

The Case for a Melbourne Waterways-Maritime Trail

Whereas many other cities celebrate waterfront promenades or trails as public infrastructure assets, attractive to both locals and tourists, Melbourne has yet to do so. Public access to the waterways of Melbourne remains interrupted, patchy, sometimes prohibited and most certainly not assets optimised by State or Local government. The bureaucratic tangle governing so much of our maritime heritage, policy or planning around our waterways has impeded the proper development of such infrastructure.

Existing Trail Initiatives

Melbourne's major public assets, its waterways and water-edge, lack necessary connectivity. Fragmented parts of several trails remain under-valued and under-developed. Examples of this are the **Port of Melbourne Heritage Trail- map** – publication ceased in 2010. The federally funded **Captain Cook Heritage Trail**, a project which has minimal recognition in Victoria yet reference is made to many places along the Victorian coastline sighted by Cpt. Cook. (*Mal Nicholson (Local Chapter of the Captain Cook Society)*). **The City of Melbourne** has a series of disconnected and unsigned pathways along the Yarra River which is a consequence of there being no Master Plan for its Urban Waterways.

Responsible authorities governing or controlling urban waterways in Melbourne collaborate poorly, if at all. The City of Melbourne has control of 4 per cent of the total river frontage in Melbourne (Yarra and Maribyrnong Rivers), 36kms of navigable waterways (72kms of waterfront), 7kms of waterfront at Docklands, 12kms within the Port of Melbourne. Yet close attention to the relationship between water and urban development in Melbourne and adjacent municipalities seems to not to have been the focus of successive governments. The Yarra River has metropolitan significance as an environmental, aesthetic, cultural, recreation and tourism asset. It is significant to note that two international maritime museums (London and New York) refer to accesses to Docklands areas and waterways trail as 'attractions'.

Evidence of this 'deficit' is clear.

The Municipal Association of Victoria submission (October 2016) to Government representing many municipalities re problems with the *Marine and Coastal Act* referred to "Confusion within the community and sometimes within agencies about respective roles and responsibilities..." Noting an *Absence of direction...* and "lack of interest."

Commissioned by the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change it identifies the absence of a shared comprehensive 'vision' in relation to Melbourne's waterways "Layered with complicated governance". The *Draft Moonee Ponds Creek Strategic Opportunities*, another paper

currently out for community consultation and completion 2019. The plan extends to the mouth of the Moonee Ponds Creek where it enters the Yarra River near the Ron Barassi Senior Park in the City of Melbourne. Areas of the plan require access to waterfront and access to the confluence of both which are under the control Port of Melbourne which controls BOTH the banks and actual water of the creek.

The City of Melbourne shares control of these waterways with Parks Victoria, adjacent Councils, Port Authorities, and the Port of Melbourne Corporation. State Government, through DELWP and Melbourne Water (a statutory authority) controls various drains and outlets running into the Yarra, estuaries and bay. The **Lower Yarra River Management Advisory Committee Report (2018)**

The State Govt 2019-2020 Annual Budget recognizes the inadequate management of the major public asset. (i.e. The Yarra river) in allocating \$5.1 million to protect waterways citing specifically the need to continue to improve management of the Yarra River.

Progress on the Waterways/Maritime Trail

- **City of Melbourne**

Significantly, despite the ‘bureaucratic tangle.’ the City of Melbourne draft Annual Plan Initiatives 2019-2020 proactively set about effectively enabling a ‘joined-up’ Melbourne Waterway-Maritime Trail.

In June 2019 a draft City of Melbourne River Strategy is currently out for public consultation. Inexplicably there is scant reference to or recognition within it of Melbourne’s river-based trade heritage and its irrefutable contribution to the social, economic and cultural evolution of the city.

The City of Melbourne envisages a trail connecting ‘*green public spaces*’ many of which exist already or are planned along the waterways e.g. Domain Gardens, Birrarung Marr, Federation Square, Enterprize Park, Seafarers Park, pocket park at the end of North Wharf at No.5 Goods Shed, pocket park at the tip of Collins Wharf, Buluk Park, various pocket-parks in Docklands, the Ron Barassi Senior Park etc.

From the maritime heritage perspective a Waterways/Maritime trail would have the added benefit of connecting the ‘dispersed’ maritime heritage assets in Melbourne e.g. The Shrine Museum, aboriginal sites along the Yarra, the Immigration Museum, the vessel ‘*Polly Woodside*’ (Discovery Centre), ‘Duke & Orrs’s Dry Dock, Mission to Seafarers (heritage room), several heritage wharves (e.g. Australian, Collins, Central), heritage crane, port tower crane, the Heritage Fleet in Victoria Harbour. A heritage construction in its own right. Eventually, the Melbourne Maritime Heritage Museum and the ANARE museum may form part of this extraordinary Waterways/Maritime Trail.

“Progress investigation of connected network of green public spaces from Royal Park to the Bay along Moonee Ponds Creek, Docklands, Yarra River North Bank, Birrarung Marr, Domain Parklands and St. Kilda Road.” (Formerly called Greenline)

“Partner with Development Victoria to progress an integrated Master Plan for Harbour Esplanade and Stadium Precinct.”

“Prepare a vision and planning framework for Maribyrnong River (West Melbourne Waterfront

to guide future development.”

“Partner with Victorian Government to commence delivery of the Moonee Ponds Creek Strategic Plan.”

