

**Submission
No 237**

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT

Name: Mr Martin Brown

Date Received: 30 August 2018

Legislative Council
Public Accountability Committee
NSW Parliament
6 Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Legislative Council Inquiry into the impacts of the Westconnex project Submission

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the NSW Government's Westconnex project. I have several concerns with Westconnex (WCX) and related Government projects in the Rozelle area, including the proposed West Harbour tunnel and Rozelle/North Sydney tollway.

Inadequate planning: lack of consideration of alternatives

When it initially announced WCX, the Government claimed that it would better connect Port Botany and Sydney Airport to users in Western Sydney. However, WCX does not connect to either the Port nor the airport.

- Project planning regarding the linkage to Port Botany and Sydney Airport has been inadequate and this has contributed to weakened public support for the project.

A key inadequacy has been the failure to undertake a detailed consideration of the relative merits of the alternatives to WCX and related projects. For example, the Government announced the proposed West Harbour tunnel and Rozelle/North Sydney tollway without undertaking an analysis of alternative options to address northern Sydney's transport needs. As a result, there is little evidence, and little community confidence, that the project is a good use of tax payer funds.

- A detailed consideration of the relative merits of alternative options, including light and heavy rail in the north shore and northern beaches is urgently required before any further public finances are expended on this project.

Inadequate planning: multiple projects underway concurrently

Recent press reports indicate that one result of the simultaneous construction of various announced projects is that there will be an additional 9000 large trucks per day using the streets of Annandale, Rozelle, Forest Lodge and Camperdown to access the various construction sites for WCX, the West Harbour tunnel and the tunnel to the Iron Cove Bridge. The narrow streets in these suburbs are congested in the hours 6am to 10 am and 3pm to 6.30 pm. They will be unable to manage this increase in traffic and the increased congestion in these suburbs will have serious negative impacts on nearby major traffic arteries including Parramatta Road, Victoria Road and the Anzac Bridge.

The Inquiry should recommend that the Government commission, and publicly release, an independent study showing the impact on traffic volumes and speeds in both these suburbs and nearby major traffic arteries of the simultaneous construction of these projects, as opposed to undertaking the construction in a sequential manner.

Inadequate planning: impact on local streets

It is likely there will be increased traffic on streets close to WCX's entrances and exits, including The Crescent and Ross Street which are heavily congested at peak hour. Grid-lock at the intersection of

Ross and Arundel Streets is common as Ross Street vehicles typically queue across the intersection. It is difficult to envisage how these streets will cope with the increased traffic generated by WCX.

The Inquiry may wish to recommend that the Government commission an independent expert to undertake, and publicly release, a detailed study of traffic flows in streets close to WCX including recommendations on traffic management strategies. Such strategies should address the risk of increased traffic on local roads of vehicles wishing to avoid WCX tolls

Air quality and potential impacts on health

The approval process for the M4-M5 has not fully and transparently addressed the health issues related to air pollution. The proposed ventilation stacks are to be unfiltered and located close to schools, homes (including multi-storey apartments), aged care facilities and playing fields. This is of concern to the community.

- Information released to the public does not provide confidence that community concerns have been addressed. In particular, the Department of Planning has not released the full report by NSW Chief Health Officer Dr Kerry Chant (*NSW Health review of response comments following the EIS response for Westconnex M4-M5 Link project, 28 February 2018*). Pages 6 and 7 of the report were redacted and the final paragraph under the heading “Human Health Risk” appears incomplete. This lack of transparency is worrying. The Inquiry may wish to seek further information from Dr Chant.
- An independent review of the air quality assessment of the M4-M5 project (Todoroski Air Sciences, *WestConnex M4-M5 Link; Independent Consultant Peer Review*; Appendix F of EA Report_Air Quality) recommended areas for improvement. The Inquiry may wish to examine these recommendations and seek further information from the independent reviewer.

It is of concern that while the NSW Government has pushed ahead with this project, it has not taken broad policy action to address traffic-related air pollution. The Inquiry may wish to recommend that the NSW Government work with the Commonwealth and other State governments to adopt improved standards for road transport fuels and stricter motor vehicle emission standards.

Unfair compulsory acquisition process

In Haberfield and St Peters, some residents whose properties were compulsorily acquired received compensation well below the market value of their properties. As a result, they were unable to buy back into their neighbourhoods. This is enormously unfair. The Inquiry may wish to recommend ways in which property values are protected when subject to compulsory acquisition.

The Sydney Motorway Corporation (SMC) recently lost a court case over a compulsory acquisition site in Rozelle. SMC indicated that it would appeal the court’s decision. SMC, a large, Government-backed corporation, is in a much stronger financial position to fight expensive legal battles than the small business which won the case. The Inquiry may wish to identify ways in which Government-backed businesses may not use Government funds to take unfair advantage in compulsory acquisition court cases.

Project costs

WCX’s budget is \$16.8 billion, not including the West Harbour tunnel or Rozelle/North Sydney tollway. This figure also does not include the costs of traffic works on roads close to WCX’s entrances and exits. These local roads will be subject to major changes in the numbers and types of

vehicles using them and local councils will be required to undertake many local projects to manage the changed traffic flows.

- The costs of these works should be independently assessed and included in the WCX business case.
- These works should be funded by the WCX project, not the councils and their rate payers.

Governance

Expenditure of this sum of public money should entail best practice governance and strict accountability. The NSW Auditor-General, the Australian National Audit Office and Infrastructure Australia have commented on aspects of WCX's governance. The Inquiry may wish to recommend ways to improve the project's governance.

- While the project is funded by grants from the NSW Government, SMC's activities, including its expenditure of that money, is not subject to the same level of scrutiny as would apply if a central Government agency, such as Roads and Maritime Services, were undertaking the construction. The Inquiry may wish to consider whether expenditure of public funds should be subject to the requirements of the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* including when undertaken by a Government-owned corporation such as SMC.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely

Martin brown