

INQUIRY INTO CROSS CITY TUNNEL

Organisation:

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Date Received: 29/05/2006

Theme:

Summary

SUBMISSION TO JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE
ON CROSS CITY TUNNEL
LANE COVE TUNNEL

Thank you for the opportunity to make comment on consultation over the Lane Cove Tunnel.

Pre EIS

As a long term local resident of Naremburn, my local neighbourhood has been negatively impacted over the years by first the Warringah Expressway and then the Gore Hill Freeway. When the Lane Cove Tunnel Overview Statement was released in 2000 and advertised broadly in local media, I thought this was a poor planning decision as it would follow a similar alignment to the then proposed Chatswood to Parramatta Rail Link and therefore encourage potential train travellers to take their car – not a very sustainable decision. I was, though, interested to also know how it would cater to for people on bikes since the new road was entirely in a tunnel. I was therefore pleased to see that bike lanes were proposed along Epping Road, a truly horror stretch for anyone on a bike, an utter disincentive to anyone wanting to use anything but a car. My only concern was that those lanes be continuous for the entire length of the project and that they be a good width with separation from vehicular traffic.

I also supported the objective to ‘manage and contain the trend for growth in this corridor’ as from personal observation alone, I could see how, when new roads were build, such as the M2 and the Gore Hill Freeway, extra traffic was quickly induced which soon filled the new roads. It seemed very sensible that new free-flow lanes in the tunnel, with their high capacity, should be offset by a reduction of lanes on the surface lanes, to constrain a growth in traffic. Everyone who lived in the area was aware that the Lane Cove Tunnel Action Group had heavily campaigned for this tunnel for years, so as to return Epping Road to local use and stop its use as a through road.

EIS Focus Group

Over the next few years, I was offered the opportunity to be part of the consultation process. I attended a number of meetings of the Bicycles, Pedestrian and Public Transport Focus Group during the lead up to the EIS. It soon became apparent that plans were now for a more substantial facility, off-road and shared with pedestrians. While useful for beginner cyclists, I had concerns about its usability for commuter cyclists in general. Along with other representatives, I was further disturbed that the consultants for this project, were planning for a recreational cyclist facility. Cyclists needed to use the Epping Road / Gore Hill Freeway alignment for the same reasons as cars used it – as a transport corridor linking the employment, educational and residential areas of North Ryde and the lower North Shore. When it became apparent that there was a failure through the consultation process for this to be understood, we had to appeal to the professionals in the RTA Pedestrian and Bicycle Unit. Eventually there was recognition of this commuting need, but it was evident that only a single sided (and therefore two-way) off road facility would be considered.

Throughout this consultation period, we achieved only one major improvement, an underpass of the Pacific Highway which ensured continuity of travel, critical to commuter cyclists.

Also during this consultation period, there was discussion over the section alongside the Gore Hill Freeway between Chelmsford and Park Roads, where we were concerned about the potential gradients. This was also discussed in another Focus Group, where residents of Grandview and Olympia Roads were concerned at the proximity of the pathway to their backyards. As a result of discussion with both Focus Groups, the alignment was eventually adjusted away from their backyards and the gradients adjusted correspondingly. This seemed a good compromise outcome.

EIS Exhibition

The EIS eventually went on display documenting a high quality two-way shared path alongside the Gore Hill Freeway and alongside Epping Road. Whilst this was a compromise on the one-way facility we knew would be best, but we could see that an effort had been made to specify the best quality facility within that constraint. We saw this as a compromised facility, but still far better than what was already available, a hostile road which only the road warrior would cycle - a major barrier to cycling. At least with this facility, inexperienced and less confident people could ride the pathway, more experienced would use the road, but be able to use the path on up-hill sections where there speeds were lower.

Approved Project Changes

When the project was eventually approved, I was shocked to see that the proposal has immensely changed in the Naremburn area. The new design would take over the existing bicycle lanes through the Naremburn cutting and not replace them, removing safe access along the road shoulder. To compensate for the loss of bicycle lanes, the shared pathway was to be extended beyond Park St to Merremburn Ave. The route though did not follow the freeway contours and was a major degradation of the existing facility, in terms of gradients, directness and separation from pedestrians. These changes were not consulted with either with local cyclist or residents. There is a major flaw in the planning process that allows changes to be made to the design after the EIS process, without further consultation,

Design and Construction

When the design and construction period commenced I applied to join the Community Construction Liaison Group for the Gore Hill Freeway section of the project. My application was successful. The consultation has required frequent meetings and can be quite tedious. It is primarily an information receiving process, although local issues can be raised and answers are received, although these often take a long time and can be inadequate. There are some very few opportunities to make changes, probably because the contract conditions are locked in and obviously the tunnel builders would be driven by the profit motive (as would be expected when that path is taken).

