not rail should make allowance for the comparative under-regulation of trucks and, for

¹ Currently B-doubles can use prescribed public roads without a permit. Super B-doubles with four 20-foot long containers weighing up to 68.5t gross vehicle mass (GVM) can only operate inside the port precinct without a permit – a permit is required for any journey on a public road. In special circumstances of an ultra heavy freight journey, combination vehicles may be able to carry up to 109t GVM on prescribed (public) routes subject to obtaining a special one-off permit.

the public good, impose automatic overheight/overweight/unbalanced container detection, permit only modern compliant high-tech trucks that are regularly inspected, introduce daily drug-free driver checks, etc.

REASON 7 - Blighting of land, parkland, pedestrian-bicycle trails and waterways

The Footscray Road boulevard gateway to the western suburbs will be roofed and destroyed by the elevated WD tollway to be built above it. Valuable land like the former wholesale fruit and vegetable market site and E-Gate site will be blighted, as will many properties near noisy ramps (including Scienceworks) unless international standards for night-time and daytime truck noise (especially near ramps and gradients) are stringently applied.

The WD reference design consumes much open space without compensating for any lost land and amenity. The design will remove parkland and constrain public access and linear open space development along Moonee Ponds Creek, Maribyrnong River, Stoney Creek and Kororoit Creek. The WD design terminates the Federation Trail at Hyde Street so the remaining route from Spotswood to the CBD will be indirect, circuitous and contain several hazardous intersections – a lost opportunity. Even though the Moonee Ponds Creek is a tributary of the Yarra River, the Government continues to neglect its management including during the current CityLink Tullamarine Widening. The WD will likely drain its stormwater into these creeks and waterways, flooding their valleys with litter, vehicle pollution, dust and 24/7 noise.

No noise barriers are proposed for these open spaces. Hundreds of mature trees will likely be felled in the night without community consultation, as happened recently with CityLink Tullamarine Widening. As Transurban's vegetation plans for the CityLink Tullamarine Widening demonstrate, local communities will have no say in the minimal revegetation proposed that uses cheap mass-planted tube stock, without proper ground preparation, fertilisers, irrigation, ongoing maintenance and tree care. Some homes and other properties will be left exposed to WD traffic without any noise barriers or vegetation buffers.

After completion of WD road construction, municipal councils and ratepayers will be left with the effort and costs of unfinished landscaping rectification, ongoing care, maintenance and rubbish removal just as occurred with CityLink.

REASON 8 - Funding is inequitable

Transurban will be the main beneficiary of from the investment in the WD, not Victorians. Toll roads are immensely profitable in Melbourne. Toll revenue generated from the WD is predicted to be well in excess of the cost of the building it. Therefore, why shouldn't the State Government fund the whole project through borrowing from the public (e.g. public infrastructure bonds) and retain the toll revenue after paying out such loans? The Government could leverage its strong balance sheet and take advantage of low interest rates to invest in economic infrastructure projects without risking Victoria's AAA credit rating. This would save excessive profits going to an uncontested private toll road developer, and avoid the Government needing to treat the toll revenue projections as confidential and conceal them from the public.

It is also inequitable that Transurban's WD toll revenue is proposed to come partly from CityLink Tullamarine Freeway users who receive no benefits but will be tolled for a further 15 years by the proposed Concession Deed extension. This is despite Monash, Peninsula Link, Craigieburn Bypass, Deer Park Bypass, and Western Ring Road freeways remaining untolled. It is inequitable that Transurban's WD costs lack transparency and will be partly imposed on road users, local municipalities and communities not benefitting at all.

Levying tolls on port trucks will increase the cost of goods carried, imported and exported. Many drivers will avoid tolls and divert along routes through the western suburbs similar to the way they avoided West Gate Bridge tolls from 1978, so much so those tolls had to be abolished in 1985. Transurban proposes to give toll discounts to large truck operators running 24/7 truck shuttles between the port and their western depots, which will give them an unfair advantage over small truck operators and freight train operators.

Before contributing financially to such a project, the Federal Government should insist on a full Environmental Impact Statement and independent justification. Municipal councils should likewise assess the impacts on their municipalities and seek remediation and compensation.

REASON 9 - Flawed consultation, planning and appraisal processes

Transurban has failed to feed back to affected communities its understanding of community concerns and needs. Many issues and design alternatives repeatedly raised by citizens have been dismissed and neglected. Only selected local micro issues are described on Transurban's website after being dumbed down.

Significant problems like night time noise and carcinogenic ultrafine diesel particulates are being neglected, just as Transurban has done with the consultancy studies for CityLink Tullamarine Widening and interstate tollways. Public consultation processes have not allowed community participation in solutions or resolution of community concerns to the extent of previous major projects, contrary to the Transport Integration Act requirements of genuine stakeholder engagement.

The EES lacks epidemiological and other vital studies: The Government's lower-than-normal EES Terms have allowed Transurban to issue its EES consultants with restricted terms of reference and to fast track the process in even less time than that allowed for the East West Link Comprehensive Impact Statement. The EES public exhibition is scheduled for 30 business days during early 2017, an insufficient period for proper community investigation and response.

The Andrews Government needs to ensure processes to include community participation in decision making at least as per the W.H.O. Consultation Guidelines. VTAG requests that the WD Terms of Reference for the EES be amended to try to resolve community concerns.

