

Ms. Rachel Westaway's speech:

Good evening, everyone.

Thank you, James, for that introduction, and thank you to Jan and the entire MSYRG committee for inviting me here tonight. I know how much work goes into organising an AGM, and I'm genuinely honoured to be part of it.

I want to start by acknowledging what MSYRG represents. You've been active since the 1960s—that's more than six decades of residents standing up for South Yarra. That's not just impressive, it's essential. Because this is what representative democracy looks like. Not politicians talking at communities, but communities holding politicians accountable. And that's exactly what I'm here for tonight—to listen, to be held accountable, and to tell you what I'm doing to represent your concerns at the State level.

South Yarra is one of Melbourne's most unique communities. You have incredible heritage, diversity, and a strong sense of place. But you also face unique pressures. And your concerns—about transport, about planning, about safety, about basic maintenance—they matter. They matter to me, and they should matter to every level of government.

So tonight, I want to address the issues you've raised. I want to tell you what I'm doing about them.

And I want to be honest with you about what I can deliver, what I'm fighting for, and where the challenges lie.

Let me start with some context about Prahran itself.

Prahran is the smallest electorate in Victoria. The smallest. And the most densely populated electorate. Now, I'm not opposed to density—cities need to grow, and housing is a critical issue. But here's what that means: every planning decision matters more in Prahran. Every transport connection is more critical. Every piece of infrastructure, every park, every school—it all matters more because we don't have the luxury of space that other electorates have.

When politicians in outer suburbs talk about managing density, we're already living it. And that context matters for everything I'm about to discuss.

So, let's talk about transport. Specifically, the Route 8 tram.

Route 8 stopped in April 2017. That's eight years ago. It stopped for the Metro Tunnel construction and the work on Anzac Station. And residents were told—traders were told—it was temporary. Just wait for the construction to finish, and the tram will come back.

Well, here we are in 2025. The Metro Tunnel is complete. Anzac Station is apparently complete—though when it will actually be operational, who knows. The infrastructure is ready—the tracks are there; the overhead wires are there. Everything is in place. And yet Route 8 is still missing.

This isn't just an inconvenience. For residents along Park Street and Domain Road, this is your main connection to the city via St Kilda Road. It's how you get to the schools, the village shops, the Arts Centre. The current Route 58 forces you to change trams at Anzac Station just to get into the main city area. The 605 buses don't deliver the same connection. And for traders on Domain Road, they're missing the foot traffic and vibrancy that the tram brought.

So, what have I done about it?

I've written to the Minister for Transport. And last sitting week—just days ago—I stood up in Parliament and asked a formal Parliamentary Constituency Question. I demanded that the Minister confirm when Route 8 will be reinstated. Under parliamentary rules, the Minister now has 30 days to respond. I'll be sharing the link to that question with all of you, and the moment I have an answer, you'll know about it.

I'm going to keep applying pressure because this community deserves a timeline, not excuses. The infrastructure is ready. There's no good reason for this delay. And I won't stop pushing until we get Route 8 back on its original route.

Now, let me turn to planning and density—because this affects every resident in this room. Labor's Activity Centres policy allows for up to 20-storey towers within 800 metres of train stations.

Let me spell out what that means for Prahran. We have five train stations in our electorate: Prahran, South Yarra, Windsor, Hawksburn, and Toorak. Five stations. Five 800-metre radii. That's massive potential for towers across our community. And remember what I said at the start—we're already highest density of housing in the smallest electorate in Victoria. We're not talking about bringing density to underdeveloped suburbs. We're talking about adding up to 20-storey towers to areas that are already dense.

Here's my concern: Where's the analysis showing our infrastructure can handle more density? Where are the additional schools for the families moving in? Where's the healthcare capacity? Where's the open space? Where's the upgraded public transport?

Because right now, the approach is: density first, infrastructure maybe later. And that's backwards.

The Coalition's approach is clear: infrastructure first, then density. Not the other way around. We need to ensure that when we add housing, we're also adding the schools, the parks, the transport, the services that make communities liveable.

