

**Submission
No 42**

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT

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Submission to the Inquiry into the Impact of the WestConnex Project-

From

Residents of Lilyfield

Responses to the TOR:

- A) There has not been a uniform, transparent business case from the outset. What has been distributed are a series of statements and planned approaches which support a variety of shifting goals. There are no mechanisms for revision, especially those revisions which meet the requirements of the community. The early business case was driven by the Commonwealth with its significant contribution of \$7billion as the first injection of funds. With this the mostly hidden aims of the Commonwealth formed the basis of the business case which focused on the shift of freight from the western part of Sydney to Port Botany. e NSW was expected to find funds to go somewhere to match the Commonwealth investment, and this occurred without community mandate.

It was clear from the outset that residents who were in the way of the road were irrelevant and that has happened since the 2013 Business case was revealed. (At that time there was a narrower scope that did not show a road in Lilyfield & Rozelle for stage 3). The focus and strategic direction appeared to be for transport – trucks and cars – and no notice was taken of the opposition and concerns of residents from Ashfield, Haberfield, Leichhardt, Lilyfield, Annandale, Rozelle, Balmain, Glebe, Newtown and Camperdown who were largely opposed to the road and wanted better public transport instead. As time went by, the Business cases changed to for example widen the corridor to link roads that were yet to be constructed, like the Western Harbour tunnel and the M4-5 link. The interests of residents from the northern beaches – quite valid- were tacked on to the WestConnex as a political gain for the NSW politicians in the north of Sydney.

The focus was now more obviously on the car for these other roads as well as freight. Western Sydney motorists who have been touted as benefitting from the road would be better served with well-constructed, fast public transport. Large parts of the community do not want these roads, and the question is raised about the powerful lobby groups who have the government's ear. The need to shift freight from Port Botany could have been managed in a less intrusive way.

The 2015 Business case states that the additional sections of the road, i.e. the Rozelle Interchange is necessary due to blockage and congestion in the M5, which itself has been widened. The sense is that the forward planning is out of control with one road growing to meet the backlog in another newly constructed road. This is poor investment practice.

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The car and truck lobby groups are large and powerful and the business interests in construction of the WestConnex have their own self-interests.

The argument the government has put forward for '\$20 billion in economic benefits' was never adequately explained in 2013 yet we are now at a point where the taxpayer has made a payment close to the \$20 billion with nothing to show for it. There was never a cost

benefit analysis carried out after the scope widened apart from justifying the benefits of and allowing for exponential growth in car use. There are some motherhood statements on page 43 of the 2015 Business Case, with a few throw away lines and the stated aim of meeting environmental problems 'as they arise'. The 2015 Business case states 'public transport is simply unable to provide a convenient alternative for the large proportion of travelers' (p;27). This statement implies that there is now and will not ever be, any enhanced budget for public transport.

In both Melbourne and Perth there are excellent examples of public transport. Sydney could have a viable and competitive public transport system if even half the funds given to the WestConnex were re-directed to public transport.

- F) The publicly known goals for WestConnex appear to be assuaged around a number of political messages of the day. Initially the goal was urban and economic regeneration and then most recently goals focused on meeting the needs of Sydney's population (2018 Community Update). As time moved on the goal was to deliver the travel time savings necessary to meet Sydney's growth. Yet the Western Harbour Tunnel aside, as we see the road form, the main goal is as clear as it always was for the discerning eye; to provide a freight road from Port Botany to the Western Suburbs, while allowing motorists to subsidize the toll. Sydney's growth is in the west yet the road shifts traffic toward the Sydney Gateway and Parramatta Road. This veers from the stated goals and intentionally encourages car use.

The goals which were articulated in the 2015 Business case; *Urban Housing and Transformation of Parramatta Road* have not been realised. Parramatta Road is a ghost town. Investors are not prepared to invest in Parramatta Road but wisely they wait until government shows its hand. Nothing is happening because all of the funds and effort are going into the WestConnex. This appears to be gross neglect by government. Originally the NSW Government proposed a public transport corridor along Parramatta Rd but without any consultation with the community, that strategy was deemed to be unimportant. The community from Haberfield to Annandale is not pleased with this delay and there is a strong sense of mistrust of government.

The widening of the WestConnex to include the Rozelle Interchange occurred without any consultation. It appears that the progress of the road and the injection of additional funds by the Commonwealth has opened a gateway for massive extensions of the road without proper consultation. The goals have simply shifted. This is not a good investment.

The reason these inconsistencies and project runover have occurred is because engineers and private companies like the Sydney Motorway Corporation and LB Joint Venture are managing this road, not the government, and not the community. Should community members have questions about the WestConnex M4-M5 they are now re-directed to the Roads and Maritime Engagement Team. This further protects the WestConnex from any community concerns about stated goals and is a major shift in proposed responsibilities of the WestConnex, without any consultation. Community trust has been further eroded.

The overall strategic direction has been touted as a reduction in traffic congestion, yet after the completion of the WestConnex, the Anzac Bridge will carry an increase of 20,000 vehicles per day. This is not a good investment, and veers from the original goals, nor is this good for the health of the community. (see p: 39 2015 Business Plan.)

- G) From the outset it appeared that the WestConnex was not working effectively with shareholding Ministers. The Inner west was looking forward to the Bays Precinct, but from the beginning the WestConnex seemed to trump all other Ministerial decisions. The Bays Precinct has moved into the background, mentioned briefly in the 2015 Business Plan (p37) but no plans of integration have been offered. The Bays Precinct website shows that the Rozelle Goodsyard will be transformed in 2022 well after the WestConnex has tunneled six roads, acquired land for portals and built up to three ventilation stacks. In its place, is the Rozelle Interchange, seemingly for the purpose of the Western Harbour Tunnel connection. The proposed playing fields are surface fill and according to the June-July Community Update, the map indicates that there will be six tunneled roads on this site, with four tunnel portals in the area. Subsurface acquisition will be required in the area from Catherine street – in direct line with the playing fields and the newly constructed Light Rail substation. There has been no effective discussion with the Community regarding these changes and most of the information about plans have been provided by the Local Council. There is a potential loss of investment should subsurface acquisition be required. These playing fields are designed for young children, a scarce commodity in the inner part of Sydney. There are three ventilation stacks on the land next to the fields (Inner West Courier Tuesday 24 July) yet the WestConnex Community Update shows one stack only in the area.
- I) The process of the sale of 51% of the Sydney Motor Corporation has not been transparent for the taxpayers in NSW. The Commonwealth, the primary investor of tax payers money appears to be negotiating the sale behind closed doors. Whether the sell-down to the private sector will result in NSW gaining cost benefit has not been disclosed, nor have the potential purchasers been listed publicly.

There is potential for the Commonwealth to retain its investment through the sale and leave the NSW taxpayers with the bill. This is a serious concern. Perhaps the Commonwealth has always intended to return the funds to its Treasury without transparency for the people of NSW. It wanted freight, not to pay for transport for NSW. The domestic car is transport. If the deal is for NSW to get the toll money as reimbursement, then NSW would have to wait for a long time to regain its investment. This is poor investment practice. We simply do not know what is happening with our tax payers funds.