LETTER FROM MELBOURNE

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Letter from Melbourne

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About the editor
Alistair Urquhart, BA LLB
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
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.

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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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- Training courses
- Monitoring of senior executives
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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.

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From 5.15 until 6.30pm

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Editorial

This editorial is peut etre a little shorter than usual as your Editor is perdu somewhere in the middle of France.

This French visit follows conferences in Birmingham with the Conservative Party and in London with the Institute of Company Directors, and some thirty formal, and less formal, sessions in England and Scotland in the areas of welfare, disability, employment, education, the third sector (not for profit/charity), the government money trails, the continuing privatisation of more to come in the aforesaid British government spaces. Naturally gathering Labor, and other political perspectives, in London.

Brain storming all day every day.

And now a space en France to polish up a couple of French skills. Including an afternoon with the professor of bagpipes in Esplanian (Get out the map). He has eighteen sets of pipes from all over Europe and Africa in his lounge room. He picked up my pipes and started to tune them! We all laughed.

It’s all a long way of saying that the editor has left this edition in the hands of a couple of young lieutenants...

I would this month know less about what is going on in Victorian politics than someone who only reads the Sports Page of the Herald Sun. How relaxing. So the editor looks forward to reading this edition.

To finish, every time, that he sees something different in Scotland, England and France, whether it be road safety (or the contraire), a health or education or other issue, there is always the comparison to make with Australia and the way we do things, or should do things!

Cover: The hat shop below the Flinders Street station is useful at this time of the (racing) year.

Happy reading.

State government & politics

Numan Haider

A suspected plot to behead two police officers by an 18-year-old terror suspect with links to international group Islamic State has elevated fears of further terrorist attacks just days before grand final weekend. The Victorian Premier, the Chief Commissioner and the Grand Mufti of Australia have pleaded for calm as law enforcement agencies investigate the fatal shooting of Numan Haider. According to the Al-Furqan Islamic Centre in Melbourne’s south-east.

High alarm

Chief Commissioner Ken Lay has called for calm in the wake of Australia’s biggest anti-terror raids. According to the Herald Sun, no

Victorians were implicated in the pre-dawn terror raids in NSW, but Islamic State supporters are known to be operating in Victoria. A terror attack is not imminent according to police. Mr Lay said that he had spoken to AFL boss Gillon McLachlan about extra security over the next few weeks, Victorians had no cause for immediate concern.

Shot dead

The terrorism suspect shot dead by a Victoria Police officer outside Endeavour Hills police station has been named as 18-year-old Numan Haider. According to The Age, Mr Haider stabbed a Victoria Police officer and an Australian Federal Police member, who were investigating him over allegations he had recently unfurled an Islamic State flag in a suburban shopping centre and made several inflammatory remarks about the Australian Federal Police and ASIO on social media.

Details exposed

A government authority has leaked the billing and contact details of Victorians online, but decided against telling affected customers even though the privacy breach posed a ‘medium to high’ level threat. According to The Age, the undisclosed state authority responsible for the breach notified Privacy Victoria about problems affecting its online payment system after discovering the personal information of some customers could be seen by other users. According to the Victorian Privacy Commissioner’s annual report, tabled in state parliament on Thursday, the exposed details included customers’ full names, home addresses and amounts owing on bills.

Slush funds

According to The Age, the head of a conflict-plagued Health Services Union branch in Victoria, Diana Asmar, has denied receiving tens of thousands of dollars from a slush fund run by current state MP, Cesar Melhem. Mr Melhem told the royal commission into union corruption this week that when he ran the Australian Workers Union he donated tens of thousands through his slush fund to Ms Asmar’s campaigns to win control of the HSU’s No.1 branch.

Calling for calm

According to The Age, Victorian political and community leaders have called for calm in the wake of the anti-terror raids, praising the state’s multicultural community and warning against racism. It comes as senior police revealed they discussed safety at the Royal Melbourne Show and spring racing carnival and warned AFL fans to expect a longer wait to enter grounds due to increased security.

Open letter

There was a full page ad in the papers from the Victoria Police Multi-Faith Council to the community of Victoria to ‘affirm our rejection of all violence, particularly that which is based on sectarianism.’

Melhem future

According to The Age, Labor MP Cesar Melhem faces an uncertain political future with Labor leader Daniel Andrews refusing to fully back the embattled MP over his handling of a controversial slush fund.

Napthine salary

According to the Herald Sun, the Department of Premier and Cabinet annual report shows that Premier Denis Naphthine’s remuneration for 2013-14 was between $430,000 and $439,999. This includes $281,946 of base pay, up from $275,000 the previous year. The full package includes superannuation, a second residence and $275,000 the previous year. The full package includes superannuation, a second residence because he is a country MP, and an electorate allowance.

Micro party

According to The Age, Cam Nation is a Moonee Valley councillor who unsuccessfully sought preselection for the state seat of Essendon this year. He also ran as the Liberal Party candidate in the state seat of Footscray in 2006, and won preselection for the federal seat of Gorton in 2007 but pulled out midway through. While on the council, Cr Nation has not been a vocal opponent of the $6 billion to $8 billion road the Victorian government wants built to link
Tourists spend $53 million each day, front-desk position after detailed findings of an independent adviser, Marc Boxer, quit his ministerial office and inappropriate touching. Mr Guy's planning his authority after his most senior adviser was waiting Matthew Guy suffered a serious blow to any other government ad campaign. is refusing to say how many taxpayer dollars the year, industry data shows. The government and newspaper advertisements since the start of the proposed train to the airport in television been spent on spruiking the East West Link and according to its 55 recommendations, including a range of Electoral Review Panel is set to hand down aimed at improving local government elections.

Donation musings
Donations to Victorian council candidates could be capped as part of a raft of proposed reforms aimed at improving local government elections. According to The Age, the Local Government Electoral Review Panel is set to hand down its 55 recommendations, including a range of measures to foil so-called 'dummy candidates'.

PT ads
According to The Age, more than $3 million has been spent on spruiking the East West Link and the proposed train to the airport in television and newspaper advertisements since the start of the year, industry data shows. The government is refusing to say how many taxpayer dollars have been poured into the Moving Victoria or any other government ad campaign.

Sex scandal
According to The Australian, Liberal leader-in-waiting Matthew Guy suffered a serious blow to his authority after his most senior adviser was exposed as a sexual predator who had harassed a 15-year-old schoolgirl with suggestive emails and inappropriate touching. Mr Guy's planning adviser, Marc Boxer, quit his ministerial office position after detailed findings of an independent tribunal showing a series of inappropriate, sexually based emails Mr Boxer had sent in his previous teaching career.

