CORRECTED VERSION

OUTER SUBURBAN/INTERFACE SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into growing the suburbs — infrastructure and business development in outer suburban Melbourne

Melbourne — 18 June 2012

Members

Ms J. Graley
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Witnesses

Maribyrnong City Council
Mr I. Butterworth, general manager, infrastructure and engineering

Metropolitan Transport Forum
Cr T. Melican, chairperson, and
Ms S. Strain, executive officer

Casey City Council
Mr P. Hamilton, manager, transport
The CHAIR — I call the proceedings to order. It is important that we maintain things being done in a timely fashion because there are other witnesses following this group. I am Jan Kronberg, the chair of the Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee. I welcome our four witnesses here today. I am delighted to see we have got Cr Tom Melican, chairperson of the Metropolitan Transport Forum and one of the mayors within my electorate. It is good to have you here today, Tom. I also welcome Mr Paul Hamilton, the manager of transport for the City of Casey; Mr Ian Butterworth, the general manager of the Maribyrnong City Council; and Ms Susie Strain, the executive officer of the Metropolitan Transport Forum. Welcome to you all.

In the proceedings today we wanted to let you know that all of your contributions and your action today is protected by parliamentary privilege, which we hope encourages you to make unfettered contributions, because that is important. However, that parliamentary privilege is not extended to you outside this immediate forum if you were to engage with other agencies or the media. This hearing is being recorded by Hansard staff. A hard copy of the transport will be available to you for your perusal, and any spelling changes can be accommodated within about two weeks time.

I invite your chair, Cr Melican, to begin his presentation. It is most welcome.

Cr MELICAN — We did not need encouragement, but we will push ahead. I am not sure how much you understand about the Metropolitan Transport Forum. It formed about 20 years ago. It comprises 22 of the metropolitan councils as members, which represents about 3 million of Melbourne’s population. We have 23 associate members, but this presentation today is strictly on behalf of the member councils. Some of our members include Metro Trains, Yarra Trams, the bus association, various transport-interested groups and some peak bodies.

Obviously transport is a key component of the liveability of a city. The MTF has a monthly meeting. We normally try and get a presenter along each week to give us their perspective on various transport issues and subjects. You would have to say the MTF has a very strong focus on public transport, and we believe the improvement of public transport and rail in Melbourne is essential, but today we want to talk more about the transport aspects in the growth corridors because we believe that transport is much more than just moving from A to B.

We see transport affecting people’s health not only in the way they commute but when they become ill. We recently had someone from Travellers Aid who talked about people who change their schedule of hospital visits just because they cannot access the city. A woman undertook an operation she did not really need because she could not get to the city to get the treatment she needed to take the other alternative. Transport options affect people’s lives so intimately.

Then there is the environment — obviously where people live — and air quality and things associated with that. People’s social participation is also affected by their level of transport access. Obviously the ability of people living in the outer suburbs to access the amenities in the city and cultural events that happen only in the city is limited by their access to transport. Also general liveability and people’s feeling of connectedness to their community is affected by their transport. Transport choices also affect land use and what develops on the fringes.

The other big one not often considered is people’s access to education. The access of people on the outskirts of Melbourne to education is severely limited if they have not got the transport choices, particularly given that most education is done below 18, so it changes their thoughts and their choices about their educational opportunities. Once they get to higher education opportunities, their access to transport changes their decision on what courses they might undertake. It is vital to the way people live and move that transport is right. That is why the MTF is really quite strong and believes that if these suburbs are to be built, then the transport component should be there before the development is made.

We talked about the northern sewerage pipe which went in not that long ago, ahead of schedule and ahead of budget. No-one knew about it. When we build these suburbs no-one thinks about what the sewerage requirements are; it is just there. There is never any debate about the electricity or the gas — it is just there — yet when it comes to the transport component, it is often an afterthought.

We are looking at the Doncaster rail at the moment. Doncaster was a growth area 30 years ago, and there was a plan to put a train down the middle of the Eastern. It has never happened. Now, because it has developed the way it has and because car usage in Doncaster is so high and so entrenched, it is very difficult to retrofit the train line down the Eastern.
Now we are looking at some other growth areas, including the Aurora estate in Epping. That is another example of where it has actually changed the way the land was developed, because where the train station was to be positioned there was much higher density of housing in that area, yet the train line was never built there. By not providing the public transport you change the land use, and that just adds to the continuous growth, and then the argument comes up that there is not the density of population to support a decent transport system, so it is never built.

