

Communications and Community Engagement Strategy

Updated May 2025

1 Introduction

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.

As part of Victoria’s Big Build, we’re delivering 3 major road projects. The 6.5km North East Link tunnels from Watsonia to Bulleen will fix the missing link in our city’s freeway network, take 15,000 trucks off local roads a day and reduce travel times by up to 35 minutes. Upgrades to the Eastern Freeway and M80 Ring Road will include new lanes, smart technology and a seamless connection to the North East Link tunnels.

This massive program of works is being carefully planned so the projects can open in 2028 – bringing all the pieces of North East Link together.

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.

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, North East Link 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 project to date. Now, as major construction progresses, involving residents, businesses and the local community 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.

1.2 Moving into construction

In 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.

The following year, two preferred bidders were selected for the first stage of Eastern Freeway Upgrades and the M80 Ring Road Completion.

Preparation for major tunnelling works then started and an Urban Design and Landscape Plan (UDLP) was exhibited for public comment in May 2022 and approved in February 2023.

In 2023, we focused on preparing for the arrival of the tunnel boring machines (TBMs). We constructed two purpose-built facilities to ensure the TBM launch site at Watsonia was ready. This included building an acoustic shed at Winsor Reserve to remove dirt and rock excavated from the tunnels, as well as a tunnel segment storage shed in Watsonia.

Our two hard-working TBMs launched in 2024 and are well on their way digging the 6.5-kilometre tunnels from Watsonia to Bulleen. Both TBM 'Zelda' and TBM 'Gillian' have made it to their first pit stop at the Lower

Plenty Road interchange in Yallambie, and are powering ahead on their journey south towards Bulleen. The names of our TBMs were selected from hundreds of submissions as part of a TBM naming competition, where we invited the community to nominate ‘local legends’ from Melbourne’s northeast.

In Greensborough, the development of two new interchanges at the M80 Ring Road and Grimshaw Street will ease congestion and slash travel times, with dedicated lanes for local trips and express lanes to North East Link. Works to build the concrete piers and retaining walls to support the new entry and exit ramps are now underway.

Works will continue at Elder Street and Greensborough Highway throughout the project so we can safely prepare to build the two new landscaped bridges, enabling better east-west connectivity for local road users and safer pedestrian access to Watsonia Station.

Upgrades to the Hurstbridge line will continue throughout 2025, to ensure comprehensive upgrades to safety and reliability for passengers, with works to extend the rail tunnel and rebuild the Grimshaw Street bridge ongoing until 2026.

The upgraded Eastern Freeway will see new express lanes, new traffic management technology and Melbourne's first express busway. Work is well underway on a new Bulleen interchange that will link the upgraded Eastern Freeway with express lanes to the North East Link tunnels. Crews are undertaking piling and concrete works to build foundations for the major interchange, which are taking shape above-ground.

In Doncaster, crews will start to build a new Ringwood-bound entry ramp to the Eastern Freeway. We're also undertaking excavation and rock-cutting to make space for the Eastern Busway that will include express lanes from Doncaster toward the City. These changes will reduce travel times by up to 11 minutes between Springvale Road and Hoddle Street and improve public transport in Melbourne's east.

Contracts for the remaining sections of Eastern Freeway Upgrades were awarded in April 2025 and will commence major construction in 2026.

As always, we work to minimise the impacts of construction, carefully planning to ensure minimal traffic impacts and maintained access to local connections throughout 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.

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

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.

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 research, and lessons learned from both North East Link and other infrastructure projects have also assisted in the development 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 project'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
Approach to stakeholder identification.	Section 3
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 North East Link website.	Section 2.5
Approach to communicating and engaging with the community and potentially affected stakeholders in relation to: - 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) - Changes to transport conditions and relevant mitigation (e.g. road closures, detours)	Section 2
Timelines and an outline of works that will affect particular local areas, to be updated to reflect current and anticipated conditions.	Section 2 Section 4
Identifying how stakeholders can access information on environmental performance that is to be made publicly available.	Section 2.5
Incident and emergency communications, including notification methods and timeframes in the event of a major incident or overrun.	Section 5.5
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 Section 5.1
Innovative communications tools and methods to enhance the project's ability to effectively communicate and engage with the community and stakeholders including best available technology in addition to conventional means.	Section 2.5
Approach to engaging with local schools to ascertain safety requirements (including evacuation opportunities) and to provide education opportunities on construction activities.	Section 3.5
Approach to making relevant 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 Section 5.6
How it will evaluate the effectiveness of the communication and engagement under the Communications and Community Engagement Strategy.	Section 6

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 project 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 project.
- 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 project.
- We maintain transparency where feedback has and hasn’t shaped the project 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.



