Letter from Melbourne

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Letter from Melbourne

Since 1994, a monthly public affairs newsletter distilling public policy and government decisions which affect business opportunities in Victoria, Australia and beyond. 2,000,000 words available to search digitally.

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Alistair Urquhart graduated from the Australian National University in Canberra, in Law, History and Politics.
He may even hold the record for miles rowed on Lake Burley Griffin.

About the publisher
Alistair Urquhart trading as Affairs of State.

The firm provides the following to clients:
- Two monthly publications
- Events at our offices and elsewhere
- Charts and specialist directories
- Facilitation with business and legal skills
- Training courses
- Mentoring of senior executives

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He may even hold the record for miles rowed on Lake Burley Griffin.

He was admitted as a barrister and solicitor to the Supreme Court of Victoria, and remains a (non-practicing) member of the Law Institute of Victoria. Previously, he graduated from high school in Bethesda, Maryland, and had many opportunities to become aware of the workings of Washington D.C.

For 30 years, he listened every Sunday evening to the late Alistair Cooke and his Letter from America.
Alistair's early career was mostly in the coal industry, where he became involved with energy, environmental and water issues, and later in the SME finance sector.

He found time to be involved in a range of community activities where he came to understand some of the practical aspects of dealing with government and meeting people across the political spectrum. He now chairs a large disability employment service, including its British operations.

About the publisher
Affairs of State

Established in 1993, is an independent Australian public affairs firm with contemporary international connections. Affairs of State provides a matrix of professional tools to multinational businesses, professional and industry associations, government agencies, pressure groups, NGOs and community causes in Australia and abroad.

The firm works with many engineering and information technology firms and other professional association and industry groups on a wide range of issues in Victoria, Canberra and overseas.

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INVITATION

Understanding Government

Letter From Melbourne and its Editor invite you, our hard copy subscribers, to short complimentary seminars at Level 2, 14 Collins Street over the coming months.

On Monday:
- 25 August *(Ethics in Government)*,
- 22 September *(How to pitch to public affairs groups in Birmingham)*,
- 27 October *(What Alistair learned in Birmingham).*

From 5.15 until 6.30pm

When you RSVP, please consider sharing this opportunity with any of your colleagues, and any interns and like-minded younger folk. You can have several people attend, even without you!

RSVP about five days beforehand preferably. 9654 1300 or alistair@affairs.com.au.

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Editorial

Gosh is too modest a word to describe the major Dailys that we still have in Melbourne, as to how they focus with their headlines on issues that are not in much of a way helpful or supportive of a more productive Victoria, which is of course the raison d’âtre of this publication. The lost tapes is one matter where integrity and worse has been by-passed by some people. More importantly, I was bought up to respect the role of Unions. They have had a huge and important role in our Society and still do, but the culture over many and recent years has allowed a few of its leaders, and now its next generation, to reflect on some of its governance at a couple of levels. The media could more productively report on the details and let us all understand more clearly how things are. Rather than just focus on headlines...

Your editor muses that one of the best and busiest teams in Victoria, the Auditor-General’s Office were unaware the some transport officials were being very naughty. Not so naughty was the Office of Living Victoria, a Victorian government agency, which has now been merged into the Department of Environment and Primary Industry.

Cover. Off You Go, to Bendigo. The regional Galleries are working hard to spread the pleasure and thought of Art around the Victorian countryside, to complement the main Melbourne Galleries. Photo below is of the Director of the Bendigo Art Gallery, Karen Quinlan, who is doing a spectacular job.

State government & politics

Tape row

A dropped dictaphone belonging to Farrah Tomazin, columnist for The Age, was handed in to lost property at the recent Australian Labor Party state conference, whence it was taken by an ALP staff member and listened to by others. Those others included the ALP’s assistant state secretary Kosmos Samaras and staffers from the office of Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews. After obtaining legal advice that it would be illegal to distribute the contents, Samaras and others say that they destroyed the digital recorder, rather than return the recorder to its owner. However that might be, somehow, a copy of part of the contents – that is, of commentary by ex-Premier Ted Baillieu being critical of some colleagues – ended up being emailed to hundreds of Liberal MPs and members. The source of this mass mail-out was someone purporting to be a Liberal Party member. Resultant strife within the Coalition continued until the ALP’s actual role was revealed last week. Now, the revelations have created havoc within Labor.

Digging in

Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews is under intense pressure, after denying that his office was complicit in a dirty tricks campaign to undermine the Victorian government using a journalist’s stolen recording device. Labor MPs were despondent, with some of them privately demanding swift action against the perpetrators to allow the party to refocus on the November 29 election. The Victorian government. The Victorian government seized on the revelations, with senior minister Matthew Guy saying it was the grubbiest incident he had seen in 24 years in politics. ‘This kind of thuggish bully boy union behaviour that we are seeing from Victorian Labor gives Victorians a very clear understanding of how Labor would run the state if they were elected in November’.

Dealing with their side

Despite this, Liberal Party officials remain convinced that the recording was passed by a Labor figure to a rogue member of their party who, in June, emailed it to hundreds of Liberals, including serving parliamentarians. According to the Herald Sun, a senior Liberal official stated that party authorities were confident they knew who was responsible and the guilty parties were very nervous. The official said that in the next few days, party leaders would begin having ‘discreet conversations’ with the suspects. ‘We’re going to keep pushing people on it’. The Liberal officials’ confidence comes as Labor figures debated how their party should handle revelations that their party was involved in the affair.

Chief’s link

According to the Herald Sun, an a dramatic escalation of the tapes crisis, it can now be revealed in public that John McLindon – chief of staff to Daniel Andrews – heard the recording back in early June, as Labor figures were debating whether to release it. Senior Labor sources have confirmed that Mr McLindon listened to the secret tape, made by a Fairfax reporter, which was an off-the-record conversation in which Ted Baillieu slammed Liberal colleagues. Andrew’s office dodged specific questions about McLindon’s listening to the tape. Its representatives confined themselves to a denial that McLindon had been involved in actually obtaining the dictaphone and broadcasting the machine’s contents. ‘Any allegation that McLindon was in any way involved in the theft or dissemination of this material is wrong and defamatory’.

Victorian Police are investigating.

Musings

In the Herald Sun, columnist James Campbell wrote: ‘After days of revelations in the Baillieu Tapes affair, Daniel Andrews has an opportunity. Mr Andrews must now know that no-one believes this is 100 per cent a Liberal Party affair. He must also know that unless he acts decisively and comes clean on who knew what and when in Labor, it will end up damaging his chances of becoming Premier later this year. He might not know who gave it to the Liberals. But someone does.’

Moving right along

It doesn’t seem to be getting much better for Daniel Andrews personally of late, even though opinion polls continue to suggest that the ALP remains on track to defeat Victoria’s Coalition government next November. That poll lead might not continue to be the case for long.

The Age reports that Mr Andrews’ admissions of involvement by his staffers in the Baillieu Tapes affair have not eased the pressure on Labor. He called the business a ‘dirty mess,’ and various ALP parliamentarians are frustrated with both the handling of the incident and the damage it could do the party at the next election, if it is not cleared up soon.

As for Ted Baillieu, whose comments sparked the whole business, the ex-Premier was quoted by the same newspaper as demanding that Mr Andrews ‘come clean on Labor’s involvement in the affair.’ Mr Andrews, for his part, maintained that ‘voters were not interested in the broadcast of private conversations or how the audio between Mr Baillieu and [political editor] Farrah Tomazin was obtained.’

Andrews deflecting

Building union corruption allegations are seriously undermining Victorian Labor’s run to the November 29 election, but leader Daniel Andrews refuses to take action to avoid political fallout. Mr Andrews has defiantly refused to address corruption allegations and Construction, Forestry Mining and Energy Union state leader John Setka’s long criminal history, amid fears of an internal ALP backlash that could affect his leadership.

