

# How North East Link can transform Watsonia

**Don't just impact, improve**

**North East Link is the largest road project ever undertaken in Victoria.**

Council is working to ensure North East Link doesn't just impact Banyule but improves Banyule.



*An artist's impression of North East Link with a green lid, as proposed by Banyule Council*

North East Link Authority's current plan for the northern section of North East Link puts a massive 10-lane trench through Watsonia. Wall to wall, the trench will be 65 metres wide, at some points the project will be 100 metres wide, with 18 lanes of asphalt including service lanes and on and off ramps.

This plan will split Watsonia in two and separate people from shops, services, the train station and each other. It will threaten the viability of businesses and increase noise and visual clutter.

Given the scale of North East Link, Victoria's largest ever road project, Council is pointing out how relatively minor changes can deliver maximum impact.

**In recent years, Council has worked with tunnelling, analytics and modelling experts to identify how the project can improve Banyule and create hectares of open space, facilitate investment, attract services and create jobs.**

## Council's proposal to put a green bridge over the grey trench will:

- create more than three hectares of green open space
- provide access from one side of Watsonia to the other
- help keep businesses open and the community thriving
- enable a wider landscaping buffer between homes and Greensborough Highway
- replant at least 700 trees
- boost accessibility and access between Watsonia Village, the train station and car park
- create opportunities for future development to create the places and spaces the community needs and deserves
- renew the gateway to Watsonia.

Economic analysis<sup>1</sup> of the proposal found that a covered road extension at Watsonia would:

- expand Watsonia Village across both sides of the railway line, creating better integration and accessibility between the town centre and the community
- create up to \$340 million in value from opportunities enabled by a covered road
- inject up to \$20 million into the Banyule economy each year and create more than 200 jobs
- enable an upgraded Watsonia Station integrated with Watsonia Village and new underground parking
- uplift of up to \$40 million through improvements to pedestrian and cycling amenity.

## Delivering on a promise

The Victorian Government's updated North East Link Urban Design Strategy recognised the need for additional design considerations for Watsonia beyond what was included in the original document. Adopted in March 2020, it lists 18 objectives for Watsonia.

Council's proposal will enable North East Link to deliver on the design elements promised for Watsonia.

Through the small changes proposed by Council, half of the Urban Design Strategy's objectives can be achieved and will improve Watsonia – now and into the future – by:

- maximising opportunities for land use, transport integration and minimising the fragmentation of land parcels
- enhancing the quality of public open space in Watsonia including walking paths and cycling tracks linking to existing trails

- improving connections to Watsonia Station and Watsonia Neighbourhood Centre and the activity centre consistent with Plan Melbourne's 20 Minute Neighbourhood Strategy
- providing significant opportunities for new tree planting, reinforcing the area's leafy character

## Why Watsonia needs a 'cut and cover'

Economic modelling of options for the Watsonia section of North East Link identified the current State Government Plan as the least preferred outcome.<sup>1</sup> It would remove the opportunity for \$190-\$340 million of value to be created for the community.

In contrast, putting a green bridge over the grey trench will create local opportunities for renewal and activation that would promote a connected, accessible, safe and vibrant mixed-use precinct, creating up to \$185 million in accessibility benefits and \$160 million in safety and amenity. It would also enable a 20-minute neighbourhood.

**The opportunity to improve, rather than just impact, Banyule is deep and long-lasting. It includes the creation of more jobs, economic benefits and development, valued at up to \$20 million each year.**

It also extends to the community's most vulnerable with the potential to create up to 750 new medium density dwellings and 160 affordable housing units.

# Benefit highlights

The economic analysis<sup>1</sup> provides evidence that an extended covered road provides a wide range of benefits – economic to environmental – that a trench cannot deliver.

## The green lid

A green lid over the grey trench that is proposed to cut through Watsonia will deliver short- and long-term improvements to people and places within Watsonia and the broader Banyule area.



## Watsonia Village

Expanding Watsonia Village to both sides of the railway line will improve accessibility and integration between Watsonia town centre and the community.

This will help keep businesses open and the community thriving.

## Value creation

The top ten opportunities that would create the most value for Watsonia, providing an uplift of many millions of dollars include:

Rank	Opportunity	Low (\$M 2021)	High (\$M 2021)
1	Upgraded Watsonia Station (major)	65	114
2	Urban design treatment of extended cut and cover deck over NEL to create series of spaces to sit, picnic, playground, community gardens etc.	54	101
3	New town square and amenities at Watsonia Village	19	32
4	Enhance the pedestrian/cycling corridor of Morwell Ave (west of High St) and along the Elders Street Reserve (east of NEL)	17	32
5	Development of VicTrack car park site for mixed use and residential, with underground commuter carparking (Site #6)	17	30
6	Extended pedestrian and cycling path above NEL to Watsonia (focusing on safety)	14	26
7	Redevelopment of social housing site (on west side of Greensborough Rd, near transmission line corridor (Site #8)	13	23
8	New Commercial development over Watsonia rail corridor (including timber yard site) (Site #5)	9	18
9	New bus Interchange at Watsonia Station	5	9
10	Expand Council services and offering available on or adjacent to the library site	4	8

Source: Value Advisory Partners | Amenity Discount rate of 4% | Commercial Discount rate of 7%



## Increased social capital

Better integration will create new floor space for the provision of council services at Watsonia Village and enable the development of up to 100 new affordable housing dwellings in the area that will also feature new energy and water efficient environmentally sustainable design.



## Amenity

New active frontages to Watsonia Road and new retail and food and beverage opportunities would be created as part of any new developments.

The covered trench would create opportunities for new landscaping, increased green canopy and open space amenity on the green bridge which will reduce urban heat impact and noise pollution.



An artist's impression of how a green lid at Watsonia will connect the community

# A critical moment for Banyule's future

North East Link is a once in a lifetime project.

There is only one chance to get it right and ensure the project can improve Banyule, not just impact it.

Once the trench is built there will be no opportunity to retrofit or augment it.

With builders for the northern section of the North East Link due to be appointed in late 2022, now is a critical time to advocate for Banyule's community.

## What our community is saying about Putting A Lid on the northern section of North East Link:

'The prospect of a 10-lane highway dividing a community and crippling businesses sends a shiver down my spine.'

'We only get to do this once. Let's do it right.'

'Keeping communities connected is vital. COVID demonstrated what happens when we are kept apart.'

'It's a great opportunity to help the environment, improve air quality and get double use out of the space: road below, park above.'

'This is a crucial space to assist with the physical and mental health of the community – seriously important!'

'It will be nearly impossible to live next to a 10-lane highway. The noise will impact our kids and others. Please raise your voice.'

'This is a massive opportunity to create green space for generations.'

'Although I truly believe the North East Link matters, so do the communities it runs through! We are happy for the horrible congestion to ease and make travel easier but adding this green lid will allow the communities to thrive.'

# North East Link history



## July 2018

Urban Design Strategy for the North East Link released.



## December 2019

Victorian Government adopts recommendations from the Environmental Effects Statement hearing to provide more in-depth urban planning consideration of several sections of the North East Link, including Watsonia.



## March 2020

Final Urban Design approved by Victorian Government.



## October 2021

Construction consortia SPARK appointed to deliver the central package of works.



## May 2022

Detailed Urban Design Landscape Plans for the central tunnelling package placed on public exhibition.



## Late 2022

Victorian Government due to award tender to the company which will deliver the northern section of North East Link (from Watsonia Rd to M80 Ring Road).



## Early 2023

Final designs for the northern section will be placed on public exhibition for 21 days. Banyule Council will submit their design recommendations based on community feedback.