

**Submission
No 255**

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT

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Submission into Upper House Inquiry into the WestConnex Project

by Helen Gilbert

31 August 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on this project. My submission is based on points listed in the terms of reference for the inquiry.

(a) The adequacy of the business case for the WestConnex project, including the cost-benefits ratio

There was **no** proper consideration of the costs and benefits of this project prior to its announcement in 2012 or even since then. Any worthwhile major transport infrastructure project requires full consideration of the economic, social and environmental costs of the proposal (a massive road tunnel project) and all sensible alternatives (including public transport alternatives or incorporating public transport into the road project - such as occurs in WA where all new road freeways include rail along the same corridor). This is a major failure of this project and it shows that planning for this city is back in the 1950s when road was considered 'king'. Almost universally, other global cities have moved away from this model and are focussed on managing future traffic demand not pandering to it and encouraging it.

(b) The cost of WestConnex project, including the size and reasons for overruns

Apparently the budget is almost a 70% increase on the huge cost initially estimated. Overruns can occur but are much more acceptable if the project is appropriate. In this case, we have seen the sale and use of public assets (like the Rozelle Rail Yards and various parks) and many private residences and businesses used or sold to fund and supply land for this short sighted project. In the case of the Rozelle Rail Yards land - its potential to extend the inner west light rail to the Balmain peninsula and beyond is now extinguished permanently - all for a massive road tunnel interchange. How is it good planning to put such a development on the doorstep of the massive Bays Precinct redevelopment project?

(c) The governance and structure of the WestConnex project including the relationship between Sydney Motorway Corporation, Roads and Maritime Services, the Treasury and its shareholding Ministers

Both Infrastructure Australia and the NSW Audit Office have criticised the governance of this project. Today's announcement that the government will sell 51% of the project to Transurban demonstrates part of the governance issues in this project. Transurban already owns a majority share in 7 out of 9 Sydney toll roads! Transferring part of the Sydney Motorway Consortium (which is headed up by a major Liberal Party figure) to Transurban for future private profits these companies shows how incestuous, political and corrupt these major projects are.

Like this one, they are funded by the disposal of public assets (such as land and infrastructure including the NSW electricity poles and wires) and yet it's the private sector (and only certain sections of it that are politically aligned to the current government) that will benefit. The public will not enjoy benefits from this toll road that will simply increase road congestion and air pollution along its length and in local streets near exit points.

(d) The compulsory acquisition of property for the project

This was really poorly done in the case of the Westconnex project. People whose places were acquired were treated awfully - in terms of financial terms offered and time frames. As a comparison, the Sydney metro project acquisition program was much better implemented, much fairer and caused much less disruption, social outrage and stress for those concerned.

(g) The relationship between WestConnex and other toll road projects including the Sydney Gateway, Western Harbour Tunnel, F6 and Beaches Link

This is planning 'on the run'. When the Westconnex project was first announced, there was no mention of any Western Harbour tunnel. It was also supposed to be a quick link to airport. The airport section has been shelved and the Western Harbour link has been included as an afterthought in an effort to make it all more attractive to investors. The lack of planning was fully apparent when there were no private sector bidders willing to construct and manage the 'spaghetti junction' tunnel gateway at Rozelle Bay. All round this is appalling planning and governance and demonstrates a total lack of strategic vision for what would really make Sydney a liveable, sustainable city.

(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

Please see my comments under point (c) above.

(j) any other related matter.

A major issue related to the costs and benefits of this project is the social, environmental and **health** costs of the project - particularly for communities that are adjacent to the planned exhaust stacks. This project includes tunnels of 8-10km (longer than any other toll roads in Sydney to date) and only plans to have longitudinal ventilation (air simply gets pushed to either end so the last sections of tunnels are highly polluted and the stacks at the two ends release high levels of air pollution (with benzene and particulate pollution the biggest concern.) At community 'consultation' sessions (which were really just 'information' sessions, the air pollution 'expert' provided was unable to answer simple questions about filtration (he claimed it did not occur elsewhere in the world - which is incorrect) and had little to know knowledge of what would even be planned for in this project.

If the project is completed, given the length of the tunnels and the high density of population at the exhaust stacks (especially around Rozelle where stacks are proposed right next to a large primary school), there needs to be world's best filtration and transverse filtration (with regular air openings (stacks) and inlets along the length of the tunnels) as occurs in other places for tunnel roads eg all Japanese major road projects. It is notable that in 2008, the now premier, **Gladys Berejiklian** called for filtration of the Lane Cove tunnel and claimed that filtration of stacks was 'ethically right in the interests of ...health'. Her words back then, were:

"Members of Parliament should examine their conscience and consider how they would feel if their children or the children of loved ones were exposed to this level of fumes every day and they were part of a government that could have put in place measures to reduce the impact of the fumes."

"It is not too late, the government can still ensure that filtration is a possibility. World's best practice is to filter tunnels."

"Why won't they (Labor) allow people to sleep at night, knowing their children aren't inhaling toxins that could jeopardise their health now or in the future?"

- cited by Ben Graham, North Shore Times
August 23, 2017 2:50pm

This project has been poorly planned and executed every step of the way. It will impact on the health of Sydney residents who live along the corridor - particularly those who live near the exits and the stacks as no treatment of the resulting air pollution is planned. It is apparent that the project is simply a way for the private sector to benefit from the sale and misuse of public assets and it has been falsely marketed as a way of reducing congestion for Sydney. Any traffic or transport planner knows that such road based projects are not the answer to congestion and transport issues - most other world cities stopped doing this 50 years ago.

I hope the members of this inquiry get to the truth of this project and its lack of appropriate planning and governance, and can somehow make sure that the final sections of the project are stopped or at least substantially improved by the inclusion of appropriately placed and fully filtered air pollution stacks using transverse not longitudinal filtration.

Yours faithfully

Helen Gilbert