



25 NOV, 2022

Voters say SRL is not worth it

Herald Sun, Melbourne



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\$125bn 'too much' to stay in loop

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EIGHTY per cent of voters in the area set to benefit most from Daniel Andrews' Suburban Rail Loop say they do not believe it is worth the reported \$125bn for the first two stages, or they are unsure about it.

Polling commissioned by the Herald Sun reveals that only 20 per cent of people who live in Melbourne's southeast

where the first section will be built from Cheltenham to Box Hill – think the price tag is justified.

The poll found 46 per cent said it wasn't worth it, while 34 per cent said they were unsure.

The federal Parliamentary Budget Office will now examine how much the project could cost taxpayers after Mr Andrews was this week forced to admit he didn't know what the total would be.

Deakin MP Michael Sukkar

and opposition infrastructure spokeswoman Bridget McKenzie have requested the federal costing, in light of Anthony Albanese promising \$2.2bn of federal funding despite it not being assessed by national advisory body Infrastructure Australia.

The Herald Sun revealed earlier this year that the Victorian PBO estimated the first two stages would balloon out to \$125bn.

Mr Andrews has questioned the accuracy of that figure but refused to give an updated costing to the \$50bn estimation the state government attached to the project in 2018.

"I don't take my instructions from Infrastructure Australia, a national body," Mr Andrews said on Thursday.

"I take them from the Victorian community."

Senator McKenzie said: "My concern now is the risk Labor has signed itself and

future federal governments up to."

Polling by independent agency RedBridge found just 14 per cent of statewide voters ranked the Suburban Rail Loop as Victoria's highest infrastructure priority.

One third chose the Melbourne Airport Rail link as the most important.

The poll found voters across all regions were virtually split on the anticipated \$125bn cost, with 38.4 per cent saying the project was not worth that much, while 35.1 per cent were comfortable with that price.

RedBridge senior consultant Tony Barry said voters had given the airport rail a big tick but were lukewarm on the Suburban Rail Loop.

"At a cost of \$125bn for the first two stages they mostly see it as dud value," he said.

"Of political concern for Labor is that in the southeast-

ern suburbs, twice as

many people think it's bad value as those who think it's good value.

"Compounding this is that the poll also shows a clear majority of voters want to delay the project and redirect the balance into health.

"At its core, politics is about choices, and Labor has got the politics wrong on this one."

Opposition Leader Matthew Guy has pledged to shelve the project if elected and divert all available state funds into the health system. It is estimated the move could inject up to \$9bn into health.

Transport and cities program director at the Grattan Institute Marion Terrill said: "The SRL was popular when it was announced four years ago but it's less clear now because the state has \$100bn of debt, rising to \$165bn.



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“There’s been so much construction and we know there’s capacity constraints, it’s become very expensive to build.”

Ms Terrill said NSW had mothballed three mega projects in the past six months because the market was so overheated.

“That’s been a very interesting and a very mature response,” she said.

“It’s just not a great time to press ahead, as industry prefers more of a steady pipeline.”

Ms Terrill said the main reason for new infrastructure was to keep up with population growth. But governments could do a lot to get more out of what had already been built.

“There is a big maintenance backlog,” she said.

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