Oh...
The stolen Dictaphone affair is set to haunt Labor during the election campaign, with police actively considering pursuing those who passed on for dissemination the covert recording of former premier Ted Baillieu. According to The Australian, legal advice has been sought by police on whether to widen the net to include prosecuting those who were responsible for disseminating the recording. This could implicate the office of Daniel Andrews, which has been blamed by the Liberal Party for passing on the recording.

Dirt unit
A secretive ‘dirt unit’ has been set up by the Victorian government to counter Victorian Labor’s relentless black operations and assist MPs in vulnerable seats to remain in office. According to The Australian, the Government Liaison and Support Unit inside Premiers Denis Napthine’s office, has been modelled in part on John Howard’s Government Members Secretariat. Some senior Coalition figures have expressed unease about the unit, referred to internally as GLASU, as being ‘unbecoming’ of a premier’s office. Others have defended it as no more than a resource for backbenchers attempting to hold on to their seats in the run-up to the November 29 election.

Election musings
In The Age, Josh Gordon wrote: ‘Dan Andrews still needs to convince voters that change is worth the risk. Abbott does not represent a positive for Naphine, but he is less of a negative than he was.’

Auditor General
The Auditor General covers a lot of ground. Recent reports include: ‘Management and Oversight of the Caulfield Racecourse’ and Effectiveness of Catchment Management Authorities’.

Hawthorn
Premier Denis Napthine’s legal adviser John Pesutto has won Liberal preselection for the prized seat of Hawthorn.

Who spends $33 million in Victoria each day?
More nature-based tourism, an airport rail link, and special international visitor myki cards are part of the tourism sector’s policy wish-list ahead of the state election. The industry’s peak body, the Tourism and Transport Forum (TFF) has released an eight point plan to boost tourist numbers and build on the $19.6 billion pumped into Victoria’s economy last year. Number one on the TFF’s list of election policies it wants parties to promise is a commitment to increase tourism marketing by at least 10 per cent in order to attract more visitors from Asian neighbours with growing middle-classes according to the Herald Sun. Tourists spend $53 million each day across Victoria.

Federal
Shipbuilding woes
Williamstown shipbuilder BAE Systems has challenged the federal government over claims Australia lacks the capacity to replace two large navy supply ships. According to The Age, in a further potentially devastating blow to Victorian manufacturing, the navy shipbuilding industry is warning it risks closing following a federal government decision to exclude Australian companies from the tender process to replace the two ships, the HMAS Success and HMAS Sirius. The decision has fuelled concerns the industry is in danger of entering what defence experts have called a ‘valley of death’, a scenario where the gap between large contracts forces the industry’s demise.

Arts
Gallery mutiny
According to The Australian, front-desk volunteers at the Art Gallery of NSW are dismayed by plans to replace them with paid staff from next month, which is expected to add $250,000 a year to wages’ costs.

Education
Gonski Secured?
Despite the Victorian government claiming success when it sealed a heads of agreement over Gonski funding from the federal Labor government before last year’s federal election, freedom of information documents cast doubt on the validity of the idea and how the funding will flow under Prime Minister Tony Abbott. The concerns emerged after state Labor MP Colin Brooks accessed information on the funding under FOI laws, but was denied access to various details on the basis that they relate to ‘ongoing negotiations between the Commonwealth and Victoria.’ When asked whether a deal had been finalised, Education Minister Martin Dixon did not answer directly.
according to The Age which only adds to the ambiguity and confusion as to what exactly was agreed to under the Gonski deal.

Elite Graduates Earn the Same as Technical Peers

Students who graduate from elite universities do not earn any more over their lifetime than if they had attended a less prestigious technology university according to The Age. The Grattan Institute report, Mapping Australian Higher Education, finds that the choice of university degree has a strong affect on lifetime earnings but the choice of university has relatively little impact.

Back to Basics

Children should learn to read by sounding out words, and history should be taught with a greater focus on the impact of western and Judeo-Christian civilisation, the final report on the review of the Australian curriculum recommends. The federal government’s review of the national curriculum, conducted by Queensland University professor Ken Willshire and education consultant and senior research fellow at the Australian Catholic University Kevin Donnelly, calls for ‘immediate and substantial action’ to reduce overcrowding of the curriculum in primary schools. The report recommends subjects be removed or ‘slimmed down’ and students in their first three years concentrate on learning the three Rs, underpinned by a focus on teaching phonics, the letter-sound relationships in English, in a systematic way. The report also calls for the dumping of ‘curriculum themes’ that required cross-curriculum priorities of indigenous, sustainable and Asian perspectives, and general capabilities, including critical and creative thinking, ethics, personal and social, to be taught across all subjects according to The Australian.

Monitoring students

Police have moved to stop the threat of radicalisation in schools, with principals and teachers urged to monitor vulnerable students at risk of turning to extremist groups such as Islamic State. According to a report in The Age, weeks after the fatal shooting of a teenage terror suspect in Melbourne, a strike team of Education Department officers will be appointed to inform police about “unnatural behaviour” in schools — including signs that students may be susceptible of being indoctrinated into radical terror groups. Under the initiative, schools will now have a clear point of contact within the department who will report their concerns to an assigned police officer, as well as any other major problems relating to racial vilification of students.

Alerts on arrival

Parents will be sent electronic alerts when their kids arrive safely at school in an Australian-first initiative aimed at encouraging more children to walk or cycle. According to the Herald Sun, the technology uses swipe-cards to monitor travel rates among students. A Melbourne primary school is already trialling the system with more to follow. The initiative provides students with radio frequency identification cards which they swipe at a unit in the foyer on arrival to record whether they have walked or ridden. The second stage — due in a fortnight — will involve automatic emails notifying parents when their child has completed a successful journey.

Extra funds

According to the Herald Sun, an extra $23 million has been announced to fix crumbling Victorian schools. Education Minister Martin Dixon, said the maintenance, on top of the $51.5 million allocated in the state budget, would assist 169 schools.

Principals angered

A government decision to scrap an allowance for low-income families in favour of direct payments to needy schools has angered some principals who fear students will miss out on excursions and essential education materials. According to The Age, Victoria’s most disadvantaged schools will receive $42.5 million next year to replace the Maintenance Allowance, which is set to expire. But low-income students who attend more well-off schools will not get any extra help.

Philosophy

According to a report in the Herald Sun, primary school students as young as nine are being taught philosophy in a bid to boost literacy and thinking skills. More than 40 pupils at Springvale’s Heatherhill Primary School will graduate from the two month program, touted as the only one in Australia that deploys ‘highly trained philosophical thinkers’ into classrooms.