We see transport as the vital link. It has been said that transport is the hidden hand that shapes the city, and that is correct. We feel that if we do not get the transport right, these suburbs will become the ghettos of the future as petrol prices increase, people’s access to education and employment decrease and when the house prices on the fringes eventually collapse — that is, if people from those outer areas cannot access the opportunities they need to continue their education or get the jobs they want.

From my perspective as the mayor of Banyule, we do not have any growth areas in our area, but the impact that they have on Banyule is significant, and I think if you went to the inner suburbs, it would be even more considerable. Currently Banyule is divided by what is sometimes called the north–east link. Because of the growth corridors to our north, the traffic volume through Banyule has increased significantly to the stage where it is not safe to live on some of our roads. Because the roads are so congested, people now use any rat run through any part of Banyule to get to the Eastern Freeway.

The other impact the growth areas have is on our rail network. If you know Watsonia railway station, you will know that it is the first railway station at the end of the Western Ring Road. It has a massive car park that is full all the time with cars belonging to people in the growth areas who are trying to access the public transport system. Those massive tracts of land around Watsonia are quite valuable, and yet they have all been turned into just car park. My station is Macleod. We have a huge number of complaints about parking in the residential streets by people from the growth corridors trying to access the public transport system. So the growth areas are impacting our suburbs.

If you go to Yarra or the other inner suburban councils, you see the traffic volume there is just horrific and it changes the liveability of those suburbs. If we do not get it right on the outskirts, it affects those suburbs, but it also affects the whole city. Then the bigger concern is that as transport costs increase, as oil prices increase, people will not be able to access jobs, and then the whole economic viability of the city will diminish. I am not the expert to talk about that. How long would you like us to talk?

The CHAIR — We have another 30 minutes together.

Cr MELICAN — We can have some question time, so I might hand over to Paul.

The CHAIR — Just before we do that, Cr Melican, the committee will want to be interactive with you over this time and will formulate questions as we hear your contributions. I have a question I would like to put to you as a collective, or to the chair. In lots of ways we are looking at retrofitting public infrastructure, because the growth in a lot of the outer areas has already been well and truly undertaken. Moving through the catchments are bus systems taking people to other points, and then the reliance is on private cars. To me it seems like there is a great urgency to retrofit as well as provide for the ever-expanding urban growth and that there is a call on a lot of money in a hurry.

In your deliberations, what have you thought would be the source of funding? Would it be derived through private-public partnerships, through state and federal funding or infrastructure bonds? What do you see through your analysis and deliberations is a good model — I do not mind if you draw upon international models at this point — to actually make this infrastructure happen sooner rather than later, because we cannot just put it off for another 25 or 30 years?

Cr MELICAN — All those things you talked about, of course; developer contributions are supposed to be a major source of funding, but if you have a hectare of land for the low density we have, the amount of profit to a developer on the outskirts of Melbourne is not that great.

The CHAIR — Developers need their 15 per cent, do they not?

Cr MELICAN — I am not a developer, so I would not know.
The CHAIR — Can somebody give me a clear answer? What becomes a disincentive for developers in terms of their return?

Mr HAMILTON — I could not tell you what would be a disincentive point, but obviously they have to make more on their money, including the holding costs, than they would if they put that investment straight in the bank and got interest. The holding costs can be considerable. Some of these parcels are purchased 5 or 10 years in advance, so there can be significant costs in holding those properties.

On raising the revenue through developer contributions, for example, in Casey there is an area which has been approved in the past 12 months, which is Clyde North. It is an area just to the east of the established urban environment, but it is moving into an area where there is no infrastructure at all — the roads around it are all gravel roads — so the cost of developing that land is up around $300 000 per hectare for developer contributions. The developer contributions plan is raising about $117 million for this contained suburban area. That is providing only the immediate infrastructure in the area where the development is occurring and providing only just some of the infrastructure on the immediate boundary — the roads immediately bounding that area.

Around $46 million of that is going into roads — protecting land and providing the roads. The rest is going into providing public open space and community facilities. That is without considering the impacts of that development back through Casey, the upgrades that are required to the Monash, the established arterial road network or any of the other infrastructure that needs to be provided, and it does not cover off the cost of providing even many of the community facilities with recreation reserves and things that council has to provide. So there is only so much that we can leverage out of the new development land.

