

North East Link Eastern Freeway Upgrades – Urban Design and Landscape Plan (UDLP)

Manningham Council Submission

27 October 2023



Interpreter service

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Introduction

1. This submission has been prepared by Manningham Council (Council) in relation to the public exhibition of the *Eastern Freeway Upgrades Urban Design and Landscape Plan* (UDLP), delivered as part of the North East Link Project (the project).
2. The UDLP contains designs for the Eastern Freeway upgrades from Burke Road to Tram Road. This includes the widening of the freeway, delivery of the first section of the Eastern Express Busway, interface works with the Eastern Freeway Interchange, upgrades to the Koonung Creek Reserve, noise walls, walking and cycling links, and upgraded bridge crossings.
3. Council acknowledges the consultations that have occurred with Council officers and other relevant stakeholders that have informed the preparation of the UDLP, and now welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the exhibited version.
4. However, the limited exhibition period to seek individual and group feedback from the community is concerning given the large volume of documentation associated with the UDLP.
5. Council generally supports the UDLP, and notes that the designs mostly accord with the details presented in the initial reference design for the project exhibited in 2019 via the Environmental Effects Statement (EES).

Submission

6. To work towards a net-community benefit for Manningham's community as a result of the project, this submission identifies various matters in the UDLP for attention by the North East Link Program (NELP).
7. It is expected that appropriate consideration be given not only to Council's submission, but also to any other submissions lodged by the Manningham community, and that NELP's response to all submissions will be clearly communicated prior to (or by) the final UDLP.
8. This submission reiterates Council's strong and ongoing advocacy to ensure that no net loss of open space results from the project, that pedestrian connectivity is maintained and improved, and that noise walls meet the expectations of our community to protect amenity.

Traffic and Transport

Eastern Express Busway

9. Council is strongly supportive of the proposed Eastern Express Busway that will provide a fast and direct connection between Doncaster Road and Hoddle Street via a physically separated busway on the Eastern Freeway.
10. Increasing the efficiency and reliability of the bus network aligns with multiple State and Local strategic documents, including:

- Manningham's Bus Network Review, 2017
- Manningham's Transport Action Plan, 2021
- Victoria's Bus Plan
- Plan Melbourne 2017-2050

11. Council seeks that Eastern Express Busway be 'future-proofed', by designing and constructing it to a standard that is suitable for conversion to light/heavy rail in the future, to accommodate potential future demand.

Doncaster Park & Ride

12. Although the Doncaster Park & Ride is not included as part of this UDLP, Council reinstates its strong desire for the State Government and NELP to amend the EES reference design for Doncaster Park & Ride.
13. Council has released design concepts and an economic feasibility study in support of a mixed-use transit-oriented development for Doncaster Park & Ride.
14. Council's position is that a mixed-use transit-oriented development is a strongly preferred outcome for this site instead of the 'like-for-like' reinstatement shown by the EES reference design.

Pedestrian and Cycling – Shared User Paths

15. The provision of walking and cycling infrastructure to promote and improve higher use of active transport modes is a strategic goal of Council.
16. Council supports the efforts shown in the UDLP to provide new and upgraded pathways including dedicated Shared User Paths (SUP) within the project boundary.
17. Council recommends that any retained pedestrian and cycling paths within the project boundary be upgraded to provide seamless connections to new SUP's, and to meet the prescribed best practice standards. This includes the full extent of the Koonung Creek trail on both sides of the freeway.
18. Council's preference is for the SUP on the north side of the freeway to be 4 metres wide and mode separated, to avoid pedestrian and cyclist conflict.
19. Providing mode separation will assist in managing future pedestrian and cyclist demands, which are likely to increase over time.

Pedestrian and Cycling - Amenities

20. Council supports the provision of pedestrian and cyclist amenities along the SUP and existing path network, noting that the locations and details supplied in the UDLP are notated as "*to be confirmed in further design stages*".
21. Council stresses the importance of developing the location and details of these amenities in direct consultation with the relevant stakeholders, including Council, to ensure maximum community benefit.

