

# Communications and Community Engagement Strategy

Updated June 2024

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# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 About North East Link

North East Link is the biggest ever investment in Melbourne's north-east – changing the way people move around Melbourne.

Fixing the missing link in Melbourne's freeway network has been talked about for decades.

But North East Link will deliver much more, including the big road, bus and walking and cycling upgrades needed to keep Melbourne's north-east moving in the decades to come.

**The North East Link Tunnels from Watsonia to Bulleen will take vehicles under instead of through local suburbs – taking 15,000 trucks off local roads a day and reducing travel times by up to 35 minutes. We're also building new parklands, better walking and cycling paths and transforming Greensborough Road into a tree-lined boulevard.**

We'll also complete the M80 Ring Road in Greensborough, deliver Eastern Freeway upgrades, build Melbourne's first dedicated busway and construct more than 34km of walking and cycling paths.

In 2016, Infrastructure Victoria – Victoria's independent infrastructure advisors – named North East Link as the State's next priority road project, and the Victorian Government committed to building it.

Since then, the program has been through extensive planning and consultation with the community, including the preparation and public exhibition of an Environment Effects Statement (EES) – Victoria's most robust and transparent impact assessment process.

More than 17,500 pieces of community feedback have helped shape the program to date. Now, as the program heads into major tunnelling construction, involving the community, stakeholders, residents, businesses near construction has never been more important.

We'll also continue to involve the community in our massive tree planting program, with more than 30,000 to be planted as part of North East Link.

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## 1.2 Moving into construction

In late 2021 we appointed Spark Consortium, a team of some of the best builders in Australia and around the world, to build the North East Link Tunnels from Watsonia to Bulleen. We released an updated project design which included Victoria's longest road tunnels, interchanges at Lower Plenty Road and Manningham Road, new parklands, wetlands, bike and walking paths and improvements to local roads. In response to community feedback through the project's planning approvals, we're building longer tunnels to Watsonia – tunnelling an extra 1.9 kilometres using tunnel boring machines (TBMs) to keep more works underground.

An Urban Design and Landscape Plan (UDLP) for the North East Link Tunnels and connecting Eastern Freeway upgrades in Bulleen and Balwyn North was exhibited to the public in May 2022.

The UDLP had detailed maps and drawings of the project design and an explanation of how it meets strict requirements in place for North East Link.

It gave the community an opportunity to make submissions on local elements for their area including new parklands, wetlands, walking and cycling paths and improvements to local roads. The UDLP was approved by the Minister for Planning on 3 February

2023. Preparations for tunnelling in 2024 are now well progressed with significant construction underway from Watsonia to Bulleen.

The UDLPs for the M80 Ring Road Completion and for the first section of the Eastern Freeway Upgrades between Burke Road and Tram Road were on exhibition for comment from Monday 9 October 2023 to Sunday 29 October 2023.

Contracts were awarded on 15 December 2023 for the M80 Ring Road Completion and the first stage of Eastern Freeway Upgrades between Burke and Tram roads. Nexus – made up of Laing O'Rourke, Symal, WSP and Arcadis – has been appointed to deliver the first section of the Eastern Freeway Upgrades from Burke to Tram Road. AMA – made up of Acciona, AECOM, and MACA – will deliver the M80 Ring Road Completion.

We're also working through procurement for the second and third stages of the Eastern Freeway Upgrades between Hoddle Street to Burke Road and Tram to Springvale Roads. UDLPs for these upgrades will be placed on public exhibition as well, so the community can comment on local elements of the design ahead of major construction.

### 1.3 Purpose of this Strategy

The purpose of the Communications and Community Engagement Strategy for North East Link is to describe how we are developing and maintaining collaborative relationships with the community and stakeholders through planning, design and delivery of this massive construction program.

North East Link is being built in built-up urban areas, with limited road reserve. Some works are very close to homes and businesses. We are committed to engaging the community and stakeholders in constructive and co-operative dialogue based on mutual trust and respect.

**This strategy outlines the phased approach we're taking to engagement, outlining how we have and will involve, inform and guide the community and stakeholders through the design and delivery of North East Link.**

The strategy governs our communications and community engagement activities and that of our contractors, while making sure we satisfy the communication and stakeholder specifications outlined

in the program's Environmental Performance Requirements (EPRs).

Findings and insights from qualitative and quantitative research, and lessons learned from both North East Link and other infrastructure projects have also assisted in the development and updating of this document. It also considers the Victorian Auditor General's Office's (VAGO) Public Participation in Government Decision-making Guidelines and the International Association of Public Participation's (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum.



Construction works at Lower Plenty Road

### 1.4 Environmental Performance Requirements

**Environmental Performance Requirement (EPR) SC3 requires North East Link to prepare and implement a Communications and Community Engagement Strategy to engage the community and potentially affected stakeholders, and communicate progress of construction activities and operation. The Strategy must be published on the program's website prior to and for the duration of construction.**

The table below sets out the requirements of EPR SC3 and where in this Strategy further information can be found.

EPR SC3 Requirement	Section of this plan
A process for identifying community issues and the recording, management and resolution of complaints from affected stakeholders including business owners, community service providers, education providers, public and active transport key user groups and residents, consistent with Australian Standard AS/NZS 10002:2014 Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organisations.	Section 5.6, page 30
Approach to stakeholder identification.	Section 3, page 22
Enquiry management and record keeping approach and procedures including making available an attended 24-hour telephone number, postal address, and an email address and publishing these on the program website.	Section 2.5, page 17
Approach to communicating and engaging with the community and potentially affected stakeholders in relation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Construction activities including temporary facilities and impacts that may affect the community, businesses or individual stakeholders (e.g. dust, noise, vibration and light) and relevant mitigation (e.g. relocations policy)</li> <li>– Changes to transport conditions and relevant mitigation (e.g. road closures, detours)</li> </ul>	Section 2, page 4
Timelines and an outline of works that will affect particular local areas, to be updated to reflect current and anticipated conditions.	Section 2, page 4 Section 4, page 26
Identifying how stakeholders can access information on environmental performance that is to be made publicly available.	Section 2.5, page 17
Incident and emergency communications, including notification methods and timeframes in the event of a major incident or overrun.	Section 5.5, page 29
Approach and processes to ensure that the workforce has appropriate community awareness and sensitivity including to prevent the workforce from parking in local roads and in public parking in the vicinity of local shopping areas except when frequenting those areas for private purposes.	Section 2.2, page 4
Innovative communications tools and methods to enhance the program's ability to effectively communicate and engage with the community and stakeholders including best available technology in addition to conventional means.	Section 2.5, page 17
Approach to engaging with local schools to ascertain safety requirements (including evacuation opportunities) and to provide education opportunities on program activities.	Section 3.5, page 25
Approach to making relevant program information available to the community with specific consideration to vulnerable groups (including culturally and linguistically diverse groups) and a responsive process for resolving complaints by vulnerable groups or individuals.	Section 4, page 26 Section 5.6, page 30
How it will evaluate the effectiveness of the communication and engagement under the Communications and Community Engagement Strategy.	Section 6, page 31



## 2 Our approach to communications and engagement

North East Link is Victoria's largest ever investment in the north east. We have been engaging with communities and stakeholders since the program was first announced in late 2016 and will continue to guide and involve stakeholders and the community until North East Link opens.

We've divided our communications and engagement approach into key stages as we deliver this massive program of works, taking in planning, design and progressing from early works into major tunnel construction and freeway upgrades.

All of these phases will be guided by the following principles, supporting effective, meaningful and consistent communications and engagement across all aspects and stages of North East Link.

### 2.1 Communication and engagement principles

#### Honesty and transparency

- Approach all engagement with genuine intent to involve communities in a positive manner and improve understanding of the program.
- Front up and talk to people face to face.
- Be transparent about the nature of our work and impacts.
- Actively seek opportunities for community input.
- Establish clear expectations about how much disruption communities should expect.
- We close the loop and demonstrate how community feedback was considered and reflected in shaping the program.
- We maintain transparency where feedback has and hasn't shaped the program and developing community understanding on the reasoning behind this.

