

Submission
No 80

INQUIRY INTO CROSS CITY TUNNEL

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Theme:

Summary

PEDESTRIAN SAFETY AT FALCON ST, NORTH SYDNEY AS A RESULT OF THE LANE COVE TUNNEL RAMPS

Who are the Walking Volunteers?

The Walking Volunteers began in 1999 working with North Sydney Council to improve and promote pedestrian facilities in North Sydney. (We were then called the North Sydney Walking Volunteers.) We are now working with 15 Councils and State and Federal bodies on both sides of the Harbour.

Attached is a brief summary of our work. Our qualifications are set out in page 18 of our attached submission to the Lane Cove Tunnel EIS.

What is our role in relation to the Lane Cove Tunnel?

As the head of the Volunteers I represent the Walking Volunteers on both the Falcon St Lane Cove Tunnel Community Liaison Group (CCLG4) and the North Sydney Council Pedestrian Committee.

What are our current concerns about pedestrian safety at the Falcon St Crossings?

As a result of three new ramps being built for the Lane Cove Tunnel pedestrian safety has been severely compromised at this major North Shore crossing.

Students from eight schools use this and we feel the risk of an accident or fatality is very real.

Before work commenced there was an uninterrupted northern footpath used by school children and others. Pedestrians now have to cross three separate pedestrian crossings. Teachers are forced to manage groups of students on one side of the extremely busy road as well as children who cannot complete the crossing in one trip stranded on a central traffic island.

The crossings are blind to oncoming motorists and are inadequately signed. Vehicles regularly run red lights at speed and cement walls and high steel structures obscure views.

What did we initially do to promote pedestrian/bike safety?

In 2001 we worked with North Sydney and Willoughby Councils, assisted by the RTA, to design a level pedestrian path alongside the expressway completing the network being proposed by the RTA from Willoughby Road to the Harbour Bridge. Attached is our submission to the EIS dated January 2002. This proposed a level pedestrian underpass north south under Falcon Street.

Subsequently we helped North Sydney Council design an east west overpass.

Walking Volunteers submission to the Inquiry into the Lane Cove Tunnel 25 May 2006.

The Council, RTA and Thiess John Holland (TJH) have agreed to the cost. The Council and RTA have also agreed that it is appropriate to allow advertising to pay for the under and overpass. This requires Department of Planning approval. The Department has indicated that it would consider approval, but the RTA, as the responsible authority, has not applied for it.

The cost of building the under and overpass would have been greatly reduced if the large TJH crane had been used, but it has now been removed and the opportunity squandered. With the crane in place North Sydney Council estimated savings of about one third.

The under and overpass would provide a safe, economical, level, pedestrian/cycle path in both directions avoiding interference with the dangerous and congested vehicular crossings.

Support for the North Sydney Council's submission

We have read the detailed submission by North Sydney Council and agree with it in every respect. In addition, we wish to raise the following issues for consideration by the inquiry.

1. Why were the under and overpasses not included in the plans approved by the Planning Minister in March 2004?

For safety, useability and economy, the under and overpass should have been built at the same time as the Falcon St works. The RTA, while at first very interested, did no pedestrian studies, ignored our studies and referred the matter to the RTA General Manager Pedestrian/Cycles for future consideration.

The construction cost of about \$2.5m is very modest in regards to the current project costs reported to be \$1.4 billion, and the crossing is one of the most important and dangerous crossings for pedestrians and cyclists in the whole area. Most pedestrians and cyclists pass through there on their way to the North Sydney CBD, the Harbour Bridge or shops, libraries and schools etc.

One possible explanation is the supremacy given by the RTA to drivers above pedestrians and cyclists. The position of General Manager Pedestrian/Cycles was abolished in 2005 and the Pedestrian Cycle budget cut by two thirds. In Action for Transport in Sydney 2010 the RTA was to 'Develop a Pedestrian Strategy by 1999'. It has not done so.

RTA states the southern crossing, which involves six sets of lights over 200m from the west of Merlin St to St Leonards Park, solves the problem. It has been suggested that this was mainly built to strengthen the inadequate bridge itself, the pedestrian crossing being a convenient side effect.

Mr Paul Forward, then head of RTA, defended the southern crossing by saying most pedestrian/cycle movements from the east were directed towards Crows Nest, and the proposed southern overpass would not provide for them. When questioned he had done no studies, and the North Sydney Council commissioned study showed only about 10%

Walking Volunteers submission to the Inquiry into the Lane Cove Tunnel 25 May 2006.
of movements were so directed. The other nearly 90% were crossing St Leonards Park towards the North Sydney CBD and would better and more safely use the proposed overpass.

The RTA after many months of requests produced its study of the times to cross the southern crossing. Under questioning the time gradually increased to a maximum of 9.3 minutes, less than the Council's estimate of 12 minutes. When the details of the RTA calculations were provided, it was found it had omitted to include the final crossing on the west and did not include the Merlin St crossing. This is another instance where outside scrutiny revealed mistakes in RTA evaluations (see question 5 below).

