

Submission
No 243

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Submission to the Inquiry into the impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel (WHT) and Beaches Link

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission into the Impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link. I hope your enquiry will help to unearth the truth about the viability of the project and assist the community in making significant design changes to improve its negative impacts on the public amenity of the North Sydney CBD and local residents in North Sydney and untangle the complicated, undemocratic processes at play on this major State Government infrastructure project.

This submission will focus on the Western Harbour Tunnel project as it affects the North Sydney CBD area.

This submission will address the following terms of reference points:

b) the adequacy of the consideration of alternative options,

The WHT Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which is over 1200 pages long did not present alternative transport options nor the alternative design options for the tunnel alignments, costings and the comprehensive analysis of the impacts on the local communities.

What is unacceptable to the residents of North Sydney is that the EIS stated that the local residents must cope with the negative impacts of the project for the common good of the rest of Sydney.

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

The EIS and the consultation process was not unusual for the NSW Government— top down written communication only and verbal clarification at a number of display centres with limited time available and resistance to requests for more time in which to lodge submissions. Preparation of the EIS took the best part of two years and yet the public and stakeholders were given just 6 weeks to respond to overly complicated technical data and very diagrammatic road layouts.

Transport for NSW made no attempt to explain the project in a way that would lead the audience to fully understand all of its implications including benefits and drawbacks. In fact, it failed to explain how the environmental impacts would be mitigated or ameliorated. Conversely, it went to great lengths to demonstrate that there would be no impact on air quality and as a consequence there would be no need to provide air filtration equipment now or in the future even if their experts were wrong.

The EIS is a document more like a sales brochure than one that listed and examined the environmental impacts of the project. It was prepared in a similar way that a merchant bank would prepare a case for sale of a business to interested parties. Such a document would require a prospective purchaser to make its own enquiries or due diligence. But that is not what we should expect of government because it represents the interests of all the people of NSW. Having allowed Transport for NSW to do its bidding, the government then relied upon the Department of Planning and Environment to examine and assess the project without the benefit of its own independent experts in the respective fields to produce responses for the express purpose of identifying issues

that Transport for NSW has ignored. For example, there is no independent detailed traffic analysis report which is at the core of the project. There is no independent analysis of the impacts on the marine environment.

In regard to traffic, the government failed to consult adequately on the project's impact on traffic in and around North Sydney CBD. It has taken the approach not to connect traffic onto the several freeways at intersections with arterial roads and instead has continued with using Berry Street on-ramps to connect traffic onto the Warringah Freeway, the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Sydney Harbour Tunnel and the Cahill Expressway and now the Western Harbour Tunnel and the Beaches Link.

In other words, traffic that wants to use these new roads to go from their point of origin to locations outside the North Sydney CBD are directed on to Berry Street on ramps. This is unacceptable traffic design. Nowhere else in the world would such an arrangement be tolerated let alone contemplated. The correct place to connect is from the surrounding arterial roads on to those major traffic freeways and toll roads.

There were no consultations with the communities impacted by this project prior to the selection and finalisation of the design and the identification of the best and least impacting road routes. There were no consultations on the very significant negative impact of the additional traffic on local streets and major local road intersections and no presentation of traffic modelling and analysing of impacts.

The so-called consultations required by the NSW planning legislation were more like information sessions showing the final designs like it or not.

Over 2600 submission opposing the WHT project were submitted to the EIS by the public. This strong opposition to this project was ignored and dismissed by the NSW State Government and it was approved by the NSW Minister for Planning and Public Spaces Rob Stokes in January 2021 without any design changes.

Even the North Sydney Council was silenced into submission by Transport for NSW officials.

In the early 2020 the combined North Sydney Council Precinct Committees voted overwhelmingly to oppose the WHT project.

On the scheduled North Sydney Council meeting of 23/03/2020 (rescheduled to 06/04/2020) the Mayor of North Sydney has put forward three minutes to support the North Sydney community concerns.

She said: "***Why should the infrastructure that benefits the whole city be built at the cost of North Sydney community?***"

She said its time to get political, to begin a campaign seeking wide spread community support for changes to the WHT with the budget of \$50,000 (later amended to appropriate budget).

She asked Council to seek NSW Government to amend design of the Berry Street access to the tunnel and to prevent channelling huge volume of traffic from Sydney onto the local North Sydney street.

The other issues raised by the Mayor were about addressing in more detail the air quality concerns and the loss of open space and she had requested the Council to write to the NSW Premier for support on these issues.

It is necessary to mention that all the North Sydney Council Councillors present at the meeting supported all these motions.

Subsequently throughout 2020 Council distributed multiple banners and posters throughout North Sydney advocating for action against significant shortcomings of the WHT project.

To this day there was no communication by Council about the outcomes of this short-lived campaign. The banners and posters have disappeared from local streets and the Council got silenced.

This is not democracy.

The community would like to find out why the North Sydney Council got silenced and what was the NSW Government's bargaining offer to Council to bring the democratically elected Local Council to submission and against the local community wishes and their democratic rights.

