

Submission
No 221

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT

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The Chairman
Public Accountability Committee
New South Wales Legislative Council
Inquiry into the impact of the WESTCONNEX project

PERSONAL SUBMISSION

Dear Sir

In this submission I endorse the reasons for opposing the WESTCONNEX project made by the residents group known as Rozelle against WESTCONNEX (“RAW”).

It is RAW’s contention that the business case for the WestConnex project, including the cost-benefits ratio, is disturbingly inaccurate. The cost of the WestConnex project has been seriously underestimated and its forecast benefits overstated. This assessment is justified in considerable detail throughout the RAW submission and draws on data provided by SGS Economics and Planning, Searle CG and Legacy as well as from other sources.

The governance and structure of the WestConnex project including the relationship between Sydney Motorway Corporation, Roads and Maritime Services, the Treasury and its shareholding Ministers does need to be examined in detail. Substantial contributions made to both political parties by organisations in the business of providing infrastructure also need to be scrutinised in the light of the subsequent awarding of tenders for State Significant Infrastructure projects.

Allegations of corruption levelled against key players such as CIMIC and AECOM in other parts of the world have led to these companies being banned from tendering while these charges are being investigated. Good governance suggests that the same approach should also have been applied here.

Inaccurate and overstated usage figures supplied by AECOM on at least 3 other tollroad projects here have not been met, resulting in the shortfall being made up from the public purse. AECOM’s figures for The Sydney Harbour Tunnel has cost NSW taxpayers over \$1 billion during the time of its operation.

The compulsory acquisition of property for the project has caused considerable dislocation and distress. RAW is aware of a number of owners of compulsorily acquired properties who were paid as little as 60% of the market value of their homes and who were subsequently forced to move well away from the area as they couldn't afford to buy back in.

The breakdown in community ties is palpable both in terms of community, social and school networks. One resident contesting eviction was actually jailed for a week for refusing to vacate his family home. • 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.'

Clearly the project fails to meet the original goals of the project as articulated in 2012. These include connectivity to the ports and the airport. On this criteria alone the project is a failure.

The relationship between WestConnex and other toll road projects including the Sydney Gateway, Western Harbour Tunnel, F6 and Beaches Link is apparent. Clearly it is one big interconnected project and the Sydney community recognises it as such.

The separate staging of each of these components, the use of private companies to hide detail from the public, the sham of the community information sessions and the blatant disregard of the 13,000 objections to Stage 3 alone, demonstrates that the Government is acutely aware that the public genuinely believes that WestConnex and similar tolled freeways aren't a solution and that a world class public transport system is desperately needed here in Sydney.

The sale of the Sydney Motorway Corporation may not represent a good investment for NSW taxpayers. Any sale that guarantees to reimburse the operators from the public purse for less than projected usage, is clearly contrary to the public interest. Any contract, such as the one for the Eastern Distributor, that precludes the Government, or any operator, from providing an alternate or competing transport corridor, is also definitely not in the public interest.

Because of the secrecy surrounding the Project it is impossible to ascertain the extent of taxpayer liability.

With tolls to increase by 4% annually many will seek to avoid the tollways, further driving down usage and increasing the shortfall.

In Los Angeles, a maze of urban freeways has clearly demonstrated that freeways actually create traffic problems, not solve them. LA's 8 hours of bumper to bumper traffic in daily peak periods has

finally convinced legislators to abandon the freeway approach and to invest heavily in public transport.

Of enormous 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 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 four 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.

In conclusion, the NSW Government must meet its duty of care. It has a legal and moral responsibility to enhance the quality of life of its citizens and to protect them from harm. All Governments are elected to act in the best interests of their citizens. Failure to knowingly do so is unconscionable.

Thank you

John Fitzgerald