

**Submission
No 8**

INQUIRY INTO HEALTH IMPACTS OF AIR POLLUTION IN THE SYDNEY BASIN

Organisation:

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Subject:

Summary

TO: The Director,
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2,
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FROM: Mrs. Diane Michel,

Leaving the details of chemical reactions, air movement in the Sydney basin and physiological damage to those more qualified to comment, I will share only these simple facts of life on the edge of Epping Road at North Ryde.

1. Sheer numbers of vehicles as well as traffic congestion are on a steadily increasing trajectory.

Repeated widenings of Epping Road, and construction of the M2 Tollway, have done nothing to reduce the traffic and the congestion. Further, futile additions to roadspace will only continue to reduce amenity and to damage the environment.

Epping Road between the Lane Cove River and Wicks Road, and Delhi Road between the M2 off-ramp and the Epping Road intersection, are undergoing widening in preparation for increased traffic, induced by the Lane Cove Tunnel project. There obviously will be no reduction in traffic. On past performance, any relief from congestion also is, at best, temporary.

In Ryde, immediately west of the Lane Cove Tunnel, the current situation is as follows:

- despite the parallel option of the M2, Epping Rd eastbound is at a standstill for hours every morning. A contributing factor between Delhi Road, North Ryde and Mowbray Road, West Chatswood is eastbound traffic forced to exit the M2 at Delhi Rd in order to access Mowbray Road. An extra left turn lane is under construction on Delhi Rd to accept this M2 traffic plus normal north shore traffic seeking access to Epping Road. It appears that the primary purpose of the extra turn lane is to protect the M2 off-ramp from congesting to the point of blocking that toll road. Traffic on Delhi Rd and eastbound Epping Road at North Ryde will experience further increase when the Lane Cove Tunnel opens and upper north shore motorists opt to use that route to the CBD.

- afternoon traffic on Epping Road, between Delhi Road and Pittwater Road at North Ryde, is congested by the 'normal' eastbound flow, plus a bank-up of vehicles attempting a right turn into Pittwater Road. These motorists are regularly delayed and frustrated by the short turning sequence of the lights at the Epping/Pittwater intersection and by the antics of those who attempt to drive to the head of the queue and force their way into the turning lane(s). Lane Cove Tunnel-related roadworks will provide no relief.

Well-intended plans for additional traffic-calming devices and pedestrian refuges on Pittwater Road may slow the traffic but will contribute to increased congestion and thus to air pollution.

- construction of a new, eastbound bus-only lane between Wicks Road and Delhi Road may increase the speed of bus travel, but it will do nothing to decrease congestion in the motorcar lanes.

- although a new cycleway is nearing completion on the south side of Epping Road, east of Wicks Rd, cycling groups already state that the commuting cyclists prefer to ride on the roadway. Their numbers are increasing and will contribute to congestion accordingly.

- the use of large and small diesel trucks, and the overwhelming proportion of antiquated diesel-powered buses in the public transport fleet, contribute enormously to the pollution of air on and near Lane Cove Road, Epping Road and Delhi Road at North Ryde. High tolls discourage at least some truck-drivers from choosing the M2 as an alternate route. Other constraints include desired routes and destinations of both buses and trucks.

- the M2 is constructed in-cutting at North Ryde, a design which generates heat and channels the

movement of pollution throughout the Sydney airshed.

- the Lane Cove Tunnel's (unfiltered) western emission stack will further contribute to air pollution at East and North Ryde and throughout the Lane Cove River catchment. The two-stack tunnel has been designed to deliver considerably more than half of all in-tunnel emissions to the western stack.

2. The effect of road-related air pollution is well-known to nearby residents - a black, sticky, oily film on windows and interior surfaces near open windows. An inordinate need to dust the furniture. A need, in all weathers, to close doors and windows during traffic peaks (now approx. six hours daily). Although Government has been slow to examine health impacts, affected residents cannot fail to notice the effects on eyes, noses and lungs. Only specialists are able to gauge the effect on the human heart, the unborn foetus, the growing child, and the elderly.

3. Forms of air pollution, other than those related to motor vehicles, are coming under control.

-backyard burning banned.

