

A few thoughts and lessons from the Coburg LXP process...

This is my own personal perspective as a local resident, cyclist and walker. It's not at all a comprehensive list of everything that happened during and after the Skyrail project but I thought there might be some useful info for Brunswick residents trying to get the best outcomes from this project.

### **Generally**

- Good results for bikes/ pedestrians/ disabled transport users are not guaranteed without lobbying and pushing. The focus is on cars not active transport.
- Maintaining the local environment and heritage is definitely not a priority!
- This time around it seems like the Council is on board from the beginning which wasn't the case previously. This might be helpful. James Conlan and Sue Bolton were both involved in the campaign for good outcomes in Coburg and are great allies. Not sure if being a Greens seat State-wide will help or hinder negotiations with the LXP.
- Unless there's been a drastic change, LXP consultation is tokenistic- you may get to say you'd like a table tennis table or express your preference for colors for the pillars. That was about it in Coburg.

### **During the building period**

- The LXP offered relocation for those immediately adjacent to the works. This was for a number of months. This was during the period they were drilling down 18 metres 24 hours a day which was pretty unbearable. However if they choose not to operate 24/7 during the drilling, it will all take longer.
- Those whose properties were very close to the Skyrail were offered the opportunity to sell, up to 6 months after completion.
- The detours for bikes were obviously designed by someone who had never cycled. Impractical and dangerous. In Brunswick it would be great to increase the lobbying for decent separated lanes in Sydney Rd. to be put it as soon as possible. (Merri-Bek Bicycle User Group continues to lobby for improved cycling infrastructure and is a good source of info.)
- Intense lobbying for retention of mature trees took place in Coburg. Sadly we lost hundreds, despite offering constructive ideas on how the mass destruction could be averted. There was absolutely no commitment to retention of the local environment. Trying to prevent the destruction resulted in LXP bringing in police to remove us from the site. Their answer was that they would plant thousands of new trees. This was true but did not make up for the loss of mature habitat trees. (yes I'm still bitter!)
- In Coburg, LXP set up an office in Sydney Road which was meant to be a community access point with a communications/ community liaison team. Occasionally, communicating with this team was helpful, but more often it was not.
- The Coburg Historical Society worked very hard to push for retention of heritage features, with mixed results. They would certainly be worth talking to about the Brunswick heritage aspects.

### **Now:**

It's worth Brunswick residents having a walk/ride up to Bell Street to check out the Skyrail.

There is some really good stuff:

- It has 'joined up' both sides of the suburb and offers some pretty impressive outdoor space which is very well-used by the local community- bike riders, walkers, dog walkers, people using mobility scooters /chairs and wheely walkers, skateboarders and scooter riders, families with little kids.
- Being under cover it offers both shade and shelter from rain for path users.
- We are next to the rail, with a lane and back yard behind and have experienced some noise reduction. (This may not be the case for those closer however.)
- Nice playgrounds, basketball courts, skate park etc. Very well used and great for families.

### **Not so good...**

There are some things you'll want to keep an eye on to ensure the Coburg mistakes aren't repeated in Brunswick.

- The landscaping is looking OK now overall, but the plan included swales which just became open drains with lots of plants dying. Trees also died due to not being watered in when planted.
- Some improvements to drainage now. Lots of weeds due to poor maintenance.
- LXR is responsible for landscape maintenance for 2 years after the project.
- The bike path required some resurfacing after completion as it was slippery!
- The bike path does a weird diversion around Coburg station, crossing the pedestrian path.
- The walking path is too narrow.
- The crossing roads still have pedestrian and bike crossings (as opposed to overpasses) so traffic is still stopped at each road quite frequently.

Resident input will be very important to keep LXR accountable (or as accountable as possible!) and to push for quality outcomes for all. I hope it's not too frustrating a process for you. Good luck!

Denise Whimpey