

**Submission
No 276**

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT

Name: Ms Adrienne Shilling

Date Received: 31 August 2018

SUBMISSION TO UPPER HOUSE INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT

Terms of Reference addressed in this submission are:

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

(j) Any other related matter

RECOMMENDATIONS:

.....

- (i) At the very least, the whole WestConnex project, its financiers (banks/consortia), relevant government departments and previous and current politicians championing it, should be referred to the Independent Commission Against Corruption for thorough investigation and analysis by independent experts, followed by a full public report;
- (ii) the announcement by the Government as to the successful tenderer/s of the proposed sell-off of 51% of the Sydney Motorway Authority should be held over until after the next State election on 23 March 2019, to give more time for the public to scrutinise the proposal and have meaningful input into it; and
- (iii) Stage 3 (the M4-M5 'Link') of this project should not be allowed to proceed until **all** elements of its design (including tunnelling, filtration options, air quality monitoring and control, impacts on nearby houses and other buildings, impacts on local communities) and associated full costs, are assessed. A complete report must be made publicly available for comment from independent experts in the field of health, traffic, transport planning, environment and any other associated areas.

Introduction

I live in Petersham and have been involved in exposing the problems with the WestConnex project since 2013. I am a member of an increasingly broad and vocal campaign which opposes the WestConnex tollway and its associated arms and which instead promotes integrated, publicly-owned, affordable public transport – most especially train networks - as a *first* priority.

My participation in this campaign has come at quite a high personal cost to me, my family and friends. And over these past five and a half years, I have witnessed the high cost to my friends, colleagues and general community members in suburbs most severely affected already by this project.

Over the last five or more years, I have lost vast amounts of personal time for my own preferred pursuits while instead dealing with challenges associated with this project: attending WestConnex “community information sessions”, public meetings, rallies, stalls and protests. I have met with then Premier Baird and other MPs to explain the detrimental effects of this project on community members. I routinely carry out administrative tasks associated with community-led meetings. In effect, I have an unpaid job opposing this project because I am determined - along with an increasing number of community members - to continue participating in actions that will demonstrate to the wider public that WestConnex is a shambolic waste of taxpayers’ money that will not improve Sydney’s traffic

congestion. This personal cost – and similar costs to hundreds of my community colleagues – will never be accounted for by the proponents of WestConnex.

Concerns

My major concerns at this point include:

- the imminent announcement of the sell-off of 51% of SMC to a private consortium and the opaque manner in which this process has been conducted;
- the approval and proposed construction of Stage 3 of WestConnex which, if built, will destroy large swathes of inner west suburbs, pollute the air to even higher, more unsafe levels, and create ever more traffic congestion without offering any viable transport alternatives;
- integrated, environmentally sustainable, efficient public transport systems are given only lip service and there appears to be determination by the current Government to privatise as much of the public system as possible (for example, Sydney Region 6 bus network; Sydney Metro lines). They have no mandate to do this;
- People living in Western Sydney are unduly penalised for using the M4Tollway. The costs are enormous and a promised cashback scheme will be paid for by taxpayers to the private tollway owners (see for example Matt O'Sullivan's article 19 July 2018 <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/labor-s-m4-cashback-plan-an-earnings-free-kick-to-westconnex-owners-20180711-p4zgrj.html>);
- the contribution of this project to harmful climate impacts is immeasurable but could at least be scientifically assessed and openly reported to the public; and
- the disruption to the lives of ordinary people due to constant noise, dust, vibration of works etc.

I take this opportunity to emphasise that the costs of WestConnex on individual and collective health (both physical and mental) of thousands of people across the Inner West including me were predicted from the outset by a range of transport planners, health experts and urban planners.

I cannot express my concerns more aptly than has Dr Chris Standen, transport analyst at The University of Sydney Business School Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies:

“Clearly, WestConnex is not in the public interest. The scheme involves arguably the biggest misuse of public funds for private gain in Australia's history – billions of dollars that could otherwise have been used for worthwhile infrastructure or services.

