

The Suburban Rail Loop's 'preferred' stabling yard site is commonly referred to as 'the Delta site', in reference to the Delta Group, the large demolition and construction consortium who currently own most of the land. The Delta Group purchased the land around 20 years ago after it had been sand-mined. One condition of the original sand-mining and subsequent purchase of the property was that the land be eventually returned to the community as park land.

Residents in and around Kingston's Green Wedge, particularly in the suburbs of Heatherton, Clarinda and South Oakleigh, have worked hard for many decades to ensure that the area's landfills and waste facilities to be transformed into parks, walking/riding tracks and sporting fields. The rehabilitated land would eventually link Karkarook Park in the north with Braeside Park further to the south and become known as the 'Sandbelt Chain of Parks'.

The Delta site has been in planning for many years as a key element in the Sandbelt Chain of Parks¹

More recently, the Delta site was zoned Green Wedge Zone A with a special Parks Victoria Acquisition Overlay as a result of the C143 Planning Scheme Amendment in 2015.

In October 2015, after years of policy process and consultation, the City of Kingston welcomed the news that the Minister for Planning, Richard Wynne, had approved the Parks Victoria Acquisition Overlay via Planning Amendment C143.

The C143 amendment rezoned land outside of the urban growth boundary, north of Kingston and Heatherton Roads, from a Special Use Zone that facilitates waste related activities to a new Green Wedge A Zone which prohibits waste industries.

At the time, the Minister for Planning, Richard Wynne stated the following:²

"We said before the election that we would protect Melbourne's green wedges, and that's exactly what we're doing."

"The rezoning will turn this spot into one which families and the community can enjoy, making Kingston a more liveable place to be."

"The Andrews Labor Government believes in modern, state-of-the-art waste recovery and recycling facilities properly located in industrial areas, away from parklands and homes."

The local Labor Member for Clayton, Hong Lim added:³

"This is a big win for our community. Together we've secured the long-term future and protection of the Kingston green wedge."

In the last State election the \$24.8 million dollars was also promised to local voters for the acquisition of former landfills and sand-mines to begin work on the long awaited Sandbelt Chain of Parks. Further, the government had recently made several declarations such as "The Sandbelt Parklands have been in the too hard basket for too long – only Labor will

1 <https://www.kingston.vic.gov.au/Places-and-Events/Green-Wedge/Chain-of-Parks>

2 <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/labor-government-secures-kingstons-green-wedge>

3 <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/labor-government-secures-kingstons-green-wedge>

get on and deliver this project to give families in Moorabbin more open space, close to home.”

The Chain of Parks was a concept identified in the early 1970's which was formalised in 1994 in the 'Sandbelt Open Space Project Development Plan' report prepared by Melbourne Parks and Waterways. The report recommended a series of parklands stretching from Warrigal Road, Heatherton to Braeside Park at Springvale Road, Dingley.

Supplying over 40 hectares of precious green active and passive open space, the remediated Delta site was planned by Kingston Council to become a much-needed regional hub for Women's sport, with hockey and soccer fields; a multi-purpose pitch; a 1.5km cycling track and two AFL/Cricket ovals plus nets; as well as a wetlands and parking. With the enormous uptake of sport among young women all over Melbourne, many have to travel great distances to train and play their chosen sport.

Only a couple of months after the announcement of the SRL project, in November 2018, Daniel Andrews also announced that "in Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs, Labor will create the Sandbelt Parklands, a 355 hectare chain of parks running from Moorabbin to Dingley Village with walking and bike trails, conservation and adventure play areas".⁴ This statement was followed in July 2019 by Martin Pakula announcing "this year's Budget provides a major investment of \$24.8 million to create a 355- hectare chain of parkland from Warrigal Road in Moorabbin to Braeside Park in Dingley, with walking and bike trails and adventure play areas for local kids."⁵

The 'A' Zone Green Wedge category plus the Acquisition Overlay was expected to give certainty to the rehabilitation of the land as a park.

Local residents, residents groups and their city councillors have, however, been devastated with what has actually occurred. Residents feel completely abandoned and do not understand why the heavily contaminated former sand mine that cannot be dug into because of the poor quality of landfill, has been so rigorously defended by the Labor State Government. It must be clear to everyone, including the SRLA, that a more costly and difficult site to work with would be hard to find. The alignment alone insists on picking its way through landfills in 4 suburbs between Cheltenham and Clayton, when a direct route would avoid all of those problems while saving future parkland and moving a decade long construction project off people's backyards.

During COVID lockdowns, the Green Wedge in Heatherton has been full of people walking, cycling, dog walking, bird watching and generally freeing themselves of the mental and physical stresses of lockdowns and general difficulties. Many of the walkers locals meet on the way to the other parks in the area are from all over the south-east. Every weekend, Karkarook Park (on the corner of Warrigal Rd and Dingley Bypass) is packed with families celebrating birthdays or just relaxing.

The Delta site is inches from homes, with the closest residential properties, on Nicholas Grove and Kingston Rd, sharing a boundary fence. Hundreds of residents live within 150m of the Delta site.

The site itself has to be one of the most inappropriately located construction site that any

⁴ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b46af5a55b02cea2a648e93/t/5bdf85a0f950b7feaf52baac/1541375398749/Surban+Parks+Package.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.martinpakula.com.au/news/sandbelt-chain-of-parks/>

Melbourne citizens would have seen for some time.

