

**Submission
No 554**

**INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTCONNEX
PROJECT**

Name: Mr Brian Gorman

Date Received: 1 October 2018

To: Legislative Council, Committees
NSW Parliament
6 Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Including but not limited to the following:

Chair: Nile, Fred (CDP, LC Member)
Deputy Chair: Mason-Cox, Matthew (LIB, LC Member)
Members: Donnelly, Greg (ALP, LC Member)
Field, Justin (GRNS, LC Member)
Houssos, Courtney (ALP, LC Member)
Khan, Trevor (NAT, LC Member)
Ward, Natalie (LIB, LC Member)

From: **Brian Gorman**

RE: Submission regarding the **Inquiry into the impacts of the WestConnex project**

I live less than 100 metres away from where a Westconnex tunnel portal and unfiltered exhaust stack will be built. I, my family and my local community will be subjected to 8 years of extensive noise (24/7) and highly carcinogenic pollution coming from the thousands of diesel truck movements required for the construction of this and associated road projects (Western Harbour Tunnel). After it is completed we will be exposed to high concentrations of air pollution spewing out of that tunnel portal and the unfiltered exhaust stack.

I fear that my life and that of my family will be cut short by the decisions being made by the NSW government on the design and governance of the Westconnex project.

When my family and I first considered buying our home in Rozelle, we had concerns about being so close to Victoria Road due to a previous health condition that I had. My wife contacted the EPA and they stated that the pollution from the vehicles on Victoria road posed no significant risk to our health. They said that the emission fumes rise into the air and land further away than our immediate location. We naively believed what the EPA said, but scientific evidence from the CSIRO and other

international bodies show that this is not the case. I feel like I've been provided with false security from the very government body that should be protecting me. We've been tricked and now, with the additional concentration of pollution coming from the proposed tunnel portals and unfiltered stacks, we feel trapped in a toxic suburb endorsed by the EPA and created by the NSW Government via Westconnex.

I have first-hand experience of the devastating effects that air pollution has on people's health. I was diagnosed with Bladder Cancer 20 years ago and underwent major surgery, plus intensive post-surgery treatment in order to eliminate my cancer and keep it from recurring. I never smoked or worked in any industry using harmful carcinogenic chemicals. The only other possible cause of my cancer was exposure to air pollution, which was the advice I received from my urologist, Dr David Eisinger. He and my GP, Dr. Helen Greer has told me that continuing exposure to pollution puts me at increased risk of recurrence. This is reinforced by the World Health Organisations view in their fact sheet from May 2018 regarding ambient (outdoor) air quality and health.

[http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-\(outdoor\)-air-quality-and-health](http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-(outdoor)-air-quality-and-health)

The World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer classified diesel exhaust as a human carcinogen in 2012. Diesel emissions are a major source of pm2.5 particulate pollution. The WHO states: "Small particulate pollution have health impacts even at very low concentrations – indeed no threshold has been identified below which no damage to health is observed."

The EIS for Westconnex specifically states: "there would be an increase in pollutant concentrations on Victoria Road to the north of the Iron Cove Link and near Anzac Bridge as a result of the general increase in traffic due to population growth and the project at that location"

Clearly those like me, who live close to the tunnel and stack at the end of the Iron Cove link, will have higher exposure to cancer causing pollutants and a higher rate of disease and premature death. In particular, some will suffer heart disease and heart attacks which may occur after only short term exposure.

Why is the NSW Government knowingly sacrificing the health of my family and my local community?

Why is my life less valuable than someone who lives where there are no tunnels or stacks?

There is no doubt that deaths will occur as a result of increasing concentrations of pollution from the unfiltered stacks. Highly populated residential areas will be blanketed by these emissions. Short and long term ill health and disability will be a result of that pollution.