Cr MELICAN — But then if you provide the transport options, your yield per hectare is much greater and the value of the land increases even as the transport infrastructure does. If you look at a block of land in Yarraville or Wyndham — a block of land is a block of land anywhere. The only difference is that one has better services than the other, so that is why the one in Wyndham is cheaper. But longer term it costs so much more for those people who live there than it does for the people who live closer in, because their transport costs are up. About 25 per cent of their income is spent on transport, and that continues through their whole life.

If you provide the transport infrastructure, the value of the land will increase significantly and the yield for the block will increase significantly. People will be prepared to pay more. There could be a levy on the land, and people will pay it because they know that over the longer term they will get the value. The developer will get his return, and the people who buy the blocks will get their return.

The CHAIR — We also have to take into consideration housing affordability in our all-encompassing view of some of these issues.

Cr MELICAN — That is correct, but I think that buying the cheap block on the outskirts is not the right option, because it may be cheap to buy, but it is not cheap to live there.

The CHAIR — In your analysis and your exchanges as a collective have you looked to the effects of providing increased density, that let us say a bus company would get more immediate return with greater densities in those outlying areas, rather than what has been the format in the past?

Cr MELICAN — But then that would not provide the return to the developer.

The CHAIR — I am talking about a viable business option for a bus operator.

Mr HAMILTON — Certainly increasing the densities will make it easier to service these areas with public transport up to a point. On public transport, again with Casey, we are 20 kilometres from Dandenong, it being a principal activity centre. The majority of the employment in Casey is not so much in the principal activity centre but in the industrial areas of Dandenong South and through Kingston to Monash and Knox — those sorts of areas. You cannot get to those locations by public transport. Even if you catch a train to Dandenong, there is not a bus that links into the industrial areas. So people are forced into using their private car.

The other issue with increasing the densities is that it is certainly occurring. The densities have increased considerably in the new precinct structure plans. That is an outcome of both council and GAA working together to try to achieve that, but the problem is that it is a chicken and egg situation. We have a situation around the
Cranbourne East railway station, which is a planned extension of the railway line from Cranbourne out to Cranbourne East. We have been working with the developer that holds the land in the immediate area — that is privatisation. It is not reliable for him to go to a high-density housing development if the station is not there. How long do you wait before the station arrives? One has to go with the other. Many of our suburbs have been established for five years and do not have a single bus. Again we are saying, ‘Let us put the higher densities in to support public transport’.

**The CHAIR** — Can there be any infill in those areas that have been without a bus service for five years to actually have it stack up for the bus operator?

**Mr HAMILTON** — These are new estates of over 1000 homes which still do not have a bus, and you do not have a connection. They are reasonably close to train stations, but you do not have a connection to the train station. The station car parks are all full, so you cannot park at the station and you cannot catch the bus to the station, so you end up using your car to do the full journey. If you are going to put the higher densities in, then you need to put in the bus services at the same time.

**Ms STRAIN** — The Aurora development is another case in point, isn’t it? When it was originally laid out, I understand it was quite high density, and they were looking at innovative forms of transit-oriented development. Because of the station, with the train line did not being extended to there for the foreseeable future that the developers could be sure of, the density and opportunities there were whittled away. The developer could not put the density in around the railway station if the train was not there and there was no security or surety that the train would arrive at any — —

**The CHAIR** — Can you give me a time line around this Aurora development?

**Ms STRAIN** — Aurora was originally conceived about 10 years ago, I think, under VicUrban. In the early stages of Melbourne 2030 it was going to be a lead development with transit-oriented development, new urban forms and that type of thing around rail stations, and high-quality public transport. The planning went ahead to quite an advanced stage, but it foundered because it did not have the train; transit-oriented development must follow high-quality public transport service levels.

**The CHAIR** — We have actually seen that working in Western Australia.

**Cr MELICAN** — There is an issue around these huge car parks that they tend to build around the transport nodes. The area around your railway station is the most valuable land in the area. If we turn that into car parking, it is very bad use of what should be the dearest land. If we were to have people living there instead of cars parking there, it is a much better use. People prefer to live close to the railway stations, but what we are doing is we are turning that area, which is the most desirable place to live, into a massive car park, which is adding to congestion, discouraging people from walking there because they are so congested and people live so far away that it is not an easy walking distance anyway.

