Massive Tree Losses in Whitehorse and Destruction of our Natural Landscape

1. Blackburn Level Crossing Removal
   As readers are no doubt aware, the Blackburn Village and surrounds are being destroyed by the Blackburn Road level crossing removal and the construction of a shared use path along the south side of the rail corridor between Laburnum and Nunawading. Over 450 trees will be removed and many have already gone – all 63 historic and iconic Cypress Trees in Morton Park have been removed in the past few weeks and most of the trees in the Blackburn Station Gardens have been bulldozed, including an historic 100+-year old magnificent Oak Tree.

Unless we maintain our rage and opposition ALL of the vegetation in the station gardens will go, as well as trees further west along South Parade. The Tree Society committee, Blackburn Village Residents’ Group, local residents, traders and others have been busy opposing this massive attack on the natural landscape and character of Blackburn. Actions have included:

• Holding a Public Protest Rally on 18 June that was attended by over 60 people
• Conducting a massive letter-writing and email campaign protesting the permanent damage being caused by the level crossing removal to politicians, councillors, the Blackburn level crossing authority (BLXRA) and various media outlets
• Emailing and letter-boxing local residents, providing updates on actions and strategies and the promotion of forthcoming activities.

The committee urges members to keep up the pressure on the BLXRA and state Labor politicians to mitigate the damage being caused by this monstrous project.

TIE A YELLOW RIBBON ON THE CYCLONE WIRE FENCE!!
During the June protest rally people tied yellow ribbons and fixed protest signs onto the cyclone works fence near the Rotunda opposite the Blackburn Village shops. The ribbons are still there and we can add to them by tying more ribbons on the fence every time we visit South Parade for shopping or commuting. The yellow ribbons represent a constant reminder of all the trees that have been (and will be) callously cut down for the level crossing removal/shared use path works.
**Help lessen the Destruction of Blackburn’s Trees & Natural Character**

**NOW is the time to send emails** to the following people to show that we are very angry and will NOT sit back and accept this devastation in our community. If EACH ONE of us sends one email, the politicians and the Level Crossing Authority will soon learn that we are a force to be reckoned with!

It only needs to be at least one sentence containing one or more of the following key objectives:

1. Initiate a genuine consultation process with the Blackburn community and Whitehorse Council to lessen level crossing removal impacts on the natural character of Blackburn Village and surrounds
2. Actively adopt strategies to limit further tree removals
3. Develop, with Council and community consultation, an extensive tree/vegetation re-planting program within the project works zone to re-establish the character of the Blackburn Village
4. Provide fair and timely compensation (in cash or in kind) for the destruction of mature trees on land owned by Whitehorse Council and in private ownership due to the level crossing removal
5. Implement the necessary strategies such that the tree canopy in Whitehorse will not be diminished due to tree and vegetation losses caused by the removal of level crossings in Whitehorse

**State Government Politicians:**
shaun.leane@parliament.vic.gov.au luke.donnellan@parliament.vic.gov.au daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au jacinta.allan@parliament.vic.gov.au

The Blackburn Level Crossing Removal Authority:
Email contact@levelcrossings.vic.gov.au or telephone 1800 762 667.

Keep updated via Facebook: www.facebook.com/theblackburnsolution

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2. **Heatherdale Level Crossing Removal (HLXRA)**

Tree Society representatives have been attending Stakeholder Liaison Group meetings for the level crossing removals at both Heatherdale and Blackburn this year. Initially, we were provided with the information and materials we requested by reps from the Heatherdale LXA in a timely manner. However, more recently the provision of information has stopped and any semblance of community liaison seriously compromised.

Questions about tree fates for the 250+ trees impacted by the works have not been answered, nor has information been provided on re-planting programs and community compensation for the massive loss of trees between Mitcham and Heatherdale due to the level crossing removal project and the construction of the shared use path abutting the rail reserve.

From the HLXRA’s arborist report and the Tree Management Strategy sheets, the fates of the 250 trees assessed are:
- 134 (54%) to be removed (some already removed)
- 57 (23%) to be re-assessed
- 1 tree (#239), an indigenous Eucalypt has a '?' marked as its fate.