Rotten

According to the Herald Sun, a Labor powerbroker was the middleman in alleged extortion attempts involving demands for $50,000 payments to underworld figure Mick Gatto for industrial peace. Ken Hardy, now secretary of the party’s Melton branch, was accused in the royal commission of being a key player in a union campaign to take over the $800 million Pentridge Prison redevelopment.

Polling

According to The Age, an opinion poll on July 24 showed that Premier Denis Napthine’s government has clawed back lost political ground after an aggressive campaign attacking Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews’ building
union links. But four months from the November election, the Coalition continues to languish in a losing position, with the latest Age/Nielsen poll showing it trailing Labor 46 per cent to 54 per cent after distributing preferences using stated voting intentions.

**Palmer a saviour for Naphthine?**

It sounds unexpected, but that’s the hypothesis propounded by *Herald Sun* columnist James Campbell. He reckoned on July 17 that ‘the ongoing chaos – for there is no other word for the farce that has played out in Canberra this past fortnight – has meant it has been very difficult for [Victoria’s] state government to get much coverage, or “clear the air,” as the political class likes to call it. In these circumstances it is hard to imagine how the Naphthine government could be returned.’ Yet Campbell argues that the sheer obstinacy and flamboyance of Clive Palmer – whom *The Age* quoted as implying Tony Abbott’s government either to call a double dissolution or to come up with a mini-budget – can help, rather than hinder, Denis Naphthine. ‘If Palmer and his crew stick to their guns along with the new Labor Party and the Greens, then many of Joe Hockey’s Budget nasties are going to die on the Senate floor.’ This outcome would certainly please Victoria’s Premier, who is currently suffering the knock-on effect of the federal Liberals’ unpopularity in opinion polls.

**Shaw rejected**

Rogue MP Geoff Shaw is in for a landslide defeat at Victoria’s November election, with just 4 per cent of voters in Frankston wanting to return him to State Parliament, new polling shows. According to the *Herald Sun*, Denis Naphthine’s chances of holding power are under threat, with three key seats – at present Liberal, but only just – expected to fall into Opposition hands. The Labor Party will comfortably win the marginal seats of Frankston, Mordialloc and Bellarine, a poll of 800 people conducted on June 25 and 26 in each electorate found.

**Not a Shaw thing**

Geoff Shaw, the outspoken former Liberal elected to state parliament in 2010 and a similar number of government depots and part of a hospital are among surplus sites up for sale. According to *The Age*, at least 24 former school sites in Victoria were sold during the last financial year. The state government revealed that it makes good on a promise to disclose what public land it has sold or intends to sell. Following the 2010 election, the government began an audit of state assets to identify those that could be sold to fund new projects. Land identified for surplus was first offered to other state, local and federal authorities before being put up for public sale, Minister Gordon Rich-Phillips said.

**Investigation**

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change has requested the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council to carry out an investigation into historic places on public land across Victoria.

**Forced to quit**

Former Liberal candidate Aaron Lane who was forced to resign by his party after homophobic comments on Twitter, has now lost his work at Deakin University. Deakin University spokesman Sarah Dolan said Mr Lane had been a casual sessional tutor in law at the university teaching sessions in the first semester of this year. ‘The situation is that he has previously worked in a casual role but he won’t be employed at Deakin any longer,’ Ms Dolan would not elaborate. Any reference to Deakin’s website to his role, if it ever existed, has been deleted.

**Attorney-General to speak**

State Attorney-General Robert Clark is set to address a hard-line pro-life event in Melbourne organised by a controversial US-based group dedicated to preventing abortion and the decriminalisation of homosexuality. Less than three months before the November 29 state election, Mr Clark will deliver a ‘welcome to Victoria’ speech to the World Congress of Families.

**Euthanasia party**

According to the *Herald Sun*, euthanasia advocate Dr Philip Nitschke is heading for the state election after his political party was approved by the Electoral commissioner. Dr Nitschke said he was planning for the Voluntary Euthanasia party to contest all Upper House seats in the upcoming election – and a few of the lower house seats as well.

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On Hold
The Victorian Government enters (election) caretaker mode on Melbourne Cup Day. However, apart from this formalist, probity is already starting to enter the paddock as far as tenders and purchasing go.

Federal
Not giving the cold shoulder
Denis Napthine says that he is happy to campaign with Tony Abbott ahead of the November 29 election, despite warnings that his own chances of retaining the Premiership could be impeded by the Prime Minister’s unpopularity in Victoria. According to The Age, internal polling is believed to show voters are failing to distinguish between the state and federal governments, with damage to the Coalition brand, inflicted by the federal government, leading Victorians to believe they will be worse off as a result of the May 6 Victorian budget.

Backing Putin call
Premier Denis Napthine says that Russian President Vladimir Putin would not be welcome at the G20 conference in Australia if he does not co-operate with investigations into the MH17 attack. As well as backing similar remarks about Russia’s ruler which had been made by Queensland Premier Campbell Newman, Dr Napthine took a swipe at the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and United Nations Security Council, urging them to take action.

Official service
According to the Herald Sun, the official multi-faith service for victims of MH17 was held at St Paul’s Cathedral in Melbourne.

Agriculture
New industry
A few kilometres off the main road, not too far from the Murray River in north-west Victoria, soft and fluffy white cotton balls wobble gently in a vast field. According to The Age, a cool westerly wind sweeps across the 110-hectare cotton crop, while persistent showers have turned the red Mallee soil into mud. The wet conditions have brought what is a historic harvest to a temporary halt. This crop, standing in a paddock at Winlaton, about 30 kilometres south-east of Swan Hill, is believed to be the first cotton crop grown in Victoria in decades and possibly the first ever commercial-size crop. Those growing it believe it has been a success, and that cotton has the potential to be a ‘game-changer’ for the district.

Arts
Theatres
In The Australian: ‘it’s bizarre to think that there were once plans to demolish some of Melbourne’s beautiful heritage theatres, which are now prime assets in a lively entertainment sector. For several months, four theatres within the city grid have been busy with shows, giving Melburnians and visitors a choice of musicals not available elsewhere in Australia. Wicked has been playing at the Regent, The King and 1 at the Princess and Les Misérables at Her Majesty’s. The stage adaptation of Mother and Son opens at the Comedy, where The Rocky Horror Show has just ended an 11-week run.’

Education
Jewish education
The Jewish instruction provider for state schools is seeking legal advice to ensure that its lessons remain available, amid concerns new conditions will undermine cultural diversity. According to The Age, the United Jewish Education Board has told parents it is exploring ‘all avenues, including legal options,’ so that Jewish children can continue to receive special religious instruction. The letter to parents comes after the Education Department issued a new ministerial directive in May that said schools could withdraw from religious instruction programs if there were insufficient resources. The directive also said religious instruction sessions must be ‘clearly opt-in’ for parents.

Prayer in schools: now a no-no
The Age announced in late July that ‘Lunchtime prayer and Bible study groups run by teachers or volunteers have been banned at state schools in Victoria under a ministerial directive. … Peter Stevens, the Victorian state officer of Christian ministry Family Voice, called on Education Minister Martin Dixon to rescind the “unjust and unwarranted order”.’

This is different to the federally funded religious education that continues on its very regular basis.

Poor miss out
According to The Age, next year Allyson Griffith, student and single mother of three, worries that she will not be able to afford school camps at all when the Victorian government abolishes – as it intends to abolish – the Education Maintenance Allowance. This payment provides more than 200,000 Victorian students from low-income families with up to $300 to help cover the cost of books, uniforms, excursions and, increasingly, computers. ‘People tend to think if you go to a state school it’s free. The reality is, it’s not,’ says Emma King, the CEO of the Victorian Council of Social Service. A spokeswoman for Victorian Education Minister Martin Dixon said the Victorian government had to relinquish the allowance to secure the Gonski school-funding deal with the Commonwealth last year. ‘We have a needs-based system in Victoria … and we will continue to support the most vulnerable in our community, including through the increased [federal] funding going directly to our schools,’ she said.

