

A new Watsonia Station that is accessible to all

We are seeking:

1. State Government investment to design a new Watsonia Railway Station that:
 - Complies with accessibility standards
 - Integrates with the Watsonia shopping precinct
 - Activates the station and town centre development
 - Supports the need for more key worker accommodation.
2. Coordination of the new Watsonia Railway Station build with construction of North East Link.



Watsonia Station has poor accessibility and amenity and is not well connected to the nearby shopping village.

The proposed station upgrade and North East Link construction present a significant opportunity for current improvements and future housing and precinct development.

Banyule Council welcomes the State Government's announcement in the 2022-23 State Budget to undertake planning for an upgrade of the Watsonia Station. Council is keen to work with the State to ensure the new Watsonia Station is integrated with the Watsonia Town Square that is being constructed in 2023 and is consistent with the recommendations of *Picture Watsonia*, Council's Strategic Vision for the Watsonia Neighbourhood Centre.

Access and Safety

Access to Watsonia Station is provided by a non-DDA compliant ramp off a pedestrian bridge across the rail line between Watsonia Road and the station carpark. The poor access and the lack of a lift to the platform discourages and prevents use by some passengers.

The current singular access is unsafe from a Crime Prevention Through Environment Design perspective, with vulnerable passengers alighting from trains in full view of potential assailants with no alternative exit but the ramp.

“Watsonians see the train station as an important asset but it is not well connected to the main street, which means that few commuters make the journey up to the centre from the station. Access to the train station can feel unsafe and difficult for people with mobility issues.”¹

Station History

Watsonia Railway Station on the Hurstbridge Line was opened in 1924.² Located in a deep cutting, the current station dates back to 1977, when this section of the line was lowered to remove level crossings³ before the line was duplicated in 1979.²

The train station adjoins the Watsonia Shopping Village but does not relate to the streetscape as it is in a trench and is difficult to access because of steep ramps.

Many commuters do not frequent the shopping centre on their return journey because station parking is inaccessible from Watsonia Road.



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North East Link impact and opportunities

The Watsonia neighbourhood centre will be impacted by the construction of North East Link (NEL).

Watsonia is expected to remain a neighbourhood centre, providing local retail and services in an increasingly pedestrian-friendly village atmosphere.

Residential growth is expected to occur around the Watsonia Road and the Station, with a greater diversity of housing serving a gradually changing demographic and a future shift to more shared and active transport options.¹

There are significant opportunities to improve the urban design outcomes at and around Watsonia Station to support future residential growth. It is important to address this during the North East Link construction phase, to avoid prolonged disturbance of the Watsonia Traders beyond the NEL Project completion (2028/29).

While providing a critical connection in Melbourne's freeway network, the North East Link will cause significant disruption for adjacent communities and businesses during its seven year construction phase.

More than 90 per cent of current businesses in the Watsonia Town Centre doubt their business will survive the challenging period.⁴

A comprehensive upgrade to Watsonia Station Precinct is urgently needed because:

- It has very poor amenity and accessibility. The Station is not compliant with Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002 (Cth) (DSAPT).
- Victoria is experiencing a housing crisis and Watsonia has capacity and demand for key worker and affordable housing.
- Best practice design for railway stations is for activity hubs that are activated with 24/7 uses like restaurants, open space, and other services.

Watsonia Station Precinct has significant redevelopment potential including:

- Development over the rail line and multideck carpark with restaurants, community services and housing to activate the precinct 24/7.
- Integration of future development with the new Watsonia Town Square.
- Developing more key worker housing in the station precinct.

The upgrade of the Watsonia Railway Station provides an opportunity to better integrate the station into the shopping precinct which will deliver commuters into retail shops.

New Station

Council's strategic plan for the precinct, known as *Picture Watsonia*¹, identifies features to be included in the new railway station that will improve the economic uptake of the area. These include:

- Raising the new station to ground level with lifts/escalators transporting commuters to the train platform.
- A legible entry building that integrates into the adjoining retail area and full DDA access with an extended decking across the railway line.
- A generous station entry including vehicle access (drop-off/pick-up) and continuous linear space within the power lines reserve
- A street connection from Watsonia Road across North East Link to the east.
- All associated development to provide fine grain, active frontages to main streets and public spaces, especially at ground level, and be adaptable to other uses (high ground floors for commercial use; adequate heights and flat floors in carparks).

Redeveloped station carpark

- Relocate carparking further to the north-west to enable the creation of public spaces under the powerlines.
- Redevelop the station carpark to include office development and social housing.
- Surround the multi-deck carpark with mixed used development forming a defined pedestrian-friendly environment with active frontages.
- Create a legible, accessible entry and deck the area in front to complete the power lines 'green corridor' and provide high amenity through access.

"The grade change to the railway station from Watsonia Road poses a significant barrier for people with mobility issues. The stairs and steeply sloping path that lie between the station platform, the commuter carpark and Watsonia Road also discourages commuters from visiting businesses on the main road."



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City Council

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Michele Purtle
Advocacy Lead

Banyule City Council

 Michele.Purtle@
banyule.vic.gov.au

 0419 397 290

 banyule.vic.gov.au

¹ *Picture Watsonia 2014*

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watsonia_railway_station
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³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watsonia_railway_station
"Works". Newsrail. Australian Railway Historical Society. April 1978. p. 69.

⁴ *Watsonia Traders Association, North East Link Impacts, Online Survey Report, May 2021*