

**Submission
No 111**

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT

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I am writing this submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into WestConnex as a concerned local resident from Alexandria seeing Sydney communities being ripped apart by this road project. The original plan for WestConnex to link the airport and Port Botany to the motorway system has not been met and is now listed as a separate road project. Through every stage of the project, residents and other stakeholders have been provided with limited information and often this has been in draft form as the plans for this project have not been finalised. This creates ongoing anxiety around what next for our homes and communities? Already we are kept awake most nights from noise from the construction of this project. Around the corner from where I live trees and walkways have been ripped up to increase road lanes. As a clinical psychologist who has researched the social determinants of health and wellbeing, research shows that communities which are ignored, where people feel unheard by those who govern them, and, where people are put under intolerable levels of ongoing stress, that their physical and mental health worsens.

The pollution readers around areas already impacted by WestConnex, such as Haberfield, show dangerous levels of particles and this will be exacerbated when unfiltered smoke stacks and increased traffic volumes (including up by 400% on my local roads) when this project is finalised. Already 3000 people die annually in Australia from air pollution and with some of the lowest emission standards in the world, this figure is likely to continue to rise. When we put in place strong deterrents from other known killers, such as cigarettes and asbestos, how can we knowingly set up road projects which we know will increase mortality amongst our most vulnerable groups, such as children and the elderly? Blatant disregard of health warnings will not only lead to death but future lawsuits as we have seen happen to the tobacco industry. Already, cities and countries are taking companies and governments to court for knowingly putting them at risk. Do more people have to die for us to start to take this issue seriously and start to faze out diesel and petroleum vehicles as a matter of urgency?

Cities around the world have tried and shown that more roads does not ease traffic congestion. More roads equals more cars. With the whole state in drought and climate scientists overwhelmingly agreeing that climate change is the main driver, how are we still looking at outdated and polluting technologies and ideas? The answer is more active forms of transport, such as rail and separated cycle and bus lanes. In the business case for WestConnex, alternatives which are cleaner and cheaper, have been blatantly ignored. Instead, part of the agreement with the Sydney Motorway Corporation, has been to stop the development of public transport options on WestConnex routes, so that people feel they have no choice but to drive. Where are these cars going? The government's own plan for the CBD states that there needs to be a significant decrease in non-service vehicle numbers coming into the city. How does this marry with these toll roads? The monies wasted on this toll road could be spent on having a world class metro system so that Sydney truly becomes a global city in which the existing roads are used primarily by service vehicles. Currently, it often takes three times as long to get public transport as it does to drive, even in an inner city suburb, such as Alexandria, where I live. This is abysmal in a modern city and an indicator of how the transport system already privileges cars and trucks.

As costs continue to blow out and the mental health system I work in is at crisis point, the justification of spending billions of dollars of tax payers money, and then expecting them to continue to pay for these roads for up to 40+ years, seems like highway robbery rather than spending money for the public good. Transport projects should be overseen by NSW Transport, not an unaccountable body such as Sydney Motorway Corporation, or by RMS, given their clear remit.

Thank you for your time and consideration

Dr Catherine McCarthy
Clinical Psychologist