

MCG Trust/MCC Proposal for Yarra Park

The position of the East Melbourne Group (EMG)

September 2009

Summary: Yarra Park is an indispensable part of the City's inner city green belt and has significant heritage value. It should be retained and enhanced as public parkland and not designated or in any way treated as a permanent or even occasional commercial car park, as car parking is inconsistent with Yarra Park's purpose and value. Improved public transport access and properly located purpose-built car parking should be provided as part of an integrated development plan of Yarra Park and the sporting precinct.

Purpose and value of Yarra Park

- The land was put aside as public parkland by Governor La Trobe for the enjoyment of the whole community.
- It is part of the ring of greenery – along with Flagstaff Gardens, Carlton Gardens, Birrarung Marr, Fitzroy and Treasury Gardens, the Domain and the Royal Botanic Gardens – around the CBD, between them serving important functions for preservation of biodiversity, and provision of places for recreation and quiet enjoyment as part of the heart of the city.
- Because of Yarra Park's central place in Victoria's early settlement days, the continuing evidence of the indigenous people's occupation and use, and its natural and cultural values including its central role in the development of Australian football, the remaining area of public parkland should be on the State Heritage Register, and has recently nominated it to Heritage Victoria for listing.

Car parking in Yarra Park

- The practice of car parking is inconsistent with these values and purposes, and denies the public its 'right of use' as a park for which the land was originally intended.
- Moreover car parking is incompatible with the protection and development of the Park, compacting the soil and damaging the trees. This has the result that any investment in protection of trees and reinstatement of grass has only a short-term effect, with cars often turning the Park into a dustbowl in summer and a mudslide in winter. Conservation has continually to be repeated at considerable and wasteful cost and loss of amenity in the meantime.
- Further, the chaotic movement of cars in and out of Yarra Park is unsafe to those (including children) walking to the MCG or attempting to use the amenities of the Park before a match. The movement and speed of cars is not monitored by the car park 'managers' and cars regularly exceed the speed limit.

- Since the establishment of the EMG in 1953, we has observed with concern the increase of car parking in Yarra Park in conjunction with the expansion of sports stadiums and entertainment centres – not just the MCG but also the stadiums and other facilities in Olympic and Melbourne Parks, none of which has adequate car parking, unlike requirements on most other private and public developments:
 - car parking was initially allowed for one football match per week during the winter season and for the cricket series in summer
 - currently, car parking is permitted in Yarra Park for rock concerts, rallies, tennis tournaments, soccer and rugby matches and social functions, as well as for the whole of the football and cricket calendar, with the park sometimes enduring car parking on three consecutive days, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. CBD workers even use the parking allowed during the cricket season as a cheap alternative to city parking
 - a significant percentage of cars entering Yarra Park to park during events carry only one occupant
 - on MCG event days, Punt Road and Wellington Parade are bottle-necked by patrons driving vehicles to the MCG, materially impeding the City's traffic flow.
- Given the current drought conditions and the challenge of climate change, car parking is adding to the stress on the Park, which is in danger of not surviving unless drastic action is taken.
- The EMG was pleased to be included in the Yarra Park Car Parking Agreement 'community consultative committee' 10 years ago to discuss ways of reducing car parking and protecting the park. However the sports bodies and State Government decided to scrap the provision of a community consultative committee for the current 5-year agreement, thus denying the community a direct voice – as shown by the total absence of community consultation before the recent announcement.
- The MCG's proximity to the CBD, with just a short train or tram ride required to reach the arena, or a pleasant walk through parkland should be exploited by the provision and promotion of public transport.
- EMG accepts that it is unrealistic to expect that no car parking will be provided near the MCG and other sporting facilities; if it is not provided, the result will simply be greater pressure on local streets to the detriment of residential amenity. To complement improved public transport access, properly designed multi-level car parking should be provided, preferably underground, nearby – for example near the railway lines The adjacent to the Hisense Arena. Several smaller parking stations are likely to be better than one big parking station, to spread traffic, but this would be a matter for discussion if the Government is willing to back such a strategic move.

Yarra Park and the MCG

- Apart from its effect on the Park, car parking on the Park, far from enhancing the MCG, detracts from it.