“The harm to people's lives is immeasurable. Construction is already destroying communities, affecting people's health, and disrupting sleep and travel – with years more to come. The new tolls on the existing motorways will hurt lower-income households, particularly in Western Sydney. The extra traffic generated through induced demand and toll-avoidance will lead to more road trauma and traffic noise. In particular, we can expect more trucks on local streets day and night, as they avoid the new tolls”. (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-planning-process-corrupted-help-toll-road-chris-standen/> on 1 Nov 2017).

My belief in open democratic processes has been severely undermined as a result of attending so-called “consultations” by WestConnex representatives, keen to assert they are taking heed of the concerns of community members most likely to be affected by the project's impacts. Clearly, such consultations have been little more than “tick-a-box” exercises while massive amounts of confusing, contradictory, opaque and costly information have been disseminated by the proponents. As is now well known to thousands of fellow community members, following due processes including writing objections to various stages

of WestConnex in Environmental Impact Statements has come to virtually nothing. My views, and those of other community objectors, have been ignored or minimised by the hawkers of WestConnex.

My mental health has been eroded by the destruction of much-needed tree canopy across the Inner West (for example in swathes of Sydney Park, in Haberfield and the Cooks River/Castlereagh Ironbark Forest adjoining the M5 at Beverly Grove). Being a direct witness to wilful chainsawing of trees in these places has been hugely distressing because I am well aware that the vegetation is vitally needed in an ever-heating planet, and because WestConnex and its associated spin-off roads will only *increase* traffic volumes and increase pollution without facilitating traffic congestion for commuters. Below is an example of urban canopy destruction: *Photo: Peter Rae*

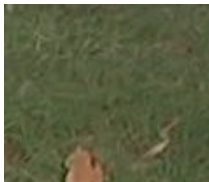
<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/protesters-halt-westconnex-clearing-of-rare-wolli-creek-bushland-20160907-graeyi.html>

Destruction of woodland at Beverley Grove in Kingsgrove begins.



<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/inner-west/antiwestconnex-protesters-clash-with-police-as-the-first-of-500-trees-fall-to-make-way-for-st-peters-interchange/news-story/8287fd7e744e41aa1a893933534ff5cc>

Accompanying this violent action towards the natural environment has been extremely heavy-handed policing to facilitate it – obviously state-sanctioned. Peaceful, unarmed, law-abiding citizens with no criminal records have been arrested (some severely manhandled unnecessarily), charged and taken to court merely for trying to protect their local communities including parklands and other open spaces (see for example reports by WestConnex Action Group http://www.westconnexactiongroup.org.au/tags/police_brutality), and the photo below taken at Sydney Park in 2017 by a local resident tree protector.



I have also been extremely distressed at witnessing first-hand the destruction of compulsorily-acquired homes and commercial properties in Haberfield, Ashfield and St Peters. I am well aware home owners have not been accorded true market value for their homes or businesses and in many cases, have not been able to remain in their chosen communities because they could not afford to buy higher priced houses. Those renting have also had to move from their communities due to higher rents. The houses compulsory acquired were perfectly habitable and in some cases (eg in Haberfield) worthy of heritage listing. What other first-world country would wilfully destroy heritage-value houses for an outdated concept of a motorway with its associated harmful effects on people and the environment?

If such a project were imposed on the residents of a developing country, we would probably shrug our collective shoulders and remark along the lines of “what can you expect in undemocratic, corrupt countries?” How shocking it is therefore to see that despite supposed democratic processes in NSW – the rule of law and associated levels of court processes, parliamentary procedures, access to members of parliament, impartial bureaucracies and so on – this project has rolled on despite any semblance of justice, fairness and transparency. WestConnex reeks of malfeasance.

All of the above come at a cost which is not accounted for in WestConnex reckoning: impacts on personal relationships, health, social cohesion, clean air, access to open spaces. We have all lost valuable family, work and leisure time – and peace of mind – while dealing with this project’s impacts. The costs of these elements of the WestConnex project are immeasurable.