I also want to talk about community voice in planning. C426 has been gazetted, which is important heritage protection. But I know many of you are concerned about broader state planning reforms—the centralisation that risks removing community input from permit processes.

Let me be blunt: I'm opposed to any reforms that strip away community voice. You should have a say in your community's future. That's not anti-development—that's democratic. And when planning decisions come up that affect South Yarra, I'm making sure your concerns are on the record in Parliament.

The Coalition has also committed to ending the Public Acquisition Overlay along the eastern side of Punt Road. If you don't know what that is, it's essentially government land-banking that freezes properties and communities in limbo. It's unfair to property owners, and it stalls communities. We are committed to removing that overlay and give certainty to those who live and own properties in that area.

Let me shift to crime and safety—because I know this is weighing on residents.

The issue of hooning and high-speed vehicles on Domain Road, Park Street, and Anderson Street has come through loud and clear. Drivers of high-performance cars visiting the restaurants, then showing off in the surrounding streets. Pedestrians feeling vulnerable. The noise at night—it's not just annoying, it's frightening.

Now, the Police Commissioner has announced they're diverting police resources to the frontline for security and safety. My question—and your question—is this: Will any of those resources be directed to traffic enforcement and preventative policing in our area?

Because we don't just need reactive policing. We need police who are visible, who are preventing these incidents, who are taking community concerns about hooning seriously.

I'm advocating for exactly that. I want those new frontline resources to include dedicated attention to South Yarra. And I want to work with you to document these incidents—times, locations, patterns—because that data helps police allocate resources effectively.

Here's what I'll commit to: I'll arrange a meeting between MSYRG and local police so you can raise these specific concerns directly. And I'll continue pushing for the resources and responsiveness this community deserves.

Now, let me address South Yarra Square, because I know this is a terrible situation for the residents affected.

The building on the corner of Commercial Road and Punt Road has serious defects. There are complex questions about who's responsible for repairs—the state government, the City of Melbourne as the issuer of the occupancy certificate or both. It's messy, it's frustrating, and residents are caught in the middle.

Here's what I've done so far: I've worked with the owners corp and residents to raise this issue in Parliament. I've met with the Lord Mayor. And I organised for the Shadow Minister for Planning, Richard Riordan, to visit the building and see the problems firsthand. Because when you see it in person, you understand the urgency.

I'm continuing to work with the residents to find a way forward, and I'm applying pressure on Council to clarify what they are going to do to help them. I can't promise you an overnight solution because this is legally complex. But I can promise you this: it won't be forgotten. I'll keep advocating, and I'll keep you updated.

Before I wrap up, I want to quickly touch on liveability and maintenance—because these City of Melbourne issues matter to your daily life.

The Domain Road retail strip has seen massive growth over the last five years. More patrons, more activity. And yet the maintenance has gone backwards. Footpaths, rubbish bins, shop interfaces, signage—it's in an appalling state. And I know MSYRG has raised this repeatedly with Council, with promises of more frequent cleaning that never materialise.

And then there's the 605 bus stops on Domain Road—route changed without proper consultation, parking spaces taken, no shelters, no seating. The excuses were frankly insulting: "Shelter would obstruct a property view." "Tree roots make the surface uneven." Well, then why put the stops there in the first place?

These are City of Melbourne responsibilities, yes. But I can apply pressure. And I will. I'll be writing formally to the Lord Mayor, copying MSYRG, laying out these concerns and demanding a proper maintenance plan—not vague promises, but measurable commitments.

So let me bring this home.

I'm here to represent all of Prahran. When good policy comes from any side of politics, I'll support it.

When policy harms this community, I'll fight it—regardless of who proposes it.

I won't always have the power to deliver everything you want. I'm in opposition, not government. But what I can promise is this: you'll have a voice in Parliament. I'll show up. I'll fight for this community. And I'll be honest with you about what I can and can't achieve.

Groups like MSYRG are essential to democracy. You hold politicians like me accountable. You advocate when others might stay silent. And you remind us all that communities—real people, real lives—must come first.

So, thank you for inviting me tonight. Thank you for the work you do. And thank you for giving me the opportunity to represent you.

I'm looking forward to your questions.

Thank you.