

## **Level Crossing Removal Project update - tree removals in Churchill Street, Mont Albert**

In the February 2022 edition of Eastsider News, the president of CROWAG (Combined Residents of Whitehorse Action Group) Ross Gillespie wrote about the removal of trees in Churchill St, Mont Albert by the Level Crossing Removal Project (LXRP). The Member for Box Hill, Paul Hamer MP was subsequently approached for his response to the issues raised in this article.

Mr Hamer's response is given below. He began by pointing out that the scope of works for the project is not just the trench, but also the associated utilities infrastructure that need to be provided to operate the rail line post construction.

While the actual trench starts and ends in the vicinity of Churchill Street and Salisbury Avenue, it is these associated infrastructure requirements that necessitates construction works beyond the immediate trench environs. This is why a project boundary map was developed for the project, and comment sought over a two month period between December 2020 and end of February 2021. The draft project boundary included Canterbury Sports ground and most of Surrey Park – for construction staging – though much of this area was able to be removed from the project boundary when the final plan was signed off by the Minister Planning. The project boundary can be downloaded here:

<https://engage.vic.gov.au/download/document/15535>

In Churchill Street, the main impact to trees is from trenching to install new high-voltage power, signalling and other cables underground. The trenching will cut through the root zones of some trees, and those that cannot survive the impact to their roots need to be removed. In some sections, LXRP are able to bore the path for the cables and this has saved around 20 trees. I did ask whether the cables could be laid on a different alignment to avoid the impact on vegetation. However, I understand that there are existing services running on both sides of the track meaning there is insufficient clearance for the new services to be laid. I also requested that the cables be bored along the entire length of Churchill Street; however, I understand that the boring of cables is only possible where no service pit infrastructure is required, and no connections to on-track signalling and power equipment are required.

A hi-rail pad is also being constructed on Churchill Street so that track maintenance vehicles can access the track. Currently, maintenance vehicles can access the track at the level crossing, but with the removal of these level crossings meaning that the line is level crossing free (except for a pedestrian crossing in Box Hill) from the City to Ringwood, a hi-rail pad is the only possible way that track maintenance vehicles will be able to access the track. On behalf of residents, I advocated for this pad to be located at a number of different locations along the rail line; however, none of the alternatives were considered to meet the infrastructure and operational requirements.

Mr Hamer said he has been consistently raising the concerns about the removal of trees with both the Minister and the LXRP. In some areas, this has in fact avoided

further tree removal; e.g. in parts of Churchill Street - through the use of small boring machines to lay signalling cables (as mentioned above). Following further work and requests, in Lorne Parade Reserve, the LXRP has also identified that it will now be able to permanently retain most of the trees along the Windsor Crescent perimeter of Lorne Parade Reserve; the LXRP has also now indicated that it will return the palm tree that currently sits in the Surrey Hills Station Car Park (it needs to be removed for the construction works), and will also retain the large pine tree in Beatty Street Reserve.

Mr Hamer indicated that he knows that some in the community would have liked to see no tree removal outside of the trench walls, but this was never possible under any level crossing removal solution. The project has saved trees by modifying designs and using alternative construction methods wherever possible. The decision to build one station with two entrances has also reduced the number of trees that would need to have been removed.

Thank you to CROWAG for this update on the tree removal. For further comment, please contact:

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