

Submission  
No 162

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

**Name:** Heidi Roland Kenn

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Heidi Roland-Kenn

14<sup>th</sup> June 2021

**Re: Northern Beaches Tunnel Link - Objection**

I write to object most strongly to the planned Beaches Tunnel Link and the Western Harbour tunnel. I urge the Parliamentary enquiry into these proposed tunnels to give greater consideration to the environmental damage and the permanent loss of our natural amenities which will ensue, and which have not been properly assessed in the Environmental Impact Statement by Transport for NSW (TfNSW). Further, I do not believe the business case has been made for the tunnel, not do I believe it will meet the objectives of relieving traffic congestion on the beaches. It will certainly cause undue suffering for those of us whose lives will be impacted for the better part of decade during the build.

I have lived up and down the beaches since the 1980's. I have commuted daily from Mona Vale to Lidcombe, Dee Why to Chatswood, Balgowlah Heights to Marrickville and Strathfield, to Hornsby during the Beaches Hospital Road build, and now Balgowlah Heights to St Vincent's and mostly to Royal North Shore Hospital. The single greatest transformation to road traffic in this time was the introduction of the B1 bus line (which our suburb cannot access). I now travel to Royal North Shore Hospital in 20 minutes by car, leaving later in the morning than I previously had to – that is traffic congestion has improved.

My family, friends and I are avid users of the extraordinary natural amenities of our area. I swim in the ocean or one of the ocean pools daily after work. We walk at least a section of the Spit to Manly walk weekly, regularly circum-ambulate Manly Dam or Bantry Bay with friends, swim or kayak at Clontarf.

We access shopping and social amenities at Mosman and Cremorne at least weekly.

The Beaches and Western Harbour tunnel project is an example of an un-examined political announcement, has been in my opinion poorly planned, and I urge the enquiry to note in relation to items of the Terms of reference that:

***(b) the adequacy of the consideration of alternative options,***

- The terms of reference for the tunnel proposal excluded consideration of public transport options and options for better linking residents to public transport. The recent removal of our local buses has had a significant impact with many now back in their cars and we watch once full buses now pass by our house empty because they no longer serve the commuters purpose.

***a) the adequacy of the business case for the project, including the cost benefits ratio; and  
(h) whether the NSW Government should publish the base-case financial model and benefit cost ratio for the project and its component parts,***

- The project did not include a cost benefit analysis which was publicly available; and
- Did not include stand-alone cost benefit analysis for the two tunnel projects separately.
- A project of this size will undoubtedly contain extraordinary cost blow-outs (based on all prior infrastructure projects in NSW of the past decade) which will be paid for by taxpayers across the State and by we the residents in perpetuity. This is a cost on top of the extraordinary COVID-19 related debt our children will be paying for decades.
- Does not include traffic mitigation plans throughout the duration of the build. The cost to business of the traffic problems the build will create has not been addressed.

***(e) the extent to which the project is meeting the original goals of the project, and  
(g) the extent to which changes in population growth, work and travel patterns due to the Covid-19 pandemic have impacted on the original cost benefit ration***

- The project is based on an assumption that those crossing Spit Bridge do so only to access the CBD and ignores the multitude of other locations within our locale which the majority of us commute to.
- The tunnel access and egress are poorly planned at the site of Manly vale/Balgowlah such that it simply moves the bottle neck and has been designed with no knowledge of local traffic movements. This tunnel will not ease congestion but rather move it down the road.
- Traffic assessment was conducted prior to COVID-19 and has not accounted for the changes which have resulted from the significant shift to Work From Home (WFH) and which are likely to persist beyond COVID-19. TfNSW consider these impacts to be temporary. However, McKinsey Global Institute stated in early 2020 that changes to work that had been predicted to pan out over the next five years were delivered in 60 days. (Baig, A. et al (2020) *The COVID-19 recovery plan will be digital: A plan for the first 90 days*).
- Independent assessment of traffic movement on the beaches by Dr Michelle Zeibots has shown approx. 44% of residents move East to West. The remainder is evenly split between local traffic and those who cross the Spit bridge (but don't necessarily travel to the city). Her recommendation for traffic relieving infrastructure for the Beaches was to improve east to west public transport and could be achieved at far less cost than the proposed tunnel. This was supported by the Beaches Council but rejected by the current State government.
- In the most recent TfNSW zoom consultation, it was suggested that travel time from Balgowlah to the CBD would be reduced by 38 minutes by 2037. This is bizarre given that even in peak times now I can travel from Balgowlah Heights to Royal North Shore Hospital in 20 minutes. What is this estimate based on?
- There are no measurable goals which indicate that travel times will actually be improved. Closures of local roads to force people into the tunnel will increase congestion - not relieve it. The EIS indicates that travel times will be increased due to changes at other major intersections such as along Warringah Freeway and Military Road. That is, the tunnel will not meet its purported objectives.
- The EIS states increased traffic congestion will occur particularly on weekends – with nowhere for the additional vehicles to travel to and park.

