

4.4 LEVEL CROSSING REMOVAL PROJECT – OPEN SPACES DEFECTS & MAINTENANCE (TT:TRAF200)

Responsible Director: Ossie Martinz

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is to advise councillors about the various assets the Level Crossing Removal Project (the project) has delivered for our community and the role Council is anticipated to take with the ongoing maintenance and care of these facilities.

PURPOSE

The project was delivered by the Level Crossing Removal Authority (LXRP) on behalf of the Victorian Government. A vital component of the project was the delivery of community space beneath and alongside the rail. The project provided new public open spaces and station precincts including more than six kilometres of linear park and a continuous 17 kilometre Shared User Path (SUP) from Caulfield to EastLink.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS/ISSUES

The key project outcomes delivered in Monash were:

- Linear park open spaces and landscaping – Hughesdale and mostly Clayton with vast areas transformed from the previously unusable rail reserve;
- Redeveloped Galbally Reserve – Council project with funding contribution from LXRP for new equipment and features;
- Clayton Road multi-generational recreational and rest area;
- Clayton Station Bus Interchange;
- RSL memorial and ceremonial space;
- Centre Road recreational and sports area; and
- Three kilometres of new 3m wide SUP.

The linear park between Poath Road and Centre Road provides good community space and amenity.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

LXRP has offered Council \$3,865,000 for future maintenance of the linear park for a 10 year period. Within this amount is an allowance to rectify the poor condition of some components of the linear park prior to handing over ongoing maintenance responsibility to Council.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council accepts the offer from LXRP for the ongoing maintenance subject to the conditions specified in the report and subject to a satisfactory licence agreement.

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RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. *Accepts the Maintenance Funds offer from the Level Crossing Removal Project of \$3,865,000 to deliver the maintenance of the Open Space areas along the Level Crossing Removal Project from Poath Road, Hughesdale to Centre Road, Clayton.*
2. *Notes that the offer falls short of the anticipated cost of a ten year maintenance program by approximately three years and that Council will have to fund ongoing maintenance after this period.*
3. *Requires that the Level Crossing Removal Project offer also includes \$312,250 for reinstatement of concrete areas, trees, garden areas and damaged roads within and adjoining the agreed area.*
4. *Note that the Level Crossing Removal Project has previously agreed to contribute 50% or \$75,000 towards an additional future PlaySpace west of Centre Road.*
5. *Subject to agreement of the additional funding outlined in Item 3, Council authorises the Chief Executive Officer or her delegate, on behalf of Council to do all things required to effect the Licence for the areas along the Level Crossing Removal Project from Poath Road Hughesdale to Centre Road Clayton, inclusive of an obligation upon the Level Crossing Removal Project for Maintenance Funding.*

INTRODUCTION

In February 2016, the Victorian Government announced a design for the removal of all nine level crossings between Caulfield and Dandenong on the Pakenham-Cranbourne line. The design consisted of three stretches of elevated rail line: from Carnegie to Hughesdale Stations; from Clayton Road to Centre Road; and a third portion in Noble Park. Practical completion of the project was reached in October 2018.

In Monash this included:

- An elevated rail over Poath Road (with a new station on the west side)
- A continuous elevated rail over Clayton Road and Centre Road
- A new elevated Clayton Station above its previous location
- A proper modal interchange at Clayton
- A continuous Shared Use Path (SUP) along the rail corridor
- Large areas of open space underneath and alongside the elevated rail
- Activation nodes with sporting and recreational facilities
- A new look Galbally Reserve and link to Poath Road

This report advises about the various assets the project has delivered for our community and Council is anticipated to take with the ongoing maintenance and care of these facilities.

BACKGROUND

The Vision

A vital component of the elevated rail project was how the community space beneath and alongside the rail was to be used and developed. The project aimed to provide new public open spaces and station activity precincts by creating over 6 kilometres of linear park and providing a continuous 17 kilometre SUP from Caulfield to EastLink.

Council was given a unique opportunity to influence the design and development of the open spaces through the Community Open Space Expert Panel (COSEP).

Council prepared and endorsed a Community Space Strategy to:

- Help Council engage with COSEP to refine the delivery of spaces adjacent and beneath the elevated rail;
- Identify opportunities for value adding that will best benefit the local community; and
- Document principles and desired outcomes for the open space, in order to provide Council's consolidated position to COSEP.

