

**INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE CBD AND SOUTH EAST
LIGHT RAIL PROJECT**

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 8 July 2018

Partially
Confidential

My community (the businesses within it), our environment and myself have been adversely impacted by the light rail project and the entire process that made it come about. Our street, Devonshire St, is tiny and should never have been a candidate for 67 metre long trains. Trains that are just 3 metres shy of a Boeing 747.

This inquiry should also be widened to consider the impact on public transport and congestion that is happening now, and that will occur once it finally goes live. There are huge social, environmental and monetary costs that far outweigh any perceived benefits. This project will have an adverse impact on our communities and budget for generations.

The government was asked to prove the project's worth. The then Transport Minister, Gladys Berejiklian waved an A3 page at the meeting of 700-800 people and said "what about this?" Then realising she wasn't getting a free pass said "I didn't have to come here tonight". When a motion was passed in parliament to compel the government to release documents to show the business case and the figures used to justify the project, Berejiklian made the majority "cabinet in confidence". Effectively this hid any justification from the people who are paying for the project; the people of New South Wales. Whilst those being impacted by the project might support light rail they will only do so if it is justified properly. Berejiklian stated "there will be winners and losers". She obviously doesn't care if we are the latter and refuses to make any justification. "They'll understand the benefits once it's implemented" is her patronising refrain. Tunnels are being built all over Sydney with the exception of this project. Instead the streets are being made into a wasteland and huge trains added to cover up errors in costing. These have the potential to block multiple intersections at a time, creating worse traffic conditions than currently exist.

1. Reduced capacity - Experts have queried the capacity claims of the project and reports (including one undertaken by Randwick Council done in 2018 have shown that public transport capacity will be lower than it currently is. Experts advise it will be at capacity on day 1.
2. Damaged environment – trees that are 60-100 years old have been torn out. In some cases for a temporary road diversion. Streets now mirror a wasteland.
3. Congestion – the premier advised this project existed to reduce city congestion from buses yet she has done nothing about the cars that are the real cause. It has been transferred elsewhere and with the light rail crossing and then blocking at least 13 major intersections plus a myriad of others, congestions will in fact be worse.
4. Cost of the project – this has been particularly dishonest. One major contractor withdrew due to hidden cost concerns and it has been reported the current contractor underquoted to get the contract. The government themselves hid information from view and we are seeing the result of this in the current Supreme Court case.
5. Loss of amenity of roads - lanes have been removed, traffic congestion has increased, bus stops removed, parking spots gone for good. What is the impact of the light rail on all these things? Any impact must be properly quantified and accounted for. An entire review of the costs and benefits of the light rail project is required now and the only way it must be done is by widening the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.
6. Parklands and trees – these were effectively given away to private enterprise at the community's expense. Public amenity is reduced to criminal levels with the broad destruction of trees and parklands. Both on a temporary and a permanent basis.

The Auditor General has pilloried the project yet the government has refused to budge. Meanwhile the budget has gone from \$1.6 billion, to \$2.1 billion and now there is an additional \$1.2 billion. This takes the total to \$3.3 billion with the supposed benefits reducing constantly. The only winners are the developers. Developers were advertising new apartments as being next to a light rail stop at Kingsford and Randwick before the project was officially approved.

Community social impacts including Government response and communication

The premier is fond of touting the consultation that has occurred. To be very clear; there has been absolutely zero consultation. Telling us what will happen is not consultation. It is one way.

TfNSW has used divide and conquer as their method. Initial meetings saw immense opposition. Many of the representatives chosen were sympathetic to the government. The process has been treated as a war on citizens. TfNSW have been combative from the start and residents were merely an annoyance that had to be moved away. Any sign of trouble and they quickly started to close down forums. Protests about the project at Parliament House saw project staff hiding across the road and taking photographs of citizens. Phone staff have mentioned there are notes about individuals and whether they are a problem for the project.

Residents have now stopped engaging with the project and the premier. Why put ourselves through continuing arrogance and condescension trying to engage meaningfully with deaf ears. People are angry. They've given up and refuse to engage with Berejiklian and her cohorts. They are just watching disaster after disaster unfold. A good democracy should be about participation. This premier uses the patronising tenet, the government is in power and makes the decisions for the good of the people regardless of what they might say. She knows best. Well it's been proved time and time again she doesn't. The numerous backflips are costing us; and the projects she pigheadedly pushes on with, will cost us for generations. Berejiklian sees activity as a good thing regardless of whether it's justified or whether the people agree with it. Sometimes it's better to do nothing, than do a project poorly.