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	2024-2025 Tunnelling starts and works commence on Eastern Freeway Upgrades and M80 Ring Road Completion in Greensborough	From 2028 Completion and ongoing operation
Objectives: 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. 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. Inform stakeholders and the community about decisions and actions being undertaken during the planning process and following the delivery of the ESS. Establish systems and procedures to develop and maintain a collaborative relationship with the community and stakeholders. Outcomes: Ensure stakeholders understand the potential environmental impacts of North East Link and how they will to be managed. 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.	Objectives: Support landowners and tenants through the land acquisition process through one-on-one case management with NEL staff. Establish clear processes for notifying stakeholders and the community about potential impacts from works, including a transparent complaints management process. Engage with, and provide advance notice to local businesses, residents, road and public transport users about our early works program. Outcomes: Ensure multiple communication channels and opportunities are provided for stakeholders and the community to ask questions, raise issues and provide feedback. Community and stakeholders are aware of the project benefits, timing and how impacts and disruptions are being managed.	Objectives: Supporting the detailed design work undertaken by the appointed construction contractors, including providing opportunities for stakeholder and community input and feedback. 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. Outcomes: Ensure multiple communication channels and opportunities are provided for stakeholders and the community to ask questions, raise issues and provide feedback. Community and stakeholders are aware of the project benefits, timing and how impacts and disruptions are being managed.	Objectives: Support communities and stakeholders during major works, managing construction and consultation fatigue. 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. Detailed conversations with individual properties to understand specific needs and provide detailed construction lookaheads. Effectively communicate road and rail disruptions. Assess, coordinate and manage the cumulative impact of interfacing works across projects. 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. Highlight the remaining stages of the Eastern Freeway Upgrades from Hoddle Street to Burke Road, and from Tram Road to Springvale Road. Outcomes: Impacted residents, businesses and stakeholders are involved in and aware of construction program, impacts and mitigations. Effective disruption communications to ensure drivers are aware of changes to travel.	Objectives: Support the transition from major works delivery to operation of the tunnels and North East Link road network. 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. Outcomes: Community and stakeholders are aware of the project’s completion and understand how North East Link will operate. Community and stakeholders have the opportunity to take part in celebrating the completion of North East Link.

Phase One

Planning (complete)

Background

North East Link (NEL) 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 project 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 project'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.

NEL 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 NEL to seek information about communities and stakeholders to inform the development of a reference design, and EES technical studies.

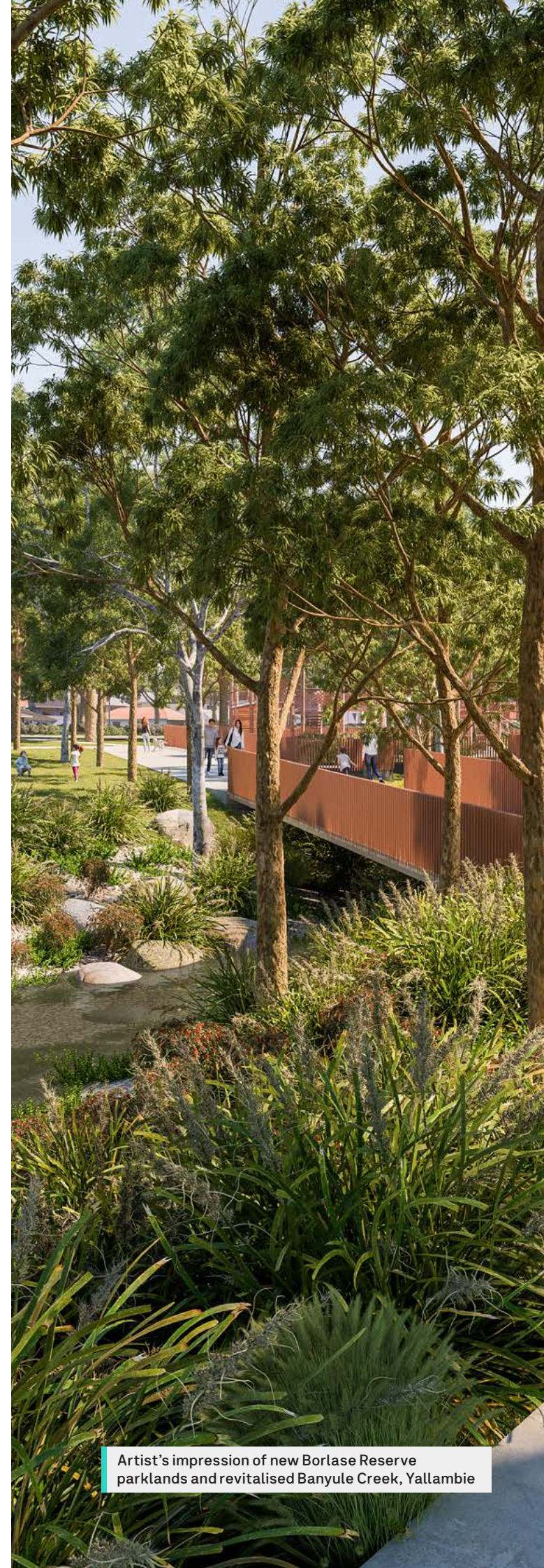
Feedback covered a range of topics including corridor selection, project design, traffic and transport, amenity, business, construction and environment. This feedback informed development of the North East Link reference design and preparation of the EES which was released for public exhibition on Wednesday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