Laptop problems
The Victorian Education department could be forced to repay millions of dollars to teachers who leased laptops under a controversial program. The Australian Education Union is suing the department in the Federal Court for ‘loss and damages’. According to The Age, it claims it is ‘unreasonable’ for teachers to have to lease the computers when they are needed to perform their duties.

Not up to scratch
Universities and colleges are failing to produce teachers who meet the needs of Victorian schools, according to the state government. According to a report in The Age, in a submission to the federal review of teacher education, Victoria says it has ‘higher expectations for teacher education graduates’ in some areas than are presently being met. Of concern was the evidence indicating that degrees were not equipping teachers with the specialist knowledge required in literacy, maths and science. Courses often did not devote enough attention to teaching children with special needs. This particular field was seen as an area of specialisation rather than a core requirement for every teacher. And principals had consistently identified classroom organisation and behaviour management skills as areas in which graduate teachers were often lacking.

New head
The newly appointed head of RMIT is perfectly placed to steer the institution through the ups and downs of deregulation, says its chancellor Ziggy Switkowski. According to The Australian, Dr Switkowski said Martin Bean’s experience of higher education reform in Britain as boss of the Open University would stand RMIT in...
good stead. An expatriate Australian, Mr Bean worked with Microsoft and other IT companies on technology and education before joining the Open University in 2009. He was a pioneer in making OU content available on mobile devices and spearheaded Britain’s semi-official foray into free online courses.

Energy

Radical plan
Electricity prices would rise 700 per cent from one day to the next, with households only warned on TV weather reports the evening before, according to the Herald Sun. And power companies would be able to remotely switch off air-conditioners during hot weather in areas of where the grid typically strains, such as the fringes of major cities. These radical proposals — which aim to lower bills in the long run — have emerged in response to a reform paper published today by the influential Grattan Institute. The paper not only argues that electricity prices are too high, but goes on to assert that they are unfair, because some people pay more than they should.

Mildura plant
A $174 million biomass power plant not far from the state’s border with New South Wales is a step closer, with rezoning approval from Minister for Planning Matthew Guy. Mr Guy today rezoned land at Carwarp, near Mildura, for the 35-megawatt power station and approved an 18-kilometre electricity transmission line and substation to connect to the existing grid. ‘Transforming plant waste into a new source of power has numerous benefits for the region and our environment. Residents are likely to see lower power bills, farmers will have a new income stream and the local economy will be bolstered by new industry and jobs,’ Mr Guy said.

Smart meter problems
An independent audit of electromagnetic radiation from smart meters will begin next month as critics claim that there exist valid reports of illness from hundreds of Victorians, and that these reports represent an emerging health crisis. According to the Herald Sun, more than 250 Victorians have contacted Stop Smart Meters Australia to report insomnia, headaches, ringing in the ears, tiredness and burning or tingling sensations.

Environment & conservation

Nice view
Point Nepean is set for a $100-million facelift that could transform a historic section of the national park into a health retreat with a geothermal bath house and hot spring pools surrounded by bushland, a marine education centre and luxury accommodation. Premier Denis Napthine has revealed details of a successful bid to revamp Point Nepean Quarantine Station, as part of a move to attract more tourists to the national park. The move is part of a controversial state government push to open up two-thirds of Victoria’s national parks for ‘nature-based’ tourism development.

Green rating
VicForests needs to improve ‘significantly’ its care of the state’s forests if it wants international accreditation of its timber products, according to an unannouncing letter. According to a report in The Age, VicForests – which is owned by the Victorian government itself – is seeking certification from the Forest Stewardship Council, based in Germany, to demonstrate that its harvesting practices are sustainable, is ethical, and protects natural forest. FSC accreditation is widely recognised in the paper and printing industries. So VicForests, if it got such accreditation, would be able to market more effectively its products to environmentally-conscious customers. But the FSC’s preliminary assessment report, handed down in June, criticised VicForests. It highlighted a number of areas that needed reform before certification could be considered. FSC rejected VicForests’ first attempt for certification in 2008.

Wild Deer
Hoof marks are clearly visible on the floor of Sherbrooke Forest, a special part of the Dandenong Ranges National Park which is traditionally renowned for its lyrebirds and towering mountain ash, but which in recent years has been home to a growing number of wild deer leaving an unwanted mark on the park. The hoof prints are broad and sunken quite deep into the soft red soil. Parks Victoria has a permit for up to 220 deer to be killed at three parks east of Melbourne (including up to 70 at Sherbrooke) until mid-January.

Short sighted
In a media release, Environment Victoria CEO Mark Wakeham said that the carbon tax repeal was ‘poor, short-sighted policy, protecting vested interests ahead of the interest of Australians and promoting polluting energy at the expense of our renewables industry.’

New book
Federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt recently launched Biodiversity: Science and Solutions for Australia, a new book from CSIRO. Dr Megan Clark, CSIRO Chief Executive. ‘The book draws on CSIRO’s 90 years of research into biodiversity, as well as insights from the broader community, including research organisations, industry, all levels of government and the wider community.’

Events

GP deal
The Victorian Government will renew a multi-year contract extension of the Grand Prix from next year.

Archbishop visit
According to the Herald Sun, the controversial head of the Anglican Church will visit Melbourne in August. Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury since early 2013, will preach at the inauguration of the new head of the Australian Anglican Church, Phillip Freier, who has been Melbourne’s archbishop since 2006.

New arena
A revamp of a stadium at the Melbourne Park Tennis Centre has given it a roof that can open to the skies — while shutting out thousands of Australian Open fans. According to the Herald Sun, the $183 million taxpayer-funded revamp of Margaret Court Arena has given it a state-of-the-art retractable roof — the fastest operating in the world. The centre’s third retractable roof makes Melbourne’s the only Grand Slam tournament that has three courts playable in rain, hail or shine.

Les Mis manuscript
Written in Victor Hugo’s own handwriting between 1845 and 1862, the original manuscript of Les Miserables is considered a national treasure of France, a cultural and historical statement so precious it is rarely displayed in its homeland, let alone anywhere else. The Australian delegation wasn’t even allowed to see it. But following a lengthy negotiation, the team, including curator Anais Lellouche, eventually secured the book, and the State Library’s upcoming Victor Hugo: Les Miserables — From Page to Stage exhibition had its centrepiece. Bound in white parchment and written on 17 different types of paper, the full text is contained in two manuscripts of, respectively, 945 and 828 pages, though only the first volume has made the trip to Melbourne.

The Editor of Letter From Melbourne used to teach English to French students at a coffee shop around a statue of Victor Hugo in his birthplace Besancon in the Jura, the Upper East of France.

Cadel
The inaugural Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race will take place in Victoria on January 31 and February 1 next year.

More of France
The Melbourne Truffle Festival was held at Caulfield Racecourse in mid-July. Australia’s truffle trade might not grab too many headlines, but it is the fourth largest in the world.

Art Fair
A four-page fold-out fell out of The Age on August 2, highlighting what to see at the Melbourne Art Fair.

Gaming

Payout appeal
Melbourne-based Tabcorp said that it would appeal against the Supreme Court’s judgment that it was not entitled to a compensation claim from the Victorian government of $686.8 million following the loss of its poker machine licence in 2012. The appeal follows the Victorian government’s confirmation this week that it will also appeal a decision that it must pay compensation of $451.2 million, plus interest of $89 million and costs, to Tatts.

Lobby target
Victoria’s poker machine lobby will target 35 key seats at the November state election, in retaliation for the Victorian government’s tax rise on poker machine revenue, a rise imposed earlier this year. Pokie venues’ representatives will campaign against the Victorian government in crucial suburban and regional seats, arguing that the recent tax rise will cost jobs and create a shortfall in funding to charities and community sports clubs. The strategy, soon to be launched, will mirror a campaign spearheaded at federal level by Clubs Australia, against the Gillard government’s pokie reforms in 2011.

