

• CRAIGIEBURN

# • BYPASS •

A SEMIOTIC ENTRY INTO MELBOURNE  
BY TAYLOR CULLITY LETHLEAN,  
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In what way is the urban landscape of Melbourne different from that of Sydney? Without buying into the humorous rivalry that has shaped the perceptions of Sydney-siders and Melburnians alike, there is one key difference between the two. As artist Robert Owen has described it, "Melbourne is a semiotic landscape". I would tend to agree with him. The urban landscape of Melbourne does not have the grand symbolic vocabulary of Sydney. When you think of Sydney, more often than not the Opera House or Harbour Bridge will spring to mind. However, when thinking about Melbourne you may be more tempted to think of the colours, textures and shapes that construct a Melbourne place. It is this urban texture that has shaped the new Craigieburn Bypass.

Situated at the edge of the city, the bypass connects the Hume Freeway with the Metropolitan Ring Road. The first section opened to traffic on 21 December 2004. The aim of the \$306 million Federal Government-funded project is to ease traffic congestion on the Hume Highway for the 75,000 vehicles that travel along this stretch of road each day, reducing peak-hour driving time between Craigieburn and the Metropolitan Ring Road by approximately 30 minutes, and improving road safety as the irritation caused by continually stopping and starting at twelve sets of traffic lights disappears.

The project's urban design is the result of the collaborative efforts of Melbourne landscape architects Taylor Cullity Lethlean, Sydney architects Tonkin Zulaikha Greer and artist Robert Owen. Their client, VicRoads was sensitive to the delicate ecological equilibrium of the natural grasslands in the area. They ensured, from early on, that all the contractors used environmentally friendly practices and management strategies so as to avoid any negative effects on the surrounding environment. Their project partners used an "ecosophical" approach. This strategy was driven by three guiding principles – sensitivity to the social environment, sensitivity to cultural history and sensitivity to the natural environment.

The urban design team worked closely with locals and drew inspiration for the design of their noise wall from the visual cultures of the largely immigrant community. The Aboriginal community was also regularly consulted in an effort to help salvage and preserve any artefacts that were discovered during the construction phase. This gesture respectfully acknowledged the Wurundjeri people who once lived in the area. Lastly, taking into consideration the equilibrium of the wetlands that are home to the Southern Bell Frog and the striped legless lizard, large conduits were strategically placed near the

freeway to allow the frogs to cross safely. After consulting with Environment Australia and the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, run off water treatments were used to protect the water streams of Merri Creek from contamination.

The scheme could be seen to draw on the colourful vocabulary of Denton Corker Marshall's CityLink Freeway urban design, which drivers encounter as they approach the city. The palette subtly feeds off the signature reds and yellows of DCM's design. This colour scheme appears at night, along one section of the sound barrier, in the form of lighting shifts and modulations. Scrambled computer text (the Latin names of plant species native to the area) was sandblasted onto the acrylic noise wall, producing a sense of repetition. Visually, this creates an internal system of differentiation. It is inspired by the lace curtains hanging in many of the windows of the homes in the surrounding suburbs of Lalor and Campbellfield and also makes reference to a Lucio Fontana painting held by the National Gallery of Victoria. In this way, semiotic layers are woven through the surfaces of the sound barrier, providing a sense of texture and movement while concomitantly forming connections across space and time. At night, the noise wall is transformed into a large flickering curtain illuminated by LED lights that are programmed to respond to traffic density. The colourful light patterns amplify as the volume of traffic increases.

The blue blades robustly lining the edges of the freeway open up gradually like an unfolding venetian blind as drivers travel down the road towards the city. The rusty red footbridge stretches alongside the road and twists over and across the freeway, dramatically framing the view of Melbourne's skyline. The effect is of a snake peeling its skin. The ochre colour of this element recalls the volcanic activity that once defined the nearby region of Mount Ridley.

The Craigieburn Bypass urban design encourages users to "read" it, like they might "read" the colour, form and materiality of the city of Melbourne. It produces some intelligent connections to the landscape, embraces the particular cultural and ecological characteristics of the immediate surroundings, and brings to life the broader cultural and social textures of the city. The most striking feature of this design, however, is the way in which memory is overlapped with the specificity of place, all the while patterning a new place within what already exists. The bypass, therefore, does not act as a dividing line; it is neither an arbitrary addition nor a defined space. Rather, it draws on, echoes, and ultimately reflects the textual qualities of the city.

× **design statement**

The Australian Federal Government and VicRoads, as part of a commitment to delivering a new freeway connection to northern Melbourne, undertook a competition for the design of a gateway element and noise attenuation features. Taylor Cullity Lethlean, Tonkin Zulaikha Greer and Robert Owen won this competition in 2003.

