

Community Consultation Report

Eastern Freeway Upgrades: Burke to Tram

September 2024

BIG BUILD

EASTERN FREEWAY

**What we
heard**

**Urban Design and
Landscape Plan**



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About this report

We're upgrading the Eastern Freeway with new express lanes, new traffic management technology and Melbourne's first dedicated busway. These changes will slash travel times and improve public transport in Melbourne's east.

We'll also connect the Eastern Freeway to North East Link in Bulleen – taking 15,000 trucks a day off local roads and cutting travel times between Melbourne's north and east by 35 minutes.

From 9 to 29 October 2023, we asked the local community to share their thoughts on the Urban Design and Landscape Plan (UDLP) for the first stage of the Eastern Freeway Upgrades from Burke Road to Tram Road.

We asked for feedback on key local elements of the plan including 10km of new and upgraded walking and cycling paths, reimagined Koonung Creek parklands and wetlands as well as new noise walls to meet a tough new standard of 63 decibels during the day and 58 decibels at night – a first for a road project in Victoria.

The plan also explained how the UDLP meets strict requirements for the project design developed through community consultation for the project's Environment Effects Statement.

This report includes a summary of what we heard and how it helped further refine the UDLP, ready for major construction to start.

You can see the final Urban Design and Landscape Plan at bigbuild.vic.gov.au/projects/roads/eastern-freeway-upgrades

Community consultation timeline

2017

Deciding where to build North East Link

Understanding the traffic and transport problems North East Link needs to solve, including overhauling the Eastern Freeway and completing the M80 Ring Road in Greensborough.

10,000+
pieces of feedback

2022

Urban Design and Landscape Plan – North East Link

Showing how the final project design for North East Link meets the requirements community helped develop during the EES, and refining local elements ready for construction to start. The section of Eastern Freeway Upgrades: Burke to Tram covering the interchange with North East Link and upgrades to Koonung Creek Reserve and walking and cycling paths in Bulleen and Balwyn North was also included.

The UDLP was updated in response to community feedback and work to build North East Link is well underway.

250+
submissions

Other UDLPs

UDLPs for the remaining stages of the Eastern Freeway Upgrades from Hoddle Street to Burke Road, and Tram Road to Springvale Road, will be exhibited as we bring builders on board.

A UDLP for the upgraded Doncaster Park and Ride will be on exhibition for comment from 4 to 24 September 2024.

2018/19

Environment Effects Statement (EES)

Developing a reference design and setting requirements the final project design must meet for the Eastern Freeway Upgrades, North East Link and M80 Ring Road Completion.

3500+ **870+**
pieces of feedback submissions

2023

Urban Design and Landscape Plan – Eastern Freeway Upgrades: Burke to Tram

Showing how the Burke Road to Tram Road stage of the Eastern Freeway Upgrades meets the requirements community helped develop during the EES, and refining local elements ready for construction to start.

The UDLP covers the sections not included in the North East Link UDLP. Some further updates to improve walking and cycle paths and materials for noise walls in this area were also exhibited for comment.

130
submissions

Cover image: Artist's impression of Valda Wetlands, Mont Albert North
This page: Artist's impression of Estelle Street bridge, Bulleen
Page 1 inset: Artist's impression of upgrades to the Eastern Freeway

Engagement

Communication

How we let people know the Eastern Freeway Upgrades Burke Road to Tram Road UDLP was on exhibition

2+ million

people reached through social media and online advertising

51,000+

postcards sent to residents and businesses in the local area

4750+

letters sent to residents and businesses close to where works will be happening

10,000+

subscribers received email updates

50+

residents visited at home

3

newspaper advertisements

Engagement

Who was interested to know more about the project design and the UDLP

7000+

visits to the UDLP online

4500+

visits to the online map

140+

people came to an information drop-in and spoke with our team

8

briefings for community stakeholders

Submissions

Who made a submission

119

local residents

3

local councils

3

government agencies

4

community groups and organisations

1

resident committee

Key changes made

In response to submissions received, the UDLP now includes

Improved walking and cycling connections

An extra 1.2km of upgrades to the main Koonung Creek Trail.

Better bike connections at Doncaster Road to Doncaster Park & Ride.

Improved Heyington Avenue bridge at Valda Wetlands.