Non-executive directors
Racing Victoria is looking for non-executive directors. Visit racingvictoria.net.au/careers.

Health

The cup that cheers, but too often kills
Every day, 15 Australians die and 430 are hospitalised because of alcohol. Those are
The East West Link stands to be one of the largest infrastructure projects ever constructed in Melbourne. The 18 kilometre, cross-city road connection from the Eastern Freeway to the Western Ring Road is designed to tackle many existing transport problems associated with population growth and our urban sprawl, including transit delays and rising congestion.

It is also designed to ensure that as Melbourne grows and changes, and demand for travel and freight increases, we can rely on fast and efficient connections around the city, our suburbs and critical destinations such as the Port of Melbourne and Melbourne Airport.

Meeting both challenges is important for business and the future prosperity of all Victorians.

The project has two stages. Both can be expected to generate significant long term direct and indirect benefits for the state, not least employment opportunities, with Stage 1 creating 3200 jobs and Stage 2 3000 jobs during their respective construction phases.

Stage 1, or the Eastern Section, is a six kilometre section with a tunnel connecting the Eastern Freeway with CityLink. Construction is due to commence later this year and be completed in 2019.

A connection from CityLink to the Port of Melbourne has been included in the planning process for Stage 1. The port connection will provide a high capacity freight link to major destinations and improve the travel reliability of freight. This will benefit businesses in Melbourne and regional Victoria that move goods interstate and overseas.

The East West Link will play a key role in ensuring additional freight capacity and demand can be met by providing a new high-capacity connection to Victoria’s key export gateways and freight precincts, including the Port of Hastings and key industries in Gippsland.

The value of the East West Link in providing an improved connection to Melbourne Airport should not be underestimated. Around 20 per cent of Melbourne Airport-related travel is to and from areas in Melbourne’s eastern suburbs; an improved east-west connection will give commuters faster, more convenient access to the airport, whether they are passengers, workers or businesses using air freight.

Stage 2 of the East West Link project, or the Western Section, is expected to be completed by 2023. This section will provide an alternative to the Monash and West Gate freeways for direct east-west travel. In doing so, it will also play a major role in transforming Melbourne and the way we do business.

History has shown us that transport congestion problems do not simply go away. Plan Melbourne highlights the likelihood of even more congestion in the absence of an improved road transport network, noting that demand for road travel from east to west across our metropolis is expected to grow by 38 per cent between now and 2031, to 440,000 trips a day.

However, the potential benefits of the East West Link extend beyond economic, business and employment gains.

Congestion cost savings not only raise productivity but provide social benefits by redirecting growing volumes of traffic away from local streets to new freeway standard roads. Many areas will become safer, cleaner, quieter and more attractive places to live.

Improvements in average travel times and lower vehicle operating costs will benefit regular users of the city’s road network, while less competition for road space and less time at traffic signals will improve the reliability of many tram and bus services.

Although the new road network embodied in the East West Link project is not the only infrastructure priority for the state, few other projects rival it for its capacity to make game changing improvements in urban and economic development for the benefit of all Victorians.
the chilling statistics quoted in The Age and supplied by the Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre – which gets part of its funding from the state government’s VicHealth – in a new report. During the decade since studies of the topic were last conducted, there has been a 62 per cent increase in the number of alcohol-caused deaths.

Law amended
Australia’s only HIV-specific law, which criminalises intentional transmission of the virus, will be amended by the Victorian government to reduce stigma associated with the disease. According to The Age, a meeting of sex workers held at the 20th International AIDS Conference in Melbourne heard that criminalisation of the profession was fuelling secretive transactions and unsafe sex practices, putting people at risk of HIV and other harm.

Construction started
According to the Herald Sun, construction has started on the new 230-bed Monash Children’s Hospital, aimed to take pressure of already stretched services at the Royal Children’s by providing new options for patients. The $250 million four-storey hospital, being built on the northern edge of the current Monash Medical Centre in Clayton by Lend Lease, is to be finished by late 2016.

Paramedic offer
According to The Age, Victorian paramedics have been offered a $3,000 sign-on bonus by the state government, in a bid to end the prolonged pay dispute with ambulance staff. Premier Denis Napthine detailed an upgraded offer to the paramedics, which doubled the sign-on bonus to a new pay deal from $1,500 to $3,000. But the new offer has failed to appease the Ambulance Employees Association, who said it only received the pay offer only after a press conference on the proposal had begun.

‘So we haven’t had time to go through it and digest it, but on face value … we will not be accepting any reduction in working conditions for Victorian paramedics,’ AEA assistant secretary Danny Hill said.

On and On and On
According to the Herald Sun, a suggested pay deal – one which, if accepted, would give paramedics an extra per-capita payment of $3,000 up-front, and a 12 per cent pay rise over three years – has been formally rejected by the ambulance union. Ambulance Employees Association secretary Steve McGhie said that the union had outstanding problems with the offered deal, including about shift locations and the pay boost period. ‘It’s not an offer we can recommend to our members. But we are still prepared to meet … and try to negotiate.’

No doubt, this heading for an election issue, which the Government would like to avoid.

Business & investment
Powerhouse
A new report by the Grattan Institute, Mapping Australia’s Economy: Cities as Engines of Prosperity, identifies Melbourne’s Docklands region as one of the fastest-booming urban areas in the country as a whole, second only to Perth’s central business district in terms of wealth generation. Docklands employees – more than half of whom work in finance and insurance – generate an average $103 worth of goods and services for every hour worked. The average for the entire Melbourne city-wide area is comparatively low: $52.5 per hour.

Industrial relations
Fires dampened
According to the Herald Sun, the Metropolitan Fire Brigade sends two fire trucks to every bin fire in the city, because for six years union officials have refused to change workplace rules, MFB management has alleged. In an extraordinary catalogue of union bloody-mindedness, the MFB has announced that United Firefighters Union officials have caused a multitude of problems. For instance, the opportunity to spend $3.5 million in funding to refurbish one of the oldest and largest fire stations was lost, because the union would not agree on whether lockers should go inside or outside the fire fighters’ bedrooms. What’s more, a new fire-truck worth $1.5 million has been sitting unused for two years, since the union will not approve it. As a consequence of that, fire fighters had to be flown in all the way from South Australia in order to drive the truck during the Hazelwood mine fire.

Dirty tactics
According to the Herald Sun, Boral chief executive Mike Kane has accused the union of using ‘cartel tactics’, blackmail and intimidation to wrest control of Melbourne’s multi-billion dollar construction industry.

Dirty tactics (2)
Tony Abbott’s royal commission into trade union shenanigans has ridden into town, causing hope and fear to rise in the breasts of Victoria’s state politicians. For Denis Napthine and his government, allegations of CFMEU skulduggery are an excellent opportunity to remind voters that Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews shares a faction with the rogue construction union. The chosen vessel to deliver this message has been Planning Minister Matthew Guy, who has been fronting the media on a daily basis with a simple message. ‘If you want an insight into how Daniel Andrews would run Victoria if he was given the chance to be premier,’ he thundered, ‘then look no further than the news reports we see today.’

Corruption
The Age reported Melbourne developer Leigh Chiavaroli as having accused Victoria’s powerful construction union of demanding that he employ union boss John Selka’s brother-in-law – and also Mr Selka’s best friend – on $70,000-a-year jobs, in return for securing industrial peace. It is likely that the royal commission into trade union corruption is likely to examine these activities at its next hearings into the CFMEU in Melbourne. Other subjects it will consider include allegations that Victorian ALP official and industrial consultant Ken Hardy told Mr Chiavaroli to work with gangland boss and union fixer Mick Gatto. The Pentridge allegations add to previous claims by building companies Boral and Grocon, and industry whistle-blowers, that the CFMEU threatens companies unless they cede to union demands. These matters are going to increase the government’s pressure on Daniel Andrews over Labor’s close ties to the union.

