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To: Port Phillip Council

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Submission on the Draft Acland Street Streetscape Framework Masterplan

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The City of Port Phillip Council has released for public consultation a Draft Acland Street Streetscape Framework Masterplan. Submissions are due by 15 November 2015.

The aim of the Masterplan is to design public realm improvements in Acland Street that complement the Public Transport Victoria (PTV) works and provide a welcoming space for traders, tourists and residents alike. PTV is proposing to upgrade the Route 96 Acland Street tram terminus to accommodate new low floor E Class Trams, improve tram efficiency and reliability, and ensure compliance with the Federal Disability Discrimination Act 1992 that requires all public transport be accessible by 2022.

This submission supports the Draft Acland Street Streetscape Framework Masterplan.

The Acland Street traders have raised concerns about the proposed works in Acland Street. But I believe that the overwhelming evidence of pedestrianization in international case studies is positive. I believe that this will also be true in Acland Street.

An example of the international experience is the European Commission's paper 'Reclaiming city streets for people Chaos or quality of life' (http://ec.europa.eu/environment/pubs/pdf/streets_people.pdf). This is a useful guide to the Acland St proposals. The paper analysed 8 European cities where planners took congested road space away from private cars. In the majority of the case studies, there was opposition on two main counts: firstly that traffic conditions would be made worse and secondly that retail trade would suffer (the same concerns that we are seeing in Acland St). In each case study, after an initial settling-in period, the predicted traffic chaos did not materialise. The paper found that it was more difficult to judge the impacts on retailers; however in the majority of cases, trade actually improved.

It is not the Council who will decide whether there will be a new 96 terminus; that is a decision for the State government (for convenience lumping together

the Minister, PTV and Yarra Trams). The State government has decided that there will be a significant upgrading of the 96 service as part of its overall public transport strategy for our growing metropolis. This has been the position of both the Labor government and the previous Liberal government.

This means that for the State government it is not an option for them to 'do nothing' in Acland St. The current set-up in Acland St does not allow for a significant increase in the number of trams per hour. Therefore the State government will require a new double terminus somewhere.

The State government has also consistently said that the traders' preferred option of a Luna Park terminus is not feasible. If in fact it is possible to have a Luna Park terminus then I would agree that there should be a full debate on the respective merits of the Luna Park and Barkly St options. But my working assumption is that the State government will insist that the only feasible option it will consider is a terminus at or near Barkly Street.

It is deplorable that the State government has not yet released its technical analysis of a possible Luna Park terminus. This is a factual matter concerning the need to allow the 16 tram to pass through without interruption, the length of the 96 terminus, the length of track needed for a cross-over, the turning circles of the 96 trams into Acland St, the turning circles for vehicle traffic around the interchange etc. The community cannot be expected simply to accept PTV's assertions that a Luna Park terminus is not feasible. PTV must release its technical analysis so that Council and traders' independent experts can assess it. We need the facts.

The Council's role is to secure best possible outcome for traders and residents wherever the State government decides to locate the new terminus. The State government's original plans in 2013 would have been a disaster for Acland St and the top of Fitzroy St (similar to the disaster PTV earlier perpetrated on us in the bottom half of Fitzroy St). Those plans only took into account the interests of the PTV, not the interests of traders and residents.

In 2013 PTV was happy to have big ugly concrete platforms, removal of the palm trees, bollards along the street to create a tram-only pathway and even a toilet block for the tram drivers in the middle of the terminus in Acland Street. unChain criticized this plan in its submission in August 2013 which is on its website (www.unchain.org.au).

But since 2013 Council (Councillor Thomann in particular) and the community have worked hard to radically improve PTV's plans for any Barkly St terminus. This began with the Community Reference Groups that the Council set up in 2013 and has finished with the Draft Acland Street Streetscape Framework Plan that the Council has now released for consultation.

The draft Streetscape Plan is demonstrably superior for traders and residents to the PTV's 2013 proposals. We have had many wins. PTV has agreed to share the street with car traffic so that there is now no question of the palm trees being

removed. There will be a European-style plaza at Barkly St. There is a 'no-clutter' approach to street design. There will not be the ugly concrete platforms that have been used in other 'super-stops'. There are no metal fences, shelters or a toilet that have resulted in other 'super-stops' ruining their streets. The terminus in Acland Street will flow seamlessly into the plaza at the south end and the widened footpaths at the north end. This will also allow a significant increase in footpath trading. However some issues remain. I believe that Shakespeare Gve should be two-way to allow better access to the Luna Park and Safeway car parks. There should also be a comprehensive review of traffic management in the surrounding streets and the provision and cost of car parking in the wider precinct.

What is the future for Acland St? Many residents think that the street is in decline. All suburban shopping strips are under pressure from the rise of on-line shopping, competition from shopping malls, and changed consumer preferences. But Acland St has additional issues such as the loss of its monopoly on Sunday trading, the high rental expectations of its landlords and the passing of the generation of post-war European migrants who gave the street its distinctive European flair.

Traders who previously serviced St Kilda residents have fled the street. In recent memory we have lost 'resident-focused' businesses like the Tandi electronics store, the art supply store, the florist, 'different' restaurants like Sherazade, the newsagency etc. Further back in history we lost the fresh food market where Coles now is. And it could easily get much worse. We almost lost the Readings bookstore recently but it was saved, in part thanks to Councillor Thomann. The result of these changes has been that we are left with just a couple of very ordinary supermarkets in Acland St and little shopping for local residents.

I believe that there are valid concerns about the loss of car parking and the awkward traffic flows. It will be necessary to measure and monitor the 'before' and 'after' situation rigorously, including traffic flows and retail sales statistics. It will also be necessary to take a step-by-step approach to ensure we make best use of the plaza and the widened footpaths.

But overall I am optimistic that the European style plaza and the expanded footpath trading will help revitalize the street. The 1285 sq m. plaza will allow all sorts of entertainment and programmed activities – a mini Fed Square. I know that this is not a 'silver bullet' that will solve all the problems. We will have to explore additional measures such as Council's Vibrant Villages program, measures to allow more Council control over the shopping mix and a possible multi level car park in Council's land in Belford St which could include Council-controlled shops at the street level to allow Council to influence the shopping mix of the street. The best single improvement would be for the Council to be successful in its attempt to get the State government to build the new NGV gallery for its modern art collection at the St Kilda Triangle. This would be a complete game-changer for both Acland and Fitzroy Streets.

Finally we should not forget the benefits for tourists, residents and traders of the significantly increased service on the 96 route. There will be a European-style tram service where the trams are so frequent that travelers do not have to bother looking up a timetable.

In conclusion, I support the Draft Acland Street Streetscape Framework Plan. However I also submit that

- The State government must be asked to release its technical analysis of the alternative of a Luna Park terminus
- Shakespeare Gve must remain a two-way street to allow easy access to the Luna Park and Safeway carparks
- Council must explore additional measures to reverse the decline of Acland Street as a shopping precinct for residents.