22. Additionally, notations in the UDLP refer to these amenities as “*potential rest / furniture / bike repair areas*”. Council suggests that a broader notation may be more appropriate, to ensure shelter, lighting, wayfinding, public toilets, and any other relevant amenities are also within the scope of works for these locations.
23. Council recommends reviewing the provision of rest stops and amenities on the northern side of the freeway within ‘Zone 6’ as shown in the UDLP (attachment 2, part 2, page 6). This section of the SUP and existing pathway has a lower number of rest stops and amenities compared with other sections, which should be increased to better serve the needs of the community.
24. In addition to amenities, the fencing and other infrastructure for the SUP must be designed with all users in mind. For example, the UDLP shows some fencing styles that might be a snag hazard for bicycle handlebars. Council would prefer more bicycle-friendly options to be explored, with rub-rails provided to improve safety.

Pedestrian and Cycling – Additional Links

25. The provision of the new and upgraded SUP provides an opportunity for active transport links to be provided to existing facilities, recreation uses, and other locations of interest.
26. Council encourages NELP to explore all such opportunities to increase connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists, to encourage access to these locations via active transport. An example opportunity is the proximity of Koonung Reserve to the SUP on the northern side of the freeway within the Southern Interface Zone.
27. Another opportunity to improve bicycle and pedestrian connectivity is between the proposed SUP, and the southern end of Marjorie Close in Bulleen. The UDLP proposes to retain the existing vegetation in this location between the end of Marjorie close, and the proposed SUP.

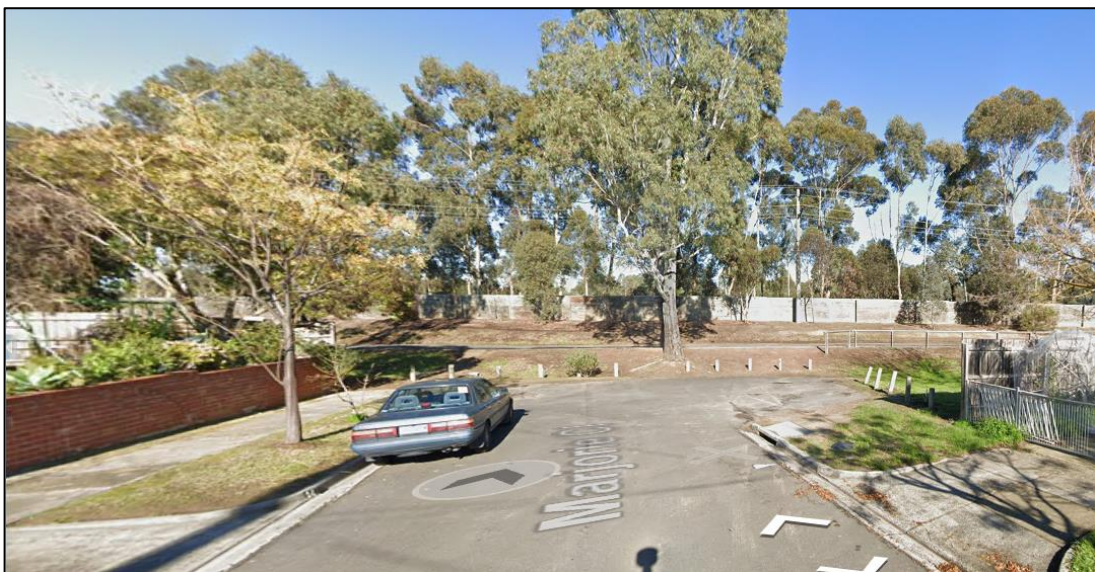


Figure 1 – Streetview image showing the view from Marjorie Close looking south towards the existing freeway noise walls.

28. The vegetation here is limited to a single tree as shown in Figure 1 above, and this land is already included in the project boundary. There is therefore clear capacity for a link to be provided, which would significantly improve connectivity for Marjorie Close residents and other members of the community accessing the SUP or surrounding open space from this location.

