

Summary Report on the MTF Transport Forum Melton

Wednesday 19 August, 6.30 pm – 8.00 pm, Melton Library and Learning Hub

Attendance: 80+

Chair: Margaret Paul

Video recording: <https://youtu.be/oxQDBlc4XVQ>

Speakers:

Broden Borg, Labor;

Veronika Levchenkova, Greens;

Dr Joe Garra, The West Party;

Matthew Catsellis, One Nation Candidate for Melton;

and David Ettershank MLC, Legalise Cannabis.

Based on the transcript of the Metropolitan Transport Forum hosted by Melton City Council, here is a summary of the messages from each of the five key speakers, followed by the questions asked by members of the public.

Summaries of Key Speakers

Dr. Joe Garra

(West Party Candidate for Western Metropolitan Region)

* Advocacy for the West: Emphasizes that the West Party was born out of frustration with 12 years of neglect of the Western suburbs by the current government. He promises that any elected West Party candidate will be a full-on advocate who will use the balance of power to negotiate for the West.

* Public Transport and Roads: Strongly supports the electrification of the Melton line, building planned stations, and upgrading congested roads like the Western Freeway, Melton Highway, and Hopkins Road. He advocates for the "forgotten" Outer Metropolitan Ring Road to move freight and get big trucks off local roads.

* Buses and Funding: Believes the quickest and cheapest way to move people is through buses and trains. He supports pausing "vanity projects" like the Suburban Rail Loop (from Cheltenham to Box Hill) to redirect those massive funds to the Western suburbs.

* Local Jobs: Argues that instead of spending billions moving people to work, the government should incentivize companies to move white-collar, health, and business jobs to Melton (such as Cobblebank), allowing residents to work closer to home.

David Ettershank

(Legalize Cannabis Victoria MLC for Western Metropolitan Region)

* **Record and Representation:** Reflects on his four years in the Upper House representing the region, noting that transport has occupied a massive portion of his work. He introduces Xavier Mentor as the party's new candidate for the upcoming election.

* **Systemic Under-servicing:** Highlights the severe under-servicing and lack of investment in the West compared to the Eastern suburbs. He criticizes the government for taking 13 years just to spend \$150 million on planning for the Melton electrification.

* **Smart Alternatives (Buses):** Argues that the West is growing too fast for road building to keep up. He advocates for a cheap, fast, and coordinated bus grid system with frequent, reliable, and safe routes. He notes that the cost of fixing the bus network is a mere "rounding error" compared to the \$40+ billion Suburban Rail Loop.

* **Community Action:** Concludes that because the state is broke and rationing is inevitable, real change will not come from political promises alone, but from organized communities working with local councils to pressure the government.

Broden Borg

(Labor Candidate for Melton)

* **Lived Experience:** Speaks as a lifelong Melton resident who personally experiences the daily frustration of commuting on the congested Western Highway.

* **Acknowledging Progress:** Points to recent Labor investments, including the opening of Ferris Road, the upcoming opening of the new Melton train station, and the introduction of nine-carriage trains next year to increase capacity by 50%. He also notes the joint federal-state funding of \$150 million allocated for Melton line electrification planning.

* **Finishing the Job:** Acknowledges that the job is not finished and that residents are legitimately frustrated by disconnected bus networks and traffic. He pledges to advocate for delivering the Melton line electrification, reviewing and improving the bus network, planning future stations (Mount Atkinson, Thornhill Park, Calder Park), and building walking and cycling connections.

Veronica Levchenkova

(Greens Candidate for Melton)

* **Public Transport Priority:** States that the Greens' core principle is to put community interests ahead of corporate profits. She advocates for prioritizing public transport because it is cheaper, universal, better for the planet, and reduces road congestion.

* **Free and Frequent Transit:** Campaigns for free public transport to encourage patronage and make transit accessible, pointing to a recent trial that successfully increased usage.

* **Addressing Neglect:** Criticizes successive governments for decades of neglect, which has delayed critical projects like the Melton electrification, new stations, and airport rail. She supports the "Better Buses" program to establish a rapid bus transit grid system.

* **Shifting Away from Cars:** Advocates for better planning laws to ensure new housing developments have accessible services that do not rely on cars, improving bicycle/e-scooter infrastructure, and returning public transport to public ownership to ensure coordinated services.

Matthew Catsellis (One Nation Candidate for Melton)

* **Alternative Representation:** Speaks to his background running in the federal seat of Hawke and his desire to provide an alternative voice to address the state-level issues affecting Melton.

* **Specific Road Upgrades:** Proposes immediate, practical road fixes, including finding out where the Western Freeway upgrade money is, adding freeway on/off ramps at Bulmans Road, Clarks Road, and Mount Cottrell, and duplicating both the Ferris Road overpass and the railway overpass to prevent bottlenecks and ensure safe ambulance access to the hospital.

* **Bus and Parking Solutions:** Suggests short-term solutions such as peak-time express buses from Melton to Watergardens to ease train congestion, extending the bus route from Cobblebank to Woodgrove for Aynesbury residents, and building a multi-level car park at Melton Station.

* **Financial Realism:** Refuses to make false promises regarding Melton line electrification, pointing out that the state is \$200 billion in debt. He promises to work to secure funding but prioritizes building the Western Freeway first. In the short term, he supports increasing capacity on existing V-Line trains.

Questions from the Public

1. **Jaksha (Melton Resident):** Having recently been stuck on a V-Line train for three hours during a disruption, what is the emergency and communications plan, and what role do buses play as a short-term solution? Additionally, how can we address "low-hanging fruit" issues, such as the lack of a direct bus network connecting Melton to services in Point Cook?

2. **Audience Member:** What are the candidates' opinions on seeking public-private partnerships (PPPs) to help bridge the budget deficit and co-fund infrastructure, such as licensing train station names to corporations or getting co-contributions from data centers and warehouses popping up in the area?

3. Audience Member: Given that 86,000 cars travel the Western Freeway daily compared to only 2,500 to 3,000 train passengers, should the candidates reconsider the sensitivity of where money is spent and focus on where the actual traffic is, rather than investing in "pie in the sky" rail electrification projects?
4. Audience Member: Are the candidates familiar with the Melton City Council's election priorities wish list brochure, and how does it fit into their discussions?
5. Audience Member (Aynesbury Resident): Where are the quick fixes for local roads? Specifically, when will we see action on the Leaks Road bridge (which is one of the worst roads in Victoria), the "temporary" traffic lights that have been in place for six years on the way to Mount Cottrell Road, and the pothole-ridden, half-completed boundary roads?
6. Adam Roberts: Do the candidates seriously think that \$1 billion is going to be enough to properly upgrade the Western Freeway between Melton and Caroline Springs without addressing the Deer Park bypass, especially when the state is spending tens of billions on the Suburban Rail Loop and Northeast Link? What will the state government contribute to ensure it is done properly?
7. Audience Member: When candidates talk about Melton electrification, are they also talking about quad-replication (adding extra tracks), given that the tracks from Deer Park in are already at capacity and shared with Ballarat, Geelong, and Wyndham Vale?
8. Audience Member: When is active transport going to be competently planned and built so that residents and children can walk, run, or ride bicycles safely around Melton without taking their lives into their own hands on busy, unsafe roads?