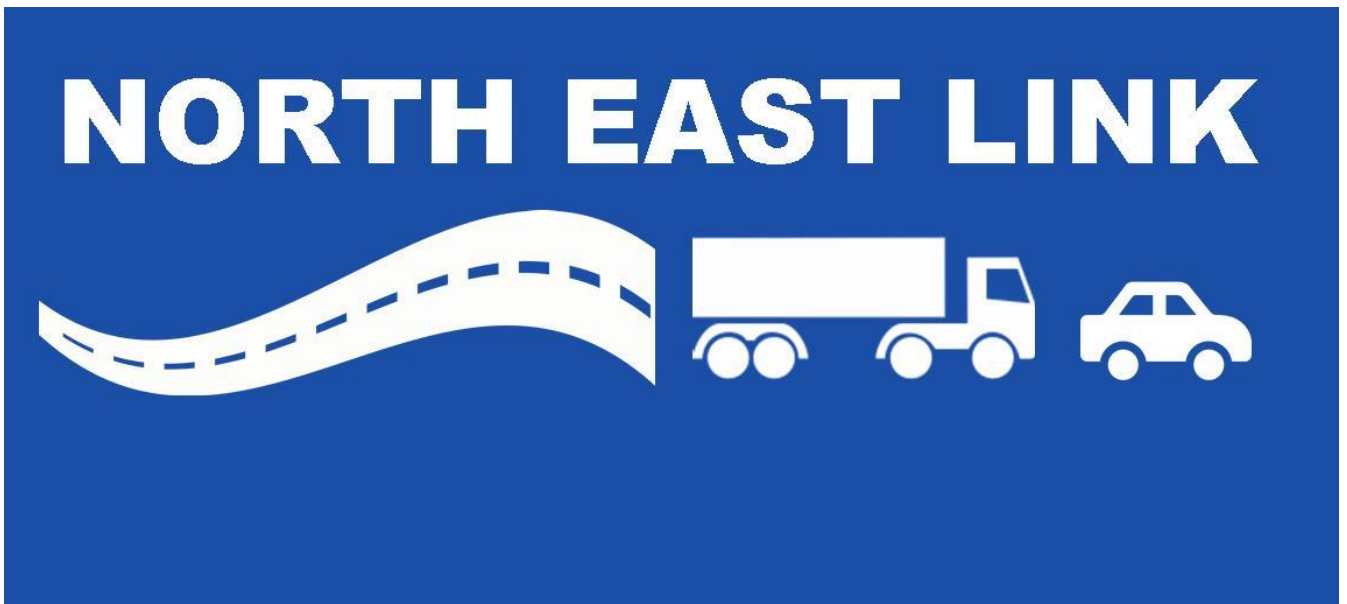


**North East Link options:  
Eltham residents have their say**



**A report of residents' views compiled by Mary Wooldridge MP  
Member for Eastern Metropolitan Region  
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## **Preface**

I welcome the opportunity to present this submission to the North East Link Authority on behalf of the Eltham community. The submission is not a reflection of my personal views, rather the many deep concerns residents have regarding the proposal to complete the “missing link” on the Metropolitan Ring Road, the M80, which currently ends on the edge of the Nillumbik Shire touching the suburbs of Watsonia North, Greensborough and Bundoora in the city’s north.

The proposed construction of the “missing link” to either the Eastern Freeway or to Eastlink was first raised nearly 50 years ago but despite extensive development in the outer east, this link and other vital road infrastructure has not been developed. As a result Eltham residents are plagued by daily traffic congestion as they go to and from work and move around their suburb just 20 km north east from the Melbourne CBD.

In late 2016 I began a petition calling on the State Government to plan, fund and construct the North East Link, arguing that serious amenity and safety issues are occurring through the City of Banyule and the Shire of Nillumbik due to its non-completion, on roads such as Rosanna Road Rosanna, Bolton Street Eltham, Main Road Eltham and many other arterial roads. I circulated the petition at the Eltham Festival in November and had many residents approach me asking where they could sign. It evoked much discussion and several hundred people signed within a few hours.