New connections to Koonung Creek Trail in Bulleen and Doncaster.

Additional upgrades for Koonung Creek Reserve and parklands

Extra fitness equipment.

Extra BBQ and rest areas.

Extra bike repair stations and drinking fountains.

Improved designs for noise walls

More space for trees and plants at Koonung Creek Reserve near Doncaster Road.

More trees for screening and shade along Koonung Creek Trail at Elgar Road.

Acrylic panel extensions where additional noise protection is needed for existing concrete noise walls that are able to be kept to minimise construction disruption.

What you were most interested in

More than 25% of comments were about walking and cycling paths and connections.



Artist's impression of Heyington Avenue bridge, Doncaster



I would truly appreciate an upgrade of the exercise equipment along the Koonung Trail. The current equipment is out of date.

Balwyn North resident

Burke Road to Doncaster Road

New noise walls, trees and plants, and walking and cycling connections

In response to community feedback received through the project’s planning approvals process, including submissions to the Environment Effects Statement, the exhibited UDLP included:

An improved design for the Estelle Street bridge – keeping the existing bridge open while the new bridge is built.

Extensive reinstatement for areas of Koonung Creek Reserve used to support construction, including increasing the number of trees and plants and building a new dry creek bed for a healthier Koonung Creek and Yarra River system.

A better location for the new underpass to Doncaster Park & Ride and Eastern Busway.

An upgraded underpass at Doncaster Road between Koonung Creek Reserve and Valda Wetlands.

New noise walls to give residents better protection from noise.

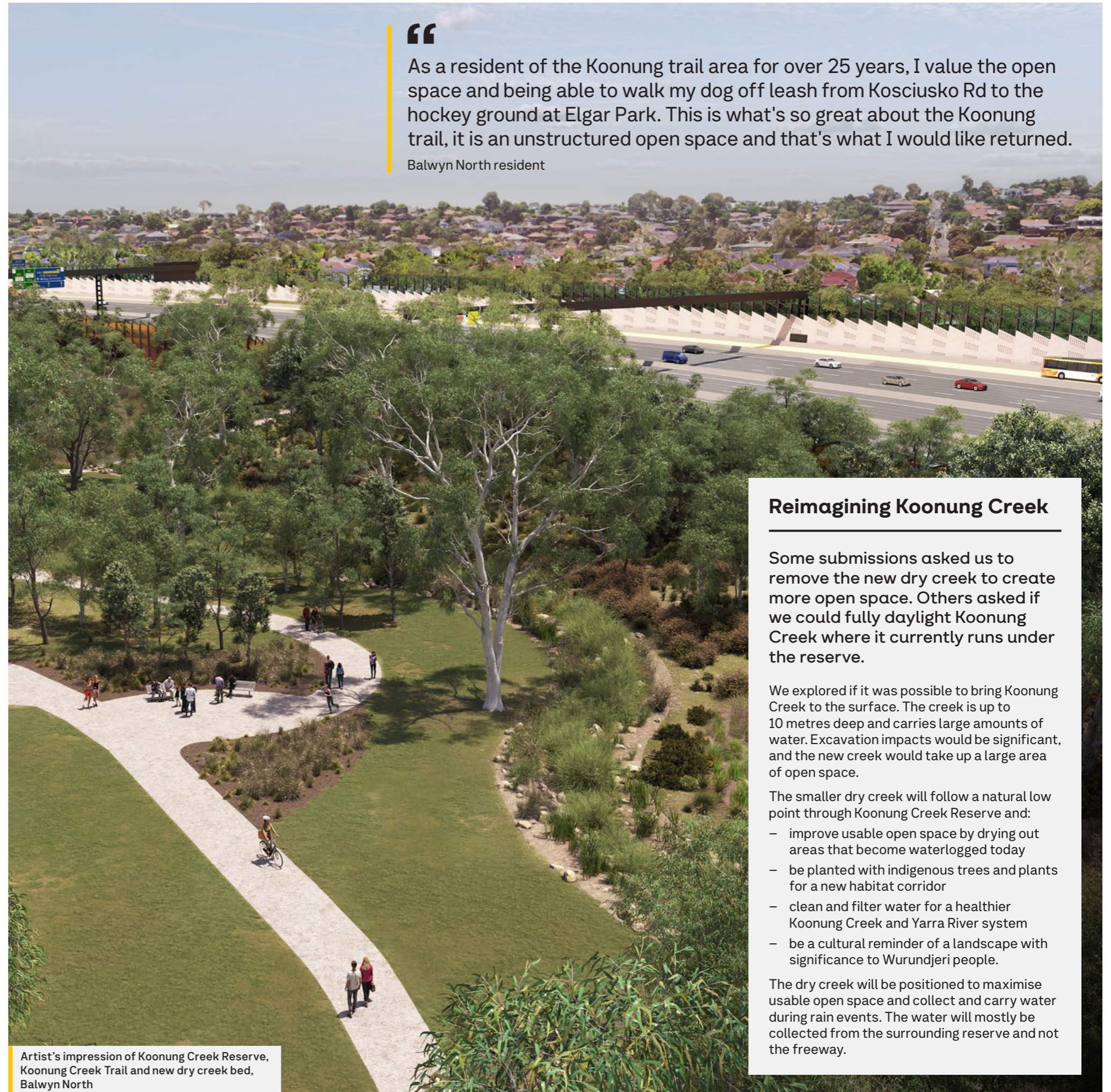
Overall, people felt most positive about the selection of indigenous trees and plants, new noise walls and bus lanes.