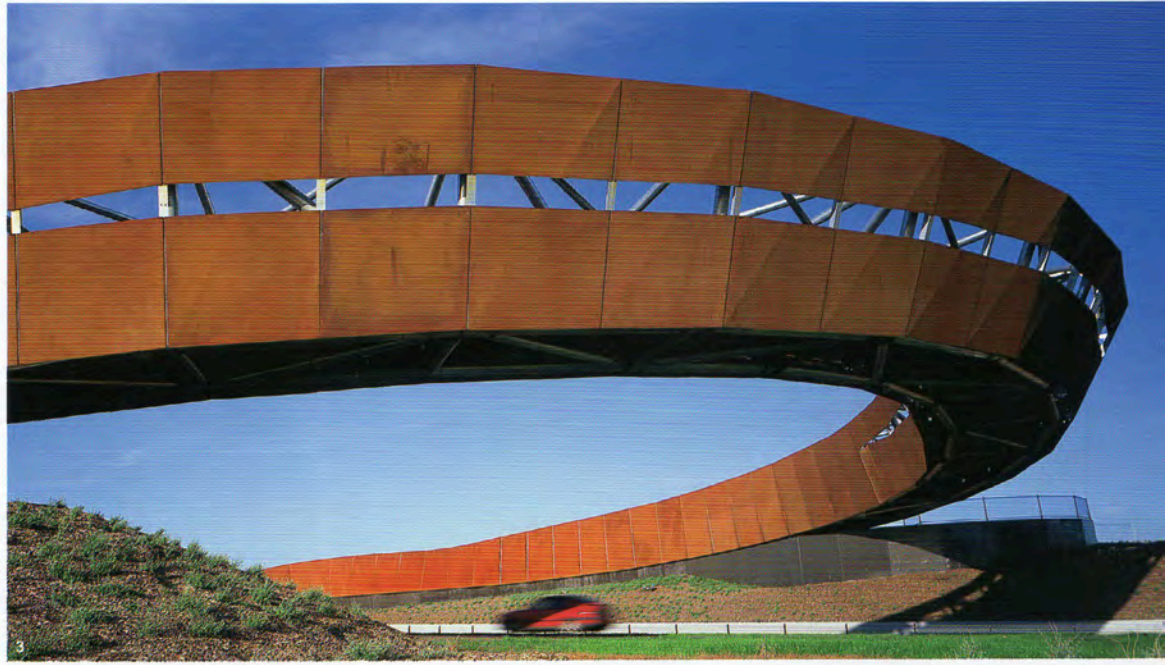
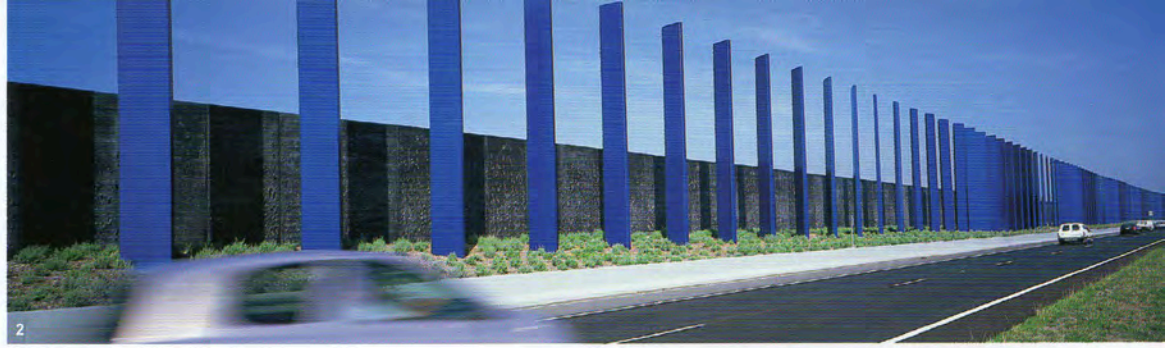
The winning design, comprised of walls, bridges and landscape, was informed by a poetic reading of the site and a freeway environment largely experienced at speed. In particular the design explores how otherwise static objects begin to exhibit dynamism or are activated by the travelling motorist.

Two wall types were developed, each distinctive and responding to their adjacent condition. The "Curtain Wall", a long, sinuous steel ribbon, is fluid in its form, dynamic and experiential. Used robustly, it transforms along its length from a lightweight screen to sculpted landform and ultimately a pedestrian bridge that frames the view to the city of Melbourne.

The "Scrim Wall", by contrast, is located alongside a residential interface and is composed of patterned acrylic panels and repeated louvres. The material provides a translucency, while the louvres create a sequence of micro-climates to the linear park behind the wall. Each louvre is rotated slightly to create a constantly changing driving experience. At night the Scrim Wall is illuminated, using the intensity of the traffic via electrical impulses, to become an ephemeral lighting system.

Taylor Cullity Lethlean, Tonkin Zulaikha Greer and Robert Owen

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Abi Group
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Eco Dynamic



1 / THE URBAN DESIGN INCLUDES WALLS, BRIDGES AND LANDSCAPE. AT NIGHT THE NOISE WALL IS TRANSFORMED USING LED LIGHTS.

2 / THE RESOLUTE BLUE BLADES LINING THE EDGE OF THE FREEWAY UNFOLD LIKE VENETIAN BLIND.

3-4 / THE RUSTY RED PEDESTRIAN FOOTBRIDGE UNFOLDS ACROSS THE FREEWAY FRAMING THE VIEW TO THE CITY OF MELBOURNE.