

Proposed Melbourne Jet base being constructed by the Little Group at Melbourne Airport

FUTURE MELBOURNE

Future Melbourne 2017: Why Melbourne needs an airport rail link

Martine Letts, Herald Sun

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THE case for a high-quality direct public transport link to and from the airport is compelling for Australia's fastest growing city.

As Melburnians we are rightly proud of our status as the world's most liveable city. However, we stand alone as one of the world's leading cities without a high-quality direct transport link to and from the airport. Such a link is a strategic investment in Melbourne's future, its brand, livability and visitability. Planning must start now.

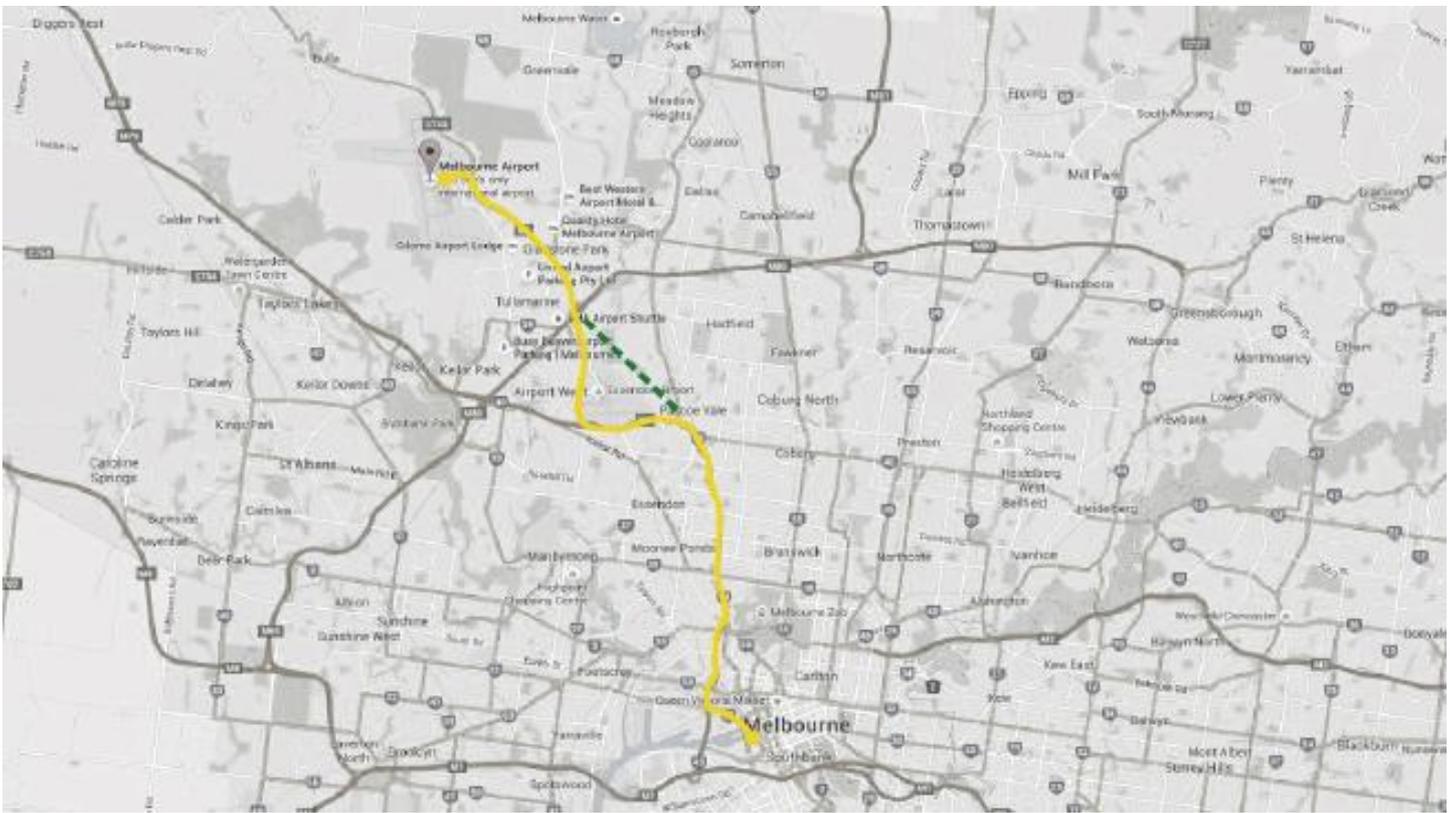
Australia is one of the fastest growing countries in the world, and Melbourne its fastest growing city. We expect to hit eight million people by 2050. Melbourne Airport services 35 million people annually. This is expected to grow to 60 million by 2033.



📷 Moonee Valley Mayor Andrea Surface and local residents are busy campaigning for an airport rail link through Moonee Valley. Picture: George Salpigtidis

That is, if current projections are correct. Remember that in 1998 the Australian Bureau of Statistics' mid-range projection was that Australia would reach 25 million people by 2051. We will reach that number by the middle of next year. There are good reasons why the ABS projections were off: changes in migration policy, our population living longer and a robust birthrate have up-ended the trends of 20 years ago.

Melburnians and visitors are already feeling the pressure of this growth, especially on our roads, and especially to and from the airport. Millions of additional air passenger trips will exacerbate existing congestion, causing significant problems with access to the airport, as well as the wider Tullamarine artery.



📷 Mono Rail route map for the proposed Mono Rail Melbourne to the Airport.

Intelligent transport systems of the future may help resolve the problem. This does not mean we should not be planning now to effectively manage this growth.

The Committee for Melbourne has long advocated for a dependable, rapid transit link to the airport. In December 2016, in these pages, we called for it once again. It is a once-in-a-generation productivity-raising piece of infrastructure that will significantly benefit the city, the state, and arguably the country.

A linked airport that optimises our local, national and international connectivity is one of the nine strategic needs identified as part of our recent Melbourne 4.0 Taskforce. This taskforce looked at preparing our city for rapidly changing technological and geopolitical environments. The Committee for Melbourne welcomes the announcement by the federal and Victorian governments to commence a business case for an airport link.

We recently convened a forum with our members, the city's top transport leaders and key stakeholders from the public and private sectors to develop some guidelines to contribute to the business case.



📷 A rail link could help ease commuter congestion on major arterials. Picture: David Smith

Our forum agreed on five guiding principles that will underpin our submission to the state and federal governments:

THE future is already here. We are playing catch-up. Insufficient access to and from Melbourne Airport will inhibit our connectivity and our ability to distribute goods and services, and will erode our high standard of living.

AN integrated and holistic perspective is needed. A linked airport must do more than move people to and from the CBD. It must be part of a connected network linking the airport to key metropolitan hubs and to the regions.

A FLEXIBLE approach to design. Any design must allow for policy and planning flexibility to account for inevitable technological change.



📷 People who live near to the airport often complain that taxi drivers refuse to take them as it is a short fare and the taxi driver sometimes has been lining up for around three hours. Picture: Ian Currie

THE cost-benefit analysis must include the broader economic impact. Many beneficial major projects have not initially stacked up from a traditional-business-case perspective.

A linked airport is likely to provide deep and lasting benefits beyond what is demonstrable in a short-term assessment framework.

THE approach must be customer-centric. The modern consumer of airport services is changing all the time.

Any business case must account for how an airport link will complement other forms of transport. A successful link will provide a seamless experience for the passenger.

Let's start planning for this city-shaping piece of infrastructure now through the prism of what we want Melbourne to look like in 2030.

Martine Letts is Committee for Melbourne chief executive



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