When the North East Link Authority announced it was looking at a number of options for the proposed route I undertook a household mail survey of Eltham electorate residents to gauge exactly what they thought and where they would prefer the link to be constructed.

At the time of writing I have received over 2100 responses, a strong indication of the interest in this road. This is a response rate of nearly 10 percent of the households in the Eltham electorate I contacted. I distributed my survey in late July suggesting three possible routes which had been detailed in earlier studies. My survey suggested a possible route through Bulleen and Rosanna, a second through St Helena and Donvale or a third forming a large arc through Kangaroo Ground and Lilydale. I also asked residents whether they would support the prospect of an elevated roadway, a Skyroad, being built after neither the NELA Chief Executive or the Minister for Roads ruled out that possibility during parliamentary hearings. Soon after, the Link Authority released its four preferred corridors and what it had discovered during its initial testing and discussions.

This submission is a snapshot of the resident views I have received. Overwhelmingly the respondents are in favour of the ring road being completed. Those who strongly oppose, just 4.8 percent, often cite concerns for the future of the Nillumbik Green Wedge. More than 47 percent favour route 1 while 41 percent support a route that would go through Eltham and link with Eastlink. Substantially fewer (7 percent) support a much longer road skirting Melbourne's outer eastern areas.

There are a substantial number of residents who want to ensure the Green Wedge is protected regardless of what route they might support. They cite the Wedge as a major reason for living in Eltham and are anxious to ensure it will be protected. And many responses argue more than one link is necessary for Melbourne's development, both for now and into the future. Views on a Skyroad as part of the roadway is fairly evenly divided with 44 percent favouring the idea and 45 percent against.

The overarching theme of the responses however was simple – **they want the government to build the link now**. Their responses reflect not only a high level of frustration but also cynicism about the project ever being completed – certainly within their lifetime. The cancellation of the East West project by the Andrews Government and the \$1.2 billion payout is also bemoaned by many residents as a wasted opportunity for more city infrastructure.

I was deeply impressed at the time many took to write to me and believe it is an indication of the seriousness of the issue for residents. Some residents sent me comprehensive dossiers, others wrote lengthy letters. I'd like to thank all of those who took part in my survey and I hope this submission assists the North East Link Authority when it considers the Eltham community's views on how and where to build our North East Link.

## **Part A**

### **In support of Route 1**

This route, travelling through Rosanna to Bulleen, is favoured by 47 percent of respondents. They argue it is the obvious choice. They believe it will absorb most of the current traffic congestion, particularly along Rosanna Road, which residents describe as dangerous and a “carpark” and give examples of being intimidated by heavy vehicles sharing the narrow roadway with their cars and bikes. They also argue this route will be a shorter roadway to construct and is therefore a cheaper and a faster option. The possible inclusion of tunnels under the Banyule Flats will, they believe, alleviate any environmental concerns of harm to the Green Wedge. There is also a strong group that consider this proposal has already been well debated by the public and should be pursued without the distractions of considering other routes at this stage.

*“The most direct route 1 the shortest and quickest to build as it is so overdue. We live in Eltham and it’s so over-congested with traffic getting from the ring road to the south.”*

*Eltham resident*

*“Route 1 is the best option for the freeway so you don’t go through the green wedge suburbs. Let’s keep Melbourne as green as we can.”*

*Eltham resident*

*“This link needs to be completed as quickly as possible with consideration to the environment. However we should not let the “greenies” rule and cause delays and cost blowouts. (The other routes) would create a huge backlash and do little to ease the congestion experienced at the moment through Greensborough and Eltham.”*

*St Helena resident*

*“Route 1 seems to be the only effective route to relieve existing congestion while still providing the most effective route for freight and other traffic going north-east/north/city. Businesses along route would stand to benefit. Other routes further out would not provide as much benefit due to lower number of households and businesses”*

*Greensborough resident*

*“After being intimidated by a B-double truck travelling 10-15 kmh over the speed limit on Rosanna Road it seems the North East Link cannot come soon enough. Do it.”*

*Montmorency motorbike ride*

There are some that hold a more cynical view about the need for Route 1.

