



The proposed Doncaster railway. Map courtesy of the Age

24 July 1975: The Victorian Railways has bought 18 properties for the railway, reports the *Sun*.

25 July 1975: The government says the railway will go ahead despite serious doubts over the viability of the project, according to the *Age*. The Premier, Mr Rupert Hamer, makes the announcement after an all-party committee rejects the other transport proposals and says the railway should be given priority. The official cost is \$74 million, but government sources put the cost at \$120 million, and the line's cost-benefit rating appears too low for Federal Government financing. The opposition dismisses the announcement as a hollow 1976 election promise. The Premier says construction of the line will not start until after the underground rail loop is finished in 1980. He gives no firm starting date.

18 August 1975: A cutting dug near Victoria Park station for an underpass for the railway stops because of economic difficulties faced by the contractor, reports the *Age*. The Transport Minister, Mr Meagher, denies the excavation would be filled in. 'I would never allow anything so stupid to happen,' the article quotes him as saying. Oh, really? See 12 October 1976.

March 1976: Labor Party transport policy says 'we will support the construction of the Eastern railway'. Liberal Party transport policy makes no mention of a railway or light rail to Doncaster. Liberals re-elected on 20 March 20.

12 October 1976: According to the *Herald*, the '\$600,000' cuttings, made more than two years ago, is being used as a dump for excavated earth. Officials at the site, which is 400 metres north of Victoria Park station, say it needs to be temporarily filled in so the Eastern freeway can open the following year. The article says 'a tunnel is proposed under one line of the freeway to feed the line on to the centre plantation' of the Clifton Hill line, with railway and Country Roads Board officials talking to the government about constructing the tunnel now for a cost of \$1.5 million. The article reaffirms that the line 'is not expected to begin until at least the 1980s after the Loop is completed. However under present economic circumstances even the chances of work starting then seem remote.'

December 1977: Eastern freeway opened to Thompsons Road.

3 May 1978: The State Government orders the immediate start of work on a 2.7 kilometre extension of the freeway to Doncaster Road.

8 September 1991: A Public Transport Corporation report on transport options for Melbourne's eastern corridor rules out building a railway or railway/light rail to Doncaster because of the cost — \$336 million for the railway and \$167 million for the railway/light rail. (*Age*)

17 November 1991: The Australian Conservation Foundation and the Australian Railways Union release a joint report calling on the Federal Government to increase spending on railways, including a new line to East Doncaster. (*Age*)

26 February 1992: In a review for the state government, Professor Bill Russell of Monash University rejects the proposed extension of the Eastern freeway and calls for independent financial advice on the cost of a railway or light rail to Doncaster. (*Age*)

27 February 1992: The state government releases its \$256 million transport plan for Melbourne's eastern suburbs which defers — indefinitely — building a rail link to East Doncaster. (*Age*)

27 August 1993: *BRW* magazine runs an interview with Professor Bill Russell, who says: 'In a study I did of the Eastern freeway, I asked the Corporation to do a costing of a heavy rail network out to Doncaster. It was quite clear they did not have the expertise to do that. The engineers are very conservative. They seem to be in the habit of telling politicians that the costs are too high and that it would be better to use buses.'

7 September 1993: Funding allocated in the state budget for a \$225 million extension of the Eastern freeway to Springvale Road.

24 January 1995: In a letter to the *Age*, Collingwood resident Mr Gary Schurr quotes the state Minister for Roads, Mr Bill Baxter, as saying most of the traffic on Alexandra Parade is

bound for the western suburbs, rendering unnecessary a line to East Doncaster. Yet, claims Mr Schurr, Vicroads later produces figures indicating that 70 per cent of the traffic is city-bound.

10 October 1995: Transport and environment groups protest against the decision to extend the Eastern freeway by pushing an eight-metre train made from wood and cardboard along the freeway's median strip.

1996: Transporting Melbourne, the first integrated transport strategy for Melbourne since the 1969 study, is released. Despite the fact that Doncaster's population has swelled enormously since 1969, there is no mention of the railway — even a light rail — for that corridor. 'The extension of the Eastern Freeway, currently under construction, provides the potential for significant improvements to bus operations in this corridor, the only major radial corridor in Melbourne primarily serviced by buses,' it says. Wonder why?

1997: Eastern freeway extension to Springvale Road opens.

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G522 works a local container movement through Osborne (SA) enroute to the National Rail Islington Freight Terminal. This unit, along with ex-AN loco 517 have been used by NR on metropolitan trip train workings in Adelaide, replacing ASR locomotives. FR4.5.12.97 Roger Zhou

