



Melbourne "The most liveable city" Cartoon by Ron Tanberg (The Age)*

ROYAL PARK PROTECTION GROUP INC.

NEWS BULLETIN – OCTOBER 2009

Royal Park Again under Threat by Premier Brumby's Major Transport Project Plans

Royal Park has been in VicRoads firing line for years ever since the F1 (Eastern) freeway cut a swathe through the suburbs of Collingwood and Fitzroy back in the 1970's. The Eastern Freeway was opened on 7 December 1977 after a sustained blockade and police battles with inner city residents, spear-headed by the "Citizens against Freeways" group. The Royal Park Protection Group Inc (RPPG) fought intermittent campaigns over five years after the Bracks Government twice raised the spectre of the extension of the Eastern Freeway through the Park. Before the 2002 and 2006 elections Bracks assured voters ever so sincerely that there were no plans for the Eastern Freeway extension. But after the elections behold - the race resumed to build freeways and election promises lay in tatters. In 2003 then Major Projects Minister Peter Batchelor also forgot his pre-election "no freeways" promises and made a memorable trip to Versailles, France, not to visit the Palace but to see the latest two level road tunnel regarded as a great model for Melbourne.

Last year saw a concerted and extremely vocal community campaign, in which RPPG took a leading role, battling Sir Rod Eddington and opposing his Review, which recommended construction of the "East West Link" road tunnel through Royal and JJ Holland Parks. Designed as a freight road tunnel bypass from the Port to the Eastern Freeway and EastLink, it would have destroyed the Parks and wiped out areas of the inner suburbs in its path. Whether it was due to demonstrations of "people power" by inner Melbourne groups or ALP MPs fear of losing their State and Federal seats in the next elections or lack of Federal funds, the East West Link was deleted from the Victorian Transport Plan.

This was only a temporary reprieve and concern is now mounting since the Major Transport Projects Facilitation Act 2009 was press ganged through the Upper House of Parliament on 18 September 2009. The only opposition was presented by the Greens and DLP. This is legislation designed to fast track major road projects and remove community opposition. VicRoads may well be now dusting off their plans again for the extension of the Eastern Freeway. Ms Colleen Hartland, Greens member of the Upper House, read out in Parliament a statement from Mr Brian Walters SC, President of Protectors of Public Lands Victoria Inc. on its significance. He said: *"In our view, this bill is an affront to democracy as well as to good planning. It will inevitably lead to damage to the environment and public assets. It is an irresponsible measure and suggests that its proponents are in league with developers instead of upholding the community's interest. Under the provisions of the bill, the planning minister (in consultation with the Premier) can recommend that a project be a 'declared project'. Then the project is fast-tracked through without any of the normal safeguards the community has a right to expect. The community will have no right of objection, and comment by the public is only to be permitted at the whim of the planning minister - and then only in exceptional circumstances, and with only 15 days notice. To expect community organisations to provide proper comment on major projects with only 15 days to master the material and assess it - and if necessary obtain expert advice - is ludicrous. These provisions provide for a sham right of consultation which is effectively impossible to exercise. The real goal is to remove public comment altogether, but the bill lacks the integrity to say so."*

Protectors of Public Lands Victoria Inc. is arranging a "consultation" with the Department of Transport over plans for the construction of Melbourne's underground rail. RPPG is keen to find out the location proposed for the Parkville station and will attend in order to lobby the powers that be to ensure that the station is not located in Royal Park!

*We thank Ron Tanberg for his cartoon of Melbourne, once the ranked as the world's most liveable city!

More News from the Front

Breach of Royal Park Master Plan by City of Melbourne referred to the Victorian Ombudsman:

Previous news bulletins reported that staff of the City of Melbourne departed from the Royal Park Master Plan and in an extraordinary move planted 120 Red Ironbark Eucalypts (forest gums) across the hill top in West Parkville, thus obscuring the exceptional views of the Macedon Ranges. Representatives from the North and West Melbourne Association and RPPG have lodged a formal complaint with the Victorian Ombudsman over this breach of the Master Plan.

Royal Park Protection Group's Application for a 2010 City of Melbourne Community Grant:

Members may recall the story that as RPPG Committee members were ill and away overseas RPPG submitted our application by email. This was not accepted as only postal applications were specified! It is extraordinary as many organisations including the State Government accept online submissions and by email. There is now a second round of applications and RPPG has been invited to resubmit our initial application. We will take care to do this by snail mail.

Establishment of a Phoney Parks Advisory Committee:

In the last bulletin we reported on the establishment of a Parks Advisory Committee by the City of Melbourne. What started as an Advisory Committee morphed into a "Community Engagement Committee" then back to an Advisory Committee. The community representatives appear to have been chosen specifically because they have NO backgrounds in Parks or Gardens; only two – as far as we know - have connections with community groups; no-one has served on Parks Advisory Committees; no-one has ever been seen at community planting days in Parks; no-one has any connection with Royal Park as far as we know (Lorna Hannan was as a Councillor on the review of the Royal Park Master Plan but that was 11 years ago.); and she has long been retired. It is particularly disturbing as the Royal Park Master Plan Advisory Committee was terminated and we were told it was to be replaced by a general advisory committee. One wonders if members know where Royal Park is located! Apparently Councillors left the selection to Mr Rob Adams, the Director of Urban Design. It is not known if it went to Councillors for comment. A number of excellent, well qualified candidates with great references were overlooked.

Royal Park Protection Group Inc - Next Meeting:

Time: 11:00 am

Date: Saturday 10 October 2009

Venue: Walmsley House Royal Park corner of Gatehouse Street and Royal Parade Parkville.

Transport: Park in Gatehouse Street; tram up Elizabeth Street to Royal Parade. Get off at Gatehouse Street. Train to Flinders Street then tram as above.

Preparation for AGM: We will be discussing our forthcoming AGM on 11 November 2009.

Volunteers Needed: We need help from members to stand for the new Committee for 2010. We meet every two months in pleasant surrounds in the Walmsley House in the Australian Native Garden in Royal Park.

Greens Candidate for State Seat of Melbourne:

It will be of interest to RPPG members that Brian Walters SC President of Protectors of Public Lands Victoria Inc. is the Greens candidate for the State seat of Melbourne. This augers well for Royal Park as he has impeccable environmental credentials. Bronwyn Pike the sitting member is the ALP candidate.

Membership Renewals:

We thank those members who have renewed memberships and extra special thanks to those who gave donations. We need membership renewals as we have no certainty of a grant to assist operations.

Oft quoted quote: *"Your parks are your breathing spaces. Guard them, cherish them. Parkland is valuable and greedy eyes see the money in it. So you must always be on the alert. Hang onto your breathing spaces in this developing and already over-congested city. Protect your parks from the pressure of political concrete"* (Patrick White 1972 Rally, Centennial Park, Sydney.)