



Submission to:

Planning Scheme Amendment C154 to the Stonnington Planning Scheme for the proposed expansion of Chadstone Shopping Centre

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Overview

The amendment has been made at the request of Colonial First State Global Asset Management (CFSGAM) and The Gandel Group as agents for the owners of the land. The City of Stonnington has invited submissions from affected individuals on Stonnington Planning Scheme Amendment C154.

This details proposals to make extensions to Chadstone Shopping Centre, situated at 1341 Dandenong Road, East Malvern, and at additional land at 2-4 Chadstone Road, Malvern East. The amendment was lodged with Stonnington Council in October 2011.

The amendment would allow for the redevelopment of the oldest part of Chadstone - where Target, Coles, Kmart and the cinemas are located – as well as for two multi-storey tower blocks on the Princes Highway frontage for a 180-room residential hotel and 15,000 square metres of office space. As part of the amendment, existing bus stations would be consolidated in a central location and there would be associated traffic and car parking works.

Inter alia, it is proposed to increase the allowable shop floor space from 146,000 square metres, as provided for in Amendment C32 of the Stonnington Planning Scheme approved on 22 December 2005, to 160,000 square metres.

As the existing Centre includes a retail floor area, including shop and restricted retail, of approximately 129,924sqm and it is therefore evident that in the order of 16,000 square metres of approved retail floor area is yet to be constructed. Thus, if the current application were to be granted approximately 30,000 square metres of additional retail floor area could be constructed, an increase of 23%.

It is also proposed to reduce the car parking rates that apply at the centre as follow:

- Shop (excluding Restricted Retail Premises): from 6.5 to 6.2 spaces per 100 square metres of leasable floor area;
- Restricted Retail Premises: from 2.7 to 2.6 spaces per 100 square metres of leasable floor area; and
- Food and Drink Premises: 6.5 to 6.2 spaces per 100 square metres of leasable floor area.

It is also proposed that the traffic curfew on Chadstone Road will be lifted.

Chadstone strategy is past its use-by-date

Chadstone Shopping Centre was first established in 1960 with a business strategy that relied entirely on cheap motorised transport and free parking. It was situated at the corner of Warrigal Road and Princes Highway for easy arterial road access, east-west and north-south, in the then rapidly growing dormitory suburbs of south-east Melbourne. It was developed at a time when the Victorian government of the day was quite relaxed about either closing down effective public transport services or simply letting them fall into disuse.

Chadstone Shopping Centre has since grown beyond all recognition to be the largest shopping centre in the southern hemisphere. However, the business model endures: it relies on visitors travelling to Chadstone in their ones and twos almost exclusively by private motor car.

Failure of integrated transport planning for Chadstone

Historically the greatest failure in the official assessments and consent to the unrelenting incremental growth of Chadstone Shopping Centre has been the lack of accountability for its impact upon the wider transport network and the social costs that imposes.

The Public Transport Users Association has measured traffic in the segment of Warrigal Road adjacent to Chadstone Shopping Centre travelling as slow as 4.2 kilometres an hour during peak periods. This is largely due to vehicles entering and departing Chadstone Shopping Centre.

Prior to the announcement of this major redevelopment of Chadstone, VicRoads was undertaking an analysis of Warrigal Road because of increasing road congestion. They measured road speed as low as 8.7 kilometres per hour in this segment of Warrigal Road.

The current "planning" process is well on the way to repeating these historical errors. The Transport Impact Assessment analysis prepared for the project proponents by GTA reads more like a marketing document to sell the project to a gullible public than it is a hard-nosed assessment of the impact on the transport network as a whole. The focus this time, as with its predecessors, is exclusively to "tweak" additional access for more cars to Chadstone Shopping Centre from the road network.

Vague reference is made in the documentation to the development of an integrated transport strategy, a document to be finalised later in 2012 by GTA in consultation with the Department of Transport. This is far from satisfactory because it is not to be completed at stage 1, when the proposed planning scheme amendment is to be considered. It is likely to be part of stage 2, the future planning permit application.

Just as significantly, it is not intended that the document will assess the social costs to be borne by the rest of the community because of the car dependent nature of the project, due largely but not only to the traffic congestion that it will cause. The previous such integrated transport plan, completed in 2003, was primarily a statement of good intentions about encouraging sustainable transport to the centre. It has been a failure in that regard.

