

# EastLink - THINK BIG

The scale is enormous and the pace of construction is phenomenal. The biggest road project in Australia is a construction juggernaut unrivalled in Victoria's history.

The EastLink project is the centrepiece of the State Government's infrastructure agenda and its construction is the culmination of more than 40 years of planning.

The major road project existed under various guises in planning schemes and street directories dating back to the early 1960s, but the \$2.5 billion project finally became a reality in October 2004 when the Victorian Government announced ConnectEast as the winner of the highly competitive bidding process.

Since then, ConnectEast and its design and construct partner, Thiess John Holland, have set a cracking pace with the rate of construction – much to the amazement of residents and businesses along the route.

Since the start of major works in February this year:

- more than 30 km of the 45 km of works has been opened up to construction
- more than one million cubic metres of bulk earthworks were completed
- tunnelling has started at the four tunnel faces
- a major precast concrete facility was set up and has started operations in Morwell

- the first two bridges of a total of 86 bridges are complete, part of the largest bridge-building program in Victoria's history
- work is under way on the EastLink-Monash interchange, which will be Victoria's biggest and busiest freeway interchange carrying about 250,000 cars each day
- more than 1,600 people have been employed on the project.

Progress on this phenomenal scale does not come cheaply. Spending has already reached more than \$50 million each month and this will peak at almost \$100 million each month. This is the most rigorous construction effort Victoria has ever seen on a single infrastructure project.

Much of the early effort focused on the start of tunnelling operations in Ringwood and Donvale. Four new road headers, each costing \$4.1 million, are boring through tough rock under the Mullum Mullum Valley. The longest tunnel is already more than 60 metres long and will stretch for 1.6 km underneath the valley when it is completed.

The construction of bridges is equally important. With 17 major interchanges and 86 bridges to build in less than four years, Thiess John Holland has called on the help of a big gun – the largest mobile crane operating

in Victoria. The new 500-tonne mobile crane has been dubbed Snow White and now features large in the landscape of commuters.

It has already completed two early bridges in Dandenong, but Snow White's real value will be seen when serious work begins on EastLink's three biggest interchanges at Ringwood, Monash and the Princes Highway.

The \$100 million Monash interchange is a big project in its own right. The interchange will see EastLink built under the Monash Freeway and will involve the construction of nine new bridges and the widening of six existing bridges. And all this has to be done without restricting traffic capacity for the 100,000 vehicles that use the Monash Freeway each day.

These massive works will be replicated on a slightly smaller scale at the Ringwood interchange, where EastLink passes under the Maroondah Highway and connects with the Ringwood Bypass. At the Princes Highway interchange, EastLink will pass over the Princes Highway and under Heatherton Road.

Like everything else on EastLink, the construction task ahead is massive. But the vision of a major north-south route linking the million residents of the eastern and south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne is getting closer to reality every day.

Left: works at Boronia Road, looking south towards Burwood and Mountain Highways. Bottom right: Deep Creek tunnel.

## EastLink - fast facts

- \$2.5 billion construction cost
- 45 km of new roadway
- 6 km of bypass roads at Dandenong and Ringwood
- Twin, three-lane 1.6 km tunnels under Mullum Mullum Creek
- 7 million cubic metres of earthworks
- 86 bridges
- Jobs for 6,500 people during the construction of this project.

