

**Submission
No 365**

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT

Organisation: WestCONNEX Direct Action

Date Received: 31 August 2018

This submission responds to the following terms of reference:

1. (f) the extent to which the project is meeting the original goals of the project as articulated in 2012
1. (j) any other related matter.

In 2011, Liberal Premier Barry O'Farrell appointed another former Liberal Premier, Nick Greiner as the head of Infrastructure NSW, tasked with prioritising major projects. Fifteen months later, Greiner announced the WestConnex toll road as the state's top priority transport project. Normally, planning for Sydney's transport needs is done by Transport for NSW. But Greiner pushed aside the Expert Advisory Committee who recommended rail, not toll roads.

To this date, not a single independent transport expert has supported WestConnex and its cost has blown out from \$10B to \$17B. It appears that Nick Greiner subverted the process to benefit toll road construction firms and operators such as Transurban, where he is an advisor. Nevertheless, the WestConnex juggernaut was set in motion.

Since shortly after announcement, community groups formed to oppose the project and promote rational public and active transport alternatives. At every stage, WestConnex has been dogged by a growing chorus of criticism, from individuals, community groups, transport experts, councils, parliamentarians and state and federal audits.

The ill-defined goals of WestConnex were never clearly stated and continue to shift. Traffic on Parramatta Road has surged, due to motorists avoiding the new tolls on the M4. The connection to the airport was quietly excised from the project and because the existing Airport motorway (M5 East) will be tolled \$14 for a round trip from 2020, many people driving from Western Sydney will be switching to slower local roads.

Modelling by Veitch Lister Consulting has confirmed that WestConnex will increase traffic and congestion in inner Sydney. Euston Rd, Alexandria is forecast to get a ten-fold increase in traffic volumes and will need to be widened at a separate cost of \$1B. 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. International evidence of the harmful effects of motor vehicle exhaust are alarming.

Australia's greenhouse gas emissions from transport continue to grow amidst the worsening global climate crisis. Such decisions against all evidence and warnings are no mere errors of judgment.

This is malfeasance on a scale that is difficult to comprehend. Sydney University transport expert Dr Chris Standen described it as such: "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 NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the impact of WestConnex must go back to the beginning and get to the bottom of this scandal. That is why WestCONnex Direct Action calls for Nick Greiner and Barry O'Farrell to appear before the Inquiry to answer questions about how and why this toll road came to be the state's top priority infrastructure project.

If these questions cannot be answered satisfactorily, a Royal Commission with stronger powers must be held.