

Feedback on Deer Park level crossing removals

The Public Transport Users Association (PTUA) thanks the Level Crossing Removal Authority (LXRA) for the opportunity to provide feedback on the level crossing removal projects in the Deer Park area. Fitzgerald Rd, Mount Derrimut Rd, and Robinsons Rd have all seen substantial increases in road traffic in recent years, as well as substantial increases in train numbers; with the acute need to provide more public transport to the western suburbs of Melbourne, as well as to the regional centres of Geelong and Ballarat, we hope that train numbers will be increasing further in the near future. It is therefore timely that these crossings are being grade separated and that Deer Park is receiving a new elevated station.

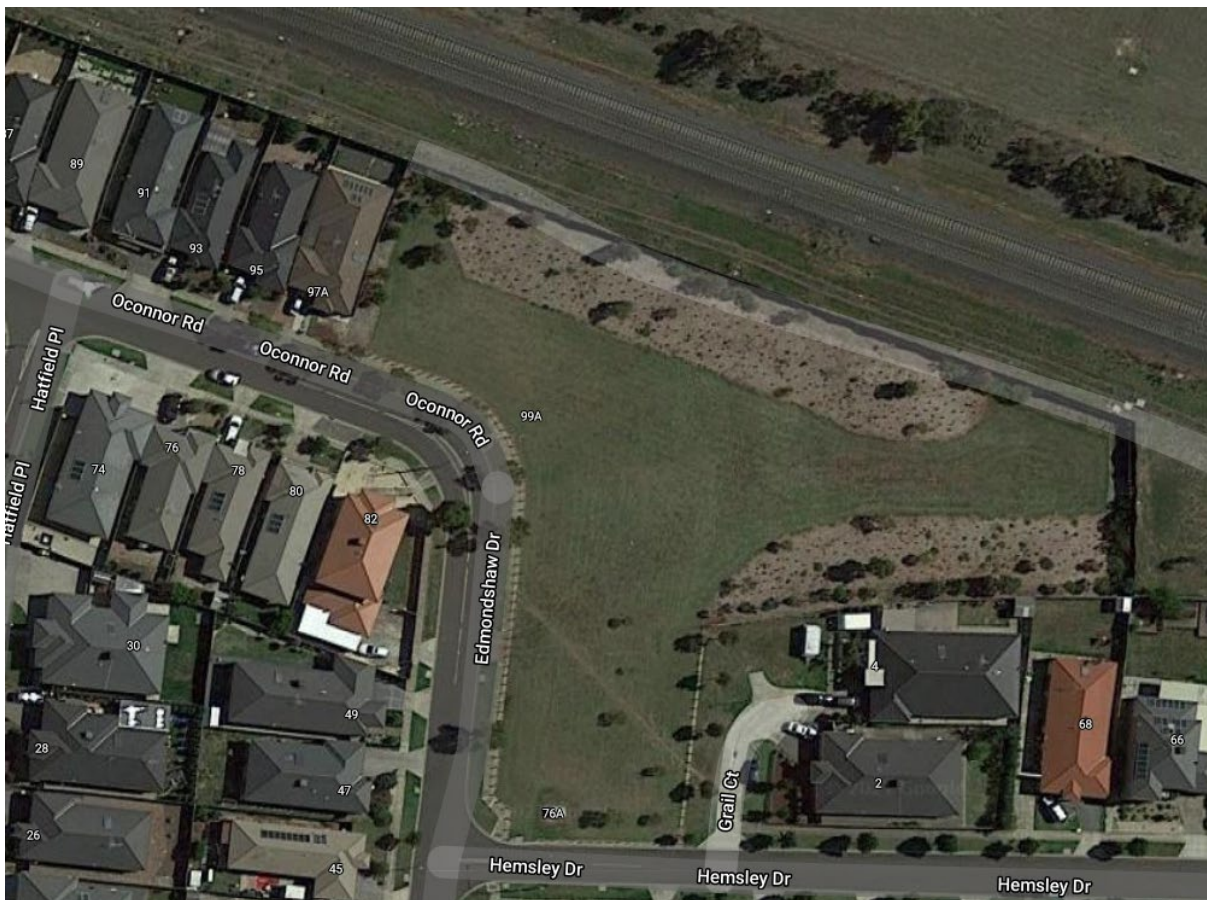
To summarise the points made in this submission:

