Report to the Future Melbourne (Transport) Committee

Agenda item 6.1

Western Distributor

17 May 2016

Presenter: Kate Vinot, Director City Strategy and Place

Purpose and background

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an outline of the proposed Western Distributor project and seek endorsement for management's proposed approach.
2. On 8 December 2015 the Victorian Government announced it would build the Western Distributor project (the Project) in partnership with Transurban. The Project is a proposed upgrade of the M1 freeway including a new link from the M1 under Yarraville, across the Maribyrnong River and via an elevated freeway connecting to CityLink, Port of Melbourne, Footscray Road, Dynon Road and Wurundjeri Way.
3. The Victorian Government is currently seeking input from the City of Melbourne by the end of May 2016 to inform the preparation of the Request for Tenders for procurement of the Project.

Key issues

4. The City of Melbourne recognises a number of benefits of the Project. These include:
   - 4.1. providing a second crossing of the Maribyrnong River to reduce dependence on the Westgate Bridge and improve the resilience of the road network
   - 4.2. improving the operation of the M1, the city's most important road; providing access for people in Melbourne's west to jobs and activity in the central city
   - 4.3. reducing the impact of heavy vehicles bound for the Port of Melbourne on residential areas especially in Maribyrnong
   - 4.4. reducing motor vehicle trips through the Hoddle Grid to the north of the city from the M1 and reducing driving distances to central city locations from the north/west of Melbourne
   - 4.5. potential improvements to the shared path network on Dynon and Footscray roads.
5. The Council's policy is that travel growth into the central city should primarily be through improved public transport supported by cycling and walking. The key issue for the City of Melbourne is the likely increase in vehicle traffic in West Melbourne, North Melbourne, Carlton and Parkville and the associated congestion and negative impacts on land uses and the public realm.
6. Management's initial concerns about the Project are detailed in Attachment 2. In summary the Project (as currently proposed) is likely to significantly increase traffic into North and West Melbourne (via Dynon Road) and to the north of the Hoddle Grid. The main anticipated effects of this are the potential negative impact on land uses through the creation of demand for car parking and storage; on public amenity and safety due to increased numbers of cars in the city, particularly in streets and areas not designed to absorb the increased traffic; greater traffic noise; potentially undermining conditions for walking, cycling and public transport and possible impacts on the public realm, including trees.
7. The current concept design for the Project also raises specific concerns in regard to the possible removal of approximately 148 trees on Footscray Road; the impact on a future walking connection between E Gate and North Melbourne; the widening of Wurundjeri Way; the alienation of land by freeway ramps and the possible loss of urban renewal opportunities; the impact of extra freeway ramps on the proposed linear park on the Moonee Ponds Creek; worsening of the already difficult walking environment on Dudley Street connecting Docklands to West Melbourne; and the urban design challenges presented by the Project, especially the proposed elevated freeway in the Footscray Road median.
8. The $5.5 billion project is a significant opportunity cost. It is not clear that a freeway with connections to the central city is the highest priority transport project to support central city job growth and the development of the knowledge economy. The inherent space efficiency and significantly greater capacity of public transport is better suited to bringing large numbers of people into busy central city areas. Public transport projects generally enhance the value of nearby land rather than degrade it.

Recommendation from management

9. That the Future Melbourne Committee:

    9.1. notes the benefits provided by the proposed Western Distributor project

    9.2. notes the City of Melbourne's 'Key Issues and Preliminary Analysis' (Attachment 2) that will form the basis of Management's advice to the Victorian Government in regard to the Western Distributor project

    9.3. note management's intention to work with the project team to pursue the policy position of Council, address the key issues outlined in this report and identify opportunities that may improve the social, environmental and economic outcomes of the Project.

Attachments:
1. Supporting Attachment (page 3 of 14)
2. Western Distributor Key Issues – Preliminary analysis (page 4 of 14)

Attachment 1
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Supporting Attachment

Legal

1. There are no specific legal implications due to this report.

Finance

2. There are no specific financial implications related to this recommendation. Work on the Project will mostly be officers' time. Other work on the project will be the subject of future budget considerations.