A comprehensive integrated transport plan should be undertaken at stage 1, and it should take into account the full impact of the proposal on the entire transport network. It should also assess the sensitivity of this impact according to different transport solutions, including different modal mixes, and the pricing and service quality strategies necessary to achieve these different modal mixes.

Scale of Chadstone and the centralised bus terminal

It is proposed as part of the planning permit application to consolidate all the bus stops into one location adjacent to the fresh food entry. This has merit but there is major concern that with just one location for buses the walking distance is prohibitive, and especially for older people and those with mobility difficulties. Note that Department of Transport guidelines say people should be able to catch public transport within 400 metres of their home. The same should certainly be the case within retail areas such as Chadstone, which is surrounded by car parking that is close to almost every shop.

Free parking and the Chadstone business strategy

Free parking has been a key attractor since Chadstones inception as a major shopping destination. There are currently 8,900 free parking bays and it is proposed to increase this by another 1,400. There is apparently no intention by the proponent to charge for parking as a demand management tool with a view to encouraging more visits by public and active transport or greater shared car use.

The PTUA does not have a firm position on charges for parking, but believes they should be considered as part of a broad transport plan for Chadstone.

A strategic approach to pricing could potentially achieve the primary public objective of alleviating the increasingly chronic congestion on the road network to which Chadstone contributes and also enhance the experience of those who visit the shopping centre. It would be good for business as people would spend less time going to and from the centre, whichever travel mode they used.

Applied effectively, pricing of parking would assist in reducing congestion, both on the public road network and within the centre itself. It would facilitate mode shift to public transport and active transport.

For such a strategy to be effective, however, public transport serving Chadstone area would require substantial upgrades, as outlined elsewhere in this submission.

Trashing the environment

As the development is so dominated by the movement of motor cars it is almost impenetrable by active transport (walking and cycling). The built environment created over the years at Chadstone is extremely hostile to pedestrians and cyclists. This is a potent test of Chadstone's lack of connectivity with the surrounding community. The situation will not improve until vehicular traffic movements are reduced and substantially more visitors to Chadstone travel by public transport.

In addition to the car-dependent nature of Chadstone Shopping Centre there are now concerns that it covers such a substantial area with largely impermeable surfaces that it contributes significantly to flash flooding in severe rain events. The increasing frequency of such events in the absence of compensating measures any expansion of the centre will make this problem worse.

The Chadstone Shopping Centre is also a major contributor to the urban heat island effect (UHI) because of its large built mass on a large surface area which causes temperatures to rise above that of the natural landscape. As it is now proposed to substantially increase the size of the centre, with no offsetting measures indicated the urban heat island effect will be further accentuated.

Rail service needed

The only way to reverse the trend of the car dependent nature of Chadstone would be with a rail link. Such an extension could be established by extending the Alamein line to Oakleigh via East Malvern railway station and Chadstone shopping centre. Without such a rail extension, further expansion of Chadstone shopping centre cannot be justified.

A railway line/heavy rail would provide far greater capacity than is possible with bus services. Chadstone has over 20 million visits a year, which is more than enough to justify a heavy rail extension.

On average there are 55,000 visitors a day, with visitor numbers for major events such as Boxing Day sales exceeding 150,000¹ To move this volume of people would require around 3,200 buses, but only 190 trains, due to the much higher capacity of heavy rail.

The Traffic Impact Statement suggests the 85th percentile count was at 59,812. It is worth noting that nearly two months of the year will be in excess of this figure.

Furthermore, travel times are likely to be far superior on a grade separated railway line, where as buses are delayed in traffic without sufficient priority. Travelling from Oakleigh to Chadstone could be as quick as two minutes by train, compared with over twelve minutes by bus. Such time saving would be a huge catalyst for patronage growth and modal shift towards public transport.

There would certainly be other benefits, such as providing greater rail access to Monash University and Holmesglen TAFE.

An extension of the number 3 tram to Chadstone via East Malvern railway station should also be completed.

Chadstone bus services

Buses provide an important transport link to Chadstone. In the 2003 Integrated Transport Plan, it was shown that buses account for 21 percent of trips to Chadstone during the week. Despite an increase in travel demand, this drops to 11 percent on weekends. This fifty percent reduction in patronage is said to be due to the significant reduction in bus services on weekends. The disparity between bus services on weekends and weekdays has not been adequately addressed since the most recent expansion of Chadstone.

