

**Submission  
No 178**

**INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX  
PROJECT**

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# **Submission by Peter Boyle and Philippa Hinman to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the impact of the WestConnex Project**

We make this submission to the above inquiry because, as residents living in the direct path of the M4-M5 Link road tunnel, we have strong and growing concerns about many aspects of the WestConnex Project, in particular its negative environmental and social impacts and its significant draw on public funds with very poor public accountability.

These are some of our key concerns:

## **1. Concerns about WestConnex increasing greenhouse gas and other pollution**

Traffic-Based air pollution (TRAP) accounts for 30% of air pollution in a city like Sydney. A motorway and tunnel project like WestConnex induces more traffic and hence more TRAP. It certainly will encourage more freight to go on roads (instead of rail), more big diesel trucks, more dangerous, cancer-causing pollution.

It also redistributes TRAP. So some places might be a bit better off, and other places might be worse off. So the tunnels themselves, the smoke stacks, the entrance points the exit point – all these places are likely to have higher levels.

TRAP has two main components. The first is what comes out of exhaust emissions, so that's got compounds like carbon monoxide, nitric oxide and nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide. It's got benzenes; hydrocarbons, all of which have got a definite association with cancer and contribute to greenhouse gas emissions and hence global warming.

Road transport contributes almost 15% of total green house gas emissions in Australia - more than 80 million tonnes . And projects like WestConnex are totally irresponsible because they induce more road traffic and hence more green house gas emissions.

There's a second component to TRAP: fine particles from bitumen and rubber ware, and these two components contribute to this thing that they call "particulate matter". It's all small, some of it's really small and some of it's really really small, and that gets absorbed into your lungs and into your body.

All these things are bad for health, as Sydney's leading respiratory physician Professor Paul Torzillo has advised our community on several occasions.

There's overwhelming international evidence now from organisations like the World Health Organisation (WHO) that shows that that sort of pollution increases the number of heart attacks people have, strokes, it increases deaths from heart disease, deaths from respiratory disease, and there is some new evidence which says it probably impairs lung growth in children and it makes a contribution to diabetes, so these things on a population basis have a big impact on health. There's no evidence about a "safe" lower level of any of these things. So less is better, but less isn't safe.

RMS has admitted that while there are supposed to be "zero emissions" at all road tunnel portals in NSW there are no air monitors placed at the portals (there is one under a tree in Callan Park, it seems) and these monitors cannot detect particulate matter smaller than 2.5 microns.

If WestConnex Stage 3 goes ahead there will be several exhaust stacks will be releasing unfiltered, carcinogenic exhaust fumes into the air. Claims that these don't pose any danger are belied by reports that buildings our these stacks will not be allowed to have opening windows.

## **2. The false business case for the WestConnex project and its dangerous consequences**

All major projects in this era of the climate change crisis need to be measured up against the need to radically reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The \$17 billion (or more) that will be spent on WestConnex is a serious misallocation of resources that would have been better spent on improving and extending public transport, as most other major cities around the world are doing.

This impacts on the social and environmental cost-benefit calculation of the WestConnex project.

Transport experts are overwhelmingly in agreement with this and the many changes to the WestConnex project raise doubts about the any coherence to its transport outcomes for Sydney.

WestConnex was supposed to be about connecting western Sydney to Port Botany but it does not.

There have been many significant and ad hoc changes to the scope of the project through 2016 that include extra kilometres of tunnels, changes to tunnel alignment, additional ramp structures and removal of the portals in Camperdown. The original plan for roads from the west to the port area appears to have been abandoned. None of the proposed roads go anywhere near the port.

The traffic modelling that decisions have been based on has not been amended to reflect these changes, nor have the effects on the St Peters Interchange been considered, which means the current traffic modelling is inaccurate.

It follows that the business case predictions and cost benefit ratio are also incorrect.

As local residents, this raises our concerns around quality control and public safety connected to the construction of the tunnels that will run under our houses, once the sale of Sydney Motorway Corporation goes through and the new owners seek to cut profit losses due to the original incorrect modelling.

Environmental and health impacts due to increased traffic congestion from the St Peters Interchange on surface roads such as King Street and narrow densely populated side streets.

## **3. Concerns about potential damage to heritage homes and other buildings**

As residents in its pathway, we are very concerned about the M4-M5 Link and its effects on Newtown and Camperdown homes and heritage structures near and above the proposed tunnel construction.

Many houses were built in the 19th Century in this heritage listed area, which already suffers from the unstable earth and environment.

The public “consultation” and information sessions organised by the Sydney Motorway Corporation have been grossly inadequate.

The exact tunnel route has not been finalised, and to date residents have only had access to “indicative” plans. The EIS had only a single, minimum reference to heritage items located above the indicative tunnel corridor that merely suggested they were unlikely to be impacted.

Residents in the suburbs to be impacted by the M4-M5 Link have repeatedly asked and failed to receive adequate answers from Sydney Motorway Corporation about the following:

### **Condition reports**

SMC has said that affected properties within 50 metres of the construction sites for the tunnels will be offered condition reports. Will the pre- and post-construction condition reporting for affected

properties be conducted by independent assessors? We need truly independent assessments of our properties before, immediately after construction works and three years on, to allow time for the effects of subsidence to show.

### **Compensation process**

We have not been provided with clarification of compensation processes and timelines for properties damaged during construction and after (subsidence) of the M4-M5 Link tunnel.

Residents will be doubly disadvantaged if heritage and other buildings are damaged and they have to spend months or years trying to establish fault before any redress can be provided.

Residents will be further disadvantaged if they find that their claim has been voided because it falls outside of the approved timeframe for damage to be identified and a claim lodged.

We have seen graphic images of damage to people's homes caused by construction on the M4 and M5 and have heard residents' accounts of the refusal of the SMC to take responsibility or to address these issues adequately.

### **Vibration monitoring**

We want independent real time community-accessible vibration monitors along the path of both tunnels. Real time Internet access for the community or its representatives to independent vibration monitoring along the tunnel route would allow for potentially dangerous spikes in vibrations to be addressed immediately instead of being lost in aggregated reports that are monitored after the event, and after damage to structures that could have been prevented has been set in motion.

Independent monitoring is critical if community confidence in the monitoring process is to be maintained.

### **Geotechnical studies should be made public**

We would to know why has SMC refused to provide us with a copy of report from the geotechnical studies they conducted in our neighbourhood? We want to know what the below-ground conditions are for the tunneling. This is particularly significant for understanding the risk posed to the many heritage structures in Newtown. We heard from tunneling engineer Mr. Noel Childs, at a public meeting in Newtown, that the blasting, unless very carefully managed, will introduce short and longer-term risks to the fragile heritage structures.

## **4. Concerns about the privatisation of Sydney Motorway Corporation**

We believe that the privatisation of the Sydney Motorway Corporation will make it even less accountable than it already is and will further corruption the entire project.

All agreements and guarantees made by the NSW government with bidders for the SMC, construction companies and tollway operators been to be transparent otherwise the entire project could become a device to bleed the public purse. We note the serious concerns expressed by the Auditor -General and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission about aspects of WestConnex and note the multi-million-dollar compensation deals already be serviced by the NSW Government for the Cross-Harbour Tunnel and the Cross-City Tunnel.

Is it true that the private construction company who wins the contract to deliver Stage 3 will make the final decision on the route of the tunnels, and will not be obliged to tell the public, including the people whose homes it will go under, where it is?

Once the government sells off WestConnex, who will be responsible for damage? How will homeowners be able to prove damage is caused by construction if we are not even told where the tunnels are going?

Peter Boyle and Philippa Hinman