From the perspective of the people, would you rather have a second car that your family uses just to drive to the railway station, or would you rather catch a bus that is included in your Met ticket and it is free to travel to the station — that is, you have the bus pull up next to it and you get off, walk 10 metres and you are on the train? What we are doing is we are forcing people to buy a second car just so they can drive to the station, which is the most valuable land, and then if they cannot get a car park, they end up driving the whole way.

The other aspect is that with people below 18 their parents drive them to the train station and then drive home empty. So we are adding two trips with what could be replaced by one bus trip. It is very bad land use planning to have the most valuable land around your transport nodes turned into car parking.

**The CHAIR** — Have you evaluated other means of providing transport for people, where people might perhaps belong to a car cooperative? I understand the City of Boroondara is actually subsidising such an initiative. Have you put your mind to how that would alleviate the need for a second car in a family?

**Cr MELICAN** — Are you talking about shared cars or car-pooling?
The CHAIR — No, I am not talking about car-pooling. I am talking about a private enterprise structure where people can book a car for half a day from the internet, download an access code to that car, go to a neighbourhood location and utilise that car as an alternative.

Ms STRAIN — Ian might be able to talk about that.

Mr BUTTERWORTH — Certainly. That option has been around for a number of years in the suburbs. Maribyrnong, where I work, has had it in place for probably three years now. It is great. Certainly that option is there, is working and is very effective in areas dense enough to warrant and justify that service. But it is a private operation, and they need to be able to make a viable business.

The CHAIR — Have you thought about that as a way of moving people around in areas where they are deprived of ways of coming in from the catchment to a rail station or a bus terminus?

Ms STRAIN — The car-share people, who have been an associate member of the MTF for some time, say it only works where you have high density, because you need people to be able to walk to the shared car, and also it is usually a mode that supports public transport. So the sort of person who uses the shared car situation will often be in places like Maribyrnong, where there is good public transport as well. A public transport user who would need a car for an occasional —

Cr MELICAN — It works best if you have a high-rise development that has no car parking. But then it is in the basement, whereas in an average suburb on the fringe, where it is so dispersed, if it is 200 or 300 metres away, it is not going to work. In a high-rise development, because of the density, it does work. That is because some of these high-rise developments do not have access to cars. People do not want a car, except occasionally when they do their weekly shopping or go and buy a new television or pick up a pet from the vet. Very occasionally they use that. It does not work on the fringes, though.

Ms GRALEY — Chair, just for your information, Selandra Rise has a share car it is trialling down at the Stockland development in the city of Casey, so we will be watching with interest to see the levels of use there.

I am going to give you all a magic wand, because I actually would like to know — there are lots of things in your submissions — what would be your priorities for transport development in Melbourne and the outer suburbs? If you had a couple of top projects that you would like to see get off the ground, what would they be?

Cr MELICAN — I think the one that is being funded to put additional money in the last budget was the Metro 1 project, because to add any new lines in Melbourne, we need to free up the centre of the city, and the Metro 1 is what will do that. But there is also the Doncaster line. Doncaster has the highest car ownership in Melbourne. It has a complete lack of public transport. The DART system has been very successful, so the money is there. Look at what happened when they opened up the South Morang railway line: instantly it was at capacity; straightaway. The demand is there.

Imagine if you opened up a Manningham railway line. It would be successful, and yet we do not seem to do it. Metro 1 is vital, Manningham is the second one. Then there are Rowville and the airport rail. We do not talk much about the airport rail, but what amazes me is we are doing a railway line to Avalon that has a fraction of the business that Tullamarine does.

The CHAIR — But are there not historical constraints in terms of the operators of CityLink running something parallel?

Ms STRAIN — I have asked that before, and I understand that there is a high-occupancy lane on the Tullamarine Freeway — on the CityLink part of it, and if a rail line is put in, the high-occupancy lane would come off. There is some trade-off between CityLink and the rail, I am pretty sure.
Cr MELICAN — There is some arrangement that there would be compensation, but I think that only runs for about 12 years. So we could start planning now, and then by the time it is complete — —

The CHAIR — Would that be an elevated system?