Conflict of interest

3. No member of Council staff, or other person engaged under a contract, involved in advising on or preparing this report has declared a direct or indirect interest in relation to the matter of the report.

Stakeholder consultation

4. It is noted that the Project has not been assessed by Infrastructure Victoria or Infrastructure Australia.

5. City of Melbourne has done no external stakeholder consultation in relation to this report. The Project proponent is currently conducting a stakeholder consultation process. External stakeholder consultation by the City of Melbourne may be required in the future.

6. City of Melbourne officers will work with the project team to address the concerns raised in this report and to seek opportunities created by the Project. This will occur via:

    6.1. Direct input to the Western Distributor project team on urban design and other matters to inform the Requests for Tender due to be issued to the construction market at the end of the current financial year as well as to refine the Project in future stages.

    6.2. Input to the preparation of the Environment Effects Statement.

    6.3. Input to the project's Community Liaison Group.

Relation to Council policy

7. The Project is not generally consistent with Council's Transport Strategy 2012, as noted in paragraph 6 of this report.

Environmental sustainability

8. Environmental sustainability issues have been considered in writing this report. The report is based on the City of Melbourne's position on transport issues established in the Transport Strategy 2012. Achieving better environmental outcomes was one of the criteria for policies and actions in the Transport Strategy 2012. The report is also consistent with the City of Melbourne's Urban Forest Strategy 2014, highlighting the issue of possible tree removal due to the Project.

CITY OF MELBOURNE

Western Distributor
Key Issues – Preliminary analysis

City of Melbourne

17 May 2016

Contents

1. Introduction

On 8 December 2015 the Victorian Government announced it would build the Western Distributor project (the Project) in partnership with Transurban. The Project is a proposed upgrade of the M1 freeway including a new link from the M1 under Yarraville, across the Maribyrnong River and via an elevated freeway connecting to the Port of Melbourne, CityLink, Footscray Road, Dynon Road and Wurundjeri Way.

The Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR) has been designated as the proponent in partnership with Transurban.

This document details important issues about the Project which are of concern to the City of Melbourne. It is not a full analysis of the Project's benefits and costs from the City of Melbourne's perspective. This document is based on preliminary information about the Project provided prior to May 2016.

It is noted that further refinement of the Project will occur. This will include more detail on the overall project design, design of road connections, addition of lanes to existing roads in the City Of Melbourne (Wurundjeri Way) and more detailed modelling of traffic impacts.

Current knowledge of traffic impacts is based on information in the Project business case and outputs from the strategic-level traffic model. The model assumes that traffic is able to travel to destinations to which it is assigned regardless of existing congestion. This is a coarse approximation of reality. More detail and validation of traffic movements will be provided by further, more detailed modelling.

More information about the Project is available at http://consult.transurban.com/western-distributor-join-the-conversation.

2. Context for the analysis

This analysis is informed by City of Melbourne policy documents and strategies. These include:

- The City of Melbourne Transport Strategy 2012
- The City of Melbourne Open Space Strategy 2012
- The City of Melbourne Urban Forest Strategy 2012
- The City of Melbourne City North Structure Plan 2012
- The City of Melbourne Arden Macaulay Structure Plan 2012
- The City of Melbourne Road Safety Plan 2013 - 17
- The City of Melbourne Walking Plan 2014 - 17
- The City of Melbourne Bicycle Plan 2016 – 2020

- The City of Melbourne Submission to Plan Melbourne Refresh – Discussion Paper October 2015

This submission is also informed by the *Transport Integration Act 2010*, particularly the *Transport System Objectives* and *Decision Making Principles*.