The Tree Society is fighting hard to retain as many indigenous trees (which represent 125 or 50% of the total trees) as possible, as well as the native trees (representing 87 or 35%). We are also seeking information on the fate of the 57 trees slated for ‘re-assessment’ by the HLXRA. We are less concerned with the fates of the exotic trees and woody weeds, however, we maintain that all trees removed must be replaced with suitable non-weedy trees (indigenous and natives trees preferred) to be planted as close as possible to where the original trees were located.

**STOP PRESS!**

Following yet another email reminder to the HLXRA on 4 July, the Tree Society has finally received an update on tree fates for the works area in Mitcham and Heatherdale (see below). As can be seen, the HLXRA has managed to retain more trees than originally planned and this is in no small part due to the Tree Society’s advocacy and negotiation skills, along with those of Whitehorse Council staff. It is also a credit to staff at the Heatherdale Level Crossing Removal Authority, particularly Dylan and Eleanor.
3. VicRoads Community Forums on the Proposed Shared Use Path through Laburnum, Blackburn and Nunawading

The Tree Society urges all local society members to register and attend these forums and tell VicRoads what you think of their proposal to desecrate our cherished suburbs.

Forum details are:

**A. The Blackburn Section Forum:** Wednesday 13 July, 7pm at the Whitehorse Centre, Willis Room, 379-397 Whitehorse Road, Nunawading.

**B. The Laburnum Section Forum:** Tuesday 19 July, 7pm at the Box Hill Town Hall, Lower Hall, 1022 Whitehorse Road, Box Hill.

RSVP attendance to these forums to eastern_projects@roads.vic.gov.au or telephone (03) 9872 7058 by Friday 8 July.

Or just turn up and let VicRoads know your thoughts on this important issue.

The Tree Society opposes the loss of trees & neighbourhood character in Laburnum, Blackburn and Nunawading that will result from locating a 3-metre wide shared use concrete path through these suburbs on the south-side of the railway corridor. Instead, the Society is advocating for the northern community-preferred path that will result in minimal tree and vegetation impacts, will more closely follow the rail corridor, and will better provide for the increasing need for access to Laburnum and Blackburn by residents of the high-density housing developments between Whitehorse Road and the railway line.

Despite community opposition, VicRoads is determined to build this path through Laburnum Station Gardens and up Laburnum Street, with many park and street trees in imminent danger of being chopped down! And then where will the path go?

- Through Elmore Walk & up South Parade? (60-80 more trees to go!)
- Up Myrtle Grove and down The Avenue? (There goes your local character, and possibly your street trees)
- Through Blackburn Creeklands? (Don’t rule this possibility out!)
- Along Main Street? (One of the busiest streets in Blackburn!)

Many trees have already been lost in the Blackburn Station Gardens and Morton Park due to the proposed construction of this path south of the railway line!!

**Other Actions you can take to stop the destruction of Laburnum & Blackburn & force VicRoads to re-locate the path north of the railway line.**

1. Contact the VicRoads Office and register your protest:
   - Email: eastern_projects@roads.vic.gov.au
   - Phone: (03) 9872 7058

2. Contact State ALP Politicians and record your objections:
   - shaun.leane@parliament.vic.gov.au
   - luke.donnellan@parliament.vic.gov.au
   - daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au
   - jacinta.allan@parliament.vic.gov.au

3. Keep updated via the Blackburn Community Facebook page at:
   www.facebook.com/theblackburnsolution
4. **An Open Letter To Michael Hassett, the Whitehorse Cyclists Inc. and VicRoads**

It’s an understatement that the VicRoads/Whitehorse Cyclists Inc. southern shared use path project through Laburnum and Blackburn has sparked ‘disagreements’ (‘Path sparks disagreements’, Whitehorse Leader 20 June 2016).

It has done much more than this – it has inflamed community outrage!

The frightening combination of arrogance and naivety exhibited by Whitehorse Cyclists Inc. spokesperson, Mr. Michael Hassett, is obvious to all, as evidenced by his ignorance of the collateral damage caused by the southern-shared use path construction between Laburnum and Nunawading. An excerpt from the Whitehorse Leader newspaper article states:

> ‘… Mr Hassett also said he was surprised at the number of trees which would need to be removed to make way for the level crossing works and shared-use path …’

Where have you been Michael? What were you; your Whitehorse Cyclists’ cronies and VicRoads thinking when you came up with this foolish plan?