Cr MELICAN — I think it would be partly elevated, but there are other options as well. I have seen a plan that shows a rail line from Broadmeadows to the airport, so there are other options.

Ms GRALEY — Can we hear from Paul and Ian?

Mr BUTTERWORTH — Certainly from the perspective of the western suburbs, the Western Transport Alliance along with LeadWest, which is a group of the six councils in the west and other transport and trade industry representatives, has put together a transport strategy for the west. It is still in draft form, but the key projects they are recommending through that strategy are the east–west link connecting out to the Western Ring Road and the outer metropolitan transport corridor. It is felt that that is definitely needed to be planned for and reservations put in place early to ensure they are fixed early on rather than development coming in over the top of them and having to try to come back later to obtain the land.

Melbourne Metro is the other project that the west is very keen on, and there are a number of freight projects as well that the western councils are very interested in to try to alleviate a lot of the truck activity that is particularly coming through suburbs — in my municipality, particularly Yarraville and Footscray — to access the port.

Mr HAMILTON — Just quickly, from the perspective of the south-east, the upgrading of the Dandenong line as part of Melbourne Metro 1 and continuing the upgrade of the Dandenong line through the Metro 1 process between Dandenong and Caulfield particularly, that needs to be done — addressing the rail crossings through that area. Access to stations and public transport is a bus solution for us once you get to Casey, and it is expanding the bus services into the new estates as they occur.

Judith mentioned the Selandra Rise project. It is an innovative project where we are trying to kick-start an estate with additional support through community services and other services. It has the car that people can borrow if they need to. We are also trying to get a bus service into that estate, but we are having difficulty in getting a commitment from government to put in the single bus service.

Even though we are putting a lot of effort into developing that community from day one with community facilities, we cannot get a commitment to put a bus service in there. Again it is a road-based solution in many ways for us, so the continued expansion of the arterial network through Casey is quite important as well, which is how the buses are going to get through.

Ms McLEISH — Earlier there was the comment that transport is the hidden hand that shapes a city. We talked about some of the connectivity. When we talk about Dandenong the jobs are actually in the industrial areas in Dandenong South. Do you have any feel about the willingness of potential new businesses to set up in those areas and perhaps some of the limitations there?

Mr HAMILTON — If I could comment on that, it is something I should have covered in the other transport upgrade issues. It is really getting jobs where people live. Over 70 per cent of Casey residents who are in employment leave the municipality, and they all leave to go to the north-west. So you have this huge tidal flow which loads up the network in the morning, and then you get the reverse movement. It is about getting jobs where they occur.

Casey and Cardinia are working together to try to encourage new employment, but it is very hard to get employment land developed in the same time frame as housing.

Ms McLEISH — I am talking about the willingness of businesses to set up potential new businesses.

Mr HAMILTON — That is why you need the additional programs to encourage businesses to set up.

Ms McLEISH — You think they need incentives?

Mr HAMILTON — They need some sort of incentive. We have the Fountain Gate district centre, which is a huge district centre. It has the Fountain Gate shopping centre, which will be larger than Chadstone in the next
couple of years. Next to that is the business park. The developer who owns that has been trying to get office development going in there — two and three-storey offices. He is struggling to get people to rent in those locations.

We are also working to make sure that he does not take a quick fix — put more peripheral sales in there — because that is not going to generate the job opportunities. You have got this push and pull about the developers having the land, where it has been zoned for employment, but the willingness for business to come out to those areas lags well behind the housing development.

**Cr MELICAN** — It gets down to density again. It is a conglomeration effect. If you have a business that relies heavily on three or four other supply chains or other businesses, you are not going to move to the outer suburbs when a vital part of your business is miles away. Just think about it. Why do people want to be in the city? It is because the services they might need to run their businesses are very close. If you can get the density right, you will attract the businesses because there will be the mechanisms to support infrastructure and business around them. If your business relies on having other businesses around you, you are not going to locate out on the fringe. If I am a solicitor, I am not going to locate in the middle of a paddock and hope that someone will come there. If I am a solicitor or a barrister, I want to be in the city because that is where the people are.

If you want to develop employment hubs, you need density. The other thing that people look at when they locate their business is how accessible it is for people to get there. If it is not accessible for their staff or for their customers, they do not want to locate there. To get the business you need the density and you need the transport.