School religion classes

The Uniting Church will withdraw from religious instruction in state schools unless the group responsible for the controversial program improves instructor training and abandons compulsory volunteer payments. According to The Age, Uniting Church moderator Dan Wootton said church members held ‘deep concerns’ about Access Ministries’ policies and practices.

Staying in school

A landmark Victorian study is investigating how best to keep students in school amid concern that about one-fifth are at risk of leaving early. According to a report in the Herald Sun, the three-year study’s initial findings indicate teachers’ ability to connect with students is one of the bigger factors in keeping them in school. Prof Johanna Wyn, leading the study through the University of Melbourne’s Youth Research Centre, said countless programs aimed to keep students in class but there was little information about what made some work.

School librarians

Membership numbers for the School Library Association of Victoria have halved in three years, suggesting more schools are choosing to relinquish the role. Dianne Ruffles, speaking as president of the association, says principals should not have to choose between employing a teacher-librarian or other staff members such as music or art teachers.

Poor schools

Victoria’s most disadvantaged schools will receive $42.5 million next year to replace the scrapped payments made to low-income families to assist with the cost of uniforms, camps and computers. According to The Age, the funding will be given directly to the poorest schools, with principals given the power to determine how it will be spent. But needy parents whose children attend better-off schools will now miss out on assistance. The lion’s share of the money - $34.5 million - will be allocated to more than 700 state schools, which educate the most needy students. Independent and Catholic schools will receive $8 million.

Private push

Principals and teachers fear they are headed down a path of privatisation by stealth, after Victoria signed a contentious deal to enhance Tony Abbott’s push to create 1500 ‘independent public schools’ by 2017. According to The Age, schools will get access to extra funds if they become more autonomous; parent-based councils could get new powers to select principals and acquire property; and administrative work in small schools will be increasingly outsourced as part of the $16 million agreement. The changes form part of the federal government’s plan to entice at least one-quarter of Australian public schools to
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**Forced to resign**
The former principal of a Thornbury primary school, Chris Sexton, has ‘formally relinquished’ his position at the school following a departmental investigation into the exposure of children to asbestos.

Mr Sexton was stood down from Wales Street Primary in February after two prep classes were potentially exposed to asbestos particles in dust in the carpet.

**Screen time**
A third of primary school parents admit they spend too much time on their smartphone or tablet while with their children — and many confess to being addicted. According to the *Herald Sun*, mums are worse than dads, and many immerse themselves in the screen to escape parenting stress, the *Herald Sun Primary School Parents Survey* reveals.

**Energy**

**Mining morality?**
According to a report in *The Age*, the Uniting Church has voted to sell its investments in fossil fuel companies, and other churches may follow suit.

**Smart meters**
According to a report in the *Herald Sun*, a smart meter cost blowout threatens to add up to $520 more to many power bills. Electricity giant AusNet Services plans to ask for a forecast $350 million extra from hundreds of thousands of customers over the next 15 years. It overspent $70 million last year, and wants to pass on most of it. And it forecasts a further $280 million blowout by the end of next year. It has applied to increase next year’s charges for the most common smart meter to $208.87 plus GST — $51.27 more than had been approved. It blames the cost blowout on a public revolt against meter installations, government reviews that delayed the rollout, and major information technology system faults. AusNet Services covers 670,000 customers in Melbourne’s eastern suburbs and the state’s east and northeast.

**Brown coal**
Trade Minister Andrew Robb has leapt to the defence of Victoria’s brown coal industry, labelling it a resource that is often demonised by people who oppose growth and development. According to *The Age*, and Mr Robb has insisted that people who describe it as a resource of the past - not the future - are being ‘unduly pessimistic and indeed naive’ in their view of the role coal plays in the world.

**Environment & conservation**

**Yarra**
The Yarra is being drowned in red tape preventing urgent action to revitalise and clean up the Melbourne landmark. According to the *Herald Sun*, it has sparked calls to remove the sixteen authorities and twenty one pieces of legislation overseeing its maintenance. Yarra River Business Association President John Ahern said: ‘We have Third World standards on our prime waterway, which suffers under a governance structure so antiquated it is a laughing stock.’

**Snow season**
According to the *Herald Sun*, a cold winter and bumer snow falls have seen hundreds of thousands of people hit Victorian slopes this season, pumping a whopping $700 million into the economy.

**Koalas and wind farms**
According to the *Herald Sun*, Mitsui is developing the Bald Hills wind farm in South Gippsland and has been carrying out vegetation clearance in recent weeks to pave the way for powerlines to the site. About 600 trees are in the process of being ripped down and residents say they have found the bodies of three koalas, whose habitat has been destroyed. Ann Blundy, who runs Cherry Tree Organics, which is adjacent to the wind farm development, said it was heartbreaking to see the impact of the clearance work.

**EPA review**
The Environment Protection Authority has begun an internal review to ‘improve its understanding of successes and areas for improvement’ in responding to large-scale emergencies, after the Hazelwood mine fire. According to *The Age*, Latrobe City councillor and former ALP state candidate Graeme Middlemiss described the EPA’s performance during the mine fire as ‘appalling’.

**Events**
**Safety checks**
Royal Melbourne Show organisers are assuring the public that all amusement rides will undergo rigorous safety checks, following the death of a girl in Adelaide who was flung from the Airmaxx 360.

**Queen Vic Music**
Queen Victoria Market will be transformed into an amplified hub of live music to showcase an all-Melbourne line-up for opening night of Melbourne Music Week, on Friday, November 14. Indie-pop band Architecture in Helsinki will headline the night, joined by Total Giovanni, and Rainbow Connection DJs.

**Gaming**

**Casino deal**
Crowd has locked in an extension to its licence until 2050, and hundreds of new poker machines, after Labor pledged not to block its deal with the Victorian government. Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews said he had made the decision with ‘sorrow’ because it was too difficult to amend legislation before Parliament.

**Childcare**
More than 1000 licensed clubs can fill the childcare shortfall by opening childcare centres on their premises in exchange for tax breaks on gambling profits, the poker machine lobby says. Clubs Australia executive director Anthony Ball has written a submission to the Productivity Commission’s childcare inquiry, urging it to consider the clubs’ offer as a ‘credible solution’.

**Pokies gang**
According to the *Herald Sun*, police are hunting a violent armed gang they believe is raiding pokies venues across Melbourne. The gang, believed to be of Middle Eastern background, has threatened staff in terrifying robberies in the northern and western suburbs that have netted more than $100,000 over the past three months.

**Health**

**Threat of abuse**
Hundreds of elderly, disabled and mentally ill Victorians are believed to have been assaulted and neglected last year, prompting the Public Advocate to call for a formal inquiry into the safety of group homes where thousands of vulnerable people live.