People also gave ideas for improvements to walking and cycling paths and the reinstated Koonung Creek Reserve.



As a resident of the Koonung trail area for over 25 years, I value the open space and being able to walk my dog off leash from Kosciusko Rd to the hockey ground at Elgar Park. This is what's so great about the Koonung trail, it is an unstructured open space and that's what I would like returned.

Balwyn North resident



Artist's impression of Koonung Creek Reserve, Koonung Creek Trail and new dry creek bed, Balwyn North

Reimagining Koonung Creek

Some submissions asked us to remove the new dry creek to create more open space. Others asked if we could fully daylight Koonung Creek where it currently runs under the reserve.

We explored if it was possible to bring Koonung Creek to the surface. The creek is up to 10 metres deep and carries large amounts of water. Excavation impacts would be significant, and the new creek would take up a large area of open space.

The smaller dry creek will follow a natural low point through Koonung Creek Reserve and:

- improve usable open space by drying out areas that become waterlogged today
- be planted with indigenous trees and plants for a new habitat corridor
- clean and filter water for a healthier Koonung Creek and Yarra River system
- be a cultural reminder of a landscape with significance to Wurundjeri people.

The dry creek will be positioned to maximise usable open space and collect and carry water during rain events. The water will mostly be collected from the surrounding reserve and not the freeway.

What you asked us to consider

Extra improvements for Koonung Creek Trail

Providing separate paths for pedestrians and cyclists.

Upgrading more sections.

Upgrading the underpass at Musca Street Reserve.

Better access for cyclists at Doncaster Road bridge, either with shared use paths, on-road bike lanes or a separate bridge over the freeway.

Lighting for Koonung Creek Trail at night.

A new connection to Koonung Creek Trail in Bulleen.

Improvements to Koonung Creek Reserve

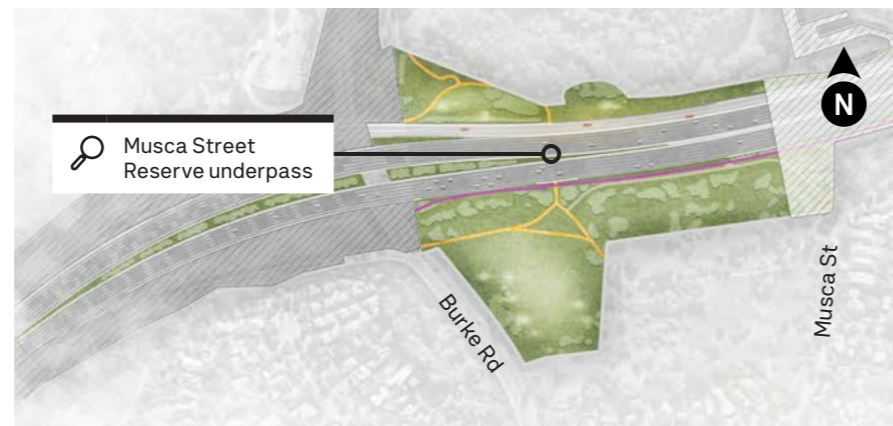
Removing the dry creek bed. People who asked for this were concerned the creek would carry water run-off from the freeway, take up open space and be difficult to maintain.