*“By the time they build options 2 and 3 you and I will be dead and buried. Option 1 is the most cost effective and should have been built 15 years ago.”*

*Greensborough resident*

### **Not support Route 1**

Residents who do not support Route 1 do so largely on the grounds that they feel the joining up of the North East Link to the Eastern Freeway will compound congestion issues on the Eastern Freeway. They feel that constructing the link will provide little solution to the traffic issues they face now. Others argue that this route does not truly complete the city’s ring road and is merely a short cut.

*“It will not solve the existing traffic problems in the north along Yan Yean Road, Diamond Creek Road, Main Street Eltham and Main Street, Diamond Creek. To feed into the Eastern Freeway is a no as it already is at a standstill. Why would anyone pay a toll to get from the Metropolitan Ring Road to get to the Eastern Freeway when you have a free option of Rosanna Road or Bulleen Road.”*

*Greensborough resident*

*“Being a delivery driver I travel outwards on the Eastern Freeway daily. From 3 pm this road becomes a road block at Bulleen Road most afternoons due to trucks and traffic entering from Bulleen Road. Why channel more traffic to this traffic jam?”*

*Montmorency resident*

*“Route 1 will overload the Eastern Freeway and make the cancellation of the East-West link more of a costly mistake, whereas route 2 delivers traffic to Eastlink.”*

*Montmorency resident*

### **In support of Route 2**

The second route I proposed is one that travels through St Helena and Donvale, covering much of the north east’s Green Wedge. It links with Eastlink rather than the Eastern

Freeway. Just over 41 percent of residents favour this option. Most who do so argue it is logical to directly connect the existing M80 to Eastlink. To do otherwise they believe, will result in the Eastern Freeway being even more congested than it is now. A further argument is that they think this project will provide the true “missing link” to the city’s ring road network. The need for a further crossing over the Yarra River is another major consideration in this option’s favour, especially to provide an alternative escape route, and fire break, from any major northerly bushfires.

*“The current situation is ludicrous. Frustrating and inconvenient for all. The metro ring road is a slow moving car park especially in peak times. It needs to connect to Eastlink to make the roads safer now with the foresight to add route 3 in the not too distant future.”*

*Montmorency resident*

*“I prefer route 2 because it provides additional crossing over the Yarra River, preserves Banyule Flats, whereas Route 1 only provides another freeway to the city centre and will cause further congestion.”*

*Eltham North resident*

*“Melbourne needs this. It’s always tempting to fixate on local impact. Even if we do so however, how is stop/start traffic good for the environment. My overriding concern however is that only two roads exit to the south in the case of a northerly bushfire. This (especially Warrandyte) is an accident waiting to happen. We need to remember Black Saturday!!”*

*Eltham North resident*

*“This road is very much needed to reduce road congestion. Eltham, Research, North Warrandyte, and Warrandyte are considered to be one of the most dangerous areas in the world for bushfires. This road would assist with being a necessary fire break. It would provide another safe access road over the Yarra River. And if it is built like Eastlink it will have bike and walking trails through an amazing environmental area protecting the green wedge.”*

*Research firefighter*

### **Not support Route 2**

Those who do not support Route 2 are adamant this route is unsuitable for their area. In particular they argue that the construction of a freeway will destroy the Green Wedge. They believe a freeway in the midst of bushland areas is unsuitable and will also adversely affect their lives with noise and visual pollution. There is also a good deal of concern about a freeway detrimentally affecting their property values with several threatening to sell their homes if that link is approved.

*“We live very close to Route 2 in an area full of flora and fauna including kangaroos, koalas and even platypus. We moved here 17 years ago for such an environment and would be devastated if the road goes through route 2. It would also have a major impact on the value of our house which represents our life savings.”*

*Eltham resident*

*“Route 2 would put a freeway near our street. It would ruin what we love about our area. This is a great, open leafy community that would be destroyed with concrete and noise. The visual appeal of a freeway when you open your front door would be horrible as well as the noise pollution. Tunnel or nothing.”*

*St Helena resident*

*“Option 2 would significantly impact my property from increased traffic noise and I have concerns about the negative impact on my property value.”*

*St Helena resident*

### **In support of Route 3**

The third option covers a wider arc over outer north – east through Lilydale and connecting with Eastlink. Those who favour this route, seven percent, took a long term approach to resolving Melbourne’s traffic issues believing future population growth will render this link necessary in years to come. They believe the advantages this route has over the others is that it not only allows for future growth but will also redirect traffic out of the suburbs and will provide the least disruption and inconvenience to all while it is being constructed. Others argue as there is less current development on this corridor it will enable a suitably wide road to be built and one that will not need to be upgraded in future.