Bus lanes and other priority measures are urgently needed at Chadstone regardless of expansion. With the substantial number of buses operating to Chadstone there are substantial economic gains to be obtained by providing traffic priority to buses. For instance, a minute saved by buses could save approximately \$250,000 a year in bus operating. A four minute saving would translate to a saving of \$1 million a year. The savings can be used to fund additional bus services on these routes, offering a more frequent and attractive service for passengers. A reduction in operation costs would make the economic impetus to upgrade services far more viable.

The 903 SmartBus is currently scheduled to take 9 minutes to travel 1.8 kilometres from Holmesglen to Chadstone and 12 minutes and 1.9 kilometres to travel from Chadstone to Oakleigh. The PTUA believes these times could be reduced by 50% as much of the time is spent stationary or travelling at very slow speeds through congestion.

¹ Herald Sun: "Bargain hunters flock to Boxing Day sales" 27/12/2011
<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/more-news/bargain-hunters-flock-to-boxing-day-sales/story-fn7x8me2-1226230286109>

Increasing congestion and car traffic at Chadstone creates further problems for buses due to non-existent infrastructure such as bus lanes. It will be necessary as part of the expansion to install full time bus lanes on Middle Road, the Chadstone ring road, Princes Highway, Warrigal Road, Chadstone Road, Poath Road and other surrounding arterial roads leading to Chadstone. Buses should also be given dynamic priority at all signalised intersections including those within the boundaries of Chadstone shopping centre.

It is also worth noting that the Traffic Impact Statement does not make any estimate on how buses will be impacted by congestion generated by the expansion. Due to the nature of 85th percentile benchmarks used, there are nearly two months of the year where the impact on buses is beyond an acceptable level.

A study by Vicroads found that buses on Warrigal Road between Holmesglen and Chadstone travel at 19.6 km/h AM peak and 18.8 km/h in the PM peak. From Chadstone to Oakleigh, speeds were measured at 8.7 km/h in the AM peak and 9.6 km/h in the PM peak. These figures reveal a situation that is already dire and far from acceptable.

In addition to bus priority, wholesale upgrades to bus services should be made. Buses on main road routes such as 900 and 903 SmartBuses, 802/804/862, 623, 767, and others. should be upgraded to operate every 10 minutes from 6am to midnight, seven days a week. Other routes should be upgraded to operate every 20 minutes.

The PTUA found a number of inconsistencies in the Traffic Impact Statement and the actual operating frequency of buses. These include (but may not be limited to):

- The 612 is listed as currently running every 60 minutes on weekends but does not run at all on Sunday.
- The 767 is listed as running every 25 minutes on weekends but runs every 30-40 minutes on Saturday and every 40 minutes on Sunday.
- The 903 SmartBus is listed as operating every 10 minutes on weekends but effectively runs half-hourly with a few extra services slotted in on Saturday.

Case Study: The 903 SmartBus

The 903 SmartBus is the main bus route servicing north-south journeys to Chadstone. It originated as the route 700 bus from Box Hill to Mordialloc, which later became a SmartBus service before later being rolled into the 903 orbital bus route from Altona to Mordialloc.

Despite a good level of service during weekday peak times, intervals between buses are inconsistent. For example, services can range from five to twenty minutes apart during weekday peak times. Weekend services are worse: the Saturday service operates for much of the day like a three-legged limping dog, operating on a 15-15-30 minute interval each hour. Despite the potential to run four services an hour on an even 15 minute headway, only three services are scheduled. Sunday services are half-hourly.

Despite these shortfalls, the PTUA has observed regularly crowding on the 903 on weekends at Chadstone. It's likely that failure to provide more services is restricting growth in patronage.

In common with all the other bus services in the area The 903 suffers serious delays from the effects of chronic private car congestion in the Chadstone area. Furthermore, successive governments have been unwilling to match the level of bus services with the high patronage demand.

Conclusions

The Public Transport Users Association opposes Planning Scheme Amendment C154 proceeding. The transport situation on the arterial and local road network around Chadstone is now dire. This is due to the motor-car dominated business model adopted by the shopping centre since its inception over 50 years ago.

A full integrated transport strategy should be undertaken by the Victorian government as part of Stage 1 to ensure that future transport arrangements for Chadstone provide for a much more sustainable transport mode mix than currently exists or would be in prospect if this process remained unchallenged.

The integrated transport strategy should particularly adopt the proposals included in this submission to elevate the capability of the public transport system in all its modes and provide more frequent, useable services into Chadstone. Completion of the strategy should incorporate full public consultation and participation from the outset.