

'Smelly, noisy' trail wins approval

By Liz Minchin

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MELBOURNE'S longest bicycle path could be built by next spring after a tribunal overruled warnings that the cyclists and pedestrians would be at risk from toxic emissions from chemical plants.

The \$12.5 million Federation Trail will follow the route of a disused sewer running from Werribee to Brooklyn. The State Government-funded trail was announced in 1999 as part of the Geelong Road upgrade but has been repeatedly held up by disputes over the route and ongoing maintenance.

In October, chemical companies Peerless Holdings and Smorgons Steel tried to block the 23-kilometre trail in the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, arguing it would bring people too close to their "toxic" plants, posing safety and security risks.

The companies also said the back of their properties were smelly, noisy and unattractive, and not the right location for a major bike path.

But tribunal members Philip Martin and Sylvia Mainwaring dismissed those objections, deciding that the three-metre wide trail can be built with several precautions. Signs will warn people about odour, dust and noise and inform them what to do in an emergency, while proposed barbecue and playground areas have been scrapped.

As well, all off-road points along the path will have to be accessible by emergency vehicles.

The tribunal members even disagreed with the claim that chemical plants were unattractive, noting that the back of Smorgons Steel's plant "might be mistaken for the movie set of *Terminator* or *Mad Max 2* and is quite striking in its own way".

VicRoads has said it is "eager to award the contract" to build the trail as soon as possible, with construction expected to take about nine months.

Bicycle Victoria general manager Harry Barber said he was delighted by the decision.