

## **INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT**

**Organisation:** Sydney Secondary College Leichhardt P&C  
**Date Received:** 29 August 2018

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The Director of Public Accountability Committee  
NSW Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

**SUBMISSION to NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the Impact of the WestConnex Project**

Dear Sir/Madam,

We write on behalf of the Sydney Secondary College Leichhardt Campus school community which consists currently of 950 students, their families, and our school staff.

Over a six year period, from 2017 when our school community was first confronted with possible Westconnex impacts and first spent energy, time and money addressing them, to when the Westconnex Stage 3 *may* be finished, almost 6000 students and their families will have passed through our school.

We remain highly concerned about sound public accountability processes with respect of the roll-out of the Westconnex Stage 3 Project.

First, we will refer to two Westconnex proposals that threatened to impact our school that are no longer current but demonstrate the highly concerning *processes* implicated in them ever having been advanced.

Second, we will table three remaining impacts that continue to concern us both in terms of their potential impacts *and* the degree to which due diligence, risk assessments, cost/benefit calculations, competent governance and adequate public accountability processes continue to be implicated.

**Inquiry's Terms of Reference**

Our concerns speak to the inquiry's terms of reference:

(a) the adequacy of the business case for the WestConnex project, including the cost-benefits ratio,

We are particularly concerned that the true costs to our school community were not/ have not been factored into the overall cost-benefit analysis.

(c) consideration of the governance and structure of the WestConnex project

We remain concerned that poor governance seems to have led to a planning process where due consultation with affected parties hasn't always taken place at timely points in the process.

(j) any other related matter.

### **Impacts**

The SSC Leichhardt school community has experienced, and anticipates continuing to experience, significant negative impacts as a result of this project and its questionable planning processes. These impacts are largely the result of five aspects of the WestConnex Project that we outline in this submission:

The first two, no longer current, speak to highly questionable planning processes:

- 1) The proposed mid-tunnel dive site at the Tram Sheds site, Devonshire Rd, Leichhardt.
- 2) The proposed mid-tunnel dive site at Darley Rd/Dan Murphies, Leichhardt.

The next three actual or potential impacts remain current:

- 3) The scheduled location of the mainline tunnel directly underneath SSC Leichhardt Campus.
- 4) Three unfiltered ventilation stacks in Rozelle Goods Yards.
- 5) Anticipated traffic delays in between-campus travelling, in travelling to and from school, and in travelling to excursions and local sporting events, due to area-wide construction activities and increased truck movements.

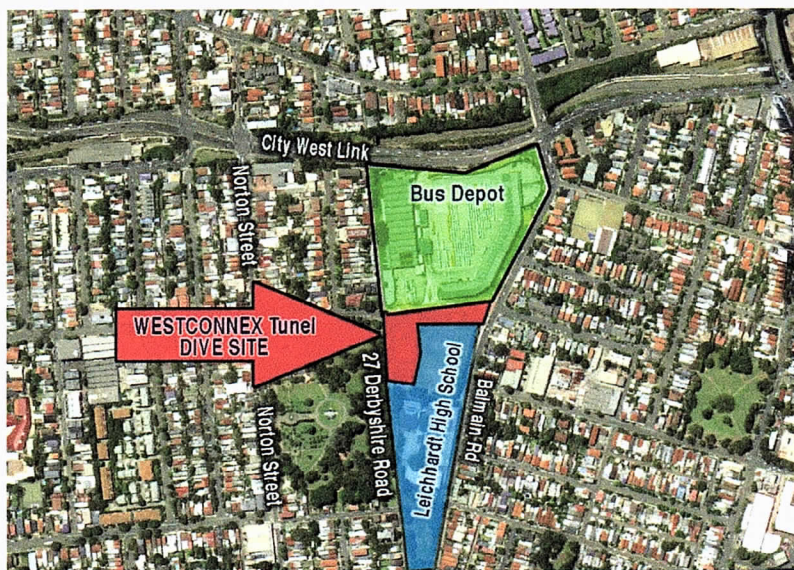
We contend that due assessment and consideration of the likely negative impacts to our community of these aspects of the WestConnex Project did not take place. Or, if it did take place, it was unnecessarily late in the planning process, which resulted in high levels of stress, anxiety and wasted time in our community in the intervening period.

We question whether negative impacts to our school were included in the WestConnex business case cost-benefit analysis. As the negative impacts to our school have historically been overlooked we are left uncertain and concerned about any future impacts. The historically secretive and non-consultative manner in which the project has and continues to be designed and delivered exacerbates our concern and anxiety.



