

Submission
No 477

**INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX
PROJECT**

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 29 August 2018

Partially
Confidential

29 August 2018

Submission to the Parliamentary enquiry into WestConnex

My key concerns with regards to the WestConnex development are

Absence of a strong evidence base that demonstrates a clear benefit to tax payers

Best (or even good) practice around the world supports that the most effective use of scarce public resources must be based on a strong evidence base.

Yet throughout the history of WestConnex from conception to the present, the evidence base for the ROI to taxpayers or the NSW economy has been insufficient, flawed and frequently both.

No complete business case has ever provided to the public, all attempts to review or seek clarification have been insufficient (partial, with short response times).

An audit of the project conducted by the Auditor General found severe concerns with the project on a number of accounts including failure to follow established procedures and a concern about the quality of the evidence used to evaluate the project. Since then the project has exceeded its budgets by a significant margin.

Evidence of the flawed history of assumptions on previous toll roads and on more realistic estimates of usage and of displacement to surrounding roads has not been applied to this case study.

Opportunity cost on other, potentially more beneficial investments of public resources

All public dollars spent on a flawed or insubstantial evidence base not only undermine that case, they divert funds from other potential initiatives that have potential to deliver a greater ROI for the taxpayers and the NSW Economy.

Examples of projects where there is at least some evidence of a greater and more beneficial outcomes for the people of NSW (and especially those of Western Sydney include) greater investment in public transport both connecting Western Sydney to the Sydney CBD and greater connectivity within Western Sydney and a focus on further roads and infrastructure that create great road connectivity within Western Sydney. Both these initiatives and others would have enabled the creation of greater economic impact within Western Sydney both enhancing the quality of life for the residents of Western Sydney and reducing the environmental footprint of that economic growth.

Piecemeal and poorly planned implementation

There is a litany of examples of the way in which the road development has not been clearly thought through or planned. Just one example is the siting of the emission stack in Leichhardt North/Lilyfield. Originally planned to be sited next to a school, exposure of the plan lead to a resiting on a recently developed site requiring compensation of the business (Dan Murphy's) to the tune of more than \$140 million dollars and additional environmental impact from the demolition.

Whether these regular implementation failures are driven by incompetence, by a conscious attempt to undermine proper scrutiny of the project or a combination of the two, these are failures that again represent a poor ROI for the taxpayer who will ultimately fund them.

Inadequate compensation for loss of homes

Thanks to relentless outside pressure it has clearly emerged that homes and businesses have been inadequately compensated for the disruptions relative to true market value. This has the potential to ruin lives and undermine our economy.

The sole beneficiaries of such inadequate compensation appear to be large developer businesses. No one sensible denies the right of such businesses to make profits but these should be based on business competence and competitive endeavour not 'super' profits built on inadequate supervision and flawed economic assumptions.

Lack of transparency over health impacts of both construction and final WestConnex emission stacks

Prior to and during construction, air quality monitoring stations have been established. However the siting of these stations has often been flawed. For example, at St Peters Public School the station was located to provide an overly optimistic view of the impact relative to where students visited close to the stacks. There has been a failure to deliver the data from these stations in the manner promised to the public unless relentless and additional pressure has been provided.

In the case of the St Peter's Public School cited above, it was not until an investigative journalist actively sought this air quality information that this was made public. The data showed that there were dangerously elevated levels of air pollution during the construction phase and the school and parent community had not been made aware of this.

This raises long term concerns about both the transparency of the impacts and the long-term effects on the health – especially for more vulnerable children. As well as the human cost, this ultimately has an economic cost to the taxpayer.

Erosion of public confidence in government and in infrastructure generally

Around the world, governments are undergoing a crisis of trust from their electorates. This trust is vital to the process of functioning democracies.

We can't all always agree with every single development that happens, especially when we are personally disadvantaged by it. However, we need to be confident that the process has been properly considered using the best possible processes and evidence with the full costs evaluated, that we as the funders of such developments have been given adequate opportunities to make informed input to its implementation and that the costs and risks are borne fairly.

Ultimately, this lack of trust raises the cost of all future infrastructure and makes it difficult for us to evaluate its effectiveness

Resident of Petersham 2049, name withheld