

Submission
No 473

**INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX
PROJECT**

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 31 August 2018

Partially
Confidential

Submission to NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Westconnex

1. Original purpose of project

The stated intent was to link western Sydney to the airport and Port Botany and links the M4 East and the new M5. The project as planned does not intend to achieve these objectives. Logically, it should be shelved unless its business case makes a compelling alternative case that it cost-effectively meets priority transport needs and is the best available solution to the range of relevant transport requirements. That case must necessarily compare and evaluate alternative methods and routes of public, private and mass and freight transport in the context of other development projects, including the Rozelle Bays Precinct.

2. Business case

Given the importance of the business case, it should make a defensible, evidence-based case on economic, technological, health or social grounds for the project but it fails to do so on many grounds.

The project cannot proceed without defying due diligence considerations and all credibility. It needs to be supported by considerable further investigation and valid conclusions that are demonstrably in the long term regional and local public interest. Those conclusions need to demonstrate how it would justify major public expenditure and ongoing public liability for commercial risk. Those conclusions also need to demonstrate how the project is clearly a priority in terms of Sydney infrastructure service requirements, given the liability to tax payers and the impacts on communities, residents, commuters and commercial transport users (rather than providers) involved. The proposal is currently biased to the interests of road and tunnel construction and management interests. Other submissions substantiate this in detail so I will not repeat those problems here.

3. Information omissions

- Above all, lack of transparent public information about contractual commitments; direct and indirect costs to the public from local to state scales; value for money of competing proposals and clear demonstration of which stakeholder groups (residents in different parts of Sydney, commuters using private cars and those using public transport; freight and other commercial users; socio-economically deprived communities; infrastructure providers and operators) benefit and lose in terms of time, money, health, urban planning quality and efficient and affordable access to target areas.
- Careful, neutral evaluation of alternative means and routes of transport and implications of project for competitive advantage and disadvantage vis a vis both public transport options and other route options and regional and local impacts and opportunities;
- Neutral and thorough analysis of congestion consequences during construction and operations including costs to public, private and

commercial users and impacts on users of other roads and residents in affected areas;

- Modelling of probabilities of changing operational relevance and issues over time taking account of technical innovation, air quality, changing pricing and affordability, urban development including the second airport and expanding regional cities within greater Sydney and impacts on roads, schools, residences, shopping precincts, open space areas and waterways . Probability modeling over the life of the project is technically challenging and assumptions and weightings need to be transparent.

4. Government accountability and public liability

The project has been managed with a distinct lack of commitment to genuine public engagement, dialogue with local councils, informed response to independent expert criticism and challenge, and concealment of decision-making. Before going any further, all contract proposals should be made public, including the costs, penalties, exclusions and compensation provisions proposed to be included in any government contractual commitments. These must include facts about proposed duration of any contractual commitments.

In view of the huge costs and engineering uncertainties associated with stage 3 of the project, it is vital that any financial costs and contractual liabilities that will fall to the Government (and thus NSW residents and taxpayers) are clear and public, and the cost-benefit analysis demonstrates their competitiveness and value for money in light of overseas and other Australian comparable examples.

5. Operator accountability and liability

Given the doubts that have been raised through independent review and the EIS process about many aspects of the basis for the project and its impacts (for example, the validity of the traffic modeling and the adequacy of the proposed tunnel ventilation arrangements) it is vital that operators who take on construction and management of the project infrastructure are also liable for costs arising from infrastructure design and construction, user demand, and downstream environmental and health impacts on users and affected communities. If this means there is no commercial interest in the project, the project should obviously not proceed. As the project is conceived as a privatized operation, at arms length from Government, the private operators have to accept the associated responsibility.