3. City of Melbourne policy

City of Melbourne policy on transport is contained in the Transport Strategy 2012. It sets key directions and policy targets for transport in the municipality and focuses on creating sustainable transport solutions to support significant growth in the City of Melbourne to 2030. The strategy is based around the principle that travel growth into the central city should primarily be via improved public transport, supported by cycling and walking. The strategy notes that residential and mixed use precincts should be protected from the degrading effects of through traffic and that the role of motor vehicles will decline in importance as the city develops and intensifies.

Between 2009 and 2030, the number of trips to from and within the city is expected to increase from 2,072,137 trips to 3,339,225 trips. The high level targets of the plan are to reduce motor vehicle trips to, through and within the municipality from the 2009 mode share of 39 per cent (833,729 trips) to 20 per cent (667,844 trips) by 2030 while increasing the number of trips by public transport, cycling and walking.

The Transport Strategy specifically notes that roads such as Victoria Street, which used to operate as by-pass roads, now run through the heart of activity precincts and that heavy through traffic disrupts local mobility and amenity.

The City North Structure Plan 2012 provides a framework to guide the renewal of City North and to fulfil the precinct's potential as an extension of the central city. It seeks to reduce the negative impacts of significant through traffic and wide roads creating barriers to local movement. It calls for road space to be allocated to more efficient modes such as public transport and opportunities to improve the public realm.

4. Key issues

Priority

The $5.5 billion project represents a significant opportunity cost. It is not clear that a freeway with connections to the central city is the highest priority transport project to support central city job growth and the development of the knowledge economy. The inherent space efficiency and significantly greater capacity of public transport is better suited to bringing large numbers of people into busy central city areas. The central city includes Docklands, City North and Southbank as well as the Hoddle Grid.

There are a number of possible public transport projects which could improve access to Melbourne's growing central city and help to stimulate development closer to areas where jobs are growing in the central city without the negative impacts of motor vehicles. These

include Melbourne Metro 2 (including consideration of connecting from Fishermans Bend across the Yarra River and further to the west), a rail line to Melbourne Airport, extensions and improvements to the tram network (Park Street, South Melbourne; Fishermans Bend; Dynon Road; Victoria Street and others). These projects are also likely to stimulate growth, improve access and contribute to property value uplift.

The Project has a relatively limited ability to deliver large volumes of people to the central city. According to the business case:

- In the morning peak, about 3000 vehicles per hour will travel city-bound on the Footscray Road section of the Project each day in 2031. Of these, 30-35 per cent will head north to CityLink (900-1050 cars), 20-25 per cent to Dynon Road (600-750 cars), 15-20 per cent to Footscray Road (450-600 cars) and 10-15 per cent to Wurundjeri Way (300-450 cars).

- Over the course of a day around 30,000 vehicles will travel on the Footscray Road section of the Project each day in 2031. Of these, 30-35 per cent will head north to CityLink (9000-10,500 cars), 25-30 per cent to Dynon Road (7500-9000 cars), 15-20 per cent to Footscray Road (4500-6000 cars) and 1-5 per cent (300-1500 cars) to Wurundjeri Way.

At current approximate car occupancy levels (1.1 people per vehicle), this means the maximum number of people entering the city from the Project (via Dynon Road, Footscray Road and Wurundjeri Way):

- In the am peak (7 am – 9 am) - between 2970 and 3960 (approximately 1485 and 1980 per hour).

- Over the course of the day – between 13,530 and 18,150.

Some of these vehicles have destinations in the central city area and some will travel through to other locations.

In contrast, the Melbourne Metro train project will create capacity to bring an extra 8000 people per hour into the central city in the peaks in 2031 (the equivalent of five inbound lanes of freeway traffic) and with the delivery of the full Melbourne Metro extended program will bring an extra 14,500 people per hour into the central city in the peaks (the equivalent of nine lanes of freeway traffic).

Traffic in North and West Melbourne

The Western Distributor proposal is likely to have significant traffic impacts in North and West Melbourne and to the north of the Hoddle Grid in the expanded central city.