- While other methods of grade separation may have had merit, the PTUA broadly supports the methods of grade separation chosen for the three level crossings.
- The new Deer Park Station design will offer walkability improvements to local residents, particularly from the southwest.
- LXRA should revamp the footpath designs south of the station to account for “desire lines” of pedestrians walking to the station.
- The Tilburn Road/Mount Derrimut Road intersection will need to be redesigned as part of the level crossing removal program; the sliplanes should be removed, and a more cyclist- and pedestrian-friendly design should be implemented.
- The design should also improve interchanging between trains and buses.
- The Victorian Government should fund the construction of a shared-use path along the rail corridor, connecting these three level crossing removal projects.
- The Victorian Government should fund a means of crossing the rail corridor by foot and bike, in the vicinity of Edmondshaw Drive.
- The new Deer Park station appears to have more overhead cover on platforms than many recent designs, but unfortunately this doesn’t quite go far enough. LXRA should ensure that approximately 90% of both the eastbound and westbound platforms have overhead cover, to protect passengers from the weather, particularly given the need for infrastructure to be resilient to climate change.
- LXRA should ensure these projects are future-proofed by ensuring all structures allow for future electrification of the existing two tracks, and for the addition of a second track pair, to support the addition of Melton and/or Wyndham Vale to the Metro network in the short term.

Deer Park Station precinct footpaths

When it comes to the grassed area to the south of the new station, the proposed design has a number of crooked, meandering footpaths which do not appear to lead anywhere in particular, and others that - while straight and seemingly intended for direct walking - do not align well with likely origins or destinations of walkers. It is possible that these designs have been chosen in an attempt to provide “quirky” meandering paths for leisure walkers, but if so, this is misguided. Instead, we encourage LXRA to consider the “desire lines” between likely origins and destinations of walkers, which would provide fairly direct walking paths for people approaching the station.

A nearby example of a desire line can be found in the park at the corner of Hemsley Drive and Edmondshaw Drive, where people walking from Oconnor Road towards the station have worn a dirt path in the grass as they cut the corner.



Satellite image of the park near the works site, with desire line visible (via Google Maps)

In essence, the station's footpath design should aim to ensure that walkers entering the precinct from Hemsley Drive, the western leg of Eagle Way, the eastern leg of Eagle Way, Tee Court, and Mount Derrimut Road itself, have as direct a path to the station as practical. (People walking from the carparks should also have a direct path, but the existing design already achieves this). One example of a design which would achieve this imperative is presented below.



Proposed new footpath design, adapted from LXRA renders

Such a design would perform the primary function of allowing quick and easy walkability and cyclability to nearby residents, as well as performing the secondary function of providing a pleasant place for leisure walkers.

Connectivity to cycle paths

The PTUA notes that the renders seem to show a wide shared-use path underneath the rail viaduct from Mount Derrimut Road to the main station building, then proceeding to the south of the station building before abruptly ending at the rear of 24 Hemsley Drive, at the edge of the station precinct.

We also note that the initial designs for the Fitzgerald Road, Ardeer crossing removal seemed to indicate that the existing SUP along Forrest Street would be partially removed; updated design renders do not clearly show whether this is still the case. These renders do appear to show an SUP on the overbridge and sweeping curve, which would maintain connectivity between the Forrest Street path and the Western Ring Road Path.

No east-west SUP is shown at all on the draft Robinsons Road designs, and at no point is there any indication that gaps in the SUPs between Fitzgerald Road and Mount Derrimut Road, or between Deer Park Station and Robinsons Road, would be filled to create a contiguous path along the rail corridor.

It is the PTUA's strong view that LXRA must provide the required east-west cycling links within their project envelopes. This means that the existing path on Forrest Street must be retained in full, rather than truncated. The designs for the SUP through the Deer Park Station precinct seem broadly appropriate, though we do agree with Bicycle Network's call¹ for the Tilburn Road sliplane to be removed as part of the reconstituted intersection that LXRA will be required to rebuild upon removal of the boom gates. The Robinsons Road project must also include an east-west SUP over the sunken road, as well as opportunities for interchange with the north-south SUP along Robinsons Road itself; it is worth noting that this should be designed in a way that future-proofs

¹ Bike route blunder in new station plan | Bicycle Network

<https://www.bicyclenetwork.com.au/newsroom/2021/04/22/bike-route-blunder-in-new-station-plan/>

the bridge and does not get in the way of an additional track pair being added to the south of the existing tracks at a later date

It is understandable that connecting these three pieces of SUP may fall outside the LXRA's project boundaries and therefore the scope of their works. However, the success of the Djerring Trail project along the Dandenong line in Melbourne's east shows why it is important for the opportunity to be taken to link up SUPs along this rail corridor, and maximise the benefit of the level crossing removal program.

