

Alignment with Yarra River Protection

(Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act 2017

BIG BUILD
EASTERN FREEWAY



Artist's impression - Walking and cycling bridge over the Birrarung, Kew

The Eastern Freeway Upgrades from Hoddle Street to Burke Road is committed to the protection of the Yarra River (Birrarung). One of the ways we are doing this is aligning our project design with the Yarra protection principles in the Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act 2017.

About the Yarra River Protection Act

The Yarra River (Birrarung) is of great importance to Melbourne and Victoria. The Yarra River Protection Act recognises the intrinsic connection of the traditional owners to the Yarra River and its Country and further recognises them as the custodians of the land and waterway which they call Birrarung. The Act safeguards the Birrarung and its surrounding lands for future generations. It recognises the Birrarung and its environs as a single, living and integrated natural entity. It also aligns broader environmental and cultural goals, promoting sustainable development and community stewardship.

Part 2 of the Act outlines the Yarra protection principles that serve as the basis for planning, decision-making and management activities affecting the Yarra River and its environs. These principles are designed to ensure the river's long-term health, cultural integrity and community value.

To read the full Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act 2017, please visit www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/yarra-river-protection-wilip-gin-birrarung-murrn-act-2017/005.

Alignment with the Yarra protection principles

This fact sheet provides information about how the Urban Design and Landscape Plan for the Eastern Freeway Upgrades from Hoddle Street to Burke Road supports and aligns with the Yarra protection principles.

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General Principles

(1) Proposed development and decision-making should be based on the effective integration of environmental, social and cultural considerations in order to improve public health and wellbeing and environmental benefit.

The design response has been collaboratively developed by a multidisciplinary, integrated Project team of urban and landscape designers, architects, engineers, planners and environment, heritage and sustainability specialists. Environmental, social and cultural considerations have been central to the collaborative design response, as follows:

- The new shared use path (SUP) bridge over the Yarra River provides an iconic landmark design for the freeway that expresses Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural themes, enhances road and SUP user experiences and minimises environmental impacts by locating piers out of the waterway with minimal disturbance to riverbank vegetation.
- The construction methodology and staging have been integrated early in the design solution to ensure infrastructure can be built safely and efficiently and minimise impacts on traffic, community and the environment during construction and in its permanent form. The design of the Eastern Busway bridge at the Chandler Highway interchange demonstrates this approach, with a significant reduction in the number of girders to be constructed to minimise crane lifts and associated disruption to road users.
- Low-carbon, recycled and reclaimed materials have been identified and incorporated into the design where appropriate and will be explored further in subsequent design phases. This includes coatings using low volatile organic compounds, energy-efficient lighting and durable, low-maintenance materials and finishes.

(2) Decision-makers should take into account the best practicably available information about the potential impacts of climate change so as to avoid, so far as possible, serious or irreversible damage resulting from climate change.

Environmental sustainability is embedded into the design response through an integrated design process that ensures sustainability requirements, targets, and opportunities are identified and incorporated across the North East Link Program. A Sustainability Design Brief is being used to communicate and develop the design response across the North East Link Program and includes sustainability targets and requirements relating to carbon reduction, life cycle impacts, Recycled First targets, integrated water management, resilience and ecology. Specific to this UDLP, potential impacts of climate change are addressed through the following:

- All materials and systems comply with necessary warranties and are designed to withstand the natural conditions of their context.
- Landscapes are being designed to support a resilient outcome from new ecosystems that are better able to manage flood events, such as around the banks of the Birrarung, to landscapes that expand over time, such as the batters planted with species that self-colonise and thrive in harsh conditions.
- Flood modelling includes consideration of climate change rainfall intensity to ensure the design responds to both current and future anticipated rainfall events; this is reflected in the design of the Project's flood protection measures.
- The Project's drainage design has incorporated impacts of climate change by factoring in the rainfall data. This provides a considered design approach which address the current and future conditions. The drainage design also seeks to improve water quality from the Project runoff through the implementation of bioretention systems.
- The Project considers increasing temperatures and heatwaves by reducing urban heat island impacts with shading and low absorption, light coloured materials.
- Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung peoples' knowledge of managing bushfire risk will inform vegetation species selection.
- Energy and greenhouse gas emissions are being reduced through a construction decarbonisation strategy that includes electrification of a proportion of construction plant and equipment, use of alternative fuels, purchase of renewable energy for all construction electricity and optimisation of the proposed construction methodology.