Major environmental damage is unavoidable should your preferred southern route be accepted. Laburnum Station Gardens, Laburnum Street, Elmore Walk, the Blackburn Station Gardens, Morton Park, the back gardens of Glen Ebor Avenue residents and the Seventh Day Adventist land all trashed as a three-metre concrete path is bulldozed through.

Here are some facts for you to ponder as more trees are chopped down or severely compromised in Laburnum, Blackburn and Nunawading to make way for this folly:

a) Two mature trees (a Eucalypt and a Liquidambar) will be removed in the Laburnum Station Gardens. A further 8 park trees including mature Ironbark Eucalypts and a privately-owned Pin Oak will have their tree protection zones impacted by the path works (Reference: VicRoads Box Hill to Ringwood Bike Path Alignment Report March 2016).

b) VicRoads has bowed to community pressure and will not now be building the path along the northern side of Laburnum Street to Elmore Walk which would have required the removal of at least 12 mature Pin Oak street trees, collectively worth ~$80,000. This begs the question of where the path will go (Reference: VicRoads Box Hill to Ringwood Bike Path Alignment Report March 2016 & Whitehorse Council Tree Valuation Tool).

c) VicRoads still exercises the possibility of building the concrete path through Elmore Walk with the loss of 12 mature trees, mostly Eucalypts, collectively worth ~$120,000 (Reference: VicRoads Box Hill to Ringwood Bike Path Alignment Report March 2016 & Whitehorse Council Tree Valuation Tool).

d) The Blackburn Level Crossing Authority (BLXRA) plans to remove 40 trees (38 in public ownership) to construct the ‘new South Parade path’ near the IGA supermarket. (Reference: Revised Blackburn Level Crossing Removal Project; update on tree management for the Blackburn & District Tree Preservation Society, May 2016).

e) The properties bordering the railway reserve in Glen Ebor & Oliver Avenues and Cromwell Court, Blackburn face the compulsory removal of trees from their back gardens due to railway cutting and shared-use path works. Between 70 and 100 trees are impacted by the works with major impacts on tree protection zones reported. A case study of three properties (2 Cromwell Court, 41 and 49 Glen Ebor Avenue) demonstrates that for a dozen of the trees slated for removal the Blackburn Level Crossing Removal Authority arborist report makes a clear distinction between the anticipated tree root damage from the level crossing removal (i.e. the creation of the cutting) and the construction of the shared use path on the southern side of the rail corridor. The report reveals that these trees won’t be (or will be only minimally) impacted by the railway works but will be severely impacted by the construction of the southern-shared use path. The trees, numbered 167-169, 173, 174, 211-215, 275, 278 and 282 would be retained if the southern-shared use path was abandoned in favour of the community-preferred route on the northern side of the railway reserve where there is scant vegetation and plenty of space. (References: Artio and Homewood consulting arborists, 2015-2016).

f) In light of the above case study there is strong community suspicion that the BLXRA and VicRoads have been less than honest with the community. Their rejection of community claims that the southern shared use path construction would cause considerable damage to the historic stand of Cypress Trees
in Morton Park and the significant and historic trees in the Blackburn Station Gardens appears to be self-serving nonsense.

I. 63 of the 66 Morton Park Cypress Trees were assessed as ‘Worthy of Retention’. The trees are collectively worth over a million dollars. They are being cut down now!

II. Only 50 of the 250 trees and large shrubs in the Blackburn Station Gardens were assessed as ‘Not Worth Retaining’. The trees in the gardens are worth in excess of one million dollars including a 100-year old Oak Tree worth $100,000. Sadly, most of these trees have already been cut down.

