

Submission
No 552

**INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX
PROJECT**

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACTS OF WESTCONNEX

I write to protest the impacts of Westconnex on my community's and my family's health, the destruction of my community, heritage and city, using the terms of reference given by the Public Accountability Committee.

Terms of reference

A. The adequacy of the business case for the Westconnex project

- The business case for this project is inaccurate and misleading and has not been amended for later revisions including the extra kilometres of tunnel and the extra infrastructure to link to future proposed projects. There are very many unknowns in the planning for Stage 3. How can the Westconnex business case have been accepted by this government when there are such extensive future unknowns. These unknowns include where exactly the tunnels will be, the long-term impact on the community, including providing for the immediate and long-term costs to the health of the many individuals and communities impacted by potential works and loss of housing.
- With the removal of the Camperdown portal, traffic modeling to the St Peters interchange is inaccurate and therefore the predictions of usage of Westconnex are also inaccurate.
- Note also that a Citigroup report also found traffic modeling of Westconnex overestimated. It found many deficiencies and inaccuracies in the business case predictions and that the cost benefit ratio was unreliable.
- Critically, it is outrageous that the NSW government instructed transport officials to ignore public transport alternatives to motorways. Projects such as Westconnex should have been benchmarked against public transport options to provide an accurate picture of the predicted claims of costs and efficiencies. The government claims it wants Sydney to be a world class city and yet every other such city has invested in public transport over motorways for decades! Indeed, many large cities in the modern world today are closing motorways and tollways and turning them into public land, housing and parks. It was most concerning that, just before the opening of the M4, train timetables were changed reducing the fast train services from the outer west of Sydney to the city. One has to question whether the timing and aim of these poor public transport decisions was to "encourage" people onto the road and off the public transport options.
- Our public transport system is critical for future wellbeing of the country including being able to contain the impact on climate change. How much has the business case for Westconnex included the serious impacts of increasing car use and roadways on climate change?

- Note the INDEPENDENT report commissioned by City of Sydney is highly critical of the Westconnex business case assumptions. What consideration has the state government given to the City of Sydney's research and report?

B. The cost of Westconnex

- Previous toll road projects such as Lane Cove Tunnel and Cross City Tunnel have overestimated travel time savings and drivers use, and they have become financial disasters for the government.
- Official estimates for Westconnex do not include:
 - i. the cost of compulsory land and property acquisitions
 - ii. the cost of legal challenges to these
 - iii. the environmental and health impacts of increased car usage with Westconnex and the pollution resulting from its construction. I live in the south end of King St Newtown/ St Peters and the air and noise pollution has now been horrendous for years. Health research studies indicate this can have life time health impacts and will be a future cost for the government.

C. The Governance and structure of the Westconnex project

- There is no proper transparency and accountability regarding crucial information on Westconnex. It is outrageous that the Sydney Motor Corporation is a private company which now has the responsibility for the largest transport infrastructure project in Australia and thus operates outside RMS and the expertise of NSW Transport.
- Crucial information such as expenditure, tenders and contracts are no longer accessible to the public via freedom of information. How can this be as we witness our communities and indeed our city trashed!!!

D. The compulsory acquisition of property

- The impact on individuals and communities has been devastating. The social impact has been and will continue to be enormous. I believe that most of those people whose homes and businesses have been compulsorily acquired will never recover.
- There has not been proper recompense for properties so that, in many cases, people who have lived in an area for decades cannot continue to live there, thus not only losing their home, but all their social support.
- The Russell Review recommended changes to this compulsory acquisition including extra compensation and this review was CONCEALED from the public for more than 2 YEARS. How can this occur in today's world?
- The loss of heritage is irreplaceable and unacceptable.

E. Recommendations from the Audit Office of NSW and the Australian National Audit Office on Westconnex

- Despite consistent early advice from the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development and Infrastructure Australia that the project should not be recommended for federal funding, it was. The report showed the government bypassed governance structures and pushed through a \$2 billion, 34-year concessional loan and the public's interest was not properly represented.

F. The extent to which the project is meeting the original goals set out in 2012.

- Westconnex began as a proposal to provide a road link from Western Sydney to Port Botany and Mascot airport. This was a legitimate need. However, in the years since 2012, there have been many changes, additions and tolls added and now the current proposal does NOT include a link to Port Botany and Mascot. Indeed, it does not resemble the original proposal, which had some merit.
- There has been massive destruction of homes, businesses, green spaces, heritage and morale. For what? Urban amenity and local traffic conditions will not improve and in fact, have been, and will be, much worsened.
- Apparently, the Sydney Gateway project has been removed and this would have achieved its original purpose. Along with all the other changes this clearly indicates the project lacks any proper process and planning.
- The lack of proper planning and process for the M4-M5, Link [which by its own description is only an indicative plan] at the most complex and expensive stage of Westconnex, is appalling.

H. No comments on this.

I. The cost of the project against its current valuation as determined through the sale of the Sydney Motor Corporation and whether it represents a good investment for NSW taxpayers

- Westconnex does not represent a good investment for NSW taxpayers because the whole premise of the NSW Governments current proposal- that Westconnex will reduce congestion and decrease travel time for people of Western Sydney is false. The Government's own business case shows:
 - i. Westconnex will save only 5 minutes for most users
 - ii. Public transport, currently is, and will be mostly faster. Even on the now appallingly reduced public transport services of Sydney [our NSW government reduced train services when it opened the M4 in 2017], it can, if one is lucky to now catch it, only take 12 minutes by train between Redfern to Parramatta. I have caught this train and would not consider driving this trip. The road trip by car between Redfern and Parramatta will take 45 minutes and will never be this good and especially not so with all the toll roads planned. Cars are not the answer to Sydney's population growth. There is not a city in the western world today which does not

understand this and has developed excellent public transport rather than roads.

- iii. It will reach capacity in 8 years.

J. Any other related matter

Climate change risks:

- The climate impacts of large scale unsustainable infrastructure, such as Westconnex, are completely unacceptable. One would have to question whether, and how effectively, the climate change impacts have been and will be measured by Westconnex. We are living at a time when these current and future impacts are crucial for the lives of communities, our children and grandchildren. The impact of increasing the amount of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere and the air we breathe will be greatly increased by the favoring of car use and tollways rather than public transport. Reversing these impacts could be insurmountable for our future generations.
- Clean efficient public transport is the answer.

Health Impacts

- Westconnex has already in the construction stage, and will in the future, if it is finished, impact negatively on the health and wellbeing of people of the Inner West.
- Increased toxic pollution levels near the proposed unfiltered stacks near residential areas, schools and parks cause highly significant health risks. Particulate matter affects more people than any other pollutant and the most health damaging particles are those with a diameter of 10 microns or less which can penetrate deep inside the lungs. And this is the plan for the very high densely populated Inner west suburbs as a result of Westconnex. Indeed, the primary school children at Haberfield Public School and St Peter's School, the sites of destruction for an extensive period of time, have been exposed to poisonous levels of these pollutants right at their school as have the nearby residents as stated by journalist, Ms Bacon, "For the first three months of this year, the St Peters School monitor also had the highest average levels of PM 10 u/gm³ of any monitor in Sydney, including 6 monitors along the route of the M4 East." (Wendy Bacon)
- Air monitors have indicated an unacceptable level of these pollutants over a majority of the time since the commencement of the building.
- This project will also lock Western Sydney residents into nonactive transport and long commutes which will have negative health impacts for generations of people. Additionally, the health impacts of long durations in unfiltered tunnels is totally unacceptable. Science has established these known health impacts.

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