-open fireplaces losing popularity.

-as a result of liaison with affected communities in Ryde and Ku-ring-gai LGAs, the Australian Native Landscapes operation at Porters Creek (Wicks Road, North Ryde) has greatly reduced the highly allergenic emissions of decomposing greenwaste.

-after almost a century, emissions from the Penfords starch factory on the east bank of the Lane Cove River also have been curtailed - a result of stiffer EPA requirements, installation of new plant to which modern regulation applies, and good will on the part of the corporate entity.

- the stink and the filth of air pollution in North Ryde now is the product of the major roads that traverse it.

4. Only the RTA enjoys immunity from regulation of air pollution created by its projects.

- it is facetious to suggest that the situation is relieved by building enough roads to facilitate 'free-flowing traffic'. As Los Angeles long ago proved, it is physically impossible to build that much roadspace, unless the city the roads serve is removed to accommodate the roads themselves. Despite the rapid increase in Sydney roadspace, the transport network remains at the critical point where one breakdown or collision on a main road can cause hours of delay throughout the system.

- emission controls at the vehicular source remain little more than a pretence . . . how many catalytic converters have been replaced when they ceased to function? how many owners of diesel vehicles regularly maintain the emission filters? how many trucks have been booked for polluting the air? how many government buses have been booked for the same violation? And, silly question, how many operators of private toll roads are interested in reducing pollution by reducing patronage?

5. Only the RTA is protected from penalties for the damage it does to the citizens who fund its existence. Asbestos was a terrible thing which brought about the deaths of many people, and the total mortality figures have not yet been reached. People were rightly shocked to find that the producers knew the danger but continued to conceal it. The same outrage and dismay is directed at the tobacco companies. Neither asbestos nor tobacco are as universal in their effects on human health as the air we breathe everywhere and every hour, but the RTA is permitted to deny its contribution to air pollution.

- don't the new tollroads induce more people to drive? Of course, they do, and that's exactly what the RTA has promised the private road operators.

- by inserting new, major roads into developed city areas, doesn't the RTA increase the length of many short trips? Of course it does. When a residential or corporate driveway deposits motorists into one-way traffic, it often becomes necessary to double the distance to the shops, e.g. go east before going west, or drive to a bridge that crosses the super-highway. The same effect applies to emergency vehicles, which are delayed in reaching their destination.

- should the public be getting more exercise, by walking, running and cycling? The RTA wholeheartedly agrees and builds pathways beside major roads, where every deep breath of air sucks an extra load of pollution into the lungs.

- would it help to filter the air in tunnels? The RTA's denial is calmly accepted by the Government it serves.

6. Why is nothing done about the RTA? Good question, but awkward to answer. Apparently, no price is too high to pay for RTA 'spin', and for suppression of uncomfortable facts.

Why did the current Minister for Roads state in a televised interview that he did not intend to read the report of the Inquiry into the Lane Cove Tunnel?

Why was the RTA able to ignore the recommendations of the Health Minister, concerning placement of warning signs in the M5 East tunnel?

In view of the known problems with the M5 East tunnel, why wasn't emission filtration a condition of construction for the Lane Cove Tunnel?

Why do RTA estimates of tunnel filtration costs differ so wildly from those of the filtration manufacturers?

Why does the Government accept the RTA's costings so willingly?

For that matter, why does the Government continue to accept traffic predictions which have never once been borne out by reality?

Why did the UDIAMetroMetrics publication, 'Essential Sydney' (distributed in July 2006 by the Sydney Morning Herald) neglect to identify vehicle emissions as a source of particulate matter in air pollution?

Only deteriorating tyres, dust and bushfires are listed in 'Essential Sydney' as producers of particulate pollution, although vehicle emissions are known to be a primary source of heart-lung and cellular damage from microscopic particles.

IN SUMMARY

It is my belief, and I am not alone in it, that the single greatest improvement to the health and wellbeing of Sydney residents would be an honest assessment of the ongoing damage done by the RTA's slavish catering to the road lobby - this assessment to be followed rapidly by a reduction in the superiority granted to the specialised authority, which appears to wield unprecedented influence over all others.

Diane Michel
28 July 2006