

**Submission
No 182**

**INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX
PROJECT**

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Public Accountability Committee
NSW Parliament
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1. Unsatisfactory business case

In February 2017, after a lengthy investigation, Federal Auditor-General Grant Hehir delivered a scathing Report on WestConnex's financial analysis: the cost of the WestConnex project had been seriously underestimated and its forecasted benefits overstated. The recommendations of the Audit Office of New South Wales and the Australian National Audit Office in regards to WestConnex both suggest that the project should not proceed 'until the business cases are thoroughly revisited for Stages 2 and 3'.

2. Impact of construction sites for second harbour tunnel

My understanding is that the second harbour tunnel will be an immersed tube construction (the same technique used in the first harbour tunnel) which has severe environmental impacts. The construction phase will take 2-3 years and will require construction sites at either end of the tube. These sites will be established either through property acquisition and/or by the purchase or lease of public open space - as was proposed for Easton Park in Rozelle.

To construct the Iron Cove Link tunnel, WestConnex proposes to acquire and demolish 27 homes and businesses along the western side of Victoria Road between Springside Street and the Iron Cove Bridge. WestConnex's own literature states that the proposed tunnel may result in increased traffic congestion at Iron Cove Bridge (already a bottle-neck) at peak times. See *M4-M5 Link Addendum September 2016, p.8*. Recent media reports calculate unmanageable levels of increased traffic on the roads in the inner west during the construction phase caused by thousands of truck movements per day.

3. Pollution Plumes

There is mounting evidence of the life-long impact and life-threatening consequences of air pollution in general and particulate substances in particular. This evidence demonstrates that the particulate substances generated by motor vehicles are composed of heavy metals that enter the bloodstream and can trigger and/or exacerbate cardio vascular and pulmonary illness as well cancer. On 12th June 2012 the World Health Organisation (WHO) classified diesel exhaust as carcinogenic to humans. *The Lancet*, an internationally respected medical research journal published findings of an analysis of the impact on long term exposure to air pollution on natural causes of mortality in 360,000 people who had been part of a research study for 14 years and found that the greater the exposure to air pollution the greater the impact on health¹. On 17 October 2013 WHO classified outdoor air pollution as carcinogenic to humans.

Of considerable concern to residents of the Inner West is the blatant refusal by the RMS to filter the proposed exhaust stacks. This decision will cause premature morbidity, ranging

¹ Effects of long-term exposure of air pollution on natural cause mortality: an analysis of 22 European cohorts with the multicentre ESCAPE project. *The Lancet*

from diabetes to cancer. It ignores world's best practice - as road tunnels in Japan, Norway, Spain, Italy, and China are constructed with in-tunnel particulate and nitrogen dioxide filtration. The 4 proposed stacks in Rozelle will easily emit in excess of 50 tonnes of particulate matter annually, based on RMS figures for the M5 East exhaust stack. The cost to the community in financial terms is impossible to quantify but could easily run into billions. Particularly vulnerable members of the population include children (one such exhaust stack is proposed for the vicinity close to Rozelle Public School), pregnant women, the elderly and those with existing chronic health conditions.

Tunnel portals for the proposed Iron Cove Link will be constructed in the vicinity of Terry Street and Callan Street, Rozelle. Their 12-metre-high exhaust stacks will not be filtered. Existing pollution monitoring equipment is incapable of measuring the most dangerous cancer-causing particles from exhaust emissions (< 2.5 microns). The only Rozelle air-quality monitor is located under a tree in Callan Park. Late last year another was installed beside the City West Link at White Bay. The next closest one is in Lindfield.

Balmain residents have already experienced the health impacts of hydrocarbon related pollution from the Cruise Terminal in White Bay.

Medical scientists insist that there is no safe level of air pollution. Figures provided by the RMS in relation to the Lane Cove Tunnel show that tunnel users will be exposed to *more than 50 times the maximum levels* suggested by the World Health Organisation, at the end of the tunnel.

