

DOCUMENT PRESENTED TO THE PARLIAMENT OF  
NEW SOUTH WALES

INQUIRY INTO ROAD TOLLING REGIMES

ERRORS AND OVER-CHARGING IN THE CALCULATION  
OF THE SYDNEY M5 EAST TOLL ROAD

Prepared by Eugene McFarlane

1 April 2022

Document tendered by	Mr Eugene McFarlane
Received by	Ms Rachel Buish
Date:	24/05/2022
Resolved to publish	Yes / No

## INTRODUCTION

I have lived in Sydney for over 50 years. I routinely commute from Roselands to Botany, working and supporting the manufacturing industry there as a Chemical Engineer.

I have estimated the continuing direct cost of the M5 East toll on me (in a non-COVID-19 year) to be over \$3500 per year (not allowing for the annual car registration credit I receive - which may or may not continue in coming years.)

While this is a severe and significant cost-of-living increase for me, there will no doubt be others who will speak to this Inquiry on these issues.

Today I would like to present the facts outlining the over-charging of M5 East tolls by Westconnex/Transurban based on their own tolling formulae, and to call on the Inquiry to makes the relevant recommendations required (i) to compensate those customers affected (ii) to ensure that M5 East tolls be modified so that they are based on the published pricing formula.

## BACKGROUND

Typical toll charges are calculated based on a “flagfall” and a price per kilometre.

Westconnex/Transurban is no different, presenting their methodology on their website:

<https://www.westconnex.com.au/plan-your-journey/tolling/>. To quote from that source:

“WestConnex has a distance-based tolling system which means motorists only pay for the section of motorway they use.”

This is supported by the Linkt Toll Calculator website <https://www.linkt.com.au/sydney/using-toll-roads/toll-calculator> (a link for which is on the Westconnex site) and more of the same is provided at the NSW government site: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/topics/tolling/toll-costs-by-road>.

The present formula is **\$1.48 flagfall plus \$0.5477 per kilometre**.

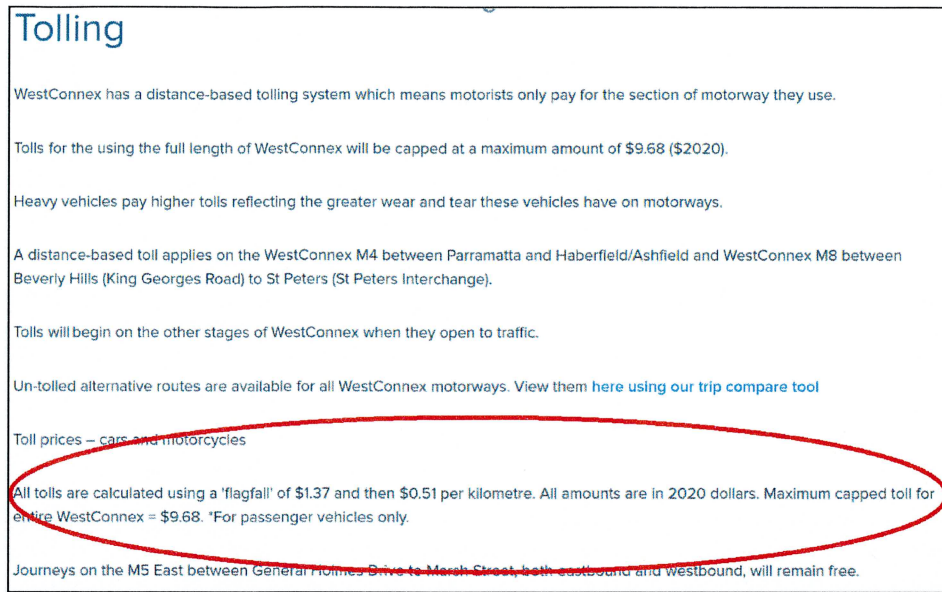
PROJECT	OPEN TO TRAFFIC	SECTION	MAXIMUM DISTANCE (KMS)	MAXIMUM TOLL: (2022\$)
Widened New M4	Now open	Parramatta (Church Street) to Homebush (Homebush Bay Drive)	7.42	\$5.54
New M4 Tunnels	Now Open	Homebush (Homebush Bay Drive) to Haberfield (Parramatta Road and City West Link)	6.07	\$4.80
WestConnex M4	Now Open	Parramatta (Church Street) to Haberfield (Parramatta Road and City West Link)	13.49	\$8.87
WestConnex M8	Now Open	Beverly Hills (King Georges Road) to St Peters (St Peters Interchange)	11.03	\$7.52
M5 East	Now Open	Beverly Hills to General Holmes Drive	?	\$7.52
M4-M5 Link	2023	Haberfield to St Peters	7.02	\$5.32

A summary is also provided on the web page (See left.) Interestingly, there is no distance quoted for the M5 East (highlight has been added by me.)

Around July 2020, the Westconnex site cited above included the formula relevant to the 2020 pricing (see below). This was the same formula used for the other Westconnex toll roads.

