

# WGTP WITNESS STATEMENT- Dr IAN WOODCOCK

## WEST GATE TUNNEL PROJECT INQUIRY AND ADVISORY COMMITTEE

1 August, 2017

### EXPERT WITNESS STATEMENT

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#### Qualifications

Doctor of Philosophy (Urban Design)(University of Melbourne)  
Master of Planning and Design (Urban Design)(University of Melbourne)  
Registered Architect (UK)  
Bachelor of Architecture (First Class Honours)(University of Bath, UK)  
Bachelor of Science (General Architectural Studies)(University of Bath, UK)

- a statement identifying the expert's area of expertise to make the report
  - 30 years experience in practice and academia in the UK and Australia.
- a statement identifying any other significant contributors to the report and where necessary outlining their expertise
  - N/A
- all instructions that define the scope of the report (original and supplementary and whether in writing or oral)
  - I have been asked to provide a statement in regard to urban design by the Inner Metropolitan Planning Alliance and in relation to urban planning by the Victorian Transport Action Group
- the identity of the person who carried out any tests or experiments upon which the expert has relied on and the qualifications of that person.
  - N/A (or see EES)
- the facts, matters and all assumptions upon which the report proceeds
  - These are as stated in the report.
- reference to those documents and other materials the expert has been instructed to consider or take into account in preparing his or her report, and the literature or other material used in making the report
  - N/A
- a summary of the opinion or opinions of the expert

SUMMARY: The WGTP runs contrary to good planning and urban design. It should be descoped to delete the most egregious impacts on the City of Melbourne and other inner city municipalities. Public and active transport should be investigated to meet future transport needs.

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- a statement identifying any provisional opinions that are not fully researched for any reason (identifying the reason why such opinions have not been or cannot be fully researched)
  - The evidence in the EES is almost non-existent in many places relevant to my expertise and therefore it is difficult to provide a full and detailed assessment.
- a statement setting out:
  - any questions falling outside the expert's expertise  
This report confines itself to matters within my expertise.
  - whether the report is incomplete or inaccurate in any respect.

Due to inordinately short time allowed for preparation of this report, there are many areas that I would have liked to cover that have not been covered. Similarly, focus on detail would have been greater with more time.

### URBAN PLANNING

The WGTP emerged shortly after the 2014 Victorian State election as an unsolicited bid under the provisions for private sector proposals to the Victorian Government. Originally named the Western Distributor the project subsumed the West Gate Distributor project that formed a key element of Victorian ALP Election Policy – Project 10,000.

P10K proposed that instead of building the East West Link tollroad between Clifton Hill and Kensington, there would be a focus on public transport (the Melbourne Metro beneath the central city and removal of 50 level crossings at a faster rate than any time in Victoria's history) and removal of trucks from inner west streets via the \$0.5 billion West Gate Distributor (WGD). The WGD involved ramps from the West Gate Freeway to allow trucks to bypass sensitive areas of Yarraville, and upgraded Shepherd Bridge to provide better access to port facilities at Dynon Yard. The WGD has been subject to significant local planning and was locally supported.

The WGTP was proposed by Transurban shortly after the ALP government took office. In essence it adopted the infrastructure upgrades from the WGD, but deferred the ramps until completion of the project by adding a tunnels, viaducts, elevated road interchanges and road widenings and extensions. These additions have resulted in a project that will nominally cost \$1.6 billion in public funds and require the extension of the City Link tolling concession to Transurban for 15 years, a loss to the public purse (or an impost on Victorian motorists) that has been estimated to be between \$8-20 billion.

As a replacement for the WGD, the Project is premised on removing trucks from local streets, but its scale and layout indicate that it will function as a funnel for commuter and other car traffic from Melbourne's Western suburbs to the central city. The traffic modeling within the EES (although questionable in itself) confirms that this will be the predominant function of the Project. Indeed, social media promotions of the Project characterise it as a faster route for driving from the west to key destinations in the city's inner north such as the University and hospital.

Much has been said by various submitters about the way traffic flows will be captured and induced by the Project to create significant congestion conditions in the North and West Melbourne and the inner north of the city. These are highly sensitive heritage precincts prized for their walkability on the one hand, and for their contribution to the nationally significant cultural, commercial and academic dynamism of the 'Urban Innovation District' that forms this part of Melbourne.

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This sensitive urban ecosystem has been nurtured by at least 30 years of committed and careful planning by state and local government. Key to this planning has been the recognition that high public amenity with walkable streets are the key to a vibrant public realm that encourages investment in a synergistic mix of higher density residential, commercial, retail and academic development. This planning effort has recognized that public and active transport are the most efficient and effective way to move the very large flows of people into and around central and inner Melbourne. Walkability, public and active transport are part of this synergy.