Corruption (2)
A senior union organiser warned a Melbourne developer that if he reported allegations to the federal building watchdog that workers were being forced to join the CFMEU it would be ‘the worst move you’ll ever make’. A tape recording of CFMEU organiser Gerry Benstead reveals his advice to a developer to sidestep the law in its dealings with the union – delivering ‘a bit for youse [sic] and a bit for us’.

Gatto fires up
The Metropolitan Fire Brigade has complained about the CFMEU union to the Fair Work Commission. Its leaders would like to see torn
Justice & police

Carl: dead but still an earner

The Herald Sun announced that the state’s senior police officer and prosecutor approved gangland boss Carl Williams’s eligibility for a $1 million reward over the deaths of informer Terence Hodgson and his wife Christine Hodgson. The reward claim will be part of a civil claim launched by Williams’ own family for damages against the state. Williams, aged 39, was murdered by a fellow prisoner in 2010.

Lucks out

According to the Herald Sun, a Melbourne drug mule on the run for 18 years has been found hiding in Dublin. She is on the way home.

Appeal

Anti-mosque campaigners in Bendigo will evidently lobby right-wing extremists across the nation to bankroll a possible appeal to Victoria’s highest court against the planning permit for a mosque.

VCAT outs her

A Bendigo businesswoman behind a vehement anti-mosque Facebook page has lost a tribunal bid to stay anonymous. According to The Age, in a tearful and rambling appearance at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal today, Monika Even, a co-administrator of the Stop The Mosque in Bendigo page, claimed she had been ‘villified’ online by people who supported the Bendigo mosque proposal. Also, she expressed fears for her own safety, and wanted her name kept out of the media.

Bikie fuel scam

Outlaw bikies have used trucking companies to defraud the federal government of millions of dollars in fuel rebates, according to a Tax Office investigation. Tax Office insiders say that federal law enforcement agencies have failed to act on evidence of a national fraud network, this network having already caused losses to haulage firms to siphon tens of millions of dollars of taxpayers’ money to motorcycle gang members.

Prison tags

According to the Herald Sun, electronic bracelets used to monitor risky prisoners are ‘dropping out’ up to 10 times a day. According to the paper, a prison source has revealed that the monitoring system was failing as the seventh sex offender in eight years walked out of the so-called ‘Village of the Damned’ in Ararat and remains on the run.

Record payout

Survivors of Black Saturday’s worst fire could receive a share of a record $500 million settlement with electricity provider SP AusNet and the state government in about a year, ending the longest civil class action in Victoria’s history. Altogether 173 lives were lost in the fires on that day in February 2009.

Dodgy contracts

Senior staff in Victoria’s former Transport Department and in Public Transport Victoria set up family companies that won about $25 million in contracts from those departments over seven years, the first on Friday in what the Napthine government’s anti-corruption watchdog has heard. According to The Age, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission is investigating allegations that serious corrupt conduct went on inside those departments for an extended time, and that those accused did so under the noses of department staff, who failed to act. The investigation, called Operation Fitzroy, is targeting two department project officers. A web of connected companies, established by officers Barry Wells and Albert Ooi, funnelled some $25 million in public money their own way, the public hearing before IBAC commissioner Stephen O’Bryan was told.

IBAC

According to a report in the Herald Sun, two public servants secured $25 million worth of state government contracts. Investigators for the Transport Department, Barry Wells and Albert Ooi shared at least $3 million in profits after companies to which they had been linked scored dozens of lucrative government contracts.

IBAC (2)

Dozens of bus and rail projects throughout Victoria were allegedly delivered at inflated prices over several years at the direction of Barry Wells, a project officer for the Transport Department and Public Transport Victoria. Mr Wells now faces accusations of serious corrupt conduct at the first public hearing of the state’s Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission.

Cash cow

According to the Herald Sun, new double- whammy speed and red light cameras reaped $1.4 million from lead-footed motorists in 27 days. The trio raced into the top 15 worst-offending locations, despite the other cameras’ data being collected over three months from January to March. The mechanism in Lakeside Drive, St Kilda came in top spot, nabbing no fewer than 8,043 drivers who paid a total of $1.86 million in fines. As for the dual-operating cameras at Flinders and William Streets in Melbourne’s centre, they took out ninth position with 3,507 red light racing motorists nabbed, while the camera at Exhibition and Victoria streets polled at number 14 by issuing 2,606 fines. Only two cameras in the top 10 were not on major highways: those at Lakeside Drive, and those at Flinders and William Streets. The Department of Justice has released its third-quarter statistics and those showed that more fines were issued in that quarter than in the previous quarter – the total jumped to 320,636, compared to 317,524 – while $74.7 million was paid in fines.

Fine outcome

According to the Herald Sun, a driver slapped with an $88 unpaid parking ticket when he ducked away to get coins for a machine has scored a legal victory against a major car park manager. John Vico pushed his foot down over the ‘liquidated demands’ damage which had been stuck to his windscreen in a city car park, while he was walking three blocks to a convenience store to get the loose change needed. ‘It’s a money-grabbing scam in my opinion,’ the law student from Brunswick West said. ‘The whole reason I pursued it was the principle, and to get the message out there to others to not just pay blindly.’

Lawyer X

According to the Herald Sun, senior police are

up an industrial agreement that currently gives the union significant say in the operation of the fire service, including minimum staffing levels. This move comes after the Royal Commission into trade union corruption heard, during July, the testimony of a builder that Mick Gatto could fix industrial relations issues for $50,000 per problem. According to the Herald Sun, a four-page spread in the summer issue of the union’s new magazine details Mr Gatto’s links with the United Firefighters Union, links which began after he grew up next door to the South Melbourne fire station.

Thuggery

A Victorian Labor Party official demanded a $50,000 payment from builders of the Pentridge Prison redevelopment in exchange for industrial peace, the royal commission into union corruption will hear soon. According to the Herald Sun, claims the official was working hand in glove with the John Setka-led Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union as it tried to take control of the multi-million dollar construction site.

Regulator problems

Any watcher of the union royal commission should be questioning why police and regulators appear to be missing in action in the building industry. According to The Age, Boral chief executive Mike Kane alleged that union boss John Setka may have been committing blackmail by threatening to ‘black ban’ his company if it continued supplying the union’s arch enemy, building firm Grocon. Whether the blackmail allegation is fair or not, the alleged offence should have been investigated when it arose last year.

Super details

A former union official has told an inquiry the construction union used confidential information to stir up trouble with employees at a company with which it was at war. Former Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union official Brian Fitzpatrick told the Royal Commission into Union Governance and Corruption that the union obtained personal details of employees of construction firm Lis-Con from Chus, the building industry superannuation fund.

Workcover

According to The Age, WorkCover inspectors are being told to restrict union officials from investigating safety complaints amid claims of escalating political interference in the regulator. Briefing documents given to WorkCover safety inspectors last week said they must follow new Victorian government guidelines restricting union officials’ ability to act on site safety issues.

Hard times

According to a report in the Herald Sun, tradesmen are involved in almost one-fifth of the state’s most serious workplace injuries, and they are up to 50 per cent more likely to be forced into early retirement than other white-collar workers. A new report by the Australian Physiotherapy Association has found that three-quarters of trades regularly ignore pain, there being a culture of ‘suffering on’ with injury, a culture pervasive across the industry.
The editor of this magazine recently had a Jam Session with his bagpipes and an elderly friend up the street, who had not played his accordian or Italian bagpipes since he played to his wife, who died several years ago. A tear or two. And a strong coffee.

Excello Cafe in Spring Street after a motor bike accident

The Editor with fellow readers at Book Talk in Swan Street, Richmond.