**Ms HUTCHINS** — The image that was presented by Casey was pretty powerful image. I want to ask about buses in the outer suburbs and whether your forum has done some research around what else is needed to provide bus services in the outer suburbs — both the immediate ones that are needed — and also whether you guys have a view around developers contributing to the first 12 months of a bus service operating, which is something we saw recently when we were in Vancouver that happens in the outer suburbs there.

**Cr MELICAN** — Is it successful?

**Ms HUTCHINS** — Yes, they pay for the first 12 months of the bus service.

**Cr MELICAN** — So why would you not do it, then?

**Ms STRAIN** — I think we have long argued that the public transport needs to go in with the development. Quite some years ago our organisation put together a paper on funding choices, which I can make available to you. It was in 2004 before the days of the PPP. Certainly it comes up frequently in our forums that there are probably many ways of paying for public transport to go in ahead of time. There are infrastructure levies, there are parking levies, there is talk of superannuation funds and there are infrastructure bonds. I do not think we have actually sat down and done the numbers on them all, but that paper, which I will certainly make available, is a good start.

I think anything we can do to get that money into public transport ahead of time is vital. Certainly our organisation, and I think a number of our councils, have agreed that if you cannot fund the infrastructure, do not allow the development. It is that important. One has to think about the condition of the development. I think developers and people can get creative and find ways to do it. It is not that we are lacking in intelligence. You hear about smart planning and those sorts of things from cities like Portland and Vancouver. If you are required to think about these things, I am sure we could find ways to do it such as up-front funding. Maybe the blocks will cost a little bit more, but it is short-term thinking to think that a low-priced block is actually low-priced living.

**The CHAIR** — Where does the impetus come from for, let us say, getting infrastructure bonds up and running? As a collective, what work have you done in that area?

**Ms STRAIN** — We have raised it, actually. Jackie, our previous chair, raised it a couple of times with the department, because this is a long-running issue, but so far we have not found any great interest to take it up. Perhaps this committee might be able to explore different ways of paying for it, but certainly the topic has come up from time to time.
Another document which I can make available to you is around the economics of transport. We ran a series of forums on economics and transport last year, which has been put together as a monograph, again highlighting the various ways of looking at the pricing of transport. At the end of that the conclusion really was that governments cannot afford not to invest in public transport because of the other benefits that come to society, not necessarily in cold, hard cash at that particular minute but in terms of more successful communities, prosperity and those sorts of things. I have certainly identified those in a submission and will make them available to the committee.

Mr HAMILTON — My understanding of the way the developer contributions work at the moment — the structure of those — is that the council can only collect funds for infrastructure; they cannot collect funds for services. The GAIC should be being collected for state infrastructure and services but we have not seen any outcomes of the GAIC funds being collected and we have not seen how they have been allocated as yet. That might be an area that the committee could look into, as to how the GAIC funds are being utilised.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Before you rush off to the bond market the first thing you should know is that there has to be a market for it, that someone wants to buy your infrastructure bonds. Do you get that idea? I agree with you about Aurora. The people at Aurora feel that they have been let down over the last 10 years; they bought in under a premise that something was going to happen and nothing did happen. Cr Melican, I want to take you up on your comments about valuable land around railway stations and your thoughts about increasing housing density. Am I hearing you subscribing to high-rise density around railway stations and transport hubs? Is that what I am hearing?

Cr MELICAN — Yes, exactly. That is why you get the density. Instead of providing a car park for someone, provide accommodation for someone and then you have got someone on the train. It takes up — it depends on the height — but it is wrong to allow your most valuable land to be turned over to car parking.

Mr ONDARCHIE — So you think governments and councils should be thinking more about high-rise density around those sorts of precincts?

Cr MELICAN — From your trips overseas, what works overseas? That is exactly what works overseas.

The CHAIR — How high, the high rises?

Cr MELICAN — I always think about Paris, the most relaxed, beautiful city in the world — nothing over six storeys. You see these 20-storey buildings going up; to my mind they are virtually high-rise, dated communities. They have no interaction to the street, the people are isolated, and I think that is the wrong way to go. I do not think we need 20-storey buildings dotted all over the place here and there; I think we need a much lower density, much lower but a more even spread across the entire area instead of huge pencils sticking up everywhere. They do not add to the community, those high rises. We have seen them down at Docklands and the lack of community in Docklands because once people are in their buildings there is no interaction between them and the street or them and their neighbours. That is because they are living in these massive, isolated buildings.

