

Community Engagement Results Report – Melbourne Water Trail Feasibility Study

Background

Melbourne Water has been exploring opportunities to open sections of its significant land holdings to the public and recently approached Council to discuss potential opportunities within Darebin.

In parallel, Council endorsed the Northern Region Trails Strategy, which identified this linear corridor as a key opportunity to strengthen the trail network and improve connections between the Merri Creek Trail in the west and the Northern Shared Path in the east. The Darebin Transport Strategy is also relevant to this project which emphasis active transport, seeking to make active transport a safer, more convenient and more attractive mode of transport for people of all ages and abilities.

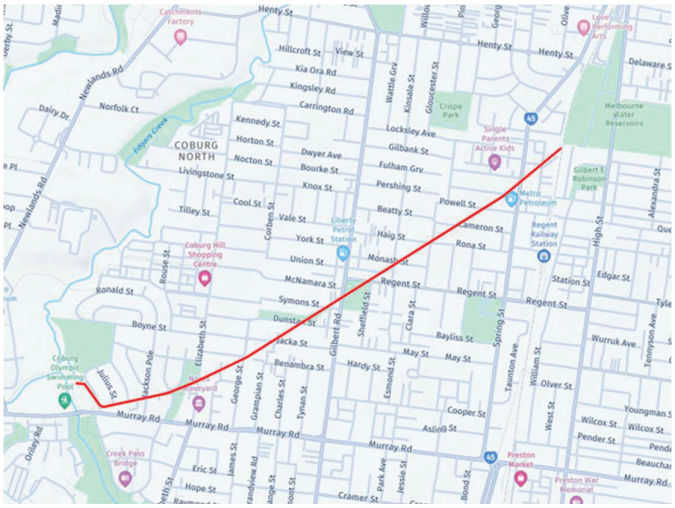
On 12 May 2025, Council passed a resolution to undertake a feasibility study to investigate and assess the viability of developing a shared user path on Melbourne Water land.

Melbourne Water has been supportive of this work and has provided Council with a grant, which—together with Council's allocated budget—has enabled Council to engage a consultant to assist in the delivery of this feasibility study.

This is now a joint project between Darebin, Merri-bek, and Melbourne Water, who all own or manage land along the linear corridor. Darebin City Council led the community consultation and Merri-bek directed their residents to provide feedback on the Your Say Darebin page.

The proposed trail extents are the Melbourne Water Reservoirs / High St in the northeast and the Merri Creek / Murray Rd in the southwest. The project area covers lies in Merri-bek and Darebin LGAs, with Elizabeth Street as the boundary.

The feasibility study will guide alignment, crossing treatments, landscaping, rest points, entry treatments, and provide budget estimates to support future funding and delivery. It will also provide a concept designs package that will address street crossings, including one arterial road managed by the DTP: Spring Street.



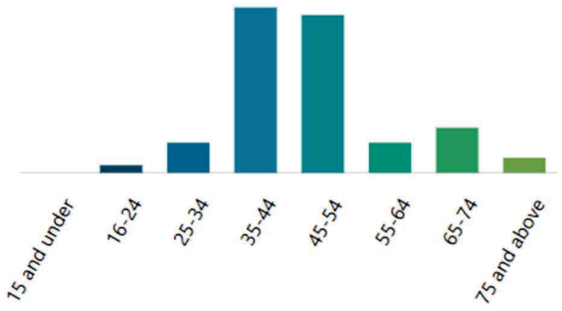
Participation Analysis

Overall engagement received 492 points of feedback for the project via the Darebin Your Say page. This was broken down into:

- 316 general comments, including opinions on the Melbourne Water land and landscaping.
- 55 responses on the Spring St major road crossing.
- 61 responses on the Elizabeth St major road crossing.
- 60 responses on the Regent St major road crossing.

Demographics:

- 55% of participants were male and 38% were female.
- Participant age:



- 15% spoke a language other than English
- 0% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- 11% had a disability
- 9% born outside of Australia
- 5% LGBTIQA+

Location of participants:

- Reservoir 43%

- Preston 24%
- Coburg 12%
- Other (Darebin) 11%
- Other (outside Darebin) 8%

Analysis

The engagement was successful at reaching those that had a geographic interest in the project, with the overwhelming majority of participants being in the areas through which the project runs.

