

CORRECTED VERSION

SELECT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LAND DEVELOPMENT

Coburg — 17 March 2008

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Witnesses

Mr R. Millward, deputy convenor, Moreland Bicycle Users Group.

The CHAIR — We now have Ross Millward from the Moreland Bicycle Users Group. Ross, if you could just start off with a short discussion and then we will ask some questions. You are obviously familiar with the topic and we very much appreciate you being here today.

Mr MILLWARD — I am the deputy convenor of the Moreland Bicycle Users Group. I am not totally prepared. I think our convenor is going to probably turn up at the correct time.

The CHAIR — At the appointed time.

Mr MILLWARD — I did ring her this morning and I have not had a reply, so maybe we will just keep going and she will turn up when she turns up. Our interest from the Moreland Bicycle Users Group is that VicTrack is selling parcels of lands adjacent to the Upfield train line, one of which came to our attention adjacent to the Anstey station. That is a small block of land, and VicTrack is selling it to the only person for whom it is of value, which is the developer and the owner of the land adjacent to the block. We are concerned because the Upfield shared bicycle track is a continuous shared bicycle and pedestrian facility that goes currently from Fawkner cemetery, which is probably one of the most visited features in the northern suburbs, which you might not expect, and it goes all the way to the city — in fact, continuously off-road bicycle shared path all the way to the city and, with the completion of EastLink, a continuous off-road shared bicycle facility all the way to Frankston. It is part of a huge network, and we are concerned that the sale of the land was done pretty much in isolation without considering the totality of the effect it would have on a significant network of off-road cycling facilities. Also I suppose VicTrack's mission includes that it should improve public amenity. So I think part of its business mission, part of its charter and part of its environmental policy is to consider these things and not just sell off the family silver to make a buck. In this case, it is probably not a very big buck, but it could considerably be to the detriment of the continuous shared cycling facility.

There are other parcels of land and one which has come to our attention, although it has not been advertised very widely, is the parcel of land adjacent to Moreland station which is quite a significant parcel of land. I think from the Moreland Bicycle Users Group's point of view that is going to affect quite a significant stretch of bike path and it would be nice to be convinced that that was taken into consideration during any development. In terms of the wider view of it, I think for the residents who have moved into the area where there is a park, a child-care centre and the Ilma Lever Gardens for the disabled, there is a significant community development and small pocket of park in an area that is not very well looked after for parks, as well as having the bike path through it.

The only notification I have seen is a very small bit in the local paper which most people are not going to notice. I am not sure whether VicTrack's process in terms of community consultation and in terms of considering their charter to improve public amenity and not just flog off the land has been seriously considered. That is probably about it for my unprepared speech.

The CHAIR — Thank you, first of all, for that additional piece of information. I guess the Moreland Bicycle Users Group's interest is to see that the bike path network is maintained and strengthened?

Mr MILLWARD — That is right.

The CHAIR — In the sense of this hearing we have been looking at some public land in and around Moreland. But to summarise what you are telling us, VicTrack is proceeding to sell small parcels along the Upfield line and that this is likely to impact directly on the shared track.

Mr MILLWARD — That is our view, yes.

The CHAIR — Other than the notifications, is that published anywhere else that you are aware of? Is there a document that lays that out, is there a VicTrack —

Mr MILLWARD — If you go to their website there is considerable information in considerable detail, but I suppose it is a matter of there not being a sign on the site itself that I have seen. I would have thought at the very least there would be notification on the sites for the residents who do not very closely peruse the local paper to be able to see that something is happening.

The CHAIR — Are you aware as to whether local councils are informed of these sales and given an opportunity to respond?

Mr MILLWARD — I am not sure about that. I presume that the council has been in discussion with VicTrack on various aspects of the sales of these parcels of land, but I am not sure.

The CHAIR — We might seek some information on that in a minute. What is the long-term impact of the sale of those pieces of land?

Mr MILLWARD — In the long term I suppose it is the abrogation of open space that has been open space pretty much forever. In a sense the open space was put aside for presumably public transport use, not for housing development, so whilst I can see the merit of opening up more housing in the inner suburban areas — —

The CHAIR — Near stations.

Mr MILLWARD — Near stations and generally in the inner suburbs. You need to be careful that you do not fill up every spot of vacant land. That is not what people want; that is not how people want to live would be my guess. But also the expectation that this is land owned by the community through the government and it is a little short-sighted to sell everything off just because you can make some money out of it would be my perspective.

Mr TEE — I do not have any questions. Thank you very much for your presentation.

Ms PENNICUIK — Ross, could you just clarify this for me? Did you say the land at Anstey is already sold?

Mr MILLWARD — The sale, I think, is contingent upon the planning approval being given, so we objected to the parcel being sold, leaving very little room for the mix of pedestrians and bikes that go through the area. I think that the sale is contingent on the developer getting planning approval for the subdivision.

Ms PENNICUIK — I am not familiar with the area, so are you saying there is an existing bike track?

Mr MILLWARD — There is an existing shared path through there.

Ms PENNICUIK — It goes through that site currently?

Mr MILLWARD — That is right. For a significant number of years the council policy documents — the Moreland integrated transport strategy and the Anstey something or other development; there have been a number of policy documents written — have said that it will be supportive of cycling and pedestrian access and all the other things, but when it comes to the crunch it does not always seem to be put into play. Also I am not sure that the council has final say on the recommendation even if it recommends that there be a certain amount of land set aside for the shared path. I think it can still go to VCAT.