### 1) Proposed mid-tunnel dive site, Tram Sheds site, Devonshire Rd Leichhardt

In February 2017, when the construction of the WestConnex project was well underway, a State government-owned site of heritage significance directly adjacent to our school was proposed as a '**preferred option**' as a mid-tunnel dive site.<sup>1</sup> This major digging, drilling and excavation site shares an 80m long boundary with our school's only oval, an outdoor classroom for the curriculum subject of PDPHE, and numerous extra-curricular sporting activities. The oval is also used every weekend by local sporting groups that typically include our students. Sporting ovals are notoriously scarce in this high-density community with one of the lowest green space to population ratios in New South Wales.



The proposed site is 36m from indoor classrooms and the school library, with approx. 20 classrooms directly facing the site with no intervening buildings or buffers. The proposed site is 20m from one of the school's main entrance gates for students, similarly with no buildings or buffers between. The site is located at the end of a dead-end street with intricate, cramped vehicular access. Yet, given the awkwardness of the school site wedged between a busy main road and narrow, overcrowded residential streets, this cul-de-sac is a precious parental drop-off point, relieving vehicular pressure elsewhere, plus the pick-up/drop off site of the college's minibus for the cross-campus Instrumental Music Program.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.innerwest.nsw.gov.au/news-hot-topics/media/media-releases/council-categorically-rejects-westconnex-dive-site-options>  
<https://www.smh.com.au/nsw/westconnex-considers-cheaper-option-of-tunnelling-next-to-inner-city-high-school-20170226-gulhcg.html>

Most of the school community first heard of the proposal in a Sunday evening television news report that itself followed the Inner West Council's online minutes of a 7/02/17 meeting between the then-administrator and Sydney Motorway Corporation re Westconnex. Two print news reports in major Sydney dailies ran in the ensuing 24 hrs. The SSCLC P&C was not consulted by SMC or RMS, nor directly supplied with any information from them detailing the proposal. It was the P&C who actively sought information, and this information revealed that, amongst other things, trucks were predicted to leave the site every 4 minutes from 7am to 8pm for 4 years, whilst excavation was to be around-the-clock 24hrs.

**Negative impacts to our community as a result of this proposal (not considered by the WestConnex governance body in a timely manner):**

- i) Significant reduction in the overall learning environment due to excavation noise, vibration, truck movements, and increased air pollution, for almost 4000 student enrolments over a 4 year period.
- ii) Significant disruption to the *only* outdoor classroom for PDHPE, 20 indoor classrooms and the school library due to excavation noise, truck movements, and increased dust and air pollution.
- iii) Massive reduction in the usable outdoor area for students at our school. Our school campus is already smaller than the DEC-recommended size for an inner suburban school and has less outdoor space per student than nearly all other high schools in the state. The oval and its landscape surrounds would also have been rendered unusable during recess and lunchtime where they constitute essential spaces.
- iv) The site includes heritage listed former Tram Shed buildings that presumably would have required demolition. Had this eventuated, this demolition would have caused additional noise and air pollution. This would also have been a critical loss of local history and a potential asset to the school should they be included as part of the school campus in the future.
- v) The vehicular and pedestrian approaches to our school are already busy, narrow and congested. The proposed dive site is located at the end of a dead-end street requiring trucks to move through these approaches. The proposed dive site would also have lead to an unacceptable increase in utilities vans in the area (to relocate and address utilities issues), and workers' vehicles. The addition of heavy truck movements and associated additional traffic increased congestion greatly reduced student safety when travelling to and from school.

**Additional Negative impacts to our community as a result of this proposal:**

- a) Stress, anxiety and concern to the whole community due to the proposal



- b) Loss of confidence that those delivering the project had anticipated and evaluated the negative impacts upon the school community
- c) Increased concern over possible future negative impacts

**We submit that due diligence, risk assessment and cost/benefit calculations was not undertaken:**

- a) We submit that this site was always inappropriate and that adequate safety, health and welfare studies were not undertaken.*
- b) We submit that the relevant government departments should have independently commissioned reports into safety, health and welfare impacts before nominating it as a preferred mid-tunnel site/*
- c) We submit that the NSW Education Department should have formally consulted about a proposal which clearly impacting on its students. We understand that no information was sought from the Dept of Education with respect of their assessment of the impact upon student safety, health and educational experience.*
- d) We submit that if there was any assessment undertaken this did not inform the overall cost/benefit analysis of the Westconnex, and it should have.*
- e) An acoustic shed was proposed on the excavation site. Given the Haberfield community's experience of the limitations of an acoustic shed in mitigating noise, we submit this would have been inadequate in terms of educational, welfare, health and safety outcomes.*

**2) Darley Rd/Dan Murphies Mid-Tunnel Dive Site**

When the Devonshire Rd Dive Site was ruled out after five weeks of intense campaigning from our school community and local representatives, the alternative site in Darley Rd was officially promoted to the preferred mid-tunnel site.