**Newton-John Cancer Centre**
According to the *Herald Sun*, the launch of the Olivia Newton-John Cancer Research Institute comes as the State Government reveals it will give Victorian scientists $4.5 million to drive collaboration on trials and treatments. The institute, based at the Austin Hospital in Heidelberg, will get a new ICT system —allowing it to connect with the new Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre in Parkville. Premier Denis Napthine said the funding boost, derived from savings in delivering $1.39 million to the ONJ Cancer and Wellness Centre, would contribute to the fight against cancer.

**Good job**
The Breast Cancer Network of Australia is looking for a Melbourne based Chief Executive Officer. Call Kath Townsend on 03 9485 6519.

**Business & investment**

**Bit of a fuss**
AFL resources were used to lobby the Victorian government on behalf of a mining company part-owned by league chairman Mike Fitzpatrick and former chief executive Andrew Demetriou. According to *The Age*, in what both men admit was an inappropriate use of the AFL’s resources, the league’s executive for government relations last year emailed the office of the then mining minister Nick Kotsiras about issues affecting a mining company that Mr Fitzpatrick has a financial stake in and whose board he chairs.

**Moving house**
Viva Energy, formerly known as Shell Australia, is the latest blue-chip tenant to make the leap from suburbs to city in a trend driven by high CBD incentives. The global petrochemical company will move from its Redfern Road office in Hawthorn East to new digs at Chub Property’s 720 Bourke Street building in the Docklands.

**CentTex tender**
Discredited Victorian government services bureau CentTex will be replaced by one private-sector prime contractor as the government prepares to put The Agency’s technology activities to tender before the state election in November. According to *The Age*, the successful bidder will not be announced until early 2015. Established in 2008, CentTex services the computing needs of about 36,800 public servants and accounts for $140 million of the state’s $1.5 billion annual information and communications technology spending. It has been the subject of three inquiries, including an Ombudsman’s investigation and a police probe, and was identified as an outsourcing target a year ago by Minister for Technology Gordon Rich-Phillips, who described the in-house model as redundant.

The $6 million outsourcing project is expected to provide millions of dollars in procurement...
Crowdfunding
According to the Australian Institute of Company Directors, directors who want to understand the power of crowdfunding should look to the not-for-profit sector. Some social ventures are starting to raise significant funds for projects and social crowdfunding sites, such as chuffed.org, are doubling in size every three months. This year Chuffed helped Edgar’s Mission, a Victorian sanctuary for rescued farm animals, raise $162,400 from almost 1800 people in 14 countries. Edgar’s target of raising $50,000 in 60 days was smashed within three days, a new Australian record for NFP crowdfunding.

Guide
A six-page booklet ‘Driving Business Innovation Program Guideline 2014’ – could be worth reading, depending on your focus.

Industrial relations
Slush funds
A slush fund controlled by CFMEU officials skimmed twenty per cent of the cost of every soft drink sold to workers on union-controlled construction sites, a royal commission into union corruption has heard. According to the Herald Sun, the commission heard that from 2009-13, Coca-Cola paid more than $300,000 in commissions for soft drinks sold on building sites controlled by the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union. The revelation that John Setka, a Socialist Left faction ally of ALP leader Daniel Andrews, controls the fund will put more pressure on Labor.

Crime rife
According to The Age, a top police officer says corruption and criminal activity are widespread within the Victorian building industry and its main union, but investigations regularly collapse because key witnesses fear reprisal. In explosive testimony before a royal commission, Victoria Police Assistant Commissioner Stephen Fontana has confirmed the police force is probing organised crime links and allegations of blackmail and extortion within the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union. Outlaw bikie gang members had infiltrated the union and were being used as ‘hired muscle’ for debt collection and intimidation, he said.

Sites ruled
A shop cop has demanded union officials pass a ‘fit and proper person’ test to qualify for the job, telling an inquiry the building industry was riddled with crime and corruption. According to the Herald Sun, Victoria Police Assistant Commissioner (Crime) Stephen Fontana told the royal commission into union corruption there were links between organised crime and the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union.

Jail project
According to the Herald Sun, a ‘Croatian mafia’ who acted like ‘animals’ pressured contractors on the Pentridge Prison redevelopment to sign up to CFMEU union conditions, the Royal Commission has heard.

Justice & police
Mexican crime wave
Members of a deadly Mexican drug cartel – responsible for kidnappings, beatings and thousands of killings – have set up shop in Australia. According to the Herald Sun, drug criminals from Mexico’s most powerful drug cartel, the Sinaloa Federation, are basing themselves in eastern states to distribute hundreds of kilograms of drugs, including ice, cocaine and heroin.

GPS tracking
According to the Herald Sun, Labor has dismissed a Victorian Government plan to track high-risk family violence perpetrators with GPS devices. The Government revealed a $150 million package to tackle the ‘scourge’ of family violence, including the GPS trial that would begin next year. Other parts of the plan include more safe housing for victims, ‘virtual schooling’ for children affected by violence, safer courts, and a $42 million awareness campaign.

Jail terms
Several years could be added to the sentences handed down to killer drivers, child rapists and drug traffickers from November as the state government’s tough new baseline reforms come into effect. According to The Age, the median sentences for incest, sexual penetration of a child and trafficking a commercial quantity of drugs could all more than double.

Child abuse figures
At least 64 vulnerable children were abused in out-of-home care last year, as reports to authorities about at-risk children reached a record high. According to The Age, more than two years after the Cummins inquiry into vulnerable children, the latest Department of Human Services annual report paints a grim picture of an overworked child protection system, where authorities are grappling with a spike in child abuse notifications.

Nurses attacked
According to the Herald Sun, seven out of ten nurses who responded to a Victorian survey say they have faced aggression or violence at work in the past year. The Monash University survey of 4900 nurses, midwives and personal carers has given a worrying insight into the extent of workplace violence.

Temper temper
According to the Herald Sun, a respected policeman and former member of the Police Association executive fronted court recently accused of choking a handcuffed man during a routine arrest at Flinders St station. The officer denied assaulting the suspect and said he took him to the ground because he thought he was about to be spat on.

IBAC laws
According to The Australian, the federal government will overhaul its anti-corruption framework after a wave of concern about its failure to do the job. Premier Denis Naphine vowed to loosen the threshold test for the $170 million anti-corruption commission to begin inquiries. The government will also back a uniform requirement for all public sector bodies to notify the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission if they suspect corruption. This would include the state’s parliamentarians.

Correction
According to The Age, in what the Victorian government calls an Australian first, it will pay financial incentives to a private prison operator if it can reduce the rate of reoffending. The government has signed contracts with GEO Consortium to build and operate the state’s new medium security Ravenhall prison in Melbourne’s west.