- ✓ **2016–2018**
 - North East Link Authority formed
 - The preferred route for North East Link was determined, its benefits assessed, and recommendations made on how it could and should, be funded
- ✓ **2019**
 - Environment Effects Statement (EES) developed and released for public comment
 - Minister approves Planning Scheme Amendment
- ✓ **2021**
 - Contract awarded to Spark for the North East Link tunnels and project design released
 - Detailed design and construction planning work for the North East Link tunnels underway
- ✓ **2022**
 - UDLP for the North East Link tunnels exhibited for public comment
 - Preparation for major tunnelling works began
 - Contracts awarded for the first stage of the Eastern Freeway Upgrades and the M80 Ring Road Completion
- 2023**
 - UDLP for the North East Link tunnels approved by the Minister for Planning
 - UDLPs for the M80 Ring Road Completion and the first section of the Eastern Freeway Upgrades exhibited for public comment
- ✓ **2024**
 - TBM 'Zelda' and TBM 'Gillian' launched
 - UDLPs approved, work sites set up and major construction underway on the M80 Ring Road Completion and the Eastern Freeway Upgrade from Burke to Tram Road
 - UDLP for Doncaster Park & Ride exhibited for public comment
- 2025**
 - Major construction continues
 - Contracts awarded and UDLP exhibited for the remaining sections of the Eastern Freeway Upgrades
- 2026**
 - Major construction continues
 - UDLP for Watsonia station car park to be exhibited for public comment
- 2027**
 - Major construction continues
- 2028**
 - North East Link opens

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	– Raise awareness of North East Link and the project corridors for consideration. – Support stakeholders and the community to view the Environment Effects Summary (EES) and make submissions to the independent Inquiry and Advisory Committee. – Identify key issues, ideas and concerns from the community that need to be considered in the EES. – Provide a forum for the community and stakeholders to understand potential environmental impacts of the project and encourage input.
Engagement outcomes	– Community and stakeholders are involved in EES process via several in-person and online engagement tools. – Genuine engagement and interest in the program of works and corridor options from community. – Collection of input, data and sentiment to inform EES and project corridor selection.
Program activities	– Public exhibition of EES, public submissions, and public hearing chaired by independent Inquiry and Advisory Committee. – Minister’s assessment of environmental effects and recommendations.
Communication focus	– Collect feedback and input from communities to select a preferred project corridor. – Identify and collate key issues for specialists to consider in preparing the EES. – Support stakeholders and communities to make submissions to independent Inquiry and Advisory Committee.
Communication tools	– Printed newsletter, interactive online map, new website, fact sheets, social media, advertising, posters, technical reports and summaries, videos, artist impressions and project images.
Engagement tools	– Online surveys, forums, workshops, information displays. – Pop-up stalls at local markets and community events. – Face-to-face home visits, door knocks and street meetings. – Two Community Liaison Groups, Two Community Technical Discussion Groups. – Translation service and Q&A online tool.
Evaluation	– 1.2 million+ people reached through social media. – 250,000+ homes and businesses received updates in their letterboxes. – 359,000+ visits to online maps. – 8695+ visitors to 32 information displays. – 2290+ visitors to the Watsonia Community Information Hub. – 2175+ conversations with landowners, tenants and businesses. – 250+ meetings and briefings with stakeholders. – 45+ interactive workshops. – 14,900+ pieces of feedback. – 870+ EES submissions.

