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Suburban Rail Loop is unapologetically an ambitious project – designed to not only make cross suburb travel easier and quicker, but also to reshape over time how Melbourne lives and works.

It is puzzling therefore to read negative and misleading commentary about the project from a high profile think tank and others. And frustrating that inaccurate claims are regularly made about Suburban Rail Loop's business case (released last year) and the project's recent inclusion on Infrastructure Australia's priority list.

Narrow criticism from the same people who regularly call for more innovative and long-term thinking to address Melbourne's growth challenges. The same observers who demand greater investment in infrastructure and lament a supposed lack of planning beyond the political cycle.

Infrastructure Australia recognises that an orbital rail line, with investment in the surrounding communities, will support Melbourne's growth for the future. We'll be working with them in the coming months as they complete their assessment of the project.

We want Suburban Rail Loop to be the gold standard for every suburb and community it passes through, and we are working with councils, stakeholders and locals to get that right.

It's a big and complex project and you consult widely, but you cannot delay building it.

We expect the community to speak up and drive us towards the best passenger and neighbourhood outcomes possible. We have an enormous responsibility to get this right.

We've been taking feedback onboard during the Environment Effects Statement (EES) process. It's why we're working to deliver more direct connections to existing stations – meaning passengers won't have to touch off and on again at Box Hill, Glen Waverley, Clayton and Cheltenham to change trains. This was made clear in the EES public hearing and Councils are aware of this commitment.

The rationale for Suburban Rail Loop along with its big picture objectives are straightforward.

Despite a Covid-induced pause to population growth, Victoria will be rapidly growing again before we know it, with the experts predicting Melbourne will surpass Sydney as Australia's biggest city in just a couple of years. By 2050, we'll be a city of nine million people – the size of London today.

Even accounting for this government's record investment in roads, rail and level crossing removals, it'll be a never-ending cycle of catchup unless there is a step change to recalibrate *how* we grow in the decades ahead.

Just like London, and many other great cities of the world, Melbourne needs to become a 'city of centres' if it is to grow in a sustainable way that preserves all that we love about it.

This won't happen on its own. We need to plan for it. We need to get ahead of it.



Suburban Rail Loop will deliver a turn-up-and-go train service from Cheltenham to Werribee that connects with the existing radial rail lines and regional services. The wheel on Melbourne's existing hub and spokes. It connects the fastest growing centres of jobs, tertiary education, major hospital and research centres, and Melbourne airport.

The new rail line will shift a huge number of motorists off our roads. By the time SRL has been delivered from Cheltenham to Melbourne Airport, there'll be around 600,000 fewer daily car trips as more people choose public transport to avoid road congestion.

And jobs for our kids. Suburban Rail Loop is a job creator like nothing Melbourne has seen. And I'm not just talking about the hard hats and high vis.

The delivery of fast, efficient transport and new underground Suburban Rail Loop stations will be a catalyst for investment, development, and new business opportunities in the suburbs.

Just as the City Loop transformed the CBD when it opened, SRL will reshape Melbourne. New housing options and hundreds of thousands of jobs will be clustered around the new stations in the middle corridor of Melbourne – giving people access to diverse employment opportunities nearer to where they live.

By the 2050's, the number of jobs in Suburban Rail Loop precincts (about a 1.6km radius around each of the train stations) will be roughly the same as in the central city today.

For once, we won't be playing catch up – we'll be getting ahead of the curve.

The Business and Investment Case showed that Suburban Rail Loop stacks up. It will deliver nearly \$60 billion in economic, social and environmental benefits to the state and generate between \$1.10 and \$1.70 for every dollar invested.

We have a golden opportunity to set Melbourne up for the future. A chance to thoughtfully plan how we'll make these neighbourhoods ready for the families and businesses that will want to locate near SRL stations. A chance to plan new and improved open spaces, walking and cycling paths, and increase quality, affordable housing options.

Construction on Suburban Rail Loop started last month - the first excavators and boots are on the ground in Clayton. Our progress will steadily ramp up as we pave the way for tunnel boring machines to dig from Cheltenham to Box Hill on the first leg of the loop.

Those who want to assess this project only through a transport lens need to lift their eyes to the horizon. Suburban Rail Loop is more than a rail line. It is the biggest project in our history – and our most important.

No matter where you live in Victoria and no matter what you love most about this city and state – this project is for you and those who'll come after you.

Frankie Carroll

CEO

Suburban Rail Loop Authority