

## **INQUIRY INTO CROSS CITY TUNNEL**

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Theme:

Summary

SUBMISSION OF SUZANNE O'CONNOR  
COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE  
KINGS CROSS CLG

I volunteered to be a community representative because I believe that it is essential for individuals to become involved in the process of significant change. I began the experience with what I thought were realistic assumptions and expectations. For example, I realised that there were engineering and business aspects of the project that would not be comprehensible to me. However, I naively thought that my local knowledge and experience would be regarded as relevant and valuable.

**How wrong I was!**

1. The beginnings of doubt began at the first meeting when some RTA representatives distributed maps of the area in Kings Cross that would be affected by construction. The maps were completely inaccurate in terms of names of streets and directions of traffic flow. When this was pointed out, the RTA representatives brushed aside the mistakes and claimed the maps and diagrams were “preliminary”. Interestingly, we community representatives seemed from the very beginning to be taking this process far more seriously. This relatively minor example was a symptom of a much more serious problem –
2. **NO ONE FROM ANY OF THE ORGANISATIONS ON THE COMMITTEE SEEMED TO BE ABLE TO PRODUCE GUIDELINES OR DEFINITIONS OF THE PHRASE **COMMUNITY CONSULTATION**.**
3. The community representatives repeatedly asked for any documentation but no one seemed either willing or capable of producing such basic guidelines.
4. Surely such a set of guidelines should be devised and used consistently in all such projects? As it was, the increasing tensions and frustrations that developed could often have been avoided if we had all been able to refer to a clear set of directions.
5. There were many instances when the RTA in particular seemed to regard ‘consultation’ as a synonym for ‘instruction’. For example, at a later meeting, we were given documents that claimed to be projections of population increases in the Kings Cross area. These statistics “proved” that there was no projected population increase. When we exploded as one and told the Committee of the huge number of hotel to apartment conversions, as well as other apartment constructions of which we were well aware because of our local knowledge, the information was treated with contempt. The seriously flawed information was “right” and our knowledge was not.
6. Another example of the misunderstanding of the much abused phrase “community consultation” was the presentation by a series of young engineers each meeting. Pleasant young men, equipped with overhead projections and/or Power Pointless equipment, would TELL us what would be happening in the next month or two in terms of construction. In 2005, one of our members pointed out a serious difference between what we were told would happen and what actually *did* happen. In this case, it was the arrangements for heavy trucks entering and leaving the site at the Rushcutters Bay portal. There were serious safety

implications but the RTA representatives' response was that the planned system had not been practical. We were left wondering why these alleged experts could not have worked out a safe method for such a basic arrangement as truck entrances and/or exits. Also, why when this method had to be modified, were we not told? Surely this would have been genuine Community Consultation? It was only that our member overlooked the site and saw a number of near accidents that we were aware of the situation. This legitimate concern was brushed aside, even after the Chairman of the committee remonstrated with the RTA representatives.

7. We spent meeting after meeting asking that ALL documents on which we were supposed to comment be distributed a reasonable time **before** each meeting. It took many months before this request was met. Surely, allowing the community a reasonable amount of time to read and analyse some quite complex material before each meeting would be a perfect example of functional community consultation.
8. Many of the community representatives resigned in disgust and despair over such examples of our treatment which was at best inept and at worst deeply cynical. We increasingly came to feel that we were the little boxes marked "Community Consultation" and, as long as it could be shown that the community had been consulted, the task had been completed.
9. The final, insultingly brief meeting was the nadir of the process. Few RTA representatives were present – they were frequently "on leave" – and we were told the group no longer needed to meet. We had given up countless hours of our own time over a long period and came to be treated with increasing contempt discourtesy.

Before any other community group is exposed to such a farcical experience, I suggest clear guidelines be drawn up and ALL participants be made aware of them

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