#### Clear communication

- Match communications programs to the communications needs of communities and key stakeholders.
- Deliver activities using clear communication and ensure that messages are designed to be effectively received.
- Create collaborative and two-way communication programs.
- Synthesise and present feedback and technical and construction information into clear and easy to understand formats.

#### Accessibility and visibility

- Proactively engage communities and stakeholders.
- Communicate at multiple levels, through multiple channels.
- Encourage and meaningfully consider feedback on our communications.
- Make information accessible to everyone included translation when needed to ensure all members of the community have understood our message.

#### Proven approach

- Create community engagement programs using a considered framework.
- Plan activities to ensure maximum opportunity for community participation.
- Review and revise policy and procedures in line with best-practice community engagement and evolving systems, media and communications.
- Actively applying these principles through our engagement approach ensures that we make meaningful contributions to the communities in which we operate.
- Learn from our own experiences and those of other infrastructure projects to inform our engagement approach.

### 2.2 Minimising community impacts during construction

To improve community outcomes and the experience of residents living close to construction, we will focus on identifying, managing and mitigating community and stakeholder issues and impacts.

Key to this approach will be ensuring we are aware of the issues that cause disruption to the local communities and residents where we are undertaking works.

We will work closely with construction teams to mitigate impacts where possible and where impacts are unavoidable, we will ensure those who are potentially affected are given plenty of notice.

Artist's impression of Grimshaw Street interchange, Watsonia North





## 2.3 Communication and Engagement Phases

2017-2019 (complete) Planning	2020-2022 (complete) Early works construction, sports relocation, land acquisition and tunnelling preparation	2022-2023 Major construction of North East Link	2024 Tunnelling starts and works commence on Eastern Freeway Upgrades and M80 Ring Road Completion in Greensborough	From 2028 Completion and ongoing operation
<p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <p>Provide a forum to enable stakeholder and community knowledge and views to be considered in the planning and formal decision making for North East Link.</p> <p>Describe the specific environmental matters to be investigated and documented in North East Link's Environment Effects Statement (EES) – a requirement under Section 3(1) of the Environment Effects Act 1978.</p> <p>Inform stakeholders and the community about decisions and actions being undertaken during the planning process and following the delivery of the ESS.</p> <p>Establish systems and procedures to develop and maintain a collaborative relationship with the community and stakeholders.</p> <p><b>Outcomes:</b></p> <p>Ensure stakeholders understand the potential environmental impacts of North East Link and how they will to be managed.</p> <p>Provide opportunities and mechanisms for the community to learn more about the planning process for North East Link and provide feedback online and in person.</p>	<p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <p>Support landowners and tenants through the land acquisition process through one-on-one case management with NELP staff.</p> <p>Establish clear processes for notifying stakeholders and the community about potential impacts from works, including a transparent complaints management process.</p> <p>Engage with, and provide advance notice to local businesses, residents, road and public transport users about our early works program.</p> <p><b>Outcomes:</b></p> <p>Ensure multiple communication channels and opportunities are provided for stakeholders and the community to ask questions on the program, raise issues and provide feedback.</p> <p>Community and stakeholders are aware of the program benefits, timing and how impacts and disruptions are being managed.</p>	<p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <p>Supporting the detailed design work undertaken by the appointed construction contractors, including providing opportunities for stakeholder and community input and feedback.</p> <p>Engage with, and provide advance notice, including direct contact where required, to local businesses, residents, road and public transport users about major works construction activities, including impacts to travel by road or public transport and the public exhibition of urban design and landscape plans.</p> <p><b>Outcomes:</b></p> <p>Ensure multiple communication channels and opportunities are provided for stakeholders and the community to ask questions on the program, raise issues and provide feedback.</p> <p>Community and stakeholders are aware of the program benefits, timing and how impacts and disruptions are being managed.</p>	<p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <p>Support communities and stakeholders during major works, managing construction and consultation fatigue.</p> <p>Continue to provide advance notice, building relationships and engaging with residents, businesses and stakeholders in newly impacted areas, explaining and preparing them for major works, construction activities and long-term benefits.</p> <p>Detailed conversations with individual properties to understand specific needs and provide detailed construction lookaheads.</p> <p>Effectively communicate road and rail disruptions.</p> <p>Assess, coordinate and manage the cumulative impact of interfacing works across projects.</p> <p>Acknowledge community patience to get to this point, show progress of tunnelling starting underground and highlight the start of works on the Eastern Freeway and M80 Ring Road.</p> <p><b>Outcomes:</b></p> <p>Impacted residents, businesses and stakeholders are involved in and aware of construction program, impacts and mitigations.</p> <p>Effective disruption communications to ensure drivers are aware of changes to travel.</p>	<p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <p>Support the transition from major works delivery to operation of the tunnels and North East Link road network.</p> <p>Engage with and provide advance notice, including direct contact where required, to local businesses, residents, road and public transport users about operation of the new tunnels and road network.</p> <p><b>Outcomes:</b></p> <p>Community and stakeholders are aware of the program's completion and understand how North East Link will operate.</p> <p>Community and stakeholders have the opportunity to take part in celebrating the North East Link Program completion.</p>



# Phase One

## Planning (complete)

### Background

NELP has been engaging with communities and stakeholders since it was formed in late 2016 to investigate and recommend a project corridor, develop a business case for the program of works and seek primary planning approvals.

Public participation has been included in each stage of the program with conversations starting during early strategic planning – much earlier than for most major projects of this kind in Victoria.

More than 15,700 pieces of community feedback since 2017, including over 870 submissions on the Environment Effects Statement, have helped lock in the longer tunnel length, interchange designs, where to build new walking and cycling paths and bridges and where to deliver better outcomes for local people and the environment.

In 2017, four different project corridor options were presented to the community and stakeholders to consider for a future North East Link.

On 2 February 2018, the Minister for Planning declared North East Link to be 'public works' under Section 3(1) of the Environment Effects Act 1978, which was published in the Victorian Government Gazette on 6 February 2018 (No. S 38 Tuesday 6 February 2018). This declaration triggered a requirement for the preparation of an Environment Effects Statement (EES) for the confirmed project corridor to inform the Minister's assessment of the project.

The scoping requirements for the EES published by the Minister for Planning described the specific environmental matters to be investigated and documented in the program's EES. The EES allowed stakeholders and the community to understand the potential environmental impacts of North East Link and how they were proposed to be managed.

NELP carried out an extensive communication and engagement program to support the development of the reference design of North East Link and to inform the EES.

The program included a range of activities such as community and stakeholder workshops, targeted meetings, online communications and site visits. The purpose of these activities was two-fold:

- to provide opportunities for communities and stakeholders to learn and understand the likely environmental impacts of North East Link and how they are proposed to be managed; and
- for NELP to seek information about communities and stakeholders to inform the development of a reference design, and EES technical studies.

Feedback covered a range of topics including corridor selection, project design, traffic and transport, amenity, business, construction and environment. This feedback informed development of the North East Link reference design and preparation of the EES which was released for public exhibition on Wednesday 10 April 2019.

During the 40-day EES exhibition period, 850 submissions were received, with more than 700 people attending a community information session.

Significant community feedback and more than a year of technical studies shaped the 10,000-page EES, which included specialist reports on 18 key topics. People who made an EES submission also had the chance to present to the independent panel during the Public Hearings which started in July 2019.

The panel reviewed the EES and public submissions received and made recommendations to the Minister for Planning in late 2019.