New traffic will result from the connection of the Western Distributor via ramps (two lanes in either direction) directly to Dynon Road. Capacity for this new traffic will be created by widening and extending Wurundjeri Way to Dynon Road. Traffic using Dynon Road to access the city will be able to use the new Wurundjeri Way. Traffic from the Western Distributor will be travelling to destinations north and east of the central city.

Preliminary analysis of the traffic impacts in North and West Melbourne indicates that the Project is likely to create a demand for an extra approximately 7200 vehicles per day in 2031 attempting to travel east-west across Royal Parade/Peel Street on various streets between Gatehouse Street and Lonsdale Street. The Project business case notes that about 7500 to 9000 cars will be distributed to Dynon Road from the Western Distributor during a 24 hour period.

Council has been working for many years to reduce traffic volumes on these streets.

The situation would be exacerbated by the possible permanent removal of a lane of traffic in each direction on Grattan Street as part of Melbourne Metro Rail. This would remove capacity for about 8000 east-west movements. Some of the traffic which will no longer be able to use Grattan Street will seek to use other existing east-west streets such as Queensberry Street along with the new traffic from Western Distributor. The cumulative impact of both projects will be the addition/redistribution of 15,000 east west vehicle trips per day in North and West Melbourne.

Significant local area traffic management works already exist in North and West Melbourne, Carlton and Parkville which have successfully reduced the negative impacts of traffic on local areas. Further protecting streets will be expensive and is likely to require severe measures, such as closures, which will create “winners and losers”. Some measures will require the approval of VicRoads which has previously rejected similar treatments proposed by City of Melbourne.

The impact of extra traffic on public transport is not yet known.

There is concern that changes to the road network to increase its capacity may be required in North and West Melbourne to cope with extra traffic. This process would worsen the conditions that the City of Melbourne’s policies are designed to address and would reverse the traffic management outcomes in the area which have been achieved over many years. It is not clear what measures will be needed or proposed to accommodate the extra traffic from Western Distributor in North and West Melbourne. Increasing the carrying capacity of local streets to meet the additional demand created by the Project and growth in vehicle trips may have a negative impact on the value of residential properties located on those streets.

The impacts of traffic and new road capacity

Because of the strong link between transport and land use, there will be a variety of land-use responses to the Project and ways in which it will change behaviour and decisions.

The main anticipated effects are the potential negative impact on land through the creation of demand for car parking and storage in the central city; on public amenity and safety due to increased numbers of cars in the city, particularly in streets and areas not designed to absorb the increased traffic and where there are significant numbers of vulnerable road users; greater traffic noise; air pollution; potentially undermining conditions for walking, cycling and public transport and possible impacts on the public realm such as trees.

There is a concern that the Project will further embed sprawl and car dependence because it will provide access for motor vehicle travel. In contrast, public transport projects tend to encourage the clustering of land uses around public transport nodes reducing car travel. Enhancing public transport would have the added advantage of encouraging more development in the inner city and less on the periphery.

For example, the Project could have an impact on the type of development in the Arden precinct. This is a brownfields development site based around the new Arden Central Station with a strong emphasis on transit oriented development, mixed use, walking and cycling. Clearly road links and access for motor vehicles will be a part of the planning for this area. However, the presence of Western Distributor is likely to create demand for more car parking in the precinct and pressure to prioritise motor vehicle travel within and through the area. As has happened in other precincts in Melbourne, such as Southbank, demand for car parking can result in significant amounts of land being used for parking rather than active and productive uses. Also, the quality and attractiveness of the precinct's public realm may be undermined by podium style development with streets overlooked by levels of car parking rather than active buildings which contribute to the streetscape. Adding car parking to residential developments also tends to increase the price of residential development.

Modelling for the Western Distributor proposal indicates that there will be reductions in traffic entering the Hoddle Grid from the M1 including via Spencer and King Streets. This is a benefit of the Project if these traffic reductions are locked in by changes to central city road space allocation. Otherwise the capacity created by these reductions is likely to be subsumed by induced traffic.