In addition to retention of existing significant vegetation and trees wherever possible, the design includes the new landscaping to complement these. New planting will include indigenous and native species of plants with the specific purpose of adding resilience to the habitat and biodiversity value of the corridor.

(3) Decision-makers should take into account the impact of any individual action or policy on public health and wellbeing and seek to ensure that public health and wellbeing is enhanced by the action or policy.

Public health and wellbeing are central to this UDLP, as follows:

- Prioritising universal access by carefully considering the location of pathways, ramps and access to both the road and SUP along the network.
- The Project includes a new and upgraded SUP and linkages along and across the corridor to make it easier, safer and faster for communities to access services and facilities through active or public transport.
- The proposed walking and cycling networks are integrated with existing infrastructure and link into adjacent connections to facilitate growing community demand for safer, more attractive and efficient walking and cycling paths.

Yarra protection principle

Urban Design Landscape Plan alignment

(4) Each generation should ensure that the environmental, social and cultural benefits that have been acquired are maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations.

This UDLP addresses the environmental, social and cultural benefits as follows:

- The design approach seeks to protect, enhance and maintain the Indigenous and non-Indigenous identity and sense of place embedded in the land along the interface to the Eastern Freeway, including the modernist architecture, rock escarpments and the naturalistic setting of the Birrarung, Yarra Bend Park, golf courses and mature trees. This is done through compliance with the Project's Cultural Heritage Management Plan and by avoiding vegetation removal where possible and preserving the existing cultural features.
- The landscape response improves the quality, amenity and character of the peripheral areas of the Project and areas either side of the SUP through planted areas, which will be selected in consultation with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWCHAC). Retention of existing habitat and biodiversity is achieved where possible by strategically aligning the SUP to minimise impact, and similarly the design of the SUP bridge. The proposed landscaping has the effect of celebrating the valued landscape character while simultaneously improving and extending biodiversity, ecological and habitat values.
- The SUP and surrounds at Yarra Bend Park has a site-specific design response, which seeks to minimise the area of disturbance, including by the redesign of the SUP bridge piers to minimise impacts on the Birrarung. The development of the bridge also provides the opportunity to imbue themes of Country into its function, symbology and design and to enhance Country through new plantings within the Project area where the land would be disturbed by the construction phase.
- A co-design process is being undertaken in parallel with the preparation of this UDLP. The Project will be working with the WWCHAC to further develop meaningful and innovative ways to represent Indigenous cultural themes and living culture into the design.

5) Protection of the environment and delivery of sustainable development is a responsibility shared by all levels of government, industry, business, communities and the people of Victoria.

As outlined in Principle 2, the protection of environment and sustainability are considered at a broader level across the North East Link Program and through a Project-specific design response. The North East Link Program has gone through a rigorous Environment Effects Statement (EES) process, including the preparation and endorsement of an Environmental Management Framework (EMF) and Urban Design Strategy (UDS). This process has included involvement from all levels of government, industry, business, communities and the people of Victoria.



Environmental Principles

(1) If there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation or for failing to assess the risk-weighted consequences of the options.

(2) Environmental practices and procedures should ensure that biodiversity and ecological integrity is maintained or enhanced in ways that are proportionate to the significance of the environmental risks and consequences being addressed.

(3) If approaches to managing environmental impacts on one segment of the environment have potential impacts on another segment, the best practicable environmental outcome should be sought.