**The planning phase of the North East Link Program is now complete. The Minister for Planning released his assessment of the EES on 5 December 2019 and approved a Planning Scheme Amendment on 23 December 2019.**



Artist's impression of new Borlase Reserve parklands and revitalised Banyule Creek, Yallambie

## Planning Timeline

- ✓ **2016**  
**December**
  - North East Link Authority formed
- ✓ **2017**  
**Corridor selection**
  - Where to build North East Link determined
- ✓ **2018**  
**Business case**
  - Benefits of North East Link assessed and recommendations made on how it could, and should, be funded
- ✓ **2018-2019**
  - Reference design prepared for intensive studies to assess environmental effects and set strict conditions the program must meet
- 2018**
  - Minister determined that an EES was required
  - Draft scoping requirements for EES released for public comment
  - EES technical studies and preparation of EES technical reports
- 2019**  
**April-June**
  - Public exhibition of the EES for submissions  
**December**
  - Minister approves Planning Scheme Amendment
- ✓ **2021**  
**Contract awarded and project design**
  - Contract awarded to the Spark consortium for the North East Link Tunnels and project design released
  - Detailed design and construction planning work for the North East Link Tunnels underway
- ✓ **2022**
  - In May, preparation for major tunnelling works started and an urban design and landscape plan for the North East Link Tunnels was exhibited for public comment. The plan also included a section of connecting Eastern Freeway upgrades in Bulleen and Balwyn North
- ✓ **2023**
  - In February, Minister approves urban design and landscape plan for North East Link Tunnels
  - In October, urban design and landscape plans for the M80 Ring Road Completion and the first section of the Eastern Freeway Upgrades between Burke Road and Tram Road were exhibited for public comment\*

\* Urban Design and Landscape Plans for other sections of the Eastern Freeway Upgrades between Hoddle Street to Burke Road and Tram Road to Springvale Road will be placed on exhibition as the project progresses. There will also be UDLPs for Watsonia station car park and Doncaster park & ride.



A summary of the engagement approach and communications tools used during the planning phase of North East Link is featured in the table below:

### Phase One: Planning 2017-2019

Engagement objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Raise awareness of North East Link and the project corridors for consideration.</li> <li>– Support stakeholders and the community to view the Environment Effects Summary (EES) and make submissions to the independent Inquiry and Advisory Committee.</li> <li>– Identify key issues, ideas and concerns from the community that need to be considered in the EES.</li> <li>– Provide a forum for the community and stakeholders to understand potential environmental impacts of the program and encourage input.</li> </ul>
Engagement outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Community and stakeholders are involved in EES process via several in-person and online engagement tools.</li> <li>– Genuine engagement and interest in the program and corridor options from community.</li> <li>– Collection of input, data and sentiment to inform EES and project corridor selection.</li> </ul>
Program activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Public exhibition of EES, public submissions, and public hearing chaired by independent Inquiry and Advisory Committee.</li> <li>– Minister’s assessment of environmental effects and recommendations.</li> </ul>
Communication focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Collect feedback and input from communities to select a preferred project corridor.</li> <li>– Identify and collate key issues for specialists to consider in preparing the EES.</li> <li>– Support stakeholders and communities to make submissions to independent Inquiry and Advisory Committee.</li> </ul>
Communication tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Printed newsletter, interactive online map, new website, fact sheets, social media, advertising, posters, technical reports and summaries, videos, artist impressions and program images.</li> </ul>
Engagement tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Online surveys, forums, workshops, information displays.</li> <li>– Pop-up stalls at local markets and community events.</li> <li>– Face-to-face home visits, door knocks and street meetings.</li> <li>– Two Community Liaison Groups, Two Community Technical Discussion Groups.</li> <li>– Translation service and Q&amp;A online tool.</li> </ul>
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 1.2 million+ people reached through social media.</li> <li>– 250,000+ homes and businesses received updates in their letterboxes.</li> <li>– 359,000+ visits to online maps.</li> <li>– 8695+ visitors to 32 information displays.</li> <li>– 2290+ visitors to the Watsonia Community Information Hub.</li> <li>– 2175+ conversations with landowners, tenants and businesses.</li> <li>– 250+ meetings and briefings with stakeholders.</li> <li>– 45+ interactive workshops.</li> <li>– 14,900+ pieces of feedback.</li> <li>– 870+ EES submissions.</li> </ul>

## Phase Two

### Early works (complete)

#### Background

Between early 2020 and mid-2022 a key focus for North East Link was its early works program.

This included relocating power, water, gas, sewer and telecommunication services as well as preparing future work sites and building new infrastructure to support the next stage of construction.

Utility relocations were completed in late 2022, with specialist crews moving almost 100 above and underground services to make way for North East Link.

During this time, we also worked closely with sports clubs who needed to relocate due to North East Link construction. We invested \$68 million in upgraded sports facilities to keep local clubs playing and thriving during construction and beyond.

Major upgrades to Ford Park, Binnak Park, Greensborough College and Veneto Club were completed, with construction at the Bulleen Soccer Facilities on Templestowe Road starting in early 2023.

The early works program also included the construction of Bulleen Park & Ride. The premium bus station opened in April 2023, four years earlier than planned. This was to ensure it was finished before major works started on North East Link, avoiding disruptions for residents and businesses, passengers and motorists and meaning a temporary park and ride at Doncaster is no longer needed, further reducing disruption in the north east.

During this time, the program team also worked very closely with property owners impacted by acquisition. Thirty-six homes and almost 100 businesses, largely in the Bulleen Industrial Zone, have now been acquired and removed.

In addition, a Voluntary Purchase Scheme was made available to property owners located in Borlase Street, Yallambie due to impacts from the early works program.

### Early works program (complete)

#### 2020-2022

Moving key power, water, gas and other services out of the way of North East Link

Supporting sports club relocations and upgrades

Supporting residents and businesses through the property acquisition process



Transmission tower installation, Frensham Reserve

A summary of the engagement approach and communications tools used during the early works phase of North East Link is featured in the table below:

### Phase Two: Early works 2020-2022

Engagement objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support landowners and tenants through land acquisition process and eligible residents through the Voluntary Purchase Scheme (VPS).</li> <li>Support affected sports and recreation clubs through the relocation works.</li> <li>Establish clear processes for notifying stakeholders and the community about potential impacts from works, including a transparent complaints management process.</li> <li>Engage with and provide advance notice to local businesses, sports and recreation clubs, residents, road and public transport users about early works.</li> </ul>
Engagement outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multiple communications channels and opportunities provided for stakeholders and the community to ask questions about the program, raise issues and provide feedback.</li> <li>Community and stakeholders are aware of the program benefits, timing and impacts.</li> <li>Highly impacted residents and businesses feel supported and informed through acquisition and VPS process.</li> <li>Sporting clubs are informed of program impacts and feel supported to take their clubs to alternative locations.</li> </ul>
Communication focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce early works contractor team to the local community.</li> <li>Explain the program, early works timelines and benefits, and upcoming disruptions.</li> <li>Understand community values and concerns.</li> <li>Continue to build on existing relationships with local communities and stakeholders.</li> <li>Where possible, seek community and stakeholder input into program design scope and construction impacts.</li> <li>Work proactively with Community Liaison Groups (CLGs) to share program information within their community networks.</li> <li>Provide the community with regular updates and simple technical terminology through a range of communications channels.</li> <li>Explain preferred program design and how community input has been considered.</li> <li>Work one-on-one with residents and businesses in highly impacted areas to support relocation.</li> </ul>
Key communication tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Works notifications, electronic newsletters and email updates, fact sheets, website updates, signage, local advertising, street meetings, drop-in information sessions, letter box drops, door knocks, home visits, face to face meetings with local businesses, social media and maps to highlight works.</li> </ul>
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular monitoring of compliance with enquiries and complaints processes for both contractors and NELP team.</li> <li>Contractor compliance with stakeholder engagement audits.</li> <li>Increased community understanding and awareness of the program as measured through surveys.</li> <li>Sustained participation in engagement processes and interaction with the program during public engagement activities.</li> <li>Sustained participation and desire for involvement demonstrated by registrations for email updates, follows on Facebook and visits to the program website.</li> </ul>

## Build awareness

Program focus for 2021

Set the tone for early and respectful engagement.  
Raise awareness about the program and its benefits.

- Awarded contract for major tunnelling
- Communicated updated tunnel design
- Shared program timing, scope and tunnelling milestones
- Progressed early works and engaged with the community about tree planting opportunities
- Progressed delivery of sports upgrades
- Local presence at the Watsonia Community Hub



## Build knowledge and facilitate input

Program focus for 2022

Set the right tone with early and respectful engagement around tunnel preparation works and finalising land acquisition, facilitated input into urban design and landscaping solution, and prepared stakeholders for major works.

