

Calder Action Group

22 Shetland Way,
Sunbury,
Victoria. 3429
2 July 2007

Department of Transport and Regional Services

Department of Infrastructure,

VicRoads

Dear Sirs,

I have been tasked by our new organisation, the Calder Action Group, to make a belated attempt to strengthen the draft Melbourne - Mildura Corridor Strategy in respect of the section of the Calder between Taylors Lakes and Keilor, in outer Metropolitan Melbourne. In our view, generally the Strategy represents a very thorough and worthwhile basis for the development of the future Auslink 2 program for 2009 - 2015. but we see it as very weak in respect of this section of the Highway. Our Group has been formed with some short term aims but importantly "to lobby and secure a funding commitment and upgrade to this part of the Calder Highway within the next two years or earlier from the Federal and State Governments via Auslink Network roads program or similar."

We have serious concerns that the safety implications of leaving the Highway in its present condition are badly under-estimated even now in the report. You will be well aware that the influential Calder Highway Improvement Committee (CHIC), representing local government and communities all along the Calder, has recently committed its first priority to the Kings Road Interchange at Keilor. Its concerns are the high accident rate and the number of near misses, despite some interim improvements, and the lack of capacity particularly for the ongoing high traffic growth rate. The CHIC recommends an initial single overpass be built, although we are very conscious that three overpasses and some significant bridge work are needed before all safety and capacity problems can be properly addressed. We also know that peak hour bottlenecks have significant productivity and work-family balance effects and build driver frustration with its safety implications. The funds required are not insignificant but are well short of the cost of the more major improvements carried out further along the Freeway. Our Group sees this unfunded work at Keilor being a major obstacle to the effective realisation of the benefits from these other major improvements.

As a basically non-political/ bi-partisan group we recognise the political sensitivities in current apparent reluctance to act, but we consider that the urgency of this project

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should justify strong joint State and Federal action to begin work as soon as possible. In pursuit of this aim and understanding the major influence the Corridor strategy paper will have, we recommend the following sections of the draft Strategy be strengthened as follows:-

1. In the initial Summary section, the 'Current Performance of the corridor' section should be changed to insert the word 'partially' before 'satisfactory' in the sentence beginning 'The overall performance of the Calder.....'.

2. The next sentence which understates the parlous traffic situation in this section of the road, has a subsequent qualification which weakens its message altogether. The safety problems are ignored. To ameliorate these weaknesses the 'but' word should be removed, the two issues separated and a statement after 'outskirts' added to the effect "and serious safety problems arise from the lack of Freeway standard overpasses and bridges".

3. Reference to travel times in the fourth sentence should have an added clause 'but serious bottlenecks occur daily at peak travel times in the Keilor area'.

4. In the table under 'Key Challenges' we consider the current ninth item 'In the southern section' needs to be placed at the top of the table in concert with the CHIC view of its top priority and have the words 'particularly in the Keilor section of the Highway' added as is reflected in the main text at page 25.

5. Under 'Short-term Priorities' the third last item dealing with capacity and safety and the overpasses should be highlighted by moving it to a more prominent place up the table.

6. The section on page 14 'Capacity' refers in its first para to problems emerging 'in the medium term'. In our view these are present with us now. the para failing to recognise the traffic funneling that occurs from all parts of the Macedon region through the bottlenecks at Keilor.

While our Group hopes to achieve funding for the overpass and bridge work at Keilor before the Auslink 2 project can be effective, we consider the current draft strategy paper may not achieve even the latter outcome. In parallel to our efforts toward a more immediate solution, we hope these comments will highlight the urgent need for action at least under Auslink 2, and will achieve a clearer perception in the funding governments of

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the community concern at the apparent lack action over the years as the problems has escalated.

The Calder Action Group commends our submission for changes to the Strategy for your steering group's sympathetic and urgent attention.

Yours with respect,

I T Sutherland AO, AVM RAAF (Retd)

for Calder Action Group

Copies:- Tim Pallas, MP Minister for Roads and Ports,
Joanne Duncan, MP, Member for Macedon,
Bernie Finn, MLC, Member for Western Metropolitan Province
Donna Petrovic, MLC, Member for Northern Province
Terry Mulder MP, Member for Polwarth
Senator Michael Ronaldson, Senator for Victoria
Brendan O'Connor, MHR, Federal Member for Gorton
Martin Ferguson AM MHR, Federal member for Batman,
Hon Fran Bailey, Federal Member for McEwen
Hon Peter Costello, Federal Treasurer

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Yours sincerely,

Ian Sutherland