

MONBULK COLUMN

No one enjoys being stuck at a level crossing waiting for a train to pass. We all know the feeling – you are on time to wherever you are headed when you approach a crossing and hear the dreaded ding, ding, ding signalling that a train is on its way. It's a sound that means you aren't going anywhere soon.

But it doesn't have to be this way. We can engineer our crossings in a way so that people aren't held up when a train approaches. That is why the Andrews Labor Government is removing 50 dangerous and congested level crossings across Melbourne over the next eight years. It's a big task but one that we believe needs to happen.

Waiting for a train to pass at a level crossing is incredibly frustrating. It is time that can't be spent travelling to work, returning home or just getting around the neighbourhood. This eats into the city's productivity - no one benefits from sitting still at a crossing.

But removing level crossings is not just about convenience, it's also about safety. If we remove level crossings we remove the prospect of accidents occurring. This is a particularly big problem at highly congested crossings, so removing them is a high priority.

You will be glad to know that the Level Crossing Removal Authority is removing several crossings that will make a real difference for people in the outer east. Work has already begun on removing four level crossings along the Belgrave and Lilydale lines, which will see the rail go underground at Mountain Highway and Scoresby Road in Bayswater, Blackburn Road in Blackburn and Heatherdale Road in Mitcham. And with the Lilydale and Mooroolbark crossings now commencing early planning stage.

The work being performed in Bayswater is particularly impressive. Not only is the rail line being lowered but a completely new station is being built with a modern transport interchange, reconstructed car park and a walking and cycling path. People with disabilities will be able to access the new platform via a lift.

Now unfortunately getting the job done on these level crossings can't happen overnight and it will involve some delays. So here is what you need to know.

Scoresby Road is currently closed at the level crossing and will be until late November. Buses will replace trains between Ringwood and Belgrave until 12 December and Station Street will be closed to traffic between Mountain Highway and Pine Road until 12 December. From 20 November to late December Mountain Highway will be closed at the level crossing.

Buses will also replace trains between Box Hill and Belgrave/Lilydale from 25 and 27 November. From 27 December to 29 January 2017 the same thing will happen between Blackburn/Box Hill and Ringwood.

There will be detours in place but it's important to factor all this before you travel. It's also worth bearing in mind that works will affect many of the car parks at the stations. If you are looking for more information just go to www.levelcrossings.vic.gov.au.

It may seem like a lot of disruption but let's remember the scale of what we are doing here. Building the new Bayswater station and road bridges alone will involve digging up 63,000 cubic metres of dirt. To get an idea of how much soil that is picture 25 Olympic-sized swimming pools!

So let's all be patient and look forward to many hazardous and time-sapping level crossings being a thing of the past. It will involve a lot of work and a bit of flexibility on the part of commuters. But remember, the end result is that we will be where we need to be rather than being stuck in traffic.