



At the crossroads

If you had \$12 billion to spend on transport around this city, where would you put your money?

Two major inquiries are due to report, which will have a huge impact.

Tomorrow there's the Eddington Inquiry into Melbourne's east-west transport connections, and there's also the ongoing federal Garnaut Review on climate change policy.

For Melbourne's transport planning these inquiries signpost opposite directions.

Sir Rod Eddington's story is all about how to fix congestion in one city, one location within 10 years.

Professor Ross Garnaut's story is about how to tackle climate change by a broad approach, including transport planning for the nation's entire metropolitan regions over 50 years.

Eddington will advise the State Government to start building a road tunnel connecting the Ring Road with CityLink and the Eastern Freeway under inner Melbourne.

The tunnel will not primarily serve through traffic. Why? Because the demand is for traffic to the city centre and inner suburbs.

So, to be economically viable for the private operators, it will have to include a series of off-ramps into the city and surrounding areas.

This is certain to feed a more or less permanent state of gridlock in inner Melbourne.

To help with the gridlock problem, a rail tunnel will be proposed to free up capacity on the trains, together with an improved bus route to Doncaster. The works will have an estimated cost of between \$10 billion and \$12 billion.

Garnaut will advise the Commonwealth Government to impose a price on carbon emissions sufficient to change people's energy



consumption habits. For transport, the problem is that too many people are using too many cars to get around because no satisfactory alternative is available.

This is not an inner Melbourne congestion problem, but an outer Melbourne opportunity problem.

Outer Melbourne residents do not have public transport opportunities to get them where they want to go.

True, the two areas are connected by the minority of commuters who move down the road corridors from outer to inner at peak times.

But although relatively small numbers of trips cause a lot of congestion — incidentally blocking road space for trucks — most trips by car are very short, and most people live in the suburbs they work in.

The private promoters of the toll tunnel that Eddington will recommend are betting that people will continue to go by car even if the price of fuel goes through the roof.

They have a vested interest in keeping our suburbs car-dependent.

They don't want better public transport anywhere in Melbourne because their profits come from building roads.

Freight transport alone will not deliver the profits they need, so the roads must also serve cars.

The State Government faces a conflict between its desire to encourage infrastructure business and its desire to improve public transport.

Inner suburbanites have good public transport options, and it is safer to

walk or cycle. But in the outer suburbs these alternatives are either unavailable or unsafe.

There may be an affordable replacement for the internal combustion engine, but it will not be happening for a long time.

Meanwhile, people must still get around.

The Garnaut Review points in some different directions for Melbourne's transport.

It would mean investing in extending the fixed-rail system to the fast-growing outer suburbs.

Buses cannot move large numbers of people across town or into town quickly with low greenhouse emissions.

We also need more funding in fixed rail for the Doncaster corridor.

The bus system should connect with and feed the rail system via fast, direct routes to rail stations.

There should be new rail lines across town to connect the suburban rail network.

Finally, why not put extra investment into safe cycling and walking paths in the outer suburbs?

The NSW Government has woken up to the uncomfortable truth that building itself out of congestion with private-public partnership toll roads does not solve the transport problem.

NSW is spending \$12.5 billion on a new underground metro rail system.

From what we have seen so far, Eddington is not the main game when it comes to transport.

Garnaut is.

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Gridlock: the State Government may face a conflict between road planning and public transport policies.