



## 1 Executive summary

Currently, 50 level crossings in Victoria are being or have been removed as part of a major State Government program aimed at reducing traffic congestion and improving safety. The crossing removals (referred to as "grade separation") have often brought benefits to the affected areas. On several occasions however, the crossing removals have negatively impacted local communities, depending on the specific urban context.

The level crossing at Ferguson St, Williamstown is one of the 50 crossings earmarked for removal, and is scheduled to be completed between 2019 and 2022. The level crossing is part of a complex intersection including seven streets, multiple pedestrian crossings, a major oil pipeline and several nearby residences and businesses.

Several Williamstown residents are questioning the need to remove the level crossing. There is also a concern that the complexity of the entire precinct may restrict the available removal options, resulting in a sub-optimal outcome. A further concern is that grade separation may draw more traffic and trucks to the area, replacing one set of perceived risks with new risks.

Williamstown Crossing Group (WCG) was founded in May 2017 to address these concerns, and seek the best possible outcome for the community in relation to the crossing. WCG is a volunteer group, politically independent and open to everyone in the Williamstown community. WCG has analysed the existing safety and congestion situation at Ferguson St crossing in detail and proposed possible improvements, which are discussed in this report.

From a safety perspective, there are several existing unmarked and uncontrolled pedestrian crossings in the precinct. These crossings, particularly Ferguson St (east of the rail line) and Victoria St, are heavily used and more dangerous than the controlled pedestrian pathways over the rail crossing.

From a congestion perspective, the pedestrian-activated signals situated between the North Williamstown Station and the Rifle Club Hotel are the primary cause of vehicle congestion in the precinct. They are responsible for 40 interruptions adding up to 25 minutes of delays over the two-hour morning peak. The rail crossing is only responsible for 12 interruptions adding up to 13 minutes of delays over the same period.

In proposing solutions to resolve the existing problems at the crossing, WCG chose to focus on outcomes, rather than options. WCG's approach consisted in first defining clear outcome-based evaluation criteria and subsequently looking at options. This ensured the evaluation criteria are objective and unbiased, reflecting the true outcomes for the community.

WCG built on Hobsons Bay City Council's excellent Principles for Grade Separation and developed four option evaluation criteria. These criteria are summarised by the motto "a Safe and Respectful Outcome for All". The criteria take a holistic view to ensure that resolving issues at the level crossing is not done at the expense of the rest of the suburb.

WCG then identified ten different options, including four grade separation options and six non-grade separation options. The options were assessed against the evaluation criteria. Of the ten options, two options were identified as preferred, six were discarded as substandard or unacceptable and two were discarded as not viable.



The two preferred options are, in order of preference:

1. Improving the existing crossing, replacing the pedestrian crossing with an underground pedestrian chamber connecting all sides of the crossing, together with other enhancements to adjoining traffic routes;
2. Lowering the rail under the road, partially covering the resulting trench, and introducing measures to prevent truck traffic.

Among the options considered unacceptable, elevating rail (skyrail) or road (overpass) have been assessed as the worst possible outcomes. They would create a visual barrier and overshadow residences and businesses and segregate of the community. Further, pylons and overshadowing would reduce visibility over the crossing, increasing the risk of accidents.

The remaining options were discarded on grounds of constraining vehicle flows, compromising public transport service levels or not being technically viable.

Based on the option assessment, WCG's position is that:

- The community should seek clarity from State Government on the expected outcomes of the level crossing removal project, before delving into detailed discussion around options;
- The option analysis should be driven by shared principles and outcomes rather than predefined solutions, and thus consider non-grade separation options alongside with grade separation options;
- If grade separation is deemed as non-negotiable, rail under with partial trench covering and truck control measures is the best solution to achieve the stated WCG objectives whilst minimising the impact to local residences and business and the broader community;
- In order to achieve these outcomes, the community should be empowered to choose its preferred option via a transparent and inclusive consultation and decision-making process;
- An impartial assessment of which options are technically feasible is a prerequisite for the community to be able to choose its preferred option, and be comfortable that it is not pre-emptively ruled out.