This is particularly important since this corridor is listed as a priority on the Victorian Department of Transport's own Strategic Cycling Corridors map². We also note that the Victorian Government has recently committed to increasing active transport's mode share to 25% as part of its net zero emissions strategy³, and we understand that incorporating active transport improvements into existing "Big Build" projects will form a significant part of this.

We therefore urge the Victorian government to add these links to the scope of LXRA's works and commit the relatively modest funding that would be required to complete these works concurrently with the three level crossing removals.

Connectivity to buses

Interchange between trains and buses should be as quick and seamless as possible. Currently, passengers have to walk approximately 300m from the platform to the bus stops on Tilburn Rd, and the new station will be set back even further from the road than the current one. The traffic light cycles also strongly prioritise the movement of road traffic over the movement of pedestrians, which can lead to long wait times at these lights.

There may be a number of possible solutions to improving bus-train interchange, but it is noteworthy that removing the sliplanes at the intersection of Tilburn and Mount Derrimut Roads in order to create a more cyclist- and pedestrian-friendly intersection may have the co-benefit of facilitating the bus stops being moved closer to the intersection, shortening the distance passengers need to walk when interchanging.

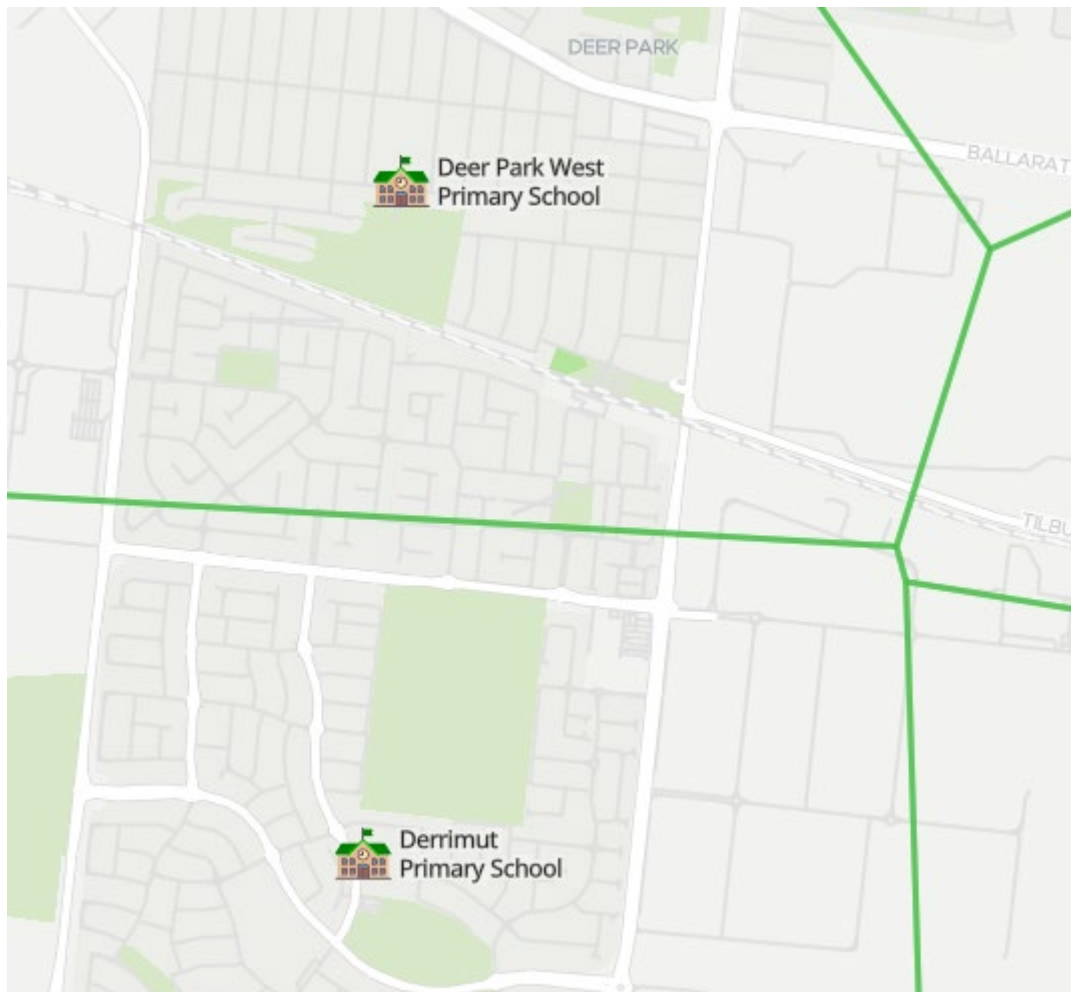
Connectivity across the rail corridor

Currently, the rail corridor acts as a significant barrier to movement, dividing the Deer Park community. The distance between Mount Derrimut Road and Robinsons Road is approximately 1.6km, and no opportunities exist for pedestrians or cyclists to cross the rail corridor between these two roads.

This means that residents south of the railway line find it difficult to access sporting facilities in the Bon Thomas Reserve, Deer Park West Kindergarten, and Deer Park West Primary School by foot or by bike - despite them being very close as the crow flies. In fact, much of the area south of the railway line is in the Department of Education's catchment for Deer Park West Primary School, because it is closer as the crow flies; but using actual roads and transport links, Derrimut Primary School is likely to be closer for most students due to the indirect trip they would have to take to cross the rail corridor.

² Strategic Cycling Corridors | Department of Transport <https://transport.vic.gov.au/getting-around/walking-and-cycling/strategic-cycling-corridors>

³ Cutting Victoria's Emissions 2021-2025 | Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning <https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/victorian-government-action-on-climate-change/Transport-sector-pledge-accessible.pdf>



Map of school catchments in the project area, via <https://www.findmyschool.vic.gov.au/>

