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SUBMISSION TO GEELONG RING ROAD SECTION 4C ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Introductory Statement

The Geelong Branch of the Public Transport Users Association (PTUA) opposes making provision for a multi-lane motorway along the 4C route.

A six-lane dual-carriageway motorway paralleling the Warrnambool railway line will impede opportunities for necessary transit-oriented development in Armstrong Creek. It will further divide communities north and south of the combined rail and road reserves.

Background

In 2007, the Geelong Branch of the PTUA made submissions to both the Strategic Planning Department of the City of Greater Geelong, and to the Armstrong Creek Planning Panel, opposing the creation of a major east-west road link parallel to the Warrnambool railway line between Anglesea Road and the Surfcoast Highway. We see no reason to alter our stance now.

The original vision for the Armstrong Creek project was that it would be a model of sustainable suburban development. As the City of Greater Geelong (CoGG) has put it, “the Armstrong Creek urban growth area will be developed into a sustainable community that sets new benchmarks in best practice urban development.”¹

To help achieve this aim, emphasis was to be firmly on promoting sustainable means of transport, and reducing the unsustainable car dependence which has marked the post-war suburban form in Australia.

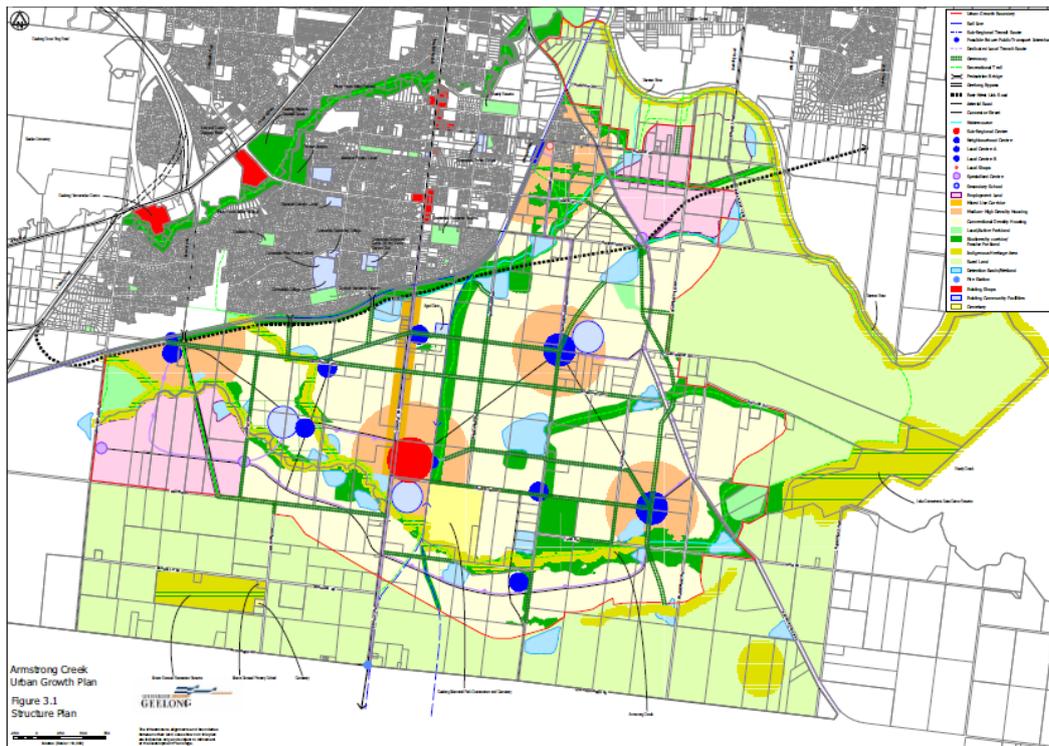
The Armstrong Creek Social Interagency Infrastructure Delivery Plan Report maintains that that “the adopted Framework Plan and Urban Growth Plan set out that growth will ... provide alternatives to car based travel through significant public transport provision, walking tracks and cycling networks.”²

The emphasis on public transport in achieving the vision for Armstrong Creek was evident in the original 2006 Structure Plan for the development (reproduced below), which was based on the recommendation of consultants David Lock and Associates, following extensive consultation.

Although we were concerned that the corridors provided in the 2006 plan did not allow easy walking access to public transport from all parts of the estate, their presence did show that public transport routes were an important consideration, and that public transport was to be given priority by being separated from other road traffic.

