

**Submission
No 226**

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT

Name: Mark Martin
Date Received: 30 August 2018

30 August, 2018

Re: NSW Parliament Inquiry into the impact of the WestConnex Project

Please find below my submission to the Inquiry addressing specific terms of reference.

A. The adequacy of the business case for the WestConnex project, including the cost-benefits ratio

The Business Case for this project is inaccurate and misleading and has not been amended to reflect the significant changes to this project's scope from the March 2016 SEARS to revisions in September and then November 2016 which include extra kilometres of tunnel and stub infrastructure to link to further proposed infrastructure. Additionally the removal of the proposed portals in Camperdown, means that the existing traffic modelling is more inaccurate particularly in relation to the St Peters Interchange and therefore the predictions of usage of WestConnex are also inaccurate.

The City of Sydney commissioned an independent report into the WestConnex Updated Business Case by SGS available here –

www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/251891/Report-SGS-Westconnex-Business-Case-Final-Report-160204.pdf

The report raised significant concerns with the Business Case and concluded (in part):

Setting aside discrepancies in the Updated Strategic Business Case and how WestConnex has been assessed to date, the most significant issue is that strategic alternatives to the road are not considered in the document or in the Environmental Impact Statements which have been made publicly available. This approach fails to consider Sydney's transport future beyond 2031 when WestConnex is likely to reach capacity.

It would seem that the NSW Government is going out of its way to build more roads as an answer to Sydney's very significant transport problems, despite the fact that roads have inherently less ongoing capacity than public mass transport alternatives.

This bias towards road development is explicit within the NSW government – it has been instructing transport officials to ignore public transport alternatives to motorway projects, see here – <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/f6-planners-told-to-ignore-public-transport-build-roads-documents-show-20170407-gvgbon.html>

Projects such as WestConnex should have been benchmarked against public transport options so that the cost comparisons and relative efficiencies were analysed and documented. It is completely against the best interests of the public that this has not occurred.

The business case is based on a strategy only document, it does not commit to any design and it therefore does not address any local impacts created by the proposed M4-M5 Link in the manner that an Environmental Impact Statement should. Rather it prepares the

pathway for the sale of a 51% stake in the WestConnex project to the private sector. It seems absurd that the government is selling something before it has actually been built and its true value is known and that it is also unknown if the proposed Rozelle interchange can actually be realised technically as it is presently envisaged.

B. The cost of WestConnex project, including the size and reasons for overruns

Previous toll road projects have overestimated the travel time savings and driver's propensity to use the toll road to the point where the toll roads have been financial disasters. These include the Lane Cove Tunnel and Cross City Tunnel.

The project costs are uncertain and very high. The budget for WestConnex is now \$16.8b – a 68% increase on the original estimate.

Official estimates don't include consideration of all costs including:

- The cost of compulsory land and property acquisition which is currently excluded from WestConnex's capital cost.
- The cost of legal challenges to compulsory acquisitions.
- The environmental impact of increased car usage induced by WestConnex.
- The health impact of increased car usage including the impacts of unfiltered pollution stacks.
- Increase in traffic accidents as a result of increased traffic on surface roads, for example, in and around the St Peters Interchange, Haberfield and Ashfield and along Parramatta Road.

The true cost of WestConnex is also likely to be much larger than that \$16.8b figure if other road upgrades required to handle traffic flowing into and out of the WestConnex tollway are taken into account, which they clearly should be. The City of Sydney has estimated that an additional \$28.5b will be required meaning a total cost of \$45.3b, see – [www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/ data/assets/pdf file/0008/286163/12625 West-Connex-12pp-public-summary-report-June-2017 DE12-singles.pdf](http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/286163/12625_West-Connex-12pp-public-summary-report-June-2017_DE12-singles.pdf)

F. The extent to which the project is meeting the original goals of the project as articulated in 2012

Since the project was first announced in 2012 there have been constant changes. WestConnex began as a proposal to provide a road link from Western Sydney to Port Botany and Mascot airport. But in the last five years, designs have been scrapped, extra lanes and tunnels added, major intersections moved and removed, tolls introduced, construction sites proposed and abandoned. The current proposal does not include a link to Port Botany or Mascot airport but delivers vehicles seven kilometres away from Port Botany at St Peters.

The SGS WestConnex Business Case Review linked above outlines the evolution of this project from the original route proposed in 2012 to the updated route (2014) and finally the 2015 Updated Strategic Business Case and states:

- Urban amenity and local traffic conditions will not be improved along Parramatta Road by WestConnex, and the opportunities for urban renewal will not be improved by the project. Hence one of the key strategic reasons for the project has been lost
- The Updated Strategic Business Case is also silent on the potential impact of the Western Sydney Airport on future traffic demand in relation to WestConnex..

The significant removal of the link from Sydney's western suburbs to Mascot airport and to Port Botany from the original WestConnex proposal should alone necessitate that the project be halted and that the Business Case and all traffic modelling be reviewed so that the public is given an accurate indication of the real impact of this changed project.

This is not the only major alteration to the original scope and plans for WestConnex which demonstrates clearly that this project lacks any proper planning and process. This lack of proper planning and process has reached its apex with the M4-M5 Link EIS which is by its own admission only an 'indicative' plan. The lack of detailed plans in this EIS for what would be the most complex and expensive stage of WestConnex, is staggering.

I. the cost of the project against its current valuation as determined through the sale of the Sydney Motorway Corporation and whether it represents a good investment for NSW taxpayers.

WestConnex does not represent a good investment for NSW taxpayers because the whole premise of the NSW Government's current proposal – that WestConnex will reduce congestion and decrease travel times for people in Western Sydney – is blatantly false.

This is made clear in the Government's own business case which shows:

- WestConnex will save most users only five minutes
- In many cases catching public transport will remain a faster way to move around
- It will reach capacity in just eight years.

J. Any other related matter.

Public Health

WestConnex will impact negatively on the health and wellbeing of residents in the inner west specifically increasing toxic pollution levels near the proposed unfiltered ventilation stacks which are located in residential areas and also near schools and parks. Particulate Matter affects more people than any other pollutant and the most health-damaging particles are those with a diameter of 10 microns or less, (\leq PM10), which can penetrate and lodge deep inside the lungs which are those which will be concentrated in highly densely populated areas as a result of WestConnex.

Extensive information on air pollution and the impact of ventilation stacks can be found in the Report on Inquiry into the M5 East Ventilation Stack by the NSW Parliamentary here – <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/inquiries/2106/Committee%20Report%2023%20July%202001%20-%20Inquiry%20into%20M5%20Ea.pdf>