- Extensive engagement to support urban design and landscaping solution for tunnelling package
- Construction compound set-up
- Opened Jobs and Skills Centre
- Completed land acquisition and progressed Voluntary Purchase Scheme for those impacted by tunnel construction
- Confirmed preferred communication methods for our stakeholders and community and started to establish regular communication
- Educated the community that tunnel preparation works are commencing to make way for major excavation in 2023
- Announced and awarded inaugural North East Community Fund grants
- Removed trees and realised early planting opportunities
- Upgraded sports and recreation facilities to offset construction impacts
- Completed early works for tunnelling package and mobilised construction compounds for tunnelling
- Changed traffic conditions to pave the way for major tunnel works.
- Construction of Bulleen Park & Ride to provide offset parking for commuters when Doncaster Park & Ride is closed for construction works



# Phase Three

## Major construction (current)

In late 2021 we appointed Spark, a team of some of the best builders in Australia and around the world, to build the North East Link Tunnels from Watsonia to Bulleen.

We released an updated design which included Victoria's longest road tunnels, simplified interchanges at Lower Plenty Road and Manningham Road, new parklands, wetlands, bike and walking paths and improvements to local roads. In response to community feedback through the program's planning approvals, we're building longer tunnels to Watsonia – tunnelling an extra 1.9 kilometres using tunnel boring machines (TBMs) to keep more works underground.

Preparation for major tunnelling works then started and an Urban Design and Landscape Plan was exhibited for public comment in May 2022 and approved in February 2023. The plan also included a section of connecting Eastern Freeway upgrades in Bulleen and Balwyn North.

In 2022, two preferred bidders were selected for the upgrade of the Eastern Freeway and the completion of the M80 Ring Road.

In 2023, we focused on preparing for the arrival of the tunnel boring machines (TBMs). To ensure the TBM launch site at Watsonia is ready, two purpose-built facilities were constructed.

An acoustic shed has been built on Winsor Reserve ready to collect and remove dirt and rock excavated from the tunnels. At Watsonia, we're building a tunnel segment storage shed to house the pre-cast concrete segments that will become the tunnel walls. Construction of interchanges and preparation for tunnelling at Lower Plenty Road, Yallambie and Manningham Road, Bulleen also progressed in 2023.

We kept traffic moving during construction by diverting Bulleen Road to make room for excavation of the tunnel entrance, while maintaining access for local schools, sports clubs and the Veneto Club. Major changes were also made to intersections along Bulleen Road, Manningham Road and Templestowe Road to allow construction of the future Manningham Interchange.

In 2024, we're focusing on the start of tunnelling for North East Link. We'll also start building a major new interchange at Bulleen Road to connect the upgraded Eastern Freeway to the 6.5km North East Link tunnels in Bulleen. We'll also be setting up worksites on both sides of the freeway, including at Koonung Creek Reserve, to create space to build new express lanes and the Eastern Busway.

We'll also set up worksites at AK Lines and Gabonia Avenue reserves in Watsonia to support construction for the M80 Ring Road Completion, and build new car parking to offset the closure of the Watsonia station car park during our works.

**We're working closely with nearby residents to ensure construction disruptions are minimised wherever possible.**

On the following page is our approach to coordinate our communications and engagement activities and guide stakeholders and the community through the various phases of construction.

## Preparing for major works

Program focus for 2023

Educate stakeholders about the construction methodology and prepare them for tunnelling, major excavation, and road works to ramp up.

Preparing sites and adjacent residents for tunnel boring machines to arrive

Strong on-ground presence and relationship building with residents/businesses near construction

Building community partnerships and community grants for groups nearest construction

Open Bulleen Park & Ride

Highlight key work sites, equipment and methodology needed for tunnelling

Reiterate that we're getting ready for TBMs to launch in 2024

Consistent communications channels to keep people up to date

Clear processes for respite and relocation

Communicate long-term changes to traffic

Listen to feedback and manage construction impacts as best as possible

Highlight jobs creation and opportunities

Ongoing engagement with high impact residents and progress Voluntary Purchase Scheme with those eligible

Start to communicate tunnel alignment details where possible

Prepare construction sites and communicate key disruptions for first stages of M80 and Eastern Freeway upgrades

Prepare and exhibit Urban Design and Landscape Plans for M80 Ring Road Completion and Eastern Freeway Upgrades

## Mitigate impacts

Program focus for 2024

**Continue to 'front up' and be there for communities when they need us most. Support communities and stakeholders during major works, managing construction and consultation fatigue. Assess and manage cumulative impact of interfacing works. Acknowledge patience of community to get to this point and show progress of tunnelling starting underground.**

Continue to show progress on North East Link – with Tunnel Boring Machines launching this year

Progress construction of M80 Ring Road Completion and Eastern Freeway Upgrades

Engage with affected residents on confirmed tunnel alignment and associated impacts

Proactively manage dust, noise and vibration with launch of tunnel boring machines and major excavation underway

Highlight proactive and reactive mitigation measures during construction and commitment to EPRs

Step up disruption communications, encouraging drivers to regularly check their travel options

Highlight engineering innovations and complexities

Continue to support directly affected residents, including those eligible for Voluntary Purchase Scheme

Highlight sustainability outcomes and tree planting opportunities

Strengthen community partnerships and support through community grants



Construction at Lower Plenty Road

## Maintain trust

Program focus for 2025

Do what we say we're going to do. Coordinate interfacing works and communications to reinforce 'one program'. Continue to support the community and stakeholders during major works, managing construction and consultation fatigue. Reinforce how community input throughout the life of the program has shaped the design outcome, and how it continues to shape the construction methodology.

Highlight tunnel boring machine launches and break-throughs

Show progress below and above ground – reiterating achievements to date

Acknowledge that construction can be disruptive and the program team's ongoing commitment to early and respectful communication

Acknowledge mitigation measures in place to continue managing dust, noise and vibration

Involve community in open space planning

Communicate road disruptions in and around the M80 Ring Road and Eastern Freeway

Highlight any community legacy initiatives underway or completed

Continue to support impacted communities with grants program

## Reinforce benefits

Program focus for 2026

Celebrate the completion of major tunnelling works and highlight ongoing fit out works. Highlight significant progress on M80 Ring Road Completion and Eastern Freeway upgrades and communicate program benefits realised early.



Start to educate the community and stakeholders about tunnel fit-out and commissioning activities

Continue to provide meaningful construction communications and support to those still impacted by works

Communicate disruptions to road users for M80 Ring Road Completion and Eastern Freeway upgrades

Highlight urban design and environmental outcomes

Reiterate program timing, milestones and next steps

Ongoing community grants and legacy projects

## Phase Four

### Completion and ongoing management

In this phase, we'll be preparing to open the North East Link Tunnels, educating motorists on how to travel on North East Link and involving the community in the final phases of construction, such as reinstatement and creation of open space. We'll share more details around the state-owned company that has been set up to collect tolls from the North East Link Tunnels with toll revenue going to the cost of building and maintaining North East Link upon completion.

## Educate

Program focus for 2027

Educate drivers and communities about how they will travel around Melbourne (including multimodal solutions) after North East Link is open.

Start to support the transition from major works delivery to operation of the tunnels and road network

Communicate tunnel planning and testing, ventilation system and emergency management for safe tunnel operations

Install and commission smart technology to optimise network operations and driver experience

Community grants achieving \$10 million spend and benefits realised

Major construction complete for M80 Ring Road upgrades and Eastern Freeway upgrades

Highlight connectivity with broader transport network

Highlight reinstated parks and landscaping

Involve community in landscaping and planting

Reinstate Winsor Reserve based on community input



## Celebrate

Program focus for 2028

Celebrate North East Link opening and thank communities and stakeholders for their involvement and patience during construction.

Finishing and reinstatement works in preparation to open tunnels and new freeway sections

Driver education and safety

Improvements to buses, bikes, parking and feeder roads

Open green spaces

Tunnel operations and maintenance (including tolling model, graffiti removal, emergency management etc.)

Job creation and program legacy projects

Thank community for patience during construction

Acknowledge the program achievements and contribution to the community

Final community liaison group meetings, including lessons learned for future projects



## 2.4 Guided by industry standards

Our approach to communications and community engagement has been developed based on two recognised industry frameworks.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum is a key tool for establishing an effective stakeholder engagement strategy. IAP2 is the internationally recognised organisation for advancing public involvement and participation in government programs and services. Australian government departments, at all levels, use IAP2 as the industry guideline for community engagement.