Yet, as a major digging site with one truck movement minimum on average every 4 minutes, this site would also have a range of impacts on our school community that didn't seem to have been factored into the project.

The so-called Dan Murphies site, like the Tram Sheds site, is also a 'sliver' of land awkwardly wedged between a hazardous major arterial route, City West Link and the Leichhardt North Light Rail station where several hundred of our students aged 11-16 alight and embark their transport to and from school every day. At peak times, this means that crowds of young people can be standing on a narrow footpath on a notoriously awkward corner waiting to cross the road at the lights.

A major increase in trucks in that area, particularly around that dangerous steep turn at the lights, would therefore have a significant impact on the safety and welfare of a great many of our students. The fumes from increased traffic jams, greater truck and utility car numbers in the area may also have affected them whilst waiting at the lights.

Whilst a second set of purpose-built lights on City West Link was flagged as one option for the site,

- A) Whether trucks would be strictly bound by the prescribed routes remains a question in view of the Haberfield experience
- B) The new traffic light option was never conclusively advanced.
- C) The demands of the awkward site and reality of unregulated trucks parking in side streets as happened in Haberfield may have necessitated the corner continued to be used by trucks anyway.

Whilst neither SMC or RMS ever formally acknowledged this or seemed to take it into account in their formal risk management assessments, their representative finally acknowledged that it was good news for students' safety that the site was abandoned by the new contractor in late June 2018.

Indeed, the fact that the contractor so quickly said the site was inappropriate on a range of measures simply raises further the question of whether due diligence with respect of safety and impacts on the surrounding community was undertaken in the first instance

**Our concerns therefore remain:**

- a) We submit that due diligence was not undertaken with respect of the safety and health of hundreds of SSC Leichhardt students using Leichhardt Nth Light Rail station adjacent to the proposed Darley Rd site nominated eventually as the preferred mid-tunnel dive site.
- b) We submit that safety assessments should have been conducted because of the well-documented hazards of that corner (i.e. a sharp turn on a steep incline, plus a narrow pathway) and the number of trucks anticipated to be arriving at and departing the site every few minutes, and there are large groups of young people standing on that corner, having come from the station and waiting to cross as the lights.

**3) The mainline tunnel is scheduled to come directly underneath Leichhardt SSC Campus.**

The school has never been formally notified of this. Parents reading the proposals became aware of it in mid 2017. It was approximately nine months later when RMS invited a representative of the P&C to sit



on their community consultative committee. The P&C has been given no information on anticipated impacts and has had to formally request this through the Consultative Committee.

Possible negative impacts to our community as a result of this proposal:

- d) Disruption to learning environment due to construction noise and vibrations. Given the experience of construction noise in Haberfield and St Peters, with many families relocated to hotels at the last minute, this is a reasonable concern.
- e) Obviously there is a big difference between one or two ordinary school days of disruption and multiple days or weeks of disruption, or a *special* day's disruption eg examinations, performances, concerts, inter-school debating or public speaking competitions. Yet no information has been forthcoming about anticipated impacts or how and when RMS and the contractor plan to negotiate this with the school so that appropriate considerations and preparations can be made.
- f) Students with special needs eg autism may need to be related during the drilling period, yet no formal communications have been forthcoming to the P&C or school as to when we may expect communications to appear re timetabling.
- g) Disruption to our learning environment due to possible damage to buildings and infrastructure due to excavation, as have been issues in other motorway construction, including the Lane Cove Tunnel, Haberfield and Beverly Hills.
- h) Safety issues for students as a result of any subsidence calamities eg as in the collapse by the units adjacent to the Lane Cove Tunnel.

#### **Our Recommendations:**

- a) We submit that there should be an impact statement on the school so that the Department of Education and the school community can assess the requirement for due preparations. (At this stage, it is left to the P&C to request this information.)
- c) We submit that an assessment of the possible impacts of noise and vibration on students and staff should, along with many other matters, have been formally submitted to a process of due diligence in the very early planning stages of the project.
- d) We submit that the possible impacts of subsidence on student safety and the school premises should have been formally submitted to a process of risk assessment and due diligence.
- d) We are concerned that the NSW Education Department has not been formally consulted about the mainline tunnel proposal and any potential impacts on its students and submit it should have been.



