

**Submission  
No 117**

## **INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT**

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## Westconnex

My name is Dr Jeremy Fisher OAM. I have lived at Northcote st, Haberfield, with my partner since 1997. Northcote st runs parallel to Wattle st which carried the final stages of the City West Link to Parramatta road and Frederick st, Ashfield. We have been much affected by WestConnex, an ill-conceived project. It has affected our quality of life adversely and caused us enormous stress.

- *Adequacy of the business case for WestConnex:* Initial planning for what emerged as WestConnex was very poor and not communicated adequately. The fact that the term 'commercial-in-confidence' was used to prevent public access to the business case and decision-making processes for WestConnex demonstrates that revenue, that is commerciality, was far more significant to the project than the provision of workable infrastructure. The secrecy, akin to that around the decision to move the Powerhouse Museum so its inner-city site could be sold to developers, smacks of dubious deals. The fact that the Premier responsible for both WestConnex and the Powerhouse decision took up a lucrative position with an institution with vested interests in infrastructure and development (and a tainted reputation as to honesty) after making the deals for WestConnex and the Powerhouse gives this writer no confidence in the transparency and clarity of those deals – especially as they remain 'commercial-in-confidence'.
- *Cost of the WestConnex project:* Wastage and mismanagement are hallmarks of WestConnex. An example is the corner of Martin St and Ramsay st, Haberfield. This used to be closed. WestConnex opened it and built new footpaths and laid new roadway. Then they dug it all up again because somebody hadn't taken water into account. Then they fixed it. Then they dug it up again, three times all in all. It is currently a mess. Another example is the footpath work on Wattle st; it took months for new footpaths to be installed, then they were dug up so electric light poles could be installed. Shouldn't the poles have gone in first?
- *Consideration of the governance and structure of the WestConnex project:* Cost/benefit analysis does not take into account social factors, destruction of heritage, and damage to communities. The destruction of houses in Haberfield, heritage listed, was a disgrace and totally unnecessary. The route was first proposed to run under Parramatta Road. It could then have run under Iron Cove Creek, which would have led to little demolition of surface buildings. Again, commerciality appears to have been the decision maker, moving the tunnel route away from under Parramatta rd so as to provide solid ground there for the construction of massive blocks of units, as shown in the Parramatta rd plans of the Greater Sydney Commission (<https://www.greater.sydney/parramatta-road-urban-amenity-improvement-program>). The head of that Commission, Lucy Turnbull, is so inept at her job, presumably because she is only there at the behest of developers, that she was unaware of the destruction of 50 heritage houses in Haberfield to permit the construction of the cut-and-cover section of the tunnel in Wattle st.
- *The extent to which the project is meeting the original goals of the project:* WestConnex is touted on the protective sheeting surrounding its building sites as 'easing congestion in Haberfield'. This is demonstrably untrue. The tunnel constructed from Concord and exiting at Ramsay and Wattle sts simply deposits traffic onto the City West link, an already crowded roadway. Traffic reports on the radio demonstrate this every day. WestConnex has no plans to add any lanes to the City West Link or change its 11 sets of lights. Traffic will come to its usual standstill and Haberfield roads will be congested from that and from rat running. Why RMS has permitted this to occur is beyond me. But mark my words; WestConnex is doomed to failure because of this.
- *Relationship between WestConnex and other toll road projects:* NSW Department of Planning could be assumed to be in overall control of infrastructure projects such as WestConnex,

keeping an eye on integration and encouraging synergy between the numerous agencies and organisations involved. Nothing could be further from the truth. Planning NSW is useless, sidelined by the Sydney Motorway Corporation. Moreover, it has no ability to ensure co-ordination between utility providers. Sydney Water, Ausgrid and the gas utility can and do act as they wish, failing to co-ordinate their activities. This leads to repeated digging up of seemingly finished projects and enormous waste of money. We have had numerous breaks in our water and electricity supply, and to our phones and internet, with no prior warning. Sewer lines have also been severed.

- *Other related matters:*

1. Minister Stuart Ayres has the communication skills of a gnat. His letters to me have been dishonest and the truth has been obscured. One example; our bus stop on Ramsay st, under cover, was moved by WestConnex with no warning and no notification to an exposed location. This occurred the day after WestConnex had reopened Ramsay st after 4 months building a bridge. During this time residents of Northcote st were forced to use a difficult to board (I have a disability) shuttle bus. Complaints about this led to Ayres claiming Inner West Council was responsible for moving the stop and denial that the change had anything to do with WestConnex. Ayres' arrogant missives are insulting and indicate he believes complainants from Haberfield are barely worth responding to. His attitude filters down. Fortunately, Member for Summer Hill Jo Haylen assisted in having the stop moved back to its original location, and a seat has been installed, for which we are most grateful.

2. The dirt raised by the project has been constant. Our washing has been stained. Dust comes in everywhere.

3. Workers for WestConnex (4500 jobs created, according to the propaganda pasted around the destruction sites for the project) park wherever they like. They have blocked driveways in Northcote st. WestConnex had security officers monitoring worker parking in the early stages, but this was obviously an expense too far for Sydney Motorway Corporation. Perhaps its well remunerated Chief Executive needed extra expenses to entertain Minister Ayres. Notices are handed out in Walker Ave but not in Northcote St. Numerous emails on this matter to WestConnex have been ignored or treated with obfuscation. The Parramatta end of Northcote st was closed so a tunnelling pit could be built to constrict the Concord-Haberfield tunnel. That was WestConnex. That's if now part of the M4-M5 construction, so WestConnex says the problem of worker parking is not their problem, it is the M4-M5 authority's problem. To me, it is all one project, but the workers I see are working in Wattle st on Westconnex. Minister Ayres must supervise communications from WestConnex personally; they are so poor, misleading and inadequate.

4. The footpath in Northcote st was dug up by WestConnex over two years ago. It has not been repaired and is dangerous. WestConnex also damaged the water line running into our house. They denied they had done so. Fortunately Sydney Water repaired the damage.