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'No way' to freeway link

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LOCAL action groups are uniting to oppose State Government plans to build a freeway link through Banyule.

A 15-member steering committee will meet for the first time this month to develop a strategy for their campaign against the North East Link, revealed in last month's Victorian Transport Plan.

Spearheading the fight is the

Friends of Banyule group, formed six months ago by Rosanna and Heidelberg residents Marion Ware and Sally Harris.

It has about 60 members, while more than 1000 people have signed the group's "no freeway" petition.

Also on the steering committee are Warringal Conservation Society president John D'Aloia and barrister and Eaglemont resident Brian Walters, who heads the Protectors of Public Lands, a coalition of 80 community groups.

The groups say improving transport and the rail freight network would be cheaper and cleaner ways to ease Melbourne's transport woes than building a freeway through public land.

Ms Ware said the planned 9km tunnel - to go underground south of Lower Plenty Rd and connect to the Eastern Freeway near Bulleen Rd - would have "devastating effects on our communities".

She pointed to EastLink's 1.6km tunnel beneath Mullum-Mullum

Creek near Mitcham - and the 12-storey ventilation stacks that came with it.

"Along Bulleen Rd, that's where all the private schools have their sporting grounds," she said. "How would parents feel if kids exercised along an elevated freeway or in the vicinity of the vent stacks with all the pollution coming out?"

The "missing link" joining the Eastern Freeway to the Metropolitan Ring Rd at Greensborough is not planned be built until 2017.

Ms Ware said the groups were in their battle "for the long haul".

State Government spokeswoman Fiona Macrea did not respond to a *Heidelberg Leader* inquiry about whether ministers would listen to residents' concerns, issuing only a statement outlining the route: "The North East Link will provide a quicker and easier route to the west for people living in areas like Lower Plenty, Viewbank and Templestowe who currently travel south to use the Eastern Freeway."