¹ <http://www.geelongaustralia.com.au/armstrongcreek/>

² Armstrong Creek Social Interagency Infrastructure Delivery Plan Report, February 2009, pp.8-9



Armstrong Creek Structure Plan, 2006

The purple lines on the map are the dedicated public transport corridors.

The Armstrong Creek Planning Panel in 2007 accepted the argument of developers that it was acceptable to eliminate the proposed public transport corridors, on the basis that public transport within the development could be accommodated on an appropriately-designed local road network.

However, the Panel did not provide recommendations relating to on-road priority, nor did it provide an alternative public transport network plan. Public transport's role was therefore significantly downgraded, a disappointing result for a development that promised best practice.

The Problem with the Section 4C Proposal

While the road planned for Section 4C is to some extent independent of the Armstrong Creek development, it will nevertheless have a significant impact upon it, and upon existing communities to the north.

In spite of that, although there are a number of individual studies into such things as air quality, noise impacts and social impacts, no overarching Environmental Effects Statement has been prepared. Therefore we lack a formal examination of the wider social and environmental effects of the proposed 4C alignment on existing and future communities in the vicinity.

A six-lane dual-carriageway road alongside the existing railway will create a very significant barrier between the Armstrong Creek development and the adjoining Geelong urban area. It will serve to promote and symbolise car dependence in the contiguous area, contrary to the original intention in designing the development.

The barrier created by the combined road and rail reserve will be even more severe where the proposed 4C road intersects with the Surfcoast Highway, as it appears to be imperative that a significant road interchange will need to be constructed at that point,

possibly grade separated, and which would have to include the grade-separation of the adjacent railway level crossing.

The proposed road will make it a greater challenge to ensure that links to transit hubs from adjacent areas are both convenient and aesthetically pleasing, and that surrounding development is as dense and as “transit oriented” as the original Armstrong Creek plans proposed.

Lack of a Public Transport Plan

It would be unusual for any assessment of a major road expansion not to consider public transport provision, given the important relationship between the two.

It is worrying that despite there being almost 50 documents making up the “Background Information” related to this Advisory Committee’s function³, there is no public transport plan. In spite of the original vision of Armstrong Creek as a model of sustainability, the only document specifically related to sustainable means of transport is a single map entitled “Bicycle Strategy Plan”.

Given the role that usable public transport can play in reducing the demand for increased road capacity, it is notable that in the three Traffic Modelling documents (Parts 1, 2 and 3), prepared for VicRoads by Veitch Lister Consulting Pty Ltd, almost no mention is made of public transport⁴. For example, in the examination of the Armstrong Creek Local Road Network in Part 1, no mention is made of the proposed use of that road network by public transport services.

We note that the road proposed to run along the 4C route includes provision for dedicated bus lanes. However the Committee needs to establish whether this road, or any other, will actually comprise part of a feasible bus route, and if so, to ensure that the road can be provided with the necessary bus priority measures, and convenient pedestrian access to stops on both sides of the road. Otherwise, flagging the eventual provision of bus lanes or other public transport infrastructure must be seen purely as a “greenwash”.

Armstrong Creek Railway Station

The creation of a wide, noisy, high-speed road link will not encourage pedestrian friendly, high-density, transit-oriented development close to the proposed railway station on the Warrnambool railway line, near Rossack Drive. It will inevitably distance residential areas from the station, and reduce the amenity of adjacent properties.

The report by AECOM relating to Section 4C and Armstrong Creek Railway Station mentions public transport in the context of enhancing overall sustainability, noting:

“A key strategic issue confronting Geelong City Council is the need to provide for a sustainable city by reducing car dependence, through improved public transport and integrated land use and transport planning. The strategic vision for a sustainable transport system in Geelong includes:

- Reducing the need to travel by car and facilitates an attitudinal shift in favour of non-car transport; and
- Is well connected and co-ordinated and integrates all modes of transportation.”⁵

It goes on to state that:

³ <http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/planning/panelsandcommittees/current-planning-panels-and-committees/geelong-ring-road-section-4c-advisory-committee>

⁴ ibid

⁵ AECOM, Amendment C232 Summary Report - Geelong Ring Road Section 4C and Armstrong Creek Railway Station, p. 20

“The proposed Armstrong Creek Railway Station supports the strategic vision by contributing to improved access to public transport services in southern Geelong, which currently has limited mobility options. A bus-interchange will also be provided at the proposed railway station.”⁶

However, merely providing a railway station and an adjacent bus stop does very little, in itself, to promote sustainable transport options.