*“A true ring road should pass outside major population centres. This is a once in a generation chance to put in infrastructure that will be relevant for many years to come.”*

*Eltham resident*

*“We must think long term when constructing this freeway and therefore take the ongoing expansion of Melbourne into consideration. The proposed routes 1 and 2 are short term fixes to an ever growing problem.”*

*Eltham resident*

*“Altogether, the general principle of taking the ring road out as far as practicable and feeding and running off is far superior to any proposal to increase traffic in the Bulleen and surrounding suburbs. This has to be short sighted and only a sop to empty, fatuous commentary about the green wedge.”*

*Montmorency resident*

### **Not support Route 3**

The length of the route and the distance required to join with Eastlink are reasons why many respondents oppose this suggestion. Residents feel it is too out of the way, too “roundabout” and that more can be achieved by an upgrade of the Maroondah Highway. Others argue that constructing such a route will merely encourage outer urban development which they feel should be contained. There are some suggestions that this route could be considered as part of a future outer ring road encompassing some of Melbourne’s most outer areas.

*“There’s no point sending people halfway around the world.”*

*Anon*

*“Route 3 would be the second choice however it would add a lot of time and distance to the journey either way. No doubt No. 3 would provide a greater catchment.”*

*Montmorency resident*

*“Let’s think 20 years ahead and plan an outer ring road that will take in Bacchus Marsh, Sunbury, Craigieburn, Whittlesea, Yarra Glen and feeds to the back of the Dandenongs, Narre Warren, Officer etc.”*

*Greensborough resident*

## **Part B**

### **Build more than one route**

Some residents said they preferred several of the options put forward, arguing the city needs more than one route to be built to cater for future urban expansion. They urge government not to rule out a wider ring road option for future development and argue that building just one route will not resolve congestion in the northern suburbs.

*“We are a fast growing state with a population growth which needs to be sustained. Adequate infrastructure is a ‘no-brainer’. Don’t just fix the problem for now, find a solution for the next 50 years.”*

*Greensborough resident*

*“This was needed 10 years ago. My main concern (is that) it will be built without consideration of the increasing population. Spend the money now on more than adequate lanes. Don’t be like the ring road that keeps needing to be widened.”*

*Greensborough resident*

*“The sooner it’s built the better. And please make sure it’s at least four lanes each way so we don’t have to endure roadworks in the following couple of years for widening! The Peninsula link is a two lane embarrassment!”*

*Greensborough resident*

### **Public transport**

Discussion about building Melbourne’s “missing link” also raised concerns about the need to look at a wider picture of the city’s road network, its public transport and other infrastructure. While some respondents believe we should move away from road transport, which they believe is unsustainable in the long term, others suggest greater investment in rail infrastructure and the need to improve public transport. They argue freeways are not the answer to successfully move people around the city.

*“Melbourne needs to complete the ring connection and look to the future to build a second ring 50 km from the GPO. At the same time (it) should look at additional public transport to overlay the current poor system.”*

*Eltham North resident*

*“The State Government is allowing/encouraging a massive increase in population in the north east with totally inadequate infrastructure. We need the North East link but also duplicated train lines. I have lived in Eltham for over 40 years and there has been no investment in infrastructure during that time. “*

*Eltham engineer*

*“We should be moving away from road transport, unsustainable in the long term.”*

*Briar Hill resident*

*“If you build for traffic, you get traffic! The damage will be horrendous. Spend the money building liveable communities and converting short car trips to active transport.”*

*Eltham resident*

*“Stop putting money into noisy, congested roads. Build new roads and they will soon fill up with cars and trucks and the QUALITY of life will diminish further! We need more intelligent, imaginative thinking! Stop destroying our once beautiful city.”*

*Eltham resident*

### **Protecting the Green Wedge/Totally Opposed**

Some of the strongest responses are from those who are implacably opposed to the idea of any link being constructed in the north east. Their concerns largely focus on the impact such structures could have on the Green Wedge, arguing it would be highly detrimental to the flora and fauna in the area. They also fear the impact it could have on their family and that of their property. While some accept the inevitability of a link, they argue tunnelling should be carried out under already urbanised areas and not areas of significant environmental value.