Ms PENNICUIK — Yes. It is not always a happy outcome at VCAT.

Mr MILLWARD — Not always; that is right.

Ms PENNICUIK — I am just wondering what would happen to the bicycle traffic if that section of the bike path is lost. Where would it go?

Mr MILLWARD — There is significant contention between bikes and pedestrians, because it is adjacent to the opening of the station and, because of where the ticket machine is located, people queue along the path. So I think that there is likely to be contention between bikes and pedestrians, which, if there is an accident, will mean that people will say that we should not have bikes along there, and then we will have to sort of wiggle around. It is just unnecessary to contemplate having that contention between the bikes and pedestrians for such a small block of land.

Ms PENNICUIK — Can you just fill me in a bit more on the detail on the Moreland parcel of land?

Mr MILLWARD — On the west side of the Moreland station there is the Gandolfo Gardens, and I am not sure how much open space that is, but then there is the Disabled Motorists Association, and then there is the Ilma Lever Gardens, where there is occupational therapy with disabled people. There is significant open space and community use on the west side. On the east side there is a car park with some treed and grassed area, then there is some more treed and grassed area heading north, and then there is a council-maintained playground. Then there is

more open space with trees, and then there is the Shirley Robertson child-care centre, which I think is council managed. All of those are within the area that is VicTrack land. The expression of interest that VicTrack has put out for the developer is to develop that whole area but specifically to take into account the needs of the child-care centre, the disabled driving association and the Ilma Lever Gardens for disabled people. I am just not sure how that is all going to pan out, but it would seem that most of what is open space will become housing if it proceeds.

Ms PENNICUIK — Does it have the bike track through it, too?

Mr MILLWARD — On the east side of the train line there is a bike track for several hundred metres.

Ms PENNICUIK — Thank you.

Mr TEE — Just in relation to the first block of land that you talked about, is your concern there that it would be more difficult for bike users to have access, or is the proposal to exclude access for bike users?

Mr MILLWARD — It is difficult. I think the guidelines say that just for pedestrian access or for wheelchair access you need 1.5 metres. For pedestrian access you need a 2 metre path so that you can have a wheelchair or a pram plus somebody squeezing past in the other half a metre. The original proposal by the developer was to have about 2 metres, which would not leave room for the mix of pedestrians and bikes.

Mr TEE — That is the current proposal, the 2 metres, from the developer?

Mr MILLWARD — Yes. The developer has conceded a small bit, and I think the proposal that the council has now approved is to give 4.5 metres, which is just enough, given the situation. My concern is that this is council intervention subsequent to VicTrack's proposal to sell it, and it would be nice if there was a consideration by VicTrack and consultation.

The CHAIR — There is currently a path there, though, and that would be lost.

Mr MILLWARD — Currently there is a path and an unmade informal parking area. If the council's proposal goes through, there would be just an acceptable amount of space for the path to stay, and there is a little bit more given, but that presumes it does not go to VCAT and get knocked on the head. I don't think council is the final arbiter in this.

Mr TEE — But the worst-case scenario is the developer's proposal, which is a 2-metre path with a bit more?

Mr MILLWARD — Yes, that is right. I think at the first meeting we had they conceded as part of the council subdivision to excise a little bit around the opening of the station, but at either end it would narrow again.

The CHAIR — But your point mainly is that VicTrack was not helpful in the early part of this process.

Mr MILLWARD — It seemed to not participate in the process. Basically it said, 'We've got an owner here. Great. We can sell off that pesky little parcel of land and get a couple of grand'. I do not know what it would get for it, but it was not considering the improvement of public amenity, which seems to be part of its charter.

Mr KAVANAGH — Just on the present route, when it gets to Royal Park does it still go along the train line?

Mr MILLWARD — Yes, it does. It continues around, follows the train line and goes under City Link down through to Docklands. It goes all the way through to Docklands.

Mr KAVANAGH — A lot of the train line there is well below ground level, is it not?

Mr MILLWARD — No. Along City Link?

Mr KAVANAGH — No, along the train line.

Mr MILLWARD — No, the train line actually gets more elevated as it goes across the bridge and crosses Flemington Road. It heads upwards, and the bike path heads upwards with it.

Mr KAVANAGH — With what is proposed at the moment for the sale of this land, does it close the bike path?

Mr MILLWARD — It does not close it, but it potentially narrows it down so that it is quite unsafe. I suppose it compromises the concept of a large continuous network. It puts in a bottleneck and it puts pedestrians at risk. The concept of having a shared bike path is that where there are critical points of contact between pedestrians and bikes, you need a little bit more space. It is quite acceptable in the in-between bits to narrow it down, and there are plenty of places where you have to narrow down because of the obstacles, but here we have only a few metres — the length of this room — and it just seems churlish to squeeze it down there for the sake of a small parcel of land being sold.

Mr KAVANAGH — The government has been putting in bicycle lanes and things; is there not a long-term policy to retain and improve bike paths around Melbourne?

Mr MILLWARD — That seems to be the case, yes.

Mr KAVANAGH — Do you know where that policy is stated?

Mr MILLWARD — No.

Mr KAVANAGH — Do you think that the 2-and-a-bit metres that are proposed at the moment just would not be enough?

Mr MILLWARD — It would not be enough, no.

The CHAIR — Thank you. I appreciate your giving evidence to the committee. If you or your group, particularly the convenor, want to provide any more information, we would be thankful.

Witnesses withdrew.