

**Submission
No 252**

**INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX
PROJECT**

Name: Dr Rosemary Webb

Date Received: 31 August 2018

Re Parliamentary Inquiry into the Impacts of WestConnex.

Dear Public Accountability Committee,

I write as a resident of the Inner West, a social historian of Sydney and a lifelong lover of this city. I am immensely distressed by the intensifying, pointless, and inefficient remodelling of so much that has evolved over time to give our city its character. Notably of course this has, since 2016, included the removal of more than one hundred Moreton Bay Figs for the Eastern Suburbs Light Rail despite clear alternatives existing, and multiple house demolitions in heritage suburbs (example, Haberfield) to build mega-roads.

In relation to WestConnex I am appalled by the existing and impending impact on Sydney of the WestConnex project and ask that the Public Accountability Committee inquire into and report on the planning, implementation and impact of the project. Please consider the concerns and comments below. I have addressed Terms of Reference (c), (d), (i) and (j).

In early submissions I urged the Secretary of Planning to advise the Minister to reject the application WestConnex M4/M5 EIS, Project Number SSI 16_7485. I hold that NSW Planning should have demanded that proponents address and redress the devastating impacts on Sydney community, on built environment and air quality clearly foreshadowed in the 2015 iterations of the project, and now shattering so many suburbs in this beautiful city of ours. Of course that did not happen.

It is reprehensible that plans reached the advanced stage revealed in last year's EIS, while retaining colossal construction ambit and caveats. People have suffered appallingly in their daily lives - sleep deprived and homes filled with dust, setting down likely life-long health issues, their children attending schools suddenly alongside construction zones - and in the enormous and ill-thought changes to local roads. To drive around St Peters these days, ripped apart by 'planning' and a callous disregard for residents' well-being, is a shocking assault on urban senses. Did the individuals behind WestConnex, both in and out of government, decide the impact on residents, streets, community networks, and schools to be collateral damage? History shows that homes will deteriorate over time as a consequence of construction near and beneath the streets, yet the project's processes for preliminary inspection and recompense are grossly unfair, as are processes for compulsory acquisition of properties for the project.

The emotional and financial impact on the people of Sydney's west and inner west has been huge and ongoing. Long-standing communities have been disrupted. People have sold their homes at significant loss and been forced to relocate out of community, or have stayed in their homes to significant health impact and financial loss on the value of their homes. Are WestConnex instigators contemptuous of these losses? What will be the impact of today's effective privatisation via the 51% sale to TransUrban? The project overall reveals devastating failure of duty of care to citizens by Government, a failure to respect the communities impacted on by the project.

Government has tried to convince us that, given a choice, the people of Greater Sydney prefer bigger roads to an improved and efficient bus and rail network. This is rubbish. For example, see the Facebook pages of Western Sydney residents and commuters! A three-hour round-trip daily commute in heavy traffic is no heart's desire. Failure to inject the massive funding allocated to this project into public transport (within Sydney and across the state) shows that

Government intends to push motorists onto these massive roads/ toll roads, at high weekly dollar cost for the outer suburbs. The failure to allocate public funds to infrastructure other than high-cost roads outs Westconnex as a bad investment for NSW taxpayers. This indeed, as per the Terms of Reference, raises questions on governance of the WestConnex project, including the relationship between the SMC, Roads and Maritime Services, the Treasury and shareholding Ministers.

In 2017 I wrote the EIS submission for Labour History Australia, focussing on the Inner West's industrial heritage and, as a case study, the Camperdown (Mallett St/ Pymont Bridge Road) mid-tunnel site. I objected, and do object, to the significant disruption the project poses to traffic and pedestrians and to local transit routes at and around this mid-tunnel site. That road section in Camperdown functions well for local traffic, and for through traffic to the city and Victoria Road. It is however utterly unsuited to carry the heavy truck movements the works mandate, an intensification threatening pedestrians, including school children and motorists. I live near King Street Newtown and have seen an increase in spoil trucks there since the St Peters/ Sydney Park works began. I shudder to think of the impact of large movements of such trucks past schools, homes, and the shopping centre in Annandale to and from the Camperdown site. People's right to safe movement around their localities must be respected. Safe movement and a safe and healthy living environment cannot coexist with WestConnex works as currently managed. From my study of public plans and from attending stakeholder meetings on WestConnex, I do not believe that safety concerns have been responsibly considered by the planners.

A further detail here, also derived from my own study of plans and attendance at stakeholder meetings, Labour History's EIS submission suggested that project designers did not properly take on board Camperdown's swampy history, with Annandale and Newtown draining into Camperdown. Late 19th century engineering works to alleviate swamps are verified in contemporary documents. Old streams and storm drains (for example Orphan School Creek), tributaries of Johnston's Creek draining into Rozelle Bay, remain characteristic of the locality today. Clearly the old drainage works were never expected to contend with the scale of the tunnel works integral to WestConnex. Will earthworks and tunnelling undermine existing roads, buildings and infrastructure? People are afraid that this tunnelling means sinkholes (as happened recently in Alexandria): how will Government and the SMC respond when roads collapse?

Thank you for the opportunity to put my concerns on the impacts of Westconnex. I look forward to the Committee's timely outcomes.

Sincerely,

Dr Rosemary Webb

31 August 2018