

Metro East Bicycle User Group (MeBUG) Response

to the Parks Victoria 2022 Concept Design Report and Park Layout Plan

1. Shared Path within Healesville Freeway Reserve (HFR)

Gradient

According to the Concept Design Report the HFR project will include a high-quality shared path to create a safe and accessible visitor experience. Section 5.1 envisages a Parks Victoria Grade 2 Trail.

Such a trail would have a maximum slope of 1 in 10 (10% gradient), which would deter most people visiting the park. Such a path would encourage hoon cycling and detract from the park.

Information about trail grading is in the Parks Victoria Track and Trail Grading Manual. However, this manual is for walking trails and is not intended for the design of shared paths. Shared paths are required to suit everyone, including walkers, cyclists, disabled people, prams, trikes and the like.

We suggest a more appropriate selection would be a Grade 1 Trail as detailed on page 7 of the Trail Grading Manual. A Grade 1 Trail is intended for people of all abilities and complies with DDA requirements.

For DDA requirements the AS1428 series stipulates a maximum slope of 1 in 20 (5% gradient), or 1 in 14 (7.14% gradient) if flat rest stops are provided every 9m. Resting flats are commonly formed in concrete or timber ramps, but never in unsealed paths. Hence our recommendation to adopt a maximum slope of 1 in 20 (5% gradient) for the HFR shared path.

For cyclists refer to Cycling Aspects of Austroads Guides clause 7.5.5 Vertical Alignment. *"Gradients steeper than 5% should not be provided unless it is unavoidable."*

A path can be constructed throughout HFR without exceeding 5% gradient. See report submitted by Elaine Hopper, Community Reference Group member HFR to the Engage Team 2022 titled HFR Indicative Route of Shared Path. Elaine is also a MeBUG member.

Surface

We are concerned about the durability of the stabilised gravel surface proposed for the shared path. Over time, movement cracks will grow large enough to destabilise cyclists and cause crashes. There is no satisfactory method of restoring the original surface without reconstructing the path.

Parks Victoria manages similar parks within the Melbourne suburban area, such as Jells Park and Westerfolds Park. These urban parks have shared paths with sealed surfaces. Why should HFR Park be an exception with an unsealed path?

We recommend the adoption of a sealed surface for the shared path as that will improve the safety of users and their feelings of security.

Crossing of Bellbird Dell

Bellbird Dell which crosses HFR is a revered conservation area.

The Concept Design shows the shared path cum maintenance track crossing Bellbird Dell at its most critical point, which would be very disruptive. The bridge across the creek should be relocated. The route shown makes use of an existing path which climbs steeply up the west side of the valley. However, that arrangement would be too steep for many park visitors who would regard it as a blockage in the linear path.

We again refer to the report HFR Indicative Route of Shared Path submitted to Parks Victoria in February 2022 by Elaine Hopper, a Community Reference Group member for the HFR project and a MeBUG member.

This report includes two bridge options with costings estimated:

Option 1

A new treetop cable stayed bridge across the Bellbird Dell valley near the north boundary of HFR. This preferred option will become an overpass to carry shared path traffic over the valley to avoid interference with Bellbird Dell below. This bridge is intended to maintain the seclusion of Bellbird Dell. The approach paths would be short and high up, and much less invasive than any other option. There would be an interconnecting path along an existing trail on the east side.

Option 2

A short low-level bridge also near the north boundary of HFR. Note that the western approach would sidle down the hillside and cut a swathe through the thick bush.

Note: Option 1 above envisages a brand-new treetop bridge over Bellbird Dell. This should not be confused with the previous proposal to recycle a bridge from the Eastern Freeway widening. DELWP advise that it cannot be recycled.

Funding

The DELWP Concept Plan 2018, page 2, Divestment Strategy Tranche 3 shows that the HFR Divestment Process was for VicRoads “to commence the process of selling certain residential properties and allocating the proceeds of the sales to fund the development of the shared bike/ pedestrian pathway.” The amount realized we understand was \$10.5 million.