The WGTP therefore runs counter to several decades of established policies. It will Undo investments that have been made in urban design and will compromised long planned future urban renewal to extend the centre of Melbourne west to eventually join up with Footscray. The WGTP will create significant damage to existing urban ecosystem and seriously hamper its planned extension.

The traffic congestion caused by the Project will also have adverse effects on existing public transport between the central city and the northern suburbs. It will impact on tram passengers by slowing down journey times due to traffic congestion. It is likely to seriously compromise or render impossible plans to upgrade services on the Upfield Railway Line. The potential for increased traffic in the inner north west (in particular Macaulay Rd and Arden Street) would make it difficult to raise service frequencies on the railway line. This will either jeopardise plans to divert regional trains along this line (away from the Craigieburn line which is congested) or create significant additional congestion.

The impacts of WGTP on the Melbourne Metro are contradictory and perverse. The Arden urban renewal area, premised on the large public investment in the Melbourne Metro station there, is envisioned as a walkable and vibrant inner urban environment. This will be compromised by the WGTP.

The Melbourne Metro station at Parkville will become a major node in the public transport network. The alignment of the Melbourne Metro appears to have gone out of its way to create a station at Parkville – and for good reason. It will also provide direct public transport access from the Western Suburbs to the University, the hospital precinct and the northern end of the Urban Innovation District. The WGTP directly competes with the Melbourne Metro, and would likely draw patronage away from it as well as from the Regional Rail Link. Although there are no assessments of the impacts of WGTP relative to any of the 137 projects in Infrastructure Victoria's Draft 30-year strategy, it is extremely likely that it competes directly with the catchment for Melbourne Metro 2 (MM2). MM2 would ultimately connect Werribee to Mernda via a tunnel from Newport to Clifton Hill, with stations at Fishermens Bend, Southern Cross, Flagstaff, Parkville and Fitzroy. Compared to WGTP, MM2 is the infrastructure project that would deal more directly, sustainably and efficiently with transport needs of people in the Western suburbs who work in the central or inner city, due to the ease of making connections to other public transport from it.

From an urban planning view, there is great difficulty in assessing the merits of the WGTP because there is no Victorian Transport Plan. The Transport Integration Act (TIA) 2010 requires the government to produce and regularly update a Transport Plan. However, since the 2008 Victorian Transport Plan was excised from the TIA, the state has had no plan to provide guidance.

Fundamental aims of the TIA are for every land use and transport planning decision to be integrated, and to promote integration of public and active transport with land use and development. A core aim of the TIA is to reduce reliance on private motor cars for travel, and for extended travel in general. Even without a Transport Plan, it can be seen that the WGTP does not accord with these fundamental planning aims. The WGTP has been designed to maintain reliance on private car transport during construction (a time when it would good planning practice to encourage mode shift towards more sustainable forms of travel), and to then encourage car travel when in operation by providing a higher level of service than that offered by existing routes to the central and inner city. While this is an effective strategy to induce the payment of tolls for trips that would otherwise be free, it raises insufficient revenue to make the a WGTP self-sustaining project. From a planning view, there are no

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justifications for using public funds to subsidise a private tollway that runs counter to so many established policies for the areas – for transport and land use in general and in particular, the parts of the city that it will serve.

### **URBAN DESIGN CONCEPT**

In the EES report, There is much made of the ‘urban design concept’ in terms of what it will ‘demonstrate’, ‘generate’, ‘deliver’, however, it is difficult to find any clear statement of what the urban design concept actually is. There is no description of the concept itself, only what it will do and its intended effects. Urban design is fundamentally about shaping urban space and development, through designing the ways people will move, forming around these flows sites for development and land use activity. In this way, urban design opens up potentials for social interaction, economic and cultural development. Other layers may be added over this to reinforce and express the underlying intentions of the concept, usually to be interpreted by others at the level of architecture and landscape.

In the case of the WGTP, it would appear that the urban design concept is essentially the same as the engineering design in this instance. The project seeks to shape urban space and the way people will move via a series of roads, tunnels, bridges and viaducts. These transport infrastructure elements create a series of conditions at different sites along the WGTP, around which various future land uses have been proposed or assumed. The viability of some of these uses have had more consideration put into them than others.