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 project 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	- Support landowners and tenants through land acquisition process and eligible residents through the Voluntary Purchase Scheme (VPS). - Support affected sports and recreation clubs through the relocation works. - Establish clear processes for notifying stakeholders and the community about potential impacts from works, including a transparent complaints management process. - Engage with and provide advance notice to local businesses, sports and recreation clubs, residents, road and public transport users about early works.
Engagement outcomes	- Multiple communications channels and opportunities provided for stakeholders and the community to ask questions about the project, raise issues and provide feedback. - Community and stakeholders are aware of the project benefits, timing and impacts. - Highly impacted residents and businesses feel supported and informed through acquisition and VPS process. - Sporting clubs are informed of project impacts and feel supported to take their clubs to alternative locations.
Communication focus	- Introduce early works contractor team to the local community. - Explain the project, early works timelines and benefits, and upcoming disruptions. - Understand community values and concerns. - Continue to build on existing relationships with local communities and stakeholders. - Where possible, seek community and stakeholder input into project design scope and construction impacts. - Work proactively with Community Liaison Groups (CLGs) to share project information within their community networks. - Provide the community with regular updates and simple technical terminology through a range of communications channels. - Explain preferred project design and how community input has been considered. - Work one-on-one with residents and businesses in highly impacted areas to support relocation.
Key communication tools	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.
Evaluation	- Regular monitoring of compliance with enquiries and complaints processes for both contractors and NEL team. - Contractor compliance with stakeholder engagement audits. - Increased community understanding and awareness of the project as measured through surveys. - Sustained participation in engagement processes and interaction with the project during public engagement activities. - Sustained participation and desire for involvement demonstrated by registrations for email updates, follows on Facebook and visits to the project website.

Build awareness

Focus for 2021

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

Awarded contract for major tunnelling

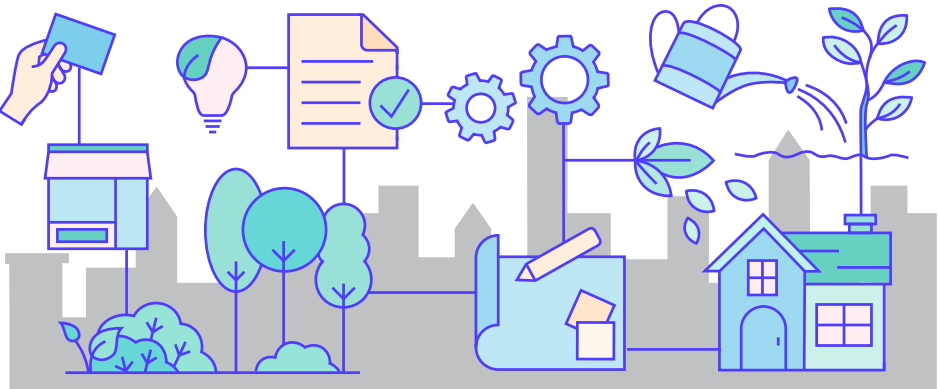
Communicated updated tunnel design

Shared project 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

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)