The people along the route has been failed by all levels of government. Even Turnbull who once protested removal of trees in Moore Park has been silent as he now sees the project as a 'state issue'. Clover Moore, the original architect, has gone missing in an effort to distance herself from this disaster.

The Surry Hills area is diverse and we live with many vulnerable people in the Housing Commission apartments; aging, poor mental health and physical disabilities. The same people TfNSW bribes with BBQs to keep their silence on the disaster on Devonshire St. These people don't have a voice and are convenient for the government as they offer little in terms of opposition. Footpaths have been moved within metres of the bedrooms and living areas of the Housing Commission apartments on Devonshire St. These people have no voice, no say and their standard of living is permanently damaged.

Many of us have made our home here for many years and there is a sense of community. We moved here because we loved the trees and the mix of people. We knew all the shop owners along the route and made sure we shopped there. We looked out for each other. Now we retreat behind our doors as the front of our homes has become a permanent construction zone. A maximum of 3 month's work at any one site was touted by the project director; yet trucks, dozers, barricades, drilling, digging and blocked streets have become the norm. 3 months of construction in one site has turned into years. Businesses are closed or are hemorrhaging. The community are over it. They're tired. They've been fighting for five years with not an inch given. The revolving team of project staff tell you how much they care before they either ignore you, placate, send you elsewhere or obfuscate to add another hurdle. No, the premier hasn't heard all this because we know she frankly doesn't care. We are the "losers". All we get is the spin whilst we try to get on with our lives. We attempt get the best for ourselves, so we can keep our businesses going or protect our homes from the increasing noise and disruption we didn't ask for.

Our streets are blocked for personal and business deliveries. I had to bring my 86 year old mother across a construction zone on the other side of the street as we can no longer stop in front of our home. She can no longer visit as a walk across the light rail lines will be impossible.

To combat the noise TfNSW are offering varying window treatments and ventilators as we are now expected to keep all windows and doors shut. They did the initial report in May 2016. Requests for air conditioning have been met with insults about "ambit" claims. When we asked for the matter to be escalated, it sat for 1 year with nothing done. They lied about escalating the matter and let it sit. They then advised they were only committing to adding noise treatments after operation starts, meaning you have to put up with construction unless they get to you earlier. The work is still not complete.

We continually leave our homes to get away from the noise. Only once has accommodation been offered and it seems the rules mean they can work all night as long as they don't go for more than 2 consecutive nights. Of course that's what they do. We are secondary to the construction site.

We had large blue temporary water pipes attached to our properties that snaked along the footpath and into our homes. These were supposed to be here for 2 months. They were there for over 8 months. We were continually promised they would be moved.

We now also have green electricity boxes in a row in front of our homes, blocking the footpaths. To achieve this underground electricity we've had our gardens dug up and not properly replaced. The government wanted to place electricity poles in every yard. This was refused then they wanted to add a pit to our already space-challenged yards. Finally they properly undergrounded it but left our homes in disarray and refused to escalate the issue of the green transformer boxes. This refusal to escalate is common. When they do promise to escalate we need to follow the matter months later only to find they have not done it and never intended to.

There is only one tree left in our street. It is in a front yard. Construction workers constantly stand under it as there are no others. People stop to talk in its shade. We and our neighbours get tense as we turn into our street and no longer look forward to going home. We are told the trees will not be replaced at all along the northern side of street. They cannot make up for the 60-70 year old trees we had on Devonshire St.

We've had portaloos sitting out the front of our homes and can no longer use our balconies due to the noise. We can no longer use our balcony due to the noise and the government refuses to acknowledge this loss of amenity. Delivery drivers now take an extra half an hour to get to us around all the street closures. This is not just a construction issue as the streets that are currently closed will be added to at the end of construction with additional "pocket parks" added to close streets off.

