

Appendix F

NURP Light Rail / Tram Draft Final Report Summary

Introduction

Prepared by consultants MRCagney Pty Ltd for City of Darebin, the NURP Light Rail/Tram Draft Final Report (Report) uses a conventional approach to investigate the conditions necessary to drive demand for a new east/west light rail route through Darebin and beyond into Banyule City Council area. The Report identifies two route options, and analyses the costs, benefits, and the timing of delivery of the proposal, and details the required conditions to support the proposal.

This pre-feasibility study has been undertaken to inform Council's NURP-related work (e.g. Concept Plan and Structure Plan, transport strategy, developer contribution arrangements or subsequent scheme amendments) and enable a constructive discussions with external stakeholders. A full feasibility study requires agreement on a defined route and a greater level of certainty about the estimated growth and redevelopment staging. A Light Rail/Tram public transport service through NURP is considered the best way to ensure the following outcomes:

- Significant shift to active modes of transport;
- Reduction in car dependency;
- Maximises community benefits; and
- Enables informed advocacy with stakeholders to attract investment.

Challenges and Issues

The Victorian Planning Authority (VPA) has completed transport modelling for the La Trobe National Employment Cluster at a strategic high level. At this stage the VPA is not supportive of a light rail connection through the Cluster and instead the preferred solution is for an upgraded Smart Bus service. However, achieving the desired land use mix and density relies on a quality and level of public transport service that can only be delivered by affixed rail connection. Examples of urban mixed-use neighbourhoods with an employment focus in suburban locations that are only supported by a bus network have not been found to date.

Route Options

Commencing at Bell railway Station, both light rail route options would serve the Preston Junction precinct, the commercial areas along Bell St and Murray Rd, the industrial areas on the periphery of the NURP, passing through the centre of the NURP and Northland Shopping Centre, residential areas in Heidelberg West and Heidelberg Heights, the industrial area south of the La Trobe University campus, and the La Trobe University. The route options then diverge within the La Trobe University campus.

Note that the route options are not subject to detailed design or engineering feasibility.

Route option 1: Connection from Bell Station to Macleod Station

- Continues north along Waterdale Rd, west along Ring Rd, exiting La Trobe University campus along Forensic Dr adjacent to Victoria Police Forensic Centre and Charles La Trobe College, and connects through to Macleod railway Station via Cherry St.



- Benefits people travelling from the NURP to La Trobe University, and destinations along the South Morang railway Line due to the broader onward connections available via multi-modal connectivity with hard rail, with improved localised east-west connectivity.
- Total route length: 9.14km
- Estimated Project Costs: \$803.0m (high)

Route option 2: Connection from Bell Station to Tram Route 86

- Continues west along Kingsbury Dr, passing the centre of the La Trobe University campus, connecting with Plenty Rd / Dunne St intersection, and tram route 86 which runs along Plenty Rd.
- This option benefits people travelling from the NURP to La Trobe University, and provides connectivity with tram route 86, but provides limited broader onward connectivity.
- Total route length: 8.05km
- Estimated Project Costs: \$718.8m (high)

These cost estimates are conservative and do not reflect the range of proactive measures government can take of facilitate the provision of a light rail service. Further experience suggests that the cost to develop a light rail route is likely to be lower than the indicative estimate subject to a detailed design and engineering feasibility being required.

Need

The Report highlights that light rail is an important policy tool for enabling urban regeneration, increased economic and social vitality, but is only one tool among many, with a key theme of the Report being that a holistic view of the options and opportunities is required. The report recommends that to achieve transformational change, the viability and timing for light rail investment could be accelerated by undertaking the following actions:

- Faster or more intensive development within the NURP;
- Accelerated population growth;
- Investment in the public realm;
- Land use rezoning;
- Future proof sustainable transport outcomes by providing rapid transit bus lanes along a dedicated north-south reserve/boulevard through the precinct;
- Potential for significant agglomeration benefits – linking new employment centres or commuter populations with major existing employment centres; and
- Monitoring programs around transport demands.

The report suggests that the break-even point where demand for public transport exceeds the cost of installation and operation is close to 2051, if these actions as outlined are not undertaken by Council. More specifically:

- Route Option 1 demonstrated broader connectivity benefits between the study area and destinations elsewhere; due primarily to inter-modal connectivity with hard-rail between two different rail lines.

Comment [MT1]: These dot points need to be finessed. I think the summary sheet needs to be more assertive to ensure the content is clearly understood by the reader.



- A dedicated north-south boulevard treatment connecting NURP to Northland Shopping Centre and Bell Street to the south, with stops spaced approximately 750-800m; the proposed light rail would provide capacity for approximately 1,260 passengers per hour at peak times, which is the equivalent to 25 buses per hour, assuming a full seated load of 50 passengers per bus. Note that this modelling assumes higher passenger uplift because of the dedicated reserve.
- Irrespective of whether route option 1 or 2 is chosen, the introduction of light rail will improve the accessibility, speed, and reliability of journeys to destinations in and around the NURP.

Comment [MT2]: Will need to? Or will improve? I wasn't entirely clear about this point.

In summary – to accelerate viability of a Light Rail proposal Council needs to:

- Establish a monitoring programme around transport demands and development forecasting for the NURP, to better identify opportunity to accelerate planning and investment work for the light rail, including innovative ways to incite modal shift.
- Continue structure planning and publish indicative concept designs for new multi-modal transport systems that will complement the eventual investment in light rail, such as future proofing and planning to accommodate dedicated bus lanes and bus priority as an interim measure, which can later be converted to light rail. This will also provide certainty about future light rail commitments, which will influence the market.
- Ensure that land use zoning is appropriate to genuinely achieving the mixed use nature and patronage numbers required to make eventual light rail investment feasible.

Risks

- If dedicated reserves for the future operation of the light rail are not future proofed, the light rail would have to share the road corridor with private vehicles, which would offer little or no improvement in service relative to a bus in mixed traffic.
- If insufficient consideration is given to steps required to achieve the necessary patronage numbers (primarily modal shift and density), the cost of establishing a light rail route may not be viable.
- Without this work Darebin will not be in a position to justifiably advocate for the best possible outcome for its current and future residents towards the MPA and State Government. Any structure plan documents or planning scheme amendments may lead to suboptimal outcomes as a result.

Recommendations

- That Council note the findings of the NURP Light Rail/Tram Draft Final Report September 2016 that a light rail/tram route through the NURP could be provided subject to gaining a significant shift from private car use to public transport use for trips to and from the Precinct.
- That Council make the Draft Final Report available, on a without prejudice basis, to the listed key stakeholders for the purposes of further discussions to explore the level of in-principle support for the concept and proposed route.
- Following discussions with key stakeholders, that a report be prepared, outlining the extent of commitment and options for a light rail route through the NURP, and investigates funding opportunities at both a State and Federal level.