

## Setting the Context

### **Box Hill to Ringwood Rail Trail ([www.BHRRT.org](http://www.BHRRT.org)) 2 August 2010 – Launch of Feasibility Study**

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We believe that cycling is for all ages, sizes, creeds and races and dare I say it, politicians of all persuasions. And let us not forget that paths for cyclists are also paths for walkers.

You have heard our President say that with over 200 members we are Melbourne's Eastern Suburbs' largest social cycling club. We may be the Whitehorse Cyclists, but with six organised rides a week, we ride the length and breadth of Melbourne and into country areas and in doing so, have gained a unique perspective on the current state of cycling infrastructure. In particular, we understand what investments other areas of Melbourne are making and what they have already achieved.

Many of the established inner suburban paths are now undergoing extensive and expensive upgrades to their condition whilst areas such as Whitehorse and Maroondah have yet to establish a comprehensive network.

In the past, the middle suburbs have suffered from the deliberate prioritisation of inner suburban bike paths within 10kms of the CBD. What we as Whitehorse Cyclists would like to see is a greater focus on developing paths in the middle suburban areas of Whitehorse and Maroondah.

Cycling is becoming more and more popular and is in turn gaining increased support from all levels of government.

In the last two years the Victorian State Government has issued several relevant planning documents including the *Victorian Transport Plan of 2008* which contains \$105 million for its Bike Plan, and promises investment to increase sustainable transport options such as public transport, cycling and walking.

Worryingly section 4 of the same document, on "*Moving Around Melbourne*" has dedicated sections on Inner Suburbs and Outer Suburbs but omits any reference to Middle Suburbs.

Things however now seem to be moving in the right direction such that the *Victorian Cycling Strategy of March 2009* prioritises network development in areas of high development and growth, including the Box Hill and Ringwood Central Activity Districts. The *Victorian Principal Bicycle Network Review of 2010* calls for route selection using railway lines and water easements that maximise directness, separation and priority for cyclists.

On 3 Feb 2010 Minister Pallas in a letter to us stated "the Government is currently examining the feasibility of using existing rail corridors including the link from Box Hill to Ringwood and improving the overarching cycling network for Melbourne as part of the review of the Principal Bicycle Network". All of which is very encouraging.

Indeed, the concept for a Box Hill to Ringwood Rail Trail is not new, having been the subject of a 1996 report on the Eastern Rail Trail from Hawthorn to Ringwood and the Booroondara Bicycle User Group report of 2005. The Whitehorse Bicycle strategies of 1997 and 2007 also included the Eastern Rail Trail.

However, the lost battles to have cycle paths included in the Middleborough Rd and Springvale Rd grade separations and more recently the disappointing decision to reject the Whitehorse Council's request for funding of \$40,000 for a new feasibility study on the Eastern Rail Trail in 2009, has spurred us into action.

We, the Whitehorse Cyclists Inc, have prepared this feasibility study on a pro-bono basis, as one of our community service activities in the belief that we should contribute to an activity which we enjoy, and which has contributed so much to our own health and wellbeing.

We appreciate that there is competition for funding and want to see investment in a cycling network in the middle suburbs treated as a priority. We've developed this study in an attempt to get things moving and hopefully generate enough momentum to finally see a Box Hill to Ringwood Rail Trail move beyond a plan and into reality.

We're aware that there are still issues around path access in Hawthorn which must be addressed, but we believe that this needn't impede on the establishment of a trail from Box Hill to Ringwood.

Concern for safety is the single biggest disincentive to more people cycling more often. The current situation is that there is no safe East-West route through the centre of Whitehorse and Maroondah. Maroondah Highway and Canterbury Rd are two of Melbourne's busiest arterial roads and are unsafe for cycling.

It should not take courage to decide to use your bike. It should not take courage or foolhardiness to send your children off to school on their bikes.

We have concentrated on the 10km section from Box Hill to Ringwood because we believe this area offers some of the most exciting prospects for a rail trail anywhere in the Melbourne metropolitan area. It's proximity to business, railway stations and schools offers unparalleled access to residents, school children and workers in the Middle Suburbs and would become a vital part of their commute to work, school and the shops. The Trail will also be a boon for recreational cycling and walking in the area.

The Box Hill Ringwood Rail Trail will solve the missing link in Melbourne's Middle Suburbs. It will connect the cyclists of Box Hill and Maroondah to over 160kms of paths in the Eastern Suburbs, including the Knox Bike Way, Mullum Mullum Creek to Croydon, Gardiners Creek and Koonung Creek trails to the CBD and Eastlink to Carrum, as well as provide access to many more paths in Greater Melbourne such as the Bayside and Yarra paths.

The trail will provide easy commuting to the major retailing centres of Whitehorse and Maroondah including the "Megamile and Eastland". The major light industry areas of Box Hill, Nunawading, Mitcham and Ringwood and Bayswater will also be an easy commute as will the burgeoning commercial centres of Box Hill, Blackburn and Ringwood. The Trail therefore presents a viable alternative to car travel for the many employees and customers of those businesses and also a safe alternative route to both Maroondah Highway and Canterbury Rd.

The seven stations on the Box Hill - Ringwood Rail Trail offer limitless opportunities for dual mode commuting. For example, you could ride to Lilydale Station or Essendon Station and board the train with your bike and get off at Nunawading and then ride to work or college along Box Hill - Ringwood Rail Trail. This provides an opportunity for "working families" to get rid of one car with tangible benefits to the family budget, the environment and of course personal fitness.

With 20 schools within 1km of the Box Hill - Ringwood Rail Trail, the trail would add real meaning and substance to the concepts and ideals enshrined in *National Ride 2 School Day*.

We are fully aware that there is competition for the prioritisation of funding, but we believe that the Box Hill – Ringwood Rail Trail provides a major boost to East-West cycling for a low comparative capital cost, when compared to the cost of other similar projects such as:

- The Cyclists & Pedestrian bridges over Maroondah Highway in Ringwood and a similar bridge over Burwood Highway which cost \$6.2m each
- The Melbourne City Council bike rental scheme which will cost \$7m; and
- Deakin University's proposed bridge over Gardiners Creek which is estimated to cost \$16m.

- In comparison, the 10km Box Hill – Ringwood Rail Trail will cost \$7.3m

As such, the Box Hill – Ringwood Rail Trail scheme will deliver value for money and just makes good sense.

The biggest challenge to the scheme is not financial or technical, but one of political will. The plan for this trail is not new; in fact it was proposed in government publications over 14 years ago. However the plan has always stalled. In fact the trail was unable to be built as part of the Springvale Road separation ostensibly because there was no detailed plan.

We, the Whitehorse Cyclists have dedicated our free time to develop a concept plan to get this initiative moving. Today is the first step of what we intend to be a vigorous advocacy campaign for its implementation. It's time for real action to finally make the Box Hill – Ringwood Rail Trail a reality.