

**Submission
No 11**

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT

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Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Impacts of Westconnex

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As a resident of a suburb profoundly affected by the Westconnex project, I welcome the Parliamentary Inquiry.

My home in Ramsay Street is the [redacted] from the major construction zone for the Wattle and Ramsay Street, Tunnel Interchange and in the block where the unfiltered stacks, or what is called the Parramatta Road Vent Facility, are being constructed and within a few hundred metres from the entry and exit portals of the tunnel to Homebush. It is part of Stage One of Westconnex: M4 East. There are five major construction sites in Haberfield: Northcote Street Tunnel site, Eastern Ventilation Facility, Wattle Street and Walker Ave Civil Site and the Martin Street/Reg Coady Reserve site and Parramatta Road sites.

My house is semi-detached and was built in 1916. The National Trust listed the two pairs of semi-detached houses for their display of the Australian coat-of-arms in the gable. Haberfield's special Federation character has a number of features: it is a garden suburb; its homes have a distinct Federation architectural style; it has no hotels; it has wide streets; the street names reflect the fact that it was developed during and immediately after Australian Federation or the creation of the nation state. It was a planned suburb. **Haberfield is a conservation area forming part of Australia's National Estate.**

There are three primary schools in Haberfield, one of them, Haberfield Primary is on a street affected by construction work, Bland Street and it is just two blocks from where the unfiltered ventilation stacks are being constructed. A second school, Dobroyde Primary is in Waratah Street, a few hundred metres from tunnel portals.

I opposed the M4East Project from the first announcement and have been active since 2014 as a resident. I have been a member of the Haberfield Association for many years devoted to preserving Haberfield's uniqueness as a suburb.

There are many big issues with the whole Infrastructure Project, but this submission is focussed on those which impact on residents living close to a construction site. The scale and massive impacts of the construction, on the residential amenity and the fragile heritage of the suburb

could not have been predicted or foreseen by residents. I believe most residents erroneously concluded that, because a tunnel was planned, construction would be underground. Few anticipated the scope and scale of surface construction at tunnel exit and entry points and where interchanges were to be located.

It is a giant footprint and it has profound consequences for people, the community amenity and the environment. Its visual impact is dramatic contributing to a complete distortion of the entire landscape surrounding the suburb. Five metre high hebel noise walls will enclose parts of the suburb. It is and has been devastating.

From the information supplied on the M4/5 Link or Stage 3, Haberfield will continue to be affected until 2022. But the longer term impacts on the air quality can only be estimated. No amount of spin from representatives of SMC can persuade residents that air quality will not deteriorate further. We expect an increase in dangerous pollutants in the suburb and its surrounds.

Initially, residential concerns focused on property resumptions and values. As we gained the requisite legal advice on this and were clear about which properties were to be acquired, we moved to broader issues around the houses to be demolished – over sixty, many of which were part of the original Haberfield estate. Some residents whose properties were not destined for acquisition sold in fear of values falling dramatically.

All houses in the immediate construction zone were offered dilapidation reports or property condition surveys so that there was a status picture before construction commenced. Many residents then paid for second dilapidation reports. We attended community information sessions; examined available public documents; made submissions; wrote to Premiers and Ministers; made representations to local members and Council; held public meetings; door-knocked and leafleted residents; rallied and protested etc. Submissions were prepared on Concept Plans for Stage One and then in response to the Environmental Impact Statement.

This has been time-consuming, emotionally draining and very confronting for many of my neighbours who, lost their homes and saw their community invaded by armies of workers and their vehicles or who had their lives severely and continuously disrupted.

Eternal vigilance is required if you want to have any influence on what actually happens during the construction phase in the area in which you live. That means day and night patrols of sites, attending and raising issues at community consultations, participating in local neighbourhood action groups, raising issues at Council meetings, lodging complaints about unsafe work practices and so on. The Environmental Impact Statements are long and technically detailed. Technical assistance is required to understand their full implications or import.

The immediate impacts during construction:

Loss of heritage housing stock. Houses and unit blocks were bulldozed.

Environmental degradation. Hundreds of trees were chopped down.
Vegetation removal. Plants and shrubs were just removed.
Loss of wildlife habitat. Possums have moved to new areas or died in the process.