The North East Link Program through the EES process has had regard to the precautionary principle and mindfully weighed up the impacts on the environment. The EMF endorsed by the Minister for Planning for the North East Link Program provides a transparent framework to manage environmental effects to meet statutory requirements, protect environmental values and sustain stakeholder confidence. The EMF includes Environmental Performance Requirements (EPRs), which are a suite of performance-based environmental standards and outcomes that apply to the design, construction and operation of the North East Link Program.

The Sustainability Design Brief used to communicate and develop the design response across the North East Link Program includes sustainability targets and requirements relating to ecology.

The design response presented in the UDLP includes new landscaping in addition to the retention of existing significant vegetation and trees where feasible. New planting will include indigenous and native species of plants with the specific purpose of adding resilience to the habitat and biodiversity value of the corridor. This approach ensures sustainable use of resources in that species are robust for the current and future climate conditions and require minimal in terms of labour and water use for ongoing maintenance, once established. Additionally, areas where there is new or enhanced planting inherently provides more connected habitat links within the area, extending existing areas or filling in gaps where they exist.

The EPRs protect biodiversity and ecological integrity, as follows:

- EPR FF1, the Project has designed the freeway upgrade, new noise walls and new SUP to avoid and minimise impacts to native fauna and flora to the extent feasible
- EPR FF2, the Project will offset the removal of native vegetation
- EPR FF3, the construction methodology includes the preparation of a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) to avoid the introduction and spread of weeds and pathogens
- EPR FF4, the Project avoids and minimises adverse impacts on the riparian, riverbed and aquatic habitat in waterways to the extent feasible by designing the SUP bridge to minimise the impact on the Birrarung and avoiding the creation of new haul routes around the Birrarung during the construction phase where possible
- EPR FF5, by obtaining permits required under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 prior to the commencement of construction where applicable
- EPR FF6, by implementing a Groundwater Dependent Ecosystem Monitoring and Mitigation Plan to avoid or minimise adverse effects on groundwater and groundwater-related receptors, including groundwater dependent ecosystems
- EPR FF7, by avoiding the removal of Matted Flax-lily (there were no Matted Flax-lily found within this UDLP during the EES and subsequent investigations)
- EPR FF8, by minimising intense noise and vibration near the Australian Grayling during critical migration or breeding periods as described in the Construction Noise and Vibration Management Plan (CNVMP)
- EPR FF9, by monitoring works in proximity to existing waterbodies that are modified for drainage purposes to avoid impacts to waterbirds as described in the CEMP
- EPR FF10, by avoiding the removal of Studley Park Gums within the extents of this UDLP (there were no Studley Park Gums identified in the EES and subsequent investigations).

This UDLP adopts a holistic and integrated approach to environmental management.

Yarra protection principle

Urban Design Landscape Plan alignment

(4) There should be a net gain for the environment in the area of Yarra River land arising out of any individual action or policy that has an environmental impact on Yarra River land.

The Project will provide a net gain for the environment in the area of Birrarung land through the following:

- As part of the North East Link Program, each Studley Park Gum tree removed will be replaced by two new gums to ensure an increase in the local population. To ensure the 2:1 replacement goal will be met, the North East Link Program will plant and carefully monitor for up to 10 years more than 300 juvenile trees. Three sites for the Studley Park Gum planting program are located along the banks of the Yarra River at Westerfolds Park in Templestowe and Montpelier Reserve in Lower Plenty
- A proposed planting palette that includes indigenous and native plantings that would have naturally occurred in the Birrarung environs to bolster biodiversity, extend habitat and food sources for native wildlife.
- The design of the SUP bridge is reflective of the natural context in which it sits. The open steel truss, slender piers and an open stainless-steel tensile mesh protection screen keep the bridge light and transparent. The design approach maintains views through to the Birrarung's valley and tree canopy for pedestrian, cyclists and motorists
- Avoiding impacts on the designated habitat of the Grey-headed Flying-fox colony situated to the south of the Eastern Freeway in Yarra Bend Park.



Social Principles

(1) The existing amenity of Yarra River land, including its natural features, character and appearance, should be protected and enhanced for the benefit of the whole community.