2. Linking the HFR shared path to the Dandenong Creek Trail

Advantages of a Link

- A link will provide access in the east to the 100kms of the Dandenong Creek Trail and to the Eastlink Trail, both of which lead to other trails. The HFR is a recognised Strategic Cycling Corridor Class 2 by virtue of this potential.
- It will provide safe access to the Dandenong Creek Trail for people in the large residential area adjoining or near the HFR path.
- Access via the eastern end of HFR has for decades been unavailable to the public. An attractive entrance to the park there is a vital way to increase patronage.
- It will increase safe access for students at Vermont Secondary College, Emmaus College and Parkmore Primary School.
- It will increase the opportunities for sustainable transport.
- It will increase opportunities for disabled access and carers with prams.
- It will link two Parks Victoria parks, Koomba Park & HFR.
- It should provide synergistic cost savings to Parks Victoria in management of the two parks.

Increasing patronage of the HFR at the east end.

People living on the north side of Boronia Road cannot safely cross directly into the HFR. The speed limit is 80kph, and there are many heavy vehicles in the traffic. There is no impediment to fast driving near the HFR. Any link from HFR along Boronia Road should be concreted and preferably 3m wide with a guardrail. There needs to be a safe interface onto the Dandenong Creek Trail. The existing underground passage of Boronia Road then provides access north and south.

The writers of this submission have noted in their many visits to the west end of HFR and the Bellbird Dell, that the HFR is quite lightly used, and chiefly by dog-walkers and walkers. The east end has had no public usage.

An extended path could double the number of visitors to the Healesville Freeway Reserve. The new park should be made as attractive as possible, in line with the investment in it, and one means of doing that is enabling cross travel to other trails or bringing people in from those trails.

It is difficult to estimate the number of additional park visitors who would be attracted to the shared path if it is extended to the Dandenong Creek Trail. There are no automatic traffic counters nearby. The VicRoads counter at Ringwood records about 60 bicycles daily, which is 22,000 p.a. The counter at Mount Waverley records about 300 bicycles daily, which is 110,000 p.a. These figures suggest an estimate of 10,000 bicycles p.a. for the extended HFR path. Adding the number of pedestrians, the extra visitors to HFR would be about 15,000 p.a. or 40 a day. On Sunday 23 October 2022, a fine and calm day, Elaine Hopper counted 70 persons in the hour from 2pm to 3pm, cycling (55) and walking or running, (15)