III. In those sections of the Blackburn Station Gardens and Morton Park where the railway cutting/drainage works required tree removals, the subsequent construction of the 3-metre wide concrete shared use path over the top will exclude ANY substantial replanting in the park and the gardens. This alone is sufficient reason to re-locate the path to the northern side! (Reference: Hundreds of Blackburn and Laburnum residents, pers. comm.; Homewood consulting arborists Preliminary Impact Assessment, 2015 & Whitehorse Council Tree Valuation Tool).

g) Thirty-two historic Pine Trees and indigenous Eucalypts will be removed with the railway/shared use path construction works on the Seventh Day Adventist land, near the Nunawading Christian School oval. Whilst construction works access has required the removal of a few trees in the north-east corner of the land it is interesting to note that the railway line is ‘at grade’ in this location i.e. no railway cutting works are required. However the southern shared use path will be constructed near these trees and one can only assume that the trees will be removed because of the path works. (Reference: Level Crossing Removal Project Furlong, Main, Blackburn, Heatherdale, Design Package B27, Shared Use Path, Final Design, October 2015 & Artist’s impression of new railway cutting, Level Crossing Removal Authority, May 2016).

With these facts about the southern shared use path now at your disposal, Michael, we in the Tree Society hope, along with the Laburnum and Blackburn communities, that your public utterances in the future will be much better informed.

The Laburnum and Blackburn communities say [NO] to a southern shared-use path and [YES] to the northern ‘community’ route! The Tree Society committee and our 80+ members support this community view because the northern ‘community’ shared use path route results in minimal tree and vegetation impacts.

Nunawading Parklands Development Update
Nunawading Parklands (Melway 48 F/6) is an 11-hectare open space in Nunawading bounded by the Eastern Freeway, Springvale Road and Junction Road. Over the past few months the Tree Society committee and local residents have organised two site meetings/walkthroughs with Whitehorse councillors, council staff and Mr. Shaun Leane, state MP for the Eastern Metropolitan Region. The principal objective is to ‘kick-start’ the development of the parklands as a major district park by maximizing passive recreational opportunities, including walking, jogging, recreational cycling, unstructured play, community stewardship via planting and associated activities, environment educational activities, fauna surveys and water quality assessments for the Koonung Creek.

Major actions resulting from the meetings and additional correspondence with Whitehorse Council and the State government include:

• An undertaking by Council to organize community-planting activities in 2017 as part of the National Tree Day celebrations. These activities will be centred around the planting beds along Junction Road near the intersection with Springvale Road
• The organization of revegetation activities in the state government-owned section of the land to replace dead and dying remnant trees
• A resolution by Mr. Shaun Leane to set up a meeting with the principal landowners (Whitehorse Council, the Department of Environment, Water, Land & Planning {DELWP} and Melbourne Water) to
resolve land ownership and management issues and initiate a concept plan to develop the land as a major district park.

**Upcoming Nunawading Parklands Working-Bees**
Representatives from the local community have organised a number of weeding and clean-up activities in the Nunawading Parklands over the next few weeks.

Working bees will be held on **Saturday 16 July** and **Saturday 30 July** from 9.30 a.m. onwards. The location for these activities is the park area bounded by Spencer Street, Springvale Road and the creek. The contact person is Brian Duvoisin, telephone 9878 9043. Please bring gloves and basic garden tools and wear sturdy footwear and work clothes. Refreshments will be provided.

Please note that there is no provision for volunteer insurance for these activities, so attendees will be working at their own risk in the park until these community activities are officially sanctioned by Council and/or DEWLP.

**Healesville Freeway Reserve Linear Park**
Informal community working bees are being regularly conducted in the park to remove woody weeds, ivy and rubbish from the section of the park between Davy Lane Reserve and Terrara Road Forest Hill. Another working bee is scheduled for the end of this month. For further details please contact Mary Crouch on 9894 3025. Please bring gloves and basic garden tools and wear sturdy footwear and work clothes. Refreshments will be provided. Please note that there is no provision for volunteer insurance for these activities so attendees will be working at their own risk in the park.

Mary Crouch and David Berry from the Tree Society, along with other community stakeholders, have gained membership of the Healesville Freeway Reserve Project Reference Group. This body will be pivotal in making decisions regarding the development of this 35-hectare open space as a major regional park for wide community use. This land contains important remnant vegetation and directly links with Bellbird Dell. The park has the potential to be a crucial component of an extensive biolink network between Dandenong Creek, Bellbird Dell, Campbells Croft/Abbey Walk, Mahoneys Reserve, Wurundjeri Walk and Gardiners Creek Reserve. Two project reference group meetings have been held in the past two months and another is scheduled for mid-July.