At the recent IPAA (Institute of Public Administration), Victorian Division, current or recent senior civil servants spoke of a novel which had inspired each of them to quality leadership.

‘Wolf Hall’ by Hilary Mantle.
Fran Thorn, former Secretary of the Department of Health

‘The Sirian Experiments’ by Doris Lessing.
Graeme Head, NSW Public Service Commissioner.

‘To Kill a Mocking Bird’ by Harper Lee.
Dean Yates, Secretary of the Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure

‘Grand Days’ by Frank Moorhouse.
Katy Haire, Deputy Secretary, Department of Human Services.
to be investigated by a former Supreme Court judge. The move is a significant advance in the IBAC probe, which began amid a series of revelations of potential police misconduct over lawyer in the paper. The judge will review Victoria Police’s conduct in relation to the case.

Sad
According to the Herald Sun, a prison executive has been declared dead three years after he disappeared on a mountain. David Prideaux, 50, then general manager of the maximum security Barwon Prison, vanished on Mount Stirling – more than 200 kilometres north-east of Melbourne – on June 15, 2011, while deer-hunting with his brother in law.

Loggerheads
According to a report in The Age, Chief Commissioner Ken Lay has conceded that a key promise by the Victorian government to assign to protective services officers at all metropolitan train stations would not, in fact, be honoured in time for the November election. But Premier Denis Napthine insists the commitment will be fully implemented by the election, as the relationship between force command and the government becomes increasingly strained.

Prison rehab
Victoria’s prisons will be investigated by Deborah Glass, the state’s new Ombudsman, in an inquiry into the level of rehabilitation offered to a record number of prisoners. According to The Age, Ms Glass announced that she would investigate rehabilitation and transitional services offered to prisoners before and after their release, focusing on those provided to female and indigenous offenders. A report on the investigation would be released in October.

Public examinations
The Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission conducted public examinations from 21 July to 8 August into alleged serious conduct involving current or former employees of the Department of Transport or Public Transport Victoria.

Good job
The Ombudsman is looking for a Deputy Ombudsman. Contact Jen D’Arcy-Smith of Jo Fisher Executive Recruitment on 03 9016 6000.

Local government
Advisory panel
According to the Herald Sun, Melbourne City Council will spend $150,000 on a ‘People’s Panel’ to tell councillors how to do their jobs. Precisely 43 residents, business owners and students will be recruited, first in order to study reports and data, and then to advise the council on issues such as setting rates and how much to spend on community projects.

Mosque debate
In the Herald Sun regarding the plans to build at $3 million dollar mosque in Bendigo, Ecehan B. Gullbayrak wrote: ‘The controversy surrounding the Bendigo mosque represents deep issues in the Australian psyche. Objections against a building permit for the mosque are frivolous, with many other building plans receiving permits without having to face the same level of attention and criticism. Till debate over the mosque has grown out of proportion. The Muslim community in Bendigo is a long established one and the current debate over the mosque is prejudicial on all those residents of Bendigo who have welcomed its construction. The Australian Constitution protects religious freedom and we all agree that this freedom protects one’s right to practise their religion — or no religion for that matter.’

Councils easing up
Victorian households will be hit with the lowest average rate rise in at least a decade this year, but council bills are still rising faster than inflation. Ratepayers across the state will on average need to pay an extra $7 at rates rise 4.2 per cent, according to data released by the Municipal Association of Victoria. The biggest rise is in the tiny shire of Buloke in the state’s north-west, where residents will be slugged an additional $170, a jump of 10.1 per cent. In metropolitan Melbourne, the residents of Banyule council – taking in Ivanhoe, Heidelberg and surrounding areas – are the worst hit, with an average increase of $109, or 7.1 per cent.

Councils: could do better
More than 90 per cent of Victorians, so said John Muscatavas in the Herald Sun recently, believe local councils should improve their performance … Topping the list of concerns was maintenance of sealed roads, planning permit bureaucracy, and management of population growth. About 28,000 people were interviewed earlier this year for the Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey Report.’

Energy savings passed on
Casey Council is believed to be the first council in the state to decide to immediately pass on savings from the Commonwealth Government’s scrapping of the carbon tax. According to the Herald Sun, rate rises of 6.3 per cent announced in June will now be trimmed to 5.9 per cent on the city’s 102,000 bills for the current year. The council voted for the change, which will save about $7 on the average annual rate bill, at a special meeting. Councillor Rosalie Crestani said, after the meeting, that councillors wanted to pass the savings on as quickly as possible in recognition of the hardship which many families in Casey were experiencing. ‘While $7 isn’t a lot, every little bit helps when people are struggling to pay household bills, including soaring energy and utility costs,’ Councillor Crestani said.

Aerosol cans drawn
According to The Age a ‘great divide’ has emerged within Melbourne’s street-art scene, as councils employ street artists in their battle to erase and prevent graffiti. During the past two years, 12 inner-Melbourne municipalities have spent more than $8 million painting over ‘indiscriminate’ tags. In the meantime, they have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars funding commissioned murals, many with the aim of deterring letter-based graffiti. During the past year, Melbourne’s inner ring of councils, including Stonnington, Moreland and Maribyrnong, have spent about $465,000 funding street art, on top of a combined multi-million-dollar expenditure on graffiti removal.

In the clear
According to a report in the Herald Sun, Victoria’s local government watchdog investigated Team Doyle’s donations — spent on ensuring the election to Melbourne’s mayority

of former Liberal Opposition leader Robert Doyle — and found ‘poor practice and potential breaches’, but chose not to prosecute, once it had received legal advice. An investigation was launched after it was revealed that a state government campaign donor list had incorrect information. The finding comes as the City of Melbourne released a Conflict of Interest Register for the first time. This register discloses 100 conflicts dating from 2009, with multi-millionaire developers among those causing conflicts for city councillors. Documents show that Councillor Doyle was forced to walk out of official meetings 12 times during his two terms as Lord Mayor (from 2008 to 2012, and then from 2012 to the present).

New law
According to the Herald Sun, administrators of a formerly strife-torn suburban council are introducing new measures to stop the misuse of grants to community groups when new councillors are elected in two years.

Geelong Xmas tree
According to the Herald Sun, Geelong council will pay $450,000 for a fancy new Christmas tree. It will also pay $135,000 a year for four years for its installation, maintenance and storage.

Melbourne
If it’s Tuesday, it must be … Victoria
The Herald Sun proclaimed that ‘Victoria is proving the place to be for international tourists, with visitors to the Garden State up 10 per cent – the highest in Australia. Almost two million tourists visited Victoria over the past year, with a third of all overseas visitors Down Under including Victoria on their travel itinerary … Tourism Victoria chief executive Leigh Harry said the strong growth from China continued to underpin Victoria’s international visitor and expenditure growth.’ Most popular tourist attraction in Victoria was, predictably, Melbourne itself. Almost 1.9 million overseas visitors spent at least one night in Melbourne.

Melting pot
According to The Age, more languages are spoken in Melbourne than there are countries, a cacophony of 251 tongues whose voices stretch to all corners of the city. But demographic warn that Melbourne’s melting pot could be at risk, as rising house prices force new migrants into concentrated pockets. Across the city, three in every 10 people speak a language other than English at home, and variety grows daily as migration reshapes the city. A major analysis by the The Age reveals that 200,000 more Melburnians are speaking a language other than English at home than was occurring even a decade ago.

Dead end
According to the Herald Sun the Victorian Government is seriously considering a plan to change central Melbourne dramatically by allowing the running of Elizabeth Street trams past Flinders Street, Lord Mayor Robert Doyle strongly backs the move, saying that the intersection needs ‘a whole lot of love’ and would benefit from the removal of the Elizabeth Street tram terminus. ‘If the tram goes around the corner it gives us the opportunity to consider removing parking, extending the footpaths, doing tree planting to make it a beautiful.
1 July to 8 August, 2014

Letter from Melbourne

intersection rather than the mess that it is right now," he said.