One solution to this problem would be to continue the elevated rail viaduct west approximately 400m beyond the new Deer Park Station, creating a significant amount of new, permeable green space underneath the line, which would allow for the easy creation of ground-level walking and cycling links between Edmondshaw Drive and the Bon Thomas Reserve. Again, the huge improvement to amenity created along the Djerring Trail in Melbourne's east is a good example of what could be achieved here.

However if the LXRA is unwilling to extend the viaduct this far, an alternative may be to create an elevated bike and pedestrian bridge over the ground-level rail corridor.

Deer Park Station platform coverage

Based on the renders, it appears that approximately 60% of the Melbourne-bound platform has roof coverage, while approximately 33% of the Melton-bound platform does. This leaves substantial amounts of the platform without weather protection; this can cause significant issues with passenger amenity, and as climate change increases weather extremes of both severe rain and severe heat, it will become even more necessary than today for weather protection to be provided.

Given that adding simple roof structures to the platforms represents a tiny portion of the overall costs of the project, we would request that LXRA ensure approximately 90% of both platforms receive roof coverage.

Future-proofing

The PTUA notes that in the very near future, the existing dual-track line to Melton will need to be electrified to take Metro trains, and a second express track pair will need to be provided to allow Ballarat and Geelong regional trains to bypass stopping trains in this section. Provision for an extra track pair to the south of the existing track pair has already been provided during the grade separation of Anderson Road, Sunshine, during the Regional Rail Link project.

The renders for the Fitzgerald Rd and Mount Derrimut Rd crossings appear to indicate that new structures will also provide passive provision for a second track pair, however the bridge abutments on the Robinsons Rd renders do not appear to have space to support a second track pair. Given that the extra track pair will need to happen in the very near future - and that track amplification is one of the reasons this grade separation project is necessary - it is important that this crossing provides passive provision for a second track pair in the same way that the other crossings do, by building the required abutment for the second track pair now, so that disruption and costs are minimised in future.

None of the renders clearly indicate one way or the other whether provision for electrification has been included; presumably this is just a limitation of the renders. We would urge LXRA to ensure electrification is taken into consideration when constructing these grade separations; notably, for the elevated rail sections, mounting points for electrical stanchions should be incorporated into the elevated structure.