

Public Environment Report

Chapter 2

Objectives of the action



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2.1 Objectives and guiding principles

North East Link has been designed to support business and job growth in Melbourne’s north, east and south-east, while also improving cross-city connectivity and helping to address critical traffic, freight and amenity issues.

Project objectives and guiding principles have established the broad strategic direction for the design and development of North East Link. These have been informed by the transport system objectives of Victoria’s *Transport Integration Act 2010* (‘TIA’) and the Victorian Government’s key metropolitan long-term planning strategy, *Plan Melbourne 2017-2050*.

North East Link’s objectives and guiding principles are summarised in Table 2-1 and Table 2-2.

Table 2-1 Project objectives

Objective	North East Link outcome
Improve business access and growth in Melbourne’s north, east and south-east	North East Link would reduce congestion on arterial and local roads and enhance cross-city movements, benefiting businesses by facilitating cost savings with faster travel times and better business-to-business connectivity. North East Link would particularly benefit freight businesses and those reliant on the transfer of goods. This would promote the growth of businesses to the benefit of the north, east and south-east.
Improve household access to employment and education in Melbourne’s north, east and south-east	By linking Melbourne’s north, east and south-east, North East Link would better connect households to employment and educational precincts, such as the La Trobe National Employment and Innovation Cluster (NEIC). North East Link would help reduce congestion, improve travel time reliability and improve network resilience. North East Link would also divert traffic from local roads, making it easier for people to get to local facilities such as schools and businesses.
Improve freight and supply chain efficiency and industrial growth across the north, east and south-east	North East Link would facilitate improved cross-city movements which would boost supply chain efficiency, particularly for freight businesses and those reliant on the transfer of goods. Increased productivity due to greater efficiency enabled by North East Link would also promote industrial growth, making Melbourne more attractive for business start-ups, expansions and relocations.

Objective	North East Link outcome
Improve access, amenity and safety for the communities in the north-east	North East Link would improve connections between the north, east and south-east which would reduce the reliance on local and arterial roads in Melbourne’s north-east. Benefits for residents and businesses would include reduced traffic noise, better air quality, safer local roads, less time sitting in traffic and less stress. Freeing up arterial connections in the north-east for appropriate vehicles and trips would also better connect residents to key local destinations (such as schools and recreational facilities) and encourage more people to walk and cycle. The cumulative effect of these benefits would be improved quality of life and wellbeing for people living in Melbourne’s north-east.

Table 2-2 Guiding principles

Guiding principle 1	Guiding principle 2	Guiding principle 3	Guiding principle 4
Minimise impacts on communities	Minimise impacts on environmental and cultural assets	Minimise impacts during the construction phase	Optimise the efficient use of resources

2.2 Strategic context

Melbourne’s growing population, evolving economy and spatial structure have generated transport challenges for the city. These are summarised below.

2.2.1 Urban growth and economic transformation

The main drivers for North East Link relate to the changing shape of the Melbourne area. Melbourne is Australia’s fastest growing capital city, with an estimated 30 per cent of Australia’s population growth occurring in Melbourne in 2016. Population growth and urban development to the north and north-east of the city are increasing demand on transport infrastructure.

Victoria’s economy has also transitioned from a primarily manufacturing base to information and services. Employment in the information and services sectors has predominantly been in the central city region while areas in the city’s outer western, northern and eastern suburbs have been impacted by the manufacturing decline.

This means the distribution of jobs has not kept pace with increasing population growth in Melbourne’s outer suburbs, creating a disconnection between where people live and where they work.

Central city businesses face high overhead costs while businesses in secondary centres have lesser accessibility due to congestion and limited transport options.

Declining housing affordability in inner urban areas also means that many people now live in areas with limited access to jobs and services.

The continued evolution of Melbourne's spatial structure translates into increasingly constrained access for businesses to markets and for households to jobs and services. A key challenge for Melbourne is to adjust to this changing spatial organisation with its largely radial transport network.

2.2.2 Poor cross-city movements

Melbourne's cross-city road network connects major population, employment, service and industrial centres across the city's north, east and south-east. It facilitates access to Melbourne Airport and other significant gateways and freight hubs, and provides links to the wider metropolitan road network.