*“We need to preserve the green wedge. A freeway anywhere through this wedge will cause irreversible damage to the environment and community living here.”*

*Diamond Creek resident*

*“I would be outraged if the link went through the green wedge of Eltham, Warrandyte or Kangaroo Ground or Research. We have not only a native environment to protect but an ambience and irreplaceable atmosphere. All our children learn the plight of the Eltham Copper Butterfly. Where will the native species go?”*

*Research resident*

*“Eltham is a uniquely beautiful suburb of Melbourne. To run roughshod through or over it with a freeway link would be an absolute disaster and would ruin the way of life of the local population.”*

*Eltham resident*

Some residents are implacably opposed to the whole concept of a ring road.

*“Over my dead body will this road come anywhere near Diamond Creek.”*

*Diamond Creek resident*

*“Really unhappy about the entire project. Will devastate the green areas and wreak havoc with regard to traffic and I don’t see a real benefit from where we are. If I had to choose one, then route 1 would be the lesser of three evils.”*

*Eltham resident*

*“I have lived my entire life in the Eltham area and would be horrified to see this beautiful green, environmentally, friendly suburb and its community destroyed by an imposing noise-polluting, light-polluting and air-polluting concrete monstrosity of a tollway, whether a Skyroad or not.”*

*Eltham resident*

*“None of the options. They destroy either wildlife habitat or the green wedge that makes a big part of living in the area.”*

*Eltham resident*

### **Opposed to a Skyroad**

Residents who oppose Skyroad are concerned an elevated roadway will be detrimental to the landscape. Many are vehemently opposed to any suggestion of an elevated roadway anywhere near their homes at all. They cite visual and noise pollution and a deep concern that such structures will intrude into the amenity and ambience of their neighbourhoods, a major reason for living in the Eltham area. There are some concerns that property prices will be diminished if a Skyroad is built nearby with several families threatening to sell and move out of the area if such plans are approved. Residents say they also believe the existence of such structures will adversely impact on the Green Wedge. These respondents argue

tunnelling should instead be considered, with many citing the Mullum Mullum and Melba tunnels on Eastlink as examples of protecting flora and fauna while constructing a major roadway.

*“A skyroad through parts of Eltham, Warrandyte and Kangaroo Ground? Are you joking? Don’t be cheap, build a tunnel that we can pay off for the next 100 years.”*

*Eltham resident*

*“Skyroad! Straight out of an episode of Utopia. An elevated road/viaduct will be hugely disruptive during construction, a visual eyesore and create significant noise issues, especially if constructed only in creek lines and in valleys. A tunnel is the best option for route 1 and 2 and part of route 3.”*

*Eltham resident*

*“We live in Eltham and we do not want to see an elevated skyroad from our balcony out the front of our house. At the moment we have a beautiful outlook of trees and we do not want that to change.”*

*Eltham resident*

*“We live in Eltham because there are more trees and less concrete. It would ruin the integrity of the whole suburb. If the Minister for Roads lived in Eltham he would not have the skyroad as an option.”*

*Eltham resident*

*“Exposed concrete beams required to construct a skyroad would be an eyesore and attract graffiti and vandalism. A tunnel would have less impact on the look and feel of the green wedge community and improve access for all.”*

*Greensborough resident*

### **In support of Skyroad**

Those in favour of a Skyroad point to similar overseas road infrastructure working well as a way of moving traffic through cities. They also argue an elevated freeway can minimise construction disruptions and lessen the impact on the environment. Others who favour an elevated roadway argue this could allow existing amenities, such as parks, to remain. They do however, point to the need to ensure such a road is built to carry future traffic loads, arguing it can be difficult to widen such a road in future years if traffic demand increases.