Trees

The current concept design for the Project also raises concerns about the possible removal of approximately 148 trees in a double row in the central median of Footscray Road. This is an area of the City of Melbourne with relatively poor tree cover. There is a possibility that bidding consortia may be able to design the road without losing these trees. It is noted, however, that the elevated viaduct in the centre of Footscray Road was also a component of the East West Link proposal so it is unclear whether there is a reasonable likelihood of an innovative design which retains the trees.

There are potential tree losses in other parts of the Project including along Wurundjeri Way. Details of these tree losses or plans to replace them are not yet known. It will be the responsibility of the Project proponent to plan for the replacement of lost trees and include significant greening as part of the urban design of the Project.

Specific impacts on land in City of Melbourne

The Project raises concerns about the alienation of land by freeway ramps and the possible loss of urban renewal opportunities. The concept design for the Project includes a network of freeway ramps linking the new Footscray Road viaduct section to Footscray Road, Dynon Road, Wurundjeri Way and CityLink. These ramps could have a significant impact on how this land can be used in the future.

A connection is also proposed across the north west part of the E Gate precinct. Dual connections from the extension of Wurundjeri Way (to Dynon Road and to the Western Distributor viaduct) are located on the north side of E Gate. These may have a negative impact on the value of future development opportunities there and the quality and attractiveness of places that can be developed there.

Walking/cycling links

The Project raises concerns about future walking and cycling connections between E Gate and North Melbourne. The extension of Wurundjeri Way is proposed to run along the north side of the E Gate site. Walking and cycling connections between E Gate and West Melbourne have long been regarded as essential for knitting the site into the existing urban fabric and creating the access which will make E Gate attractive as a place to live and work. A significant part of the value of E Gate will be in its local walking and cycling connections to nearby destinations including public transport hubs, jobs and entertainment. These walking and cycling connections will also facilitate movements in and out of Docklands.

The concept design includes a widening of the intersection of Dudley Street and Wurundjeri Way to retain the existing surface connection for motor vehicles between the two roads while integrating the new elevated section of Wurundjeri Way. This is likely to worsen the already very difficult walking and cycling environment on Dudley Street connecting Docklands to West Melbourne as well as adding another bridge which will further reduce light for people using the intersection. The poor level of service provided by the existing crossing to people walking and cycling has been highlighted in resident feedback during initial consultation on the West Melbourne Structure Plan. It will be the responsibility of the Project proponent to examine options for the design of this intersection which improve walking and cycling links and urban design. This should be a requirement of the request-for-tender process.

The Project has identified other benefits such as the completion of the Federation Trail cycling and walking path. This is of significant benefit to the City of Melbourne because it will link a large area of the west by a safe and convenient cycling route to the central city. It is noted that completing the Federation Trail does not depend on the construction of the Western Distributor. It could be completed as a stand-alone project however there is no current proposal to fund these works.

Other benefits to the shared path network, which may be provided by the Project include a new bridge on the Footscray Road path over Sim Street, an extension of the Moonee Ponds Creek path under Footscray Road and a connection along the Dynon Road Bridge.

Open space

The Project includes up to seven new ramps across the Moonee Ponds Creek. This will have a negative impact on the creek corridor. The City of Melbourne has been working towards a masterplan for the Moonee Ponds Creek corridor which would support local communities and a healthy urban ecology and be underpinned by Integrated Water Cycle Management.

Urban design

The Project presents significant urban design challenges. These include the proposed elevated freeway in the Footscray Road median, the extensive network of ramps, connections and flyovers in the vicinity of the Moonee Ponds Creek and impacts on roads to which the Project will connect including Wurundjeri Way.

