



Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek Inc

PO Box 54, ESSENDON, Victoria, 3040

*To ensure the preservation, restoration, environment protection and ecologically sensitive development and maintenance of the Moonee Ponds Creek and adjoining catchment areas.*

September 13, 2015

Traffic Noise Policy Review  
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## **SUBMISSION**

### **Introduction**

The Moonee Ponds Creek corridor is subject to significant impact from traffic noise, because freeways with large traffic volumes, the Tullamarine Freeway and CityLink, as well as major arterial roads, run along a large part of the Creek corridor. The proposed widening (CityLinkTulla Widening Project) to accommodate more traffic (30% increase), much of it truck traffic and more at night will exacerbate road traffic noise along the Creek corridor and its impacts on surrounding communities – residences, schools, work places and recreational open spaces. Our submission is thus based on experience. We seek to ensure that the communities along the Creek corridor can enjoy its environment in the widest sense of the word, protected from detrimental impacts of road traffic noise through an improved traffic noise policy.

### **Chapter 1 – Our Changing Environment**

This chapter comprehensively sets out the issues around traffic noise, concluding: *As the population of Melbourne and Victoria grows, there will be more people and more vehicles on the roads (cars, trucks, trams, buses, motorcycles). As a result, traffic noise will become a larger and more complex problem on our roads and for the people who live (and play) nearby.*

We do not agree that the way forward is a traffic noise management policy that must be a “flexible and adaptable process” to protect “*social connectedness and the economy*”. We suggest that the liveability of Melbourne and Victoria is as important as ‘social connectedness and the economy’ and that to protect our liveability, stringent traffic noise limits need to be applied – with the ‘adaptability and flexibility’ in the policy applied to the techniques, measures, planning provisions, etc. whereby mandatory noise levels can be met.

We consider that ‘liveability’ encompasses not only residential aspects, but also work and recreation. So all three need protection under a traffic noise policy. The introduction of world-best practice noise levels, including night-time noise limits and noise limits for recreational and public open spaces are key changes that the new VicRoads policy must make to protect our ‘liveability’.

## Chapter 2 – Living with noise

### *Causes of traffic noise*

The Discussion Paper rightly draws attention to the fact that traffic noise is not only from freeways, but also from arterial and local roads and trucks on country roads cited specifically. Surely this means that noise controls should be applied to all new roads; to redevelopment of existing roads; and when additional traffic is generated by land use developments – as in the NSW Road Noise Policy.

The lesser VicRoads policy - applicable only to freeways and arterial roads - should be changed so as to cover all roads (freeways, arterial, sub-arterial and local roads) as in the NSW policy.

Truck Engine Brake Noise: We join the many respondents in expressing strong concern about noise from truck engines brakes. It is stated in the Discussion Paper that engine brakes are “important for safe operation of heavy trucks in hilly terrain”. So why aren't truck engine brakes banned in non-hilly terrain, both city and country? It is stated that high noise levels from truck engine braking is due to faulty mufflers. So, why aren't truck brakes and mufflers tested every 6 months with heavy fines for non-compliance?

Motorcycles: Noisy motorcycles cause a disproportionate number of complaints about traffic noise compared to their numbers on the road. Why can't motorcycles be required to have mufflers that limit their noise level and that they be required to undergo 6-12month testing? It is clearly evident that the present enforcement regulations (Environment Protection (Vehicle Emissions) Regulations (2013)) are not strict enough or are not being effectively implemented and present difficulty in public reporting.

## Chapter 3 - Minimising Traffic Noise

### *Measures or tools to manage traffic noise in addition to those in the Discussion Paper.*

Lower speed limits: Upgrading a road will lead to increased traffic volumes and increased traffic noise, unless restrictions are placed on the noise generating factors. Lower speed limits should be applied in order to decrease noise impacts from the increased traffic volumes; these should be commensurate with the recommended traffic noise levels, i.e. they should be applied for both day and night times.

Impacts on feeder roads: Upgrading major roads inevitably leads to increased traffic volumes with increased noise and air pollution on feeder roads. The Discussion Paper does not address this significant issue where surrounding communities on feeder roads would be subject to increased noise and emission impacts. The CityLinkTulla Widening proposal shows large traffic increases on feeder roads, for example: 60-80% for Moreland Road, Pascoe Vale Road, Brunswick Road/Ormond Road, Flemington Road, Mt Alexander Road and Dynon Road (Spencer St). Noise mitigation should not stop at the new or redeveloped freeway or major road. Noise mitigation measures must be applied in the wider traffic impact corridor.

