

INQUIRY INTO CROSS CITY TUNNEL

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Theme:

Summary

Submission to the Cross City Tunnel Inquiry
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The Darlinghurst Residents Action Group (DRAG) is a citizens group for residents and small business of Darlinghurst Ridge in Sydney's inner-city. Darlinghurst Ridge comprises the inner-Sydney suburbs of Kings Cross and Darlinghurst. DRAG is committed to Darlinghurst's history of tolerance and diversity and to maintaining and extending the quality of public and community resources in a sustainable and liveable City of Sydney.

DRAG has taken a strong interest in the road closures and other traffic changes in the area and their deleterious effect on local residents and businesses – both those associated with the Cross City Tunnel and those proposed or implemented by the City of Sydney. Along with many other resident organisations in the area, DRAG has consulted widely in the community and made numerous representations to the Council and the State Government.

People in the area which we represent are not able to use the Cross-city tunnel because there is no entrance in this area. However we are badly affected by the many road closures and restrictions associated with it, which were allegedly introduced to encourage traffic to use the tunnel.

We believe that, as with other private commercial enterprises, feasible pricing and level of custom should have been calculated more accurately. The local community should not be inconvenienced by State and local Governments attempting to shore up the profitability of the Cross City Tunnel consortium.

Community Consultation in relation to Cross City Tunnel

DRAG is also seriously concerned that community consultation on the Cross City Tunnel arrangements were inadequate.

Our vision

DRAG believes that the vibrant and diverse community in the City East area needs a mix of residents, businesses and services. DRAG further believes that the key to a healthy and prosperous city is efficient movement throughout the metropolitan area to maximise social and economic participation and engagement. We are strongly in favour of maximising the use of public transport, walking and cycling wherever feasible, but we recognise that these do not provide adequately for all journeys.

The over-riding objective of traffic planning in the East City area should be to provide the most efficient, fair and environmentally responsible means of enabling residents to travel to work, and to engage in social and cultural participation, to allow mobile services and businesses to operate effectively, to provide maximum accessibility for workers and customers in local businesses.

Increases in the cost of travel reduce accessibility, particularly for low income residents and low paid workers. Such increases occur through circuitous routes, traffic delays and tolls. Any such impacts should be taken into account in a relation to the potential benefits of changes to traffic arrangements.

The initial Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the project, quoted in the Roads and Traffic Authority Submission, contained the primary objectives of the Cross City Tunnel:

1. to improve the environmental quality of public spaces within Central Sydney
2. to improve the ease of access and reliability of travel within Central Sydney
3. to improve the reliability and efficiency of travel between areas east and west of Central Sydney

The associated surface road changes in the area we represent have led to a spectacular failure to achieve objectives 2 and 3.

If the vision of the plan was to reduce traffic congestion by removing traffic from the surface roads then the narrowing of William Street, closure of Bourke Street and closure of direct routes into the Eastern Distributor, Anzac Bridge and the Harbour Tunnel have been counter-productive.

We believe that the low volume of traffic using the tunnel is not only all due to drivers refusing to use the tunnel because they cannot afford the level of the tolls, but also, and more importantly, it is due to a relatively small amount of traffic travelling from Rushcutters Bay to the Anzac Bridge and vice versa.

Narrowing of William and Park Streets

The volume of traffic using the Cross City Tunnel has not been sufficient to offset the congestion caused by the narrowing of William Street and Park Street.

The stated objective for narrowing William Street is to provide a wider pedestrian boulevard. Those in favour of narrowing William Street claim that this will attract small shops and cafes to William Street. It is our contention that

- The buildings in William Street are not configured to provide spaces for small retail outlets, so these will not come into existence to any large scale.
- William Street remains a necessary major thoroughfare for traffic in the inner East and from elsewhere travelling to the city – the cross city tunnel does not provide

- direct access to the city and cannot be used by those in the inner Eastern city fringe as there is no entrance in this area.
- William Street has a steep gradient and is a wind tunnel for the prevailing West east wind. It is not attractive for pedestrians.
 - Furthermore the air pollution from congested traffic makes William Street less attractive for pedestrians.
 - The nearby small retail areas such as Oxford Street, East Sydney, Stanley Street, Victoria Street, Darlinghurst Road and Kings Cross provide sufficient retail, restaurant and other facilities to saturate local demand. A growth in small retail businesses along William Street would be likely to be at the expense of these existing small businesses, rather than adding more successful outlets.
 - In short the potential benefits of narrowing William Street are outweighed by the cost to surface travellers of delay, inefficiency and congestion, and to local residents of the resulting air pollution.

The volume of traffic on William Street is one of the reasons given for not restoring the route from Bourke Street across William Street to provide an alternative route for accessing the Eastern Distributor.

4. CALL FOR A CITY EAST TRAFFIC PLAN

Resident groups in Kings Cross, Potts Point and Darlinghurst are therefore urging the State Government, the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) and City of Sydney Council to:

- i. Keep local streets open, and re-open Bourke Street South at William Street.

Trial openings rather than trial closures will allow pre and post traffic studies to ascertain the true traffic and transport impact of the CCT.

- ii. Assess existing closures and 'trial closures' in East Sydney.

These residents already experience difficulty in accessing their own streets. Recent closures include Forbes and Burton Streets at Taylor Square and 'trial closing' of sections of Forbes Street, Forbes Lane, St Peters Street and Yurong Lane.

- iii. Initiate a proper traffic and transport study for City East and CDB

No official study has been made in this area for over 20 years!

The impact of a 30% local population increase in the last five years also needs assessment as does the extensive re-zonings in the South Sydney LEP (1998) to allow increased commercial activity in former residential areas.

- ii. Encourage use of buses and trains, and walking and cycle routes, but acknowledge a need for City East road traffic.

Local people must travel distances for work, services, delivery as well as family, social, cultural and recreational reasons. A strategy to discourage use of vehicles by intentionally creating road congestion is unlikely to be successful and has negative economic and social effects.

iii. Aim for a fair traffic plan.

The only significant east-west access from Oxford Street between the CBD to Bondi Junction is via College Street, Crown Street, Darlinghurst Road then Ocean Street.

iv. Consult all interested and affected third parties.

Public Meetings Sponsored by DRAG

Due to the poor consultation by the RTA and the City of Sydney on street closures and street changes, DRAG has sponsored three large public meetings dealing with this topic along with 2011 Residents Association and the Darlinghurst Business Partnership.

These meetings attracted between 60 and 150 people. At all three meetings there was overwhelming support for keeping all public street open, re-opening those which had already been closed, and demanding a large, comprehensive traffic study for all of City East.

We believe all citizens must have adequate access to our area so that businesses can flourish and people can freely move around their neighbourhoods. Closed streets are deserted streets. Deserted streets attract crime and are unsafe for all people in the vicinity.

Julia Perry