

# It's Werribee but not as you know it – high-tech city for 100,000 proposed

The Age, Clay Lucas

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In one aspect it would be like nothing Melbourne has seen before: a shining city of 100,000 people, housed in soaring 50-level skyscrapers, employed in high-tech industries, and learning from the world's top universities.

But in another aspect – a lack of public transport to get there – it would be a quintessential major Melbourne residential project.



An imagined aerial view of the precinct.

Welcome to Australian Education City, a plan for Melbourne's west that has emerged as one of the bidders for 775 hectares of paddocks and old research laboratories outside Werribee that the Andrews government is selling.

The consortium behind the plan, Investors Direct, is one of five bidders to have lodged expressions of interest in the project. The Metropolitan Planning Authority is expected to announce the winning bidder next month.



Fountains and boulevards are part of the plans.

Investors Direct is remaining tight-lipped about plans for the 1.5 million-square-metre city it wants to build on the site.

And its highly credentialled advisory team, which includes former Victorian premier John Brumby and a candidate for the next state architect, Shelley Penn, is keeping quiet too. Ms Penn did not return calls, while Mr Brumby said while he could not talk due to the plan being part of a tender process, he had a long-standing commitment to research and development and to new opportunities in the west.

The planned city is, however, detailed in a breathless website that is light on detail but heavy in promises.

It would be 25 kilometres from the CBD, and adjacent to the Werribee rail line – although despite the promise to ensure the new city was "100 per cent public transport", there is no plan for a railway station for it.



An imagined aerial view of the precinct.

Road infrastructure is significantly more advanced: construction is under way on the \$71 million Sneydes Road interchange, which has blocked off lanes on the freeway to Geelong during construction.

While cars might be funnelled into the site by the thousands via the new freeway exchange, the project's backers say they would be little noticed – "by using smart underground tunnels and parking".



An imagined aerial view of the precinct.

The Andrews government is selling the site in a process that has stretched for more than three years.

On Monday, even Metropolitan Planning Authority chief executive Peter Seamer was silent on the project, claiming probity conditions as a reason not to talk about it.



The sale began last June, and the government's own suggestion for the site, while ambitious, was modest in comparison to Australian Education City's.

The sale has been delayed after the Andrews government came to office and allowed bidders longer to submit long-term plans for the area. Mr Seamer conceded it had added time to the process of selling the land.

But the government hopes to see a total of 58,000 new jobs created on the site, and 7000 new homes built.

A spokesman for Melbourne University, originally listed by the consortium as one of its partners but removed after Fairfax Media made queries about the project, confirmed the university had been approached by Australian Education City about its proposal.

He said discussions had taken place, although Melbourne University was not yet a formal partner to the project.

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/its-werribee-but-not-as-you-know-it--hightech-city-for-100000-proposed-20150803-giqi8a.html>