The existing amenity of the Birrarung (Yarra River) land is protected and enhanced for the benefit of the whole community through the following:

- A proposed planting palette that includes indigenous and native plant species to the Birrarung environs to bolster biodiversity, extend habitat and food sources for native wildlife. Stormwater runoff will be filtered before the water enters the Birrarung and other waterways
- New and upgraded cycling and walking connections along the Project alignment provide for new opportunities for the community to visit and enjoy these recreational and habitat areas
- A proposed planting palette that includes indigenous and native plant species to the Birrarung environs to bolster biodiversity, extend habitat and food sources for native wildlife
- The design of the SUP bridge is reflective of the natural context in which it sits. The open steel truss, slender piers and an open stainless-steel tensile mesh protection screen keep the bridge light and transparent. The design approach maintains views through to the Birrarung's valley and tree canopy for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists
- Avoiding impacts on the designated habitat of the Grey-headed Flying-fox colony situated to the south of the Eastern Freeway in Yarra Bend Park.

(2) Community consultation and participation should play an essential and effective role in the protection, improvement and promotion of Yarra River land.

Community consultation for this UDLP prior to and after public exhibition includes:

- Engagement with public authorities, Councils, the Urban Design Advisory Panel and the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation
- Advertising through print and digital channels including social media, letterbox drops and door knocks
- Community information events, with locations and dates promoted through local channels
- Supporting material including information on the project website bigbuild.vic.gov.au/projects/roads/eastern-freeway-upgrades, an interactive online map, facts sheets and artist impressions.

The UDLP is available for public exhibition and comment for a period of 21 days from 27 October 2025. A Consultation Summary Report addressing written comments received during public exhibition and responses to issues raised will be provided to the Minister for Planning at the time of final UDLP submission.

Following the Minister for Planning's decision on this UDLP, the Project will report back to stakeholders and the community about how issues and opportunities raised through the public exhibition process were considered, including where changes were made to the UDLP.

Engagement with stakeholders and the community will continue throughout the life of the Project to keep people informed of its progress and to ensure community and stakeholder priorities, concerns and opportunities are considered and responded to in a timely and transparent way.



Recreational Principles

(1) Community access to, and use and enjoyment of, Yarra River land should be protected and enhanced through the design and management of public open space for compatible multiple uses that optimise community benefit.

The provision of a new and upgraded SUP along the Eastern Freeway alignment will provide an efficient, safe and visually interesting active transport link. In particular, the provision of a SUP crossing of the Birrarung, as well as under Chandler Highway and Burke Road, will provide substantial benefits by improving walking and cycling connectivity to and through Yarra River parklands and the Main Yarra Trail.

New built elements on Birrarung (Yarra River) land, while respectful and fitting to place, are memorable and distinctive. For instance, the SUP bridge is a unique crossing of the Birrarung (Yarra River), delivering an engaging experience for pedestrians and cyclists. It is also a distinctive wayfinding event and a vibrant element along the journey.

Further west of the SUP bridge is Yarra Bend Park, where secondary paths at the existing River Circuit Trail and enhancements to public open space have been incorporated into the design to provide enhanced safety, function and enjoyment.

(2) Public open space should be used for recreational and community purposes that are within the capacity of that space, in order to sustain natural processes and not diminish the potential of that open space to meet the long-term aspirations of the community

The importance and prominence of public open space is integral to the design response proposed through this UDLP.

The SUP through Yarra Bend Park, including the SUP bridge, improves access to public open space and provides a new route for walkers and cyclists through this culturally significant park. Upgrades to the existing River Circuit Trail at Fairlea Reserve will further contribute to the enhanced function of public open space at the interface with the Project.

The proposed SUP also provides enhanced access to public open space east of Yarra Bend Park, including new connections to the Main Yarra Trail east of Chandler Highway. Where the proposed freeway infrastructure and SUP adjoins key destinations for active and passive recreation, such as at Kew Golf Club, retaining walls have been provided to minimise encroachment into this area. Elsewhere within the Project retaining walls have also been utilised to minimise the extent of battering.