Pedestrian and Cycling – Safety and Access

29. Council discourages the use of any tight switchbacks or ‘hairpin’ turns along the SUP, to minimise safety, functionality, and general access concerns for both cyclists and pedestrians. Further development of the SUP alignment should maximise the radius of any switchbacks or ‘hairpin’ turns.
30. Future view lines along the SUP alignment following the maturing of the proposed vegetation is another important safety consideration, due to the potentially high speeds of commuter cyclists. Planting must carefully consider view lines along the SUP to ensure safety outcomes are prioritised.
31. Council acknowledges that finer details will be developed at the detailed design stage after the UDLP process. However, it is recommended that some clarity be provided by the UDLP drawings and visualisations on the visual appearance and location of any safety measures for pedestrians – such as physical barriers or separators in locations such as the Doncaster Road bridge.
32. Council has been made aware of safety concerns in relation to school children travelling on foot or by bicycle from Heyington Avenue to the pedestrian bridge across the freeway, whereby they are not adequately looking both ways before crossing Stanton Street.



Figure 2 – Heyington Avenue / Stanton Street intersection with the crossing point of concern indicated in red.

33. Options to upgrade the Heyington Avenue / Stanton Street intersection should therefore be explored to improve safety outcomes at this location, in particular given the newly proposed pedestrian bridge has the same access point as the current one,

given patronage of this crossing point will likely increase as a result of the project, and given the project boundary already extends to cover this road intersection.

34. Council expects that the detailed design phase following the UDLP approval will address all relevant *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA)* requirements to improve and maximise connectivity across the freeway for all members of the community.

Doncaster Road Interchange

35. It is expected that all design elements in the UDLP have appropriately considered future transport demand projections, and where possible, any associated future works for upgrades to road and transport infrastructure. Council seeks assurance that the Doncaster Road Interchange is designed to not preclude integration of other public transport modes in the future, such as light rail.
36. Council's position is that an at-grade pedestrian refuge and signalised crossing is required on the southern side of the Doncaster Road / High Street intersection. Pedestrians seeking to access the Doncaster Park & Ride from the south side of High Street must first cross to the north side of High Street, and then cross again to the east side of Doncaster Road. Alternatively, they can take an indirect route via the proposed underpass.
37. This is an inefficient and inconvenient outcome that may lead to illegal 'Jaywalking' and subsequent serious safety concerns. Additionally, provision of a signalised crossing over all main lanes of traffic is a common and standard outcome for intersections of this type and size.
38. Council submits that this additional crossing should be provided as part of this current UDLP to enable its construction at the same time as the Doncaster Road Interchange upgrade – which includes the other signalised pedestrian crossings at the High Street / Doncaster Road intersection.

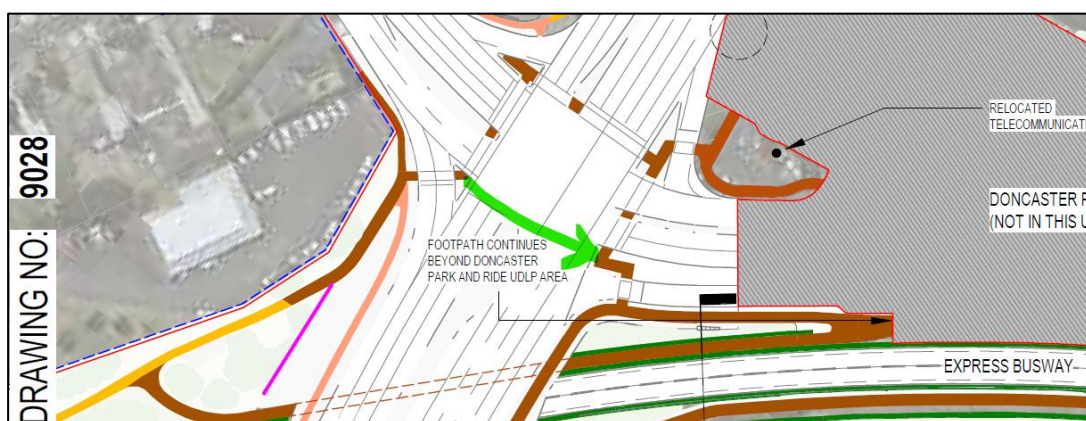


Figure 3 – Excerpt of UDLP Attachment 1, Part 1, page 17 (drawing 9028) showing Council's recommended additional crossing point (green arrow) at Doncaster Road / High Street intersection.

39. Council is committed to ensuring that all users of the SUP network feel comfortable and safe, including at the proposed underpass beneath Doncaster Road on the northern side of the freeway.