- The MCG attracts over 3m visitors annually, with some 2.8m attributable to the AFL season alone. This volume presents the State Government with an opportunity to showcase Australia's iconic sporting stadium with the provision of world-class public access and a world class setting.
- The MCG's iconic status would be significantly enhanced by the development of Yarra Park as parkland where car parking is prohibited. Yarra Park properly managed would enhance the setting, promote Melbourne as a garden city and provide a meeting place for MCG attendees and a place for children to play in safety.
- The existing car parking arrangement at Yarra Park makes a joke of any attempt at claiming world-class status for the whole experience.

The MCG Trust/MCC proposals

- If the MCG Trust believes it can turn Yarra Park into a world class show piece while continuing to use it as a car park for the whole of the sporting and entertainment precinct, then it is misguided. A lot of money has already been poured into the park and failed miserably because of the continuance of car parking. The welcome investment announced this month will again be poured down the gutters and have only a short-term effect while car parking continues.
- The Melbourne Cricket Club says it must secure 'an appropriate level' of car parking for economic reasons, notwithstanding that only a small proportion of patrons use Yarra Park for parking. If there are such reasons the MCC should make public this information and thereby subjected it to scrutiny. Without such scrutiny there is no reason why anyone should accept the assertion at face value. The EMG does not.
- There is no mention of what is 'appropriate', or for that matter who determines it. Given the responsibility of the MCC and the MCG Trust, it is hard to see how anything other than commercial considerations, rather than Park management considerations, will be the determinant. At least under City of Melbourne administration the differing interests could be balanced. Under the new arrangements, environmental considerations will too easily be sidelined.
- In any event, the EMG does not accept that, whether or not this amount of parking is needed, it must be provided in Yarra Park itself, rather than in properly constructed parking facilities, allied to upgrading public transport access, to serve the needs of all the major sporting and entertainment facilities in the area.
- If car parking is so important to patron attendance for the whole of the sporting precinct then purpose-built car parking should be of the highest priority before any more stadiums are built, or existing facilities, including the MCG and the National Tennis Centre, are upgraded. Private developers have to provide car parking, why not sporting bodies and venue owners?
- The proposal talks about increasing the number of days of the year the park will be used for car parking, which means a reduction of full public use as parkland.

- The proposal also suggests lowering the impact of parking by moving parking through different areas of the Park, the result of which will be to place under stress even more of the Park that is stressed now.
- Given the lack of consultation, the proposal for a hard surface 150 place car park for visitors to the Sports Museum, at the expense of a wedge of Yarra Park, is readily seen as the first of many future further incursions into the Park.
- In summary, the funding package announced is very welcome, but cannot be used cost-effectively while car parking continues in the Park. Money will be thrown at a problem that keeps degrading the results of the investment.

The East Melbourne Group's proposal for a Master Plan

A rescue package for Yarra Park should be a joint effort between sporting bodies, venue owners and managers, and state and local government, with three elements:

1. Park Management

Adequate funding, at least to the level proposed, for the transformation of Yarra Park to produce a world class public park and impressive entrance to Australia's premier stadium which is fitting for the Park's historical and cultural significance, including plans for:

- water recycling and management
- soil restoration
- pathway redesign and upgrading
- restoration, conservation and management of trees and other park features.

2. Public Transport

- The State Government should rebuild the Richmond Train Station to provide easier access to the major sporting and entertainment venues, including considering moving the exits closer to the stadium, and with overpasses from platforms over rail lines and Brunton Avenue to overcome the current chaotic arrangements.
- The State Government should immediately put in place 'park and ride' strategies for the football and cricket.
- Ticketing for major events should include free public transport, as was done during the Commonwealth Games when public parking was restricted.

3. Car Parking

- The current underground car park under the MCG should be extended to provide access the elderly and infirm who need to be driven by car to the MCG, and for visitors to the National Sports Museum.
- Commercial multi-story (preferably underground) car parking, preferably several small car parking stations, to distribute traffic flow better, should be developed at central points in the sporting precinct to provide adequate parking for use by all venues. Sporting bodies and venue owners and managers who will gain from such facilities should be prepared to subsidise their operation.