



Surrey Hills Progress Association Inc.

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2020 – 2021 PRESIDENTS REPORT

Introduction

This annual report covers the activities of the Surrey Hills Progress Association to 30 June 2021, a year immersed in the Victorian Government's railway level crossing removal project.

At the state election in November 2018 the government promised to remove the two level crossings at Union Road, Surrey Hills and at Mont Albert Road, Mont Albert. This was to entail a trench design, with the railway line going under both main roads and the building of new stations at Surrey Hills and Mont Albert.

On 2 December 2020 the Premier of Victoria, Hon Daniel Andrews, visited Surrey Hills to announce the railway project would be fast tracked and completed by 2023 instead of 2025 – with a major surprise being the proposed closure of both railway stations and construction of a new station in the residential corridor between the two shopping villages.

Public consultation on this major infrastructure project was undertaken by the Level Crossing Removal Project agency (LXRP) - against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic that continued to enforce strict lockdowns on Melbourne residents over much of this reporting year.

Meetings

The Association continued to meet monthly led by Greg Buchanan (President), Yvonne Bowyer (A/Secretary) and Phillip Dews (Treasurer/Vice President).

They were strongly supported by the other committee members – Sue Barnett and Lynette Giddings.

We record our thanks to Sue Barnett and Edward Cohen for their service in the position of 'Secretary' for part of this year.

Yvonne, as Acting Secretary, has enthusiastically taken on this role and helped coordinate one of the busiest agendas the Association has faced. We are very grateful for her personal approach and initiative in undertaking the many tasks of this position.

The Association again thanks the Salvation Army Surrey Hills Chinese Corps for the use of its facilities in Guildford Road to hold our meetings, although the pandemic meant that the majority of meetings were held on line by zoom.

Special Events

The Anzac Day Dawn Service held in the Surrey Gardens continues to be well supported by the local community, and especially honours residents from the area who served overseas in wartime, many who never returned.

The Association first held the Dawn Service in 2015 and now co-sponsors it with the Surrey Hills Neighbourhood Centre (SHNC).

The Surrey Hills Progress Association acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation as the traditional custodians of the land in this area. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

Special thanks go to Lynette Giddings and Yvonne Bowyer who served on the Anzac Day committee and to Susannah Jones, Ben Jones, Courtney Horsfall, Cliff Williams and Sue Langford who helped out on the morning of the service.

We especially thank Shima Ibuki for her leadership of the Anzac Day Committee and the assistance and strong support she provided to the SHPA throughout her time, of some nine years, as Manager of the Surrey Hills Neighbourhood Centre.

SHPA was a proud supporter of the Salvation Army Brass Band concert held on Sunday 16 May 2021 at the Guildford Road church. Lynette Giddings worked tirelessly to ensure the day's success including arranging a sausage sizzle and managing Covid precautions on the day. A number of members of the Association were in the large audience for the concert.

Sue Barnett played a key role in SHPA's nomination of David Winter (Bread Street) for an Australia Day Award – culminating in David being named Whitehorse Citizen of the Year on Australia Day 2021 for his wonderful community service.

A large crowd of local residents, councillors and state politicians attended a gathering at Lorne Parade Reserve on 18 April 2021. This event, organised by Kirsten Langford, Greg Langford, Julianne Willing, Scott Willing, Sue Langford and Greg Gunn, received wide media coverage in drawing attention to the adverse effects of the project, especially on the parkland and mature trees.

Finally, we held a public meeting at Our Holy Redeemer Church Hall on Thursday 29 April 2021 to discuss the railway project. The meeting was chaired by Jane Nathan (urban planning specialist and former mayor of the City of Hawthorn) and attended by over 200 people.

Excellent presentations were given at the public meeting by Don McDonald, Tim Woods, Susannah Jones and Kirsten Langford on a range of relevant issues (for the SHPA, Rail Corridor Residents Group & Friends of Lorne Parade Reserve) as well as from representatives of the Surrey Hills Traders (Phillip Warren-Smith), Mont Albert Traders (David Winter) and the Boroondara Bicycle User Group (Peter Campbell).

Jane Nathan took a range of questions from the floor, after the presentations, and a public letter to the Premier and relevant ministers was signed by many who attended. The meeting was live streamed on facebook, thanks to the great work of Gerald Brown and Justin Begg.

Projects & Planning

We noted the completion of the new rotunda in Surrey Gardens, which replaced the original John Gray Memorial Rotunda that was erected by members of the Surrey Hills Progress Association in 1912. Thanks to Sue Barnett for following this project through and ensuring the original plaque and John Gray name was reinstated adjacent to the new structure.

The Association sought introduction of a 40kmh speed limit in Union Road, through the shopping village between Montrose Street and Canterbury Road. This has largely been completed with final electronic activation of signage still to happen.

We thank Cliff Williams and Geoff White who kept us updated with major planning applications and strategic planning studies in Boroondara and Whitehorse. Geoff has also provided invaluable links to other community groups in the Whitehorse area.