Many Victorian Government departments and agencies also refer to the Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) Public Participation and Community Engagement Guide in addition to referencing the IAP2 spectrum to decide how to work with program stakeholders. This Strategy also considers those principles.

Inform and educate	Consult	Involve	Collaborate
<b>Goal</b>			
To provide the community and stakeholders with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the issues, alternatives and opportunities.	To obtain community and stakeholder feedback on options and/or decisions.	To work directly with the community and stakeholders throughout the process to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the community and stakeholders in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.
<b>Promise to the community and stakeholders</b>			
We will keep you informed and provide you with tailored information for you to better understand key concepts.	Your voice will be heard. We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge your concerns and provide feedback on how stakeholder input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns, and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how stakeholder input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.

The North East Link Program has expanded the first level of engagement from 'inform' to 'inform and educate'. This recognises that all written materials need to assist in building capacity of the community and stakeholders to understand the program concepts, timing and rationale, and potential impacts on them.

## 2.5 Engagement tools and methods

Construction of the program is taking place in built-up urban areas, near homes and businesses. We are committed to ensuring all interested stakeholders, communities and property owners can easily access the information that they need to engage meaningfully on the program.

North East Link construction will involve a range of impacts to traffic and access at times, in addition to other impacts from large-scale infrastructure construction such as vegetation removal, noise, vibration and dust.

Our approach is to:

- Reach a diverse range of stakeholders through a number of direct and online activities and tools
- Consult with culturally and linguistically diverse, religious and minority groups to identify key cultural groups and hard to reach communities

- Develop high-quality visual materials to demonstrate program works, including maps, videos, photos, animations and information graphics to increase understanding of the complex engineering and construction aspects.

To support this approach, we'll use a variety of engagement tools and channels. Continuing to tailor our communications approach based on community and stakeholder feedback and looking for new and innovative ways to provide information, seek feedback and resolve issues.

## Communication and engagement tools (A to Z)

### 3D fly-through animations

Lifelike animations will be developed and released via the Program website and NELP social media pages at various points of the program to convey complex technical information, visually communicate the project boundary and corridor, and other key aspects of the program.

### Accessibility service

For people who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment, accessibility services are available through National Relay Service on **1800 555 630**.

### Advertising

Print, online and TV and radio advertisements will be used to notify the community prior to the start of construction, to provide updates on construction activity, future disruptions, notify of upcoming community engagement events and announce program milestones.

### Community email address

An email address has been established to give stakeholders access to the program team and enquire about the program – [community@northeastlink.vic.gov.au](mailto:community@northeastlink.vic.gov.au). All communication materials will include this email address, and correspondence will be recorded in accordance with privacy requirements.

### Community information line

The program will use MTIA's 'Big Build' phone number **1800 105 105** for people to contact the program team. Calls will be directed to a 24/7 call centre and, as appropriate, forwarded to the program team 24 hours

a day, 7 days a week. All communication materials will include this number and correspondence will be recorded in accordance with privacy standards.

### Counselling support service

A free and independent community counselling service can be accessed at any time throughout the program by residents, businesses and other community members. NELP encourages community members needing support in relation to the North East Link program to call **1300 830 687** and quote 'North East Link' to talk with qualified clinical and counselling psychologists from New View Psychology who are available to provide support on a strictly confidential basis.

### Door knocks

Door knocking will take place across the program alignment with residents, businesses, schools and early learning centres, aged care facilities, places of worship and other relevant groups who may be temporarily impacted by program works.

### Electronic Direct Mail (EDM)

Email updates/enewsletters will be sent to the NELP subscription list throughout the program and feature construction updates, road and other transport network changes, community events and program news. Subscriptions are encouraged through the Program website and are at the discretion of each user/stakeholder to sign-up. EDMs will also be used on a weekly basis to send works notifications emails to specific areas of the program.

### Engage Victoria website

Engage Victoria is the Victorian Government's Online Consultation platform and provides a range of tools to enable the community to readily share their ideas and opinions regarding issues, topics and projects across the state. NELP has a dedicated Engage Victoria page that is coordinated under Victoria's Big Build which represents MTIA projects. Information regarding engagement sessions and activities will be available via Victoria's Big Build.

### Fact sheets

Fact sheets will be used as required to explain key aspects of the program to the community and stakeholders. Copies of the fact sheets will be posted on the website so that an archive of reference material can be accessed by the community throughout the program. Fact sheets will also be mailed to designated areas in the program at various phases of the program.

### Information sessions

A range of public information sessions will be delivered, ranging from informal pop-ups to advertised sessions at local venues, and attendance at community festivals and events. These sessions will be designed to provide members of the public with the opportunity to talk with members of the program team and view information on program activities.

### Media

NELP will work proactively with print, TV, radio, online metropolitan and local media outlets, and CALD publications to distribute media releases communicating program milestones, program progress, disruptions and other newsworthy information. NELP will also provide timely media responses to media enquiries and work to provide appropriate spokespeople as required.

### Meetings with individuals or community groups

Briefings will be held with key interest groups or individuals to help secure support for the program or address issues. These meetings will also be used to consult with directly impacted residents and businesses.

### Phone calls and briefing meetings with directly impacted residents and businesses

NELP will meet one-on-one with residents and businesses who will be acquired or highly impacted during early works and major construction. These meetings will be held on an 'as required' basis with each impacted resident/business to ensure appropriate mitigation strategies can be delivered.

### Postal address

NELP will maintain a postal address throughout the duration of the program for residents and stakeholders to submit feedback.

### Photography

NELP will proactively release photography of construction activities throughout the program to showcase progress and visually display the transformation of key sites within the program boundary. Time lapse photography will also be shared on NELP's social media pages to document progress.

### Site tours and visits

Site visits may be used, where appropriate, to inform stakeholders about the progress of the program and any key milestones or activities taking place.

### Signage

Program signage, barriers, roadside signage and hoarding displays will be installed at key sections of the program corridor that are visible to the community and road users. This signage will have a dual purpose to display important messages about the program and protect community and road users from the program areas.

### SMS notifications

As construction progresses, SMS notifications will be used to provide time-critical, program-related information. SMS notifications are intended to supplement, not replace, email alerts or notifications. Stakeholders will be offered the opportunity to register to receive these updates via public materials produced for the program.

### Social media

NELP has dedicated Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn pages which will be used to proactively provide updates to the community on construction milestones and potential disruptions. These channels are also a medium for the community to engage with the program directly and manage feedback and complaints.

Social media will also be used to advertise information sessions and events and share information to targeted suburbs within the program boundary at various stages of the program where works or disruptions are concentrated at specified times. In addition to NELP social media pages, program milestones and announcements will also be published on the Transport Infrastructure social media channels and respective local members of parliament.

### 'Sorry we missed you' cards

'Sorry we missed you' cards will be left at properties if we have door-knocked residents and businesses and no one was home. Cards will include the reason for the door-knock – e.g. access, out of hours work, impact to property and contact information.

### Stakeholder meetings

Stakeholder meetings will be used to discuss program activities including work in progress, upcoming work or any issues in connection with the activities. Meetings will also be used to discuss the potential impacts of the program and, where relevant, mitigation strategies to offset impacts.

### Translation service

NELP will publish details of a translation service for languages other than English on all printed materials and on the 'Contact' page of the NELP website. Interpreter services are also available on (03) 9679 9896.

### Video

NELP will release progress videos of construction throughout the program and include on the ground footage of works, informational graphics and time lapse footage where possible. The videos will be hosted on the Program website and via NELP's social media pages. NELP will also look to develop videos with program experts to explain key concepts and technical information.

### Video conferencing

Where face-to-face engagement is not possible, video and conferencing platforms including Skype and Zoom should be used to engage with residents and stakeholders.

### Visitor Information Centre (Hub)

A visitor information centre at 17 Watsonia Road, Watsonia has been established at the northern end of the program alignment to support the program and provide a location for the community to view information and talk directly with program team members about North East Link, including design features, construction activities, and timing and program benefits. The centre is open from Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm.

### Website

A program website, [northeastlink.vic.gov.au](http://northeastlink.vic.gov.au) has been in operation since 2016 and will be maintained throughout the duration of the program. The website will be a repository of key program information and milestones and will host fact sheets, works notifications and other key documents and frameworks relating to the environment.

