

WCC rate rise and a \$450,000 roundabout makeover



The Kepler St-Koroit St roundabout is in line for a \$450,000 makeover later this year, in addition to new zebra crossings like those now operating in Liebig St.

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

How to save \$700,000 in seven days, instalment #5:

On the same night Warrnambool City councillors decided to explore breaking the rate cap – on December 3 last year – they also agreed to spend \$450,000 to spruce up a single city roundabout.

That's almost half a million dollars to beautify just one roundabout – at the corner of Kepler and Koroit streets – and they did it without a hint of irony.

Not one of the five councillors who supported potentially raising rates above 2.5% (Cr Peter Hulin voted against and Cr David Owen was absent) seemed concerned that they expect ratepayers to choose between paying more for services, or having services cut, while they plunge money into non-essential projects.

Like dressing up a roundabout.



Mayor Tony Herbert was a strong supporter of the upgrade, saying Kepler St was the most important CBD street after Liebig St.
Image: WCC

The council will draw \$450,000 from the city parking fund – putting that fund into deficit – to upgrade the roundabout by the end of this year.

This is the busy roundabout outside the Warrnambool Hotel and Ishka etc, which is no doubt unfriendly to pedestrians in its current state.

But improving pedestrian safety (more about that in a moment) and a \$450,000 makeover are two separate issues here.

Mayor Tony Herbert was particularly enthusiastic about the improvements because, he says, Kepler St is “the next most important” CBD street after Liebig St.

“It doesn’t matter who occupies businesses there, but I believe that is the next street to get the work done,” he told the meeting.

As it happens, Mr Herbert does occupy a business there, with his office smack bang in the middle of Kepler St, in the Wyton’s cafe precinct.



The \$450,000 makeover at the Kepler St intersection will include bluestone pavers on each corner and new lighting in the centre of the roundabout.

Until last year, this intersection wasn't even part of the city renewal plan, but it is now.

Now it will have bluestone paving wrapped around each corner footpath and central lighting poles that allow for banners and decorations. (See the [plan here](#)).

The council calls this "high end aesthetic treatment" and there is no doubt it will be swish compared to boring old bitumen and basic lighting, but is it really necessary in a cost-cutting environment?

It's a bit like fixing the electrical wiring in your house – for safety – and digging into your savings to replace all the light shades at the same time.

Because what started the momentum for this makeover was money from the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) to make the CBD safer for pedestrians.

The TAC will fund almost half of a \$1.67 million upgrade to three CBD intersections, including the Kepler St/Koroit St roundabout.

The council will use that money to replicate those painful zebra crossings that are now in Liebig St and which make drivers give way to pedestrians as they enter *and* exit a roundabout.

(VicRoads, by the way, say this style of zebra crossing can work, but they also create a [greater potential for rear-end accidents](#). But I digress...)



Love 'em or hate 'em, you're getting more of them. The same style zebra crossings in Liebig St will be replicated at the Kepler/Koroit streets intersection and two others around the CBD.

Having secured money to build the crossings, the council decided to go one step further.

It rummaged around behind the couch and found a neat \$450,000 to throw into beautifying the Kepler St/Koroit St roundabout.

Importantly, such a makeover would also create a distraction from the fact the council has run out of money for Stage 3 of the CBD renewal along Koroit St, which is not surprising given the other two stages blew out by more than \$3 million.

So from not being part of the CBD renewal, the Kepler/Koroit intersection now has star billing.

In fact it will probably be all that happens along Koroit St between Kepler and Liebig St for some time.

Even so, can new pavers and lamps really be a priority when the council says it must save \$700,000 a year from its budget?

It's too late to ask that question because the beautification is going ahead.

Your input, via the council's [online consultation that opened last Friday](#), is to decide *what* else you might like to see added to the works and *when* you would prefer the 12-week project to start.

There is no option to say, um, we don't want that style of fender-bender zebra crossing and, by the way, can we also save the \$450,000 for something more important?

There is actually no mention of the \$450,000 cost of the "high end aesthetic treatment".

This figure remained buried inside the council agenda and minutes: until now.

More tomorrow.

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