Stop giving please

Fridges, flat screen TVs. Ikea furniture and even portable showers are being given to Melbourne’s growing homeless population, in a move that experts say is harmful. According to the Herald Sun, the Salvation Army, Melbourne City Mission, HomeSafe and Melbourne City Council have all raised concerns about the nature of the donations. They maintain that the problem is worst in the CBD’s Enterprize Prize. Organised groups of up to 50 people are driving in from suburbs such as Werribee and Carrum Downs with ‘boost-loads’ of supplies weekly.

Lord Mayor Robert Doyle said Melburnians had big hearts but that they were unintentionally hurting the homeless. ‘It’s actually not helpful for people to deliver food, drop money in the street or install amenities. These things don’t help homeless people to get on a path out of homelessness.

CCTV cameras

Hi-tech security cameras are being credited with five arrests a day in the CBD. According to the Herald Sun, and a further 13 ‘incidents of concern’ are captured daily. Nine new cameras have been placed in six CBD locations in a bid to deter thugs and to catch them in the act.

Robert Doyle said the revolving cameras could ‘recognise’ a face from several hundred metres. CCTV makes the city safer; CCTV saves lives; CCTV prevents crime. No doubt about any of that.’

Planning

Housing density

The number of homes in the City of Melbourne almost doubled in the decade to 2012, as new clusters of high-rise precincts emerged across the city. A commentary in The Age found that 24 blocks were now considered to be ‘super-dense’, compared with just three blocks in 2002. These blocks cram 150 to 500 homes into areas about the size of a cricket ground.

Old and new

Two Melbourne architects have won a national design competition for their homes in heritage-restricted areas. Patrick Kennedy, of Kennedy Nolan, and Graham Burrows, of Jackson Clements Burrows, were joint winners of the House in a Heritage Context award at the 2014 Clements Burrows, were joint winners of the Nolan, and Graham Burrows, of Jackson and United Breweries. The town would overshadow the state library forecourt, located about half a kilometre away. According to council’s 3D computer modelling the first shadow would creep into the square at exactly 5.50pm on June 22 each year.

Stampede

A ‘stampede’ of plans for new high-rise and medium-density building projects are being made in Melbourne’s northern suburbs, according to an inner-city council that says applications have sped up as a result of new planning rules will protect the Yarra River from over-development. A 70-kilometre stretch of the river from Footscray to the CBD will be subject to mandatory height controls and setbacks for the first time. Planning Minister Matthew Guy said that he wanted to protect the river and adjacent bushland from overbearing and domineering apartment and office developments.

Bridge design

Designs have emerged of an inner city council’s plan for a new bridge for trams over the Yarra River at Docklands. According to The Age, the Port Phillip Council design, which would cost around $350 million to build, would include a glass bridge so that boats using a Docklands marina could get in and out. But Robert Doyle, Melbourne’s mayor for the last six years, was firm in his view of the design: ‘That is horrible.’

State architect

Victoria’s state architect will stand down next month despite long-awaited rules for the design of high-rise apartments remaining incomplete. The Better Apartment Design draft included minimum ceiling heights of 2.7 metres, and minimum apartment sizes set at 37 square metres for a studio apartment and 50 square metres for one-bed apartments. In June, a Melbourne City Council report warned the boom was ‘in danger of leaving a lasting legacy of poor-quality housing’, because of a lack of enforceable density or height controls.

Investors driving trends

More apartments are being built in Melbourne than at any time in the city’s history. Experts say that this building surge is being driven largely by overseas investment. It has also sparked fears of a glut of new apartments, causing property prices to drop once they come to be re-sold. Almost 6,000 homes have been completed or are set to be finished by the end of this year, nearly three times the annual average over the past decade, City of Melbourne development activity data show.

Ugly ducklings

Four Melbourne locations have been named among some of the nation’s best ‘ugly duckling’ areas with potential to become ‘real estate swans’. According to the Herald Sun, a quarterly report on affordable suburbs where property values could increase significantly in the future has identified suburbs within Casey City and Dandenong City, as well as new infrastructure hubs around Epping and Sunshine. Battler suburbs, including Berwick, Cranbourne, Dandenong, Noble Park, Epping, Craigieburn, Sunshine and Deer Park, are all named in the report as likely to benefit from a range of infrastructure improvements.

Melba retreat

For generations, people driving into the Yarra Valley from Melbourne have wondered what lay behind the thick cypress hedge lining Nellie Melba’s property. According to The Age, curiosity is set to be sated from next month when the opera diva’s stunning 30-hectare Coombe Cottage estate at Coldstream opens to the public. Melba’s great-grandsons, Lord Samuel Vestey and the Honourable Mark Vestey, are spending millions converting outbuildings into a cafe-restaurant, gallery and cellar door, which will open on August 23.

Yarra controls

According to the Herald Sun, tough new planning rules will protect the Yarra River from over-development. A 70-kilometre stretch of the river from Footscray to the CBD will be subject to mandatory height controls and setbacks for the first time. Planning Minister Matthew Guy said that he wanted to protect the river and adjacent bushland from overbearing and domineering apartment and office developments.

Waterfront

According to the Herald Sun, a revamped Docklands waterfront should boost an outdoor activity data show.
cinema, a fresh food market, green spaces and a ferry terminal, Victorians say. Most Melburnians want Harbour Esplanade to have areas of lawn, spaces to play, and be able to interact with the water, according to a survey released by urban renewal authority Places Victoria.

**Allegations galore**

Key members of an indigenous group claiming rights to Victoria’s biggest urban growth corridor are facing serious allegations of fraud, theft and tax evasion. According to a report in The Age, the alleged impropriety involved former members of the Bunurong Land Council. It has been uncovered by a federal government-commissioned investigation into how the council used funds generated on major state projects. But despite the allegations being referred to police and the Tax Office, the Victorian government has allowed the former council members who are under suspicion to register a new breakaway group, the Bunurong Land and Sea Association, which is now seeking native title rights to a vast tract of Victoria, from Melton in Melbourne’s north and across the south-east growth corridor to Wilsons Promontory.

**Crumbling**

The National Trust is calling for election pledges to revive the crumbling Flinders Street Station, a year after selection of a winning design to revitalise the station, saying it remains half-occupied and ‘falling to pieces’. Trust chief executive officer Martin Purslow said the group was planning to write to the major parties ahead of the November state election seeking a commitment to proceed with the works on the century-old station.

**Fisherman's Bend**

According to the Herald Sun, a European style boulevard and an new tram route feature in the final plan for the massive Fisherman’s Bend redevelopment. Under one transport option, trams would run down a green belt in the middle of the boulevard as part of a new line branching off from the 109 route at Ingles St.

**MPA**

Former Labor minister Theo Theophanous was recently appointed to the Metropolitan Planning Authority.

**Sport**

**Special games**

The Special Olympics National Games are to be held in Melbourne this year. Gold medallist James Tomkins said he was proud to support almost 1,000 athletes with an intellectual disability competing across sixteen sports. The games will be held from October 22 to 25 in and around Melbourne’s sport and entertainment precinct.

**Swim lessons**

According to the official newsletter of Swim Australia, between July 2012 and June 2013, drowning deaths in children under The Age of four had doubled. The number of overall fatalities also rose five per cent, to 291. To help combat this avoidable tragedy, Swim Australia teamed with EnergyAustralia to launch the National EnergyAustralia SwimSAFER Week.