### Works notifications letters

Notifications of construction activities will be developed and distributed to resident and business mailboxes within (but not limited to) a 150-metre radius of intended works. Notifications will be distributed five to seven days prior to works commencing and include key information regarding scope, location and hours of work, duration of activity, type of equipment to be used, likely impacts including noise, vibration, traffic, access and dust, noise attenuation used to minimise noise, and program contact information. Works notifications will also be published on the NELP website and in weekly EDMs to the program's subscriptions list.



## 2.6 Liaising with directly impacted residents, property owners and businesses

Direct, personal and frequent communications and engagement with residents and businesses near construction is a key priority for us and our contractors. We have completed a formal acquisition process of some homes and businesses and continue to work closely with eligible residents on a Voluntary Purchase Scheme.

In addition to this, some residents may experience extended impacts during the construction phase, of North East Link. It is critical to establish productive, trusted relationships with these highly impacted stakeholders as early as possible and to ensure information provided is timely and transparent.

A key focus of relationship development is to build a strong rapport with these stakeholders, involving them on the program journey and seeking meaningful input on construction impacts and, where relevant, participation in engagement to help revitalise and reinstate areas post construction.

Our approach is to:

- Provide a dedicated communications or landowner engagement lead for key zones so heavily impacted residents have a consistent 'go to' person or team

- Establish a program of formal and informal interactions with residents to build relationships and trust, while providing an opportunity to share feedback on construction activities and associated impacts

- Ensure a consistent approach to respite and relocation.



Clay manufacturing in operation at Manningham worksite

# 3 Stakeholder engagement

## 3.1 Stakeholder identification and analysis

North East Link is of interest to a broad range of stakeholders across the large program area and the broader Melbourne and Victorian community.

Identifying interested stakeholders and community groups began during the preparation of the business case and continued through the extensive Environment Effects Statement (EES) engagement process. The program boundary extends from the north of the M80 Ring Road Greensborough bypass through to the south at Bulleen Road and along the Eastern Freeway from Hoddle Street to Springvale Road.

The defined stakeholder groups represent broad categories of potentially impacted and interested groups within the program boundary. Detailed knowledge and analysis of how these groups are likely to be impacted by various aspects of the program will help build awareness of their relationship and sentiment towards the program and informs effective ways to communicate and engage with them.

Interactions with key stakeholders are recorded in a centralised stakeholder relationship management platform to ensure coordinated communications and engagement. Enquiries and complaints are also managed through this tool which is explained further in Section 5.6.

**Depending on delivery stage and other circumstances, stakeholder groups may change and evolve, and different approaches may be required to support engagement with impacted and interested groups.**

## 3.2 Stakeholder groups

Stakeholder groups	Impacts	Interests	Engagement methods
Associations and Peak Bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members may be affected by construction activities</li> <li>Shape broader public discussion about the program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program impacts and benefits related to member bodies</li> <li>Growing influence and economic development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Direct email</li> <li>Briefings</li> <li>Face-to-face meetings</li> <li>Program newsletters and EDMs</li> <li>Program website</li> </ul>
Business and Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential disruption from construction activities</li> <li>Ability to influence program decision making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program impacts and benefits on business and industry</li> <li>Changes to transport network</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business Liaison Groups</li> <li>Information sessions</li> <li>Face-to-face meetings</li> <li>Program newsletters and EDMs</li> <li>Program website</li> </ul>
Community and Interest Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential disruption from construction activities</li> <li>Influence community perceptions, attitudes and behaviours toward program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program impacts and benefits related to specific areas of interest</li> <li>Opportunities to improve social inclusion and cohesion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community Liaison Groups</li> <li>Information sessions</li> <li>Pop-up sessions</li> <li>Watsonia Hub</li> <li>Program website</li> <li>Home visits</li> <li>Program newsletters and EDMs</li> </ul>
Directly affected Residents and Landowners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disruption from construction activities</li> <li>Changed access and parking conditions</li> <li>Temporary occupation/permanent land acquisition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construction management and mitigation measures</li> <li>Opportunities for local community infrastructure improvements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Face-to-face meetings</li> <li>Dedicated case management</li> <li>Phone calls</li> <li>Door knock</li> <li>Direct email communication</li> <li>Street meetings</li> <li>Information sessions</li> </ul>
Public transport users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disruption and changed travel to bus and train services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Impacts to travel routes and times</li> <li>Program timeline and future disruption impacts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advertising</li> <li>Road signage</li> <li>Direct letter</li> <li>Referral channels by bus and train providers/operators</li> <li>Social media</li> <li>Posters/fact sheets</li> </ul>
Road users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disruption from construction activities</li> <li>Detours and impacted travel times</li> <li>Changed access and parking conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Impacts to travel routes and times</li> <li>Program timeline and future disruption impacts</li> <li>Alternative methods of travel and detour routes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Road signage</li> <li>Radio and TV advertising</li> <li>Social media</li> <li>Website update</li> <li>Program newsletters and EDMs</li> </ul>
Government Entities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Direct influence over program decisions</li> <li>Responsible for planning approvals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key program milestones</li> <li>Statutory requirements are met</li> <li>Overall program delivery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Direct email</li> <li>Briefings</li> <li>Meetings</li> <li>Program website</li> </ul>



Stakeholder groups	Impacts	Interests	Engagement methods
Local Councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local planning issues resulting from construction activities</li> <li>Responsible for local permits and approvals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program benefits and impacts in municipality</li> <li>Long-term benefits and legacy of program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Direct email</li> <li>Monthly meetings</li> <li>Program website</li> <li>Social media</li> <li>Advertising</li> </ul>
Local Traders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disruption from construction activities</li> <li>Changed access and parking conditions</li> <li>Prolonged interruption threatens business viability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construction management and mitigation measures</li> <li>Opportunities for business support</li> <li>Opportunities for precinct renewal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Briefings</li> <li>Door knock</li> <li>Direct letter/email</li> <li>Information sessions</li> <li>Business group meetings</li> <li>Program website</li> <li>Social media</li> <li>Program newsletters/EDMs</li> </ul>
Sports and Recreation Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disruption to users and facilities</li> <li>Temporary occupation/permanent land acquisition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suitable replacement facilities</li> <li>Opportunities for permanent facility improvements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Direct email</li> <li>One-on-one meetings</li> <li>Program website</li> <li>Program newsletter/EDM</li> </ul>
Utility Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assets may need to be relocated or protected</li> <li>Potential impacts on asset renewal plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoiding service disruption to clients</li> <li>Opportunities for asset improvements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Direct email</li> <li>Meetings</li> <li>Program website</li> <li>Social media</li> </ul>
Vulnerable and Culturally And Logistically Diverse Groups (CALD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential disruption from construction activities</li> <li>Lack of awareness and confusion about program impacts and benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Availability of information in accessible formats</li> <li>Engagement approach tailored to specific requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Direct email/EDM</li> <li>Briefings</li> <li>NELP information published on referral channels where CALD audiences access news</li> </ul>
Traditional Owners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shape public discussion on the program</li> <li>Impact to environment and land within the program boundary</li> <li>Areas of cultural significance that could be impacted through the program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EPRs</li> <li>Construction management and mitigation measures</li> <li>Opportunities for collaboration and influence</li> <li>Avoiding culturally sensitive and significant sites</li> <li>Opportunities for precinct renewal</li> <li>Opportunities to engage the Indigenous community throughout the program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Briefings</li> <li>One-on-one meetings</li> <li>Direct email</li> </ul>
Religious and worship groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disruption from construction activities</li> <li>Changed access and parking conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construction management and mitigation measures</li> <li>Suitable replacement facilities and measures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Door knocks</li> <li>Program website</li> <li>Information sessions</li> <li>Program newsletters/EDMs</li> </ul>

### 3.3 Community Liaison Groups

Two community liaison groups (CLG) representing the North and South of the program area have been established to provide a forum for relevant community groups to engage directly with NELP during the planning, design and construction phases of the program.

These groups continue to run during construction to connect the community and relevant contractor and help the CLG share program information within their community networks.

These groups are referenced in Environmental Performance Requirement SC4.