Data secrecy
The Country Fire Authority and the state’s Auditor General watch as $20 million in funds have been channelled to volunteer organisations and other agencies as part of an investigation into an officer’s bullying. The Auditor General has written to both the Coalition Government and the Opposition advising the crime statistics for the release on November 26 — three days before Victorians go to the polls — would be delayed until December 1.

Bullying probes
Detectives have taken more than 100 statements as part of an investigation into an officer’s suicide, according to the Herald Sun. Sgt Nigel Atkins’ is one of four police suicides – three of which involve bullying allegations – which are the subject of an inquiry by the Coroner.

Parole Board
One of Melbourne’s respected crime journalists has been appointed to the Adult Parole Board. Geoff Wilkinson is a long time senior reporter for the Herald Sun.

Local government
Excuses
According to the Herald Sun, Moreland council did not apply to install nine CCTV cameras along Sydney Rd, Brunswick — scene of the murder of Jill Meagher — for more than a year. Mayor Lambros Tapinos blamed complex bureaucracy for failing to have cameras installed and working. But he failed to mention council only applied to install the nine cameras to street poles in the last three months. Applications were lodged with VicTrack and CitiPower exactly 12 months after council voted to accept a $250,000
With the November state election nearly upon us, it was positive to see the recent release of both major parties’ agendas for jobs and the economy.

VECCI welcomed these announcements, highlighting the fact that both the State Government and Opposition are listening to business and prioritising jobs, infrastructure, skills and international engagement.

The economic outlook is mixed and whoever wins government will face a range of challenges. Unemployment is at its highest point since 2001, high population growth is fuelling increased demand for services and infrastructure, government revenues are constrained and neither business nor consumers are overly optimistic about the outlook. However, there are some upsides for business with historically low interest rates providing cheaper finance and a moderated exchange rate providing benefits to exporters.

Forecast government revenue growth of 3.7 per cent a year to 2018 means that the parties can offer little in terms of new spending, unless this is funded from savings or asset sales. Furthermore, Victoria can’t count on additional support from Canberra. This means election commitments need to be carefully targeted and deliver real value to taxpayers.

Taking Care of Business, VECCI’s 2014 state election business agenda, provides a clear blueprint for both parties targeting jobs, infrastructure, skills and international engagement.

Five key recommendations from this agenda are to increase the payroll tax threshold, commence construction of stages one and two of the East West Link project, expand the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, improve training outcomes, especially for youth, and boost Victoria’s International Engagement Strategy.

Raising the payroll tax threshold from $550,000 to $850,000 is a great way to stimulate new investment and jobs growth. It will reduce the number of businesses that need to pay payroll tax, saving them time and money, and will reduce the tax burden on 40,000 businesses. In the VECCI-Bank of Melbourne Business Trends and Prospects Survey for the September quarter, 36 per cent of respondents indicated that this increase in the threshold would encourage them to hire more staff.

Expanding the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre is a key example of urgently required economic infrastructure. The centre currently turns away 17 per cent of potential new events due to capacity constraints. The $300 million investment in the expansion is estimated to generate an excellent return to Victoria of $150 million annually through its contribution to the state’s business events sector.

Youth unemployment is a challenge for Victoria, particularly in regional areas and is currently running at around 15 per cent, more than double the state average. Many young jobseekers are becoming discouraged and are disengaging from the workforce. If this is not addressed we risk creating a lost generation who will place a significant strain on government services and support in years to come.

For this reason, VECCI is pushing for vocational education and training reforms that balance the needs of traditional industries with those of service and emerging high growth sectors. A key objective must be to boost apprenticeships, including increasing the number of students undertaking school-based apprenticeships.

The recent job creation announcements show that both major parties are committed to international engagement and leveraging inbound and outbound trade. Both parties need to maintain this focus to maximise the opportunities presented by the Asian century.

These are just a few examples of the interrelated reform recommendations outlined in Taking Care of Business. We are seeking a commitment to our agenda from both major political parties to ensure Victoria remains the best place in Australia to live, work and do business.
State Government grant for the cameras. Victorian Ratepayers Association president Jack Davis said the delays were ‘disgusting’, and people were fed up with councils’ failures.

Two years
Almost two years after Jill Meagher was killed while walking home alone from a Brunswick bar, the local council still hasn’t installed CCTV cameras on the street where she was last seen alive. Despite accepting $250,000 from the Victorian government and agreeing in June last year to install nine cameras along Sydney Rd, Moreland Council has failed to get any of those cameras working.

Parking blitz
A surveillance to curb illegal parking around Melbourne schools is set to be expanded. A southeast suburban council is looking to extend dashboard camera technology to its entire vehicle fleet following a three-month trial, its Mayor telling careless parents: ‘We will keep fining you until you change your dangerous ways.’

Numbers could surge
There could be almost 200 new Victorian councillors by 2016, an average of two extra per council, if reforms outlined in a state government review are implemented. According to The Age, the biggest municipalities could allow 15 councillors, three more than the current maximum, according to the recommendations of a panel led by former Liberal MP Petro Georgiou. As it stands, there are huge discrepancies in voter representation across the state, recently exacerbated by surging populations in Victoria’s growth areas. In West Wimmera Shire, there are just over 800 voters for every councillor. In Casey, in Melbourne’s south-east, councillors have to manage an average of 15,400 voters each.

Misconduct claims
Labor Party figure and Melbourne councillor Michael Teti is facing fresh misconduct claims, this time about alleged misuse of local council funds. The one-kilometre, two-way bike lane was installed in June along Cardinal Road, which is used by 3000 cars a day, but within three weeks a row of bollards erected to keep vehicle traffic out of the lane had been removed. Council staff replaced the bollards, but 95 per cent were driven over or ripped out again within two to three days. Council then gave up on the fight and spent another $10,000 removing the lane completely.

Cricket match blues
The work-safety watchdog wants people to stop playing sport at a city park because it deems lamp posts and benches too dangerous. According to The Herald Sun, the Victorian WorkCover Authority has launched legal action against Melbourne City Council for allowing an Australia Day cricket match on the Southbank reserve. A successful case could lead to other councils banning sport or restricting access to some parks to avoid costly litigation. It comes after an emergency worker who fell over a park bench during the social bash took the State Emergency Service to the County Court for exposing him to the ‘hazard’.

Spending big to fight issues
Councillors at Moreland and Yarra have been labelled, ‘chardonnay-swilling, yoghurt-eating, bike-riding socialists’, for opposing the East West Link by a Casey City councillor. According to The Age, Casey Council voted to join a growing list of local councils spending ratepayer funds to advocate on state election issues.