And several residents have raised the need for adequate sound barriers to protect nearby homes from freeway noise.

*“If tunnels are used many trucks will be unable to use the link due to prohibited freight.”*

*Montmorency truck driver*

*“Any freeway will impact the environment. An elevated freeway will hopefully minimise this.”*

*Montmorency resident*

*“Providing adequate sound barriers are part of the design the Skyroad style would be quicker and more economic. It also satisfies the issue of carrying dangerous goods which can't be done through tunnels.”*

*Montmorency resident*

*“A Skyroad over golf courses and footy ovals (ie. Bulleen Park) is a much better option than over peoples' houses.”*

*Eltham resident*

### **What residents want from Government**

Overwhelmingly the message from residents is clear - build the link now. A substantial number of responses argue it should have been constructed decades ago and bemoan governments' lack of action. There is also some criticism that opposition by green groups has delayed the building of the road. There is substantial frustration over the length of time this link has been debated resulting in nothing being done. Residents argue that suburban streets are now “clogged with cars”. And there is a clear message to ensure that whatever is built, it is built well and will be able to cater to future needs. They do not want to see a freeway built and then having to be widened and upgraded to cater for increasing demand. A small number of residents also argue against tolls for this road, saying motorists paid billions in fuel excise and that the money should have been spent on road infrastructure years ago.

*“Road planning needs to look forward, not to the next election. The abandoned East-West tunnel was the worst decision any government has made.”*

*Eltham resident*

*"I think the NE link must be built. I'm constantly surprised that Rosanna Road hasn't made it to the top 10 most dangerous roads on Earth. I am constantly amazed by consecutive governments avoiding building this link and it seems that government is reactive in road construction rather than proactive and planning for a decent road network. This needed to be constructed more than 20 years ago when vacant/available land was there."*

*Montmorency resident*

*"Should have been done years ago!! Let's hope the contract, if awarded, doesn't get torn up!!"*

*Eltham North resident*

*"I think successive governments have been negligent in attending to this issue. The end of the ring road was completed 18 years ago. It was barely adequate then and has been constantly upgraded since. Politicians need to travel on trains, trams and drive their own cars to see the inadequateness of their decisions. Great public transport is done in Europe in same size cities."*

*Very annoyed - Greensborough resident*

*"I have been very disappointed with politicians from ALL parties in recent years. Governments have projected figures and no politician has been prepared to make the hard decision and spend money on infrastructure now. The North East link should have been completed 10 years ago."*

*Greensborough resident*

*"Think ahead for the future. This is why this area is in a mess – now. All three options need to be done. Stop building housing estates before the roads are done to cope with volume!! We need to learn from this failure of urban planning."*

*Montmorency resident*

*"Just get on with it!!! I am a land surveyor and planning consultant who has worked in this area for 40 years. I have watched in dismay how this vital project has been frustrated and delayed by small dimwit interest groups at considerable cost and expense to all Victorians. For God's sake do something before we all choke to death in trucks and traffic."*

*Greensborough resident*

*“Just get it done! No route or road type (above/below/at ground level) ticks all boxes positively. Some folks will be affected regardless. So will wildlife. Governments are elected to make tough decisions which will upset some stakeholders. More backbone in decision making, less \$\$ spent on “feasibility” studies. Go for cost effective and DO IT!”*

*Eltham North resident*

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that the residents of Eltham, Montmorency, Eltham North, Diamond Creek, Greensborough, St Helena, Research, Lower Plenty and Briar Hill are vitally interested in what may be proposed to complete the “missing link”. The number of responses I have received is unprecedented. There is a very strong level of frustration and cynicism about governments’ ability to resolve the traffic congestion that plagues them daily.

The challenge now is to ensure that these views are listened to – and acted on. Residents want to see an end to the traffic congestion they face just to get to and from work each day. They enjoy living in the city’s north east on the edge of the Green Wedge but the traffic problems are being compounded every year. They want to see a proper resolution to these problems and not merely a band aid fix.

Most of all, they want to know that the North East Link, when it is built, will properly serve the communities of the north east.