Air quality/ traffic pollution

As Standen has so succinctly pointed out:

“Sydney’s air already has unhealthy levels of traffic pollution. Diesel exhaust is a carcinogen in the same class as asbestos. Invisible and odourless petrochemical particulates penetrate deep into our lungs and into our blood supply while we work, exercise and sleep – and we may only become aware of the health consequences years later.” (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-planning-process-corrupted-help-toll-road-chris-standen/> on 1 Nov 2017)

The question must therefore be asked: if this information is already known, WHY is this project allowed to continue being built without further investigation into health impacts and effects, particularly when the cost to all of us will sooner rather than later show in increased medical costs and early deaths?

As recently as the week beginning 27 August 2018, a Chinese study has found that reduced intelligence levels are associated with high levels of air pollution. While the research was conducted in China, it is relevant across the world, with 95% of the global population breathing unsafe air, according to the report of the study. It found that high pollution levels led to significant drops in test scores in language and arithmetic, with the average impact equivalent to having lost a year of the person’s education.

(<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/aug/27/air-pollution-causes-huge-reduction-in-intelligence-study-reveals>). This study bears further investigation and follow up in Australia, with relevance to the highly predictable negative impacts of WestConnex.

Stage 3 in particular now poses a grave risk to the health of residents across the inner west and particularly in the suburbs of Rozelle, Lilyfield, Annandale and Leichhardt. This is in large part because three (unfiltered) pollution emissions stacks are planned for Rozelle Rail Yards and are of major concern. And a fourth stack is planned for Victoria Rd close to Darling Street and remarkably, *less than 200 metres from the Rozelle Primary School*.

The Rozelle Rail Yards are located in a valley. The three planned pollution stacks in the Rail Yards are shown to be 35 metres high. The emissions stacks will be on land that is approximately 3.5 metres above sea level, making the top of the stacks 38.5 metres above sea level. Balmain Road between Wharf and Victoria Roads is at an elevation of (on average) 37 metres. Orange Grove Primary School is at an elevation of 33.4 metres at ground level. Areas in Annandale Street Annandale are at 29 metres above sea level. All these areas are in close proximity to the three planned stacks and are less than 800 metres away.

The tops of the pollution stacks will be at almost the same level as these locations so pollution will be blowing directly into properties located in these areas. This will be especially significant in Summer when many windows are open to allow for supposed “fresh” air. In situations of no wind, the pollution will accumulate in this valley area and cause the surrounding areas of rising ground to be highly polluted. There are at least four schools of primary age children well within one kilometre of these planned stacks. Young children are the most susceptible pollution-related diseases. Even if the stacks were to be filtered, future health costs can be expected to rise substantially.

Particulate matter affects more people than any other pollutants and the most health-damaging particles are those with a diameter of 10 microns or less, (\leq PM10), which can penetrate and lodge deep inside the lungs. These are the most likely particles to be concentrated in highly densely populated areas as a result of WestConnex.

It is completely unacceptable that the emissions stacks are intended for an area in a valley lower than the majority of surrounding dwellings.

Further questions arise: which Government agencies can be trusted to measure baseline and pollution levels arising from the project, monitor them and take action to mitigate impacts? Will nominated agencies monitor sites around affected sections of every suburb consistently, regularly, accurately and publicly? Who will oversee these studies? Who will act on abnormal readings? Who will be publicly accountable? What redress will residents have if they become severely affected? These, among many other questions, MUST be addressed before any further work on WestConnex is allowed to continue.

On a tangential but significant point, Rozelle Rail Yards have already been cleared of old vegetation - vegetation that was once dense enough to shelter migratory birds for decades. The vegetation also provided some offset for the severe Summer temperatures.

And meanwhile, the heavy rail lines have been wilfully ripped up and removed. This line could have been adapted for light rail through to White Bay and Balmain at far lower cost than the proposed “spaghetti junction” tangle of road tunnels proposed for the area now. Please follow a video link here for commentary on this point by a local Balmain resident: <https://www.facebook.com/EcoTransit/videos/1939189829430060/>.