Wheelie cops
According to the Herald Sun, police may search homes for stolen waste bins under a crackdown on bin theft by a rural council. Western Victoria’s Glenelg Shire Council receives up to 150 reports of stolen bins each year, costing $15,000.

Melbourne Mural
A giant mural stretching the length of the Flinders St station underpass has been proposed to give the dilapidated walkway a makeover. The illuminated artwork, which would be made of thousands of marbles suspended in clear resin, follows concern the area is damaging Melbourne’s image. According to The Herald Sun, critics have branded it the city’s ugliestunderpass. Yarra River Business Association president John Ahern, whose organisation proposed the idea, said heritage restrictions would not hinder the plan because the piece would sit on top of the station’s protected tiles rather than requiring their removal.

Free food
According to The Age, the maverick founder of a grassroots City Square daily food stall for the homeless has vowed to continue indefinitely after lasting seven weeks without council intervention. In an echo of the unrelated Occupy Melbourne movement in which anti-establishment protesters camped in the square three years ago, volunteers from the Recycled Food Network set up a marquee each afternoon, handing out free food donated from cafes. Founder Greg Geering, 31, a computer engineer who works in Collins Street, said his group is staunchly non-aligned with any churches.

Fat Duck
Heston Blumenthal fans will have to go into an online ballot for the chance to experience his famous Fat Duck menu in Australia. According to The Age, the ballot, to be operated through thefatduckmelbourne.com, will open at 9am on October 8 and close on October 26, with about 16,000 dinners given the opportunity to experience the $525 set menu once the restaurant opens of February 3.
Tree save program
Drastic measures taken by Melbourne City Council to save the city’s heat-ravaged trees have been recognised with a global climate change award. According to The Age, Melbourne’s urban landscapes program beat anti-flooding initiatives in New Orleans and Jakarta to win the C40 & Siemens city climate change leadership award for adaptation and resilience. Lord mayor Robert Doyle, who visited New York to accept the award, said five years ago Victoria’s capital was on the brink of suffering a mass tree die-off. He said the city’s chief planner, Rob Adams, warned him that soil moisture levels were within a day of dropping to a point at which the trees would not recover.

Planning
Tall towers
According to The Age, Melbourne City Council wants to claw back power from the Planning Minister to approve and reject CBD skyscraper applications. In a bold statement detailed in draft questions to be sent to state election candidates, the council called for Planning Minister Matthew Guy to be relieved of authority for all high-rise permits of more than 25,000 square metres.

Vision
According to the Herald Sun, a $30 million bridge linking Birrarung Marr to the Yarra boatsheds features in a Melbourne City Council plan to redevelop Melbourne’s prized waterfront. The steel bridge would be part of a masterplan to help move pedestrians through the CBD above ground through parkland. Other bold ideas include the 1.7km Melbourne Veloway, with a consortium pushing for an elevated cycle ‘freeway’ to keep bikes and cars separate. Under the plan, cyclists would hover 10m above six busy intersections from Princes Bridge to Southern Cross Station, separating cyclists from vehicle traffic and pedestrians walking along the Yarra.

Transport museum
Docklands would get a transport museum under a city council plan to reinvigorate the precinct. According to the Herald Sun, and work is under way at NewQuay on a new park paying homage to famous city monuments. Lord Mayor Robert Doyle said the transport museum could be built at Harbour Esplanade and be integrated with Lindsay Fox’s nearby classic car collection.

City square
A new city square and park have been given the green light by the city council, according to the Herald Sun. Developers must convince Planning Minister Matthew Guy to allow a three-section mega tower with apartments, hotel and office block to be built next to the park. Controversially, the tower would overshadow part of the Yarra’s south bank, contrary to planning rules, but developer CBUS is seeking an allowance to allow it to go ahead. At worst, the building would create a 25m moving shadow across Southbank at times of the day.

Geelong revamp
Listed agribusiness group Ridley Corporation has partnered with private developer Sanctuary Living on a proposed $4 billion marina development in Geelong to replace the Cheetham salt flats along Stingaree Bay. According to the Financial Review, the proposed 20-year Nelson Cove development at Moolap would cover a massive 500 hectares of coastal land east of the Geelong central business district, south of Melbourne, stretching from the CSIRO Research centre all the way to Point Henry. It would comprise three precincts: a commercial precinct, twice the size of Geelong CBD with a technology-focused business park, university, marina, ferry terminal and hotels; a residential precinct with up to 5000 homes, and an entertainment precinct with another marina plus hotels, shops and cafes, convention centre, a Guggenheim inspired museum and a golf course.

Parkland light
Richmond residents fear a property developer’s bid to temporarily take over a children’s playground and cut down trees to build a multi-level apartment block could set a precedent for Melbourne. According to The Age, church grounds were one of the few landowners either told them they were not selling, or the sale price they offered was ‘exorbitant’.

Geelong boom
Melbourne is experiencing the biggest building boom ‘since the gold rush’, Planning Minister Matthew Guy has told property lawyers. According to The Age, and the minister has indicated he is set to decide on scores of large-scale development applications still sitting on his desk before November’s state election.

Sports precinct
A concourse linking the MCG with Rod Laver Arena and Hisense Arena is being considered by the State Government as the next major upgrade of Melbourne’s world-class sporting precinct. According to the Herald Sun, a new deck would be built over the rail yards between the MCG and Melbourne Park under the plan, stretching from gate 1 of the stadium along Brunton Ave toward Punt Rd. Bars, restaurants, hotels and fitness centres could be built above the rail lines and events staged on the deck during the AFL Grand Final, Australian Open tennis and the Boxing Day cricket Test. The MCC has approached the Victorian government about opening up the space. MCC chief Stephen Gough said construction of a deck could transform the area.

Bombers blow
According to The Age, Essendon faces a massive legal bill after losing its Federal Court challenge against the AFL and the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority. Justice John Middledton emphatically found in favour of ASADA, ultimately validating the anti-doping body’s joint investigation with the AFL into the Bombers’ 2011-12 drug program.

Courts
According to the Herald Sun, the AFL was warned not to use an interim report on the Essendon supplements scandal as the basis for penalties, the former anti-doping chief told a
judge. But the AFL did so anyway, imposing penalties that were the harshest in league history, lawyers for Essendon have told the court.

