

Plan Melbourne Refresh
Submission by Friends of Banyule
December 2015

Friends of Banyule is a volunteer community group established in 2008 to lobby and campaign to protect Banyule's unique environmental assets and for better public transport and planning outcomes for Banyule and the north east region as well as wider metropolitan Melbourne.

FOB has made a number submissions to government at the local, state and federal level, including on the previous government's Plan Melbourne document in 2013. We also appeared at and made submissions to the Outer Urban Growth Boundary joint Parliamentary Committee.

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to this review. Key points which we wish to address in relation to Plan Melbourne Refresh include the following:

We agree with the intention to develop Melbourne as a more sustainable city in line with UN goals on sustainability. We believe the principles of the “green city” increasingly being adopted around the world which include sustainability, low carbon footprint, environmentally responsible design and energy efficient building and planning initiatives, should be incorporated into planning legislation, regulations and guidelines as fundamental principles.

We agree with a permanent restriction on expansion of the Urban Growth Boundary. Currently, speculative land banking on outer urban market garden and agricultural land is counter productive, resulting in loss of food production sustainability close to Melbourne. This however should not result in a “bigger and higher is better” approach to urban infill development. Growth in local activity centres and along train and tram routes should be developed sensitively and appropriately having regard to amenity, heritage and neighbourhood character.

We also believe there should be permanent protection of the Green Wedges. These areas of green open space and bushland are rightly referred to as Melbourne's lungs. The environmental benefits of green space, bush land and tree canopy to offset and mitigate the “heat island effect” of urban development and global warming cannot be over stated. With urban development and densification now occurring at an increasing pace, the more important this becomes.

Greater measures need to be taken also to protect against inappropriate development along rivers and waterways including the Yarra River. There is a need to protect all

bushland and green spaces in areas not necessarily within the green wedge but in significant natural corridors, from outer urban areas to the inner city. This should also include street trees as well as parkland and include retention of trees on suburban blocks being developed for town houses and apartments.

Residential zoning has a significant impact on this, leading to a loss of tree cover in middle ring suburbs where large blocks are seen by developers as ripe for potential development. This is leading to the loss of the Australian quarter acre block and the suburban backyard. Not everybody wants to (or practically with young families and children can) live in an apartment. We are firmly opposed to as of right code assessment planning approval. All residents and affected neighbourhoods should have rights of appeal to planning decisions.

Whilst we support the concept of a Twenty Minute City, we also believe if this is to be achieved, it will require requisite infrastructure to support greater density. This densification of or suburbs should not be allowed to proceed as at present, with enormous pressure being placed on local government as the responsible authority to approve development almost as of right. Councils and communities are unable to match the superior legal and specialist resources of developers, who if they do not get an outcome in their favour are likely and far better equipped to, take a matter to VCAT.

There is insufficient contribution by developers to the provision of the necessary infrastructure including public transport that should accompany the levels of urban development are currently experiencing. Whilst we support the government's initiatives in his regard on Metro Rail, the tab for this is being picked up by the tax payer not the developers. Also, lower cost more affordable and quicker to build public transport proposals such as Doncaster Rail, an Airport Link, Rowville Rail and duplication of the Hurst Bridge Line are side lined in favour of more road projects, viz; widening of Tullamarine and Monash freeways.

Overseas experience is the opposite of this with integrated, connected public transport systems placing emphasis on mass transit and public transport. This is both a more efficient as well as an environmentally responsible way to move people around cities. Building more freeways is an inefficient use of urban land as well as well as increasing contributions to green house gasses and greater carbon foot print as referred to earlier having consideration to sustainability. If we are to remain a most liveable city, our planning for the future should encompass these principles as fundamental underpinnings as regards transport, land use and urban development.

