

**Submission
No 239**

**INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX
PROJECT**

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Dear Committee members

Thank you very much for the opportunity to express my deep concerns about the WestConnex Project.

The project is too vast for me to comment on all its facets, so I will confine myself to one issue which I think is symptomatic of the wider issues.

My comments relate specifically to the following aspect of the terms of reference:

- (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

One of the extraordinary aspects of this project is that the Government's own documents demonstrate that the project is a poor investment for NSW taxpayers. In fact, it is not an investment at all, but a serious and ongoing liability which will drain the NSW budget and reduce the liveability of suburbs around Sydney (including my own).

The M4-M5 EIS was a good example of how the project documentation makes a comprehensive case for why this project should NOT proceed any further. To illustrate, I will confine myself to the traffic modelling in the EIS for my local area (Alexandria). This does not imply I am in favour of the rest of the EIS – for that, I endorse the City of Sydney's more comprehensive analysis.

In order to build the case against the project, it is possible just to quote from the EIS itself:

Performance of the St Peters network

- 'Not all of the forecast demand to and from the Sydney Airport precinct could be accommodated in the peak hour without the proposed future Sydney Gateway project.' (Ch 8-pg 135)
- 'the surface road network in the model is unable to accommodate the forecast peak hour demands without the additional road capacity provided by the proposed future Sydney Gateway.' (8-135)
- "In the AM peak hour, the 2023 'with project' scenario network performance is similar to the 'without project' scenario performance. The average vehicle performance metrics are slightly improved compared to the 'without project' scenario, but there is a slight increase in the number of unreleased vehicles." (8-136)
- "In the PM peak hour, the network performance measures suggest that the 2023 'with project' case is more congested, which is reflected in longer average trip times, and average speed in the network dropping by about 28 per cent. Queueing in the network is not forecast to prevent entry to or exit from the project. However, congestion in the Mascot area limits vehicles able to travel through the network in the peak hour to enter the motorway." (8-136)
- "In the 2033 'without project' scenario, the AM peak hour network is very congested and all travel time journeys assessed increase. Travel times show considerable improvement in the 2033 'with project' scenario. In the PM peak hour, routes that do not run through Mascot, such as Princes Highway to Euston Road, have comparable travel times between scenarios. However, the Railway Road to Gardeners Road and King Street to Sydney Airport Domestic

Terminals routes are affected by Mascot congestion and travel times recorded in the 'with project' scenarios are consistently longer than the ones recorded in 'without project' scenarios." (8-141)

- "The 2033 AM peak hour network performance results show that the 'with project' scenario is forecast to provide improved network operation when compared to the 'without project' scenario."
- "In the 2033 PM peak hour, the network performance results show that the 'with project' scenario is more congested than the 'without project' scenario. Demand was reduced by about 400 trips to and from Sydney Airport, with those trips not being served by the network in the peak hour. However, the total demand still increases by 12 per cent and all indicators show that the network is performing inefficiently." (8-136)
- "the network is forecast to not be able to accommodate the forecast traffic demand." (Appendix H-pg 196)
- "the forecast one hour future demand would exceed the physical road capacity." (H-53)
- "In the St Peters interchange model area, the demand growth forecast by the WRTM in the 'with project' scenarios caused the operational models to become inoperable ..." (H-53)

Lack of proper modelling

"...peak hour **demand was therefore reduced** in the 'with project' scenarios..." (H-53)

"For the purpose of analysing intersection performance in this assessment, all exit blocking constraints, applied in the microsimulation models to reflect network congestion beyond the modelled network extents, were removed. This allows for an assessment of the intersections within the modelled network, irrespective of any downstream queuing that would mask the actual operation of the intersection." (H-56)

Conclusion:

Four conclusions can be drawn:

1. The St Peters road network will be unable to cope - although just how badly it won't cope, we do not know, because of the relaxation of assumptions on which the modelling was based.
2. Modelling for the EIS has not been done to professional standards and needs to be redone
3. The St Peters network is facing severe capacity constraints in the future – but WestConnex will not solve this – in fact, it will worsen it. Yet alternatives to WestConnex have not been comprehensively evaluated in the EIS process.
4. Given that the project cannot work, the only response has been to claim that the solution lies with the addition of yet another tollway – the Sydney Gateway – which is outside the scope of the current one. Given there are no concrete plans for this additional tollway, this can be regarded as nothing more than wishful thinking.

That this project has now been approved constitutes, in my assessment, a serious act of maladministration on the part of the Department of Planning and Environment. **I ask** that the inquiry consider whether the M4-M5 link approvals should have been granted. I hold the same concerns for the M5 approval process.

I call on the inquiry to consider whether it is better for NSW taxpayers and residents to call a halt to this project, than to proceed with a plan to spend billions of dollars creating gridlock.

That the project has come as far as it has is an indictment of the processes for democratic transparency and accountability in New South Wales.

Catherine Welch