

TUNNEL Pressure is building on the government to announce its next big project

The east-west vision for a city on the move



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consortiums," the source said.

Another source said consideration was being given to "re-prioritising" the project so that a section from the Eastern Freeway to CityLink would be built before extending the project to the Western Ring Road, reversing the process recommended by Infrastructure Australia chairman Sir Rod Eddington.

Exit points leading to the city are also being considered to make the road more attractive for tolling purposes.

"This would make a joke of what Eddington originally proposed because he was talking about a north city bypass," the second source said. "This proposal is about eastern access into the city. Infrastructure Australia would no more put money into this than fly to the moon."

Pressure is building on the government to announce its next big road project, with Peninsula Link and the Western Ring Road upgrade to be completed in the next two years, bringing around 1000 road construction jobs to an end.

The Eastern Freeway extension is believed to be the road project most attractive to private-sector investment because of its ability to generate high toll revenue, particularly with access ramps to the city.

The government's submission to Infrastructure Australia made clear that the sections of the proposed east-west link proposal that were most amenable to a partnership with the private sector, including private finance, would be developed first.

Michael Deegan from Infrastructure Australia said the agency would be providing further advice to the state government in late April.

Business, unions and road groups are lobbying hard for the new freeway.

The RACV's Brian Negus said the finance sector was most interested in the Eastern Freeway to CityLink section of the east-west link and the RACV ranked this connection

its top transport priority for Melbourne.

Melbourne City Council's position has changed from outright opposition under the previous council to having no "formal view" on the proposed inner-city freeway.

Australian Workers Union Victorian secretary Cesar Melhem told *The Saturday Age* the east-west link "has to happen".

But Greens MP Adam Bandt said Melburnians "do not want a tollway cutting through their communities".

"Whether it is a tunnel or above ground, the east-west link will make Melbourne less liveable and create a rat's nest of off-ramps in the inner city," Mr Bandt said. If the federal government "wants to fund this madness they are going to have come through me".

RMIT University public transport expert Paul Mees said the project would not begin in the near future because no one

It is fantastically expensive and nobody has that kind of money.

PAUL MEES, transport expert

had the money to fund it.

"What we need is a very long collective cold shower... it is fantastically expensive and nobody has that kind of money," he said.

But industry experts said there were several options for governments, even in the tough economic climate, to fund new infrastructure, including asset sales, shared public-private funding of the project and even tolling existing roads to contribute to the cost of the link and help funnel motorists onto the new freeway.

Alan Rosengarten, an infrastructure expert with law firm Freehills, said: "We think it is possible to attract private-sector investment into infrastructure projects, including roads. While there have been problems with previous models that have been used in the road sector, there are other options that have been proven to work both in Australia and internationally."