- e) We submit that the costs of these anticipated impacts should be fed into the overall cost/benefit analysis for the project.
- e) We also submit that there should be a formal, independent risk assessment of the health, safety, educational, welfare and any potential relocation costs of drilling the mainline tunnel under the school and that this should inform the overall cost/benefit analysis of the Westconnex.

#### **4) 3 Unfiltered Ventilation stacks in Rozelle Goods Yards**

Three unfiltered ventilation stacks up to 35m high are proposed for the Rozelle Goods Yards. These stacks will be approximately 1.5 to 2km from our school. We understand that question marks or and contradictory information exists as to the impact of unfiltered stacks within a 3km radius of an exhaust stack. The topography of the site is sunken in relation to most of the inhabited land around it, including the site of our school. Questions have therefore been raised in public forums on the subject about whether the heights of the stacks will be inadequate to actually do their work of dispersing the exhaust high enough above ground level so as to avoid health impacts.

#### **Possible negative impacts to our community as a result of this proposal:**

- i) An increase in respiratory issues for students and or an exacerbation of issues in those that already suffer from them
- j) Longer term impacts on young people's health related to particulate ingestion, impacts that may be difficult to clearly assess and measure at this stage.
- k) Accumulative impacts on young people's health after assessing impacts from aeroplanes, ordinary traffic *and* unfiltered ventilation stacks.

#### **Our recommendations:**

- a) We submit that independent health assessments of the potential health impacts for what we understand will be 3 unfiltered ventilation stacks on sensitive receivers within 3km of such stacks, including our school should be factored into the overall cost/benefit calculation incorporating the business case of such a proposal.
- b) Given there is enough information of concern about such impacts, and a great deal of confusing information, we submit that an independent health assessment and/or audit be conducted, so that the community can be clear on whether or not it is reasonable to have concerns for the health impact on students.

**5) Anticipated traffic delays in between-campus and other travelling due to area-wide construction activities and increased truck movements.**

A mid-tunnel dive site at Derbyshire Rd or Darley Rd; huge construction activity at Rozelle Goods Yards; delays getting onto the Balmain Peninsula with any of its only 4 access routes blocked (as has begun); delays from construction at the Iron Cove portal and/or ; delays from the 1000 extra trucks per day anticipated to come from White Bay (prior to the axing of Dan Murphys, but with at least half that number still remaining as we understand it purely related to westconnex (and in addition to another 3000 per day from other construction activities including WHT in the area<sup>2</sup>); delays from mid-tunnel dive site at proposed Tigers site for construction of the Western Harbour Tunnel are amongst the traffic problems the Westconnex stage 3 and WHT impose on our school community.

Where have the costs of traffic delays for students, staff and parents during construction been factored into the costs of the overall project? Not only do these delays relate to lost time, productivity and wellness from traffic delays in travelling to and from school, but to the losses in educational experiences in travelling between the campuses.

Currently, for example, the Instrumental Music Program makes very tightly scheduled bus trips between campuses to provide students with a range of musical options and experiences. Any delay in travel times will make it impossible to continue many of these programmes. There is also a range of other sporting, performance and inter-school competitions that would be negatively impacted by construction traffic delays.

In summary, where then has SMC and RMS demonstrated due diligence with respect of assessing the

- Health
- Safety
- Welfare
- and Educational impacts

**Our Final Recommendations**

We submit that a formal *risk assessment* that demonstrate due consideration of these matters and their incorporation into the overall cost/benefit analysis and business case of the proposal should have been conducted – and should yet be conducted with respect of current proposals.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/trucks-westconnex-documents-traffic-congestion-transport-20180812-p4zx18.html>

In closing, it should also be noted that, on the basis of the Haberfield and St Peters' experience, many families at our school are likely to experience disruption over the coming months and years due to either compulsory acquisitions, sleeplessness from drilling and stress from subsidence issues. There may also be both temporary and permanent relocations. These issues all affect student health, including mental health, welfare and educational experience, and place more pressure on teachers to deal with the outfall.

Yet it is not clear where any of these costs are factored into the cost/benefit analysis and business case for either Westconnex or Western Harbour Tunnel.

We recommend a range of thorough assessments be conducted to measure the potential impact of both these projects before making decisions about its future operation.

Kind Regards,

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Jane Crawford

Sydney Secondary College P&C President