

Submission  
No 146

## INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTERN HARBOUR TUNNEL AND BEACHES LINK

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## **Response to Legislative Council's Inquiry into the Impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link**

I am a long term resident of the North Sydney Local Government area. I was Mayor of North Sydney from 1995 til 2012 and President of both the NSW Local Government Association and The Australian Local Government Association . I remain an active member of my community.

My submission opposes the construction of both the Tunnel projects as community objections and concerns have been largely ignored and alternative transport improvement measures have not been properly investigated.

I would make the follwing responses to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference:

A.

There has been no adequate business case for the Tunnel projects provided. There appears to be no cost benefit analysis for either Tunnel project.

B.

Both projects have failed to consider alternative options most notably the upgrading of rail and metro options. This is most relevant to the Beaches Link.

The Western Harbour Tunnel EIS team has failed to respond to major concerns from the North Sydney community about the traffic congestion impacts which flow from it entering onto an already heavily congested section of the Warringah Freeway.

C.

The projects are extremely expensive with an estimated cost of \$14 billion for both tunnels and some estimates as high as \$30 billion.

Aready it is unclear whether the costs of the necessary upgrades to the Warringah Freeway and Wakehurst Parkway, required by the projects, are included in the current project cost estimates.

There needs to be new and more detailed, accurate cost estimates and these need to be made public.

D.

The policy of rapid privatisation of new metro Transport infrastructure after construction, means the NSW government relinquishes control of metropolitan transport policy. As private operators control these most important links in the metropolitan transport network, new policy responses to changing technology, such as variable road pricing, will be distorted and constrained.

This is also reflected in one of the stated benefits of the WHT/BL projects is their link to Westconnex leading to increased patronage and tolls. It would appear that financial benefits to a Tunnel operator are a very poor reason to undertake major projects like these.

F.

Stakeholder and community engagement was undertaken but in my experience all sessions I attended were information sessions with little opportunity to object to the project concept.

A feedback session in Fred Hutley Hall again allowed little opportunity to object to the project concept or details like its location on the Warringah Freeway next to the entrance to the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

The NSW Planning Portal details all submissions made to the EIS team in 2020 by communities, organisations and public authorities. In total only 2% supported the project, 8% commented and 90% objected.

Despite this high level of objection, the EIS team failed to address the issues raised by objectors.

G.

Covid 19 is likely to result in increased numbers of people continuing to work from home, at least part of their working week. This will reduce peak hour demand for the tunnels and only worsen the projects' cost benefit ratio.

H.

The NSW Government should publish the base case financial model and cost benefit analysis ratio for the projects and their component parts.

This should be a fundamental requirement to ensure large projects that cost taxpayers billions of dollars are developed, approved and delivered with the public scrutiny needed.

I.

North Sydney Council's submission on the WHT EIS gave a detailed analysis of all the information available to the public. The Council's analysis concluded that both EISs gave no explanation of the chosen plan, no alternatives, no options, no financial analysis, no business case, no adequate traffic forecasts and no assessment of the traffic impacts on North Sydney.

It is difficult to imagine another project that fails so conclusively in both transparency and accountability.

J.

There will be significant environmental impacts, particularly on the marine environment, during the construction phase with harbour excavation and the immersed tube method planned for both projects.

In the initial operation of the tunnels communities, near the air extraction stacks at each end of the tunnels, will suffer significant negative environmental impacts. While petrol vehicles, particularly diesel trucks and cars, are still using the tunnels the levels of air pollution cannot be predicted.

The NSW Chief Scientist commissioned a review of the Beaches Link EIS regarding air quality. In the final paragraph of the report, the independent and highly qualified authors said, in effect, that air quality predictions were not based on sound evidence. The claims that the project reduces air pollution are 'only true if the predicted traffic reductions actually occur.' 'It is reasonable to expect a high degree of additional demand induced by the project.' 'The EIS does not explicitly indicate the sensitivity of the air quality impacts of the project on that induced demand, nor the magnitude of the potential error in predictions of traffic.'

L.

In North Sydney, during construction, there will be significant negative impacts on both Balls Head Reserve and Balls Head and Bay Roads, but to worker vehicle access, parking and the transport of excavated material.

Wawerton village on Bay Road will be significantly impacted during the construction phase and there seems to be little attempts to ameliorate these impacts.

There will be significant permanent loss of parkland and recreational land at Cammeray Park. There has been no attempt to compensate this community for the loss of this important public open space.