

**Submission
No 380**

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX PROJECT

Organisation: Saving Sydneys Trees

Date Received: 31 August 2018



Saving Sydneys Trees

Saving Sydney's Trees Incorporated

Submission in response to the Inquiry into the impact of the WestConnex Project 2018

Committee membership

Rev the Hon Fred Nile MLC Christian Democratic Party(Chair)

The Hon Matthew Mason-Cox MLC Liberal Party (Deputy Chair)

The Hon Greg Donnelly MLC Australian Labor Party

Mr Justin Field MLC The Greens

The Hon Courtney Houssos MLC Australian Labor Party

The Hon Trevor Khan MLC The Nationals

The Hon Natalie Ward MLC Liberal Party

Terms of reference

That the Public Accountability Committee inquire into and report on the impact of the WestConnex project, including:

- (a) the adequacy of the business case for the WestConnex project, including the cost-benefits ratio
- (b) the cost of WestConnex project, including the size and reasons for overruns
- (c) consideration of the governance and structure of the WestConnex project including the relationship between Sydney Motorway Corporation, Roads and Maritime Services, the Treasury and its shareholding Ministers
- (d) the compulsory acquisition of property for the project
- (e) the recommendations of the Audit Office of New South Wales and the Australian National Audit Office in regards to WestConnex
- (f) the extent to which the project is meeting the original goals of the project as articulated in 2012
- (g) the relationship between WestConnex and other toll road projects including the Sydney Gateway, Western Harbour Tunnel, F6 and Beaches Link
- (h) the circumstances by which WestConnex and the Sydney Gateway were declared to be separate projects in 2017
- (i) the cost of the project against its current valuation as determined through the sale of the Sydney Motorway Corporation and whether it represents a good investment for NSW taxpayers
- (j) any other related matter.

2. That the committee report by 1 December 2018.



Introduction

Saving Sydneys Trees welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry, in the hope and trust that what has clearly gone wrong with Infrastructure and Planning in this project can be identified, analysed and rectified for future planning processes to bring about positive outcomes.

We are a young, but now well-established Group with a network of more than 12,000 supporters.

Key objectives within our Constitution include the promotion of open and transparent governance and planning processes with the intention of valuing and ensuring protection of those Community assets and amenity associated with urban green space, trees and flora. Our particular concern is to minimise tree canopy loss across the growing Greater Sydney area.

The formation of this group and associated network in 2016 was in response to the felling of hundreds of Sydney's most Significant Trees to make way for the now recognised as failed, CSELR. We now look to the West Connex project and once again issue a clear message of alarm and disapproval of the processes in relation to it.

While many will point to other problems within this project, Saving Sydneys Tress (SST) will endeavour to "speak for the trees" and present the necessary case for their recognition in Planning and Cost Benefit Analyses. Without such responsibility for the existing vegetation in the Planning and Accountability process, the existing public and future generations are severely impacted as the Global Warming Crisis grows.

There is much that can be done better in this and future projects, and we congratulate the West Connex Action Group for their constructive efforts throughout this process and in the support for the community they have shown. We trust that this committee will produce effective and needed changes for the future.



Response to Terms of Reference

We respond to the following terms of reference;

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

As in the CSELR Project, The Auditor General's Office has again seen many questionable issues with the Cost Benefit Analysis of the West Connex Project, declaring it "Cavalier" with the tax payer's money. Yet, like the CSELR Project, this Project has been allowed to proceed despite such concerns.

This Project has incurred an Environmental Scar across the entire length of this road system. The impact of this has not been costed in terms of the continuing expenditure related to health, carbon and energy outlays as a result of the loss of the canopy of significant urban forest areas, vegetation and green spaces. Jason Byrne of Griffith University in Queensland last year showed a \$12 billion link to the Mental Health Budget alone to this environmental impact. This did not include other Health and Wellbeing costs associated with the loss of these Public Assets and their amenity.

The loss of canopy in this project has still not been audited. The proposed offset at 1 tree for 1 (65litre) tree is clearly inadequate; i.e. 10-30 square metre canopy losses, with 1 square metre in return. The cost/benefit analysis is deeply flawed.

We believe that by the inclusion of the canopy \$ value within the Cost Benefit Analysis, the incorporation of Arboricultural expertise and strict adherence to Best Practice tree management in the ground planning stages, as well as throughout the project would greatly assist the planning department in making better decisions and protect the public assets into the future.

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

We believe that the Critical State Significant Infrastructure test should not exclude the public, but rather the governance and structure should be the epitome of Best Practice and sound economic responsibility related to the protection of public assets and amenities. The public should be recognised as the primary stakeholders and indeed

“brains trust” for these projects and as such should be fully involved throughout the planning and implementation stages.

We go further to suggest, that to insure the project outcome is positive in its outcomes and public expectations, that a consistent system of Tree canopy, vegetation and green spaces audit has mandatory offsets that achieve the positive conservation outcome in shade and significant tree canopy protections to the public.

(d) the compulsory acquisition of property for the project

Compulsory acquisition of property for the project has resulted in a significant loss of public open space in an area currently being subjected to increased residential density related to high-rise developments. The deterioration of social amenity caused by the acquisition of parts of Sydney Park is of great concern to residents of South Eastern Sydney. The loss of open space and damage to large shading urban trees is particularly distressing due the increased outdoor temperatures, resulting from general climate change and the Urban Heat Island (UHI) that already exists in the adjoining high-density suburbs and will increase as a result of the materials used in this massive infrastructure project.

(j) any other related matter.

(j.1) Health Impacts

The air quality of many regions along this project have been recorded above world safety standards. This is deplorable that the tax payer is paying for such detriment to themselves and their future generations.

(j.2) Environmental Heritage Impacts

Australia has lost species of uniquely historic significant trees and animal habitat in this project. As a nation our record here is most embarrassing and requires the flaws in our planning processes to be identified and eradicated to ensure this is not allowed to happen in other infrastructure projects, particularly those designated Critical State Significant Infrastructure.

(j.3) Best Practice Technology

Issues of Stacks needs further consideration. West Connex Action Group has presented much better examples of the state of art technology related to Stacks. We would urge that these methods be incorporated in any revisions of these stacks and make particular note of methods that allow parklands above the filtered tunnels for the public.

(j.4) Contravention of UN Agenda 21

At a Workshop conducted by Planning NSW, Tim Kirby, who identified himself as “Premier and Cabinet”, gave assurance that “ARTICLE 21 of the United Nations Guidelines for Sustainable Development” underpinned ALL planning in NSW. Clearly from what we are seeing this comment requires questioning.

Within this document, Article 21, the objectives and outcomes can have no compromise. It stipulates:

The absolute and comprehensive study of an area and its unique environment, which in its explanation encompasses: -

Ecology; Geology; Soil quality and chemistry; Social structure; Indigenous (i.e. existing community); Elderly, Young and Infirm and DO NO HARM! Agenda 21 works only to enhance, that which is already functioning.

We trust that our comments will assist the committee to assess and act on the issues revealed through the Inquiry into the impact of the WestConnex Project

Yours sincerely,

Ms Margaret Hogg, Chair of SST

Professor-Emeritus Helen Armstrong AM, Member of SST

30th August 2018



Saving Sydney's Trees

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