Caulfield
Despite it being set aside 150 years ago as a park for the public as well as for horse racing, Caulfield Racecourse Reserve is run almost exclusively to serve the interests of the Melbourne Racing Club, a scathing Auditor-General’s report has found. And local residents, outraged by public land being handed to private developers for high-rise apartments, say the report calls into question how that deal was done. According to a report in The Age, Auditor-General John Doyle released his report into the management and oversight of the racecourse. He said the needs of the community had not been balanced appropriately against the needs of racing. The report found the Victorian government’s Department of Environment and Primary Industry failed to properly oversee management of the 54-hectare reserve. Established in the 1870s, the reserve’s three purposes are for horse racing, public recreation and as a park.

Huge crowd
According to the Herald Sun, a crowd big enough to pack the MCG lined city streets to cheer Hawthorn and Sydney stars in the traditional AFL Grand Final parade.

Transport – ports
Charges could double
According to The Age, Melbourne cargo charges could double over the next two years, raising prices of imported goods for consumers as the privatisation of Australian container ports pushes up rents, logistics group Qube has warned. ‘I anticipate that there is going to be a significant increase in rentals at the Port of Melbourne,’ Qube managing director Maurice James said.

Development
According to The Age, reforms by the state government have consolidated the existing ports of Geelong, Hastings and Portland and paved the way for their operations to expand. New container zoning areas for the three ports relate to the port area and the operations within it, taking into account the differences between the sites. The common theme is to protect and allow the port to operate and plan from encroaching uses, particularly residential, that could diminish the port’s operations and its ability to expand. Planning Minister Matthew Guy said creating a new port zone would provide certainty and consistency for port operators, councils and communities. The general manager, Geelong Port, John Murray, said the changes would help streamline the approval process for new development applications.

Transport – air
Airport cash
According to The Age, a spat has emerged over the distribution of lucrative Melbourne Airport council rates, after it was decided the newly created municipality of Sunbury would take an estimated $35-million slice of airport revenue. After a 20-year campaign, the state government announced the towns of Sunbury and Bulla, in the state’s north-west, would be allowed to break off from the Hume City Council.

Airport funding (2)
Sunbury residents will get their own council next year after a Hume-wide ballot last October showed 60 per cent of voters were in favour of Sunbury going it alone. Local Government Minister Tim Bull today released an independent panel’s report on the most effective way to achieve the separation of Sunbury from Hume. The new boundary between Sunbury and Hume will run along Deep Creek, meaning Bulla will form part of Sunbury as expected. The Government says it will consult with Diggers Rest residents in the future to see if they wish to leave Melton for Sunbury. All assets and liabilities including cash and investments will be allocated on a ratio of 76.4 per cent to Hume and 23.6 per cent to Sunbury. Melbourne Airport will remain in Hume with annual payments representing a 23.6 per cent share of airport rates going to the new Sunbury council for its first ten years.

Avalon rail
According to The Age, there is still no date on when trains will run to Melbourne’s second airport, despite the Victorian government saying they would commence the process for planning approval. Avalon Airport has just five flights a day and the decision to continue the rail link has been criticised by some.

Avalon
According to The Age, the only thing missing at Avalon Airport is the passengers. As Sydney clamours for a second airport, Melbourne’s second airport sits seemingly idle. Flights at Avalon Airport have dwindled to a third of what they were at their peak a few years ago. Just five now take off from its airstrip each day. And all go to Sydney. It is the only destination available since the airport’s sole remaining airline, Jetstar, axed the Brisbane service in April. Now the airport is fighting to keep its last remaining carrier from abandoning it.

Airport numbers
Melbourne Airport achieved seven per cent international growth in August compared to the same period last year, to reach 676,840 international passengers.

Transport – rail
Leaving on time
The long-anticipated Federation Square East redevelopment will go ahead, Premier Denis Nephite insists, despite major logistical challenges facing any developer attempting to build over the Jolimont rail yards. The Victorian government said it would seek private funding for the project to create the new space, opening the square up to the Yarra River and city views. A hotel, office and retail space could be likely sweeteners for investors. According to The Age, Dr Nephite said work on the 3.3-hectare site would be an ‘expensive operation’ as construction over the rail yards could proceed only at times trains were not operating. This left just a few hours in the early morning, between the last and first trains.

Squashed
Melbourne commuters are being squashed on trains more often as others are left stranded by drivers skipping stations to dodge fines. But if you’re expecting compensation, forget it. For regional passengers, the news is no better, with V/Line missing all of its punctuality targets. According to the Herald Sun, Public Transport Victoria’s annual report tabled revealed Metro met only 10 per cent of its targets, avoiding having to compensate commuters the cost of at least a daily ticket.

Peak hour crush
The level of overcrowding on Melbourne’s trains has jumped significantly this year, new data shows, with almost one in two peak-hour commuters on the city’s worst affected lines forced to squeeze into overcrowded trains. Overcrowding on trams has also risen this year, with the most densely packed services again found on routes used by the city’s smallest trams. According to The Age, in all, Public Transport Victoria counted 18 ‘rolling hour’ breaches - meaning passenger demand exceeded capacity in that hour - in its May 2014 load standards survey, up from 11 in May 2013. The survey was conducted from May 5-29 at three city cordon stations: North Melbourne, Jolimont and Richmond.

Intimidated
Metro is forcing train drivers to attend company-endorsed medical clinics for work-related injuries, leading to claims staff are being intimidated and threatened with disciplinary action if they choose their own doctors instead.

$500m failure
A half-billion dollar plan to run trains every two minutes along Melbourne’s busiest railway line using cutting-edge high-speed signalling is in doubt because of fears the technology will not work on Melbourne’s 19th-century rail network. According to The Age, the government and the consortium behind the project want to lock in contracts by the end of this month, despite alarm from rail experts at the Transport Department that the complex technology installation could lead to a myki-style cost blowout.

Mernda dig
According to the Herald Sun, a Labor promise to build a rail line to Mernda, in Melbourne’s north, will never happen according to the government. Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews promised to extend the South Morang train line 8km to the growth suburb of Mernda.

Warn before skipping stations
According to The Age, commuters should be warned before a train switches to express and starts skipping stations and locking in passengers, Victoria’s Public Transport Ombudsman says. The call comes as Metro concedes some peak-hour services are switching to express, which it described as ‘the wrong decision’. Ombudsman Janine Young said customers needed timely information to make informed decisions on whether to board a train or wait for the next one. ‘If a train is going to express an announcement will allow people to not catch that service and wait for the next one,’ she said.

Free tram
New free CBD tram travel may confuse visitors when introduced next year as key attractions are outside the zone. According to The Age, the free tram area, supported by the government and opposition, will be introduced from January 2015 and cover most of the traditional CBD and Docklands, stretching from Flinders
Street to Victoria Street and Spring Street to Docklands. But key tourist attractions such as the MCG, the National Tennis Centre, St Kilda Road and Melbourne Museum are outside the free ticket area.

