

Submission
No 476

**INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX
PROJECT**

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 31 August 2018

Partially
Confidential

To the Public Accountability Committee of the NSW Parliament's Upper House

Submission by

I have lived in Haberfield for nearly seven years, together with my husband and three children who are currently aged 6, 8 and 11. All our children are attending Haberfield Public School (HPS) and have since kindergarten. Our house is located in Dalhousie St, at the Parramatta Rd end.

This submission is made on behalf of our family.

As a result of the Westconnex project we have:

- Friends who have had their homes compulsorily acquired.
- Friends who have been living next to one of the three nearby major construction sites,
- Had significant disruption around the school including increased traffic and what we now know to be significantly poorer air quality than most other parts of Sydney.
- Had constant changing road closures so that many times I drive one way only to need to turn back and go another. Even if I am aware in advance (the ones very close to me are notified), my only option has been to stay on congested main roads as access to local roads is blocked.
- Received a seemingly endless number of notices about the project so that we have 'notice fatigue', sometimes up to 2-3 a week. This meant that when work that significantly impacted us (the signs along Dalhousie St) was notified, many in the street were unaware as they were not longer carefully reading the notices.
- Had long periods during the initial digging where the garden pavers were covered in a fine layer of dust (that we were presumably all breathing in most of the time).
- Had workers parking outside our house in an area where parking is at a premium in any case due to the blocks of flats, lack of garaging, and the shortage of street parking.
- A large permanent sign going into the footpath immediately outside our house.

- My six year old can only remember our community subjected to the construction. All my children always comment when we pass the construction area about how ugly and messy it is and how sad they feel that this has happened.

I remember when we first heard that the construction was going to dramatically impact Haberfield. At that stage we were told that a chunk of Ashfield Park was going to be taken to make way for the road. At that stage I was regularly taking my children across to Ashfield Park to play, and regularly running around it myself. It was one of the places we especially loved in the area and I joined the campaign to protect it. We were therefore delighted when we were assured it would not be used, although horrified at the rumoured back room deal that had been done to save it.

Shortly after that I realised what the cost of saving the park was. Home owners who had had no reason to think their house was near the construction were, literally overnight, told that they were in the construction zone. I remember when my friend arrived home from a morning walk to find a card in the mailbox asking her to call the number, only to find out they had to be out of the house in 3 months. She had just had her third child and it was a very emotional time.

As we were invited to 'community consultation meetings' with Westconnex the full scale of the impact on our community became clear. I recall going to one of these meetings. There was an onslaught of Westconnex staff apparently trying to divide and conquer attendees. It felt like we were being picked off so no one could cause a scene or ask questions publically that might make others in the room concerned about. Instead we were given platitudes, often very little concrete information, and if anyone became emotional they were asked to 'calm down'. The process seemed specifically designed to sap the energy from people who opposed the project. I quickly felt like there was nothing to be achieved from attending. I was not hearing any new information, sometimes I knew more than they did about specific impact for a location. I hate to think what each of those consultations cost to put on with all the staff present. I did not get the impression that anyone from Westconnex was genuinely noting down concerns so that they could be dealt with or listening to suggestions for helping minimise the impact or make any community improvements as part of the project. For example on numerous occasions I have spoken or written about a pedestrian bridge across Parramatta Rd to Ashfield Park so that the cars did not need to stop at the traffic lights for so long and so that pedestrian safety was maintained. I have never had any response to that suggestion.

This feeling intensified later after the project started and I had reason to call the phone line. Before I could ask a question they wanted a lot of information about me. I felt like there was a dossier of information about each caller and on several occasions the call centre refused to put me through to

someone who may know the answer until I provided my name, phone number, and address. Other times I have been cut off when on hold. I acknowledge that more recently I have been treated well by the staff dealing with the sign outside our house, but even then the person who directed the call has lectured me about only doing her job when I do not wish to give all my details but be put straight through to the known individual.

Despite on-going frustration, I have continued to be involved in the Community response via the HPS P&C. There I have seen first-hand how many people in our community are unhappy with the project but many do not wish to say anything publically. This is particularly prevalent for families who have migrated to Australia and for the older Italian residents in Haberfield.

As parents we felt stifled by the approach taken by the school, that we were not allowed to publically share information about Westconnex on school grounds. The teachers were concerned that they would be seen talking to us when we stood outside the school gates, even when they wished to know more. I understand that no information about the project has ever been shared with the teachers by the Principal. I understand that the Principal made it clear that as a government school the school itself would not take any position on any of the decisions being made. She would contact Westconnex about specific issues as the project got underway but not try to influence decisions.

My children walk to school, sometimes without a parent. I want to encourage their independence but all the cars around the school make me nervous, especially as it is so hard to find a park, due to all the Westconnex workers cars parked along Denman Ave and surrounding streets. The traffic is significantly heavier than before the project started. When I have complained by phone about the parking I have been told that some of the workers do the right thing and that workers know not to park on Bland St. There was never much parking on Bland St anyway, near school. Most parents always had to park on other streets around the school before the project began.

In recent months we have been told that we will have a large motorway sign outside our house. I had not heard previously of any plan for extra signs. The information provided to the community when asking for a response was inadequate to obtain a proper response. The initial 'consultation notice' provided to residents had an 'artist impression' of the enormous VMS sign planned that was located on the opposite side of the road and about 50 metres down the road from the actual planned location! When I complained I was told it was just an 'artists impression' - but surely it should at least depict the actual plan. The immediate impact was on entirely different houses. Subsequent 'consultation', when they changed the plans after the initial consultation, said that there would be

another period of 'consultation' however, despite sending a further response we never heard whether our submissions made any impact and the next relevant notice informed us that work was starting.

I don't know how much time and energy I have spent in the last 3 years thinking about this project, writing responses, attending community meetings and talking to parents and community members about this project. And I have only been on the periphery of our community response. I applaud the incredible individuals in our community who have been capable of keeping the momentum. At times it is very emotional. It is often draining and frustrating and feels like a futile effort that makes no difference. At several times I have not rung and complained about some activity, not responded to an EIS or other request for community response because I am too tired of the effort required.

However, I also recognise that I am one of the lucky ones in our community.

- My house was not acquired like some of my friend's houses or my friend's friend's houses.
- My neighbour's house was not acquired and I have not been living over the fence from three years of constant construction (with no compensation) like many of our friends.
- My children are healthy and have not suffered from breathing problems like some of their friends.

I believe that the project is fundamentally flawed. The modelling says that the roads around Haberfield will be significantly more congested when the road opens but we were told that the road would take traffic off local roads. Even the government doesn't seem to believe this given it is erecting large signage for oversize trucks along Dalhousie St and Wattle St, both suburban roads, not thoroughfares to the motorway.

Thank you for taking the time to read about the impact this project has had on our family.

Regards