Research undertaken by Sydney South West Area Health Service in 2011, in response to a possible cancer cluster around the M5 East exhaust stack, was unable to exclude the stack as a possible source of the observed increases. The 40% increase in cancer in this local population was contrasted with a fall in cancer rates of 9% across the State during the same period. It is noteworthy that prior to the opening of the M5 the incidence of lung cancer in this area was somewhat lower than the State average. If the proximity to both the port and the airport were to blame for the cancers then this would obviously have manifested more widely. It should be stressed however that there was *no* evidence of a cancer cluster in any of the other adjacent suburbs.

The RMS refuses to filter the stacks, stating that 'filtration doesn't work', that 'it's too expensive' and that they employ 'world's best practice'. All three of these statements are blatantly and demonstrably untrue. Their assertion that 'filtration doesn't work' is based on a botched trial conducted on the M5 East and flies in the face of the highly successful results obtained from filtered road tunnels in other parts of the world.

In-tunnel filtration is significantly cheaper than the exhaust stack method used by the RMS here in NSW. When filtration equipment to remove both PM 2.5, (particulate matter smaller in diameter than 2.5 microns – a micron being 1,000 of a millimetre) and the oxides of nitrogen is installed during construction as part of the tunnel design, the cost of servicing the filters compares more than favourably with the running costs of the RMS system.

Anyone who has approached the M5 East tunnel portal from the south will be aware of the acrid fumes that cause vehicle occupants to automatically wind up their windows. What is being experienced is the heavily polluted air that has been pushed down only 2.5 km of the westbound tunnel, which has particle levels up to 50 times greater than the outside air. The RMS use large fans to counter the piston effect of exhaust gases being pushed out of the tunnel by the stream of traffic. It is an EPA requirement *that there be no emissions at a*

tunnel exit portal here in NSW. But there are no pollution monitors at the exit portal and the exhaust stack on the M5 East is midway along the tunnel length.

The RMS approach is of course nowhere near 'world's best practice'. It ignores the state of the art approaches in Spain, Japan, China, Norway and Italy. Results in Japan have shown that 98% of particulate matter can be easily removed in the tunnel. The RMS are well aware of the results worldwide but still refuse to admit that they are wrong, presumably because of the loss of face, or even more likely, that they are acutely aware of the huge cost of retro filtering existing road tunnels.

4. Failure to look at bigger picture

The NSW Government is adopting tunnel vision in its approach to the design of the WestConnex project. Where is the evidence that these new tunnels will take the traffic off the street when this has not been demonstrated with any other tollway tunnel built? There is nothing in the WestConnex updated strategic business case (November 2015) that I can find that demonstrates learning from these previous projects. Why is there no discussion of strategies to make the roads and back streets less attractive than a faster commute with a toll? Where is the mention of more bicycle lanes and public transport?

If the Government believe their own claims that road traffic will be reduced (which goes against all scientific evidence), then where are the plans to reduce the number of lanes on the Anzac Bridge, or dismantle the Western Distributor which effectively bisects Leichhardt?

It is already very difficult to get off the peninsula and the development of the Bays Precinct coupled with its use as a toxic waste dumping ground during the construction period for Stage 3 of WestConnex will add to this congestion. What evidence do we have of the integration of land use and transport planning?

Melbourne's proposed \$18 billion East West Link (a tollway project similar to WestConnex) was scrapped in late 2014 in favour of rail transport by Victoria's incoming government. This turnaround in public policy required 18 months of vigorous and sustained community protest, and an election. The documentary film *Tunnel Vision* (2016) chronicles that struggle. Perth's controversial \$1.9 billion Roe8 Freight Link tollway proposal met a similar fate at the WA state elections in March 2017, and is now officially defunct.

Most if not all of the recognised experts in Sydney's transport and traffic management agree that WestConnex isn't the solution and that, in fact, it is exacerbating the problem of traffic congestion in both the short and the long term. Professor Peter Newman (Curtin University), Dr Michelle Zeibots (UTS Institute of Sustainable Studies), Mat Hounsell (Eco Transit) and Chris Standen (University of Sydney) that the impacts of WestConnex on the quality of life of residents will be extremely severe. Cities across the world are tearing down their inner-city motorways because they've all proven to be counterproductive.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Impact of WestConnex Project by the Public Accountability Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Deborah Mills