



Is the Suburban Rail Loop the Most Important Rail Project Melbourne needs?

The Rail Futures Institute fully supports the need for a rethink of Suburban Rail Loop (*The Age Editorial, 6 July 2022*.) We also question the validity of SRL's business case demand estimates, cost and timing, and whether its net benefits are still positive in a post COVID-19 world when objectively examined by an independent body such as Infrastructure Australia.(IA.)

Victoria is unlikely to afford the concurrent cost of more than one major public transport project of that scale and it would be tragic if another project is shown to be transformative with substantially wider benefits and needed far more urgently than the Suburban Rail Loop.

Rail Futures has been developing the detail of such a project for some time, a proposal with a working title of **Melbourne's East-West Rail**, based on combining a first stage of the long-proposed **Melbourne Metro 2** with the best features of the Government's stalled **Western Rail Plan**, announced enthusiastically by the Premier before the 2018 State Election, but with little evident progress since.

East-West Rail aims to redress the disparity in public transport supply between Melbourne's burgeoning outer west and its eastern and southern suburbs. Outer west residents face the challenges of limited local employment, inadequate health and educational facilities and the inevitability of lengthy, unreliable commutes on heavily congested roads. Although the COVID pandemic has temporarily slowed some commuting growth, development in the outer west has continued apace, with a projected population exceeding 1 million, just in Wyndham and Melton LGAs, by mid-century.

East-West Rail will overcome these poor public transport connections by providing a new, high capacity east-west cross-city rail corridor, giving long overdue metropolitan style train services to Melton and the Werribee/Wyndham Vale area. It will have twin 14 km tunnels which cross Melbourne's CBD from Newport and Sunshine to Fitzroy with new underground stations at Spotswood, Fishermans Bend and Fitzroy and new underground platforms at Southern Cross, Flagstaff and Parkville allowing interchange with trams and every other rail line served by the City Loop or Melbourne Metro. (See attached diagram).

East-West Rail remedies a major gap in east-west public transport linking the outer western suburbs with the job-rich Fishermans Bend, CBD and Parkville precincts and a Fitzroy underground train/bus interchange linked to the Eastern Express Busway, providing fast CBD entry for commuters using buses from the eastern suburbs. The outer west would also benefit from five new stations between Deer Park, Wyndham Vale and Werribee, filling large gaps in areas where massive residential development is occurring to the west of Werribee, in Truganina and parts of Tarneit.

A second stage of **East-West Rail** will ultimately extend beyond Fitzroy to link with the Epping/Mernda rail corridor and a proposed new line from Lalor to Wollert, both parts of Melbourne's growing northern suburbs.

Rail Futures envisages that, if prioritised over Suburban Rail Loop, construction of **East-West Rail** could commence in less than five years and have Stage One fully operational by 2035. Its likely cost would be less than the eastern part of Suburban Rail Loop but the benefits would spread across much of Melbourne's west, east and north, providing Melbourne with a substantially better integrated public transport network and, for many, a realistic alternative to long distance car travel.

By rapidly moving to commence planning, design and early works for **East-West Rail**, the skilled workforce that came together during construction of Melbourne Metro can be retained, as well as providing thousands of other job opportunities, including for apprentices.

The Rail Futures Institute (RFI) is an independent non-partisan organisation. RFI was formed in 2013 to advocate cost-effective rail and intermodal solutions for public transport and freight problems based on sound commercial, economic and social reasoning. The RFI Executive Committee and its membership includes experienced rail professionals, urban planners, engineers and economists.

