

**Submission  
No 291**

**INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX  
PROJECT**

**Name:** Dr Peter Ross  
**Date Received:** 31 August 2018

---

## **Submission to WestConnex Parliamentary Inquiry**

**Dr Peter Ross**

**31 August 2018**

### **Background**

I am a resident of St Peters, who, along with other residents, has been heavily affected by the WestConnex works associated with the construction of the major interchange in the suburb. I also have a ten year old child who attends St Peters Public School (SPPS). I have been a member of the Parents and Citizens Committee (P&C) since 2013 .

### **A and B. The Inadequacy of the Business Case for WestConnex and its Costs Analysis**

The WDA began acquiring properties in St Peters, and ejecting residents, including the families of children at SPPS, even before the business case was made public. This created considerable stress in the community. No body could be sure that their home would not be forcibly acquired. WDA offers of payments varied considerably leading to divisions in the community. For the most part the offers were too low for most families to buy back into the neighbourhood.

SPPS is a small school. Something like 10% of students were forced to relocate, some as far as Queensland and country NSW. The remaining parents were fearful that the School would be closed down.

The Business Case, itself, did not even attempt to consider the cost-benefits of other types of infrastructure to toll roads, such as public transport. Nor did it consider the costs to health (physical, neurological and psychological) of the project. Moreover, the plan kept changing. The original object of providing a link to the airport and Port Botany was abandoned.

The real costs of the acquisition of properties were not factored in, nor subsequent costs including grants, donations and gifts made to various individuals and organisations affected by the project. Similarly, there have been, and will be, more costs associated with relieving the stress created by the works. No attempt was made to measure lost production engendered by the noise and pollution during destruction/construction, and by the ongoing health problems related to increased noise and air pollution following completion.

For school children the costs may well be high and on going. Air pollution, for instance, can retard cognitive development.

### **C. Governance**

WestConnex (in all its forms and associated forms, including the Sydney Motorway Corporation, Roads and Maritime Services (RMS), the contractors and subcontractors, and Utility Companies) has treated the community with contempt as it implemented its project.

As the WestConnex Delivery Authority morphed into the secretive Sydney Motorway Corporation, and as the Roads and Maritime Services appeared to take the leading role in implementation, but not taking any responsibility, it has become increasingly difficult to actually liaise with any organisation with regard to the community's concerns with what has been happening. There is no regulatory authority that one can appeal to, but a host of them, and we are fobbed off from one to the next. And it is up to parents and residents to make the complaints, and to follow through in the attempt to have some problem resolved. Where are the government inspectors who should be ensuring that all runs smoothly, and that the health of our children is maintained at the highest level?

The SPPS P&C has found the governance of the project to be woeful. To give just three specific examples:

1. In July 2015 the WestConnex Delivery Authority (WDA) agreed that it would provide monthly updates of the data collected by the Air Quality Monitoring Station sited in the grounds of the School directly to the P&C. It has never done this.
2. The WDA stated that it would give the P&C a hard copy of the New M5 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). When the document was published in November 2015, the WDA refused to comply with this.
3. The Sydney Motorway Corporation (SMC) and the businesses it contracted agreed not to have trucks entering and exiting worksites near the School during School drop off and pick up times. They have not complied with this.

There has been a lack of transparency and a failure to adequately consult with stakeholders including affected residents and parents of children in schools in the vicinity of the project. Of particular concern in terms of health has been the failure to provide up to date data with regard to changes in air quality in spite of promises to do so.

WestConnex's November 2015 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) generally downplays the negative aspects of the project, including the changes it would bring to air quality. Causes of changes to air quality include the emission of noxious gases and the release of particulates from traffic on surface roads and from the portals and emission stacks of the tunnels. Portals and four emission stacks in two locations are sited quite close to SPPS on the old Dial a Dump site just the other side of the Princes Highway.

There is no safe level of particulate intake. And the technology does not exist to accurately measure superfine particulates – those less than PM2.5. WestConnex concurs with this. Its EIS states: "Numerous epidemiological studies have reported significant positive associations between particulate air pollution and adverse health outcomes, in particular mortality as well as a range of adverse cardiovascular and respiratory effects". (WestConnex, EIS, Appendix I, 6-27).

WestConnex modeled the positive and negative impacts on air quality of the project for 45 community centres or receptors (schools, child care centres, health institutions, aged care facilities, etc.) along the route of the New M5, and indicated those where the risks of poor air quality improved, and those where it worsened. We can assume that their modeling is optimistic. At St Peters Public School, the model indicated that air quality would be worse after completion of the project.

