

Joint Media Release



Australian Government

Hon Catherine King MP
Minister for Infrastructure,
Transport, Regional Development



Hon Jacinta Allan MP
Premier of Victoria

Tuesday, 30 April 2024

PREPARATIONS FOR TUNNELING RAMP UP AT NORTH EAST LINK

The Albanese and Allan Labor Governments' North East Link Project is in the final stages of assembling two of the biggest tunnel boring machines (TBM) in the southern hemisphere, before they launch in the coming months.

The final piece of the TBM – a 137-tonne screw conveyor – has arrived at the Watsonia site to help dig the 6.5 kilometre road tunnels that will help take 15,000 trucks off local roads.

A 550-tonne gantry crane has started lowering each TBM piece into the launch box and when assembled, each 4000-tonne tunnel boring machine will stretch 90 metres long and 15.6 metres high.

Once up and running, the TBMs will dig up to 15 metres per day as they travel from Watsonia to Bulleen – passing deep underneath traffic instead of through local suburbs.

More than 100 tunnel workers are currently undergoing intensive training to work up to 45 metres below ground level, with a hyperbaric facility currently being installed on site so workers can prepare to work under a compressed air environment.

Across Melbourne's north-east, a huge amount of work is underway to get ready for tunnelling – a covered conveyor belt and shed are in place to safely load dirt and rock onto trucks, more than a quarter of the concrete tunnel segments have been built in Benalla, and the TBM retrieval box is taking shape in Bulleen.

Worksites are being set up along the Eastern Freeway and M80 Ring Road, with large areas of open space needed to upgrade the freeways to connect with the North East Link tunnels – cutting travel times by up to 35 minutes.

Speed restrictions and barriers have already been rolled out along the Eastern Freeway between Burke and Bulleen roads and these will extend to Tram Road in the coming months.

More than 5,000 workers are already working across North East Link, the Eastern Freeway Upgrade and M80 Ring Road completion – with 12,000 jobs to be created over the life of the projects before completion in 2028.

Quotes attributable to Premier Jacinta Allan

"We're not wasting a minute delivering this vital project that will get 15,000 trucks off local roads and slash travel times by 35 minutes."

"Whether it's level crossing removals, building the Metro Tunnel or North East Link – we're delivering the transport connections a growing Victoria needs."

Quotes attributable to Federal Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government Minister Catherine King

"From the ports in Melbourne to the suburbs in the north east, the final pieces of these massive machines are on site and ready for assembly ahead of tunnelling this year."

Media contact: Zoe McLaughlin 0474 593 035 | zoe.mclaughlin@minstaff.vic.gov.au

“Not only is this incredible infrastructure project employing thousands during construction, it will leave a lasting legacy for road users and for Victoria well into the future.”

Quote attributable to Victorian Minister for Transport Infrastructure Danny Pearson

“Once launched, these TBMs will dig up to 15 metres per day from Watsonia to Bulleen, building the tunnels that will see traffic passing under instead of through local suburbs.”

Quote attributable to Federal Member for Jagajaga Kate Thwaites

“The North East Link will provide Melbourne with a complete orbital road connection for the first time, improving access and reducing travel times for both freight and commuter traffic.”

Quote attributable to Victorian Member for Bundoora Colin Brooks

“We’re getting on with delivering this transformative project that will not only cut travel times but take 15,000 trucks off our local roads.”