

Urban Encroachment and the need to protect our critical infrastructure

By EMMANUEL PAPAGIANNAKIS, Victoria International Container Terminal

Since the 1850s Port Melbourne has been a thriving transport hub. This tradition continues today with its three international container terminals positioned around the Port of Melbourne. However, as the city sprawl continues at a rapid pace, land becomes increasingly valuable for development. This is often at the expense of protecting traffic corridors and designated land used to facilitate the movement of goods around Australia, as well as for the future expansion of our container terminals.

Urban encroachment is a direct result of population growth rates. Last year, the Australian Bureau of Statistics recorded Victoria as having the highest growth rate of all states and territories with a population of 6.4 million people. On average, there are 350 new people moving to Melbourne every day. This brings lots of opportunities to the area, however it is not without its challenges.

These increasing figures are significant to the supply chain industry. Not only does it mean there will be more cargo to move to keep up with the demand, it also results

in more people utilising the city's services, such as roads, trains and housing.

Melbourne is Australia's biggest cargo port and over the last calendar year 3,018,693 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent unit) passed through the Port of Melbourne. On average, each vessel visiting the Port of Melbourne brings an estimated \$1.4 million in benefits to the Victorian economy.

Historically, Port Melbourne has been an industrial area with sugar refineries, gasworks, shipping, chemical works and distilleries. However, in recent years it has seen an urban renewal, transforming into a diverse area with parklands and residential developments alongside the many warehouses and ports.

The Fishermens Bend Framework sets out a plan over the next 30 years to transform the area into a light industrial district with a large emphasis on new residential developments. This dual function between both heavy and light industry and residential builds will evoke certain challenges with opposing interests and needs.

Although the Framework does acknowledge the need to protect operations and connections to the port due to the prosperity of jobs and business, there are growing concerns that increased residential development will place curfews or other restrictions on established infrastructure assets. Recently, heavy vehicle restrictions have been implemented along Beach Road between Port Melbourne and Mordialloc.

It is essential that these industrial assets are protected in order to protect our economy and keep pace with consumer demand. Freight infrastructure must be able to operate uninterrupted, 24/7 in order to be most efficient. This means trucks continuing to have access to the port, roads and logistic centres.

A measure to assist with road congestion is the Port Rail Shuttle Network. It has been designed to shift some of Victoria's metro container freight volumes by rail using on-dock rail and freight hubs. The project promotes the ability to take some 3,500 trucks off the local roads and replace them with 28 freight trains that would transfer up to 1.4 million containers a year.

This project would operate in conjunction with the National Rail Program which is a \$10 billion rail investment program designed to improve passenger rail networks in Australian cities. Moving freight onto rail and off the roads would reduce freight congestion within the inner city freeing up road space for other road users.

Rail options for all three stevedores is essential for a thriving economy. Long term infrastructure plans need to be developed to sustain trade activity and economic growth. Currently there is only one near-dock rail terminal at West Swanson Dock with plans to convert to on-dock, however to maximise the potential of the entire supply chain to operate at its best, there needs to be a solid commitment to have efficient and cost effective rail connections to all three international stevedores.

Without cost effective connections, the Port Rail Shuttle Network will struggle to realise its heavily touted benefits, placing limits upon the growth of Melbourne's port. It is up to our government to protect critical infrastructure corridors, which in turn will enhance economic advancements for all Australians. With that in mind, surely it is imperative to extract value from infrastructure we already have while looking ahead and forward-planning effectively for the future.



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