Many thanks also to Elizabeth Meredith for the experience and expertise she brings to the group – and special mention to the detailed submission she prepared in September 2020 to the state parliamentary inquiry on 'Community Access to Parks and Public Open Space'.

Elizabeth's submission drew attention to the importance of open space in built up urban areas and specifically the shortfall in Surrey Hills, as documented in recent public open space studies by both Boroondara and Whitehorse Councils.

Level Crossing Removal Project

In July 2020 the SHPA started to look closely at this project, even though timing for release of government designs for the project was unknown.

Bruce Harvey, assisted by Peter Forrest and Justin Begg, prepared a detailed set of design parameters for the project and principles around public engagement. At this time the SHPA was guided by the government's intention to adopt a trench design and build two new stations; at Surrey Hills and Mont Albert.

The document prepared by Bruce and the sub-group had three iterations, with Version 3 released in October 2020 and circulated to the LXRП and the two local councils.

A key step advocated in the report was the preparation of an Urban Design Framework to guide the detailed design of the project. This was well received by LXRП staff and Council officers at the time.

As it turned out, and unknown to the SHPA and the local community, a very different concept was in advanced preparation; the one station concept unveiled by the government in early December 2020.

We have made various submissions on the project and been heavily engaged since December 2020, for the most part aimed at addressing key issues and design flaws with the project, not in blanket opposition.

Early conceptual design work by Pat Cutri (Architect and SHPA member) provided the vision for a plaza over the railway trench at the top end of Hamilton Street, taking in a rebuilt Mont Albert Station heritage building.

When doubts arose as to whether the concept would come to fruition, Bruce Harvey and Mark Curry took to the street to enlist public support. Ultimately the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Hon Jacinta Allan, reversed her stance and agreed to include the plaza in the design released late in this reporting year.

It is difficult to acknowledge, in words, the time, energy and expertise put into 'fighting' this project by our members – in the interests of the local community, both residents and traders, and commuters.

However I would like to give special mention to a core group who became instrumental in guiding our response to the project, those members being Gerald Brown, Bruce Harvey, Mark Curry, Don McDonald, Kirsten Langford, Greg Langford, Susannah Jones, Sue Langford, Greg Gunn, Julianne Willing, Russell Gray, Scott Willing, Tim Woods, Justin Begg, Pat Cutri, Geoff White, Elizabeth Meredith, Peter Forrest and Yvonne Bowyer.

Against our considered efforts we have met a government agency, in the LXRП, that has conducted a form of consultation that has not measured up to community expectations. This has been marked by the withholding of design detail and technical reports from the public; standard information provided for similar projects before the government changed the planning scheme in January 2020.

Many thanks go to the staff of both Whitehorse and Boroondara Councils; in particular Angelo Da Campo and Jeff Green at Whitehorse and Clare Davey and Daniel Freer at Boroondara. They have willingly provided advice and been a constant source of support at all times.

Whitehorse Mayor Cr Andrew Munroe and Cr Amanda McNeill (Whitehorse Ward Councillor) and Boroondara Mayor, Cr Garry Thompson and Cr Jane Addis (Boroondara Ward Councillor) have also been very supportive and actively advocated on behalf of issues raised by the SHPA.

We also acknowledge the Friends of Lorne Parade Reserve and the Railway Corridor Residents' Group, led by Kirsten Langford and Susannah Aumann respectively, and the key roles they have played in regard to the community's response to the project.

At the end of this reporting year, the final plans for the project were still to be finalised by the LXP, expected in early 2022.

Membership

It was pleasing to see membership of the Association grow from 19 members in July 2020 to 65 in June 2021; largely as a result of interest in the level crossing removal project, and strong concerns around the potential impact on the amenity and character of the area and on the shopping villages.

One of our new members, Sophia Hanger, came to us on a history internship and assisted with heritage planning issues around the railway project. We are grateful for her contribution and so pleased that she has now started her working career as a heritage planner with Context, one of Melbourne's leading heritage consultants.

Graeme Davison AO also joined the SHPA during the year and has brought invaluable social and heritage expertise to the submissions and discussions of the group.

A number of our members sat on the Community Reference Group (CRG) for the level crossing removal project and we thank Bruce Harvey, Peter Forrest, Pat Cutri, Don McDonald, Scott Willing, Chris Horsfall and Greg Buchanan for filling that role.

Finances

The Financial Statement for the 2020/2021 year recorded an opening balance of \$2,230.11 and a closing balance of \$1,158.64.

Thank you to Phillip Dews for managing the finances, and membership applications.

Conclusion

We welcomed many new members, from both Surrey Hills and Mont Albert. To reflect the increased representation across both suburbs we are proposing a name change to the *Surrey Hills & Mont Albert Progress Association* and intend to take a vote on this at the AGM in November 2021.

In closing we record our appreciation to Bill Chandler for his valuable experience, advice and ongoing support of the SHPA and especially the coverage afforded to our group in editions of the Surrey Hills Neighbourhood News and Eastsider News over the past year.

Finally I would like to thank all our members for their support through this busy year and hope you enjoy a good break and time with family and friends over Christmas and the New Year period.

Greg Buchanan
President

18 November 2021