For example, the proposed public open spaces have been foregrounded in all of the project imagery. Where there are proposed noise attenuation walls, these have been highlighted. The appearance of viaduct structures, including the undercrofts has been picked out for attention at places where there impact is likely to be minimal, and the main users of the spaces will be motorists (and in some cases purportedly cyclists). What is missing however is any consideration for the way in which the urban design concept (that is, the transport infrastructure) will impact on the potential of adjacent sites that have long been earmarked for urban renewal.

Many of the reports within the EES acknowledge that future development along the WGTP corridor from e-Gate in Docklands through the Dynon Precinct is expected to occur. The Landscape and Visual Impact report (Technical Report N) suggests that Visual impact is likely to be ‘medium’, though this is only for the industrial land uses that currently exist. No impact assessment has been made for future land use development and urban renewal, for which the visual impacts of a different order. Within the urban design report, there is no evidence that any examination has been done of what the interfaces would be like in relation future developments along this corridor. However, as noted, a fundamental element of urban design is the potential for future urban development and renewal, and the creation of value through social, economic and cultural activity. The urban design concept is silent on this and it is a fundamental flaw.

I now move on to discuss the relationship of the Urban Design Concept to the Urban Design Vision.

S.3.2.2 of the urban design report states:

“The urban design vision for the West Gate Tunnel Project is to: achieve urban design excellence through genuinely innovative and high quality design, responsive and effective urban integration, positive connections within the neighbourhoods through which it passes and a positive contribution for local communities and for greater Melbourne.”

These are fine-sounding words that embody what should have informed the urban design concept. In order to achieve these aspirations for ‘responsive and effective urban integration’ and ‘positive connections within the neighbourhoods through which it passes’ the premise of the project would

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have been different. Large roads with high volumes of traffic are anathema to integrating and the connecting neighbourhoods they pass through. There has been much research that has found the deleterious effects on social connectedness and economic activity in their immediate vicinity.

The negative impact of the project on existing mixed use and residential neighbourhoods in North and West Melbourne, the Urban Innovation District (Carlton/Parkville), the Biomedical Precinct and Queen Victoria Market precinct due to significantly increased traffic will be significant. Similarly, the potential for extending Melbourne's central area westwards as series of mixed use, commercially and culturally vibrant higher density neighbourhoods will be severely compromised.

To achieve the kinds of 'urban integration', 'positive connections' and 'positive contributions' for local communities, the project would need to have been conceived as a suite of public and active transport connections designed to enhance pedestrian activity around origins and destinations.

Thus, the majority of effort that passes for urban design in the WGTP is associated with surface treatments and managing visual appearance. This is one layer of urban design, but visual appearance is the most superficial form of design consideration within this area of built environment thinking.

The report indicates that attention has been paid to applying various thematic strategies to provide an artistic veneer to the engineering structures in line with such practices on similar projects elsewhere in Victoria. Issues with some of the themes used for the decorative aspects will be discussed later.

An issue with this kind of infrastructure can be vandalism, especially when so much is invested in its visual appearance. However, a corollary of this investment is the need to protect it from aesthetic damage. To this end, the detailed urban design of the WGTP has been formulated to deter access below and around large parts of it through measures such as soft landscaping:

"The landscaping design also deters vandalism through the use of soft landscaping. This will be used to limit access to key elements and structures such as covering the back of noise barriers abutting residential zones." S. 3.5.4 Material Strategy, p.11

This is in conflict with S. 3.5.5 Environmental Performance Requirements, which are to:

- Protect and, where practicable, improve access to and amenity for potentially affected residents, open space, social and community infrastructure and commercial facilities
- Minimise, to the extent practicable, landscape and visual impacts and maximise opportunities for enhancement of public amenity, open space and facilities
- Protect access to, and amenity for, potentially affected business and commercial facilities, where practicable."

There is a dearth of information about where these defensive strategies have been employed. On the basis of the maps and perspectives provided, it appears that these techniques along with others are quite extensive and therefore what appears to be generous landscape settings and public open spaces are in fact predominantly a series of green 'moats' to keep people away from the project. Furthermore, it needs to be asked to what degree these strategies will impound the urban renewal issues created by the viaducts by constraining any potential for transverse access beneath them.

### FOOTSCRAY ROAD VIADUCT

s4.4.2 of the report states: "This location will respond to both the current context and defer to anticipated future development on the urban renewal sites to the north." It is not at all clear what this statement means. The viaduct above Footscray road and the channelization of the ground level will improve the efficiency of traffic flows, but will not make it more conducive to future urban renewal. Perhaps the meaning of the statement is that future development will defer to the WGTP? This certainly makes more sense.