Longer distance journeys within the city fall within two key categories:

- Cross-city movements – trips across Melbourne from one part of the city to another, such as using arterial roads to travel from Bundoora in the north to Box Hill in the east, or
- Orbital movements – trips around Melbourne via the outer suburbs, such as using the M80 Ring Road (otherwise known as the Metropolitan Ring Road), arterial roads and the Monash Freeway to travel from Broadmeadows in the north to Dandenong in the south-east.

Poor connectivity in the north-east means that arterial and local roads accommodate these cross-city movements as well as local traffic movements. Increasing demand for travel has led to high levels of congestion, lengthy travel times and poor reliability for road users.

As a consequence of poor cross-city and orbital connectivity, businesses located in employment and activity centres in Melbourne's major population areas in the north, east and south-east lack access to the large labour markets. This also restricts access to employment opportunities across the metropolitan area (NELA, 2018).

For Melbourne to continue to support economic development and jobs growth, and to lift productivity and workforce participation, a well-connected city where businesses and residents can access a range of travel options is vital. If a fully connected cross-city and orbital network cannot be completed, ongoing fragmentation of labour markets, poor business-to-business travel and diminished access to jobs would mean higher costs on business and households. It would limit the productive potential of the city and constrain the economic competitiveness of Melbourne and Victoria.

2.2.3 Inefficient freight movement between Melbourne's north and south-east

The north-east corridor is critical to facilitating freight flows across Melbourne from the north to the east and south-east. This includes linking regional areas such as Gippsland and industrial areas, freight gateways and distribution centres in the south-east with the Hume Freeway and Melbourne Airport to facilitate interstate and international exports. The lack of efficient cross-city movements through the north-east means that traffic travels an average 20 per cent slower between the north and south-east compared with the north and south-west, increasing travel time by around 25 per cent (NELA, 2018). This increase in travel times is especially problematic for freight operators and business customers moving goods from interstate to destinations in the south-east industrial areas and beyond.

With no fully connected orbital freeway link, freight flows across Melbourne from the north to the east and south-east currently rely heavily on cross-city arterial roads through the north-east to travel between the M80 Ring Road and the Eastern Freeway. These arterial roads include Greensborough Road, Rosanna Road, Manningham Road, Burke Road and Fitzsimons Lane. These roads are struggling to cater for growing and competing travel demands which constrains cross-city access for freight and contributes to higher transaction costs.

2.2.4 Congestion and heavy vehicles on local and arterial roads

Congestion on the north-east arterial road network and a lack of safe and appropriate walking and cycling facilities means longer travel times for residents and reduced access to local services including schools and recreational resources. Heavy vehicles are a significant cause of local traffic congestion, increasing emissions and traffic noise.

These factors are diminishing the Victorian Government's ability to achieve a 20-minute neighbourhood, which is a key platform of its metropolitan planning strategy, *Plan Melbourne 2017-2050* (DELWP, 2016b). This reduces the capacity of the north-east to contribute to sustainably managing Melbourne's future population growth to support liveable, healthy and attractive communities.

Plan Melbourne 2017-2050 (DELWP, 2016b) also establishes the spatial directions for growth and land use change across the city over time. With Melbourne's population forecast to reach eight million by 2051, suburbs in the north and north-east would need to accommodate a significant proportion of the city's growth between 2016 and 2046 (DELWP, 2016a). The ability of these areas of the city to support this growth is at risk with an unconnected freeway network and an already congested arterial road network unable to meet current and future transport needs.

2.3 Policy context

2.3.1 National context

Australian Infrastructure Plan

The *Australian Infrastructure Plan* (2016) developed by Infrastructure Australia sets out an investment roadmap for Australia, detailing the challenges and opportunities over the next 15 years as well as the solutions required to keep pace with projected population growth.

The *Infrastructure Priority List* (Infrastructure Australia, 2018) includes 'high priority' projects and initiatives that address major problems or opportunities of national significance, as well as 'priority' projects and initiatives. Infrastructure Australia has identified North East Link as a 'priority initiative' to improve connectivity between the M80 Ring Road and Eastlink in outer north-eastern Melbourne.

Smart Cities Plan

The Australian Government released its *Smart Cities Plan* (2016) in April 2016 as a guiding framework for Australian cities. The plan is centred on three pillars: smart investment, smart policy and smart technology. The plan focuses on fostering regional employment centres, connecting housing areas to employment centres, promoting the '30 minute city', enhancing green spaces in urban centres, and attracting skilled workers and entrepreneurs.