40. Important considerations include achieving an alignment that allows clear view lines for passive surveillance, materials and lighting to improve feelings of comfort and safety, noise attenuation measures, and an innovative and safe method of separating the underpass experience from the adjacent highspeed busway.
41. It is noted that Objective 15.5 on page 118 of the UDLP outlines that “*Brighter materials and colour treatments have also been selected for the internal walls and surfaces of the southern underpass to minimise the sense of enclosure and darkness, with the northern underpass (reflectivity and glare)*”. Specific details are expected during the detailed design stage to ensure the outcome is acceptable.
42. Council’s position is that lighting will be the most important factor affecting how this underpass will be experienced. Council refers to the research and analysis undertaken by XYX Lab, Arup and Plan International titled *Lighting Cities: Creating Safer Spaces for Women and Girls*. This research shows that consistent and layered lighting – where there are multiple light sources and where surfaces with different reflective values are taken into consideration – makes women feel most safe.
43. This kind of lighting reduces the “floodlit effect”, the sharp drop-off of light beyond the path, and the potential for glare and contrast to blind and disorientate. The research concluded that although illuminance (the measure of light falling on a surface, or Lux) is the only unit of measurement required to comply with the relevant Australian Standards, other metrics such as luminance (light bouncing off a surface and hitting the observer’s eye) should be considered too.
44. The material finishes and surface intensity should be considered for how the eye perceives space and safety. Council recommends more investigation to achieve an improved outcome for the SUP under the Doncaster Road bridge.
45. Council seeks further clarification regarding the noise wall shown at Doncaster Road Interchange on the west side of Doncaster Road, south of High Street (shown in pink in Figure 3). There are no private residential interfaces in proximity to this wall, and it may create a visual barrier to the shared user path and limit passive surveillance. As such, its height should be minimised, or its location reconsidered.
46. Council also recommends that all lighting at street level of the Doncaster Road Interchange be provided and detailed, to create a gateway and sense of place at this important entry point to Manningham.

Open space

47. A priority for Council in considering the UDLP and whole NEL project is to ensure that there is no net loss of open space for the community. In addition, it is expected that upgrades to open space areas provided by the project will measurably improve the useability and amenity of these spaces, while ensuring the natural environment is enhanced and protected.
48. Limited discussion of the high-level balance of open space is provided by the Project Description and Design Response of the UDLP. Various specific locations are

discussed in relation to the changes and improvements proposed, but no detail is provided on how much open space is lost overall due to the freeway widening.

49. It is recommended that this be addressed in the final UDLP for greater transparency of the overall open space outcome, and to provide reassurance for the community that the retention and improvement of open space has been prioritised with their needs in mind.
50. Council maintains concerns in relation to the loss of space between the northern boundary of the project and the soccer field at Park Reserve. Drawing 9530 (Attachment 2, Part 1) of the UDLP demonstrates that that Cross Section 03 (Attachment 2, Part 3, drawing 9553) is not taken through the worst pinch point of the SUP interface with the soccer pitch. This does not provide sufficient certainty to Council and the community about the interface with the SUP, noise walls and soccer field at this location – where a well-used spectator area for the field will be lost due to the SUP placement.