Contracting teams working across NELP's work packages are required to attend community liaison group meetings to provide information about design and construction, and provide timely responses to questions, issues or concerns raised by the groups. They are also required to consider and incorporate feedback, where possible, from these groups into construction staging plans to mitigate construction impacts as much as possible.

### 3.4 Business Liaison Groups

North East Link has established three business liaison groups (BLGs) to represent the wide range of businesses in and around the program area. These groups provide a forum to hear about the program, exchange ideas and identify opportunities to work together.

The business liaison groups seek to understand concerns and needs of businesses and build up their resilience and preparedness for the construction. Their local perspective, particularly in relation to minimising and mitigating the impacts to businesses, are vital through the stages of construction. These groups address Environmental Performance Requirement B8.

#### Northern Business Liaison Group (NBLG) and Southern Business Liaison Group (SBLG)

The NBLG and SBLG consist of members from the business community in and around the northern and southern sections in these two respective program areas.

The liaison groups play an important role in navigating the impacts of construction activities and implementing programs to support and promote the local businesses.

#### Bulleen Industrial Zone (BIZ) Group

Representing businesses in the Bulleen Industrial Zone (BIZ), this group was actively involved through the planning and approvals phase of the program and working with North East Link as the program moved through the acquisition and relocation process. This group ensured impacted businesses and their workers had the support measures they needed throughout construction. In 2022 as acquisition was finalised and businesses had relocated, this group decided to cease operation.

### 3.5 Approach to engaging with schools

More than 40 primary and secondary schools, early learning centres (ELCs), TAFEs and universities were engaged during the initial planning phase of the program. NELP attended meetings and provided briefings to school staff, councils and groups to give parents, teachers and the wider school community information about the program of works.

With construction now well progressed across the program, project teams and our contractors regularly meet with schools closest to our work sites. Through these meetings we continue to plan and prepare for construction, including providing construction updates and seeking feedback. We also work together to understand and resolve issues as they arise, making sure school staff and students can continue to operate well as construction progresses near them.

Schools have been offered opportunities to engage students through site visits, education sessions with program specialists and TBM naming competitions. More recently, schools and pre-schools closest to major tunnelling works were offered vouchers to purchase trees from a local social enterprise nursery to help green the area as construction progresses.

We'll continue to seek more opportunities to get involved with local schools, as our works progress.

## 4 Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communications

Victoria's Multicultural Policy sets out the Victorian Government's vision to enable every Victorian to participate fully in society, remain connected to their culture and ensure we all have equal rights, protections and opportunities.

Legislation such as the Multicultural Victoria Act 2011, Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 and Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 provides a driver for ensuring inclusive communication and engagement that is accessible to all Victorians regardless of their culture or preferred language.

Projects overseen by MTIA are required to include tailored approaches that ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to receive information and participate in engagement activities regardless of where they were born or what language they speak.

NELP is required to plan and implement communication and engagement activities to reach CALD communities who are impacted (or potentially impacted) by major transport infrastructure works in Victoria through the MTIA CALD Communication and Engagement toolkit.

The toolkit comprises a CALD engagement strategy template, a series of reference sheets providing practical guidance on CALD media in Victoria, CALD audience segmentation by municipality, key sources of information about CALD audiences and how to identify and utilise CALD suppliers. The toolkit also includes case studies showcasing approaches to CALD engagement from other MTIA projects.

A CALD Engagement Strategy has been developed for the North East Link Program based on the MTIA toolkit.

### CALD engagement to date

NELP engaged Cultural and Linguistically Diverse Groups in the planning phase of the program in 2017 to ensure communities with targeted needs and hard to reach communities had the opportunity to be involved in the

selection of the program corridor and the Environment Effects Statement process.

Engagement with CALD communities was facilitated via cultural leaders in the program area, and via support agencies including Expression Australia (formerly known as VicDeaf) and Blind Citizens Australia, through Expression Australia's channels, including online and social platforms and its subscriber database, and provided Auslan interpreters at agreed displays. Community engagement activities were promoted through Blind Citizens Australia's online mailing list and teleconferences on the program were offered to interested community members.

Throughout the planning phase, materials about the program and how to get involved in the EES process were translated into the top five languages other than English in the program area: Chinese, Greek, Italian, Arabic and Farsi. Materials were also translated into other languages requested by cultural leaders including Burmese, Hindi and Macedonian. This approach continues throughout the program.

### CALD engagement approach moving forward

As was done through Early Works, NELP will continue to engage with CALD communities and cultural leaders through major construction phases of the program. Stakeholders from CALD communities who are directly impacted by construction are and will continue to be identified and NELP will ensure effective CALD communication and engagement approaches are utilised. NELP will work closely with local councils and CALD groups to inform and engage these stakeholders with important program updates and program-related opportunities such as the North East Community Fund.

NELP will use the following channels for communications and engagement:

- Translated or multilingual printed collateral such as brochures and posters placed in community spaces
- Seminars, workshops or meetings with key community leaders
- Pop-up events or information stalls in community spaces
- Sponsoring or participating in community events such as community meetings, festivals and celebrations
- Providing multilingual information in direct mail to residents
- Media relations – seeking stories in CALD newspapers and on radio
- Advertising – paid promotion in relevant CALD publications
- Taking translated information along when conducting in-person engagement via door knocking
- Social media marketing
- Online resources provide materials in languages other than English.

Where appropriate, NELP will provide Auslan interpreters at information sessions to ensure CALD communities are informed of key program information, milestones and disruptions.

NELP will continue to publish details of the translation service for languages other than English on all printed materials and on the 'Contact' page of the NELP website. Interpreter services are also available on (03) 9679 9896. The program will also continue to ensure accessibility services are provided for people who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment through the National Relay Service on **1800 555 630**.

## 5 Policies and procedures

As with all construction projects, there will be some impacts to the community including increased noise, dust or vibration. These impacts may be caused by use of heavy machinery, ongoing site activities or the removal and transport of excavated material.

NELP together with construction teams are committed to keeping the community informed and reducing the impact of early works and major construction as much as possible.

As part of the Environment Effects Statement (EES) process, a number of requirements were put in place to help manage the impacts of construction on the community and the environment. These measures are called Environmental Performance Requirements (EPR) and define the outcomes that contractors must achieve during the design, construction and ongoing operation of the program.

EPRs are one way the program and its contractors will manage the impacts of construction. Reports detailing performance and compliance with EPRs will be published every six months on the NELP website. These reports will be independently verified by an Independent Environment Auditor.

### 5.1 Disruptive works

Disruptive works may include activities that generate noise, vibration, dust or light impacts during normal construction hours or outside of normal construction hours.

Normal construction hours of work are considered to be from 7am to 6pm Monday to Friday and Saturday 7am to 1pm. Due to the complex nature of the program, some construction activities will need to be carried out outside of the above hours.

#### Works out of hours may occur due to:

- The delivery of oversized plant or structures that police or other authorities determine require special arrangements to transport along public roads
- Emergency work to avoid the loss of life or damage to property, or to prevent environmental harm
- Maintenance and repair of public infrastructure where disruption to essential services and/or considerations of worker safety do not allow work within standard hours
- Tunnelling works including mined excavation elements and the activities that are required to support tunnelling works (i.e. spoil treatment facilities)
- Road and rail occupations or works that would cause a major traffic hazard
- Other works where a contractor demonstrates and justifies a need to operate outside normal working hours and exceed the noise guideline targets such as work that once started cannot practically be stopped.

Out of hours works (also called unavoidable works) are described in Environmental Performance Requirement NV4 and will be verified by the Independent Environmental Auditor for each instance they are undertaken.

NELP will work with contractor teams to identify opportunities to reduce the impact of construction on the community and be sensitive to local roads, shopping areas, schools, places of worship and businesses.

Construction compounds will be set up near work areas to provide nearby offices and parking options to keep workers from parking on local streets and in local shopping areas. Each significant construction compound across the program must be required to be delivered in accordance with a Construction Compound Plan approved by the Minister for Planning. The Construction Compound Plan will describe all proposed activities, hours of operation, potential environmental and community impacts (including mitigation and management controls) associated with their construction and operation.



## 5.2 Notifying the community of works

Written and online notifications will be provided to residents, businesses, schools, community and sporting groups, cyclists and public transport users ten days prior to activities that may cause disruption.