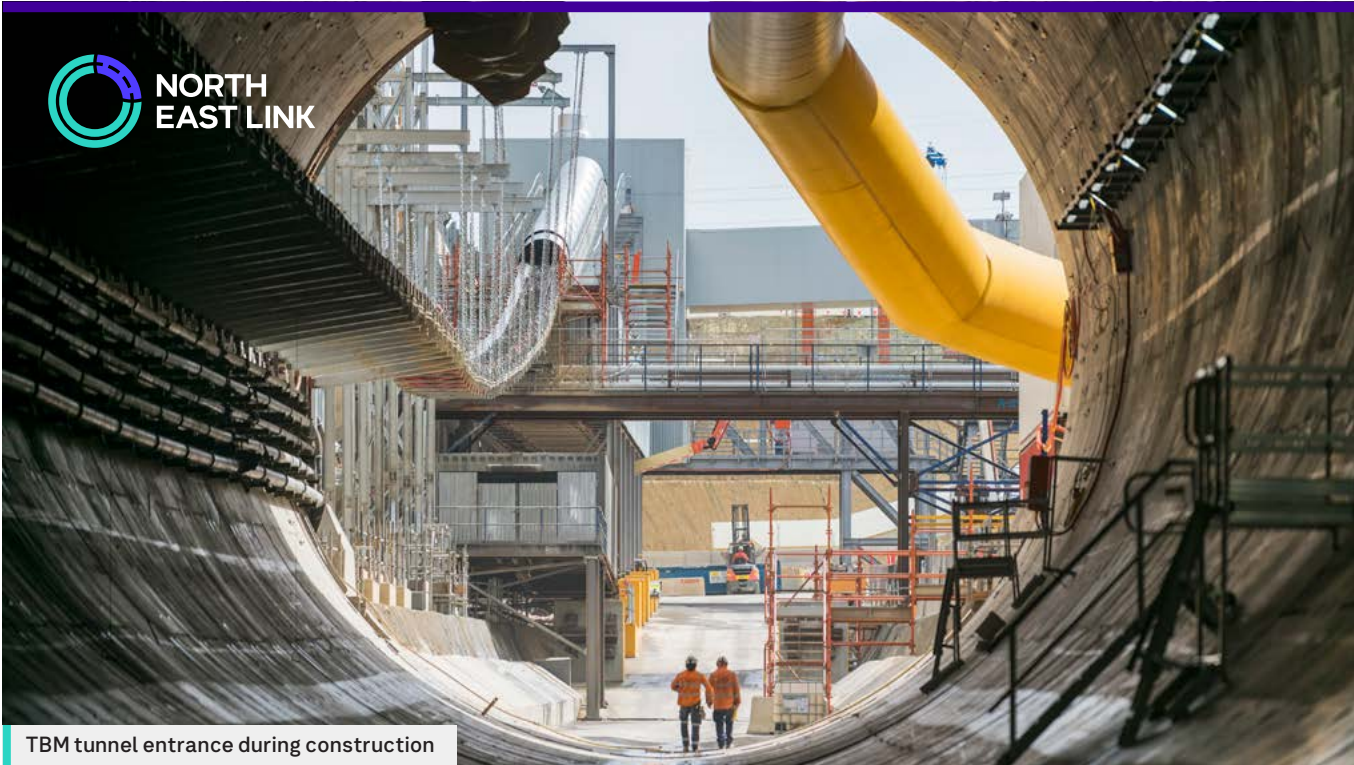
1.1 2021-2023

In 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.

In 2022, two preferred bidders were selected for the first stage of Eastern Freeway Upgrades and the M80 Ring Road Completion. Nexus – made up of Laing O’Rourke, Symal, WSP and Arcadis – was appointed to deliver the first section of the Eastern Freeway Upgrades from Burke to Tram Road. AMA – made up of Acciona, AECOM, and MACA – is delivering the M80 Ring Road Completion.

Preparation for major tunnelling works then started and an Urban Design and Landscape Plan was exhibited for public comment in May 2022. This 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 in February 2023.

In 2023, we focused on preparing for the arrival of the tunnel boring machines (TBMs). We constructed two purpose-built facilities to ensure the TBM launch site at Watsonia was ready. This included constructing an acoustic shed at Winsor Reserve to remove dirt and rock excavated from the tunnels, as well as a tunnel segment storage shed in Watsonia.



TBM tunnel entrance during construction

1.2 2024-2025

1.2.1 North East Link tunnels

TBM Zelda and TBM Gillian launched in 2024 and are well on their way digging the two 6.5-kilometre tunnels. The names of our 2 hard working TBMs were selected from hundreds of submissions as part of a TBM naming competition, where we invited the community to nominate “local legends” from Melbourne’s north east.

Last year, we kept traffic moving during construction by diverting Bulleen Road to make room for excavation of the southern 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. As the TBMs got going, the acoustic shed at Winsor Reserve began operations collecting and removing the dirt and rock excavated from the tunnels.

Both TBMs have completed the journey to their first pit stop at the Lower Plenty Road interchange in Yallambie, and are continuing to power ahead on their journey south towards Bulleen.

In the southern section of the North East Link tunnels, mined tunnelling is underway between Manningham Road and Trinity Grammar, with five large road headers chipping away at the rock layer deep underground, installing steel and concrete to support the roof and sides of the tunnel.



1.2.2 Eastern Freeway Upgrades

Last year, we made substantial progress on critical early works, including setting up worksites on both sides of the freeway, diverting Bulleen Road, and temporarily relocating the Bulleen Road citybound entry ramp. These efforts were essential in preparing for major construction activities to begin this year.

Work is well underway on a new Bulleen interchange that will link an upgraded Eastern Freeway with express lanes to the North East Link tunnels. Crews are undertaking piling and concrete works to build foundations for the major interchange, which are taking shape above-ground.

In Doncaster, crews will start to build a new Ringwood-bound entry ramp to the Eastern Freeway. We'll also be undertaking excavation and rock-cutting to make space for the Eastern Busway that will include express lanes from Doncaster toward the City.

To complete our works safely, some traffic changes on the Eastern Freeway will be required. We'll carefully plan these works to keep traffic moving during construction.

We'll carefully plan these works to keep traffic moving during construction.

Contracts for the remaining sections of Eastern Freeway Upgrades were awarded in April 2025. Momentum – consisting of John Holland, Seymour Whyte, Mott Macdonald, and Jacobs – has been appointed to deliver the Hoddle Street to Burke Road section, while Synergy – comprising of CPB, BMD and Arcadis – has been appointed to deliver the Tram Road to Springvale Road section.

1.2.3 M80 Ring Road Completion

The first two years of construction on the M80 Ring Road Completion involved major excavation to create space for new lanes, landscaped bridges and a seamless connection to the North East Link tunnels.