Cultural Principles

(1) Aboriginal cultural values, heritage and knowledge of Yarra River land should be acknowledged, reflected, protected and promoted.

The design narrative has been developed following endorsement from WWCHAC to explore appropriate cultural themes and will be refined through a careful and collaborative co-design process that is ongoing. The design is guided by the cultural perspective of Waa, the Crow, one of the two moiety ancestors in Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cosmology. Waa the Crow and Bunjil the Wedge-tailed Eagle and creator spirit are both significant figures for Victorian Aboriginal communities. Whilst Bunjil flew over a formless Country creating land, waterways and its people, Waa as his helper held responsibility as protector of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people.

The design process has involved a rigorous and respectful investigation of the landscape to identify sites with inherent physical and cultural significance. Working alongside WWCHAC representatives, including cultural knowledge holders, the co-design process has sought to understand the underlying characteristics that may have influenced patterns of use and cultural practice: geology and soils, the presence of particular species, seasonal flows of water, views to the sky (and its constellations at night), and topographic forms that may have offered shelter, gathering space, or acoustic qualities for ceremony.

Through this process, a series of sites within the Project area will be identified as places where cultural stories and practices may be meaningfully expressed or evoked. The sites for co-design interventions will be carefully chosen due to their inherent qualities to share and provide experiences that will prompt the user to understand Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung physical and spiritual connections to Country and how they may have interacted with these places.

Subject to ongoing WWCHAC co-design process, it is anticipated that the agreed-upon sites will host a range of design intervention responses. These may range from subtle to immersive, or iconic, and are intended to reveal previously unseen or unspoken aspects of Country identified as of importance to both this site and the broader Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country context.

(2) The role of the traditional owners as custodians of Yarra River land should be acknowledged through partnership, representation and involvement in policy planning and decision-making.

A co-design process is being undertaken with the WWCHAC in parallel with the preparation of the UDLP. The Project will be working with the WWCHAC to further develop meaningful and innovative ways to represent Indigenous cultural themes and living culture into the design.

Yarra protection principle

Urban Design Landscape Plan alignment

(3) The cultural diversity and heritage of post-European settlement communities should be recognised and protected as a valued contribution to the identity, amenity and use of Yarra River land.

Post-European settlement historical elements along the freeway have been retained in the design response. For example, the historic gate pillar adjacent to the Westfield Grasslands at Yarra Bend Road will be a formalised point of interest along the SUP, along with strategic tree planting and access to encourage pedestrian interaction. All but three of the existing iconic mast light poles on the Eastern Freeway west of Chandler Highway are retained and converted to LED as required, supporting wayfinding and efficient lighting for motorists along the corridor.

Necessary additions to existing bridges are geometrically sympathetic to the structures, maintain sightlines and views and minimise visual impacts. New structures adjacent to the existing bridges are complementary in form and placement.

The landscape strategy recognises and exemplifies the existing tree planting design unique to this corridor, maintaining and enhancing the tree-lined setting of the Eastern Freeway.



Management Principles

(1) There should be coordination between all levels of government and government agencies when designing policies and programs and making decisions in relation to Yarra River land.

Key Victorian Government stakeholders consulted in the development of this UDLP include Department of Transport and Planning, Melbourne Water, Heritage Victoria, Parks Victoria, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and the Office of the Victorian Government Architect. Key local government stakeholders consulted included representatives from Boroondara and Yarra Councils.

(2) When designing policies and programs, the best practicable measures available at the time should be used.

This UDLP incorporates best practicable measures to implement the UDS, meet EPRs and provide an enduring legacy from the Project.

(3) Implementation of natural resource management should aim for continuous improvement and extend beyond compliance with relevant laws and requirements.

The design response has been developed in accordance with the approved UDS, which requires that the design of the North East Link Program is of high quality and beyond compliance in order to achieve superior outcomes.

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