#### *Nitrogen Dioxide*

Due to greater release of nitrogen dioxide, at SPPS there is increased risk of:  
Mortality All Causes (Ages 30+)  
Mortality Respiratory (all ages)  
Asthma ED Admissions (1-14 years)

Of these, the biggest risk increase from the 2014 base year to 2021 is the Asthma ED Admissions (1-14 years). Of the 45 community receptors, only five have a greater increase of risk. By 2031, SPPS has a greater risk than all the other centres apart from Arncliffe Public School. (See, WestConnex, EIS, Appendix I, 6-26).

#### *Particulates*

Due to the greater release of particulate matter, at SPPS there is increased risk of:  
Mortality All Causes (Ages 32+ years, long term)  
Cardiovascular hospitalisations (65+, short term)  
Respiratory hospitalisations (65+, short term)

For 2021 SPPS is at greater risk than eight of the other centres; and in 2031, nine of the other centres. (See, WestConnex, EIS, Appendix I, 6-44).  
Note that the older ages result from effects of ingestion of particulates over a longer time frame. The earlier an individual commences, the more likely that person is to end up with health problems.

Secrecy, lack of transparency and gift giving

Consultation is a sham. WestConnex will do what it wants to do. For instance, we have frequently objected to the siting of a car park on Campbell St, as has the Inner West Council, but WestConnex insists on it, even though originally, back in mid 2015, they stated it was just a 'thought bubble' or a 'concept'. We want more trees and bushes – better for the environment. We guess that the car lovers in the RMS have determined on the car park, and the parents and citizens, and the School Principal, just have to accept their diktat.

WestConnex, the WestConnex Delivery Authority (WDA), the Sydney Motorway Corporation (SMC), Roads and Maritime Services (SMC), and contractors and sub contractors have operated behind a cloak of secrecy. For the most part, they only pretend to consult with stakeholders. They have changed the project numerous times. Their consultants provide different stories.

This has resulted in divisions within the community, and a considerable amount of stress. Plus, some residents appear to be favoured, and others not with regard to gifts from the organisations involved. For example, some residents have been provided with free accommodation in hotels and/or head phones. It's hard to tell to what extent this is about quieting critics or punishing critics.

Currently, negotiations are taking place between the Sydney Motorway Corporation and the NSW Department of Education for the former to fund an expanded playground at St Peters Public School (SPPS). This is occurring in a climate of secrecy. It ignores the fact that the Environmental Impact Statement of WestConnex (November 2015) clearly indicates that, following completion of the project, air quality at SPPS will be worse than before the project commenced. Should the NSW Department of Education be encouraging children to spend more time in the open air at St Peters when the WestConnex EIS clearly states that the risk to health will be greater when the project is completed? Is the Department of Education in breach of its duty of care for school children? Is the Department so hungry for money that it will take funds from the very organization responsible for increased health risks for school children?

#### **D. Any Other Related Matter**

St Peters has been occupied and devastated by WestConnex, which has used the police, including the riot squad, to repress us and suppress our right to protest. We have lost confidence in many of the institutions that we previously believed existed to protect us. Government politicians actively sought to divide the residents of Sydney by portraying our protests as well-off Inner West residents attacking a project that would favour residents in the western suburbs. This was never the case but simply a propaganda exercise.

Each day we have to deal with a host of difficulties, including:

Poor traffic management

Dangerous uneven footpaths

Transportation of dangerous and toxic waste through suburban streets

Unnecessary noise pollution, especially at night

The unnecessary closure of footpaths, including, for many months, one leading to the main entrance of the School

The placement of poles in the middle of footpaths

Reduced parking spots due to WestConnex workers parking where they should not. This was particularly a problem near where parents had to discharge or pick up their children.

Idling trucks and other vehicles resulting in the unnecessary emission of toxic gases and particulates

Frequent dust clouds produced by the works.

Smelly odours emanating from the old Dial A Dump site, leading some parents to keep their children at home.

The loss of green spaces

The wanton destruction of trees

After the project is completed the residents of St Peters will have to endure worse air quality, greater noise pollution and a greatly increased volume of traffic in neighbourhood streets than was the case before the project commenced. It is not right that certain communities will pay a heavy price so that others will be, supposedly, better off. The main beneficiaries of the project are not the tax payers of NSW, or those forced to pay high tolls to travel on the new roads, but the private construction companies and the toll companies that will buy up the project. Their profits will be guaranteed by the NSW government.

Yours sincerely  
Peter Ross