### Impacts on Public Open Space

Public open space is used for active and passive recreation and for environmental purposes. Traffic noise can detrimentally impact on public open spaces and their recreational uses, as was highlighted during East West Link hearings, where it was stated that EWL traffic noise would preclude passive recreational use of parkland areas; use would be restricted to cyclists or joggers passing through. Like night-time traffic noise, the current VicRoads policy is totally deficient in addressing noise impacts on public open space and recreational areas. Recreational use of public open space is increasing and will further increase with the predicted rise in population. The new policy must apply noise limits to public open spaces, for passive and active recreational use – to protect the liveability of Melbourne and Victoria. Noise limits must also be extended to night-times, given much sport is played outdoors under lights.

Development noise reports/modelling: Developers of buildings and other sensitive uses near existing roads should have to prepare road traffic noise reports with existing and predicted noise levels modelled for, say a 10-20 year period. Noise mitigation measures to noise-insulate new buildings and sensitive uses should be incorporated in mandatory planning provisions. This should be applied to all planning applications, not just to sub-division applications as in the present VPPs. The Melbourne Planning Scheme Design and Development Overlay DDO26 is an example of such planning requirement and the Discussion Paper cites other Councils' noise mitigation requirements. Developers have to prepare parking reports; there is no reason why traffic noise reports should not

also be necessary. Developers also have a responsibility for the life-span of their development and the amenity of the occupiers over a medium to longer term.

Noise mitigation should not be a voluntary requirement by developers; experience shows they fight environmental and amenity requirements when it impacts on their financial profit.

Wider open space buffers should be mandatory for new roads, and these should be heavily vegetated as part of noise mitigation.

Public transport: In the Discussion Paper it is stated: “*Traffic noise will always be with us as long as we use cars, buses and trams to move around*”. It is simplistic to equate traffic noise from buses and trams with that from cars. One bus will take 50 cars off the road; one tram many more. Traffic noise will be far less if more public transport vehicles replace private vehicle use on the roads. Therefore measures to manage traffic noise must include facilitation of public transport use of roads and prioritisation over private vehicle use, particularly for freeways and arterial roads.

Speed limits: It is simplistic to state that increasing the speed limit from 80 to 100 km/h only results in small dB(A) increase. It is the associated effects that create higher noise levels and disturbance. These include more acceleration to get to the higher speed, more noise to decelerate from the higher speed, with trucks being particular culprits in their use of many, noisy gear changes and engine brakes.

Noise barriers: Other State jurisdictions (e.g. Qld, NSW) in their updated traffic noise policies, take a more positive approach to noise walls than VicRoads’ “least preferred” approach and provide many examples. Given, in Melbourne many freeways have been built along valleys, the spread of traffic noise detrimentally impacts on a wide corridor of residents and recreational open spaces and increasingly so when freeways are elevated, such as sections of CityLink. Noise walls along the freeway structure may be visually unattractive for motorists using the freeway, but the major consideration should be for the residents and open space users on the other side, where noise barriers can be made visually less intrusive, e.g. transparent, earth mounds plus walls, vegetation (c.f. Qld and NSW examples).

In regard to the problems VicRoads raises with diffraction and reflection of traffic sound by noise walls, where are the suggestions for the use of barriers that curve over the top, partially or fully, as in the sound tube on CityLink adjacent to the Debney Public Housing Estate in Flemington? Why aren’t sound absorbing materials or design features in noise walls promoted to mitigate sound reflection?

## **Chapter 4 - Existing Approach to Managing Traffic Noise**

The current VicRoads Road Traffic Noise Reduction Policy (2005) is seen to be deficient in that:

- it does not cover freeway/arterial/sub-arterial roads where existing residences area affected by noise from additional traffic generated from land use developments.
- it does not cover local roads where existing residences are affected by noise from new local roads, redevelopment of local roads or additional traffic generated by land use developments.
- it does not cover night-time road traffic noise.
- it does not cover recreational areas and public open space.
- it does not assess noise levels for multi-storey residential buildings.
- it allows private road developers to lock in long-term noise levels without reappraisal/review.
- its noise levels do not meet world’s best practice.
- the public reporting system for traffic noise is inefficient and ineffectual

## **Chapter 5 - New Approach to Managing Traffic Noise**

It is fallacious to state that the new policy cannot encompass “situations outside the scope of the current policy”. That is what this review is all about – to establish noise limits for the situations the current policy does not address, such as night time noise, public open space, multi-level buildings!

A principle-based approach is a ‘cop-out’ option. Noise levels should be mandated for defined land uses, e.g. residential, public open space/parks/recreational areas and sensitive uses such as education and health, THEN a ‘strategies’ approach applied as to how these noise limits can be

complied with, allowing “innovative, site-specific, alternative” measures to achieve the requisite compliance.

Comprehensive and stringent noise objectives should be established that will ensure the mandatory noise levels are met through specific strategies. Weak, poorly defined objectives would allow “less stringent noise objectives and strategies” or “guidelines” to be used – open to interpretation, subjective assessment, inconsistency, political interference, legal challenge, VCAT determinations, high cost deterrence for objectors, bad decisions setting precedents... . Traffic noise mitigation is too important to be allowed to go down a “flexible” “principle-based approach”.