All these would be avoided by the southern overpass. Even those pedestrians/cyclists going to Crows Nest would enjoy a quicker and safer journey by using the slightly longer overpass route, thus avoiding the six sets of lights.

The Minister has stated (Hansard 23 May) that the RTA is considering a crossing north of Falcon Street, apparently rejecting the southern crossing and the underpass. No provision is apparently made for funding. The underpass and southern overpass are basically designed and could be quickly built, funded by advertising. RTA has agreed to provide details of its proposal to the CCLG4 meeting on 7 June 2006, and the information will be available to the hearing.

2. Why have the pedestrian/cycle crossings at the south east and north west corners of the Falcon St crossing been made so dangerous and lengthy?

The RTA states that it balances the interests of vehicles with those of pedestrians and cyclists. During our dealings with the RTA we have found that the option most beneficial to vehicles has been chosen when changes have been made, almost always to the further detriment of pedestrians/cyclists.

We are extremely disappointed that the opportunity created by the Lane Cove Tunnel to improve the already dangerous and difficult position for pedestrians/cyclists in this area has been squandered.

The major problem lies at the south east corner where:

- taxis, hire cars and motorcycles regularly run the last yellow/red lights before what appears to be the left turn onto the ramp to the Harbour Bridge;
- in the afternoon the crossings are unsighted because people drive into the westerly sun;
- drivers cannot see the pedestrian crossing due to the cement barrier and superstructure being built until they are approx 40 metres from the crossing. This is very dangerous because a person driving at 60 kmph takes 60 metres to stop. Drivers often exceed this speed;
- because pedestrians are only given 6 seconds of green light each 2.5 minutes to cross, they regularly try to cross on the yellow/red, and also cannot see oncoming cars until they are 40 metres away.

Walking Volunteers submission to the Inquiry into the Lane Cove Tunnel 25 May 2006.

Very similar problems exist at the north west corner. Further, as a result of the unapproved increase of the crossing from one to two stages, the crossing in the previously continuous footpath was increased from approx. 20m to 50m.

The RTA seems to assume all vehicles stop on the yellow, can see clearly, keep a keen lookout, don't speed and pedestrians only cross on the green. In the last few days media reports (e.g. SMH 24 & 25 May, A Current Affair 24 May) vividly illustrate otherwise.

At first RTA insisted all its experts had found the south east crossing met all relevant standards. Its safety consultants attended a CCLG4 meeting to defend their decision. Under questioning it is agreed it should be reviewed. The crossing has recently been moved five metres towards the position the Walking Volunteers suggested eighteen months ago, but is still not properly visible.

Two days ago when its new position was identified by TJH on site, it was agreed a taxi, hire car, motorbike or bus using the transit lane, where speeding is more likely to occur, would, as a result of the intervening structures now built, first see a pedestrian only 40 metres away when the stopping time requires 60 metres at 60 km/h or 80 meters at 70km/h.

3. Why doesn't the RTA properly consult with Councils and the CCLGs?

The RTA has allowed many major changes to the Minister for Planning's approval without proper consultation with the Council or CCLG4.

The first is increasing the number of crossing of the previously uninterrupted northern pedestrian footpath from two to three. As the North Sydney Council submission shows, from the first change, gradually, step by step, the pedestrian facilities were further and further eroded. As stated above, the full crossing at this point has increased from about 20 metres to 50 metres.

The second example is the major change of where the south bound entrance to Falcon Street was placed. The position approved by the Minister allowed the underpass to be economically built. The change was made over a year before North Sydney Council was even told it had been made. If the Council and the Walking Volunteers had been consulted much better provision could have been made for pedestrian/cyclists. Again the opportunity was squandered.

The RTA insists it did consult with senior officers of North Sydney Council, a claim that the Council disputes. The RTA cannot name the officers, and says it keeps no records of such meetings.

In the beginning the RTA provided the CCLG4 with copies of reports upon which the RTA made decisions. When it was shown that in some instances the reports either didn't justify the decision, or didn't even consider it, the Council and CCLG4 were told not all reports would be made available on request and if not the Freedom of Information Act would have to be used, and RTA might object. RTA has now refused the CCLG4 access to important internal studies on which decisions have been made.

4. Why can the RTA alone make the decision that a change it wishes to approve is 'consistent with the approval' of the Minister for Planning in March 2004?

The RTA made such major decisions as the two mentioned in para 3 without consulting either the Council or CCLG4. In fact it insists that CCLG4 cannot comment.

We believe such changes are not in fact consistent with the Minister's approval. In our opinion both the Council and CCLG4 should have been consulted and the changes referred to the Minister for consideration as an independent person.

The Minister for Planning could well have ordered a full review of the EIS after public exhibition. Obviously, the RTA and TJH wish to avoid this.

5. Why does the RTA avoid outside consultation?

At CCLG4 meetings, the RTA stated it was not necessary to consult as 'RTA's design review process covers safety issues'. We believe the RTA's internal processes are not always competent and thorough external consultation is necessary to secure optimal outcomes.

6. Why has a major unsafe bus stop been built with the pedestrian crossing separated from it?

Over two years ago we pointed out to the RTA that moving the bus stop to the west would create bad sight lines for drivers. The new bus stop is unsafe and as a result STA drivers are refusing to stop there.