Delivered Outcomes - Community Spaces

In Monash improvements were made to the following locations:

- Linear park open spaces and landscaping – Hughesdale and Clayton with vast areas transformed from previously unusable rail reserve.
- Redeveloped Galbally Reserve – Council project with funding contribution from LXRP for new equipment and features.
- Clayton Road multi-generational recreational and rest area
- Clayton Station Bus Interchange
- RSL Memorial & Ceremonial space
- Centre Road recreational & sports area.

Delivered Outcomes – Shared User Path

In Monash 3.0km of new 3.0m wide SUP was constructed at the following locations:

- a 370m link from Poath Rd through Galbally Reserve (in a 12 m wide corridor which was previously just 2m wide);
- a 400m connection from Richardson St to Oakleigh Station, passing under Warrigal Rd overpass (achieved by removing the southern rail track);
- an 80m connection through the Huntingdale Station interchange to separate SUP from the bus patron area;
- a 600m pathway replacement and widening behind the industrial properties along the south side of Carinish Rd at the Huntingdale end;

- a new fully automated at-grade pedestrian crossing near Flora Road enabling shift of the SUP to the southern side of the rail line with a 600m link to Clayton Station; and
- a 900m long SUP along the southern side of the rail between Clayton Station and a new signalised crossing at Centre Rd.

DISCUSSION

A number of components of the Linear Park are proposed to be managed by Council.

Prior to Council assuming the maintenance responsibility, Council has assessed the land area and the new installations. There are concerns with the quality of some components which need to be resolved prior to handover. These include garden issues, such as the lack of established grass covers, plantings and mulching and the general poor condition of the open space areas. In addition, there are defects with several components of concrete works.

Level Crossing Removal Project Correspondence

On 18 December 2019 the Level Crossing Removal Project (LXRP) wrote to the four Councils involved in the Caulfield to Dandenong (CTD) Project seeking an in-principle agreement to their proposal to enable a handover of responsibility to Councils on 1 May 2020. The proposal included a \$15M maintenance allocation over the next ten years divided between the four councils, land access arrangements and a handover approach.

A distribution of \$3,865,000 to Monash Council (from the \$15M) is based on the 25% of the linear space to be handed over and 29% of the activation spaces. In total, there is approximately 4.24Ha of open space that will be included in this maintenance agreement. The open space is a great benefit to the adjoining residents and community.

There is a desire for Council to provide a high level of amenity across all of the open space features provided by the project however the current state of the new infrastructure including some of the concrete works and most of the landscaped areas do not meet the standards of Council.

Following meetings with the other councils it was decided each would respond to LXRP individually. Monash responded in January 2020 raising numerous concerns including infrastructure quality, maintenance funding, licensing documentation and handover timing. Since responding there has been a number of meetings with LXRP, including an on-site inspection, to address these matters. Agreements have been reached on the majority of these items.

Defects

Before any maintenance can commence, an arrangement must be reached to rectify the defects either by financial payment to Council to undertake the works or the works to be carried out by LXRP prior to any handover.

In most cases it is preferred that Council undertake the works and the LXR provide funds for this to occur.

The defects involve hard surfaces and soft landscaping.

Hard Surfaces - Concrete, Sporting Areas and Road Pavement.

Concrete

There is a substantial quantity of concrete repairs required. These repairs are a result of poor delivery standards, incomplete items or damage to pre-existing assets. A comprehensive itemised list was prepared by Council officers and submitted to LXR.

A payment to Council of \$156,000 for Council to attend to this work has been agreed to.

Sporting Areas

The Basketball court has water ponding issues. The current warranty defect period ends in October 2020. Council officers are not comfortable with the current court condition. It is proposed that Council note the condition and accept the maintenance responsibility subject to an inspection in October 2020 with identified defects to be addressed by the LXR builder.

Road Pavement

On the southern side Carinish road (Clayton Road to Centre Road), there are areas of extraordinary wear and tear due to LXR construction activity.

A payment of \$25,000 for Council attend to road rehabilitation work has been agreed to.

Soft Landscaping - Grassed Areas, Trees and Garden Areas

Grassed Areas

The open space areas have very poor grass coverage and are vastly dominated by broadleaf weed growth and rubble remains profuse.