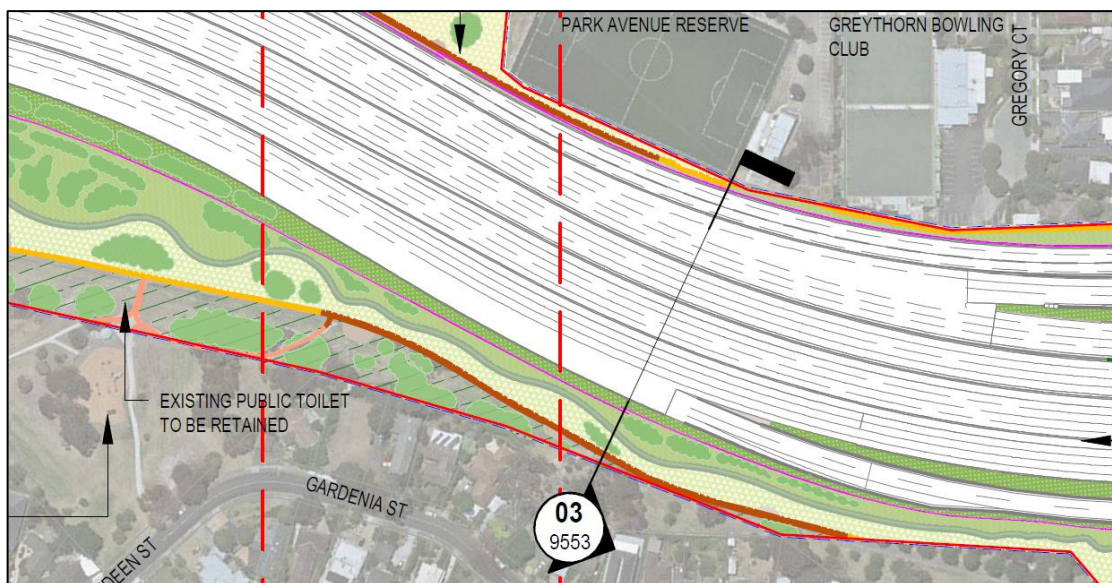


Figure 4 – Excerpt of UDLP Attachment 2, Part 1, page 24 (drawing 9530) showing the location of Cross Section 03 - which is taken through the existing path rather than the wider SUP and does not show the interface with the Soccer pitch.

51. Further work should be undertaken in consultation with relevant stakeholders for Park Reserve during the detailed design stage, to ensure impacts as a result of the project are mitigated, and that opportunities for upgrades are maximised.
52. In particular, the loss of spectator space on the south side of the reserve due to the widened freeway and new SUP should not be worsened by the introduction of freeway lights, landscaping at maturity, or any other features that arise at the detailed design stage.
53. Council encourages NELP to support and assist impacted facilities and clubs with future upgrades, to offset the impacts as a result of the project. It is noted that the North East Link Community Fund is set up with this in mind, and that round 3 applications for this funding will open in 2024.

54. At Park Reserve, Council would support upgrades including options for additional spectator seating in appropriate locations, levelling of the grassed area to the north of the existing pitch for better usability, upgrades to floodlighting, or other agreed projects – all subject to relevant investigations and consultations.
55. Another opportunity is at Wilsons Reserve due to the proximity of its carpark to Koonung Creek trail, which will be upgraded within the project boundary. Council would support improved connections to the trail from Wilsons Reserve and any associated upgrades to amenities, lighting or car parking.

Environmental Impacts

56. Another priority for Council is maximising the retention of existing trees and native vegetation across the whole project. Council supports NELP's ongoing replanting initiatives including their commitment to replanting at a ratio of 2:1, and will continue to advocate for the retention of important trees and vegetation throughout and following the UDLP process.
57. Council supports the sentiment of the UDLP Site Analysis (pages 14 & 16, UDLP report) that Koonung Creek Reserve is a key linear parkland with high landscape, environmental and recreational values. Council reinforces the strong environmental significance of this area due to the waterway connections including Koonung Creek itself, as well as the diverse native flora and fauna. It is suggested that these significant environmental values be further explained and highlighted in the Site Analysis section of the UDLP.
58. Council has been made aware of a potential issue in relation to birds colliding with noise wall panels that are constructed with transparent materials. It is expected that all relevant matters, including impacts to local fauna, will be considered in the final development of noise wall materials during the detailed design stage.
59. Council supports NELP's commitment to targeting net zero emissions in operation and maintenance and expects best practice sustainability outcomes to be pursued throughout all stages of the project.

Amenity

Noise Wall Interface – Estelle Street

60. Council has consistently raised its serious concerns with the impacts to abutting residential areas from the proposed freeway widening due to the loss of open space and proximity of noise walls.
61. At Estelle Street in Bulleen, it is noted that this UDLP only covers the area east of Millicent Avenue, leaving the western portion of Estelle Street proposed as per the previously exhibited North East Link Tunnels UDLP (Central Package).
62. Given the western portion of Estelle Street is located within the Southern Interface Zone for this UDLP, Council is disappointed that the opportunity was not taken to

explore further options to improve amenity impacts and seek resident feedback in this location where space is very limited.