National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy

In November 2016, in response to a recommendation made in the *Australian Infrastructure Plan* (Infrastructure Australia, 2016), the Australian Government announced its intention to develop a national freight and supply chain strategy to increase the productivity and efficiency of Australia's freight supply chain. The strategy would build on the government's Inquiry into National Freight and Supply Chain Priorities with implementation likely to begin in 2019.

Heavy Vehicle Road Reform

The national Heavy Vehicle Road Reform is an initiative of the Transport and Infrastructure Council, aiming to turn the provision of heavy vehicle road infrastructure into an economic service where feasible.

The M80 Ring Road and Eastern Freeway are identified by the Transport and Infrastructure Council as published in its *Key Freight Routes: Road Expenditure and Investment Plans 2016-17 to 2019-20 Victoria* (Transport and Infrastructure Council, 2017) as national ‘key freight routes’. The council aims to continue investing in these key freight routes to meet the needs of users and to strengthen the resilience of the national freight network.

2.3.2 Victorian context

Transport Integration Act 2010

The TIA is Victoria's principal transport statute. Its aim is to develop ‘an integrated and sustainable transport system that contributes to an inclusive, prosperous and environmentally responsible State’.

The TIA outlines six objectives for the transport system. A high-level summary of how North East Link is expected to address each objective of the Act is provided in Table 2-3.

Table 2-3 Alignment with Transport Integration Act objectives

Transport system objective	Relevant Project Objectives and Guiding Principles	North East Link outcome
Social and economic inclusion	<p>Project Objective 2 – Improve access to employment and education for households in Melbourne’s north, east and south-east</p> <p>Project Objective 4 – Improve access, amenity and safety for communities in the north-east</p> <p>Guiding Principle 1 – Minimise impacts on communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jobs growth in key locations • Additional jobs accessible to households • Improved travel times for commuting to work and education facilities • Improved travel times between residential areas and key local destinations in the north-east • Improvements to public transport (with the Doncaster Busway) • Improved walking and cycling conditions and connections on local and arterial roads • Improved amenity outcomes.
Economic prosperity	<p>Project Objective 1 – Improve business access and growth in Melbourne’s north, east and south-east</p> <p>Project Objective 3 – Improve freight and supply chain efficiency and industrial growth across the north, east and south-east</p> <p>Guiding Principle 4 – Optimise the efficient use of resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional workers accessible to businesses • Travel time savings and improved travel reliability for businesses • Improved business access to suppliers • Improved travel times for freight trips • Improvements to public transport (with the Doncaster Busway) • Sustainability Strategy developed to provide a framework for integrating sustainability principles into planning, design, procurement and decision-making.

Transport system objective	Relevant Project Objectives and Guiding Principles	North East Link outcome
Environmental sustainability	<p><i>Guiding Principle 2 – Minimise impacts on environmental and cultural assets</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of key environmental assets, including avoiding surface works in ‘no-go zones’ to protect Bolin Bolin Billabong, a portion of Yarra Bend Park and vegetation near the intersection of the M80 Ring Road and Plenty Road that is listed as critically endangered under the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> • Only minor surface works would be permitted in the Banyule Flats, Warringal Parklands and Yarra River to protect these sensitive areas • Environmental Management Framework developed to provide a robust and transparent framework to manage environmental effects • Sustainability Strategy.
Integration of transport and land use	<p><i>Project Objective 1 – Improve business access and growth in Melbourne’s north, east and south-east</i></p> <p><i>Project Objective 2 – Improve access to employment and education for households in Melbourne’s north, east and south-east</i></p> <p><i>Project Objective 3 – Improve freight and supply chain efficiency and industrial growth across the north, east and south-east</i></p> <p><i>Project Objective 4 – Improve access, amenity and safety for communities in the north-east</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for a range of transport modes • Improved connectivity between key business and employment areas • Improved travel times between residential areas and key local destinations • Improved travel times for freight trips • Improved air quality, reduction of noise and improved amenity on local and arterial roads • Improvements to public transport (with the Doncaster Busway) • Improved walking and cycling conditions and connections on local and arterial roads • Improved utilisation of existing transport infrastructure.
Efficiency, coordination and reliability	<p><i>Guiding Principle 3 – Minimise impacts during the construction phase</i></p> <p><i>Guiding Principle 4 – Optimise the efficient use of resources</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance efficiency across the network to optimise network capacity and reduce travel times • Facilitate integrated and seamless travel within and between different modes of transport • Improved utilisation of existing transport infrastructure assets • Environmental Management Framework developed to provide a robust and transparent framework to manage environmental effects • Sustainability Strategy.