Events that may trigger a notification include new construction activities, traffic disruptions, temporary detours, night works, noisy works, property access restrictions and temporary changes or disruptions to public transport routes.

Works notifications will include:

- a full description of the relevant works;
- the times and durations of the relevant disruptions;
- the expected impact of the works on their properties or access;
- alternative access arrangements; and
- North East Link Program contact details, including the North East Link Program Information Line, **1800 105 105**, social media accounts, translations service telephone number and website;

Works notifications will be distributed via a number of methods including:

**Mail:** hard copy works notifications letters will be mailed to impacted residents and stakeholders.

**Email:** an electronic works notification will be sent to impacted residents and stakeholders who have subscribed to NELP's database.

**Website:** a copy of an electronic works notification will be posted on the NELP website.

**EDM:** an email newsletter will be sent to the NELP subscriber database.

**Information hubs:** hard copy works notifications will be available at the Watsonia Hub, 17 Watsonia Road, Watsonia.

**A record of all works notifications distributed to the community and/or stakeholders will be recorded in the stakeholder management database, Consultation Manager.**

## 5.3 Managing noise, vibration, dust and light impacts during construction

The program will adhere to EPR NV4 Construction Noise and Vibration Management Plan which requires implementation of a Construction, Noise and Vibration Management Plan to minimise the impacts of noise and vibration as a result of construction works. As required in EPR NV4 a Construction Noise and Vibration Management Plan will be implemented which will include noise and vibration management levels and mitigation measures.

Noise modelling will be completed in accordance with approval requirements to determine potential impacts to residents and nearby stakeholders. When works begin, noise control equipment may be used to measure and monitor sound from machinery and tools to ensure EPR compliance.

In instances where noise exceeds target levels, measures such as noise blankets could be put in place to mitigate.

Dust resulting from the removal of soil and transit of construction materials will be managed using a number of mitigations including, but not limited to:

- water suppression through the use water carts and hoses
- covering of dirt loads on trucks when transporting excavated material
- rumble grills on roads to remove dirt from tyres and reduce the transfer of dirt on local roads; and
- other dust suppressants.

Where works are required to be carried out at night, construction lighting is used so work can be performed safely. Pre-construction planning will be undertaken to ensure that the potential for light spill into nearby properties, particularly residential properties, is minimised (as required by EPR LV3).

## 5.4 Managing disruptions

Due to the large-scale nature of work, traffic conditions will be significantly impacted throughout major construction. We'll work closely with VicRoads, local councils and public transport operators to ensure there is a coordinated approach to managing disruptions across the network, including impacts from other major projects in construction. Robust traffic management planning and high levels of communication will be required to ensure road users and the local community are informed of traffic impacts, and are able to make clear travel choices accordingly.

A Traffic Management Liaison Group (TMLG) has been formed to coordinate and reduce traffic impacts for each construction activity throughout the program in order to meet the requirements of EPR T3. The TMLG is chaired by NELP and consists of key transport agencies, relevant local councils, emergency services agencies, other MTIA projects as required and the program's contractor teams.

The TMLG recommends alternatives and mitigation measures to contracting teams to investigate and implement so works can be scheduled at times when they will have the least impact, lane closures and road closures are avoided and detours minimised.

Our approach for highly disruptive works is to:

- Provide variable message signs in advance of the works to notify traffic
- Provide advance notification of traffic impacts

- Use radio/online and other available advertisements for public information
- Provide a letter or email advising of the traffic impact to all relevant stakeholders, including but not limited to road users, residents, businesses, schools, community groups, municipal council/s, road user groups, public transport operators and other affected individuals
- Provide information on the program website and on social media channels
- Liaise and coordinate with responsible authorities for any adjacent works
- Undertake face-to-face communication with highly impacted individuals, whose concerns will be taken into account and addressed wherever possible.

## 5.5 Incident and emergency communications

In the event of an incident or emergency related to the program, a range of tools and communications channels will be used to inform the community and stakeholders as appropriate.

Every effort will be made to provide this information as quickly (within hours) and accurately as possible in coordination with emergency services, State Government agencies, local councils and other key stakeholders as appropriate.

Depending on the severity of the incident, the following notifications methods could be employed: SMS, phone call, email notification or EDM, direct door knock, website and social media update, radio message or other.

## 5.6 Complaints

In accordance with AS/NZS 10002-2014 Guidelines for Complaint Management in organisations, Consultation Manager, an online stakeholder management system will be used as the register for all complaints and enquiries received by residents and stakeholders.

Consultation Manager will be used by NELP personnel and contractor staff who interact with residents and stakeholders.

### We take a three-tiered approach to complaint handling, as follows:

1. Frontline resolution: frontline staff receive the complaint, assess it, and resolve it immediately, if possible.
2. Investigation, if required: if frontline staff cannot resolve the complaint, they will refer it to an officer for investigation.
3. Internal review, if required: if the complainant is not satisfied with the process or outcome of the frontline resolution and/or investigation, they can request an internal review.

### Each enquiry of complaint entry might typically include the following information:

**Event type:** Enquiry or Complaint

**Event date:** the date/time the enquiry/complaint was received

**Origination:** where the enquiry/complaint was received

**Stakeholder comments:** details of the enquiry/complaint

**Response:** details of any actions undertaken or proposed

Information collected for the purpose of resolving enquiries and complaints is subject to the *Information Privacy Act 2000* (Vic).

Records, comments and other information stored in the stakeholder management system will not be publicly available without the written consent of the individuals concerned. NELP and contractor teams will take reasonable steps to make sure individuals' personal information is accurate, complete and up to date.

The enquiries and complaints handling process is in line with the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority (MTIA) complaints management framework for all major transport projects, and will be monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis for effectiveness and amended as appropriate.

### Methods for making enquiries and complaints are available on the NELP website and can be made via:

- Direct mail to North East Link Program, GPO Box 2392, Melbourne VIC 3001
- A direct message on social media via NELP's Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn pages
- In person at Watsonia Hub, 17 Watsonia Road, Watsonia, Monday to Friday between 10am and 5pm
- Contact our call centre on **1800 105 105** or emailing **community@northeastlink.vic.gov.au**
- Post a question via the Engage Victoria website on the dedicated North East Link Program page: **engage.vic.gov.au/north-east-link**
- For people who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment, accessibility services are available through National Relay Service on 1800 555 630
- For Languages Other Than English (LOTE), interpreter services are available on (03) 9679 9896.

Where enquiries and complaints are received by NELP from the referral of other government agencies, NELP will work with the referral agency to provide an appropriate response within a timely manner.

## 6 Evaluation

The Communications and Engagement team, together with program teams across NELP and contracting teams, will review performance on a quarterly basis through a combination of methods.

Regular discussions with local stakeholders.

Review of local community feedback to improve communications and engagement approaches.

Analysis of digital channels e.g. visits to the NELP website, enquiries to call centre, visits to Watsonia Hub, engagement of social media channels including likes, comments, shares and views.

Annual information sharing meeting with other MTIA projects.

North East Link will also be evaluated and audited by the Independent Environment Auditor (IEA) through all phases of the program to ensure compliance with Environmental Performance Requirements (EPRs) and mitigation approaches as required by the Environmental Management Framework. This will include six monthly summary reports released by the IEA and published on the NELP website.

Where opportunities to improve are identified or new tools and technologies are introduced in the external market, NELP will work proactively to pursue and utilise to deliver best practice communications and engagement throughout the program.

## Appendix

More information can be found in the relevant publications via the links below

[Planning, Environmental Effects Statement, Stakeholder Consultation Report](#)

[Complaints Handling Policy](#)





Artist's impression of southern tunnel portal, tunnel ventilation structure and Yarra Link green bridge, Bulleen

[northeastlink.vic.gov.au](http://northeastlink.vic.gov.au)

1800 105 105 (call anytime)

[community@northeastlink.vic.gov.au](mailto:community@northeastlink.vic.gov.au)



For languages other than English please call 9209 0147

 @nelpvic

Please contact us if you would like this information in an accessible format. If you need assistance due to a hearing or speech impairment, visit [relayservice.gov.au](http://relayservice.gov.au)

