

**Submission
No 371**

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT

Organisation: St Peters Public School Parents and Citizens Association

Date Received: 31 August 2018

29 August 2018

Re: Impacts of Westconnex

To the Public Accountability Committee,

We the Westconnex Sub-Committee of the *St Peters Public School Parents and Citizen Association* would like to report on the impact of the Westconnex Project, as relates directly to St Peters Public School students, teachers, parents and community.

Our list of impacts come from the wider parent body. We can provide more details if needed but have kept items brief as most of these issues are known and have been reported to NSW Planning, EPA, Inner West Council and the Sydney Motorway Corporation.

1. Air Quality During Construction Phase

- 1.1. **Odour (Rotten Egg Gas):** The school and local area experienced many days of severe rotten egg gas smell in 2017 due to leachate being exposed by the SMC. The school had to make the decision on some days to keep students inside for the entire school day, and there were cases of parents refusing to send their children to school.
- 1.2. **Dust:** The SMC has regularly failed with adequate dust suppression and the school and local residents noticed an increase in dust on obvious surfaces such as cars, floors, window sills etc. There are concerns about increased episodes of asthma occurring in students and parents.
- 1.3. **Particulate Matter:** The air quality monitoring station located within the premises of St Peters Public School has recorded some of the highest levels of particulate matter in Sydney on some days in 2017 and 2018. This has caused extreme concerns in the community about the safety of the school grounds for students, and several parents are discussing withdrawing their children. It has also caused a 'viral' response from potential parents, through social media posts on community pages that parents won't send their children to SPPS due to Westconnex pollution. This is extremely damaging to our school and students from both a physical aspect (we don't want our children exposed to air pollution) and from an emotional and psychological point of view.
- 1.4. **Exposure to Asbestos:** During the demolition of houses on Campbell Street, the asbestos waste was not secured or disposed of properly, and it was left literally blowing in the wind and across the site until residents photographed the waste and complained to SMC. This site runs next to the SPPS, and students who walk

to school were required to walk past this and thus were exposed to asbestos dust.

- 1.5. **Lack of Communication:** Despite assurances that data from the monitor would be provided to the school on a regular basis, this has not occurred. Nor has data been provided in a manner accessible to the layperson.

2. Road Safety During Construction

- 2.1. **Heavy Vehicle Movement Across Sites:** There are several sites close to SPPS that are separated by Church Street, St Peters Street, Florence Street and Brown Street. Despite an original agreement with SPPS that no heavy vehicles would be moving between the sites (and thus crossing footpaths and the only roads to school) during drop-off/pick-up hours, heavy vehicles move between the sites on a daily occurrence. The Principal and school parents have complained with photographic evidence on numerous occasions, only to be informed that SMC has reneged on their original agreement and that it was *“It is not feasible or reasonable for the project [contractor] to limit vehicle movements to ranges in time within construction hours.”* (quote email to Parent 4 July 2018). This presents a daily hazard to our school and preschool aged children who walk, cycle or scoot to school.
- 2.2. **Footpaths:** The Westconnex sites have severely damaged the footpaths, and the footpaths are regularly littered with hazards such as signage blocking the whole path, rubble, mud, asphalt lumps, metal sheeting or incorrectly placed fencing. SMC contractors also regularly park across the main access to footpaths, and increase the hazards by blocking the view of pedestrians for oncoming vehicles.
- 2.3. **Hazards and Difficulty of Navigation:** There are at least 6 Westconnex sites separated by local streets on the main route to SPPS. Road closures, redirection of streets, closure of turning options requiring long detours with poor signage are weekly experiences of parents and carers trying to access the school site. The issues with the footpaths compound this issue.
- 2.4. **Poor Traffic Management:** The traffic controllers on the SMC site are often under-informed of how to redirect parents, regularly smoke cigarettes including when they are in location that requires students to walk directly past them and have been reported to provide incorrect detour information.
- 2.5. **Parking by construction workers:** The issue of SMC employees parking on streets surrounding the school, and illegally using the school carpark has been ongoing issue of concern. The SMC employees regularly occupy all the parking spaces on surrounding streets, complicating the issue of school access for drop-off and pick-up for parents and carers. SPPS now has to lock the school carpark to prevent the illegal use by SMC employees. SMC have been observed to use hire vehicles to “save” carparking spaces in surrounding streets (that is,

preventing residents from parking on their own street) in order to bring in construction equipment. This is posing a risk to St Peters students as cars are regularly parked too far from the kerb and too close to intersections, impacting significantly on visibility for children learning to cross roads.