Approximately 50 residential properties on the eastern side of Nicholas Grove border the site's western edge with a very narrow buffer zone, itself negotiated decades ago by the residents with the sand miner, separating the back fences of these homes with the most heavily used western end of the project. Another ~50 families have their front yards within 100 meters of the western end of the site. None of these families have been offered compensation let alone acquisition, a disgraceful treatment of Victorian voters. For many of these residents, the streets immediately to the north of Kingston Road provided affordable homes for their families because many bought these homes in the heyday of heatherton sandmining, tips and landfills, but knowing that the day would eventually come when those mines and landfills would be replaced by tranquil parkland. That day came about at least five years ago, when the last of the odours and dust storms abated. Since then, the area has become a delight. The problem is convincing those who would insist otherwise, to visit. One can only hope they wander down to the Henry Street Trail from Karkarook Park and experience it for themselves.

More Than Just A 'Stabling Yard'

A Train Stabling Yard typically involves the establishment of one or two branch lines to carry trains to be housed inside accompanying stabling sheds at the end of the day's service. The 'stabling' term itself is a relic of horse-drawn passenger transport. The sets of dual engines, plus three to five carriages, will then be washed and maintained in order for them to resume service at appropriate stations on the underground loop the following day.

The reality is that plans for the Delta site involve much, much more than this. For reasons yet to be made public (and like every single feature planned for the site other than the stabling yards) or publically discussed by the SRLA or any Victorian Labor MP including the Minister for the SRL, Jacinta Allan, the 3.5km of dual underground loop from Southland Station will rise to the surface at the western end of the Delta site, before diving back underground at the eastern end. This critical functionality for the site, perhaps the most invasive feature to be handled by the 'stabling yard', was, prior to the EES, buried in 3 single sentences among over 100 pages of public documentation, as follows:

“The tunnels would begin at Cheltenham, traverse the southern suburbs before surfacing at the Southern Stabling Yard, enabling a connection to the stabling and maintenance areas. The railway then returns underground before travelling towards Clayton and the Monash University”⁶

At the May 2020 meeting where Kingston Council were first informed about the Delta site by the SRLA, there was apparently no mention of surface level rail and additional extensive disruption. I cannot be sure of this however, as it is still considered 'commercial in confidence' but more than one councillor was ignorant of the surface level rail line early in 2021.

So, instead of running one, or perhaps two, spur lines from the underground loop to the Stabling Yard, for trains to be maintained and stabled at the end of service, and then unstabled before service the next day, all trains will speed along the site at surface level, at an estimated 80-100kmh. Then, for just a few hours each day, they will use a surface level

⁶https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0022/505219/Suburban-Rail-Loop-Stage-One-Impact-Assessment-and-Approvals-Report-Initial-Works.pdf

spur-line to, and from, the stabling yard sheds/rails.

One fact that I did not have to search the public records for, as it is seen as a 'selling point' for the project and therefore gets mentioned as frequently as possible, is that the SRL trains will be observing a 'walk up' timetable, and so they will arrive from a tunnel at either end of the site every 2-4 minutes. The surface level express line was just the first in a line of unpublicised features long planned for our Green Wedge but which local residents and businesses have never been consulted on, or that has ever been discussed by the state government using any form of media, whether that be radio, newspaper, internet, talkback etc. The SRL service will be 24 hours a day and seven days a week. The Delta site will also be the epicentre for a significant amount of the tunneling covered by the Eastern Stage of the SRL.

The Delta Group, who quietly advertise themselves as Australia's largest civil construction and demolition company; and Australia's largest supplier of plant and equipment, moving over 1 million cubic meters of soil per year, has been involved in years of projects for the Victorian Government and were major contractors for the massive rail crossing removal project, as well as new station construction for the Metro Tunnel Project, and property demolition for North-East Link.

Their immediate neighbours and business associates, Lantrak, also had an 18 month 24x7 contract to dispose of all soil extracted from the Metro Tunnel project at its site opposite the Delta site at 150 - 170 Old Dandenong Road⁷. How easy for the Delta Group to obtain access to the decision-makers who were to decide on the alignment of the Suburban Rail Loop. Forget all of those promises to Kingston City residents about finally having iron-clad protections for the Green Wedge. The Labor Party had, and has since, shown that regulations around public consultation are easy to brush over once you gain a sizeable parliamentary majority.

The Andrews Labor Government already has a record of this in the Kingston Green Wedge. Just last year, they broke their own promises and policies with regard to the C143 Amendment and approved Alex Fraser's request to extend their concrete crusher operations in the Kingston Green Wedge even though the C143 amendment made their operations a prohibited use, and the Planning Minister himself placed them on notice to transition to a new site in his Media Release dated 14 October 2015⁸.

Unfortunately residents of this wonderful state are increasingly having any certainty in planning and any individual oversight taken from them, their local government bodies and their residents groups. That such a shocking deployment of industrial scale could be deployed in our precious Green Wedge when suitable locations exist just over one kilometer away in a large industrial zone (the Moorabbin Industrial Precinct) is a tragedy. The heat island effect alone from the nearly 40 hectares of installed steel, cement and asphalt will be an environmental catastrophe, while the great attraction of the Delta land and its immediate surrounds - a magnificent bird corridor teeming with species - will suffer irreparable damage from the 12 plus years of heavy construction laid out in the SRL Authority's EES.

⁷ https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0026/478412/king-C196king-Metro-TunnelProject-150-170-Old-Dandenong-Road,-Clarinda,-June-2020.pdf

⁸ <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/from-rubbish-tip-to-green-wedge-in-melbournes-southeast-20151014-gk8jjg.html>