

INQUIRY INTO CROSS CITY TUNNEL

Organisation:

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Theme:

Summary

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Submission to the Inquiry into Cross City Tunnel

I write, as a resident of Potts Point, in relation to the level of public consultation and information dissemination that took place in relation to matters concerning the impacts on the local community of the Cross City Tunnel.

I would first like to comment on the Public Consultation process operated by the main players, viz. the CCT Construction Company and their public relations advisors, the RTA and the City of Sydney Council.

My impression is that the process that actually took place was one of non consultation and tantamount to a deliberate misinformation programme by way of a “no information” policy from these important players. It is particularly worrying that the RTA and City of Sydney Council, represented by the Mayor, who is also the community's local Member, appear to have deliberately kept public consultation to a minimum by not publishing, in an easily available forum, real information about the plans for road closures and changes associated with the CCT. These organisations should have had their responsibilities for public accountability highest in their culture.

I can only remember about 2 leaflets being posted in my mailbox, both from the CCT advisors, concerning the actions they were taking in relation to minimise construction noise and disturbance. No information, on closures or changes, to what the community reasonably sees as public access roads, appears to have been conveyed to the community at large. I would challenge the Inquiry to find any residents, further than 100 metres from William St, who can evidence any degree of real communication from any of those whose role should be to advise the community.

My own attempts to elicit advance information from the RTA, by telephone and letter, resulted in a single correspondence advising me “...some changes to roads will result on the opening of the CCT, these will be advised closer to the opening date.” This was one year out and followed the extended closure of the access road to the EDR, which over-ran by some 18-24 months!

Correspondence with Clover Moore's office resulted in a general reply which in no way addressed any of the specific questions I asked.

More recently correspondence with the Premier's and Roads Minister only resulted in advice from the Cabinet Office that the Office of the Roads Minister would answer my suggestions in relation to Bourke St. – to date some 12 weeks later I have received no answer.

While I understand that the Inquiry may not be able to consider such specifics I offer them by way of example of the contempt that concerned residents suffered from the public entities.

I would now like to comment specifically on the Consultants Report into the changes in Bourke Street. This Report was completed for some time before it was released to the public – some 3 months I believe after the originally published release date. Communication, with the Consultants directly, elicited the explanation that while the report had been completed it was awaiting “Ministerial Clearance” before it could be put in the public domain. Why, I ask, should it take longer than one week for such clearance?

The report contained proposals outside of those originally advised to the public so it was important that the public knew, however the deliberate 'hold up' can only be interpreted as a mechanism to reduce to a minimum to opportunity for public outcry.

An even more inappropriate control of information release was exercised by the RTA in relation to the road changes in Druiitt Street and Park Street. As far as I can ascertain no information was ever conveyed to the public until some 3 weeks before the original, advanced, opening date for the CCT. When released it was buried on the RTA web site until revealed to the Press! Again the cynical can only assume this was to minimise the opportunity for objections.

I would now like to provide the Inquiry with some personal comments on the impacts of the CCT and associated road changes.

Living in Victoria Street means that I have no reasonable access to the CCT so have to continue to use surface roads when I travel. This means that I now have longer, less direct, more congested journeys.

I travel to work on the 311 bus service which now travels a longer route through more traffic lights and over more congested roads – primarily because of the closures in William Street and restrictions around Bourke Street. This was not I believe the intended outcome of the CCT.

I would bring to the Inquiry's attention that some of this could have been predicted as the CCT only provides an exit route from the Eastern Suburbs to North Shore and City North locations. Traffic can only return to the Eastern Suburbs by use of William Street as there is no access to the CCT, other than by a long diversion to the Western entrances. This is a fundamental design problem and should have been recognised so that more West – East lanes were allowed in William Street. Had the public had full information I am confident that early representation could have been made to the RTA to emphasise this difficulty with, hopefully, a change in original plans.

In their deliberations I would ask the Inquiry to consider if a proper relationship existed between the CCT, RTA and City of Sydney in relation to political and commercial ends relative to public interest? Is it considered appropriate for the RTA to be in a position to elicit monies from a commercial operator when the sums are such that they have significant, positive, impact on RTA budgets? Could this lead to an improper consideration relative to that of public interest? Similarly should the City of Sydney develop an interaction with the RTA effectively "trading" road changes against their own, non publicised, aspirations to significantly change the street scape – effectively circumnavigating proper public consultation?

In closing I would ask the Inquiry members to consider if there are proper mechanisms in place to measure the impacts of the CCT particularly in relation to the possibility of reversing those road changes not contracted into the CCT agreements. If there are mechanisms why can they not be open to public scrutiny and comment? As far as I can ascertain the RTA have no rational figures for traffic flows in the effected areas as the nature of residences has significantly changed in the last 4 years by virtue of the conversion of many hotels to permanent residences, and the construction disruption caused by the CCT, effectively meant that people significantly changed their journeys.

There are other issues about the CCT which I suspect concerned members of the public would like to be considered but fear these are outside of your Terms of Reference. I hope that in my submission I have not strayed too far from those terms.

I thank the Inquiry for considering my submission and hope that the outcome will be a foundation for better public scrutiny of similar projects in the future.

Barrie Shepherd