Importantly the site also states: “*Journeys on the M5 East between General Holmes Drive to Marsh Street, both eastbound and westbound, will remain free.*”

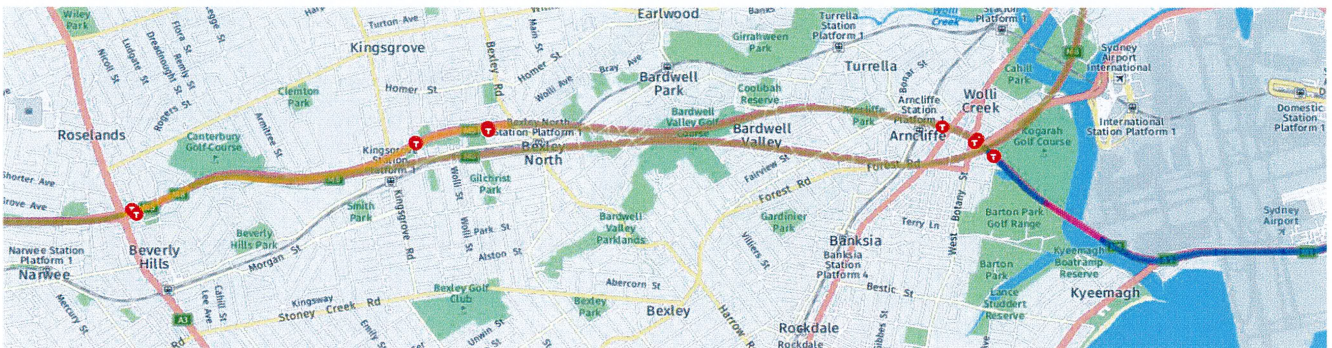
At the time, I saved a screen capture of the site and present it below. Since then, that explicit statement of the use of the formula has disappeared, but the tolls have continued to rise (by 4%) per year.



Snapshot of Westconnex' website: <https://www.westconnex.com.au/plan-your-journey/tolling/> from July 2020.

The actual kilometres travelled when driving on the M5 East between toll gantries are presented below.

The positions of the toll gantries are shown at the helpful NSW government site: <https://roads-waterways.transport.nsw.gov.au/sydney-motorways/toll-calculator/map>



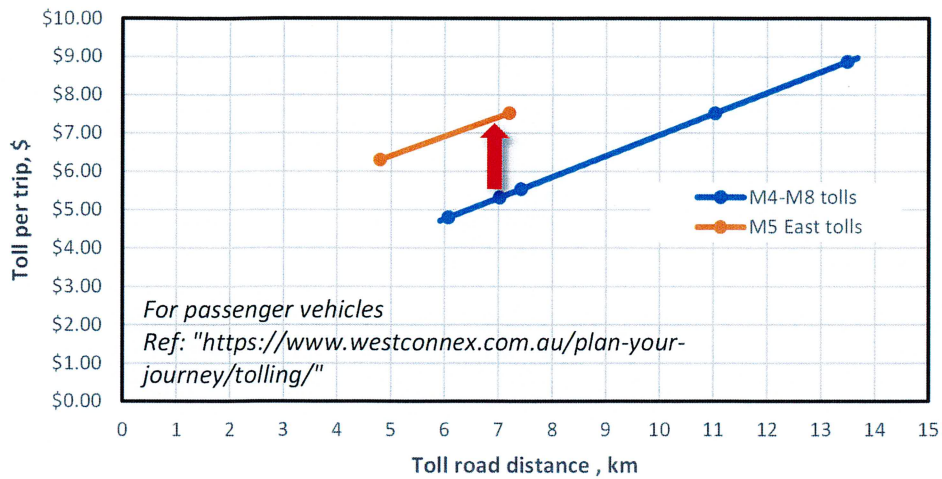
We can use online mapping (I used Google Maps) to estimate the distance quite accurately, and the distances were confirmed by myself using my car's odometer.

M5 East journey <sup>1</sup>	Distance	Actual toll (March 2022)	Estimated toll <sup>2</sup>	Estimated Over-charge
King Georges Rd -> Marsh St Exit	7.2 km	\$7.52	\$5.42	<b>\$2.10</b>
Kingsgrove Rd-> Marsh St exit	4.8 km	\$6.30	\$4.11	<b>\$2.19</b>

- The distances are about the same in both directions.
- Based on the NSW government website "Toll costs by road,  
Estimated toll = \$1.48 + \$0.5477 x( Distance)

The chart below provides a comparison of the tolls presently charged to travel on the M5 East with other Westconnex Toll roads (from the company's website).

## Sydney Westconnex toll charges



The red arrow in the chart above highlights the additional (passenger vehicle) cost per trip to travel on the M5 East compared to other toll roads that use the same toll formula.

I estimate the additional cost to be \$2.10 - \$2.20 depending on whether the trip extends to King Georges Rd or Kingsgrove Rd.

## Conclusions

Since the start of tolling in mid-2020, Westconnex/Transurban has charged over \$2 more per trip (personal vehicles) for driving on the M5 East than its published methodology. Westconnex published the original tolling formula on its website in mid-2020 and the discrepancy extends from the start of tolling to the present day.

## Recommendations

1. To the extent that Westconnex has been overcharging M5 East (passenger vehicles) for driving on the King Georges Rd to Marsh St section (based on their published toll formula from the start of the toll in 2020 to the present day,) that the Inquiry makes relevant recommendations that Westconnex compensates those customers in full for the discrepancy.
2. In acknowledging the error in the calculation, and the relatively high toll fees that the miscalculation has created, that the Inquiry makes appropriate recommendations such that the tolls (passenger vehicles) for travelling the M5 East sections between King Georges Rd and Marsh St be based on the present toll formula (\$1.48 flagfall, \$0.5477 (per kilometre), capped at \$7.52), thereby reducing the tolls on those sections of the M5 East by a little over \$2 for a single trip.