The land titles have now been searched and leaseholders told that their leases have expired and they should vacate the land. The process may be slow, but is thoroughly and carefully progressing.

**Tree Society Submission (20 May 2016) on the Whitehorse Tree Study: Draft Options Report**
A summary of the Tree Society’s submission follows: The consultants commissioned by Whitehorse Council for this Study, Planisphere, deserve the plaudits of the Whitehorse community for developing this intellectually rigorous Options Paper that completes a Gap Analysis, identifies the deficiencies of the existing tree and vegetation safeguards, develops a list of options to address these deficiencies, and ultimately makes a recommendation to extend the Significant Landscape Overlays (SLO) city-wide, an option that the Tree Society endorses.

The Option recommended calls for the extension of the SLO throughout Whitehorse as well as:
- Amending the Whitehorse Planning Scheme in favour of tree and vegetation preservation, retention and replacement in the face of the many pressures that, up to now, have resulted in the net loss of tree canopy within the city
- Lobbying the state government to increase the fines for the illegal removal and/or damage to trees in Whitehorse
- Committing up front and recurrent funding to administer the city-wide extension of the SLO
- Providing ongoing funding and support for a Tree Education Program
- Offering incentives for residents and developers to purchase and plant canopy trees
- Employing planning staff with the necessary expertise to be able to assess the quality of landscape plans that are submitted for review
• Stipulating the appropriate levels of administration and enforcement of S173 agreements for new subdivisions.

With the recommended ‘Extend the SLO’ Option, the deficiencies in the Whitehorse Planning Scheme have largely been addressed with particular reference to:
• Providing uniform tree protection across the city
• Including a definition of, and scientific explanation for, the crucial tree protection zone (TPZ)
• Describing what constitutes a ‘canopy’ tree and the different sub-types
• Emphasizing the importance of the planting of replacement trees
• Recognizing the need to engage qualified and experienced planning staff to review landscape plans
• Ensuring sufficient space is allowed for canopy tree plantings in development proposals
• Facilitating the ongoing monitoring of the health and correct maintenance practices for newly planted trees and replacement trees (short, medium, and long-term).

However the final ‘gap’ as stated on page 24 is a curious addition and requires further explanation i.e.:
‘... Weed species and exempting weeds that add value to the Whitehorse character and overall tree canopy cover ...’

Furthermore the Tree Society questions the validity of the statement on page 30 of the document i.e.:
‘... It is important to understand that while promoting the increased planting of weed species is not desirable, these species rarely endanger the landscape environmental qualities in urban areas ...’ (Bold = Tree Society emphasis). Our experience is very much to the contrary particularly for environmental weeds in proximity to bushland parks and/or those woody weeds whose seeds are dispersed long distances by, for example, birds or the wind.

In relation to the resource implications for the recommended ‘Extend the SLO’ Option in the Draft Options paper, the Tree Society contends that a financial outlay of $30,000 to amend the Planning Scheme, $16,000 for one-off capital costs and ~$650,000 pa for increases in staffing to administer the expanded SLO is a bargain when compared with other capital-heavy infrastructure works planned or already completed by Whitehorse Council. Indeed these figures represent ‘loose change’ in relation to what will be achieved i.e. the protection and enhancement of the city’s natural assets held in private ownership. As such the cost implications for the ‘Extend the SLO’ Option will be a wise and farsighted investment.

The city’s natural assets are what define Whitehorse and as such they should be afforded a monetary value and factored into Council’s assets inventory. A great deal of research has resulted in simple and effective tree evaluation methods, including that of a tree’s monetary value. The Tree Society contends that the use of Whitehorse Council’s Amenity Tree Valuation Tool needs to be promoted widely to developers and residents such that they become familiar with what constitutes the real value of our trees in dollar terms. Using this tool the tree values for ‘average’ trees are in the order of thousands of dollars through to 10s of thousands of dollars for good specimens and up to 6-figure values for outstanding tree specimens within the city. Older trees also have enhanced dollar values due to the range of habitats they provide for native fauna (e.g. hollows for nesting birds).

In conclusion the Tree Society commends the preferred ‘Extend the SLO’ Option recommendation as detailed in the Whitehorse Tree study – Draft Options Report to Whitehorse Council.