The CHAIR — I would have to say that your message does have some resonance with us. We visited Toronto to see what the future of Melbourne might look like; there are a lot of 40-storey condominiums all over Toronto, and it is quite a lot to accommodate.

Cr MELICAN — And not a good outcome.

The CHAIR — Driven by affordability and activity areas. They jump to 40-storeys.

Cr MELICAN — I think a 40-storey building is just isolating people.

The CHAIR — I am glad you have made that point to us. Does anybody else have another question at this point? We are right on time; we could fit in one other question, I think.

Ms McLEISH — We have been talking about the increased densities around the railway stations, and I am looking at very outer suburbs where the rest of the towns are between 2 and 3 kilometres from the railway stations and there are limited services there. How can you make it work?

Cr MELICAN — Where the town centre is away from the — —
Ms McLEISH — Well away. The existing town centre is well away from the stations.

Cr MELICAN — If you look at the way towns grew up, it is exactly the opposite of that; the towns grew up around their railway stations, and that, I think, is a complete lack of planning of your town centre if it is that distance away from — —

Ms McLEISH — It has happened over a very long period of time.

Cr MELICAN — That is the thing we need to avoid. If it has already happened, then buses are the answer, but — —

Ms McLEISH — Without a huge density of population at the minute, is it viable for bus services to run those distances?

Cr MELICAN — If you provide the transport services, you will increase the density.

Ms McLEISH — I am talking about that there is a transition period to do that and how to make it work.

Cr MELICAN — Buses are your answer at the moment.

Mr HAMILTON — We are allowing these communities to go in, giving them the expectation that they will have access to buses. The GAA markets these as being integrated transport and land use planning, and what it is is just land use planning.

Ms McLEISH — Some of these communities that you are talking about are actually existing towns.

Mr HAMILTON — I live in Berwick; I have been there 20 years. I am 3 kilometres from the station; I am 1 kilometre from a bus service which runs once an hour. It is quicker for me to walk the 7 kilometres to Narre Warren to work — —

Ms McLEISH — And healthier.

Mr HAMILTON — And healthier, than to catch a bus.

Ms McLEISH — Yes, definitely.

The CHAIR — Does the forum have background research or ideal models for the intermodal connections, in terms of the timetabling — running with the train timetabling and the bus timetabling — and just the whole relationship about how a bus arrives at a station?

Cr MELICAN — That is a massive issue. People complain that the train pulls up and the bus pulls away at the same time. But I think it gets right back to how the contracts are negotiated with the bus companies. You see a lot of buses running around, even in the growth areas, that are empty. Bus companies get paid for kilometres travelled, not passengers carried. Surely that is a fundamental thing: we should be looking at the outcome. We provide bus services that are not well patronised, yet we do not change them. Surely we should be looking at where they will get the best return for the money.

Mr HAMILTON — One of the reasons they are not patronised, though — again, we have done some analysis — is 70 per cent of the bus network in Casey does not meet the government’s minimum service level, which is a bus every hour, a bus from morning to evening and a bus on weekends. It might meet components, but it does not meet the full minimum service level. It is 70 per cent of the bus network, and 55 per cent of the buses that go past the station do not meet a train within a 10-minute window. I caught the train into Melbourne the other day and it ended up being an hour and three-quarters each way by the time I allowed for connections up to Narre Warren station. My options for a bus up to the office, which is at Fountain Gate, were to walk 280 metres, which is halfway there, for a bus that was out on the highway, or I could have waited 20 minutes for a bus to come through. You end up just walking. This is the level of service people make a choice about — it is no longer a service that you would use by choice; it is a safety net. If the buses were timetabled to be in the same sort of cycle — they do not have to be as frequent, but if you change the timetabling to be in the same sort of cycle as what the trains are, then you can start improving those connections.
Ms STRAIN — In Perth on the bus timetable they have the train time as well; it is actually on the timetable. The timetable for each service actually has the other service on it, so they are locked in to meet each other.

The CHAIR — Have you come up with a particular strategy to put to bus operators on this issue?