**Transport — road**

**Big loss**

The East West Link toll road project faces a further $145 million cost blowout if contracts to build the Victorian government’s signature project are signed before the start of October. Lawyers for the state of Victoria told the Court of Appeal that the project faces losses of $100 million ($145 million) from foreign exchange risks unless contracts are signed by October 1 this year. According to The Age, the potential $145 million of foreign exchange losses come on top of a $500 million kill fee being sought by the toll road’s builders. The successful East West Connect consortium wants the kill fee if the toll road does not proceed, after Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews vowed he will block the project if Labor wins the November election.

**Backflip musings**

According to James Campbell in the Herald Sun, ‘The history of Opposition leaders who threaten to tear up contracts is not a happy one.’

**Kill fee**

The consortium negotiating to build Melbourne’s East West Link toll road is seeking a $500 million kill fee in its contract with the Victorian government, after Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews said he would block the project should Labor win power at the November state election. According to The Age, the East West Connect consortium, led by construction giant Lend Lease, wants the half-billion dollar kill fee included to protect it from what insiders called ‘the enormous sovereign risk’ now attached to the toll road, in addition to the estimated $40 million of costs already incurred while working on the Victorian government’s signature project.

**East West getting locked down**

Treasurer Michael O’Brien revealed that the East West Connect consortium headed by construction giant Lend Lease had been chosen as the preferred bidder to deliver the first stage of the toll road. According to The Age, the Victorian government has begun negotiations to finalise the $6 billion to $8 billion contract with the consortium, which also includes French construction company Bouygues, Spain’s Acciona Infrastructure and Lend Lease’s financing arm Capella Capital.

**Wedge through middle**

According to The Australian, the East West Link — the decisive issue in the looming poll — is shattering political bonds, a former Liberal candidate establishing a party to run against the Coalition-backed project and a Labor councillor defying his party to support it. Ex-Liberal candidate Cam Nation has resigned from the party and says he will use his No East West Link party to steer preferences away from the Liberals, while Labor’s Oscar Yildiz says he is not afraid to say his party is making a mistake in opposing the project.

**Rickshaws**

City workers could be hailing a rickshaw instead of a taxi from as early as January. According to the Herald Sun an application has been lodged with Melbourne City Council to operate as many as a dozen of the pedal-powered machines. It is hoped they will ease congestion and prove a drawcard for tourists.

**Cycling laws**

VicRoads has hosed down reports it is considering a radical relaxation to the state’s road rules regarding cyclists, including permitting them to run red lights, ride on footpaths at all ages, or overtake stationary trams. According to The Age, the rise of cycling in Victoria in recent years has prompted the roads authority to review the state’s cycling-related road rules. VicRoads hopes to complete its review by the end of the year. About 11,000 people responded to an online survey in July that quizzed people on their knowledge of cycling-related road rules and their beliefs about cycling issues. Respondents were also questioned about whether they would change any existing cycling laws.

**Older drivers**

Victorians have been urged to persuade frail elderly relatives to give up driving by the state’s top traffic cop with 28 people aged 75 or over killed on our roads so far this year. According to the Herald Sun, Assistant Commissioner Bob Hill said mandatory testing for older motorists — the practice in other states — is ‘off the table’ for now. New figures show the number of older people dying on Victoria’s roads has risen steadily in recent years. In 2009 a total of 32 road users aged 75 plus were killed but that number shot up to 45 in 2013. Mr Hill revealed he had had a conversation with his parents about changing their driving habits and urged others to do the same. ‘In 2013 we saw a significant shift in terms of older road users killed on our roads,’ he said.

**Link money**

According to the Herald Sun, Labor’s plan to dump the East West Link risks wasting $400 million of taxpayer’s money already spent on the project, the Victorian government says.

**Bike lanes needed**

The senior manager of road safety at the Transport Accident Commission, Samantha Cockfield, said Victoria was doing well on reducing fatalities but faced a challenge with vulnerable road users such as cyclists and motorcyclists. ‘We have been doing very well concentrating on the very serious end, particularly fatalities with road side barriers, more roundabouts, safer cars and speed limits preventing the very serious end of it,’ she said.

**Truck plan**

Labor has been warned its alternative to the West Link could worsen congestion in the western suburbs and push more trucks on to residential streets if it is not planned properly. According to The Age, the opposition says it will build a truck bypass through the inner-west in its first term, which will divert 5000 trucks a day off the West Gate Bridge and relieve congestion on the West Gate Freeway.

**Road cameras**

A Victorian government promise to introduce more speed cameras is racing ahead, according to the Herald Sun. It pledged in 2013 that its road safety action plan would ‘increase our use of automated speed enforcement, including point-to-point, mobile, speed and red-light camera systems.’

**RACV**

According to Ross Heron in the RACV magazine, ‘maintenance of our crumbling regional road network continues to be a major concern for RACV members, and we’ve repeatedly raised this with successive governments. The increased funding for road maintenance in the 2014 State Budget, from $384 million last year to $514 million this year, was very welcome and will provide a significant boost to addressing this problem. However we are yet to see the benefits on the ground and clearly more needs to be done.’

**Utilities**

**Water scandal**

Leaked confidential documents reveal Water Minister Peter Walsh’s tight grip over the state’s scandal-plagued water agency - in stark contrast to his public statements. According to a report in The Age, two highly confidential letters signed by Mr Walsh, the contents of which have never been published, which outline the power and autonomy he gave the Office of Living Victoria before it ran out of control. The letters cast strong doubt over Mr Walsh’s recent attempts to distance himself from the OLV’s problems by declaring it was up to his departmental secretary to ensure it operated in accordance with the state’s purchasing rules. An Ombudsman’s inquiry last month found the OLV had awarded millions of dollars in contracts — including to former National Party advisers and consultants — with no regard for the government’s procurement rules, and to be rife with undisclosed perceived conflicts of interest. In the lead up to the release of the Ombudsman’s report, the OLV’s top two executives - handpicked by Mr Walsh to develop the Coalition’s water policy - resigned. The Agency’s stand-alone status has been abolished and it is now under departmental control.

**Grants rise**

Thousands of Victorians struggling to afford their water bills have taken advantage of relief grants to tide them over. The Victorian government utility relief grant helps those in temporary financial crisis with water, gas or electricity costs. According to the Herald Sun, the amount is capped at $500 for up to six months’ use.

**Vale**

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Huxtable, 93. 2/9th Field Regiment.
Maggie Iaquinto, 69.
Dr Chris Mardon, 72. Scientist, conservationist.
Spencer Mack, Lt Com Jesse Mackenzie, 92.
William Marr, 76. Markus Matuschka, 92.
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