The section of pathway between Chemsford and Park Rd, which had been discussed in detail during the Focus Group period, was once again subject to much discussion. The local residents were lobbying to move the pathway to the northern side of the freeway. North of the freeway, there was insufficient room for the path, it would have required acquisition of private land and would also necessitate further consultation with adjacent residents. South of the freeway there was a great deal of RTA land with a storm water channel separating that land from the residences. The southern path had already been extensively consulted with representatives of the Grandview/Olympia residents and there were further discussions during this design and construction period. The tunnel project team decided that the southern side was the only sensible location, but the pathway was located a few more metres north, where possible, right against the freeway wall, to maximise the distance from the residences, but making plantings impossible between the wall and the path. This was not necessarily the best outcome for the community overall as there was little opportunity to design out potential graffiti issues, but it was the preference of the most vocal sections of the community.

The section of pathway between Park Rd and Naremburn Shops, which had not been subject to consultation previously, became subject to review, alternative options put forward and there was consultation over these options with the community. Unfortunately by this stage, the best alignment, ie an extension of the viaduct extension, was no longer possible and the next best option was the proposed alignment. The consultation was simply too late.

I also participated with other local cyclists in a Bicycle Group Consultation Group. During this consultation, we have focussed our efforts on the best possible path in terms of the approved design, any other focus would be unproductive. We made many suggestions for improvements, minor

changes were made but not very much was taken on board. Meetings were infrequent and usually too short to cover the large number of issues we needed to discuss.

Reasonable outcomes from this consultation was made difficult by Lane Cove Council who seemed more concerned about potential bicycle/pedestrian conflict than the far more dangerous car/pedestrian and car/bicycle conflicts. For example, a proposal in the Epping Road Subplan to include a platform crossing of a minor side street crossing, to warn motorists of the presence of this shared pathway, was torpedoed by Lane Cove Council. Experienced cyclists know that such features are needed on these side streets. It makes consultation very difficult when there are such opposing views coming from influential authorities such as a Council.

It has also been disappointing that the RTA appears to have moved away from or not been totally serious about its original objective to manage and contain the trend for growth along the Epping Road alignment. There has also been no attempt to manage growth in other ways than reducing travel lanes. For example when it was reported in the EIS that an extra lane would be included to handle movements out of the Lane Cove Industrial Area, I suggested that council, RTA and the local community work on a Green Travel Plan to encourage alternative transport use. Better bus services could have been researched and planned for in tandem with the proposed. Car sharing could have been considered and piloted throughout the area. This could have served to dampen the growth in car use in the area, while still growing employment and commerce. To my knowledge, nothing of this type has been attempted.

A lack of commitment to managing growth has been evident by the extra lanes have been provided along the corridor, between the Pacific Highway and Centennial Ave and between Sam Johnson Way and the River; by the excessive number of lanes provided at major road intersections, all to increase road capacity. The bus lanes on Epping Road will have the capacity to carry large numbers of people which will negate the need for any additional road capacity for cars – any extra capacity is not necessary. The bicycle is the most efficient transport method for shorter journeys and complements public transport well. The road capacity provided in the tunnel and on the surface is far in excess of today's capacity and the roads into which they feed, simply could not carry any additional vehicles.

Conclusion

In summary, there has been a enormous amount of consultation with the community throughout all stages of the Lane Cove Tunnel Project, far more than I have seen on any previous major infrastructure project in my area. I am not happy with the outcome of our consultation, but obviously there is a wide variety of opinion and clearly not everyone would be satisfied.

In respect of the proposed cycling facility, a 2-way shared pathway is not the ideal design, especially along Epping Road, with the road intersections and some driveways (although thankfully not that many). Nevertheless, the proposed facility is so much better than now and it will encourage many more people to use this transport corridor by bike.

This facility is very much needed and quite consistent with national and state government policy to encourage cycling for its health, environment, economical and community benefits. It is consistent with State Government policy to provide cycling infrastructure as part of any new roads, such as for the M2, M7. Unfortunately for many decades, this was not provided, leaving Sydney the poorest city in one of the poorest countries in providing for bicycles.

This facility will contribute significantly to the transport mix, particularly in inner urban areas such as the lower North Shore. I am looking forward to the eventual completion of 7km of continuous direct shared pathway along this critical transport corridor.

Carolyn New