Other people asked if we could replace the dry creek bed with permanent flowing water, or bring the section of Koonung Creek that currently runs underneath Koonung Creek Reserve to the surface.

Providing more facilities for the local community including BBQs, fitness stations and public toilets.

Other design changes or improvements

Ramps on and off the Eastern Freeway on the east side of Burke Road.



Other concerns we heard from you

Loss of open space and trees in Koonung Creek Reserve and requests to keep or return the natural, bushland feel and wildlife habitat.



Upgrade where you can but retain the beauty and simplicity of our open space.

Balwyn North resident

Building paths for pedestrians and cyclists

Some submissions asked if we could build a much wider Koonung Creek Trail. Others asked for separate paths for pedestrians and cyclists.

We also heard requests to reduce vegetation removal and to maximise space for new trees and plants and usable open space.

We've worked hard to balance this feedback, and upgraded sections of the main Koonung Creek Trail will be a consistent three metres wide. This provides space for pedestrians and cyclists to safely use the path while also delivering green spaces.

In busy areas where people like to walk, including Koonung Creek Reserve and Valda Wetlands, extra paths for pedestrians will be built. These will wind through areas of open space and around wetlands and be gravel or similar to encourage pedestrians and discourage cyclists.

What we're doing

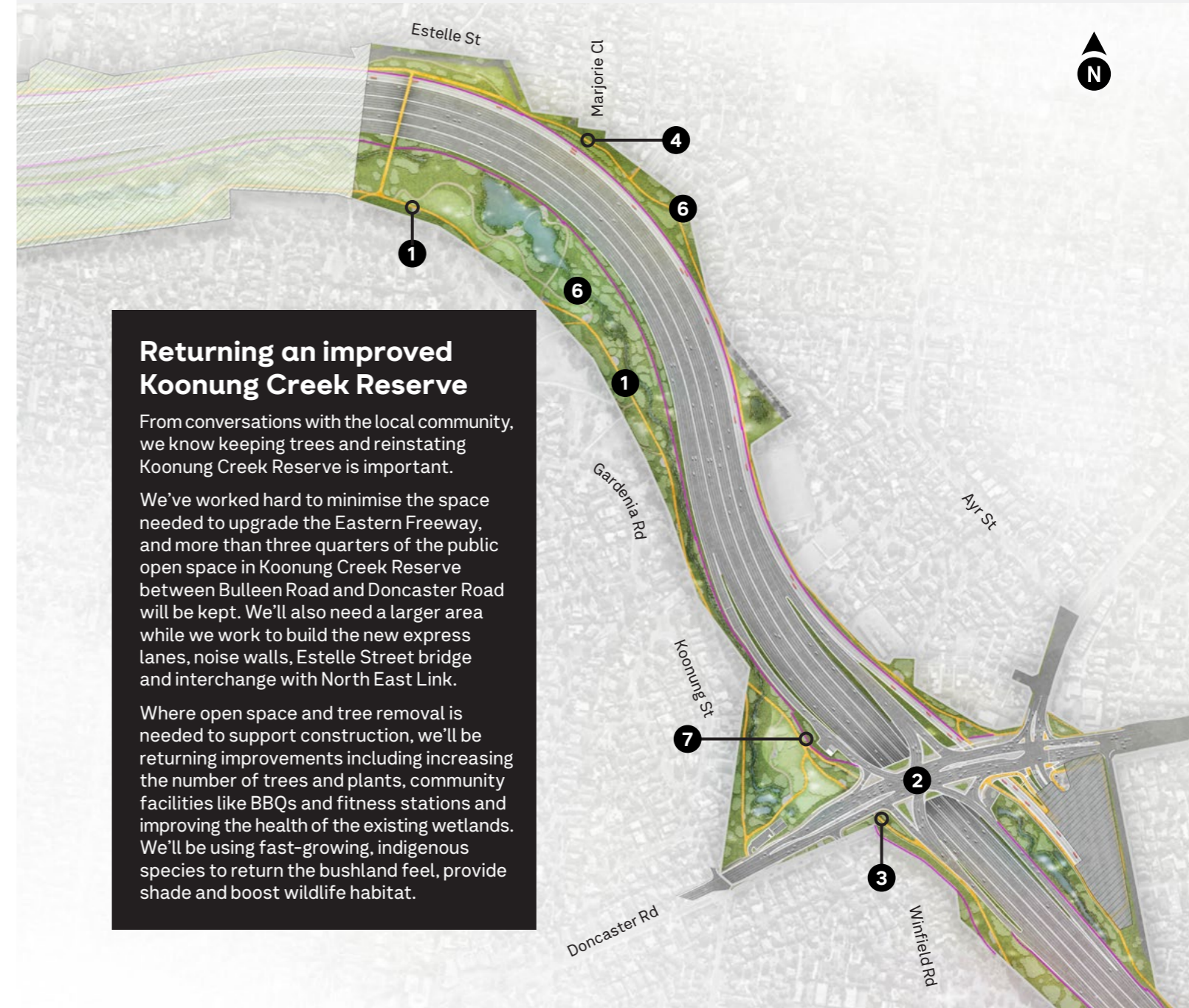
Better walking and cycling connections

1. Upgrading extra sections of the main Koonung Creek Trail.
 2. Shared use paths on both sides of Doncaster Road bridge for better pedestrian and cyclist access to Doncaster Park & Ride.
 3. Changing the pedestrian path between Doncaster Road bridge and Winfield Road to a shared use path.
 4. New connection to Koonung Creek Trail at Marjorie Close, Bulleen.
 5. Lighting for all new bridges and underpasses and a safety assessment for Koonung Creek Trail, including lighting from nearby streets and the freeway, to see where additional lighting may be needed.
- We'll also look at opportunities to make the Musca Street Reserve underpass more inviting.

Additional improvements to Koonung Creek Reserve

6. More facilities for the local community along the Koonung Creek Trail in Balwyn North and in Bulleen including BBQs, fitness stations, drinking fountains, rest stops and bicycle repair stations. We'll work closely with local councils to decide where best to build these.