**Transport – ports**

**Expanded Hastings**

The Age cites an independent report as having warned that a plan to develop a huge container port at Hastings, south-east of Melbourne, could put an impossible strain on the city’s roads and busiest rail lines: furthermore, that it could drive up the cost of imports and exports. Land in wealthy suburbs including Malvern, Armadale, Toorak and South Yarra would also have to be acquired under the plan to build a new freight rail line to the Tottenham rail yards in the western suburbs. The Victorian government’s long-term plan to expand the Port of Hastings, so it can handle nine million shipping containers a year, risks forcing 1.5 million B-Double trucks or 50,000 freight trains to cross the city annually, the report by Victoria University’s Institute for Supply Chain and Logistics contends. ‘Given the current road and rail infrastructure and distribution of import/export containers, more than 70 per cent of all containers would have to work their way through the Melbourne metropolitan area to reach Hastings,’ the institute’s Hermione Parsnell wrote in the report. ‘The plan, under consideration, was described by The Age as ‘a way to make good on its [Labor’s] proposal to build a container port in the west of Port Phillip Bay near Geelong.’ If the port went ahead, it ‘would be at one of the three possible spots west of Melbourne in a shallow part of the bay between Werribee and Geelong … an alternative analysis presented by Mr Pallias [Tim Pallias, the ALP’s spokesman on finance] claims the offshore terminal proposal could reduce dredging to between 30 million and 60 million cubic metres. … The briefing paper [is] titled Future Port Siting Options for Victoria.’ Letter From Melbourne and Affairs of State recently had one of its regular Discussion Groups, to discuss whether Hastings or Bay West is the way to go.

**Transport – rail**

**Power hungry trams**

Further doubts have emerged about whether Melbourne’s tram system can cope with the greater power demands of 50 larger trams that are progressively being put into service, after the system failed an important test. According to The Age, six early-morning tests in May of four high-capacity E-Class trams, running along a section of the inner-suburban Nicholson Street, found power problems whenever more than two trams operated at a time. Yarra Trams has identified the need to build or boost 16 electrical substations around Melbourne so the system can cope with the full order in the report, to be launched by the Committee for Wyndham.

**Home grab**

Dozens of Melbourne homeowners who live in the path of the proposed East-West Link have been told that the Victorian government intends to acquire their homes by early October, despite recent changes to the design of the road that have made its final course uncertain. Property owners in Melbourne’s inner north have been told they will not expect a formal ‘notice of intent to acquire’ in the first week of August. The notice, by the Linking Melbourne Authority, will trigger a minimum two-month period before the government can take ownership of the properties.

**Crash study**

Altogether in the last decade, 22 Victorians have been killed by reversing cars. This statistic has prompted an international study to combat the deadly collisions. A Monash Accident Research Centre study found there were almost 1,300 rear impact collisions with pedestrians during the same period, with 438 persons requiring hospital treatment. According to a report in the Herald Sun, Victoria ranked second-worst in the country for reversing crashes, New South Wales having topped the list with 29 deaths and 1,738 incidents.

**On your bike: cycling directions**

From the Herald Sun: ’It cost $13,000, is only 30 metres long and runs against traffic, but Bayside Council [in Melbourne’s south-east] says its new bike lane in Hampton, The Thomas Street “contra-flow” track is the first in Bayside, with concerns it could confuse riders or road users. Bayside infrastructure director Steven White said the contra-flow lanes allowed cyclists to travel in both directions on one-way streets.’

**St Albans crossing**

According to the Herald Sun, St Albans’s Main Road crossing has been the site of deaths, several injuries and many near-misses in recent years. Planning Minister Matthew Guy said that the $200 million project to fix the black spot would start earlier under a quicker approval process.

**Toll rise revenue**

The Victorian government is pushing CityLink owner Transurban to hand over half of the toll revenue which it has reaped from increased traffic flow generated by the $1.4 billion upgrade of the M1 freeway. This freeway is the biggest state-funded road project completed anywhere in Victoria so far. According to The Age, Transurban must pay 50 per cent of the revenue advertisement in The Age, noting how from July 27, a state-wide public transport boost will deliver almost 4,000 extra train, tram and bus services every week.

**Transport – road**

**Cabbie crims**

More than 1,300 Victorian taxi drivers have been charged with crimes in the past three years, including murder, attempted murder, rape and culpable driving causing death. According to The Herald Sun, 40 per cent of the state’s drivers have been charged with a criminal offence since the Coalition Government introduced checks of taxi driver criminal records in June 2011.
boost it got from the widening of Melbourne’s busiest road, under the terms of its concession deed with the state. The amount owed is currently being negotiated. Still, whatever the final sum, it will be warmly welcomed by a cash-strapped government that during July was ordered by the Supreme Court to pay gambling giant Tatts $540 million. Transurban’s toll revenue from CityLink has risen more than $100 million a year since the M1 was widened three years ago.

**Legal battles**

Two Melbourne councils have spent more than $500,000 campaigning against the state government’s marquee East West Link project, and the rising costs of fighting the toll road could cost local councils more than $1.5 million. According to *The Age*, Yarra City Council alone has amassed more than $400,000 in legal bills and spent a further $75,000 funding the Trains Not Toll Roads grassroots campaign in just nine months. Moreland City Council has already spent $32,788 on its campaign, with a further $350,000 having been approved to help fund a legal challenge to the decision – a decision made by Planning Minister Matthew Guy – to approve the $8 billion project. Also, the councils have joined forces to challenge the East West Link Assessment Committee’s recommendation that the project be approved.

**CityLink trucks: a bridge too far?**

All traffic will be blocked from entering Melbourne’s CityLink tunnels if trucks over the permitted height (a maximum of 4.65 metres) are approaching. That’s what will happen under a new electronic detection system, which comes in response to the millions of dollars’ damage and congestion costs that occur each year. The *Herald Sun* cited Roads Minister Terry Mulder as saying that ‘Trucks have caused damage to the Burnley and Domain tunnels 11 times in the last 12 months.’

**Utilities**

**Bad water**

The head of the Victorian government’s controversial water agency has stood down, ahead of the release of what is expected to be a critical report by the Ombudsman. According to *The Age*, Mike Waller’s resignation as Office of Living Victoria chief executive follows the government’s recent abolition of the water agency’s status as a stand-alone entity. It is now under the control of the Department of Environment and Primary Industries. The office has come under scrutiny after *The Age* revealed alleged breaches of government procurement rules to hire staff – some of the new arrivals had worked as Coalition ministerial advisers earlier on – and well-connected consultants on contracts worth several million dollars.

**Society**

**Record numbers**

Record numbers of homeless people have been counted living on the streets of Melbourne, as help services strain under fresh demand created by a ‘perfect storm’ of economic and social pressures in Victoria. According to *The Age*, in recent years Melbourne City Council’s regular survey of rough sleepers has found a relatively stable homeless population of about 100 people. But the most recent survey has revealed an unexpected 40 per cent increase since the last count in 2012.

**Vale**

Arthur Acton OAM, 100. Eric Ampt, 93.

Rev Dr Geoffrey Blackburn OAM, 99. Formerly a Baptist minister, he was for many years a minister at Scots’ church in the City. Lincoln Burchett OAM, 93. AIF.

Hilton Chadwick. Margaret Colville AM. Arthur Cowling OAM, 95.


Dr Eva Eden. 90.

Rosemary Forbes.

Allan Garlick. Dr Geoffrey Gillam.

Eilene Mary Hannan AM. Dr Kevin Harrington., Jack Henry Harty AM, 81. Carol Hogan. 73. Brian Hoy, 89.

George Jacobsen, 93. American veteran of World War II. John and Edith Jansen, 90 and 89 respectively.

Dr Hamish MacLachlan. Murray McAlister, 74. Brigadier Andrew McGilliard AM RDF ED.

Dr Ramash Nagappan, 56.

Dave Parker. Dr John Price, 64.


St Philomen Tiernan. Rebecca Thomas. Roger Towbridge.

Peter Underwood AC.

Peggy Urquhart, 87. No immediate relation to the editor, but will be missed by many.


Rev Douglas Allan. 82. Geelong clergyman. Keith Lewis Calvert. 76.

God Bless.
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