1. NOISE. Constant noise from 8am to 5.30pm with excavators, bull dozers, pile drivers, eccentric rippers and cranes. Noise walls and curtains are inadequate to ameliorate the level of operational noise generated at various stages of the surface construction. The acoustic ratings are evidently within the compliance requirements of the EIS. But, what is not understood is that the suburb has been a relatively quiet residential zone since its establishment. This is new and foreign noise which disturbs the peace and destroys the community amenity residents have come to enjoy.

2. NIGHT WORKS. Similar work at night on specified days for specified periods. Night works happen on at least three days a week. Permissible on two consecutive nights under the EIS. Night works disrupt sleep for two reasons, noise and floodlighting through residents' windows.

3. VIBRATION AND TREMOR. During the initial construction, vibration akin to an earth tremor, caused by giant jack hammers breaking into sandstone bedrock threatened the structure of heritage buildings, not to mention the health effects of this kind of vibration on people.

4. DUST EMISSIONS. Masses of dust emissions and dirt settling in every nook and cranny of our homes and vehicles are generated by the construction work and threaten the health of residents as well as exacerbating the breathing problems of those with pre-existing conditions. The elderly have been particularly affected.

5. POOR TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT. Semi-trailers and other heavy industrial vehicles on our residential streets at all hours of the day and night. Up to six truck movements per hour, and because they are sub-contractors hoping for as many loads a day as possible, they are often in a hurry, so they are travelling at inappropriate speeds or parked in local streets very early or very late.

6. WORKER PARKING. Worker vehicles parked everywhere without any respect for local needs or priorities. Parking spaces required for the workforce were not organized from the outset of the project. This has been an ongoing and unresolved issue. Some houses in Haberfield do not have off-street parking. Many homes own more than one vehicle. There has been continuing inconvenience to residents and there is little respect for parking rules by workers. Policing of parking has been sporadic and simply moves the problem to another street.

7. STREET CLOSURES. Permanent or partial street closures contribute to further disruption to the local area. Ramsay Street, a major artery was closed from mid-January, 2017 and re-opened at the end of May, 2017. Alt Street has been closed for the installation of a major water main. Further closures of this street are scheduled.

8 DISRUPTION TO UTILITIES. Water and gas pipes and electrical wiring may have to be moved to accommodate tunnel or portals or just construction and this results in service disruptions.

9. LOSS OF TRADE. The impact on local businesses and other service providers or institutions has been considerable. During the Ramsay Street road closure businesses reported a 30% to 40% loss in trade. No compensation for this loss is provided for in the project or for future losses. Some businesses have had to close.

10. ROAD DAMAGE. Streets damaged with pot holes and cracks appearing in all of those streets frequented by semi-trailers and other vehicles. Repair of these streets cannot occur until project completion.

11. PUBLIC TRANSPORT DISRUPTION. Bus stop closures or re-routing or relocated bus stops due to temporary major street closures or detours.

12. PEDESTRIAN DIVERSIONS. There have been numerous footpath closures and diversions on some of Haberfield's major streets including: Ramsay, Dobroyde Parade, Northcote and Wattle.

13. CONSTRUCTION DISRUPTION. A section of construction work can typically take three months or more and may include any or all of the following: establishing traffic controls and setting up work sites, removing spoil, installing storm water drainage, relocating water mains, constructing retaining walls, concreting and paving, installing traffic barriers, signage and new line marking; clearing and removing vegetation; modifying and installing utility services; installing and modifying pavements; endless drainage work; installing concrete slabs. All of this requires excavators, vacuum trucks, concrete saws, core drills, chainsaws, cranes, trucks, compactors, road line markers, graders, asphalt laying plant and lighting equipment.

I trust that the Committee members will give due consideration to all submissions from residents who have experienced the impacts of the Westconnex construction as well as those who are yet to be affected. The Government has continued to promote the project as solving congestion; getting traffic off local roads; expediting travel times and creating more livable communities through urban revitalization.

Residents in Haberfield have no confidence that these laudable claims or aims have any prospect of fulfilment given that this tunnel is a tollway and the ventilation stacks are unfiltered and sections of the suburb have been bulldozed into rubble and noise walls will replace trees and construction sites are set to remain in Haberfield into the foreseeable future.