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Further on, the report claims that the design concept for Footscray Rd is a 'boulevard', with the green nighttime lighting of the undercroft presumably intended to make the piers and soffits look like a tree-lined street, or a 'virtual forest'. While this is a clever analogy to make, and may well bring some joy to the hearts of tired commuters, it confuses the virtual with the actual. An actual boulevard is a tree-lined street, designed for a high level of visual amenity, and associated in many people's minds with the kinds of walkable urbanity in great European cities where this type of street design will have been experienced by many Melbournians on holiday. In sections like this, the report comes very close to marketing spin that suggests that these happy holiday experiences will be recreated along Footscray Rd by the WGTP. While it has long been the vision contained in state and local policy to redevelop Footscray Rd in the manner of a grand European boulevard as part of the western extension of the central city, the proposed 'virtual forest' will actually prevent this vision from being realized.

### CITY LINK AND CONNECTIONS

s4.4.3 of the report states: "The design of the Wurundjeri Way extension ramps will incorporate the refined pier design used for Footscray Road and a deck design that repeats the abstracted netting motif adopted across the project. This will tie the element into the coherent urban design palette, while offering a specific local solution to animate the under-croft."

The extension and widening of Wurundjeri Way will significantly worsen the environment in what is already a highly unpleasant place for cyclists and pedestrians. Any future possibilities for redeeming this important set of interfaces at the eastern edge of Docklands will be made far less likely, if not impossible.

### WILL THE WGTP VIADUCTS DETER DEVELOPMENT?

Comparisons can be drawn with those parts of South Melbourne adjacent to the West Gate Freeway viaducts. While much development of the area has indeed occurred, there is little close to the freeway interfaces and it is all on the northern side. The southern side, in the shadow of the viaduct is still the low-rise industrial built form that pre-dated the freeway, despite planning controls that encourage urban renewal.

At e-Gate, the arrangement is reversed – the viaduct is on the north side of the development site, and casts its shadows on what should be a primary north-facing active edge of the precinct. If development dynamics here are anything like those in South Melbourne, development will be deferred for a long time and the much-needed connectivity with North and West Melbourne, and with North Melbourne Railway station is likely to be compromised.

Image 10 in the Map Book ('Moonee Ponds Creek and E-Gate) illustrates the lack of attention given to understanding how development at e-Gate could occur, and how negative impacts on potential development have been minimised. There are no sections to show how connections could work with the changes in level. The only indication of how development might be arranged suggests that the majority of it will be away from the Wurundjeri Way extension. The implication of even these very vague and limited images is that the potential area for development has been significantly constrained by the WGTP.

s4.4.5 of the report states that there will be 1.4 Ha of new public open space on the west bank of Moonee Ponds Creek. The report proceeds to acknowledge that while such space is needed, it is remote, and seeks to assure readers that it will become safe due to passive surveillance once urban renewal occurs. The irony here is that the safety of this new public open space is reliant on the development of 'e-Gate and surrounding areas', the very precincts whose urban renewal is very likely to be inhibited by other features of the WGTP.

### DECORATIVE THEMES

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A variety of themes are identified for various elements of the WGTP. These are applied to the engineering structures via cladding, various forms of lighting (including on poles), mouldings on noise attenuation walls and sculptural elements alongside roadways. The report notes that from a functional point of view, textured surfaces have a deterrent affect in relation to vandalism.

The themes relate to maritime activity associated with the Port of Melbourne, the Surf Coast of Victoria (some two hours drive away) and local Aboriginal culture.

Much is made of the motifs that are drawn from Aboriginal culture and the report states that 'further consultation' will be carried out to develop them further. This raises questions about where the proposal to use these themes originated. There is no evidence provided of consultation with local Aboriginal people about the use of their cultural materials. Furthermore, Technical Report O (Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment) finds within the project boundary there are no sites of Aboriginal heritage significance. This is due to the extent to which the area has been disturbed and remodeled for port, transport and industrial operations since European settlement.

This situation suggests that there is a significant danger of commodification and appropriation of cultural materials belonging to Aboriginal people. Without clear evidence that the use of Aboriginal cultural materials is supported by local Aboriginal people, the use of Aboriginal motifs to 'brand' the project as an 'authentic' response to place is potentially highly problematic given the actual dispossession of Aboriginal people in Victoria was so intense and swift following colonization.

### CONCLUSION

The WGTP runs contrary to good planning and urban design. It should be descoped to delete the most egregious impacts on the City of Melbourne and other inner city municipalities. Public and active transport should be investigated to meet future transport needs.

### STATEMENT:

*'I have made all the inquiries that I believe are desirable and appropriate and no matters of significance which I regard as relevant have to my knowledge been withheld from the Panel.'*