

**Submission
No 232**

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

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The Hon. Daniel Mookhey MLC
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Submission to the Inquiry into the Impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link

Dear Members of the Public Works Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to an inquiry regarding these troubling projects. I strongly object to the Western Harbour Tunnel (including the Warringah Freeway Upgrade) and Beaches Link (including the Gore Hill extension) projects and urge you to recommend that the NSW Government abandon these plans immediately.

First, a little about me. I have lived in the Willoughby area for over 20 years and have 2 teenage daughters (one of whom has asthma) who have grown up in the area. Pre-covid I travelled regularly to work in North Sydney and the city by bus/train. As a family we extensively utilise local schools, shops and recreational facilities within a 3km radius of our home. I fear our lives will be drastically impacted during the 5-6 year construction of the Northern Beaches Tunnel in terms of increased noise, unmanageable traffic congestion, potential health hazards, loss of access to Flat Rock Gully and restricted activities in the harbour. And, post construction we will be left with unresolved property damage claims, restricted travel options, increased pollution, loss of the rejuvenated part of Flat Rock Gully and potential long term environmental damage to Flat Rock Gully and the harbour. To sum up, our area will endure a tremendous amount of pain for absolutely no gain. The project appears to have no business case to support it, does not seem to have considered any meaningful and future-looking alternatives, and certainly has not accounted for the true cost of the project in terms of peoples health, the environmental impact and impact to private property. Previous tunnel projects have had a poor track record of assessing and remediating these issues and I am concerned that the same (poor) oversight and performance will occur with this project. I would prefer that we spend money on planning and delivering for more sustainable outcomes that deliver more efficient and environmentally friendly transport systems.

My reasons for abandoning these plans are further outlined in relation to the Committee's Terms of Reference below:

(a) the adequacy of the business case for the project, including the cost benefits ratio,

Unfortunately no business case has been released to the public. This in itself must be an issue if intending to spend public funds or expect the public to repay debt as a result.

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

Considered alternatives were restricted to tunnel alignments and a very cursory reference to public transport alternatives. Comprehensive investigation of public transport alternatives seem to have been avoided. It does not consider the construction of a rail system or an electric bus/tram system that is conceivably cheaper and quicker to build and is environmentally friendly.

(c) the cost of the project, including the reasons for overruns,

This is always an area of concern as we have seen cost blow outs along with cost cover-ups in other similar projects. The project acknowledges that further testing and risk assessment is required for the environmental risks in particular. It will be imperative that comprehensive analysis of the project risks are detailed along with adequate risk mitigation strategies and all associated remediation activities be fully costed.

(d) the consideration of the governance and structure of the project including the use of a 'development partner' model,

No comment

(e) the extent to which the project is meeting the original goals of the project,

The project will not meet the goals stated, which is essentially to reduce congestion and improve travel times. For my area we will end up with more congestion and longer travel times as documented by the project.

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

I don't believe affected communities and stakeholder necessarily know who they are or the scope and impact of these projects. Public consultations seem to be very superficial and portray the project in the best possible (unrealistic) light. An excuse for this is that it is "only 20% planned". Affected stakeholders need to truly scrutinise the information to see beyond the veneer of its presentation. Consequently the consultation is ineffective in educating affected communities but is effective in making the project seem innocuous.

(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 ratio,

The projects have not taken into account the impact of COVID-19 and the lower traffic volumes we will see as a result for the longer term. The Australian Government Centre for Population predicts that our population growth will slow and become older. Older people tend to prefer public transport and may not be able/willing to drive.

There will also be a shift to more people working from home on a more regular basis, and certainly more flexibility in when people need to travel to work. Many large organisations are planning to reduce office space needs as a result. At the same time the advent of the e-bike will see more commuters choosing to cycle. The impact of COVID-19 on the way in

which we work and consequently our travel requirements necessitates a re-assessment of these projects and the cost benefit ratio.

(h) whether the NSW Government should publish the base-case financial model and benefit cost ratio for the for the project and its component parts,

Why shouldn't the NSW Government publish such information. Why should the public pay for something that cannot be justified or stand up to public scrutiny.

(i) whether the project is subject to the appropriate levels of transparency and accountability that would be expected of a project delivered by a public sector body,

Appropriate levels of transparency and accountability would ensure that the business case is published and that alternatives are objectively considered. This has not been done as would be expected.

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

The proposed dive site at our beautiful Flat Rock Gully is of particular concern as known buried contaminants may flow out to affect the rest of Flat Rock Gully, Tunks Park, Middle Harbour and the Sailors Bay foreshores. Further the return of the bush area is not planned and not costed in the project.

Due to the tunnelling into mainly sandstone there is a concern about silica dust which we know to be carcinogenic. The project does not adequately address this issue and has not budgeted for its risk mitigation. This dust must be carefully monitored and managed to avoid future health claims by workers and local residents.

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

The experience from management of the West Connex project demonstrates that the processes for responding to noise, vibration, and other impacts on residents, do not work.

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

There are contamination risks to Tunks Park, which is at risk from contamination emanating from the old tip site in Flat Rock Gully, and to Middle Harbour (including the learn-to swim site at Clive Park) and Northbridge Baths from disturbance of contaminated sediment.

(m) any other related matter.

Resulting reduction in air quality due to concentrated expulsion of vehicle exhaust via unfiltered stacks in the highest concentration of schools on the north shore. There is a need for independent monitoring and communication mechanisms to notify schools of air quality in REAL TIME so that they can act on the conditions. As part of the risk mitigation strategy the schools should be funded to install air filters and conditioners to enable students to remain in class when the air pollutants are at unacceptable levels.

Yours Sincerely,

Vince Lee