63. Council therefore takes the opportunity to reinstate its concerns for this location in relation to the loss of existing canopy tree cover, insufficient space for appropriate replanting, increased height of noise walls, closer proximity of the walls, and subsequent visual dominance.
64. In relation to the eastern portion of Estelle Street (east of Millicent Avenue), the UDLP Landscape Sections (attachment 2, part 3, page 4) show an embankment sloping up from Estelle Street to cover approximately two thirds of the height of the noise wall. The embankment is supported by retaining walls in two places and contains the Estelle Street Bridge SUP ramp.
65. Council acknowledges that the embankment and its capacity for planting are a positive step in providing a visual buffer to abutting residential properties that will mitigate the visual impacts of the noise wall in this location to some extent.
66. However, Council has concerns in relation to the steep slope of the embankment, which may limit landscaping and maintenance capabilities. The slope also limits the usability of this area as open space for passive recreation.
67. Given the significant loss of open space in this location it is strongly recommended that active engagement with Estelle Street residents is undertaken throughout all design stages of the project.

Noise Wall Interface – Park and Outhwaite Avenues, Doncaster

68. At the project boundary interface with Park and Outhwaite Avenues in Doncaster, Council notes there is a highly constrained pinch-point, where there will be no landscape or other buffer between the proposed noise wall and the public realm.



Figure 5 – Excerpt from attachment 3 of the UDLP showing an artist's impression of the noise wall interface.

69. Council has concerns in this location about the poor pedestrian environment created by the abrupt abuttal of solid noise walls with the footpath, undesirable visual impacts to the public realm, and the proximity of the noise walls to private residential properties.
70. It is acknowledged that there are significant constraints in relation to available space to upgrade the freeway in some locations, including this one.
71. It is therefore recommended that innovative urban design, art, and landscaping solutions be explored to soften the noise wall interface where these 'pinch-points' occur. For example, a feature or textured material may be most appropriate at this location of the noise wall to discourage graffiti and reduce visual impacts, given the noise wall is directly accessible from the footpath. Other options may include an artwork or a green wall feature.
72. Safety outcomes must be carefully considered in this location. No safety measures such as bollards or guard rails are demonstrated in the artist's impression shown in Figure 5 above. Any safety measures will need to be carefully selected and innovatively designed to consider potential visual impacts and additional space constraints.
73. Similarly to Estelle Street, it is strongly recommended that active engagement with Park and Outhwaite Avenue residents is undertaken throughout all design stages of the project.

Lighting

74. Council supports the commitment of the UDLP to providing adequate lighting for the Koonung Creek Trail and all bicycle and pedestrian nodes and links. These areas are proposed to be illuminated by 'borrowed light' from the new freeway lighting, with additional lighting provided where necessary to meet any relevant Australian Standard or in accordance with the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTUD) principles.
75. Council recommends that further clarification of what/where/how additional lighting may be implemented (where deemed necessary) within the final UDLP for greater transparency for local residents, to consider the potential amenity impacts.

Noise

76. Council continues to seek assurance that the project maintains compliance with all Environmental Performance Requirements. This includes noise management and monitoring during construction and following completion of the project, to protect the amenity of Manningham's community.
77. Council previously advocated to the State government for the development and review of the *Traffic Noise Reduction Policy* (TNRP) 2005 to include better controls for night-time traffic noise.
78. This matter was highlighted as an issue by the Minister for Planning's assessment of the North East Link EES in 2019, and Council's position remains that a review of the TNRP is necessary going forwards.

79. Council maintains that this is an important consideration for this stage of the project given the location, design, materials and approximate height of noise walls are under consideration in this UDLP.
80. It is important that the noise wall designs be 'future-proofed' to avoid an instance where they must be upgraded or reconstructed to align with any updated TNRP or other relevant policy.

Air Quality

81. Council seeks further clarity in relation to air quality management and monitoring, including updates on the reporting of results from the ambient air quality monitoring program.

Other Considerations

Plan Inconsistencies

82. Council notes that providing sufficient accuracy in all UDLP drawings is integral to ensuring transparency for all stakeholders including the Manningham community. It is recommended that a careful review of all drawings be undertaken before the final UDLP is submitted for approval.
83. Of note, is that the landscape plan for 'Zone 7' (UDLP attachment 2, part 2) shows landscaping covering an access road that connects from Paul Street in Doncaster to the carpark of the Tende Beck Scout Hall. No other access arrangements are available for this facility. It is therefore expected that this drawing will be reviewed and corrected.