***(f) the consultation methods and effectiveness, both with affected communities and stakeholders,***

I have attended in-person and zoom consultation sessions throughout the consultation period. The community consultation has been inadequate - an example was the initial in-person consultation pre-COVID where the engineers present did not understand the typical traffic movement in the area of Balgowlah-Seaforth and when attempts were made to explain this the information was dismissed. Subsequent consultation via zoom also ignored local information about traffic flows. In particular, it was emphasised by Transport NSW that traffic volumes have returned to pre-covid levels – this is patently untrue as all of us who commute daily can attest. This was raised in the last zoom consultation by multiple members of the community and was ignored. There has been no monitoring or assessment of where drivers actually travel - there has been an assumption that all traffic goes to the city – which ignores the local movement entirely.

***(j) the impact on the environment, including marine ecosystems,***

This will be the first tunnel built in Sydney with such enormous and significant environmental impact to our region with no attempt to dramatically reduce the environmental consequences of the proposed Northern Beaches Tunnel link. The environmental damage in the EIS grossly underestimates

the actual damage which will occur. The following summary of environmental damage has been identified in the EIS but has not been addressed:

- Removal of some 2500 trees and permanent loss of greenspace with no local biodiversity offsets.
- The permanent loss of the diverse habitat at Balgowlah Golf course will be replaced by open green fields and consequent effect on the water table and habitat.
- Changes to the Manly dam catchment area, and into the Garigal National Park will impact several endangered and very rare species.
- Rainwater runoff to Queenscliff lagoon and subsequent ocean outfall from Wakehurst Parkway.
- Predicted reduction in water flows down Burnt Bridge Creek of 96%.
- Reduction to the water table in Seaforth and Balgowlah which will have an enormous impact on remaining trees and plants of our area including into the Manly dam catchment and down to Bantry Bay.

The recent significant weather event of March saw flood waters down Burnt Bridge Creek were far higher than predicted in the EIS. With loss of tree and ground cover, together with increased hard surfaces, this will become a significant flood hazard which has not been accounted for in the EIS.

**Manly dam catchment:** The widening of Wakehurst Parkway from two to six lanes will do untold damage to the Many dam catchment area, threatening endangered species. The EIS states the topography of the area means the environmental impacts of the build cannot be controlled along this route. This will threaten amongst other sensitive fauna and flora the recently re-discovered climbing fish (*galaxias brevipinnis*) – thought extinct and which dates back 60 million years. Manly dam is home to diverse and endangered bird species.

**Queenscliff Lagoon** will have nearly half a million litres of wastewater pumped into it daily, contaminating the lagoon and beaches. Queenscliff beach is only 1.5km from the marine sanctuary of **Cabbage Tree Bay** – ocean currents will ensure this area is also polluted. This is the daily swimming area of over 700 members of the Bold and Beautiful and many splinter groups – of which I am one. This is a precious marine resource.

**The tree canopy** cover of our suburbs will be decimated – we know the importance of tree cover to mitigate against heat sinks and offset pollution. They are vital to soil stability and health and to retaining the water table.

- Burnt Creek water flow will be reduced by 96% by the end of the project, destroying the ecosystem.
- Removing all tress in the Balgowlah golf course area will prevent mitigation of dust produced by the build and increase water run-off in storms. It will adversely impact our local bird life. Old trees are vital to the environment and health of regions. I urge you to take steps to retain as many trees as possible. It is lazy to plan to simply remove them all.

This damage is extremely upsetting and unacceptable – our family and friends are regular and frequent users of the Manly Dam bush walks, Bantry Bay walks and daily ocean swimmers – the loss of the extraordinary natural environment right on our doorstep is a source of enormous stress.

Further, we know loss of green canopy adds to heat sinks and subsequent heat stress. Rob Stokes has himself identified that tree cover is vital for the city and much has already been lost at Frenches Forest to the Northern Beaches Hospital and related road works.

