

**Royal Park Protection Group Inc**  
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**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ROYAL PARK PROTECTION GROUP (RPPG)**  
**GIVEN AT THE AGM ON 8 DECEMBER 2007**

Today we are holding our tenth annual general meeting of the Royal Park Protection Group Inc. It was at our first AGM in 1998 that we announced our objectives and pledged “*to protect, regenerate and conserve the Royal Park as a unique, indigenous, central city park for present and future generations, consistent with principles of the 1987 Royal Park Master Plan; and to oppose alienation of parkland by government, commercial, sporting and other bodies to ensure public access consistent with the terms of the establishment of the Royal Park*”. As detailed at our 2006 AGM it was emerging threats to Royal Park, chiefly the proposal by the then City of Melbourne Chief Commissioner, Kevan Gosper, to clear-fell ten hectares of parkland round the Zoo, including historic Marconi Crescent and its avenue of Morton Bay fig trees, for construction of super market-style concrete carparks which mobilised the community. (Kevan Gosper is remembered for his comment on inspecting Royal Park for the new carpark site “there’s an awful lot of vacant land was round here.”)

Ironically enough, it was at the first RPPG AGM in 1998 that the then ALP candidate for the State seat of Melbourne Bronwyn Pike, who was our guest speaker, gave an undertaking to ensure that Royal Park would, under a Labor Government, not be treated as “Terra Nullius” ( i.e. vacant land there for the taking) but would be protected as public open space and as heritage parkland. It should be pointed out here that as Minister for Health, Ms Pike presided over the redevelopment of the Royal Children’s Hospital in Royal Park, which has not only has expanded into parkland but - under the terms of the PPP contract announced last week - includes a private, commercial hotel within the hospital precinct. In our view this reveals the complete contempt exhibited by the Bracks and then Brumby Governments for our inheritance of inner city parks. It also most instructive in showing how - in our view - the Government deliberately misled and conned the public over plans for a major development in the Park.

**East West Link to Proceed:**

I will mention events not in chronological order but according to their significance. The project which has been increasingly preoccupying us is the extension of the Eastern Freeway, whether a freeway/tollway, tunnel or expanded roadway, through or under Royal Park. We are sure that this will become reality, once Sir Rod Eddington’s “East West Link Assessment” is completed. An announcement will be made in February or March. Already Premier John Brumby speaks of it as a fait accompli. In fact the DOI engineering team, which designed and implemented East Link, is now said to be working on the East-West Link and was sent by Premier Brumby to China to investigate their tunnelling techniques.

Many inner city residents including those in Parkville – the focal point of this monster development - appear to be taking the ostrich approach and ignoring the facts. They appear to fantasise that the tunnel will mysteriously disappear underground at Hoddle Street and re emerge in the Western suburbs. Not so. Predictions are it will have giant on/off ramps or interchange junctions at all or some of these: Princes Street/Nicholson Street, Princes Street /Lygon Street, Royal Parade/Macarthur Road and Elliott Avenue/Flemington Road. In addition, pundits say that it will spawn massive polluting vent stacks, as did the Burnley tunnel. It is mooted that a giant flyover across West Parkville and Royal Park Wetlands will link the tunnel with City Link. The whole exercise, originally costed at \$1 billion, is now said to cost \$10 billion. The bets are on that the

Government will regard Royal Park as disposable and, in a “cost saving” measure, the extension of the Eastern Freeway will be in an open cut motorway through the Park, not underground in a tunnel.

RPPG members attended several events in June 2007 including the forum held in Collinwood Town Hall by “Citizens for a Liveable Melbourne” (Angela Munro is President) at which Peter Newman of Murdoch University and Kenneth Davidson, Age writer, spoke. The City of Manningham held a forum on the Eddington Study and the message was communicated loud and clear – no freeways but improved and expanded public transport especially the railway up the Eastern Freeway to Doncaster. (On the model of Perth’s railway initiated by Peter Newman.) RPPG had letters published in a spread of Leader newspapers across the metropolitan area Manningham Leader had excellent coverage of the forum.

The threatened East-West Link was a Federal Election issue for the seat of Melbourne. Important events have included the “Trams Trains and Tunnels “ Forum billed as a “Meet Your Candidates for the 2007 Federal Election - Policies for the Future of Transport”. This was held on Wednesday 24 October 2007 at Collingwood Town Hall. The host was the Yarra Council and RPPG helped organise together with Protectors of Public Lands Victoria Inc (The incumbent ALP MP Lindsay Tanner did not arrive until after the meeting was over so the ALP view was not heard.) The Greens were the only Party to clearly veto the Tunnel. Bob Brown held a media conference on the Tunnel in Royal Park wetlands (the site of a fly over.) on Friday 26 October 2007.

RPPG awaits the announcement t of the Eddington report in February or March next year.