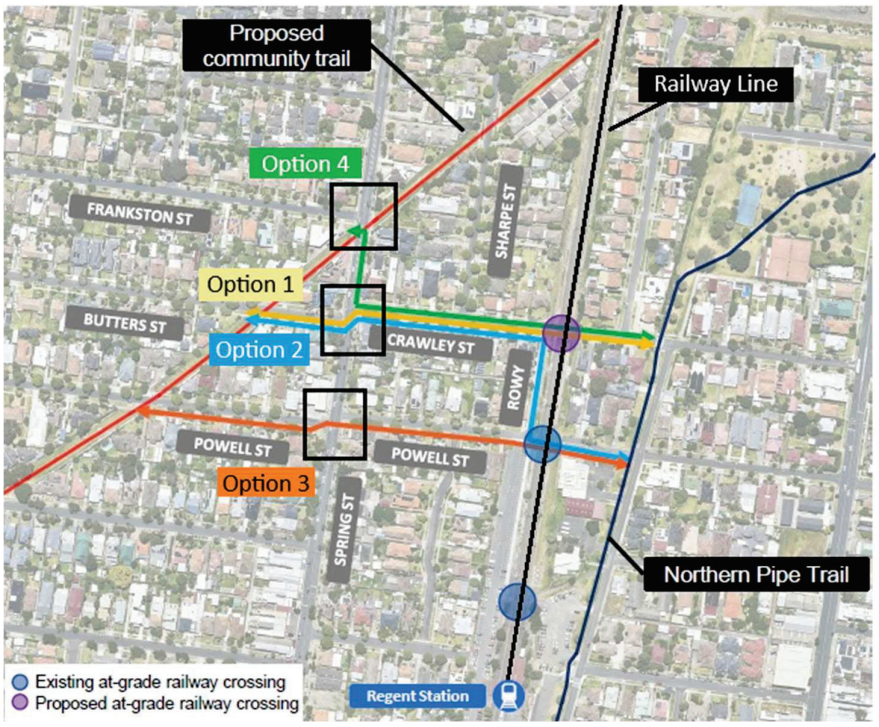
The video made for social media was incredibly positive. It had very high levels of engagement (13,000+ views and 600+ likes) which were exceptional for a Darebin project. Feedback from the community and stakeholders indicated that this was an excellent way to reach community members that may not typically take part in such engagements.

The Equity Impact Assessment that was undertaken acknowledged that the focus of the project's engagement was on those who lived nearby to the trail as those most likely to be impacted. Focus was made on how the project may impact marginalised groups, including accessibility, perceptions of safety and provisions for community space. The EIA recommended that local Aboriginal groups and Wurundjeri be consulted with directly as part of the design should the feasibility study be endorsed.

Engagement Activity	Number of participants/ people engaged	Targeted group	Demographic information
Postcard drop of neighbouring properties	*655 households*	*Local residents*	*Refer to online and hardcopy surveys*
Social media posts (including video)	*13,000 people*	*General Darebin interested community*	*Instagram users.* *Post received 633 likes, which was the most ever from a Darebin video.*
Drop-In session (Grey Reserve, Preston)	*20 people engaged*	*General community*	*Refer to online and hardcopy surveys*
Emails to local interested community groups	*3 groups*	*Transport interested groups*	*Emails to Streets Alive Darebin, Darebin Bicycle Users Group and Darebin's Transport Interested mailing list.*
Local Sharpe St resident group	*8 people engaged*	*Geographic group*	*Homeowners near trail between Spring St and Mernda Railway line.*
Key stakeholder engagement	*2 groups*	*Key stakeholders*	*Department of Transport and Planning and Yarra Trams engaged directly by email.*

Engagement Results

Spring St and Mernda Rail line crossing:



Community feedback strongly supported Council's preferred Spring Street crossing option, which proposes new pedestrian-operated signals at Butters Street. This option would modify vehicle access so that Butters Street operates as left-out only, with all turning movements into Butters Street prohibited. The shared-user path would continue along Butters Street, cross Crawley Street, and connect to a new rail crossing advocated for at Crawley Street. 88% of respondents ranked Councils preferred option as their highest ranked option.

