

**Submission
No 91**

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT

Name: Mrs Aurelia Roper-Tyle

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Dear Members

I am making a personal submission on the impact of the WestConnex project, for me, my family and my community at large. I am specifically addressing the (d) The compulsory acquisition of property for the project. I am an educated, articulate young person and take it upon myself to tell my story, that represents thousands of people who are experiencing the same if not more stress. My family's roots go back in Homebush for decades. Jeremy's (my husband) family moved into the area in 1973. All of his family settled in the area. He can remember the stressful, noisy and disruptive construction of the M4 that cut a swathe through their community 40 years ago. My husband Jeremy's grandmother lived in Short St in Homebush, when the M4 came through. It cut her off from the rest of the family on the other side of the motorway. Before that, she could walk across Short St. to the Church, the pharmacy, the shopping centre and her family. Back then the neighbourhood had the qualities of what planners today call 'liveability'. When Short St was cut off, she had to make her way all around across around the motorway until she couldn't anymore when she was in her 80s. Causing her to be isolated from her community and forced into Residential Aged Care. The M4 was promoted to be a true solution to traffic congestion for the west, 20 years later we are doing exactly the same thing, WESTCONNEX, promises a wonderful new road.

Below is my story. I moved to Underwood Road, Homebush in 2005. Our home on 86 was a Californian bungalow built in 1928. It had the original picture rails, the ornate ceilings and a big backyard, with over 20 trees and shrubs, amongst it our very own blue tongue lizard. Our twin boys were born in 2006. One reason for us moving into this home was so that we could be nearer family. We loved the green space and poured our life-savings into renovating our home. We had been told nothing from the Strathfield Council, who, we were in constant touch with and had delayed our approval for months. It had been barely a month since the end of the renovations when news of the Westconnex broke. The first I ever heard about the Westconnex M4 East tunnel was when my father-in-law rang me in December 2013 after he saw it on the evening TV news. The next thing I knew, the local paper "Strathfield Scene" was at my doorstep asking me if my home was going to be knocked down. I soon realised that my home was frighteningly close to the tunnel entrance. Jeremy rang Strathfield Council who were unable to give us any information. They suggested we ring the Westconnex Delivery Authority (WDA). When we rang WDA they directed us to their website. It had pretty pictures but we really didn't get much information from it. The WDA then went into "damage control" and assigned our family with a "liaison officer", who appeared to know very little, and who later left with no hand-over to the next person. We had no idea if our home was to be acquired or not. Our boys were attending the local Catholic school just a short distance down the street. And I was working in the local public hospital with my husband working at Parramatta. We were distressed – we had no desire to move or for the property to be acquired. I began attending information sessions on Westconnex and after looking at the detailed maps, it hit me that we needed to get out of underwood road. I realized a ventilation stack was planned right in front of our home and the entrance to the tunnel was going to be a hundred metres from our door.

I am a huge believer in global warming, and pollution, and I thought, we can't live here. They gave us a timeline of the construction (several years), and I realised there were going to be lots of issues with the constructions. Hence I felt we needed to move. By then the neighbours had received acquisition letters, but we hadn't. Our home would be left, the last house standing, next to a laneway. We were going to be this little house left on its own, with a three lane tunnel entrance on the side and an unfiltered smoke stack in the front. It was a really difficult situation, because we were wanting to sell, but we couldn't as nobody would buy. Like many others left in the dark by the WDA, My family and I went through a long period of anxiety and depression from the stress of not knowing what was going to happen. We were the last house standing and I felt devastated, which was made worse by the fact that WDA didn't seem to know either what was happening. My husband had to take time off work as he was distraught by the situation we were in, and the fear of the unknown. Our local state member for Strathfield at that time told us that we were worrying unnecessarily and our federal member for Reid told us we will have to put up with the uncertainty for the great good of the community.

Finally, in 2015, 2 years after hell, the chosen route was made public and Westconnex told us they would acquire our home. I was happy now that a decision has been made and we were no longer dealing with the constant uncertainty. But the thought of losing our home and suburb still fills me with grief. The disruption to an already busy family life was a huge pressure. In July 2015, WDA sent us a letter confirming that our home would be acquired.

Westconnex originally offered \$400,000 less than our own valuation for the house. Jeremy took time off work to deal with the acquisition process and the move. We were also sent a letter telling us, if we did not move out of our own home by a certain date that we would be charged \$650 rent per week. We moved to an apartment in Zetland and our boys move schools after they were awarded a scholarship to attend St Mary's Cathedral School in the city. I however had to travel much further to my work at Concord. My community had very strong ties. The children all rode their bikes up and down the streets and people look after each other. My 6 neighbours on either side were close and we took turns checking in on our 96-year-old neighbour, Richard. Richard was the one who suffered the most, he had a car accident, numerous falls and hospital admission. He was beside himself with worry and everyday he comes around to our house to ask when we were leaving. Richard passed away after months of anguish. Underwood Rd is presently in shambles as it is the site of the proposed tunnel entrance and ventilation stack for Westconnex. Nearly 30 homes have been demolished (I have photos of them), and many of my friends are left behind. They are experiencing increased traffic, pollution and noise impacts above safe levels. Lots of the vegetation that softens their urban environment are stripped and the community torn apart. The local catholic parish has been fragmented, hence it is closing down in the near future. There are hundreds of residents living in the Underwood Rd area of Homebush. The project has been approved and construction underway, my friends left behind are experiencing dramatic deterioration in their living conditions. There is 24 hours tunnelling that I presume will carry on for several years during which trucks will remove thousands of truckloads of spoil. While we lived there parks and trees were removed with no community consultation or information. And long before the EIS was even lodged. When the tunnel is open, the noise will still be above acceptable limits for some of those occupying buildings called 'sensitive receivers'.

The other issue is the smoke ventilation stack that is unfiltered, when I questioned the federal member for Reid regarding this, he told me that the cost outweighed the benefits. WestConnex have taken over more land in the area for their own convenience, and showing once again that their forward planning is not very good. Ismay reserve and the old bowling club was taken over, with no community consultation. Residents were told this will never happen and now all they feel is deception and lack of community regard or proper communication.

The biggest complaint here is WestConnex, has come in and ruined a perfectly quite, totally desecrated large sections of the three streets, Ismay, Underwood and Short Street. Residents noticed in 2017 a stock pile of soil on site that has come from Ismay Reserve. Approximately 24 months ago work was done in the reserve and asbestos was found in the soil. Was this stock pile been tested for asbestos contamination? The community was promised standard working hours 7am to 6pm Mon -Fri and 8am to 1pm on the Saturday, now the timings are all over the place and often go from 9pm to 5am Sunday to Friday.

While I objects to the way WDA has gone about the destruction of my community, I would have been prepared to accept some damage if the overall project was worthwhile. But having examined more closely the Westconnex claim that it will vastly improve the situation for those affected by paralysing traffic congestion in Sydney, I found the evidence did not stack up. Hence I am putting in this in a submission objecting to Wesconnex and any further approvals.