

# BOROONDARA

*Bicycle Users Group*

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Belford Rd underpass - letter of support to Boroondara Council

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## **Introduction**

Boroondara Bicycle Users Group (BBUG) exists to promote cycling and to advocate for improvements to cycling infrastructure in Boroondara and surrounding areas. BBUG may make this letter available on its website. We would like to thank Boroondara Council for appraising the Belford Rd underpass proposal via the independent Aurecon study.

## **Referenced documents:**

Draft plans commissioned by Boroondara City Council and VicRoads and produced by Aurecon. Two options are presented in the plans for consideration.

BBUG's web page on the subject provides more background information and photographs of the location – please read it:

<http://boroondarabug.org/wiki/M3>

Bicycle Victoria have some detailed information on cycling gradients – we note that the existing path on the west side has an average gradient in the 6% region over 250 metres with some sections peaking at around 9%. On the east side it's about 7 to 8%. Both unsatisfactory according to Bicycle Victoria.

<http://www.bv.com.au/bike-futures/91988/>

### **Executive Summary**

It is proposed to reroute the Yarra Trail where it crosses Belford Rd, adjacent to the Eastern freeway.

The aims of the proposed works are:

- to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety by reducing the grades
- remove a major hurdle to commuting and recreational cycling in the area - a very substantial and steep hill
- implementing some cyclist/pedestrian separation by virtue of the additional new route and assuming the existing route will be retained
- eliminate three road crossings – one of which (Belford Rd) is deceptive, in that it carries more traffic than expected

The aims would be achieved by locating the path at the same level as the freeway, effectively going under the Belford Rd bridge, rather than over the top of it – a much more pedestrian and cycle friendly result. This is also the less expensive option of the two presented.

BBUG fully supports the proposed option, whereby the path is routed at freeway level.

### **Background**

The Yarra Trail is a major off road route that links the council areas of Banyule, Manningham, northern Boroondara and Whitehorse to the CBD. These four council areas would benefit from the proposed underpass. The location is well connected to other trails such as the Koonung Creek trail, the Outer Circle/Anniversary Trail. The proposed connection to the Darebin Creek Trail nearby and improved links over the Chandler Highway, once the new road bridge crossing is put in place, will add much to the value of this proposal.

The proposed underpass is within the 10 km radius as described in the Victorian Cycling Strategy and is therefore considered a priority for State Government financing.

### **Benefits to the community – cycling as transport**

To increase cycling numbers, we need to be looking at the needs of the “proto cyclist”. People who would perhaps consider cycling to work but see it as a bit too hard or a bit too far or perhaps perceive on road cycling as unsafe. In answer to these points – it’s not too far; it’s about a 35 minute ride to the CBD from Belford Rd and the majority of the trip is off road, so one spends a minimum amount of time mingling with motorised traffic.

However it is a hard ride due to the trail topology. Implementing this proposal will substantially alleviate one disincentive (ie the hill) and will work in tandem with the

works to be instigated by Parks Victoria whereby another hill on the trail further to the west at Yarra Bend park, near Chandler Highway, will also be eliminated.

2006 census figures by area, indicate that the major transport method in northern Boroondara is the motor vehicle. BBUG believes that this proposed underpass will go some way to encouraging cycling in the area, as a means of transport, resulting in car trip replacement.

The area is poorly serviced by public transport with perhaps the exception of the park and ride facility located at Doncaster Rd by the Eastern freeway. Cycling can be a viable alternative, if the infrastructure provided makes it more desirable. BBUG believes that this underpass will remove a large disincentive to cycling as a mode of transport in the area.

**Benefits to recreational cyclists:**

While having spoken about the route as a transport corridor, we must also consider recreational cyclists. One has to realise that the average mum and dad, out for a Sunday ride with the kids, do find it extremely difficult to conquer this “Everest of cycling” and will almost certainly in most cases need to walk up the hill, rather than cycle up it.

This does nothing to inspire family groups, that cycling can be a good day out. Clearly counterproductive to Governmental aims of encouraging healthy activities.

**Safety for pedestrians and cyclists:**

This section of the existing trail is poorly lit and personal safety is questionable at night. The proposed on road freeway route would be reasonably lit by the freeway lights and have the added benefit of passive surveillance by the many vehicles passing by.

The Belford Road trail crossing is problematic given the poor lines of site at the approaches to the crossing. Belford road provides the only access to the residential area just to the north of the freeway at this point, making it more trafficked than expected.

While not wanting to harp on the subject of safety, it is clear that pedestrians can be highly intimidated by cyclists passing by at speed as they travel downhill on the shared path. It is also true that less competent cyclists may have trouble controlling their bicycle as they proceed downhill, particularly where the trail intersects with Elm Grove and Willow Grove.

One only has to refer to the poem written by Banjo Paterson in 1896 "Mulga Bill's Bicycle" to realise this is an age old problem!

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mulga\\_Bill's\\_Bicycle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mulga_Bill's_Bicycle)

**Strategies and other examples:**

A bit closer to the city, the Eddington report, the Victorian Cycling Strategy and the Boroondara Council Bicycle Strategy all talk about enhancing the Yarra Trail route. The aim is to have more people using cycling as a mode of transport to the CBD and areas east of the CBD such as Richmond, Collingwood, Abbotsford and Clifton Hill. In other words improvements in the inner city area will complement improvements in locations more removed from the CBD such as Belford Rd. Belford Rd is one piece of the puzzle.

In southern Boroondara, the Gardiners Creek Trail is highly successful with the 2010 Super Tuesday cyclist counts recorded by Bicycle Victoria showing the daily rate of cyclists to be in the thousands.

There is no reason why the Yarra Trail in northern Boroondara cannot perform in the same and safe manner. Counts at the Belford Rd bridge indicate about 600 cyclists a day climb “the hill”. BBUG firmly suggests that removing this obstacle would go along way to increasing the number of cyclists using the Yarra Trail route.

**BBUG supports the proposal**

BBUG has discussed the two options presented and fully support the less expensive option whereby the route is located at road level.

However, given that trucks are now confined to the left lane of the Eastern freeway, we would like to see fencing such as clear polycarbonate be used, in order to:

- a) minimise air turbulence, which can be severe when a large truck such as a B double passes and the bike is of light weight carbon fiber design. Such turbulence can alter your line of travel substantially, without much warning. That can be hazardous.
- b) reduce the sound levels along the section of the proposed path. This is important as often large groups of cyclists will call out to each other, indicating potential hazards eg oncoming cyclists, pedestrians on the path, loose dogs etc. We need to be able to hear what’s going on.