The next most supported option was Option 2, which also locates the Spring Street crossing at Butters Street but shifts the rail crossing south to the existing Powell Street rail crossing. 5% of respondents ranked this as their most preferred option, with 61% ranking it as their second most preferred option. Community opposition to the proposed access changes at Butters Street was minimal, with several respondents noting current safety challenges and rat-running issues at the intersection.

It is recommended that Council adopt **Option 1** as the preferred long-term solution for the Spring Street and rail line crossings, with **Option 2** identified as the preferred interim arrangement until a new rail crossing at Crawley Street can be delivered.

Regent St crossing:

The community endorsed Council's proposal for a new raised priority crossing of Regent Street to the east of Sheffield St, and a new raised priority crossing of Sheffield St with a southbound entry ban.

This received unanimous support (100%) from the 26 respondents and very high support from the 34 open text comments (74% positive, 9% negative, 17% neutral).

Comments were supportive of the traffic calming impacts, and the effect on the nearby park and kindergarten, with local consultation being supportive of the reduction in Sheffield Street rat running. Officers recommend proposing this crossing option with more robust traffic calming at the approach to the crossing.

Gilbert Rd crossing:

Council proposed a new pedestrian-operated signal on Gilbert Road; however, community feedback on the crossing type was not sought as part of the consultation. Given that Route 11 trams operate along Gilbert Road, a signalised crossing is the only feasible option. The proposed location has been selected to avoid conflicts with tram movements and to support safe and efficient access for the nearby Ambulance Victoria branch when entering Gilbert Road. Comments made from the community indicated a desire for a signalised pedestrian crossing here.

Elizabeth St crossing:

The community strongly supported Council's proposal for a new priority crossing at Elizabeth Street. Of the 21 respondents to the closed-question survey, 85% supported the crossing. Open-text feedback showed similarly high support, with 78% positive, 15% mixed and 7% neutral responses. Mixed feedback generally reflected a desire for additional traffic-calming measures to slow approaching vehicles or a preference for a pedestrian-operated signalised crossing. It is recommended that Council proceed with the proposed priority crossing at Elizabeth Street, with consideration given to incorporating additional traffic-calming treatments.

Minor road crossings

Six types of minor-road crossing treatments were presented across the remaining minor intersections along the proposed trail. These included:

- no infrastructure or pram ramps only
- signalised crossing
- raised priority crossing
- at-grade priority crossing
- slow point with priority crossing

Different treatment options were proposed for each location depending on the road profile, with raised priority crossings generally recommended as the safest and most appropriate solution unless specific site constraints required an alternative approach.

Community consultation indicated strong interest in additional local-area traffic management measures to complement the trail. Feedback included suggestions for access changes, traffic diverters and other interventions to reduce rat-running in local streets between Spring Street and Gilbert Road, as well as broader traffic-calming treatments around the proposed crossings.

General comments

The community strongly linked the trail land with cycling and walking, with safety and accessibility being important, particularly for children. Other amenities were requested and discussed, particularly the provision of shade, seating, water fountains, fitness equipment and space for animals to be walked. Lighting was seen as important, however lighting needed to be non-invasive for surrounding properties and also not be a detriment to wildlife at night. Landscaping was important to the community, particularly the provision of native flora and for wildlife to be able to use the corridor.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future engagements:

- Drone footage for transport projects gives the community a clear and concise view of the space in which the project is being done. Recommended for transport and spatial consultations.
- Short videos with real life images are far more engaging for social media than static posts for consultations.
- Include 3D renders for consultation of transport and spatial projects. It makes it much easier for the community to visualise projects, making them less fearful of any changes proposed.
    - It also keeps focus away from the minutia of designs, allowing for more meaningful consultation.