**199 Canterbury Road Blackburn – Childcare Centre Proposal refused by VCAT**

As a result of the VCAT Hearing in February 2016, the Tribunal’s decision to refuse the granting of a Planning Permit for the construction of a Long Day Childcare Centre at 199 Canterbury Road, Blackburn has been published. Congratulations to Whitehorse City Council, Tree Society Life Member Dianne Tribe, and the local community for putting up such a sound, well argued case, that brought this positive outcome.
Tree Society Submissions Objecting to Tree Removal Permit Applications

- **24 April 2016**: Submission opposing the granting of a Planning Permit for the Removal of 42 Trees at 124-126 Blackburn Road, Blackburn (WH/2016/192). Whitehorse Council issued a notice to refuse to grant the permit on 22 June 2016.

- **12 May 2016**: Application for a Planning Permit for Construction of a Childcare Centre at 25 Holland Road Blackburn South (WH/2015/1126). The Tree Society objected to the removal of a large number of mature, significant trees and vegetation from this site to make way for the proposed development. On 30 May Whitehorse Council issued a notice of refusal to grant the permit.

- **June 2016**: Glen Ebor and Oliver Avenues and Cromwell Court tree losses proposed with the Blackburn Level Crossing Removal works and Southern shared use path construction. The Tree Society has forwarded 10 submissions objecting to the removal of a large number of trees on individual properties bordering the railway reserve in Glen Ebor & Oliver Avenues and Cromwell Court, Blackburn. Owners of these properties are faced with the compulsory removal of trees from their back gardens (against their will!) due to railway cutting and shared-use path works. Between 70 and 100 trees are impacted by the works, with major impacts on tree protection zones reported. The Tree Society committee is deeply concerned with the unique circumstances underpinning these applications, i.e. an external party (the Blackburn Level Crossing Authority or BLXRA) makes application to a local government authority (Whitehorse Council) for a permit to remove trees located on private property owned by third parties (the affected Blackburn residents) who are opposed to these trees being removed from their land.

This intrusion on individual human and property rights is particularly alarming when it occurs within a residential neighbourhood that possesses the highest tree and vegetation protection controls within Whitehorse. **A Council decision in favour of the removal of these privately-owned trees will have a significant deleterious impact on the neighbourhood character of the area and in particular the surrounding bush environment. This site is in a locality designated for ‘Minimal Change’ under Clause 32.09 of the Whitehorse Planning Scheme. As such any vegetation removal must be avoided as per the relevant Schedules of Neighbourhood Residential Zone #1 and Significant Landscape Overlay #2.**

Council decisions are pending for most of these tree removal permit applications; however their fate is all but sealed, which is devastating both for our local environment and for the credibility of the Whitehorse Planning Scheme and the Schedules for the NRZ#1 and SLO#2 contained therein.

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**Tree Society Meeting Times**

The Tree Society committee meets every 2\textsuperscript{nd} Wednesday of the month from 2-4 p.m. in February, March, May, July, September and November.

General meetings are scheduled for June and October.

The AGM is held (as always) in November.

The location for all meetings is Bungalook Nursery in Fulton Road Blackburn South.

Tree Society members and the general public are most welcome to attend all Tree Society meetings.

**Tree Society Website and Email Address**

Please refer to [http://www.bdtps.wordpress.com](http://www.bdtps.wordpress.com) for the latest information on Tree Society activities.

The Tree Society committee can be contacted on mailto:bdtpsociety@gmail.com for any tree-related matter within Whitehorse.

**Receiving Your Newsletter via email**

With the recent large increase in postage rates, we are anxious that as many as possible members receive their newsletters by email. As a member who receives their newsletter by ‘snail’ mail, if you are connected to the internet we would be pleased if we could send it to you by email instead.
Whitehorse Road Mitcham in the 1950s

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<td>Ann Clayton</td>
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<td>Members</td>
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BLACKBURN & DISTRICT TREE PRESERVATION SOCIETY INC.

Aims to:

• Promote and improve the natural environment in the City of Whitehorse
• Promote an understanding of indigenous plants and the natural environment
• Disseminate information to members

Postal address: PO Box 5, Nunawading, 3131

Subscriptions:

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