It is criminal to allow these stacks and portals anywhere near schools, parks and playgrounds and yet this is what Westconnex is proposing for the primary School in Rozelle. There are also 2 pre-schools and an after care located within those grounds and across the road. There is a high school a bit further down the road and several primary schools in Balmain. They will ALL be affected by the increase in pollution. Permanent impaired lung growth in children from exposure to vehicular pollution is a proven medical fact. The government is fully aware of this yet continues to ignore the science and refuses to provide proven mitigation methods.

This project will lock Western Sydney residents into non-active transport, which will have long term negative health impacts on generations of people. This project is working against the communities' interests and in the interest of toll operators and private corporations. Our government leaders appear to be more concerned with political risk than people's health.

Why are there 'no competition clauses' that prevent current and future NSW governments from building public transport alternatives that would compete with the tollways?

What is the relationship between Nick Greiner (a consultant to Transurban Ltd.) and the various NSW government ministers who have supported the building of Westconnex and the flawed tender process that resulted in Transurban, an acknowledged toll monopoly, winning the contract to build stage 3 of Westconnex and collect tolls for over 40 years?

Why are the tunnels not using best practice technology to protect our community?

The negative health impacts of using this series of long tunnels over the short and long term are unacceptable due to the increased levels of toxic exhaust pollution concentrated in these tunnels.

It is commonly accepted internationally that tunnels over 3kms in length require transverse ventilation as opposed to longitudinal ventilation which is considered inadequate. Tunnels longer than 3kms using longitudinal ventilation can easily produce toxic air pollution readings of 50 times the World Health Organisation recommended limit.

After repeated parliamentary inquiries stating that vehicular pollution has devastating effects on the health of the community, how can projects like Westconnex be allowed to proceed?

I refer the members of this parliamentary committee to Dr. Ray Kearney's submission to the 2013 Federal Senate Standing Committee Inquiry 'The impacts on health of air quality in Australia'. In it he calls into question the methods and interpretation of data applied by government employed consultants. He also provides valuable insights and detailed evidence on the need to apply maximum protection to our community against the toxicity of vehicular pollution. I whole heartedly agree with his conviction that our government should apply the highest moral standards when considering how, when and where to build roadways and tunnels. Commercial considerations should be secondary.

With regard to minimising the effects of pollution coming from tunnels and stacks, Professor Kearney writes:

"Regarding the question of filtration in stacks and tunnels there is clearly a need for Governments to apply honesty as well as objectivity to the appraisal of the technologies as well as to the scientific and medical evidence for health risk. At the moment, Governments and the statutory authorities are dickering about on the margins of a duty of care and an endless and irrelevant discussion about whether or not more research is needed to be undertaken. The end result, to date, is a patronising 'do-nothing' outcome! The totality of the evidence is, beyond reasonable doubt, in favour of installing filtration and makes it obligatory for Governments, to unanimously endorse the installation of filtration technology in tunnels and/or in stacks as a responsibility and a 'duty of care' – as endorsed by the Australian Medical Association."

Previous Parliamentary Inquiry recommendations – Parliamentary paper 853, Report on Inquiry into the M5 East Ventilation Stack (2001)

The NSW government should be completely aware of the need to deliver best practice tunnel design and state of the art filtration. In the Parliamentary Inquiry Report of 2001 regarding the M5 East Ventilation Stack the recommendation below was made:

“It is due to these various concerns that the Committee, in this report, has resolved to recommend that filtration equipment be installed in the stack - to minimise or eliminate the additional source of pollution from the stack to the Turrella region. It is patently unfair to this community to add a significant point source of air pollution to their local air shed as a result of a political decision without taking steps to ameliorate that pollution.”

“The Committee further recommends that in view of the increasing number of proposed tunnels in NSW that the M5 East stack be treated as a pilot study of filtration technology in Australia. I believe that this would provide the perfect opportunity for the RTA and other government agencies to assess the effectiveness of this form of technology, in particular electro-static precipitators.”