Ms STRAIN — We did run a forum a year or so ago called ‘Why can’t the bus meet the train?’ and unfortunately we only seemed to hear why they couldn’t meet the train. My observation was, on my way here today on the train, I saw that as the train pulled in the bus pulled out, which happens all the time. There is a lot of discussion about, ‘They have competing timetables’, and they do not know; there is no communication between the two networks either. At the moment they run as three distinct networks: train, bus and tram. We are hoping that Public Transport Victoria will take up this issue. Apparently with Metlink — so we were told — it was not actually one of their requirements, which was the information sharing and organisation, as part of the Department of Transport, so we are hoping the new PTV will take this role.

The CHAIR — It is a question of breaking down a silo mentality; is that what we are actually looking at?

Ms STRAIN — Yes, absolutely. The systems run independently. You will see full trams and empty buses running side by side. At Kew junction you have the tram system and the tram stops at one place, but the bus stop is way on the other side of the junction. You could never ever make the transfer. The networks are not set up with thoughts of interchange and communication.

Cr MELICAN — And there is the other issue, that sometimes the bus stop is 300 metres away from the station.

Ms STRAIN — Yes, on the other side of a massive car park. It is the same at shopping centres, too. Often the bus depot for the shopping centre will be a long way from the shops — again, requiring walks across large car parks — and the people who are using those buses are often less mobile and possibly disabled. The equity is not built into it at the moment.

Cr MELICAN — If you have a bus that travels once an hour, you are not very inclined to use it. You are not going to walk there and wait an hour for a bus.

The CHAIR — How accessible are buses for people who are disabled?

Cr MELICAN — There has been a program. I think 20 per cent of buses need to be accessible, so they have raised them — less than 20 per cent.

The CHAIR — Less than 20 per cent of the rolling stock?

Cr MELICAN — No, of the platforms. It is two things: it is the bus itself but it is also the stop.

The CHAIR — I have just seen a system, the Vancouver one, where the bus can lower itself to the level of the kerb and it brings out a bridge and allows people to move smoothly, at the same level, at grade, from the footpath into the bus.

Cr MELICAN — Very rare.

The CHAIR — Very rare in Melbourne?

Ms GRALEY — We have some of those. I saw one the other day when a wheelchair passenger came on. He just put it out and the wheelchair came in.

Cr MELICAN — Trams are a lot more accessible, but with buses there are not a great deal.

Mr HAMILTON — It depends on the operator. Certainly out our way most of the bus fleet has changed over to what we call the low-floor buses and they put a ramp out. We also have to acknowledge that through state funding a lot of work has been done on creating the bus hard stops — the hard stands, the concrete pad where the bus pulls up to — so that has improved the access. There is still work to be done in making sure that you can actually get to the bus stop, which is about footpath connections and those sorts of things. Casey has worked very hard to make sure that we are getting those in place.
The CHAIR — Yes, because it is one thing to have a hard stand and a smart bus stop, but not if you have no footpath to get there in the first place.

Ms GRALEY — We have just recently conquered that one with one particular bus stop where we have a new footpath running into the bus stop.

The CHAIR — Gentlemen and lady, we have come to the end of our time together.

Cr MELICAN — The other aspect we did not talk about is the growth in public transport use has far outraced the growth in car usage. As a matter of fact, car usage in Melbourne has been reducing and continues to reduce. The other thing to point out is that petrol prices have increased. I know that at the moment they are down a bit, but I cannot see anything that is going to hold petrol prices down in the longer term. With the growth of China and India, the trouble in the Middle East and the scarcity of new wells, petrol prices will continue to increase and that will have a massive impact on the outer suburbs of Melbourne.

The CHAIR — Do you have a view as to how we will solve the problem of the number of level crossings we have, which impede putting on more train services?

Cr MELICAN — I do not understand how they impede putting on more train services. I think they impact on the road users, but what the government is doing at the moment is scheduling and doing one at a time — or one a year, I think it is planning for, with three in this year’s budget. It is the only way you can do it. That is how you address any problem: you have a schedule and work at it.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for your contributions today.

Ms GRALEY — Can I just ask Susie one question? Did you make any submission to the latest extension of the urban growth boundary and the logical exclusions process?

Ms STRAIN — The one that has just been done now?

Ms GRALEY — Yes.

Ms STRAIN — No, we have not as yet, although I imagine we will.

The CHAIR — We would welcome that, if you do that.

Witnesses withdrew.