7. Noise wall moved closer to the freeway to create more space for trees and plants near Doncaster Road.

We looked at adding extra ramps on and off the Eastern Freeway on the east side of Burke Road. The ramps at Bulleen Road are too close to safely add another entry and exit point nearby. The Yarra River is also too close.



Returning an improved Koonung Creek Reserve

From conversations with the local community, we know keeping trees and reinstating Koonung Creek Reserve is important.

We've worked hard to minimise the space needed to upgrade the Eastern Freeway, and more than three quarters of the public open space in Koonung Creek Reserve between Bulleen Road and Doncaster Road will be kept. We'll also need a larger area while we work to build the new express lanes, noise walls, Estelle Street bridge and interchange with North East Link.

Where open space and tree removal is needed to support construction, we'll be returning improvements including increasing the number of trees and plants, community facilities like BBQs and fitness stations and improving the health of the existing wetlands. We'll be using fast-growing, indigenous species to return the bushland feel, provide shade and boost wildlife habitat.



Artist's impression of Koonung Creek Trail and Valda Wetlands, Mont Albert North

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There is a very curved bend on the Heyington bridge. Big bends like this ... are hazardous if small children especially or inexperienced cyclists cannot manoeuvre them safely.

Blackburn resident

Doncaster Road to Tram Road

Reimagined Valda Wetlands, new Heyington Avenue bridge and new noise walls

In response to community feedback received through the project's planning approvals process, including submissions to the Environment Effects Statement, the exhibited UDLP included:

— An improved design for the Heyington Avenue walking and cycling bridge for a more direct crossing than the reference design.

— A reconfigured and expanded Valda Wetlands and a rebuilt Koonung Creek, improving the health of the waterway.

— An improved design for the freeway near Valda Wetlands to create more space for trees and plants than the reference design.

— New noise walls to give residents better protection from noise, and keeping existing concrete noise walls where possible to minimise construction disruption and keep trees.

Overall, people felt most positive about the improved design for the freeway near the wetlands and the selection of new indigenous trees and plants.

