



## Australian Institute of Architects

### Australian Institute of Architects – Victorian Chapter

#### Position Paper – Victorian Government East-West Link Project

16 October 2013

The Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) is an independent member organisation with approximately 12,000 members across Australia and overseas. The Victorian Chapter of the Institute has close to 3,000 members.

The Institute exists to advance the interests of members, their professional standards and contemporary practice and expand and advocate the value of architects and architecture to the sustainable growth of our community, economy and culture. The Institute actively works to maintain and improve the quality of our built environment by promoting better, responsible and environmental design. The Institute is passionate about improving the quality of our built environment and addressing urban challenges. Our need for more productive, sustainable and liveable towns and cities has never been greater.

It is in this context that the Victorian Chapter of the Institute views the proposed East-West Link Project with some concern.

The East-West Link is a city shaping project, with a role beyond a narrowly focused traffic management and engineering project, particularly in light of its central location within the City of Melbourne and consequent interface with communities. As such the Government's aspirations for the community of Melbourne, as they are intended to be realised through the implementation of this Project, need to be clearly outlined and articulated. The expectation of, and challenge to the Government is to ensure the Project delivers improved liveability for the communities of Melbourne.

The East-West Link Project needs to be structured in such a way to facilitate improved urban design outcomes and achieve net community benefit in concert with traffic and logistics benefits. As a legacy project, for the Victorian community, the Project must deliver improved environmental sustainability outcomes for current and future generations.

#### **A detailed Urban Design brief**

Diagrams and images released to date show a simplistic tunnel design with little attention to the wider urban design issues. While the Institute understands that these are only initial diagrams, we strongly believe that the final briefs *must* include an urban design brief that, *at a minimum*, covers:

##### a. Housing options

The proposed arrangement will remove a significant number of inner city houses. The designs should look to minimise the loss of houses and explore opportunities to deliver expanded and improved urban housing opportunities;

##### b. Royal Park and the Loss of Public Open Space

The Institute does not support the loss of public open space within metropolitan Melbourne. Any losses of public open space must be reinstated in the provision of new public open space and community facilities. In general we suggest that the tunnel section should not exit in Royal Park and instead should continue underground to emerge on the west side of the present Freeway.

The new entry/exit portal will have a significant impact on the south-west corner of Royal Park. The design proposals do not sensitively interface with the park, or demonstrate how the remaining

parkland near the portal can be re-configured and enhanced. The proposed new entry/exit into Elliott Avenue will further divide Royal Park - the design needs to consider techniques such as 'land bridges' to make this a positive contribution to the park;

#### c. Alexandra Parade Precinct Design

The continuation of the Eastern Freeway will reduce traffic flows and consequently the domination of vehicles on Alexandra Parade. This will create opportunities to re-envisage the precinct and improve the urban design and public realm of Alexandra Parade. These improvement works need to be considered concurrently with the road design process of East-West Link rather than as an afterthought;

#### d. Public Transport Opportunities

The Government is well aware of the desire from the community for improved public transport, and enhanced pedestrian and cycling routes within the City of Melbourne. The East-West Link Project has been given priority by the Government over its plans to improve public transport through Metro Rail. In parallel with the East-West Link Project initiatives to improve public and alternate transport facilities within Melbourne need to be developed. Issues to consider include:

- Bus rapid transport integration and improved routes into the City of Melbourne
- New cross city high frequency bus transit routes from Abbotsford to Kensington
- Improved tram facilities and routes
- Improved cycling routes
- Improved pedestrian safety and amenity;

#### e. Visual Impacts

The execution of above ground elements of the East-West Link should encompass a high level of engineering and design expertise, and be positive contributions to the visual identity of Melbourne. Excellence in urban and visual design should be designated outcomes of the East-West Link Project. We note the present alignment will have a significant negative impact on the Melbourne gateway;

#### f. Moonee Ponds Creek Corridor

The proposed second stage is not well defined and appears to assume the Moonee Ponds Creek corridor is of little value. We note that areas along the creek are currently designated as re-greened public open space in the current Arden Macaulay Structure Plan. The Structure Plan currently proposes a major increase in density, with 20,000 new jobs and 20,000 residences which will heavily rely on Moonee Ponds Creek as part of its open space. In addition, the proposed alignment will have a serious impact on the Holland Court / Debney's Park public housing estate. We believe there is no more scope for aerial road structures in this corridor, and current proposals for this area are inadequate;

#### g. Environmental Sustainability

Improved environmental outcomes should be a key benefit of any major project in a world city. Environmental sustainability has received little attention in the information provided by the Government to date. Key requirements of the Project need to include:

- An environmental impact statement on the effect of the project on the community and bio-diversity of affected precincts
- A study of the current and proposed amenity of the Moonee Ponds Creek precinct and the impact of the project on current and future water sensitive programs and initiatives.

### **Summary**

The East-West Link Project proposals to the public to date are inadequate as they fail to identify how the project will respond in an integrated matter to several important urban design considerations.

A transparent, broader, integrated planning approach needs to be utilised by the government, which can clearly demonstrate the improved community outcome objectives, rather than the current present 'tunnel vision' focus on traffic, freight and logistics.