- 2.6. **Illegal use of school carpark to turn heavy vehicles:** This occurred during the initial phases of the project, and after intervention of the Principal has now stopped.
- 2.7. **40km/hour School Zone:** The speed limit on Campbell St (West) is 60 km/hr . Given the amount of pedestrian traffic during school days comprising primary school and preschool aged children crossing this street, the parent community and Department of Education have requested that the speed limit be reduced to 40 km/hr. This has been refused by SMC for school children, but 40km/hour zones are regularly (temporarily) implemented for construction work. The double-standards on the 40km/hour zone is unacceptable. Preschool and School aged children are learning about road safety, and a large number of our student access the school via walking, scooting or riding.
- 2.8. **Constant Last Minute Changes:** The SPPS school community comes from families living both in St Peters and suburbs of Tempe, Sydenham, Newtown, Alexandria, Glebe, Arncliffe, Marrickville, Enmore — the constant last minute changes to traffic management, road access, footpath access is both confusing, frustrating and an overall negative experience for parents and carers.
- 2.9. **Silver Street Hazards:** Silver Street has an entrance to the school and is a 40km zone during school hours. Previously parents could use Silver St as another access point and it was regularly used particularly when the construction was heavier near the school car park and access was limited. Recently the residents of Silver St and parents have observed that the SMC workers arrive early in the morning and fill up all the car spaces so there is no room for parents to park and drop off their children in the Silver St entrance. The traffic controllers also often make Silver St the detour when work is being done on Campbell. They do not put a 40km sign up when directing traffic to detour down Silver and have very poor signage. Parents have observed both the detour sign and the local traffic only sign both pointing down Silver St at the same time. Silver St is a very skinny street, when cars are parked on both sides only one car can fit through at a time and cars coming from the other direction need to pull over and let them pass before continuing. Parents observe frustrated drivers honking horns and yelling at each other as they try to get down the street. The increased traffic makes the street unsafe to cross, there is no pedestrian crossing and as you try and see between the cars if anything is coming a car can hit you from the other direction. Florence Street, which is off Silver, was recently closed off and for several days there was no signage put up to warn drivers it was a no through road. Drivers had to reverse up the tiny street onto Silver St while children were walking to school. Multiple parents called SMC to complain and it was several days before a sign was put up.

3. Road Safety Concerns Post-Construction

- 3.1. **40km/hour zone on Campbell Street:** The parent community and Department of Education have requested that the speed limit be reduced to 40 km/hr on Campbell Street once the upgraded Campbell St opens, catering for up to 6 lanes of traffic. There are many precedents for main thoroughfares to schools such as this having 40km school zones. To date this has been blocked by SMC.
- 3.2. **Pedestrian Bridge Campbell Street:** The parents and community have requested that a pedestrian bridge be provided across the 6 lanes of traffic on Campbell Street. This is because there is a high number of students who walk from the northern side of St Peters (school catchment zone extends to May Street) and crossing the road will be highly hazardous. The number of student pedestrians will increase with multiple 6-7 storey apartments currently being built within the school catchment zone on the northern side. SMC has refused this solution.
- 3.3. **Lack of Active Transport Spaces:** Supporting students to walk, cycle or scoot to school will be increasingly hazardous with the 6 lanes of traffic on Campbell Street and a 60km/hr zone. The SMC has not heeded the calls from parents and the community for providing separated footpaths, cycleways or space for children to safely and actively travel to/from school.

4. Air Quality Concerns regarding Exhaust Stacks

- 4.1 **Unfiltered Stacks:** There are two proposed unfiltered ventilations stack located within a few hundred metres of St Peters Public School and St Peters Community Preschool, increasing levels of toxic pollution. Recent studies have linked air pollution with impacts on children's attention, concentration and intelligence. Adding a filtration system to tunnel exhaust stacks is world's best practice, however filtration systems are not planned for these emission stacks in St Peters. Premier Gladys Berejiklian previously expressed strong opposition to unfiltered exhaust stacks when in opposition, and the current Education Minister, Rob Stokes is quoted as saying "*I won't be party to putting stacks near kids ... There is no way in hell that I'd support any development that would put the lives of pupils, teachers and parents at risk*" (Manly Daily, July 19, 2017).

5. Displacement of residents and fracturing of our community

- 5.1 **Lost Enrolments:** The school has lost many enrolments of existing and potential students due to house acquisitions for WestConnex construction, families being unjustly compensated for acquisitions (unable to afford to remain in the area),

rental agreement terminations and the wide public knowledge of the negative impacts on the school (pollution, traffic, dust). Parents have chosen to enrol their children elsewhere because they feel that the school will ultimately close due to Westconnex. This has left the remaining school community exposed, vulnerable and struggling to ensure an ongoing sense of belonging and safety within the school.

- 5.2 **Ongoing Loss of Students:** Students attending St Peters Public School have lost friends, fellow students and neighbours from their community.

6. Noise Pollution

- 6.1 **Ongoing noise pollution:** associated with demolition of homes, construction drilling, digging, removal of rubble and excavation. 24 hour works have impacted on residents' sleep — including school children (Unfair provision of temporary relocation has meant that only some residents have been offered alternative accommodation during periods of nightwork). The heavy noise pollution means that children who walk, ride or scoot to school are exposed twice a day to walking through a noisy, hazardous construction site and have been now exposed to this since late 2016. It is the constant, unrelenting nature of the work that builds a cumulative negative impact for the students, teachers, parents and community.
- 6.2 **Traffic Noise post-completion:** once the road is completed increased traffic noise will have significant impacts on the quality of life of local families who attend the school.

7. Stress regarding unknown risks to children's health

- 7.1 **Exposure to Air Pollution Risk:** The lack of information about air quality has lead to significant stress for parents of children enrolled in the school. Since the exposed leachate in 2017, parents have been concerned about what other toxic gases their children may have been exposed to (the leachate was from an industrial landfill site that operated with limited (if any) environmental controls meaning that the waste site most likely contains toxic chemicals and industrial waste). The recent report by Wendy Bacon on particulate matter, and the concerns about unfiltered stacks, means that current parents are left struggling with the knowledge that their children have been exposed to air pollution, and are likely to be exposed in future.

In conclusion, we welcome this parliamentary inquiry and urge the Public Accountability Committee to consider the rights of our children to safe and healthy childhood.

Sincerely,

The Westconnex Sub-Committee
St Peters Public School Parents and Citizens Association