Climate impacts

It is already well established that emissions from traffic – notably diesel – contribute hugely to negative, human-induced global warming, as the graphic on page 8 of this submission indicates (ref.: <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/transport-emissions-and-climate-solutions/> Dec. 2016)

However, cement as part of concrete when used in high volumes, also contributes to emissions. see for example State of the Planet, Columbia University, <https://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2012/05/09/emissions-from-the-cement-industry/>) and <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/apr/09/cement-industry-urged-to-reduce-invisible-global-emissions>) but this is not considered as a cost of the WestConnex project.

WestConnex-linked works (and associated high-rise buildings along much of the route) are major uses of concrete and hence, cement.

Despite a wide range of benefits being claimed about WestConnex – for example, a reduction in carbon emissions attributed to supposedly smoother-flowing traffic, these benefits are claimed without considering the associated costs. As has been for too long the case, the environment appears yet again to be considered as an “externality”.

The climate impacts of large scale unsustainable infrastructure such as WestConnex are unacceptable.

And while the current building works associated with the project cannot be directly attributed to the current extremely dry weather conditions prevailing in Sydney, it is worth noting that according to the Australian Bureau of Meteorology:

“Autumn 2018 was the warmest on record for most sites in Greater Sydney, beating the previous record set in 2016. Rainfall was well below average across the region and the driest autumn at Observatory Hill since 2006. “ (<http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/current/season/nsw/sydney.shtml>)

All contributors to global warming, now a serious world problem, **MUST** be considered, and this includes the building of WestConnex and its implications.

Summary and Conclusion

The WestConnex project has already shown itself to have far exceeded its original (published) construction costs, yet the *complete* costs - financial, environmental, social, health and lost opportunity (for integrated functioning public transport across Sydney) have not been adequately factored in to the Government's estimates. Given the current and predictable impacts of this project on Sydney and by implication, the rest of NSW, I believe it shows all the elements of a corrupted process at worst, and of incompetence and maladministration at best.

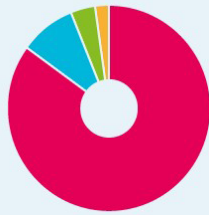
I urge the Committee inquiring into the impacts of this ill-conceived project to take serious heed of the many negative impacts that WestConnex is having and will have if allowed to continue. WestConnex's proponents must be exposed to the sunlight of full and open scrutiny and criticism. The project must be stopped until after the Inquiry's findings are released, and until after State election on 23 March 2019.

Adrienne Shilling
Resident

31 August 2018

(please see infographic on transport emissions on the following page): (ref.: <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/transport-emissions-and-climate-solutions/> Dec. 2016)

TRANSPORT EMISSIONS IN AUSTRALIA



Transport emissions
by source



TRANSPORT IS THE
3RD LARGEST
source of emissions

18%

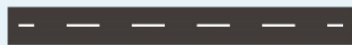
of Australia's
greenhouse
gas emissions
in 2015



Highest growing
source of emissions

**51% SINCE
1990**

**ROAD
TRANSPORT = 85%**



of all transport emissions



CARS = 46%

of all transport emissions

2016 GLOBAL RANKINGS: TRANSPORT ENERGY EFFICIENCY

TOP



**1ST
INDIA**



**2ND
ITALY**



**3RD
JAPAN**



**4TH
CHINA**

BOTTOM



**22ND
AUSTRALIA**



**23RD
SAUDI ARABIA**

WHY?

- High distance travelled by car per person
- High emitting cars
- No emissions standards
- Low use of public transport
- Low government spending on public transport

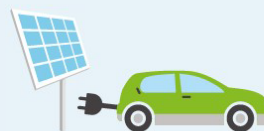
KEY SOLUTIONS



Public Transport



Mandatory Greenhouse
Gas Emissions Standards



Electric Vehicles
Powered by Renewables