

**Submission
No 249**

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT

Name: Ms Rachel Davies

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Submission to Parliamentary enquiry on WestConnex - 2018

Dear Parliamentarians,

Thank you for taking the time to consider: some of the reality of the last few years spent living with WestConnex construction, and the unnecessarily poor outcomes that we will be left with in relation to moving around our suburb by foot.

The past and present:

I live reasonably close to the construction area for the WestConnex portal on Parramatta Rd, in Ashfield.

Living with the constant noise has been wearing.

Living with the construction site is a constant worry.

My primary school age daughter has walked past the construction zone twice a day since construction began; for the past 2 years this has been unaccompanied. I have often worried about her journey.

The worry about her journey is due to the many occasions when the management of children moving in the area hasn't been well managed. They have had to cross busy Bland St (Ashfield) without help as the footpath has been dug up.

I've worried about her coming down the new footbridge stairs without a handrail to hold onto.

I've worried about her being exposed to dangerous dust with concrete cutting going on and the dust blowing around.

I've worried about the trucks leaving the site and whether they would pay attention to the small children walking past.

I have had many email, and some phone, communications with M4East. I have found some staff empathic and solution focussed and others dismissive and unhelpful to the point of being obstructive and uncaring.

The management of vehicles leaving/entering the site has been good on the whole, with a person stationed to manage the vehicles as they cross the footpath. But the management of pedestrians when sections of road or footpath were out of action has been very bad.

The management of young children near the construction site was slowly made better. Due to the many complaints by parents, work hours along the footpath were established to be finished by 2.30pm, so parents and children could use the footpaths to get to school and, though inconsistent, there were staff put on duty to help children around obstacles more often.

It is clear that when planning how they would manage the site they had not considered the needs of pedestrians, most particularly the many children who attend Haberfield Public School. There was nothing in place to give them safe passage and no recognition that there was a primary school nearby. In the first few years there were many occasions where primary school aged children were left to find their own way across busy Bland St (in school rush hour), as no provision had been made to guide them around the blockage and back to the footpath. It was not unusual to see mothers pushing a stroller down the middle of Bland St to get to the footbridge.

On one occasion, when a concrete section of road was being cut, and dust was blowing all over the place (onto pedestrians and all over the front porch of a neighbour), I took a photo and sent it to M4East. It was time stamped, but the response from M4East was that it hadn't happened, that water had been used to dampen down the dust and that they weren't working at the time I said. It was clear from the photos that no water was being used and they were working at the time I identified. It was very insulting to be basically called a liar.

When the new stairs were put in for the footbridge only one handrail was usable due to wooden hoarding being attached on one side. The hoarding was attached to the 'down' side, i.e. the left side of the the staircase which people would usually use to come down, people coming up using the left side 'up'. It took many months to get M4East to remove the hoarding to make the 'down' side of the stairs safe. I had to send many emails and all I got back for months was - 'the staircase has been constructed according to RMS specifications'. There was zero concern that young children, often carrying large backpacks, used this staircase twice a day.

The future:

Currently we are being told that between Orpington St and Bland St (Ashfield) we are to be left with a 2.9m wide zone between the gutter on Parramatta Rd and the property line of future buildings.

We have been told that this is the same width that existed prior to the realignment of Parramatta Rd and construction of the portal. But pre-construction aerial photos show a varying width, some sections as wide as 4m.

M4East says 2.9m is fine as the footpath is 'very low use at all times of day' and that there is too much constraint on construction to make it wider. Both assertions are incorrect.

There is going to be a Woolworths supermarket built on the Bland St corner (M4East is aware of this), Woolworths own the land and are currently at the detail design stage. Most of the residual land in the area will be sold by RMS for apartments, this will include the two large Muirs car yard sites directly on the other side of Bland St (on both sides of Parramatta Rd). All this development will greatly increase the pedestrians in the area.

Inner West Council has plans to extend the shared path that currently runs in front of Ashfield Park so that it continues further west on the footpath beside Parramatta Rd to create an active transport link to Taverners Hill light rail stop. Why cannot the community have the expectation that WestConnex will give us the space to have such a facility, it wont affect anything they are building.

With the change to cycling laws, which now allow children up to the age of 16 to cycle on the footpath, we will need wider footpaths to avoid danger and conflict between cyclists and

pedestrians.

Our community needs a public zone beside Parramatta Rd that can accommodate the cycling needs of adults and children and the pedestrians who will be shopping at Woolworths and who will continue to access the bus stops near Bland St.

Currently there is beyond adequate space to have a very decent zone for the current and future active transport needs of the community as there are no buildings in most of the area. For M4East to say they are constrained because of the building environment is clearly incorrect.

The shared path that currently exists in front of Ashfield Park is, as I write, being wrecked by a series of large concrete footings for WestConnex infrastructure. This is cutting into about a third of the path, and it isn't a wide path to begin with. I can't fathom how this is sanctioned.

As a community we have suffered the noise, the dust, the worry for our kids safe passage during construction; we have worn the dismissive, unhelpful scorn of the 'info team' when we seek improvements on the ground; we have felt hopeless and humiliated by the 'community feedback' sessions where we have applied our minds to improving our local area, and honestly contributed to the process, to then discover that it was all just to tick a box; and now we sit and read the legal justifications for delivering us a very poor pedestrian/cycle outcome when all it would take is a bit of common sense and generosity to deliver something back to the community that is hosting their motorway.

Thank you for your time.