There is already significant investment in a waterways Trail along the north side of the Yarra. Unfortunately CoM Master Plan does not currently exist for this key tourist /heritage precinct and this ‘deficit’ is sadly evident. The Draft City River Strategy is out for public comment until July 17, 2019. The trail in part already exists on North Bank in a series of wharfs walkways, paved pathways, gardens, but is regrettably severed several times by major roadways. Signage is inadequate – broken, defaced and often absent altogether. Heritage bridges are de-faced and under-utilized as heritage assets. Several years ago the CoM excavated to widen the river bed and re-constructed the ‘Turning Basin’ shaping this area of the north bank of the Yarra. This point was actually the former ‘turning basin’ for vessels in the Yarra so important to maritime trade on this river. Large hewn bluestone blocks form some of the riverbank at this point. These have been dislodged and appear to be sliding into the river. Three large floating beacons or buoys are anchored at the edge of this new ‘basin’ - without informational signage. A new plan to re-vitalise the Enterprise Park is under consideration which may involve abandoning turning basin created at significant expense to the CoM in order to extending grassland.

New capital works appear to take priority over adequate maintenance of existing works

Note: Several maritime artifacts and several mis-matched information signs are already installed along the North Bank which will form parts of a cohesive integrated waterways/maritime Trail. However, there is no consistency at all in the treatment of the artifacts or in the signage. Once a Trail design is agreed, re-branding of the trail through consistent signage (both way-finding and informational) will need to ensure that the trail works effectively to achieve all the aspirational goals.

- **Lendlease**

Lendlease has committed to retain the redundant dock rails extending along Collins Wharf and these will be within a public walkway along the wharf. This Collins Wharf pedestrian walkway may be understood as a ‘spur’ branching off the Maritime Trail. Lendlease as part of an adjacent development at Docklands has restored the Australian Wharf and has installed informational signage about the heritage significance of the wharf. **Lendlease** has plans to restore the heritage Harbour Port Control Tower on Collins Wharf and is committed to retaining the redundant dock rail lines extending along Collins Wharf, to the proposed park at the tip. It has already restored the Australian Wharf and has installed exemplary informational signage on the heritage significance of the wharf

- **Riverlee**

Riverlee is retaining the extensive wharf between the heritage Good Shed 5 and the river. This path links with the Jim Stynes pedestrian/cycle Bridge, which in turn links to the west side of North Bank to the restored Australia Wharf and eventually to Collins Wharf, and also heads north to link with Harbour Esplanade. Passing by the proposed walkway along Collins Wharf. Riverlee is also supporting the re-design and construction of Seafarers Park, which is between the good shed wharf walk and other pedestrian precincts along Yarra North bank.

Note: In April 2019 Riverlee prepared a draft proposal for an innovative concept plan aiming to: *“Connect Mission to Seafarers, Seafarers Rest, Seafarers Bridge and Seafarers Wharf to form a*

cohesive precinct...” “Re-connecting the city and its people to the river, building on the rich history to create a new future...” “Reactivate this forgotten piece of Melbourne’s waterfront...”

- **Development Victoria**

There are plans for a pedestrian walkway from the Collins Wharf to the north side of Victoria Harbour near Ron Barassi Senior Park. The proposed City of Melbourne ‘Greenline/Blueline’ Trail from Birrarung Marr along North bank through the CBD to Harbour Esplanade and on to the Bolte Bridge at Ron Barassi Senior Park could easily incorporate a ‘spur’ trail along Collins Wharf to the proposed park at the tip of the wharf.

- **Shrine of Remembrance**

The Federal government has granted \$13 million to establish a ‘Shrine to Sea’ Trail, linking the Shrine with Station Pier in recognition of those departing for overseas service.

- **Port Heritage Trail**

The State Library of Victoria has a map of the Port Heritage Train Linking Melbourne’s Maritime heritage produced by the Port of Melbourne 2000-2010. It includes notable maritime port features to the West, the south as well as the North Bank and the CBD.

- **Off-Shore and Specialist Ships Australia (OSSA)**

Since its recent establishment in 2018 OSSA has attracted much enthusiastic and generous stakeholder engagement by acting as a focal point for the donation of large maritime artifacts. Their aspiration in amassing these and rare items is that these items may be installed with informational signage, dispersed along the waterways/maritime trail at appropriate places. It has strong international links with all major shipping companies and ship-builders.

- **The Riparian Zone**

The value in re-instatement and protection of the riparian zone in urban waterways is irrefutable.

The Yarra Planning Scheme – Significant Landscape Overlay Yarra (Birrarung) River Corridor Environs Zone states: The Yarra River has metropolitan significance as an environmental, aesthetic, cultural, recreation and tourism asset. The river corridor links parklands and reserves into a near-continuous vegetated landscape experience that provides a highly valued, secluded natural environment, enjoyed by local and metropolitan communities. It refers to the Yarra River as: a corridor where the river, its topography, adjacent public open space and a continuous corridor of vegetation and canopy trees are the dominant features.

Note: 2019 Yarra Riverkeepers Association Andrew Kelly recently collaborated with Aunty Joy Murphy and Lisa Kennedy to tell the indigenous and geographical story of the river, publishing ‘Wilam: A Birrarung Story.’ ‘Wilam’ represents all the rivers that flow through a major city in the world, because all those rivers face the same sort of challenges, in essence protecting and conserving areas of known indigenous and non-indigenous cultural or archaeological significance.

With government and corporate good and sensitive design, the Waterways/Maritime Trail has the capacity to fulfill the many complementary aspirations of diverse stakeholders and provide, in a practical form, essential connectivity between the heritages we share.