People also shared ideas for improvements to the Heyington Avenue bridge, additional walking and cycling paths and the reinstated Valda Wetlands.

What you asked us to consider

Improvements to Heyington Avenue bridge

Removing the tight bend in the ramp down to the wetlands.

Adding a pedestrian crossing on the north side at Stanton Street.

Using more natural colours and materials to fit in with the wetlands.

Additional walking and cycling improvements

Upgrading the underpass at Elgar Road.

A new connection to Koonung Creek Trail in Doncaster.

Widening and flattening the main Koonung Creek Trail near Jocelyn Avenue.

Upgrading more sections of the Koonung Creek Trail.

Lighting for Koonung Creek Trail at night.

Improvements to Valda Wetlands and Koonung Creek parklands

Rebuilding the boardwalk at Valda Wetlands.

More facilities for the community to use, including at Winfield Reserve.

Keeping Koonung Creek above ground near Doncaster Road and Elgar Road.

Other design changes or improvements

Building ramps on and off the Eastern Freeway on the west side of Tram Road.

Other concerns we heard from you

Loss of trees and wildlife habitat at Valda Wetlands.

Returning the Valda Wetlands

We've heard how important the Valda Wetlands are to local people and wildlife.

While it's not possible to keep the wetlands where they are today while we build the new Heyington Avenue bridge, noise walls and express lanes, as we carefully rebuild the wetlands we'll expand and enhance them.

We'll also join the new wetlands with a rebuilt Koonung Creek to create a 43,700 square metre precinct with indigenous trees and plants, seating areas and new and upgraded pedestrian paths.

We'll work with qualified ecologists to safely relocate fauna to nearby areas before we begin and create an environment that encourages native wildlife to return.

To maintain water flows, build the improved noise walls and keep Koonung Creek Trail, short sections of Koonung Creek will need to be placed underground near Doncaster Road and Elgar Road. Where there is space, the creek will be deep enough for trees or other landscaping on top – continuing the habitat corridor at the surface with additional trees and plants along the creek to improve water quality.

What we're doing

A better design for Heyington Avenue bridge

1. Tight bend in ramp removed to make the connection easier for cyclists to use.
2. Stairs moved closer to the wetlands for a more direct route for pedestrians.
3. Wood added to materials for the bridge to tie in better with the surrounding wetlands.

🔍 Stanton Street is outside the UDLP area, but we'll look into whether it's possible to provide a pedestrian crossing here.

Improved walking and cycling connections

4. New connection to the Koonung Creek Trail at Wilsons Reserve, Doncaster.
5. A flatter Koonung Creek Trail near Jocelyn Avenue to make it safer and easier to use. The path will be at least three metres wide and new noise walls will use acrylic panels to help the area feel open.

🔍 We're working to see if we can make the path near Jocelyn Avenue wider but there are design and construction challenges to cut into the steep rock face.

6. Upgrading extra sections of the main Koonung Creek Trail.
7. More trees and plants to help better screen the noise wall near Elgar Road and provide shade for Koonung Creek Trail.

8. Lighting for all new bridges and underpasses, and a safety assessment for Koonung Creek Trail, including lighting from nearby streets and the freeway, to see where additional lighting may be needed.

🔍 We'll also look at opportunities to make the Elgar Road Reserve underpass more enjoyable to use.

Additional improvements to Valda Wetlands

9. More facilities for the local community along the main Koonung Creek Trail. We'll work closely with local council to decide where best to build these.
10. Extra viewing areas for places to experience the wetlands, rest and relax.

🔍 We looked at whether it was possible to replace the existing boardwalk. The larger wetlands will collect and store more water when it rains. The boardwalk would need to be high above the ground to prevent it from flooding, which would also make it awkward to use. A low path on the north side will let people walk close to the wetlands. A higher path on the south side will provide views over the area.

🔍 We looked at adding extra ramps on and off the Eastern Freeway on the west side of Tram Road. The ramps at Elgar Road are too close to safely add another merge point on and off the freeway here.

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The wetland area, the shrubby vegetation and large trees have taken decades to establish and mature to the current level.