Traffic has increased dramatically in the back lane behind our home and this is not acknowledged by the government. They refuse to supply noise treatments to the rear of our home. In the meantime, we have had up to 6 cement trucks sitting at the rear of our home blocking our garage. Added to this we have construction at the front, making the situation unbearable. Our mental health is suffering.

Getting to our home now means we have to navigate back streets from 5-6 blocks away due to road closures. We were never involved in these decisions.

Requests to escalate issues are completely ignored by the arrogant staff from Acciona and TfNSW.

Business impacts including Government response and communication

TfNSW repeatedly talk about consultation of businesses. Business have not been consulted and there is no plan. With figures in the Gold Coast stating 13% have gone under during construction, it is not good enough to abandon these businesses and hope they last until the light rail opens. There needed to be a plan to help and prop up these businesses if they are to suffer for the “greater good”. It is not sufficient for TfNSW to provide solutions such as:

- Putting up “we’re still open” signs
- Offering specials to construction workers
- Band together and get a loan to prop yourselves up
- Close up and go to Bali for 6 months
- “Change your business model from a café to selling heavy machinery”

These businesses are part of our suburb and they are our neighbours. They should not be treated as expendable and on their own. Again, if they are to “take one for the team”, they need a good reason. For us to lose iconic businesses such as the original ‘Bourke Street Bakery’, or 100+ year old pubs, we need to know there are sound reasons.

The following is a list of businesses local to our area that have been impacted by the light rail. It continues to grow.

Business name	Items of note
Rosso Espresso	Thrown out owing rent. Unoccupied.
Digital Press Printing	Found alternative rental due to vibration issues from light rail on delicate machinery.
D’lish Wrap and Roll	Thrown out owing rent. Unoccupied.
The Devonshire	Will not renew lease due to decreased patronage due to light rail. Only hatted restaurant on Devonshire St
The Book Kitchen	Left owing \$10,000 in rent. Has rented their home and moved in to parents’ house with two children. State government will not consider loss of rent claim as they are now out of business.
La Maison	Left prior to construction starting. Signs in the window made it quite clear this was the reason they were leaving. Now occupied by Acciona.
Café next door to Sample Coffee	Gone. They could no longer deal with the reduced revenue.
Kit and Ace	Were unaware of light rail when signing the lease and lasted 6 months (now occupied by Acciona)
Vini	Trying to sell and have managed to sell their small bar 121BC
121BC	Sold to a larger restaurant next door.
Eodoya Japanese	Gone. Premises empty.
Elements I Love	Left due to light rail. Signs left in the window of the empty shop explaining the issues.

Homeware shop at upper end of Devonshire St which lasted 6 months	Now has a new tenant, also a homeware shop. Last Saturday they turned over \$50. Yes \$50.
Gallery Cafe	Gone. Been there as long as I can remember. Now home to Acciona employees in high vis gear.
Japanese restaurant near Mohr Fish	Gone.
Salmon Bros Electrical	Were promised parking by TfNSW for customers. Parking never materialised. Now moved.
The Boyz Eatery	Customers advised they could no longer reach them to come for business lunches. Noise made them suffer terribly.
The Standard Store	Can't move due to their lease and have had their landlord increase the rent.
Bollywood	Gone. They were vocal and said they could not make it. The business that moved in after has also already closed.
Architect on Randle St	Left due to constant construction and removal of trees.
Architect near the Shakespeare	Gone due to construction disruption and shop empty.
Elephant Jump Thai	Had 6 staff. Now down to the owner and the cook. The noise created a terrible amenity and hoardings blocked access.
Essenza	Owner has sold personal items including his watch and car. The restaurant Workers' Comp bill cut in half as staff laid off
Acme Framing	Has now moved to Crown St and paying double rent.
The Last Strand	Moved to Kings Cross after trying to cope for years.
Altering Images	Gone
Sylvia's Skin Care	Gone and the two businesses that followed on in the premises are now gone also.

Financial impact including compensation process

Businesses and friends have moved from the area. This project has permanently damaged our community and all TfNSW said was "go to Bali, you'll get more business when it's done, there are winners and losers, and you'll see how good it is when it's done".