1<sup>st</sup> dot point: It is fallacious to argue that “a principle-based policy would allow more stringent noise objectives where feasible”. What is wrong with inserting a clause in the new policy that would ‘allow the achievement of lower noise levels than the mandated levels where possible’?

2<sup>nd</sup> dot point: We dispute the suggestion that noise walls are the only available option; noise walls should be part of the mix of available tools to address traffic noise. Reference to the QLD and NSW traffic noise policies provide many examples of noise reduction measures/tools. It is in the achievement of the mandatory noise levels where the “flexibility and adaptability” should be applied in the Policy, not to the noise levels themselves. Achieving the required noise level could be undertaken in consultation with other parties, including residents, sensitive uses owners, responsible authorities; using planning scheme provisions, infrastructure, landscape and architectural design, developers, vehicle regulations, etc.

3<sup>rd</sup> dot point: It is fallacious to state that only by using a flexible principle approach, can night–time noise be addressed. Just set a mandatory standard, like day time noise standards that already exist!

4<sup>th</sup> dot point: Read, flexibility to reduce noise standards on the grounds of “practicality, reasonableness and cost-effectiveness” - for whom? The government authority/ies and the road builder?)

5<sup>th</sup> dot point: We would argue that the priority in the revised policy should be the “safety, equity, health and well-being” over “economic prosperity”. A flaw in the Discussion Paper is that the social, health and economic costs of traffic noise disturbance on residents and workers have not been factored in; rather the emphasis is on noise mitigation “as long as practical, reasonable and cost-effective” ... for the government, road authority or developer.

## Chapter 6 – Defining Noise Criteria

The Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek seeks the following criteria in the revised Policy:

- use the more representative dB(A) LAeq noise standard;
- noise criteria should be applied to night-time periods as well as daytime and that these time periods should be:
  - daytime 7am - 10pm
  - night-time 10pm - 7am
- noise criteria should be applied to public open spaces, including parks, reserves, passive and active recreational areas;
- noise measurement should follow the QLD Road Traffic Noise policy (Transport Noise Management Code of Practice, 2013) whereby measurement location is at the level of the building or place that is most exposed to the road traffic noise. This takes account of multi-level buildings, varying sectors of open spaces and elevated roads. The current VicRoads policy ground level measurement location is clearly obsolete.
- traffic noise criteria should be expanded to cover freeways, arterial roads, sub-arterial roads and local roads;
- traffic noise criteria should be applied to all the above road categories for: new roads, redevelopment of existing roads and for additional traffic generated by land use developments;
- noise criteria adapted from the NSW Road Noise Policy 2011\*, should be applied as mandatory levels; summarised in table below.

\* <http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/resources/noise/2011236nswroadnoisepolicy.pdf>

[It is noted the Discussion Paper in Appendix D erroneously/misleadingly lists NSW traffic noise levels higher than the NSW policy document. NSW noise limits for existing residences are 55-60 dB daytime; 50-55 night-time, not 65 daytime; 60 night-time.]

- disallowance of long-term 'concession deeds' whereby inappropriate noise levels are locked in for decades without reappraisal or review.
- amendment of the CityLink concession deed to reduce its currently allowed 63dB(A) (until 2035).
- the proposed CityLink Tulla Widening project should meet the lower noise standards below as it constitutes a 'redevelopment of an existing freeway'.
- review of the public traffic noise reporting system, so that more efficient reporting; effective response and effective enforcement can be achieved.

**Recommended mandatory road traffic noise levels for roads and public open space:**

Road category	Land Use	Day dB(A) 7am - 10pm	Night dB(A) 10pm - 7am
Freeway/arterial/sub-arterial roads & Local roads	1. Existing residences affected by noise from <b>new</b> freeway/arterial/sub-arterial road corridors 2. Existing residences affected by noise from <b>redevelopment</b> of existing freeway/arterial/sub-arterial roads 3. Existing residences affected by <b>additional traffic</b> on existing freeway/arterial/sub-arterial roads generated by land use developments	<b>L<sub>Aeq</sub> 55</b>	<b>L<sub>Aeq</sub> 50</b>
Freeway/arterial/sub-arterial roads & Local roads	1. Open space used for passive recreation affected by noise as per the three categories above. 2. Open space used for active recreation affected by noise as per the three categories above.	<b>L<sub>Aeq</sub> 55</b>  <b>L<sub>Aeq</sub> 60</b>	<b>L<sub>Aeq</sub> 50</b>  <b>L<sub>Aeq</sub> 55</b>

The Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek look forward to a revised VicRoads Traffic Noise Reduction Policy where the emphasis is on effective traffic noise **reduction** for all aspects affecting our communities' health, well-being and liveability.

Yours sincerely,  
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President

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