The EIS, Chapter 9 in 9.1.1 is stating that **North Sydney Integrated Transport Program** is established working with North Sydney Council on promoting walking, cycling and public transport.

There is currently no evidence of this collaboration in the exhibited documents.

The clear indication of this lack of consultation and coordination with North Sydney Council is the fact that in July 2020 the North Sydney Council have produced Transport Strategy supporting their CBD Public Domain Strategy which shows two-way, two lane local traffic in Berry Street while the WHT EIS shows a four-lane traffic highway cutting through North Sydney CBD and funnelling a high traffic volume to the WHT tunnel.

The most disappointing statement in the EIS is that the tunnel works are considered to be most equitable outcomes from the perspective of maintaining a balanced and integrated transport network through North Sydney. However, the alternatives to this proposal would result in further impacts on other customers.

Clearly, the North Sydney residents will become a collateral damage in this ambitious, rushed and poorly conceived NSW Government project.

j) the impact on environment in particular on Pedestrian Amenity and Connectivity through the North Sydney Municipality

The EIS shows rushed design decisions which mainly focused on road geometry to benefit efficient vehicular traffic flow to the detriment of pedestrians and other road users.

It replicates what is currently existing without analysing what may be needed in the future and how to encourage people to walk and cycle more, through safe and attractive shared bridges and safe road crossings across confusing multi directional road lanes.

Many existing pedestrian crossings in the North Sydney CBD are at fail level, they are at Pacific Highway which will carry additional traffic onto the Warringah Freeway and have not been improved for pedestrians in this proposal. Miller Street, Walker Street and Berry Street intersections with Pacific Highway all require significant improvements.

The North Sydney Council's Planning for a More Vibrant North Sydney CBD planning strategy is aiming to develop a pedestrian plaza between Miller Street, Berry and Pacific Highway. This needs to be factored in in considering the excessive additional flow of through traffic into the North Sydney CBD including additional bus services terminating in North Sydney proposed by the WHT project.

North Sydney CBD needs to be the winner from the outcomes of this not welcomed major NSW Government project. It needs improved connectivity over the dreaded Warringah Freeway which slices the municipality into two, creates an impenetrable barrier for pedestrians and cyclists and it is a major scar on the urban landscape of this city for over 50 years not loading it with more traffic.

This project needs to provide more well designed and landscaped shared bridges across the Freeway, and stitch together the city after 50 years of neglect. The edges of the new construction along the freeway need to be fully integrated with local streets and well landscaped.

The 21 century North Sydney CBD needs a major park over the freeway along the edge of the CBD and be included in this project similar to the 10ha park proposed over Rozelle traffic interchange, to cater for the recreation needs of large population of workers, students and residents planned by the NSW Government.

m) the impact on North Sydney CBD.

The tunnel proposal is a major assault on the already impoverished public amenity in the North Sydney CBD. The North Sydney community will be permanently affected and burdened with an avalanche of through traffic forced onto our streets to access the proposed tunnel. The CBD will be strangled by the surrounding traffic of the Warringah Freeway, Pacific Highway and Berry Street on-ramps to the tunnel.

The whole purpose of this major NSW Government project should be to contribute not only to the improvement in travel times for the road users across Sydney but it should remove heavy traffic flows from local streets and improve the liveability of our cities.

This project should contribute to the transformation of North Sydney from a business centre with challenging pedestrian environment and assist in transforming it into an attractive centre with high quality public domain, fine streets and squares and safe pedestrian and cyclist connections within the centre and to the adjoining suburbs.

The North Sydney CBD is home to many schools and the Catholic University increasing significantly the demand on public domain and the need for safe and attractive pedestrian connections through the city and to the adjoining suburbs.

The safe public access to the Victoria Cross Metro station will be significantly affected by the high volumes of through traffic channelled to Berry Street from the entire North Shore. The North Sydney CBD will be sliced in half by yet another freeway.

The North Sydney community demands that the eastbound traffic flow into the Western Harbour tunnel into North Sydney CBD and onto Berry Street including existing Harbour Bridge traffic flow is redirected to the arterial road network.

The project should find another solution to the Berry Street tunnel access to allow for the urban revitalisation of the city centre planned by the North Sydney Council.

As an architect, urban designer, planner and academic with over 30 years of professional experience and local resident I ask this inquiry to find answers to issues raised in my submission and to assist the local community to improve this horrendous tunnel project and to require Transport for NSW to make major design changes and improvements to this project and request Transport for NSW to collaborate fully with the North Sydney Council to achieve much better public domain outcomes for the North Sydney CBD.

The major actions from this inquiry should be to:

- Significantly improve democratic processes on these major infrastructure projects. Early consultations with communities on design options, alternative transport options and costings are essential to make the NSW taxpayers be equal participants in the decision-making processes.

The actions required to save North Sydney CBD from this horrendous NSW Government project are:

- No tunnel access ramps from Berry Street.
- Better pedestrian connectivity across Warringah Freeway.
- Major city park over Warringah Freeway.