BYPASS THE TUNNEL

The congestion caused in Hobart CBD by last week’s fatal accident in Davey Street is a reminder of the traffic network’s vulnerability.

The recent Evers Network proposal for two interconnecting tunnels below Hobart to lessen traffic congestion was supported in the Mercury’s editorial (2/10/18) as endorsing the claim by the proponents of the tunnels that ‘the need for this type of visionary approach appears indisputable.’

But is it?

The DIER ‘Congestion in Greater Hobart: Response to Issues’ 2011 made critical comment on a similar proposal made previously.Tunnels and bypasses it claimed were ‘vastly out of proportion to the traffic issues and reflects an infrastructure focus rather than a network or system wide perspective to address traffic issues.’ The relative cost of building the tunnel (then proposed stage one from the Southern Outlet to the Brooker Highway) would cost around $I billion (compare $900m in the Evers Network proposal).A 2008 traffic survey on Macquarie Davey indicated a large proportion of traffic there was not through traffic but was Hobart CBD bound. The proposed tunnel was only likely to remove 15% of the Macquarie Davey traffic during the morning peak and 14% in the evening. DIER concluded that building a tunnel or a bypass was unlikely to solve traffic issues on Macquarie Davey because most traffic was not through traffic.

With the Brooker and Tasman Highway experiencing higher traffic volumes than Macquarie Davey the proposed tunnel or a bypass around the CBD did not target roads which have higher volumes or experience greater delays .It was also noted that a tunnel would cause localised traffic congestion at either end of it as traffic would be forced onto higher volume roads such as the Brooker and Tasman Highways. The report raised concern that either a tunnel or bypass would be likely to have an impact on Hobart’s many heritage buildings and as a result of vibration and disturbance caused by drilling for the construction of the tunnel.

A bypass proposed by Wilbur Smith and Associates would involve extensive property acquisition and impact on heritage residences between Molle and Melville Street. An elevated freeway would also create a significant visual impact against the backdrop of Hobart CBD and the foothills of Mount Wellington , the lower slopes of which would also be affected by a bypass from McRobies Gully to South Hobart.

DIER also pointed out that tunnels require high traffic volumes to recoup costs and both the Brooker Highway and Macquarie Davey would be an alternative to a tunnel and unlikely to have the traffic volumes to return the level of investment in a tunnel. Tolls in cities such as Brisbane indicated that for its Clem7 tunnel people were not prepared to pay $4.20 .Initially the toll was free and as soon as the toll went in the daily traffic volume dropped from 59,000 to 21,000.In 2012 a GHD Report commissioned by DIER for Hobart City Council included an analysis for a tunnel with a link from the Southern Outlet to the Brooker Highway. This Report concluded that in 2031 at peak morning traffic there would only be 1000 vehicles per day in the tunnel and 1000 in the afternoon peak. GDH confirmed that 14% of traffic on the main feeder routes (Macquarie Davey) were through traffic.

It follows that a Western Bypass consistently argued by Bob Cotgrove (Talking Point 3/10/18) is not justified. Similarly the Evers Network tunnel proposal would not solve the current traffic congestion problem in Hobart.

The setting up of the Greater Hobart Transport Master Plan outlined by Minister Ferguson in Talking Point ‘Plan steers state to a bright future’(3/10/18) would seem a necessary but overdue move in the right direction. There a too many layers of government dealing with transport and traffic that both delay and obscure action so a coordinating role for Infrastructure is welcome. However, the Minister lists a ‘western city bypass’ and the 5th lane on the Southern Outlet which both for reasons given and the disproportionate cost of the last item can be questioned and there is no mention of light rail.

The Upcoming RACT forum on Hobart Traffic is timely and since everyone deserves to be a traffic expert the resulting mix of ideas and visions may bring practical solutions.

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