The related pedestrian crossing was moved 400 metres away to the east. This increased the distance to cross the road by nearly another kilometre for the large group of often young and old users of public transport. Inevitably bus commuters will try and run across the road as they do now.

An express bus lane has been added. This requires bus commuters to cross four lanes, the first having speeding buses which also block vision.

CCLG4 Minutes

Thiess John Holland have kept excellent minutes of CCLG4 and current action lists. These are available from their web site: www.lanecovetunnelproject.com.au and detail the continued raising of these issues and the RTA's responses.

DVD – 'Dividing North Sydney'

A professionally produced, 10 minute DVD that graphically outlines these issues is attached.

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Who Are the Walking Volunteers

The *Walking Volunteers* are a group of individuals who enjoy exploring areas on foot.

They aim to assist others to share in this pleasure, an aim which is summed up in their slogan: *'It's exhilarating and healthy'*

They believe that walking is one of the most effective and economical ways to:

- combat obesity
- fight pollution, and
- reduce congestion on our roads.

What they have achieved:

- Commencing in 1999, and then known as the *North Sydney Walking Volunteers*, they came together and worked with North Sydney Council to develop a 45 km network of six connected circular walks, each with its own brochure. www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au click Recreation, then Walking North Sydney
- In 2001 they envisaged and demonstrated the need and practicality of a Lane Cove to Harbour Pathway to be built in connection with the Lane Cove Tunnel project
- In 2002 they started identifying the many little known pedestrian laneways, steps and routes throughout North Sydney. Many pedestrian opportunities, such as lanes and steps at the end of streets shown as 'no through way', lanes hidden behind walls and gardens or made to appear private were documented.
- In 2003 a working relationship was established with Willoughby, Lane Cove, Mosman and North Sydney Councils to map and sign pedestrian routes disregarding Council boundaries and to display each others' brochures. Since then, Hunters Hill, National Parks and HarbourTrust have joined in (see
- In 2003 they assisted STEP Inc in the production of two *Walking Tracks* maps, Sheets 1 & 2 '*Bungaroo & Roseville Bridge*' and Sheets 3 & 4 '*Northbridge & North Harbour*'.
- In 2004 they assisted the Hunters Hill walking volunteers in the production of 'Walks in Hunters Hill' brochures. Hunters Hill then joined with them and became the *North Shore Walking Volunteers*.
- In 2004 they produced the 'Walking North Sydney' brochure. This publicised the pedestrian opportunities and encouraged people to walk to work, school, the shops, picnics etc. The opportunities are all being signed and location maps installed.

The brochure brought together the wide range of Council's walking publications, which are now downloadable from its website.

The brochure won a 2005 Local Government Award, and is being copied by the City of Geneva, from whom one of the ideas in the brochure originated.

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- In late 2004 DIPNR offered funding to extend the area they covered, and this has resulted in 2005 the release of three Regional Brochures, *A Harbour Circle Walk*, *Harbour to Great North Walk* and *Harbour to Spit Walk* and (the latter being jointly funded with Mosman and North Sydney Councils). To produce these brochures the Volunteers have worked with ten local councils, three State and one Federal body, an example of how volunteers can work in partnership. The Volunteers are now known simply as the *Walking Volunteers*.
- These three brochures, together with the Great North Walk, the Harbour to Hawkesbury Track and the Manly Scenic Walkway make up a comprehensive network of over 400 km of walking tracks which might become the model for further expansion. www.planning.nsw.gov.au/harbour click Walking Sydney Harbour. The main routes are being marked by the Volunteers with the internationally recognised 'yellow bar' system, and posters advertising the Network are being installed. They have been so popular reprints totalling 80,000 have been ordered.
- In late 2005 working with HarbourTrust, Mosman Council & National Parks a joint brochure *Walking Middle Head – Taronga to Balmoral* has been completed.

The Walking Volunteers are:

Jim & Therese Archibald, Neil & Pam Hardie, Phil Jenkyn, Ian Napier, Bill (Coordinator) & Nedra Orme, Don & Laura Riddell, Leigh Shearer-Heriot, Cameron Sparks and Graham Spindler. Sydway Mapping (Glenn Anderson, NSW State Marketing Manager), whose quality of mapping and economy of printing have backed the Volunteers from the outset. *The Volunteers achievements have been far reaching (Planning NSW).*

Bill Orme – Coordinator

Since commencing retirement Bill & Nedra have walked over 40,000kms along the distance walking paths of Australia and overseas, and are now recognised as amongst the most experienced long distance walkers in the world. Bill has been instrumental in:

- Having most long distance walking tracks in NSW included on NRMA maps.
- Producing a checklist for walking guides, maps and signage now published in the British Long Distance Walkers magazine '*Strider*'. The checklist was written after consulting leading writers and publishers around the world. He also writes the '*Practicals*' advice in '*Strider*', as well as articles on their walks in it and other publications.
- Assisting in the Federation Track, a 7,000 km footpath from Brisbane via Sydney, Melbourne, near Adelaide to above Wilpena Pound.