We've set up worksites at AK Lines and Gabonia Avenue reserves in Watsonia to support construction for the M80 Ring Road Completion, both of which will be returned to the local community with improvements when the project is completed. We've also opened 500 car spaces at Frensham Reserve, with a new walking and cycling path connection to Watsonia Station.

The development of two new interchanges at the M80 Ring Road and Grimshaw Street will ease congestion and slash travel times, with dedicated lanes for local trips and express lanes to North East Link. Works to build the concrete piers and retaining walls to support the new entry and exit ramps are now underway.

The new landscaped bridges at Elder Street and Watsonia Road will enable east-west connectivity and better access to the Watsonia Road precinct for locals, with walking and cycling paths along both sides.

Works are carefully planned to minimise traffic impacts and maintain access to the Watsonia Road precinct throughout construction.

February and March 2025 saw significant progress on the Hurstbridge rail line, with both walls of the extended tunnel under Greensborough Highway now complete and a new slab track installed to create a smoother, quieter ride for passengers.

Upgrades to the Hurstbridge line will continue throughout 2025, to ensure comprehensive upgrades to safety and reliability for passengers, with works to extend the rail tunnel and rebuild the Grimshaw Street bridge ongoing until 2026.

We're working closely with nearby residents to ensure construction disruptions are minimised wherever possible. Where impacts are unavoidable, we're working closely with individual residents to understand how the works are impacting them and what support we can provide to help them manage through construction.

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 the community through the various phases of construction.



Preparing for major works

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

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

Maintain trust

Focus for 2025

Do what we say we're going to do. Coordinate interfacing works and communications. Continue to support the community and stakeholders during major works, managing construction and consultation fatigue. Reinforce how community input throughout the life of the project 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 project team's ongoing commitment to early and respectful communication

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

Consult with the community on open space design, primarily through the UDLP process and engagement with councils

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

Award contracts for remaining Eastern Freeway Upgrades: Hoddle St to Burke Rd and Tram Rd to Springvale Rd

Highlight any community legacy initiatives underway or completed

Continue to support impacted communities with grants program

Start Bulleen Park upgrades, continuing more than \$100 million investment in local sport

Start Doncaster Park & Ride upgrades, improving public transport in Melbourne's east

Reinforce benefits

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 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, including communities along the Eastern Freeway and the M80 Ring Road in Greensborough

Major construction works start for Eastern Freeway Upgrades: Hoddle St to Burke Rd and Tram Rd to Springvale Rd

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

Highlight urban design and environmental outcomes

Community open space starts to get opened, including sections of Koonung Creek Reserve

Reiterate project 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

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

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

Focus for 2028

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

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

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

Improvements to buses, bikes, parking and feeder roads

Driver education and safety

Open green spaces

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

Job creation and project legacy projects

Thank community for patience during construction

Acknowledge the project 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 stakeholders. This Strategy also considers those principles.

Inform and educate	Consult	Involve	Collaborate
Goal			
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.
Promise to the community and stakeholders			
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.

North East Link 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 project benefits, timing and rationale, and potential impacts on them.

2.5 Engagement tools and methods

Construction of the project 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 they need to meaningfully engage with the project.

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 project 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 NEL website and social media pages at various points throughout the project to convey complex technical information, visually communicate the project boundary and corridor, and other key aspects of the project.

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 milestones.

Community email address

An email address has been established to give stakeholders access to the project team and enquire about the project – **contact@bigbuild.vic.gov.au**. All communication materials will include this email address, and correspondence will be recorded in accordance with privacy requirements.

Community information line

Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority (VIDA)'s 'Big Build' phone number **1800 105 105** will be used for

people to contact the project team. Calls will be directed to a 24/7 call centre and, as appropriate, forwarded to the project 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

The project has a Community Assistance Program (CAP) which is a confidential and free professional counselling support service for residents, business owners and their immediate families. CAP can support community members to discuss work, life or any personal issues in a safe environment with qualified psychologists and social workers. The service is run through an independent third party so community members can rest assured that the service is strictly confidential.

To make an appointment, call 1300 830 687 and quote the project client:

- **NEL** for North East Link Tunnels
- **M8ORR** for M80 Ring Road Completion
- **EFU** for Eastern Freeway Upgrades.

Door knocks

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

Email updates have the critical information people need to stay up to date about what's happening near them, key disruptions or changes to our works program. Anyone living near the project works or who drives through the area are encouraged to sign up for updates at bigbuild.vic.gov.au/roads-subscribe

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. NEL has a dedicated Engage Victoria page that is coordinated under Victoria's Big Build which represents VIDA projects. Information regarding engagement sessions and activities will be available via Victoria's Big Build.