The nearby Marshall station provides a clear case in point. It is served by buses but, because they run infrequently and indirectly, stop running in the early evening, and aren't timetabled to meet trains, most rail travellers drive to the station, so much so that an expensive expansion of the station car park has recently had to be constructed.

To effect a genuine “attitudinal shift in favour of non-car transport” there must be high-quality, frequent and connected services involving both rail and bus modes. As the Armstrong Creek Civil Interagency Infrastructure Delivery Plan puts it: “It will be important that the new public transport infrastructure and services are established as early as possible in the life of the Armstrong Creek development, to ‘capture’ residents before they develop a car ‘habit’”.⁷

Yet the railway station planned to serve Armstrong Creek is to be provided with 2500 car parking spaces. This would almost certainly be the largest single car park in the Geelong area. It is hard to see how that provision conforms to a policy of reducing car dependence.

Alternative to the 4C Proposal

The best way of connecting the Geelong Bypass to the Surf Coast Highway without significantly disrupting the Armstrong Creek development area, would be with a road skirting around the western and southern edges of the Plan's urban area until it joins the Surf Coast Highway.

One advantage of this route is that the road would not impinge on existing and planned suburban areas. Another advantage is that it would mark a clear and defined western and southern boundary for the Armstrong Creek area, while still providing for access from major east-west roads within the Armstrong Creek development, as well as from the Surf Coast Highway.

A two-lane arterial road along the railway line between Anglesea Road and the Surf Coast Highway could be considered as a fall-back option in case an insufficient number of car trips in the subject area are shifted to public transport and the basic road system requires expansion.

Proposed Extension of 4C

During the consultation and planning process in 2006, an important reason for 4C becoming the preferred option was that it more easily allowed for the creation of a major east-west arterial road to connect the Geelong Bypass in the west to the Bellarine Highway and Portarlington Road, far to the east of the Plan area. This proposed road is clearly intended to be an alternative link to the Bellarine Highway for through traffic to northern Geelong and Melbourne.

The proposed link was rated poorly by VicRoads during its investigations into the Geelong Bypass which chose the (now-constructed) western route in preference to the eastern bypass route (the latter would have involved a bridge over Corio Bay).

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Armstrong Creek Civil Interagency Infrastructure Delivery Plan Final Report, February 2009, p. 29

The proposed extension of 4C takes the east-west road through the flood plain of the lower Barwon River which has questionable environmental consequences. As well, vehicles making the approximately 15 kilometre longer detour will use significantly more fuel, at a cost to the both the motorist and to the environment.

We have not seen evidence that there will be significant through-traffic using a new cross-river connection of the Bellarine Peninsula to the existing Geelong Ring Road. As any major new road directly linking the two will cut through the Armstrong Creek area and, in the case of 4C, cut the Armstrong Creek area off from its railway stations, the need for the extension should be carefully considered. It seems more likely that traffic will be local, and if so, it may be able to use the existing (and proposed) network of arterial roads.

The proposed road is almost exactly double the distance of the existing highway route through Geelong between Moolap Station Road and the Railway Overpass at Corio. Therefore, if the proposed road is to be competitive with travel time on the existing route, vehicles will need to travel at twice the average speed of those on the current route. This would only ever be achieved in very congested conditions on the existing Bellarine Highway.

Planners must be careful not to create a new high-speed road connection that will generate or induce new demand for fast circumferential travel; it could irreversibly change travel patterns, and it is difficult to imagine a public transport system that is likely to be able to compete.

Our Recommendation

The PTUA advocates that there be no extension of the Ring Road east of the Surf Coast Highway. That proposal should be replaced by an additional link across the Barwon River that connects to Barwon Heads Road and the rest of the present arterial road system. That road would be adequate to provide for the relatively local and low volume travel between urban areas on either side of the river.

In this context, it must be noted that the quality and capacity of more direct, alternative access routes to the Bellarine Peninsula, in particular Breakwater Road, are already being upgraded at considerable expense.

Conclusion

- The proposed six-lane motorway proposed to be built on the 4C reservation should not be proceeded with.
- As a corollary, the proposed extension of the motorway across the Barwon River flood plain to the Bellarine Highway should be abandoned.
- A comprehensive public transport plan for the Armstrong Creek development itself, and for public transport connections with the development, should be produced as a matter of urgency.
- Any connection between the Geelong Ring Road and the Surfcoast Highway should run around the western and southern boundaries of the Armstrong Creek development.
- Any road provided along the Warrnambool railway line should be of a local character only, and seen as a fall-back in case an insufficient number of car trips in the subject area are shifted to public transport, requiring some expansion of the basic road system.

Paul Westcott
11 April 2011