Box Hill community organisation

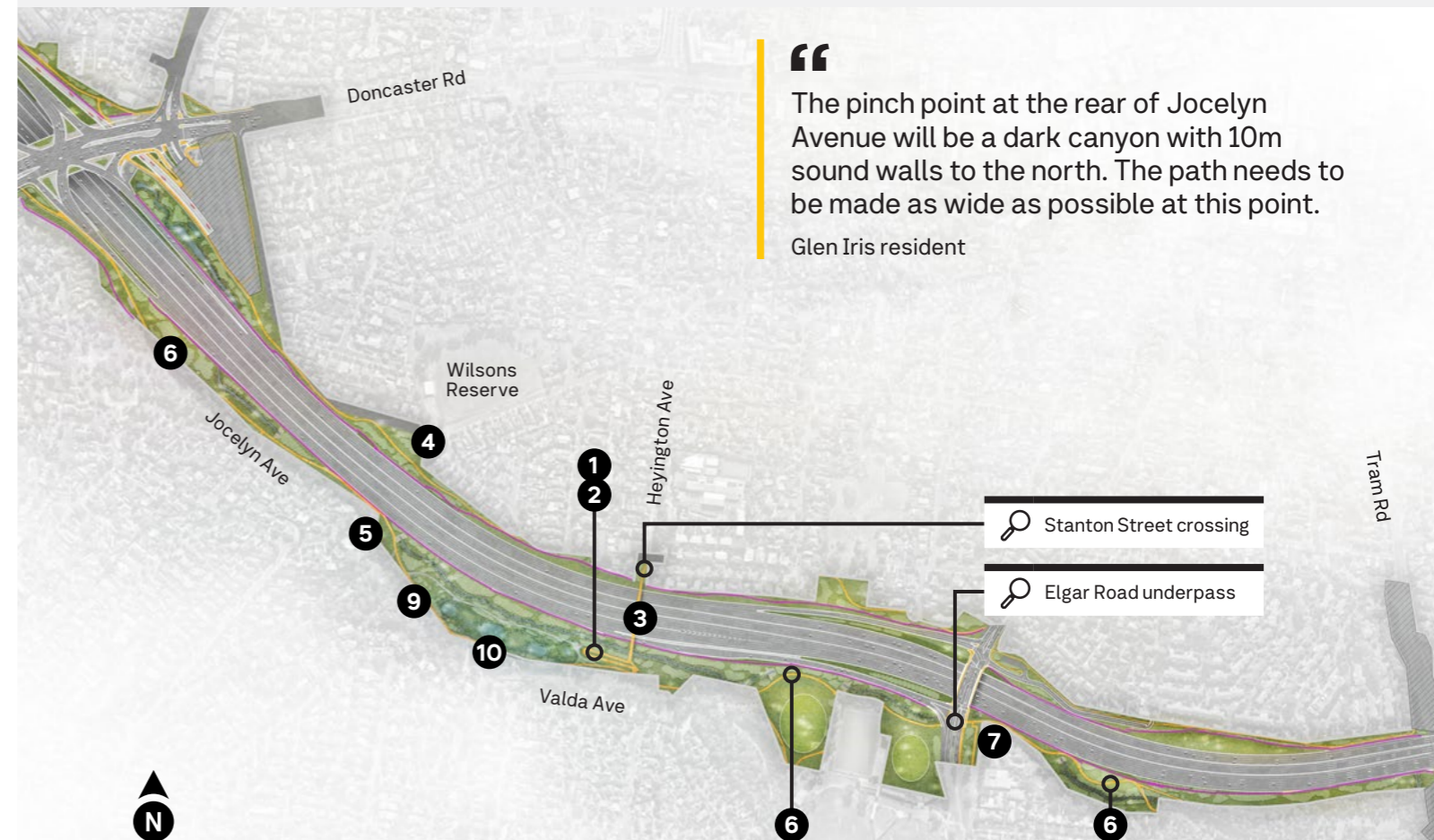


Artist's impression of Valda Wetlands, Mont Albert North

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The pinch point at the rear of Jocelyn Avenue will be a dark canyon with 10m sound walls to the north. The path needs to be made as wide as possible at this point.

Glen Iris resident



Other comments and ideas

In addition to providing comments on the UDLP, some of you gave feedback about the project in general or had questions about more detailed elements of the design we're still working through. The most frequently raised topics were:

Dog off-lead areas

Concerns the number of off-lead areas will be permanently reduced, or suggestions for how existing areas should be returned after construction.

