



# Freeways no magic time-saving bullet: study

## Travel no faster, despite new roads

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BILLIONS of dollars spent building freeways across Melbourne since 1995 have failed to deliver the spectacular time savings promised to justify their construction, a study to be published today shows.

Transport analyst John Odgers, from RMIT's school of management — in the first analysis of its kind for Melbourne — has reviewed the promises made by consulting groups whose work was used to successfully argue for several big freeways built in Melbourne since the 1990s.

The roads include CityLink, the Deer Park bypass, EastLink and the extension of the Eastern Freeway. The average speed Melburnians travel on freeways today is 78 km/h, the same as it was in 1995.

Chief among the rationale for building each major new road, the study shows, was the travel time savings the roads were promised to create. The road builders claimed the savings would bring huge economic gains to Melbourne, as businesses and individuals moved about the city more efficiently.

But Mr Odgers' study shows this has not happened — something disputed by those who

worked on the road projects.

One prominent transport consultant yesterday dismissed Mr Odgers' study as "pretty silly".

Mr Odgers has compared the forecast of travel time savings for the Melbourne urban road network made before CityLink was approved, with actual travel times reported each year since 1994 by VicRoads.

They show that Melburnians are spending hundreds of thousands more hours on freeways — leading to zero gains in speeds or travel times, as roads fill up as soon as they are built.

Speeds on Melbourne's roads have dropped since 1995, from an average 44 km/h to 40 km/h. Average speeds in Melbourne in the morning and evening peaks are the lowest they have been since 1994.

In the morning peak, freeway speeds have fallen from 67.4 km/h to 58.8 km/h, and during the evening peak from 80.2 km/h to 73.5 km/h.

However, if monitoring the entire day, Melbourne's freeway speeds have remained virtually static — except for a brief respite in 2000 shortly after CityLink opened.

Many new roads, such as the \$750 million Frankston bypass

and the Government's proposed \$5 billion WestLink freeway tunnel under Footscray, are being justified using similar predictions of travel time savings.

"Perhaps the German word *schlimmbesserung* — meaning an improvement that makes things worse — is an apt descriptor for the massive program of new road construction that has marked Melbourne's 'solution' to its transport challenges over the last several decades," Mr Odgers' report concludes.

But Dr John Cox, one of the main authors of the cost-benefit analysis used to justify construction of CityLink in the late 1990s, said the study did not stack up.

"Imagine if CityLink was stopped — you would get a lot of travel time costs," he said.

"To say that CityLink doesn't cause travel time savings is pretty silly really."

Melbourne University's transport research centre will publish the Odgers study on its website today.

Professor Nicholas Low, the centre's director, said the report threw fresh doubt on the methods of assessing the time savings that would be made by building new roads.

