Growth push to cram the trams

A STATE government department has admitted it will be a challenge maintaining good public transport services amid unprecedented growth along suburban tram lines.

Medium- to high-density development around transport routes is ramping up, but an inner-Melbourne federal MP claims the policy is foolish because it leads to both clogged roads and overcrowded trams.

The state department of environment, land, water and planning has released figures showing that the number of dwellings built within 100m of tram lines outside the CBD is set to increase rapidly. In 2004 the figure was 4000, but this rose to 8000 last year and is expected to reach 11,000 this year as well as next year and in 2038, according to the department’s latest Research Matters publication.

Most of the growth will occur in the northern suburbs, with the Pentridge site in Coburg to have 3000 more dwellings and High St, Northcote to increase by 1000.

An extra 900 units and town houses will be added in each of Sydney Rd, Brunswick, Nicholson St, Brunswick East and Smith St in Collingwood and Fitzroy.

The report said the growth reflected Maribyrnong, Moreland, Darebin and Yarra councils embracing long-term state government policies to focus development along transit routes and activity centres.

“However, with unprecedented dwelling growth expected over the next couple of years, the challenge will be maintaining the transport services that made them desirable for development,” it said.

Federal Labor MP Kelvin Thomson, whose Wills electorate includes Brunswick and Coburg, said the policy was foolish and shortsighted.

“Residents of these developments get into their cars anyway and cause major thoroughfares to become traffic sewer so they are virtuous and get on to the trams only to find that the trams are full,” he said.

Transport minister Jacinta Allan said the government ap-preciated Melbourne was growing and more people were catching trams.

“That’s why we ordered 20 new E-Class trams in our first 100 days,” she said.

john.masanauskas@news.com.au