The M5 East tunnel ventilation stacks did not include filtration in the initial construction, but filtration systems were retrofitted for a trial period after heightened community concerns. The community found a noticeable reduction of visible particulate pollution within the tunnel and improved air quality around the stack. The government’s figures showed that filtration reduced pollution levels by 16%. Yet they determined the trial a failure and in 2012, the government shut off the filtration system, which in reality was done to save on the running cost. This has exposed the community in the surrounding area to increased levels of pollution and higher risk of serious disease.

At the time, the roads minister, Duncan Gay stated that the savings would be put into retrofitting smoky vehicles and ‘reducing pollution at the source’. However, 6 years on, we have an increasing amount of vehicles on our roads and a proliferation of aging diesel powered trucks that are travelling through this very tunnel. These trucks produce the most dangerous type of particulate pollution: PM2.5, which goes directly into the blood stream when inhaled. There no safe level of exposure to these particulates. The retrofitting program lauded by Duncan Gay as the appropriate place to use the money saved by turning off the filtration system, has not solved the problem. In the most recent EPA report, by Ann-Louise Crotty, Manager Air Policy NSW EPA, it notes “500+” trucks having been retrofitted in the entire state of NSW. Clearly this will not have any significant effect on the now unfiltered pollution spewing out of the M5 stack or any future stack in Westconnex.

This is an example of how the NSW government is prioritising commerce over the health of the people in NSW. Who knows how many people will suffer from cancer and lung disease due to the long term exposure to unfiltered exhaust fumes coming from this stack in Turrella? What we do know from research undertaken by the Sydney South West Area Health Service in 2011, in response to a cancer cluster around the M5 East exhaust stack, is that this could well be attributed to the emissions from the stack. They were unable to exclude the stack as a possible source of the observed increases in lung cancer in the area immediately adjacent to the stack. The 40% increase in

cancer in this local population was contrasted with a fall in cancer rates of 9% across the State, during the same period. It is noteworthy that prior to the opening of the M5 the incidence of lung cancer in this area was somewhat lower than the State average.

Like exposure to asbestos, the long term effects of constant exposure to carcinogenic pollutants are not apparent until it's too late. This is shameful and unconscionable conduct by the government.

The New Asbestos

I'd like you to consider an alternate scenario that might help illustrate the severity of this problem. Imagine if the material coming out of the tunnels and smoke stacks was asbestos. Considering how we view the health impact of asbestos on our community, what would be your reaction to this? Horror!!!

Think about how many years it took to realise the health impacts of asbestos exposure and how intensely we now manage this risk. If you compare the risk of particulate pollution from vehicles to that of asbestos, you will find that the risk is at least the same, if not higher. As soon as the government was aware of the dangers of asbestos exposure, it took action to legislate how we manage it to minimise health risks. If we know **now** that the health risks of breathing in particulate pollution produced by motor vehicles are real and significant, why is the government not doing everything in its power to reduce this risk? Specifically, why are they not using the proven technology that filters out pollutants when it is available to them?

This is not only my view, but also the view of Anthony Roberts, who deemed pollution from vehicles: "the new asbestos" back in 2007. Mr Roberts is now the minister for planning in NSW. He submitted a bill to parliament at the time of the proposal for unfiltered stacks on the Lane Cove Tunnel. His statement to parliament can be accessed through the link below and is attached as a reference document to this submission.

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/bill/files/2525/LA%20Roads%20Amdt.pdf>

The Premier's position while in opposition

In 2008, Ms Berejiklian championed the work of Dr Ray Kearney, a University of Sydney professor (now retired) who advocated in favour of filtration as notes earlier in this submission. Dr Kearney, maintains his view that unfiltered particulate emissions pose a grave health risk and will create high-concentration "hotspots". This is evident in a CSIRO study done showing the effect of a meandering plume coming from the exhaust stack on the M5.

