

Submission  
No 348

## INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT

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Submission: Parliamentary Inquiry into Impacts of WestConnex

To the Director,

Please find my comments to the Inquiry into the impact of WestConnex:

I have many concerns about this destructive project.

My first regards climate change.

As we all know, human-induced global warming is posing an immediate and unprecedented threat to humanity, with transport and construction major contributors.

(<https://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/13/.../top-climate-change-contributors/index.html>)

This massive project will entrench increased use of CO2-emitting private transport in preference to more climate-friendly public and active transport alternatives. The construction itself significantly contributes to global warming in its use of materials, clearing of trees etc. The consequences for coming generations will be to add significantly to the cumulative burdens of global warming, when instead every major project should work to reduce that burden.

Specifically addressing the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry:

#### THE COST OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT, INCLUDING THE SIZE AND REASONS FOR OVERRUNS

The costs are obscene. Billions in taxpayer money and in unfair tolls to make developers richer while increasing the transformation of our city into a dystopia of ugliness, pollution and social division. All powered by corrupt and secretive connections between politicians, finance and development. For example the fact former Roads Minister Duncan Gay is now employed by a transport construction firm that is getting government contracts--some without even going to tender.

Many proposals have been suggested that would more genuinely solve problems of congestion and access at far lower monetary cost, not to mention the human costs of Westconnex. These proposals include alteration to existing roads as well as public transport options. I don't think we really know much yet about the ultimate monetary cost or overruns, because everything is being done to evade transparency.

#### THE BUSINESS CASE AND COST: BENEFIT RATIO

The business case has been discredited by the SGS report to the City of Sydney. There have been thousands of submissions from the public and from experts, community organisations and local government objecting to it.

And it is outrageous that Westconnex has not been benchmarked against public transport options --so cost comparisons and relative efficiencies were not analysed and documented.

#### GOVERNANCE AND STRUCTURE OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT

The transfer of responsibility from a government authority to a private company, The Sydney Motorway Corporation, was a sneaky sleight of hand to reduce accountability and transparency for the largest public infrastructure project in Australia.

The sale of a controlling share in SMC will make things even worse, and the fact Transurban was allowed to bid without even waiting for the ACCC report re: its monopoly status, indicates eagerness by government to organise and decide everything for the benefit of business cronies, not for the people of NSW.

## RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE

The national audit report criticised the federal loan and grant for part-funding of the project as not adequately protective of national financial interests. To me that further indicates what a totally dodgy project it is. It should be halted, with the existing mess re-evaluated independently to see how it can be remediated.

### COMPULSORY ACQUISITION OF PROPERTY

There was never adequate justification or compensation for the compulsory acquisitions. It is also typical of its failure to serve the public that for over 2 years the government suppressed the 2014 Russell review about the land acquisition system.

### RE: THE ORIGINAL GOALS OF THE PROJECT AS ARTICULATED IN 2012

Because of the way it has developed, I question whether the project was ever intended primarily to meet real and important transport needs, or whether the main goals were to build reputations and fortunes for certain people. Re: linking the western suburbs to Port Botany and the airport, these seem to no longer be part of the plan, despite having been the original rationale. So the cost and destruction to achieve the original purpose will be additional to the huge cost and destruction already committed.

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WESTCONNEX AND OTHER TOLL ROAD PROJECTS

The combined result of these and other existing projects will be an ugly and polluting network of the worst 20th century transport mistakes brought forward to the 21st Century. Together they are costing users and non-users a fortune in tolls and taxes and will continue to do so for decades to come. These tolls and taxes are not to fund real needs like public transport, health and education, but will mostly be delivered to the pockets of the project developers and private toll road owners.

### RE: DECLARATION IN 2017 THAT WESTCONNEX AND THE SYDNEY GATEWAY ARE SEPARATE PROJECTS

It is appalling that the "Sydney Gateway"--which is required to move vehicles to the port and the airport--isn't even part of the project anymore, but will require a further prolonged process and further billions of dollars. This separation seems to have been another sleight of hand to deceive the public.

### OTHER RELATED MATTERS OF CONCERN

One matter of great concern to me is the erosion of democracy which has allowed this corrupt project to proceed so far despite the weight of public opinion and expert advice that it is a monumental mistake.

Another is the loss of human-scale, walkable urban areas in favour of concrete and steel.

Yet another is the destruction of beautiful homes and communities like those in Haberfield, and beautiful, life-giving trees like those in Sydney Park. "Pave paradise and put up a parking lot" as Joni Mitchell sang over 40 years ago.

Finally, as stated earlier, my strongest objection is that this project completely disregards that we are now faced with a climate emergency. We need to drastically and urgently reduce the use of fossil fuels and other contributors to global warming--not accelerate the kind of building and transportation that brought us to the crisis in the first place.

Janet Kossy

18/08/2018