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Introductory Remarks on behalf of VIG by John Goulden. 28/10/2008

As Chairman of VIG, I welcome the chance to speak today because I will be abroad by the time the Inquiry focuses on VIG's evidence. I do not intend to summarise that evidence, which I endorse. Instead I should like to set out briefly the main reasons why the residents we represent are concerned about the issues raised in this Inquiry.

1. We are concerned about VSU itself. The Victoria Line was a victim of its own success from the beginning and, despite works to improve passenger transfers in the late 90s, its defects are clear every day. So we welcome the resources and priority LUL are devoting to this project. VSU may be the only opportunity in this generation to get this important line functioning effectively. But it must be got right or it will (literally) set in concrete those problems it fails to solve or indeed creates. We are not convinced that the scheme yet measures up to the challenges.
2. We are understandably concerned about the local impacts of the 7-year construction programme – especially traffic, noise and dust. LUL are clearly trying to resolve some of these issues in advance. But they seem to us to be leaving too many problems to be sorted out by their contractor as they arise. We do not believe that the setting of standards and the identification of mitigating measures should be deferred until after an Order has been secured, in the hope that solutions can be found by the various professional liaison groups dealing with construction, the environment and transport. Indeed, we fear that relying on a contractor, who has not been part of the TWA process and who may well have other priorities, will lead to adverse impacts which residents and the 115 million people who pass through the mainline station each year will just have to live with.
3. Residents are especially concerned about this because we are not convinced that we will have a fair opportunity to influence how these deferred problems will be resolved. Our experience with this process so far has led us to fear that, unless it is made clear that there must be proper consultation in the proposed Community Liaison Group, we will continue simply to be informed about what paid experts representing the big battalions have decided in the various invisible liaison groups.
4. More generally, we are finding the whole TWA process confusing and daunting. Our members are private citizens, with day-jobs. We do not have the time, expertise or resources to balance the phalanx of consultants and legal counsel representing the applicant and the statutory objectors. We sense too that most of the business of the last few months has been directed to reaching agreements with the big objectors. This may to some extent be an inevitable part of the TWA process. But it leaves us with the feeling that the concerns of the 250,000 folk who live in this area have not received comparable attention. This feeds into our worry that the same thing will happen during the construction period. Our confidence in the process, which was high to begin with, has been damaged and the community's pool of goodwill toward LUL is in danger of evaporating.
5. Residents support the need for development in Victoria and are reconciled to a degree of disruption. But we are concerned that it will occur during a period when there will probably be other extensive development projects in Victoria. One major upheaval is the commercial development proposed by LS in central Victoria and down Victoria Street, which could peak at the same time as VSU in the year of the

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London Olympics. Another is Network Rail's intention to develop the mainline station, which seems to make it harder for LUL to make optimal use of some of NR's facilities. There are also ambitious plans to develop the Chelsea Barracks site and the Victoria Coach Station. Given that the only toll-free road through central London passes either side of Victoria Station, we surely have good reason to be worried about the cumulative impact of these schemes on residents and the nearby conservation areas.

6. In short, we are caught in the middle of a 'planning race' between the big battalions for at least five major projects, each threatening to put greater pressure, during and after construction, on the already congested traffic network in Victoria. We realise that this Inquiry has to take the VSU project in isolation on its own merits. But, even setting aside the other schemes, we see severe drawbacks in what is still being proposed under VSU: in terms of traffic flows through the area and especially on the inner ring road; the provision for taxis; and most of all the arrangements for buses and pedestrian crossings. We hope that the various transport 'wings' of TfL will be able to work with LUL during the course of this Inquiry to identify satisfactory surface transport arrangements at Victoria. Unless that can be done, we believe that these problems will hit all who travel through Victoria, as commuters, shoppers, school-children or tourists. They will particularly affect the lives of local residents, who face in addition the direct nuisance to their homes of noise and dust.

7. We are aware that the picture presented by LUL continues to change, even since the Supplementary Environmental Statement in August. We have yet to be made aware, however, of changes which allay the concerns expressed in our evidence. So at present it remains our intention, when our time comes, to call the evidence we have served and if necessary to cross-examine some of LUL's witnesses. If our position changes, the Inquiry will of course be informed.

8. Finally, we are saddened by what we see as a piecemeal approach to the planning of this project, as of many major transport projects in this country. The four stations at Victoria – rail, underground, bus and coach – are among the busiest in the country. Effective transport interchange at Victoria is crucial for the whole of the south-east. Any VSU project will have a radical impact on surface transport throughout the construction period. Plans for 'keeping the system running' need therefore to be developed in an integrated manner - with the GLA, Westminster Council, Network Rail, and the Underground, bus, taxi and coach authorities all playing their part. But what we see in VSU is LUL negotiating with each agency separately to resolve problems one-by-one, many of which are beyond their remit. We sense that other Agencies have not approached this project in a spirit of whole-hearted co-operation as co-owners of the interchange, but have been sought mainly to defend their own patches. This is not perhaps an experience unique to Victoria, but it suggests that there is an urgent need for this city and this country to develop a more joined-up approach to inner-city transport. We recognise that this wider issue may be beyond the scope of this Inquiry. But we do feel that many of the defective compromises which this Inquiry is being invited to endorse have their origin in the disjointed approach which has been adopted.