In a speech that she made in Parliament in 2008 regarding the Lane Cove Tunnel, Ms Berejiklian said:

"Members of Parliament should examine their conscience and consider how they would feel if their children or the children of loved ones were exposed to this level of fumes every day and they were part of a government that could have put in place measures to reduce the impact of the fumes,"

“It is not too late, the government can still ensure that filtration is a possibility. World’s best practice is to filter tunnels.”

“Why won’t they (Labor) allow people to sleep at night, knowing their children aren’t inhaling toxins that could jeopardise their health now or in the future?”

Contrary to the Premier’s original view, the CSIRO study and expert advice from Dr. Ray Kearney, the RMS claims the following in their Western Harbour Tunnel Project Update, July 2018, page 21:

“Once in the atmosphere, the ejected tunnel air dilutes hundreds of times as it mixes with the surrounding air and becomes indistinguishable from background levels.”

This is completely false and a prime example of how our government is misinforming the public on the potential effects of tunnel exhaust on the community.

Information shown on the Westconnex website states:

“Computer modelling was used to measure the potential impacts on air quality during construction and operation of the project. Extensive ambient (outdoor) monitoring around existing motorway tunnels demonstrates that emissions from the ventilation outlets do not have a measurable impact on local air quality”

This is another false claim based upon manipulated data. There is clear evidence from the CSIRO study that there is measurable negative impact on local air quality. Their model shows the behaviour of a “meandering plume” of particulate pollution, identifying hot spots adjacent to and surrounding stacks where concentrations of particulate pollution strike the ground.

Smaller particulate matter (pm2.5) stays in the atmosphere for days and weeks after being emitted and eventually falls to the ground. With so many stacks in my immediate area (1 at the top of my street, 3 at Rozelle Junction and 1 at Haberfield) and knowing the significant health risks from studies done since 2000, how can the government seriously state that there will be improvements to air quality because of Westconnex?

Trucks and busses (including NSW government busses) continue to use diesel fuel, which in itself creates heightened levels of pm2.5 pollution. These very trucks and busses will be sitting in bumper to bumper traffic as they go past local schools and my street.

Building tunnels and tollways induce traffic and will not solve Sydney’s road congestion problem. Population growth will soon unravel any slight improvement to congestion and travel times. Given that the Rozelle link ends at the Iron Cove Bridge, which already has a traffic jam in morning and evening peak hours, the bottleneck created at the end of the new tunnel will make my street and Rozelle Primary School Sydney’s toxic ground zero.

As with asbestos, negative health effects of vehicular pollution may occur after long term exposure. The people living near and around Sydney’s current tunnels, such as the M5 and the Lane Cove Tunnel have had exposure for a limited time. Nobody has considered the potential catastrophic health effects on the families living within the reach of these tunnels for an extended period of time.

In a study by the NSW Department of Health in 2006 regarding possible health impacts of the M5 East Motorway Stacks on the Turella Community, it was clearly stated that they did not assess long-term health impacts of emissions:

“With any epidemiological study, there are limits in the study's ability to detect an effect. This study was not designed to assess long-term health impacts of emissions.”

So by the departments own admission they have failed to consider a critical factor in assessing the health risk to the community.

Conclusion

I have spent hours and hours reading through independent reports, government reports and Westconnex related media reports. It is completely clear to me that this project is not motivated by a desire to improve our city or the lives of the people within it. It is about self-interest, short term political gain and out an out greed. There is an abundance of shoddy work practice examples, poor or manipulated consultation methods and intentional government secrecy and misinformation.

As I have highlighted in the information provided in this submission, the most horrifying result of this unnecessary road project will be the premature death of those who live around its toxic emitting tunnel portals and unfiltered stacks. The NSW government appears to have total disregard for the health and wellness of its people. This is nothing short of criminal.

Therefore I call for the entire project to be halted immediately and a royal commission convened to get to the absolute truth about how this project has been allowed to proceed given the risk to public health.

I would like to thank the members of the committee for taking the time to consider my submission. I am interested in appearing as a witness if the members of the inquiry would permit.