

**Submission
No 186**

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT

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Date Received: 29 August 2018

**Legislative Council
Public Accountability Committee
NSW Parliament
6 Macquarie Street
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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL INQUIRY – IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT

SUBMISSION

I am a resident of Leichhardt of more than 35 years' standing and welcome the opportunity to comment on the impact of the WestConnex project. As a former NSW public servant familiar with the importance of good governance and accountability; a grandparent of young children living close to the proposed Rozelle Interchange; a long-term user of public transport and a regular pedestrian and fitness walker, I have watched with increasing concern the development of this project from one with an objective of "linking Sydney's west and south-west with the city, airport and port in a 33 km continuous motorway" (*WestConnex Business Case Summary September 2013*) to one that has the potential to transform the Inner West of Sydney – not for the economic, cultural and social benefit of its residents, and the rest of the city – but with the opposite effect.

The community will be left with an intrusive inner city motorway that escalating tolls will make unpopular, instead of investment in fast and efficient public transport that truly connects homes and jobs. The enormous success of the extension of the Inner West Light Rail to Dulwich Hill is a clear demonstration of the willingness of the community to embrace public transport.

I make specific comment with respect to the following Inquiry terms of reference.

ToR1 – *The adequacy of the business case for the WestConnex project, including the cost/benefit ratio*

The business case is woefully inadequate. It is inaccurate and misleading and has failed to reflect the significant changes to the project's scope. For example, attempts are made to justify the M4-M5 Link by claiming that it enables the expansion of the WestConnex network to include the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link, despite the fact that these motorway projects were not part of the WestConnex business case and are not priority projects in any State or Federal roads plan.

The economic benefit has been based on spurious claims about expected time savings, reliability and higher productivity. Consequently the monetary value placed on these savings is greatly overestimated.

Traffic modelling is conjectural and, as such, has led to inaccurate predictions with negative consequences. Any citizen of Sydney would be aware of this in

relation to, for example, the Cross City Tunnel and the Lane Cove Tunnel. Many issues are affected by the traffic model used, including:

- impact on the Anzac Bridge and Sydney CBD
- bus travel time and reliability
- traffic volumes on local surface roads and intersections
- fuel costs.

A key inadequacy is the failure to undertake a detailed consideration of the relative merits of alternative options, particularly the extension of public transport.

ToR6 – *The extent to which the project is meeting the original goals of the project as articulated in 2012*

As stated in the *WestConnex Updated Strategic Business Case* (November 2015), a key objective of WestConnex is to ‘improve access to and connectivity with NSW’s international gateways, Port Botany and Sydney Airport, which are vital economic assets’. This is consistent with the description of WestConnex in the *WestConnex Business Case Executive Summary* (September 2013) as a project ‘linking Sydney’s west and south-west with the city, airport and port in a 33 km continuous motorway’.

The 2013 Executive Summary outlined three stages of the project. Stage 2 included a new access link to the Sydney Airport area. Stage 3, referred to as M4 South, was an 8.5 km tunnel between Haberfield and St Peters. Stage 3 was ‘indicative only’ and it was noted that route development was at an early stage.

The WestConnex route has changed significantly over time, requiring publication of the 2015 Updated Business Case. Stage 2 now included the Sydney Gateway (St Peters to Sydney Airport and Port Botany) sub-project, noting that it is dependent on future development work. Stage 3 (now known as M4-M5 Link) was re-aligned, with a ‘northern extension’ being incorporated. Stage 3 originally followed Parramatta Road to Camperdown, but now duplicated the City West Link to Rozelle providing connectivity to the ANZAC Bridge and Victoria Road, and provided for works to enable connectivity with the proposed Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link and Southern Connector (part of Gateway to the South).

In 2015 the Updated Business Case was assessed by SGS Economics and Planning, who found that the Business Case did not identify the Link as a priority for ‘filling in the missing links in Sydney’s motorway network’.

For example, the Link fails to meet the primary objective of providing a direct motorway connection between Western Sydney and Sydney Airport and Port Botany. It is the Sydney Gateway sub-project that provides the ‘missing link’, yet that project was the subject of conflicting claims, with Government

representatives quoted as saying it was not part of WestConnex, despite statements to the contrary on the WestConnex website.

ToR10 – Any other related matter

Air quality

Poor air quality is a health hazard and the approval process for WestConnex has not fully and transparently addressed the health issues related to air pollution.

Of particular concern are the 5 unfiltered ventilation stacks proposed to be constructed in inner Sydney. Placing unfiltered stacks near schools (Rozelle Public School) and areas of high residential density is completely unacceptable.

Two anecdotal examples illustrate the potential problems:

- Dr Ray Nassar, a Specialist Anaesthetist with appointments at hospitals in northern Sydney, researched the health impacts of air and traffic pollution with respect to the NorthConnex Tunnel development. What he found prompted him to move his family to a location not affected by NorthConnex.
- An article in the *Daily Telegraph* on 27 August 2018 reported that at least one building in a proposed new development in Sydney's south will have no openable windows or natural ventilation because of its proximity to WestConnex smoke stacks.

It is suggested that the Inquiry conduct a rigorous review of air quality issues to ascertain the level of risk to public health posed by the proposed low, unfiltered ventilation stacks.

Susan Dixon