Transport system objective	Relevant Project Objectives and Guiding Principles	North East Link outcome
Safety and health and wellbeing	<p>Project Objective 4 – Improve access, amenity and safety for communities in the north-east</p> <p>Guiding Principle 1 – Minimise impacts on communities</p> <p>Guiding Principle 3 – Minimise impacts during the construction phase</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved air quality, reduction of noise and improved amenity on local and arterial roads Improved conditions and connections for cyclists and pedestrians on local and arterial roads Environmental Management Framework developed to provide a robust and transparent framework to manage environmental effects.

Planning Policy Framework

The Planning Policy Framework (PPF) provides overarching policy guidance across all Victorian planning schemes. It ensures the objectives of planning in Victoria set out in section 4 of Victoria’s *Planning and Environment Act 1987* are applied through appropriate policies and decision-making and fostered through appropriate land use and development policies. North East Link addresses the objectives of the PPF that relate to integrated transport, transport systems, movement networks, and the management of road systems and freight.

Local Planning Policy Framework

The Local Planning Policy Framework (LPPF) is specific in content to each municipality and comprises two components: the Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) and Local Planning Policies (LPP).

The MSS for each municipality is a concise statement of the key strategic planning, land use and development objectives for that local government area, and the strategies and actions for achieving the objectives. LPPFs are tools used to implement the objectives and strategies of the MSS and include a policy statement of intent or expectation.

Each municipal planning scheme includes land use planning and environmental policies that are relevant to North East Link to varying degrees. Relevant policies in municipal planning schemes generally include issues relating to land use planning, transport, infrastructure provision, environmental considerations and urban and public realm design.

Plan Melbourne

Plan Melbourne 2017–2050 (DELWP, 2016b) is the Victorian Government’s long-term metropolitan planning strategy to define the future shape of the city and the state for the next 35 years. Plan Melbourne seeks to integrate long-term infrastructure, transport and land use planning to align with Melbourne’s future population, employment, housing and environmental needs.

North East Link is consistent with Plan Melbourne in the following ways:

- Strengthening the connection to regional Victoria by improving movements between the M80 Ring Road and Eastern Freeway
- Improving the connection between business precincts and residential areas, better connecting workers to employment
- Shifting traffic from local and arterial roads to North East Link, improving amenity and safety for residents, local businesses and pedestrians and cyclists using the areas
- Reducing congestion and enhancing the resilience of the road network to reduce business and personal costs of travel
- Enhancing the network for freight businesses and those reliant on the transfer of goods, creating benefits for businesses, consumers and the wider Victorian economy
- Providing enhanced walking and cycling (shared use) paths through neighbourhoods and along strategic cycling corridors to facilitate direct active transport links across metropolitan Melbourne
- Improving public transport with the Doncaster Busway.

Victoria's 30-year Infrastructure Strategy

The Victorian Government established Infrastructure Victoria in 2015 as an independent statutory authority to provide advice and guidance on the state's infrastructure.

In 2016, Infrastructure Victoria released its 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy, identifying North East Link as a high priority infrastructure project for the state. There has also been a recent decision to update the Infrastructure Strategy within three years, rather than five years of its initial release, due to increased population growth and the need for infrastructure investment. North East Link is confirmed in the Infrastructure Strategy as one of several ‘catalyst’, state-shaping infrastructure projects. The Infrastructure Strategy identifies North East Link as being a high performing project that offers:

‘...substantial benefits in terms of linking people to employment across the city and improving freight reliability and travel times... North East Link provides accessibility through some of the most congested parts of the road network and improves access to major employment centres, as well as improved cross-town travel. It makes sense to proceed in the medium term, largely supporting existing land uses’.

Victorian Freight Plan: Delivering the goods

The Victorian Government has released a state-wide Victorian Freight Plan to support industries involved in the movement of goods. The Freight Plan sets out short, medium and long-term priorities to support freight and logistics systems. North East Link is consistent with the Freight Plan by:

- Decreasing travel times, traffic decongestion, and improving travel reliability between industrial and commercial precincts in the north-east
- Increasing access for high productivity freight vehicles access along the north-east corridor
- Creating more efficient transport networks between north, east and south-east industrial and warehouse precincts, allowing logistics businesses to optimise their costs with improved transport links.