### **Development of Royal Children’s Hospital in Royal Park:**

RPPG has been involved in this development and has been “consulted” over the last two years over plans for the redevelopment. Originally said to be limited to the existing footprint of 4.1 hectares. RPPG had assurances that there would be no net loss of parkland. Subsequent plans exhibited at consultations and at meetings with then Minister for Health Bronwyn Pike showed that an entirely new hospital would be built to the west of the existing hospital. Assurances were given that the existing hospital would be demolished including the Murdoch Research Institute. The next development was the announcement that the Entry building and the Research Institute would be retained not demolished. The Royal Children’s Hospital Land Bill provided for the alienation of 6.3 hectares of land for the construction site. Guarantees that the land would be return to parkland do not appear to us to be in cast iron – it is at the discretion of the Minister. Last Monday RPPG attended a briefing at the RCH at which it was discovered that plans have changed substantially. The new hospital will not be block shaped but have fingers extending into the Park; a hotel will be built on the precinct on a site where the old H block will be demolished; and there will be “parkland” in the shape of courtyards enclosed within the Hospital. There has been difficulty in obtaining plans for the new development. The RCH PR rep. Robert Larocca was to have attended this meeting but cancelled - got someone else to cancel - a few days ago.

### **City of Melbourne Parking Project at North Entrance to the Melbourne Zoo Parking Project and VCAT Appeal:**

This is the CoM undertaking a project on behalf of the Zoo, a State Government institution. This was to have been a revegetated green oasis with a bus turning circle with some parking on the perimeter but has now been turned into a supermarket style car and bus park - an extension of the existing carpark around the Zoo. The northern entrance is the second entrance to the Zoo with over 350,000 Zoo visitors entering annually. We consider it patently unsafe as 3 roadways for buses and cars cut across the pedestrian walkway, which is diagonally across the carpark from Poplar Road just outside the Royal Park Station. Nothing is being done to reduce the huge number of

commuters parking here. Neither has any attempt been made to recoup the expense of provision of parking by putting in parking meters. \$9 million was the original cost of the carpark built in 1996 to 1997. This latest carpark extension at the northern entrance will cost over \$3 million. We objected to the notice of planning permit and appealed the decision to grant a permit as we consider it a precedent setting case. This was held at VCAT on Monday 9 July 2007

The result was that the CoM's decision to issue a planning permit for a super market style carpark at the north entrance of the Zoo and for resumption of carspaces in the Northern Zoo carpark for buses was upheld. Our argument that the Royal Park Master Plan should be followed to return the area largely to parkland (with the introduction of a bus drop off/turning circle and some overflow carparking) was dismissed. The VCAT member agreed with the CoM argument that the Master Plan was "only a guide" and anyway "is out of date." (This is not what Rob Adams - now in charge of parks - said when arguing the other day for a road to be constructed off the Avenue into the Park - he said it was "in the Master Plan" and therefore should be implemented.) As the witness would not attend the hearing re commuter carparking his evidence was not accepted. The member accepted that there are 200 commuters parking there per day.

The main thing that the Tribunal member found in relation to commuter parking was a paragraph 37 of the case: " I do not propose to place any condition on a permit because this relates to a "usage" permit that is beyond the ambit of discretion in this matter. I consider the council itself has probably much better means of controlling parking times and discouraging commuter use within its local Government or Road Traffic Act provisions than the Planning and Environment Act. So whilst I agree with Mr Pikusa's argument there are other ways of dealing with this issue."

The Tribunal indicated that the Council should use its powers under the Local Government Act or the Road Traffic Act to control parking times and discouraging commuter use within the park. The Group could raise this with the Council in its discussions. This was a disastrous decision for the Park

### **Melbourne Council Disbands Parks Division and Sacks Staff to Save Money:**

The extravagant Lord Mayor and impotent Councillors have overspent on major events, development projects and have been the milch cow for the State Government (providing lavish contributions to Bracks projects such as the new Convention Centre in Docklands.) The disbanding of the Parks Section and the sacking of the Director and Deputy Director of Parks and Recreation announced on 30 May 2007 to save money is the nail in the coffin for Melbourne's parks including Royal Park. We might be faring slightly better given we are the only park with a standing Master Plan Committee and have watch dog groups especially the RPPG and the North and West Melbourne operating in the Park's interest.

### **City of Melbourne Dogs "Off Leash" Project in Royal Park:**

Following the vociferous demands of a small pressure group, the "Royal Park Dogs", the CoM is proposing to massively expand areas for owners to run dogs off the leash. The reason given by the small clique of dog owners is so they can allow their dogs to "socialise" and so the dogs don't run off onto roads (Legally dogs have to be under voice control and close by owners so they can be leashed easily.) CoM is spending \$10,000 to survey residents in the municipality plus a large area of Moreland. Will it be a push-poll to determine what the results will be? RPPG is extremely concerned over the threat to wildlife. Our position was put to a recent Environment Committee meeting, namely, that no wildlife habitat areas of the Park – that is all the park except for sporting ovals or playing fields - should be allowed for dogs off leash; that the Wetlands and billabong/pond

areas should be designated as “No Dogs” areas; and that the Poplar Oval on the Avenue and other sports ovals be used for dogs off leash.

**RPPG Submission to Select Parliamentary Committee Enquiring into Public Land Development:**

We made a submission to the Committee on the alienation and sale of the former Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital for the 2006 Commonwealth Games Village and the Parkville Gardens private property development. Our barrister was consulted on the submission. Members can refer to the Parliament website. For quick access google “Select Committee on Public Land Development” for our RPPG submission on “Royal Park” It is No 126 on list of submissions. We have yet to be advised as to when we will have a hearing. One of the shocking outcomes is that the heritage buildings are now subdivided and have been sold privately.

Other subjects of importance are: Super Tram Stops in Royal Park; threat of drought and water sourcing in the Park; and commuter cycle paths.

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