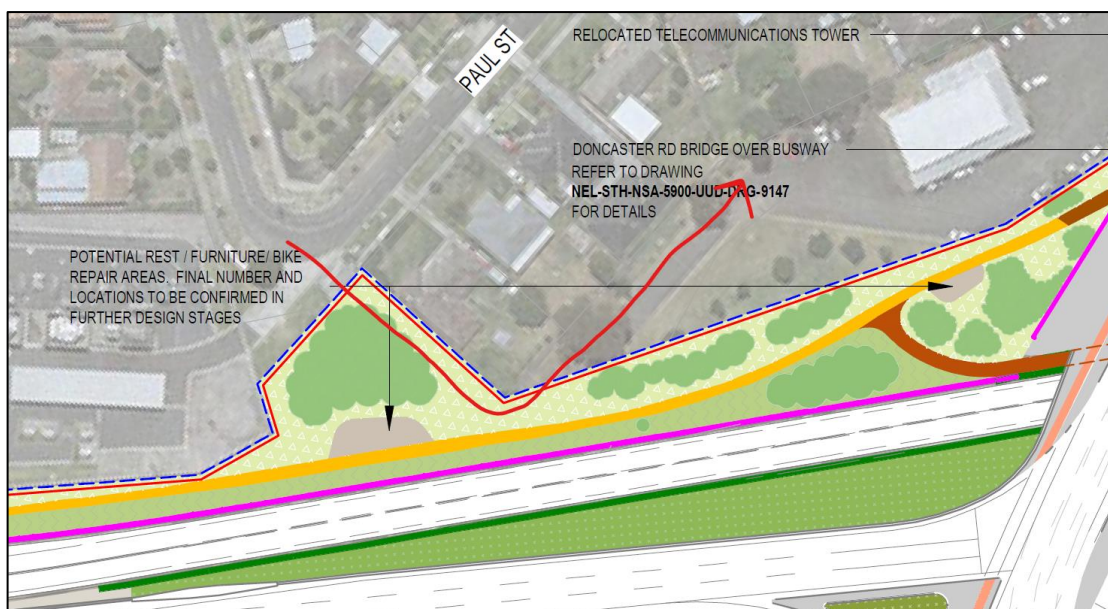


Figure 6 – excerpt of UDLP Landscape Plan for Zone 7 showing the current access to the Scout Hall via a red arrow.

Maintenance Responsibilities

84. Council does not support the handover of new assets to Manningham Council associated with the NEL project for future maintenance. Council has neither the resources nor funding to adequately maintain structures such as retaining walls, flood

walls or other structures along the alignment. It is Council's strong view that ongoing maintenance responsibilities of infrastructure associated rest with NELP and the State Government.

Voluntary Purchase Scheme

85. Council reinstates its strong support for the Voluntary Purchase Scheme (VPS) that has been developed for eligible property owners directly affected by the project works, who can sell their property to the Victorian Government if they wish.
86. The VPS is particularly important for property owners in close proximity to the 'pinch-points' shown in this UDLP, including in Bulleen at Estelle Street, Park Avenue and Outhwaite Avenue.

Art

87. Notations in the UDLP that the final placement of the Sentinel sculpture at the Doncaster Road Interchange will be subject to consultation with the artist's representatives are supported by Council.
88. Council recommends that view lines to the sculpture be carefully considered and maximised, and that lighting and landscaping opportunities be explored to complement the sculpture's relocation, to support it as a gateway piece to Manningham at this prominent road interchange.
89. Council recommends that NELP explore further opportunities to provide a series of art along the SUP and all pathways within Koonung Creek Reserve, for enjoyment by the community and to support local artists.

Conclusion

90. Council generally supports the proposed upgrades and changes proposed by the UDLP.
91. However, Council respectfully requests that the recommended changes and considerations as set out above are incorporated into the final UDLP.
92. Council looks forward to reviewing the final UDLP to understand how all feedback from the exhibition period has been implemented.