5. Figures

Figure 1 – Overall map of Western Distributor project (Transurban image adjusted by City of Melbourne to show city access connections)

Figure 2 – Western Distributor proposed city access connections (http://consult.transurban.com/western-distributor-join-the-conversation)

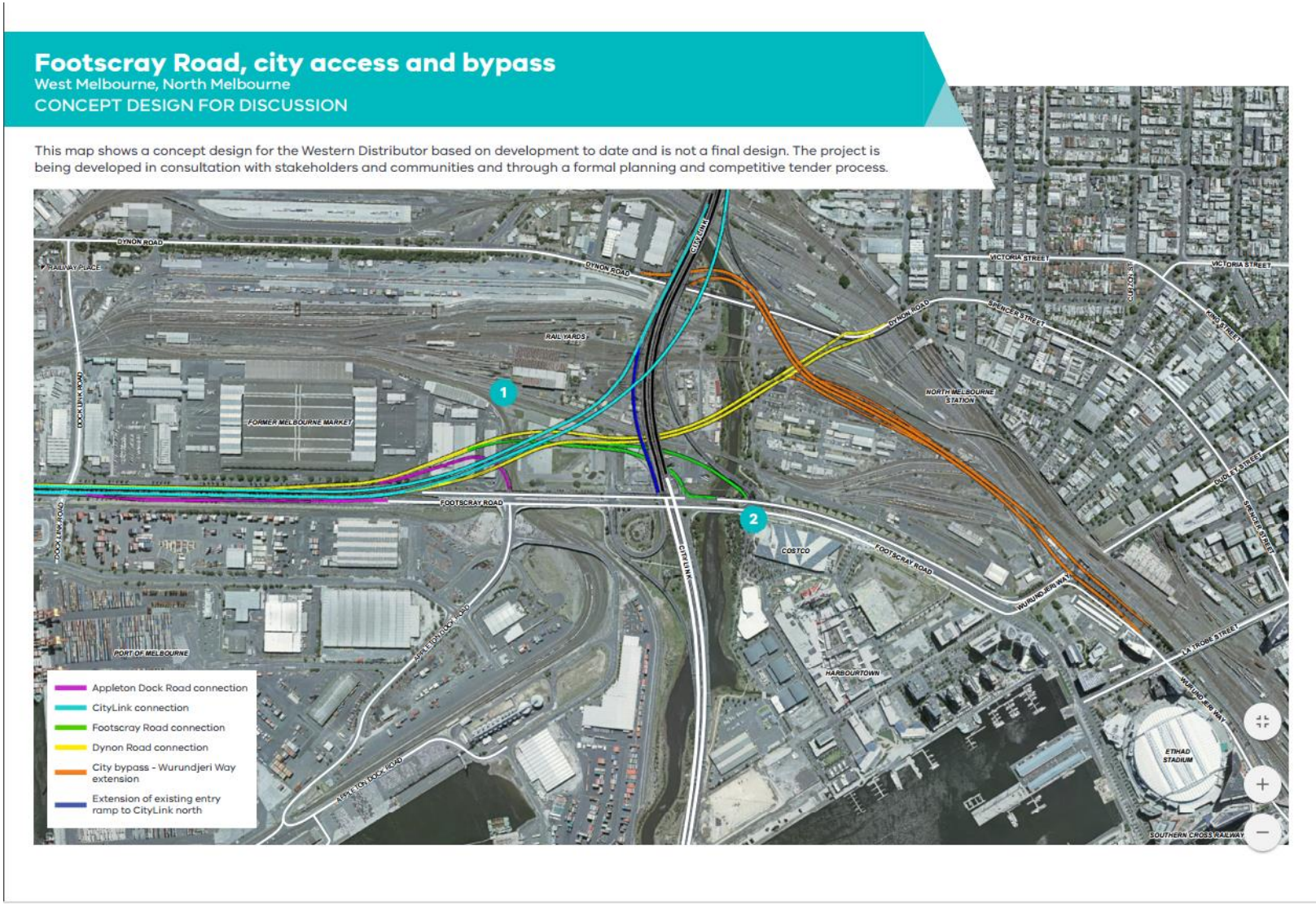

Figure 3 – Western Distributor 3D model image of city connections (http://consult.transurban.com/western-distributor-join-the-conversation)

Western Distributor - City access and bypass
View from above Footscray Road, looking east towards the city