No study was done on the impact on businesses and what it would mean to existing businesses either during or post construction. TfNSW utilised the local Chamber of Commerce to quash resistance and then initiated a "Head to Surry Hills" campaign that local businesses didn't ask for, wasn't policed and the businesses have since advised did not lead to an increase in customers as the street was a war zone. The falsehood that "small businesses are built to cope with this type of interruption" was commonly peddled to play down the impact.

The rental compensation had to be fought for by a City of Sydney councilor and was never freely offered. It was also too late for many as they closed down before it helped. What was offered was far too little and only provided a partial rent recompense. There was no cover for wages, loss of profit, insurance, and all other costs. Businesses were being asked to exist at a loss for many years.

Requests for business compensation were initially completely refused by the premier. She arrogantly states they will get an upturn in business when the project is complete. People cannot live on a hope. This promise has proven to be a lame duck in line with this project. It took a lone City of Sydney councilor to go to a radio personality to get any movement on a partial admission of responsibility for losses to businesses.

Residents have also had damage to their homes that is clearly caused by construction. Compensation has been refused. Likewise, proper noise attenuation measures and compensation for loss of resident amenity has been denied.

Communication regarding delays and compensation

Acciona and TfNSW have communicated when work will occur. However they say this helps businesses with maintaining customers. It doesn't. It only tells them how terrible it will be on a particular day.

There was no communication regarding delays to services being replaced such as water. As previously stated residents and businesses had to deal with temporary plastic pipes on the street and had to constantly follow up Acciona. Acciona have blamed the utility companies and even gave residents the 13 number to complain to companies such as Ausgrid rather than deal with the issues their project caused.

The overall delay of the project remains unexplained. We were lied to regarding the work times i.e. no more than 3 months in any location and have just been left with never-ending construction to live with.

General

This is a vanity project belonging to the Lord Mayor and the Premier. It is also a "monumental disaster" for which politicians, senior public servants and contractors must take the blame. It is a "monument to incompetence" for the following reasons:

It has done enormous damage both during construction and permanently to the Centennial Parklands, the streetscape and street capacity, businesses and to residential amenity all along the route.

The former CEO of Infrastructure NSW, Mr Broad, is right to point out the potential accidents to pedestrians and vehicles, which were removed, when trams were taken off Sydney streets in the 1950's. Infrastructure NSW recommended against the CBD Light Rail, just as the community warned about building a light rail in Sydney, so too did Infrastructure NSW "An Infrastructure NSW report- released in October 2012 by Mr Broad and then Chairman, former NSW premier Nick Greiner- alerted the Government to potential financial disruptions and lengthy delays" (ABC Fri 13 April 2018) Why were their concerns ignored?

The removal of trams helped to remove City and suburban congestion as well as safety and also to speed up traffic flows. The present arrangements reverse those gains and transfer congestion. Congestion in the CBD is caused mainly by cars with little attempt to address this problem (such as the London experience with City car taxes).

The City of Sydney, the SCG, the Centennial & Moore Park Trust, the ATC, and the University of NSW were certainly remiss in their initial advocacy of this particular light rail system in view of their vested interests overriding the obvious social, economic and one must stress environmental damage of the project.

The opportunity cost of wasted taxpayer funds and the hidden costs that extend to a wide range of social, economic and environmental consequences.

The users of the proposed transport system involving the light rail and redirected bus services will inevitably be paying a higher price in the long run in effective cost and convenience over the present highly efficient bus service to the South East. Bus Services could deliver a more flexible and less costly service than the new heavy weight trams especially in the SE Peninsular. Note the earlier recognition of this protentional with the Moore Park bus roadway. In particular the extension of the heavy rail line from Bondi Junction would have created a higher capacity and less environmentally invasive solution. Based on the current costs it also could have been built in a cost-effective manner.

Think of what Sydney loses in streetscape aesthetics, parkland aesthetics and the opportunities for more creative and economic uses of taxpayer funds and assets that have been misdirected by the pressure on government of misguided lobbyists.

Sydneysiders like to think of Sydney as a global city and thus should not be making such globally infamous mistakes. "Copycat vanity projects" fail to recognise the need for a Sydney solution that recognises our narrow streets, unique topography and historic need for rising living standards based on infrastructure that will add to productivity. The failure to release important documents, to procrastinate, and to ignore informed criticism produces a lack of transparency and lack of trust in the NSW Government that has no place in our modern democracy.