Fact sheets will be used as required to explain key project information 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 project. Fact sheets will also be mailed to impacted stakeholders in designated areas of the project.

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 project team and view information on construction activities.

DL flyers may be distributed to promptly inform residents of urgent works and any local impacts affecting their area. Where necessary, NEL delivers letters to residents offering respite periods or temporary relocation where specific eligibility criteria is met.

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

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

NEL 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.

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

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

Public Information Centres have been established at two locations on the project alignment to provide a physical space for the community to explore project information and speak directly with project team members about North East Link, including design features, construction activities, and project benefits.

The Watsonia Hub is located at 17 Watsonia Road, Watsonia and is open from Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm. The Eastern Freeway Upgrades Information Centre is located at 284 Doncaster Road, Balwyn North, and is open from Tuesday to Thursday, 9am to 3pm.

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

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

SMS notifications are used to provide time-critical, project-related information. SMS notifications are intended to supplement, not replace, email alerts or notifications. SMS notifications are sent out regularly with information about the progress of North East Link. Stakeholders are offered the opportunity to subscribe to these updates through public materials produced for the program, and can sign up for updates at bigbuild.vic.gov.au/roads-subscribe

NEL 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 project 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 project boundary at various stages of construction where works or disruptions are concentrated at specified times. Additionally, 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 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 will be used to discuss 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 project and, where relevant, mitigation strategies to offset impacts.

NEL publishes details of a translation service for languages other than English on all printed materials and on the Victoria's Big Build website. NEL offers some translated materials for key milestones and construction updates, based on the demographics of the communities served. Call (03) 9209 0147 to speak to the Big Build Contact Centre using our free interpreter service. The Contact Centre is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If assistance is required due to a hearing or speech impairment, visit relay.vic.gov.au

The project team is available to discuss any additional translation needs that may be required.

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

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.

A website, bigbuild.vic.gov.au/projects/north-east-link has been in operation since 2016 and will be maintained throughout the duration of the project. The website will be a repository of key information and milestones, and will host fact sheets, works notifications and other key documents and frameworks relating to the environment.

The project team can be contacted through the Big Build website using the 'Contact Us' page at **bigbuild.vic.gov.au/contact**

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 project contact information. Works notifications will also be published on the NEL website and in EDMs to the project'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 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 project 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 project 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 project boundary. Detailed knowledge and analysis of how these groups are likely to be impacted will help build awareness of their relationship and sentiment towards the project 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	- Members may be affected by construction activities - Shape broader public discussion about the project	- Project impacts and benefits related to member bodies - Growing influence and economic development	- Direct email - Briefings - Face-to-face meetings - Newsletters and EDMs - Website
Business and Industry	- Potential disruption from construction activities - Ability to influence project decision making	- Project impacts and benefits on business and industry - Changes to transport network	- Business Liaison Groups - Information sessions - Face-to-face meetings - Newsletters and EDMs - Website
Community and Interest Groups	- Potential disruption from construction activities - Influence community perceptions, attitudes and behaviours toward the project	- Project impacts and benefits related to specific areas of interest - Opportunities to improve social inclusion and cohesion	- Community Liaison Groups - Information sessions - Pop-up sessions - Watsonia Hub - Website - Home visits - Newsletters and EDMs
Directly affected Residents and Landowners	- Disruption from construction activities - Changed access and parking conditions - Temporary occupation/permanent land acquisition	- Construction management and mitigation measures - Opportunities for local community infrastructure improvements	- Face-to-face meetings - Dedicated case management - Phone calls - Door knock - Direct email communication - Street meetings - Information sessions
Public transport users	Disruption and changed travel to bus and train services	- Impacts to travel routes and times - Project timeline and future disruption impacts	- Advertising - Road signage - Direct letter - Referral channels by bus and train providers/operators - Social media - Posters/fact sheets
Road users	- Disruption from construction activities - Detours and impacted travel times - Changed access and parking conditions	- Impacts to travel routes and times - Project timeline and future disruption impacts - Alternative methods of travel and detour routes	- Road signage - Radio and TV advertising - Social media - Website update - Newsletters and EDMs
Government Entities	- Direct influence over project decisions - Responsible for planning approvals	- Key milestones - Statutory requirements are met - Overall project delivery	- Direct email - Briefings - Meetings - Website