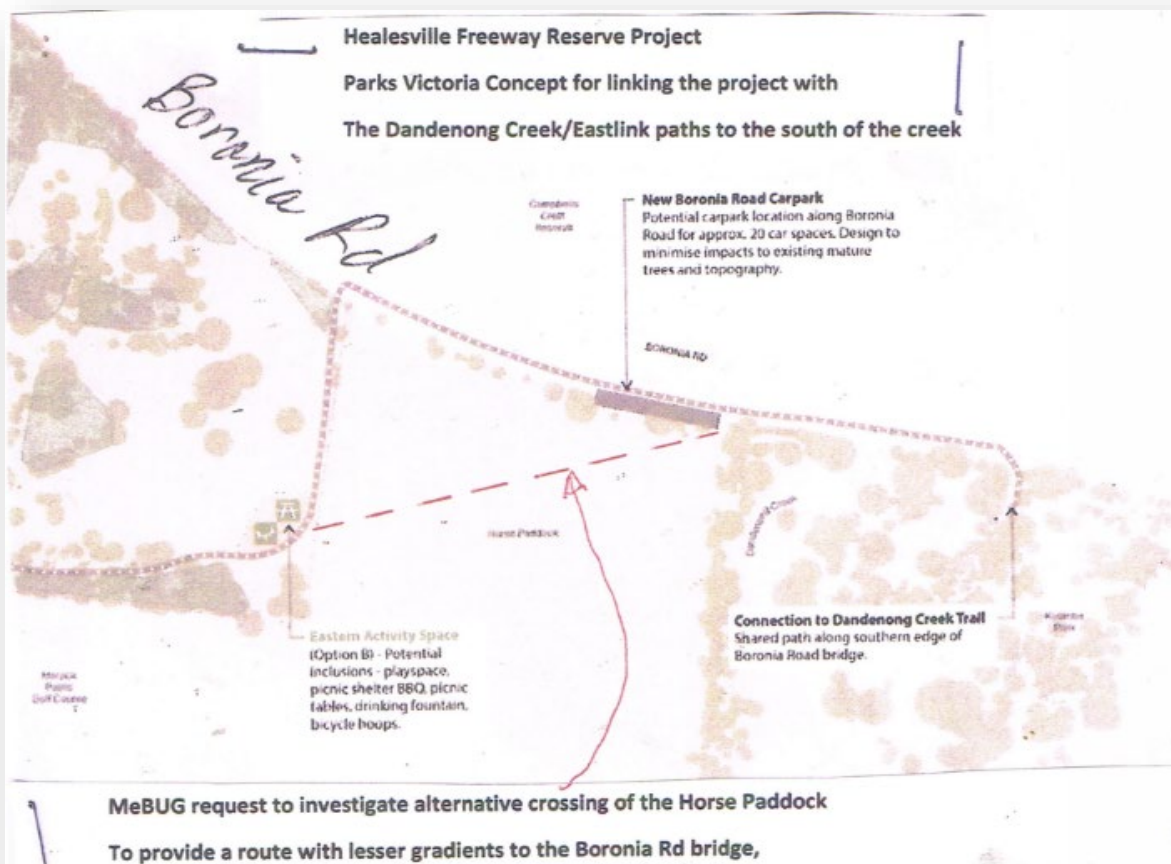
along the Dandenong Creek Trail immediately south of Boronia Road. A proportion of these will be attracted to HFR if a well-designed link is available and signed.

Eastern Entry/Exit to and from the HFR

We ask Parks Victoria to investigate the possibility of a more direct exit/entry via Crown land 122H, named “Horse Paddock” on the draft map.

This would:

- remove some of the steep gradient problem, including the gradient in Boronia Rd.
- save on the cost of a path on Boronia Rd.
- enable the path to be located more safely to the west of the new car park
- align an entry/exit to the park with the proposed new car park.
- make it easier for disability access from the car park.
- Provide a more attractive, expansive view on entering the park



Interface with the Dandenong Creek Trail

In the new draft plan, an exit from the HFR linear trail onto and along the footpath area of Boronia Road is shown as the connection to Dandenong Creek Trail.

- Sightlines for cyclists and pedestrians are limited along the Dandenong Creek Trail just south of Boronia Road. The junction needs to have this consideration in mind.
- Vehicles in the current and new car parks should not interface with passing cyclists or pedestrians.
- Cyclists entering Koomba Park from Boronia Road should be protected from cars in the car park by a short length of Shared Path between the new path in Boronia Rd and the existing gravel path.

Note: an alternate proposal for a bridge across the Dandenong Creek to join the HFR trail to the Dandenong Creek Trail was submitted in the 2022 Engage Process by Elaine Hopper Community Reference Group member.

Images by David Simm with comments.

Crown Allotment 122H (Horse Paddock) exit area and car park: considerations.

1. If it were feasible to cross the horse paddock further to the south and nearer to the bridge it would provide more flexibility to the positioning of the new car park.



2.



3.



Boronia Road footpath and bridge crossing.

4. There is also an on-road bike lane on the bridge and this section of Boronia Rd



5.



The direct interface with Dandenong Creek Trail.

6.



7. Cyclists entering Koomba Park from Boronia Rd need protection from cars in the carpark by a short length of SUP between the new path in Boronia Rd and the existing gravel path from the carpark. Vehicles are prevented by the fence from entering the paths.



8. The preferred junction of the Link path from HFRP to the existing paths in Koomba Park.



9. The existing informal walking track close to the southern end of the bridge (SUP) because has limited sight lines before/after the bends in the Dandenong Creek/Eastlink path as shown in the photos above.



Prepared by Metro East Bicycle User Group (MeBUG) November 2022

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