The suggestion that the environmental damage can be ‘offset’ by purchase of biodiversity offsets elsewhere is a furphy. Endangered species won’t move to a new area, we the residents can’t access offsets elsewhere.

**High contamination** risk has been cited for heavy metals and organotoxins into Middle Harbour from tunnel dredging, polluting The Spit, Clontarf and threatening harbour species including the last

population of penguins which - the EIS states – will likely permanently leave the area. Swimming areas such as Clontarf is an area we use frequently.

*(k) the adequacy of processes for accessing and responding to noise, vibration and other impacts on residents, during construction and operationally,*

**Traffic mitigation and management** during the build is inadequate and has not been addressed.

- The EIS cites 2.5 trucks per minute onto Sydney Rd and Wakehurst Parkway sites – such volume will bring traffic on the beaches to a standstill and all this with our public bus routes having recently been decimated and which are now unworkable. For example, in the week of June 7<sup>th</sup> I travelled down Spit Hill with one B-double truck – for safety reasons the truck moved significantly slower than motor traffic and was in the right lane. With the left lane for buses only, only the middle lane was available for motor traffic. Traffic was significantly impacted by this one lone truck and it increased my commute time by 10 minutes.
- The high truck volume poses a significant risk to students at Balgowlah Boys High and to all motorists along the Spit and Wakehurst Parkway.
- There has been little to no information about how traffic will be managed over the period of the build, nor information about how people who live in the suburbs of Balgowlah Heights, Clontarf, Seaforth and Balgowlah will be able to move about our suburbs and to Mosman once the tunnel is built. We frequently travel to Mosman to shop, dine and see movies and understand there will be significant restrictions to accessing these suburbs including the removal of the right-hand turn from Military Road onto Ourimbah Rd. This will have implications for the businesses of Mosman and Cremorne.

**Commute time:** I work long hours in cancer care which is a taxing role. I can't fathom how I will manage work-related stress on top of the truly horrendous commuting time which will occur and is predicted to last at least 6 years and has been estimated to stretch to 8-10 years. That is a phenomenally significant impact on a region – for some people it will see out their lifetime.

An **unfiltered exhaust stack** in close proximity to numerous houses and local schools and childcare centres will have significant health implications. In cancer care we are well aware of the environmental impacts of pollution on respiratory disease and cancers. While similar stacks are in use in NSW, they do not match international standards. Nowhere in the world is a tunnel of the proposed length of this one serviced by a single unfiltered stack. Yes, pollution will be reduced along the entire road length but that is no consolation for those under the stack.

- Additionally, when it was decided to move the air stack from Dudley Street to next to Balgowlah Boys high school, the air quality was not re-assessed – figures are based on the Dudley St readings.

**Access:** We will not be able to access the tunnel for our commute when it does open as it would require us to drive north and negotiate heavy traffic to access. Once in the tunnel it will not take me to my workplace. However, travelling along Military Road won't be an option due to closure of Ourimbah Road in the East and Ernest St in the west. Crossing Warringah Freeway at Falcon St to access Crows Nest will be unworkable.

**Permanent reduction in amenity:** The tunnel proposal does not include assessment of the very significant reduction of amenity to those alongside and in the surrounding suburbs throughout the duration of the build and once completed. Residents of the main suburbs around the build (Balgowlah, Balgowlah Heights, Balgowlah North and , Seaforth, will become 'locked' in our suburb once completed due to poor access to the tunnel and compromised ability to move around our suburbs. This is true especially with consideration of the many of us who move between the beaches and Mosman/Cremorne/Crows Nest, or between and through these suburbs to travel east or north to Brookvale, Manly vale and Curl Curl etc.

*(I) the impact of the project on nearby public sites, including Yurulbin Point and Dawn Fraser Baths, and*

The Manly dam area is also a significant Aboriginal cultural area.

**In conclusion:** The economic viability of the tunnel has not been demonstrated. Declarations made prior to the last State election have been relied upon without further detailed analysis and review. The benefits of the tunnel are questionable but the impact of the tunnel during the build and the loss of our natural environment and the amenity of our suburbs will be permanently lost. The knowledge of which is enormously distressing to our family. I am dismayed the project will even go ahead given the poor business case and a spectacular failure to consider adequate public transport options.

Yours sincerely,

Heidi Roland Kenn