Stakeholder groups	Impacts	Interests	Engagement methods
Local Councils	- Local planning issues resulting from construction activities - Responsible for local permits and approvals	- Project benefits and impacts in municipality - Long-term benefits and legacy of the project	- Direct email - Monthly meetings - Website - Social media - Advertising
Local Traders	- Disruption from construction activities - Changed access and parking conditions - Prolonged interruption threatens business viability	- Construction management and mitigation measures - Opportunities for business support - Opportunities for precinct renewal	- Briefings - Door knock - Direct letter/email - Information sessions - Business group meetings - Website - Social media - Newsletters/EDMs
Sports and Recreation Groups	- Disruption to users and facilities - Temporary occupation/permanent land acquisition	- Suitable replacement facilities - Opportunities for permanent facility improvements	- Direct email - One-on-one meetings - Website - eNewsletter/EDM
Utility Providers	- Assets may need to be relocated or protected - Potential impacts on asset renewal plans	- Avoiding service disruption to clients - Opportunities for asset improvements	- Direct email - Meetings - Website - Social media
Vulnerable and Culturally And Logistically Diverse Groups (CALD)	- Potential disruption from construction activities - Lack of awareness and confusion about project impacts and benefits	- Availability of information in accessible formats - Engagement approach tailored to specific requirements	- Direct email/EDM - Briefings - NEL information published on referral channels where CALD audiences access news
Traditional Owners	- Shape public discussion on the project - Impact to environment and land within the project boundary - Areas of cultural significance that could be impacted through the project	- EPRs - Construction management and mitigation measures - Opportunities for collaboration and influence - Avoiding culturally sensitive and significant sites - Opportunities for precinct renewal - Opportunities to engage the Indigenous community throughout the project	- Briefings - One-on-one meetings - Direct email
Religious and worship groups	- Disruption from construction activities - Changed access and parking conditions	- Construction management and mitigation measures - Suitable replacement facilities and measures	- Door knocks - Website - Information sessions - Newsletters/EDMs

3.3 Community Liaison Groups

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

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

These groups are referenced in Environmental Performance Requirement SC4.

Contracting teams working across NEL'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 project area. These groups provide a forum to hear about the project, 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 project 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 project and working with North East Link as the project 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 project. NEL 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, 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 project 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 VIDA 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.

NEL 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 VIDA 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 VIDA projects.

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

CALD engagement to date

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

the Environment Effects Statement process.

Engagement with CALD communities was facilitated via cultural leaders in the project 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 project were offered to interested community members.

Throughout the planning phase, materials about the project and how to get involved in the EES process were translated into the top five languages other than English in the project 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 project.

CALD engagement approach moving forward

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

NEL 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, NEL will provide Auslan interpreters at information sessions to ensure CALD communities are informed of key project information, milestones and disruptions.

NEL 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 NEL website. Interpreter services are also available on (03) 9679 9896. The project 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.

NEL 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 project.

EPRs are one way the project and its contractors will manage the impacts of construction. Reports detailing performance and compliance with EPRs will be published every six months on the NEL 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 project, 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.

NEL 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 project 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
- contact details, including the Big Build 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 NEL's database.

Letterbox drops: DL flyers may be distributed to promptly inform residents of urgent works and any local impacts affecting their area.

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

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

Information hubs: hard copy works notifications will be available at the Watsonia Hub, 17 Watsonia Road, Watsonia and at the Eastern Freeway Upgrades Public Information Centre, 284 Doncaster Road, Balwyn North.

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 project 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).

Calling the 24/7 contact centre is the quickest way to get a construction impact investigated by the project team. These calls go straight to our community engagement team on the right project, and they can work with the site managers on the ground to see how we can manage the impact at the source, or provide advice on other ways the project can help.

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 project in order to meet the requirements of EPR T3. The TMLG is chaired by NEL and consists of key transport agencies, relevant local councils, emergency services agencies, other VIDA projects as required and the project'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 project 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 project, 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 NEL 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.

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

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. NEL 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 Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority (VIDA) 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 NEL website and can be made via:

- Direct mail to Victoria's Big Build, GPO Box 2392, Melbourne, VIC 3001
- A direct message on social media via NEL's Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn pages
- In person at Watsonia Hub, 17 Watsonia Road, Watsonia, Monday to Friday between 10am and 5pm, and at the Eastern Freeway Upgrades Public Information Centre, 284 Doncaster Road, Balwyn North from Tuesday to Thursday, between 9am and 3pm.
- Contact our call centre on 1800 105 105 or email contact@bigbuild.vic.gov.au
- 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.

If you are dissatisfied with the response provided by NEL, you can escalate to the Victorian Ombudsman.

6 Evaluation

The Communications and Engagement team, together with project teams across NEL 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 NEL 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 Big Build projects.

North East Link will also be evaluated and audited by the Independent Environment Auditor (IEA) through all phases of the project 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 NEL website.

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

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

1800 105 105 (call anytime)

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



NELP2579