We know how important off-lead areas are for dogs and their owners. In the UDLP, there are four existing off-lead dog areas. These are in Koonung Creek Reserve, Park Avenue Reserve, Elgar Park and near Valda Wetlands. We're working with local councils on alternative off-lead spaces while we upgrade the Eastern Freeway and to return areas at the end of construction.

Habitat crossings

Requests to keep the proposed habitat crossing near Freeway Golf Course and to provide extra crossing points over the freeway between Burke Road and Tram Road.

We've looked closely at how to best support local wildlife to move about the area. Ecologist assessments found local wildlife is unlikely to use artificial crossings over the freeway and recommended enhancing existing corridors, including through Koonung Creek Reserve and Valda Wetlands. We'll also be connecting and enhancing existing open spaces on both sides of the freeway to provide more opportunities for pollinator pathways and other micro habitats with flowering plants.

Noise walls near homes

Requests from residents near noise walls for specific design considerations such as landscaping and natural light.

We'll be reaching out to residents near the project to talk about designs for noise walls near them.

Traffic and roads

Concerns the extra lanes on the Eastern Freeway will encourage more people to use the freeway and increase congestion, particularly on surrounding roads, at Hoddle Street and the Mullum Mullum tunnels.

The upgraded Eastern Freeway will work much better than it does today and take traffic off other roads people use to travel east and west like Doncaster Road and Whitehorse Road.

Without upgrades, existing congestion on the Eastern Freeway will become worse as Melbourne's population grows. Peak hour travel speeds will drop to less than 45km/hr and roads like Doncaster Road and Whitehorse Road will become more congested as people avoid using the freeway.

The extra lanes and other improvements we're making will carry more traffic and keep it moving. Peak hour travel speeds will be close to twice as fast at 85 km/hr or more and there will be less traffic on Doncaster Road and Whitehorse Road.

The upgrades to improve traffic flow on the freeway will also stop traffic backing up near the Mullum Mullum tunnels, which is what causes congestion today. Most of the new traffic using the Eastern Freeway will be travelling between our city's north and east using the new North East Link tunnels. Only a very small number of new trips will be heading to and from the city. The changes to traffic on Hoddle Street from the upgrades will be less than 2%.

Read more in the project's Environment Effects Statement at bigbuild.vic.gov.au/projects/roads/eastern-freeway-planning

Traffic noise

Concerns the new noise walls will not be enough to manage traffic noise, particularly for homes in hilly areas, or requests for more information about existing and future noise levels and how the new project noise standard will be met.

The new and upgraded noise walls are designed to meet the toughest traffic noise standard in Victoria – 63 decibels during the day and a quieter 58 decibels at night. The design for the walls is informed by noise modelling which extends 1.5 kilometres from the freeway edges and considers hills and valleys.

Once the upgraded Eastern Freeway is complete, we'll monitor noise levels for 20 years and publish the results online. If the measured noise is higher than the required level, we'll take action to reduce it at affected properties.

Initial noise modelling done for the project's Environment Effects Statement is on our website at bigbuild.vic.gov.au/projects/roads/eastern-freeway-planning

Construction

The final UDLP was approved by the Minister for Planning in September 2024, ready for major construction to begin.

You'll see us working to make further changes to lanes and travel speeds along the Eastern Freeway, setting up construction compounds and work areas in Koonung Creek Reserve and Parklands between Bulleen Road and Elgar Road, removing trees and vegetation and detouring sections of the Koonung Creek Trail.

Find out more

For more information about how we're upgrading the Eastern Freeway, or to sign up for construction updates visit bigbuild.vic.gov.au/projects/roads/eastern-freeway-upgrades

To talk to us

Drop in to our Project Information Centre

284 Doncaster Road
Balwyn North
Tuesday, Wednesday
and Thursday
9am to 3pm

contact@bigbuild.vic.gov.au

Call us on 1800 105 105

Our phone line is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



Artist's impression of Heyington Avenue bridge overlooking Valda Wetlands, Mont Albert North



Artist's impression of Koonung Creek Reserve, Balwyn North

bigbuild.vic.gov.au/roads

1800 105 105 (call anytime)

contact@bigbuild.vic.gov.au



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