REASON 10 - Lack of governance and objectivity

The Andrews Government WD partnership agreement with Transurban appears to have given Transurban carte blanche to deliver a market driven proposal delegating to Transurban the State's planning role. VicRoads' staff have been seconded to the project reporting to Transurban.

Transport and Planning Departments and the EPA involved in the proposal's designs, EES studies and preparation of documents for assessment by the Minister, are required to test these against the public interest principles and objectives of the Transport Integration Act as well as the Planning and Environment Act. However, there is little confidence that these statutory provisions are being applied in the overall public interest.

The WD 'business case' was redacted by the State before its release so there are major doubts over its assumptions and claimed community and industry benefits. The economic evaluation of the WD was excluded from the role of Infrastructure Victoria which advises the Government on the merits of all other infrastructure options. The Government's terms and conditions of this EES are diminished and allow fast-tracking rather than comprehensive studies e.g. no epidemiological study component.

The WD risks being Victoria's first mega project in which the State has surrendered its governance role to Transurban whose priority is creating a toll road that captures private profits. Neither Transurban's unsolicited bid nor its overall solution was subjected to competitive tendering, notwithstanding competition requirements. This appears to allow the tollway monopolist to dictate policy rather than the Government delivering its pre-election mandate.

It is critical to learn from the 'CityLink Concession Deed' mistake of the Kennett Government that gave Transurban a basis for preventing public transport to Tullamarine Airport and road improvements that could lower toll revenues. WD toll revenue is expected to exceed the cost of construction in less than a decade. Toll revenues from CityLink have already enabled Transurban rapid growth interstate and overseas e.g. funding toll roads in Washington and Pennsylvania.

A far more cost-effective solution is for the State to borrow to fund transport solutions for the inner west while interest rates are historically low and retain toll revenue for public purposes under control of the State. It is in the interests of all Victorians that toll revenue is applied to fund essential public

infrastructure such as rail transport, hospitals and schools, and to support local jobs rather than private sector profits much of which are exported from Victoria.

The opportunity exists to both steer a win-win community solution that is modest, affordable with net social benefits and creates a funding stream for the State. Priority in such a project must be given to meeting the needs of all Victorians ahead of providing windfalls to private interests.

VTAG'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WESTERN DISTRIBUTOR

VTAG recommends that:

1. the Andrews Government delivers its 'Project 10,000' policy commitment as per its mandate from the 2014 election which included *a \$0.5 Billion West Gate Distributor* (both northern and southern sections) to address freight issues as well as *doubling the size of the City Loop and building five new train stations*: the WGD southern section should be delivered within the current term of government independently of Transurban's WD.
2. the Government completes a multimodal metropolitan-wide master plan that gives priority to circumferential rather than radial roads, heavy freight on rail not road, and comprehensively improves public transport services before committing to any opportunistic corporation bids to build and operate private tollways or other mega-infrastructure projects.
3. the Western Distributor be **de-scoped: halved in size and cost** to free up funds for building rail tracks for shuttle trains to run to Swanson and Webb Docks to reduce road freight, associated road trauma and the negative community health impacts of trucks.
4. improved public transport services become part of the solution for congestion in the inner and western suburbs by providing people with more transport choices and reducing the number of low-occupancy cars on the road.
5. long-standing truck problems are addressed and laws, regulations and truck curfews fully enforced by VicRoads, the EPA and Police including through more random roadside checks, supported by retrospective fitting of automatic detectors on all tollways and freeways to apprehend speeding, smoky and noisy vehicles so that adjacent communities are protected.
6. the Government re-regulates and incentivises rail based supply chain operators between the port and inland rail-road intermodal terminals to help reduce trucks on arterial and local roads in the western and inner suburbs.
7. consideration of community benefits be made paramount and people's wellbeing protected: homes and other sensitive properties, land, parks, pedestrian-bicycle trails and waterways near the WD must be protected from 24/7 road traffic noise, pollution, hazards, litter and amenity loss.
8. sources of efficient public funding are used rather than unaffordable Transurban finance and tolling of roads is made equitable across Melbourne.
9. consultation and planning processes be compliant with World Health Organisation (WHO) Consultation Guidelines, the Victorian Transport Integration Act 2010, and Planning and Environment Act's normal EES processes that include epidemiological studies encompassing ultrafine diesel particulates and night-time noise, with an EES public exhibition period of at least 90 business days.
10. the Government adopts proper governance with segregation of public servants from Transurban's teams and conducts independent socio-economic evaluation to ensure that Government decisions are made on the basis of economic, environmental and social benefits and net community benefit in accordance with the requirements of the State legislation, the objectives of Plan Melbourne and Federal evaluation guidelines.

VICTORIAN TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP

The Victorian Transport Action Group is an independent forum that addresses the challenges of transport in Victoria. The members have a range of expertise across transport, planning, State and Local Government, IT and the environment. Members have past employment with Government agencies, the Department of Transport and VicRoads. They are familiar with the challenges of developing and implementing transport plans across all transport modes and understand the difference between blue sky ideas and the reality of funding, political interest and community support.

Members are particularly conscious that limits on funding necessitate placing priorities on projects. VTAG has an extensive network of connections in Local Government, planning and public transport that it can access for insights into the complexity of transport issues and provide options for equitable, practical solutions.

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