Proper grass reinstatement and rubble removal is required to bring these areas to the expected standard.

A payment of \$120,000 for Council to attend to grass reinstatement and rubble removal has been agreed to.

Trees

Several trees are either missing or considered to be in poor condition.

A payment of \$9,000 for Council to attend to tree replacement has been agreed to.

Garden Areas

Most garden areas require a substantial top-up of mulch and some require new edging.

A payment of \$2,250 for Council to attend to the edging has been agreed to.

Whilst it is preferred that the remediation of most of the Hard Surfaces and Soft Landscaping defects is delivered by Council, the LXRPs are in the process of purchasing mulch from Council to the value of \$85,000 for immediate use. This element will be attended to in isolation of the proposed Maintenance Funding.

Maintenance

Funding

The share of the LXP \$15 million funding allocation apportioned to Monash (based on linear park area and activation node provisions) is \$3,865,000 for the 10 year designated maintenance period.

Further, their correspondence of December 2019 indicated that the funds would be allocated in the following manner:

- 70 % as an initial instalment upon execution of the Funding agreement;
- 20% 3 years after the initial instalment; and
- 10% 5 years after the initial instalment

Council's preference is for the full allocation to be paid upon execution of a maintenance Funding agreement.

Based upon Council's existing Standards for maintenance, the proposed allocation offered to Council by LXP is anticipated to only be sufficient for approximately seven years.

Extrapolating this figure, suggests that the offered funding could be short by approximately \$1,656,000.

Handover

Details within the licence need to be finalised and are currently being negotiated.

The proposed timing for handover is 1 May 2020. This may not be practicable in terms of logistical start-up times, equipment purchase and recruitment of resources.

The finalisation of the handover will be subject to the finalisation of the licence agreement to the satisfaction of Council with a mutually agreed timeline.

Additional Features

PlaySpace

The PlaySpace is the new inclusion of a small additional 'young age' play area as part of the Centre Road – West Community Space provided by the LXP. It is designed to engage and connect children and families with the LXP activity hub.

A concept design has been prepared, and the LXP has previously agreed to provide a capital contribution of \$75,000 towards the delivery of the PlaySpace. This contribution represents 50% of the value of the project.

Additional Areas

It is worth noting that there are additional lengths of the SUP and surrounds that also require ongoing care and maintenance. These areas are outside of the areas for which the Licence and Maintenance Funding will apply. Whilst all these areas may not be owned by Council, there is an expectation that Council will attend to their care to meet community expectations.

These include the new SUP connection at Oakleigh connecting the Galbally Reserve SUP under Warrigal Road to Oakleigh Station and all of the pre-existing SUP sections along the railway line installed by Council over the past 20 years.

Whilst not the subject of the current LXR project, these areas and the management thereof will require additional maintenance funds. This will be considered upon conclusion and implementation of the current round of negotiations.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The open space is well used by the local community and provides a valuable addition to the community well-being and interaction. The level of maintenance contributes significantly to the amenity and the experience of the community. Council is well placed to provide the expected level of maintenance.

CONSULTATION

The design of the level crossing removals and the associated linear park was subject to substantial consultation including community meetings, online feedback and the development of a Community Open Space Expert Panel. This has led to improved design and better amenity.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is estimated that the \$3,865,000 on offer will cover the cost of maintenance for approximately seven years only after which Council will have to fund the ongoing maintenance.

This may result in a shortfall of \$1,656,000 over a 10-year Licence term.

Officers estimate the proposed allocation offered to Council by LXR is inadequate by approximately \$140,000 annually.

This may result in a shortfall of \$1,400,000 over a 10-year Licence term.

The LXR have offered \$312,250 for reinstatement of concrete areas, trees, garden areas and damaged roads which is considered a reasonable offer.

The LXR has previously agreed to contribute an additional \$75,000 for half the cost of an additional future PlaySpace west of Centre Road. The additional \$75,000 of Council funding has been allocated in the Capital Works budgets.

CONCLUSION

The Linear Park associated with the Level Crossing Removals between Poath Road and Centre Road provides good community space and amenity.

It is recommended that Council accepts the current offer from the Level Crossing Removal Project for the ongoing maintenance subject to the conditions specified in the report and subject to a satisfactory Maintenance Funding and Licence agreement.