

Submission
No 193

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 15 June 2021

Partially
Confidential

Introduction

I am a resident of the Northern Beaches, living very close to the Beaches Link Balgowlah portal and Link Road.

I wish to comment on the Beaches Link only since this will have a significant effect on me both during and after construction.

I object to the Beaches Link in its present form, fundamentally because it is an out-of-date and ineffective solution to traffic issues.

Comments on elements of the Terms of Reference.

The adequacy of the business case for the project, including the cost benefits ratio (Item A of the Terms of Reference)

I cannot comment on the Western Harbour Tunnel (WHT) since that is out of my area but the Beaches Link (BL) is a quite separate project and must stand by itself in the cost/benefit calculation. The WHT does not need a BL to exist and vice versa. I have seen the results of an analysis done by local experts and this concludes that the BL project is not viable as a stand-alone project.

It is vital that any analysis is done with up to date traffic patterns which have changed significantly in the last 5 years. I contend that the emphasis on personal car journeys is excessive as our country, like other developed countries, slowly and inexorably moves to a way of life with less reliance on daily car commuting. We are being forced to live closer to our places of work (or even work from home) and within one generation this will be a very significant change in lifestyle which is not considered in the EIS.

Traffic experts have declared that the timesaving achieved by the BL will reduce as traffic increases and we will be back to existing levels of congestion in perhaps two years.

The benefits of the BL have been vaguely stated. Claims of a reduction in travel time of 38 minutes to the city and 56 minutes (with the WHT) to the airport from Dee Why are just ridiculous to anyone like myself who travels on this route by car in peak hours. Consequently I believe that a realistic statement of benefits needs to be made which, using up to date statistics, can be put into a specific BL business case.

The adequacy of the consideration of alternative options (Item B of the Terms of Reference)

The alternatives considered are essentially variations on the theme of a tunnel for cars.

Dr. Zeibots, the research director of the Transport Research Centre at the University of Technology Sydney said Sydney's northern beaches and north shore would receive the most benefit from a new rail line.

There is lip service paid to the idea of a bus service in the tunnel but there is not a dedicated lane. The fairly new B-Line service to the city has been a success and would be even more utilised if there were better facilities to actually catch a B-Line bus from other areas in the Northern Beaches. The existing B-Line uses a dedicated bus lane in peak hours so there are few delays and it is a visible reminder of the public's desire for fast public transport.

The development of public transport in big cities around the world is a sign that the age of the personal car for transport, at least to work, is slowly fading away. Many cities have a congestion tax to keep cars out of the city centre because we car users are lazy and reluctant to change our habits, even if the alternative is better, so we have to be forced to change, often by financial disincentives. The BL is doing quite the opposite. It is encouraging travel by car and this will obviously stimulate local traffic so the congestion will increase in areas outside the tunnel.

A better alternative would be a train line (or similar heavy or light transport system) but this is something which our governments have been reluctant to consider. The time is coming when such a public transport system will be absolutely necessary. Think what transport will be like in 40 years. Nobody knows for sure but, if we use our imagination, we can see that individual journeys to the city by cars containing one person will be not part of the picture. However, the project documentation states that it "has been developed with a long-term view to address the challenges Greater Sydney will face over the next 40 years". I contend that it will not achieve that aim.

Some short term options could be:

Making Military Road No Stopping 24 hours per day. This will not assist weekday peaks but the weekend peaks are just as significant.

Reducing traffic to and from the city centre. There are many parking spaces within the Sydney city area even though it is a destination most favourable to access via public transport. One could restrict public parking areas to a short time limit to prevent all day parking. One could also introduce a city access charge.

Improving throughput across Middle Harbour at the Spit. Either a 6 lane bridge or a very short tunnel is much cheaper than the BL tunnel.

Should the BL proceed, the alternative of having the Balgowlah end moved to Manly Vale would bypass one of the biggest bottlenecks at the junction of Burnt Bridge Freeway and Condamine Street and Kenneth Road which, under the existing design, is where the tunnel traffic will emerge to go straight into major congestion.

**The extent to which the project is meeting the original goals of the project, and
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 ratio (Items E and G of the
Terms of Reference)**

The BL project has very vague goals. It states: “Project has been developed with a long-term view to address the challenges Greater Sydney will face over the next 40 years” and makes claims about satisfying an increasing demand for car travel.

There are statements about the increases in traffic and numerous graphs of traffic volumes and saved travel times in 2037 including the saving of 38 minutes to the city and 56 minutes to the airport. I will restate my view expressed above that such goals appear ludicrous to those like myself who regularly travel in peak hour.

However, a simplistic view of the official statistics (through the RMS Traffic Volume Viewer) shows that traffic on the Spit Bridge has been falling in peak hours over the last 10 years. This raises serious doubts about the claims of increasing traffic and consequently challenges all the stated objectives of improvements. I assume that the reason for the fall is the increase in public transport use and it supports my view that we need to improve public transport rather than create more space for cars. It is human nature that, if you build more road spaces, cars will be used more and fill up those spaces. This concept is substantiated by the fact that, since COVID concerns have eased, car traffic has increased almost to pre-COVID levels but public transport use is well below pre-COVID levels. When there is less congestion, car usage will increase at the expense of public transport which is exactly what will happen in the first few years of a BL tunnel until congestion rises and forces people back to public transport, negating the benefits of the tunnel.

I have attached two RMS graphs showing the reduction of traffic over the Spit Bridge over the last 10 years.

The adequacy of processes for accessing and responding to noise, vibration and other impacts on residents, during construction and operationally (Item K of the Terms of Reference)

It has been stated that my location adjacent to Balgowlah Golf Course will be subject to “moderate” to “high” impacts from construction and also “moderate” to “high” impacts after it is put into operation. There are no planned minimisation or mitigation measures apart from “screen plantings which will make impacts over time”. The impacts are mainly from the link access road rather than the tunnel itself and suggestions to move the location of the link road further west or to make it more underground have been ignored. The cost of such measures would be insignificant within the

project budget. Even the issue of new access road street lights being mounted at the same level as the existing Pickworth Avenue roadway has not been resolved.

I have been made aware of the 2018 Parliamentary Inquiry into the WestConnex Project which found “That the various noise mitigation measures offered by Roads and Maritime Services are wholly inadequate to substantially reduce heavy construction noise.” (Finding 14). It appears nothing has changed in the attitude of RMS.

In summary, the EIS went into great detail about how much I would be affected but had no details on how this is to be mitigated.

Any other related matter (Item M of the Terms of Reference)

The loss of the natural green space and trees of the Balgowlah Golf Course for the establishment of a Link Road is a tragedy (and I speak as a non-golfer). Claims that 90% of the golf course area will be given to the Northern Beaches Council for recreation are misleading because possibly half of the useable area will be assigned to car parking for the remaining area which will be transformed into unnatural playing fields, probably with synthetic grass which is the current council’s preference. The council has for some years been trying to get control of the golf course and the location of the Link Road has achieved this end. Alternatives to the Link Road were widely advocated but ignored.

The establishment of a Link Road with access from the most congested section of roadway in peak hours (Sydney Road) defies logic. Similarly, the location of the Balgowlah portal on the Burnt Bridge Freeway leading into one of the most congested intersections (Kenneth Road and Condamine Street) appears at odds with the desire to reduce traffic congestion. Having the portal on the northern side of Manly Vale would overcome this issue and would remove the need for the Link Road. One wonders if the desire to acquire the golf course was a factor in the design.