

Submission
No 229

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 16 June 2021

Partially
Confidential

My name is _____ and I am a resident of _____, North Balgowlah. I have a young family who attend Balgowlah North Public School and KU Bligh Park, both of which are within close proximity to the ventilation stack proposed to be installed along Wakehurst Parkway. My elderly parents also live in North Balgowlah and both have underlying health issues. I am happy to speak at the inquiry.

My husband and I are both lawyers who travel by bus to work in the City. Whilst we welcome a faster commute to the City and recognise that development and infrastructure are necessary, however at present we oppose the Beaches Link Tunnel because we are concerned that (in no particular order):

1. the Beaches Link Tunnel is based on historical modelling which may no longer be relevant;
2. the cost of the tunnel is significant and could be better spent on improving existing public transport infrastructure;
3. the marketed time saving afforded by the tunnel will likely be lost within a short period of time as a result of rezoning and increased housing north of the Wakehurst Parkway (for example the proposed new Frenchs Forest town centre and other developments proposed around Ingleside etc);
4. the tunnel will only reduce traffic along main arterial roads (namely Military Road) by a very small percentage, compared to the cost of the tunnel;
5. the ventilation stacks will surround our suburb and detrimentally affect the health of our community, and a wide area of the lower northern beaches in general;
6. the construction phase of the tunnel will likely result in a prolonged period of noise, dust and vibration exposure on the community, as well as the suburb being used as a rat run which may negatively affect the safety of the children in our suburb as a result of an increase of non local traffic driving through it;
7. the tunnel will result in contamination of many of our local natural wonders, such as Manly Dam and Bantry Bay, which we frequent and are a source of balance and serenity to both humans and the natural flora and fauna that live there.

Whilst we hope that if the tunnel proceeds some of the above concerns could be mitigated in some way, we would feel more comfortable if we knew that the tunnel was proceeding as a result of an independent review rather than at the whim of a government whose main priority is spending and infrastructure above all else.

I wanted to explain some of my main concerns in more detail, with reference to the relevant term of reference.

Ventilation Stacks and health of the community [(k) the adequacy of processes for accessing and responding to noise, vibration and other impacts on residents, during construction and operationally]

My main concern is about the location of the ventilation shafts. I understand that the TfNSW community meetings in respect of the Beaches Link Tunnel have had record attendances, and recent local media indicates that health and the location of the ventilation stacks is by far the highest concern of the public. I have been to one of the TfNSW information events and asked lots of questions, and also to some of the local community meetings. Whilst TfNSW has tried to reassure the community that the impact of the ventilation stacks will be minimal, it is only years down the line when the true impacts will be known. I recognise that the levels are within

Australian guidelines however our community pollution levels will increase to being more like our CBD which is significantly worse than they are at present and not a level that is acceptable.

I appreciate that TfNSW have agreed to move one of the shafts 500m further up Wakehurst Parkway from Kirkwood Avenue, however this is not sufficient from my point of view. The initial scoping report and the EIS recognise that the health risks of the proposed tunnel are likely to be significant, and yet the overlying justification appears to be that the tunnel will benefit significantly more people than it will affect from a health point of view. My understanding is that the topography of the Manly area is such that any exhaust fumes that come out of the Burnt Bridge Creek exit will hang around the Manly/Curl Curl area for several weeks. This will affect a very large proportion of the peninsula.

Global health experts agree that pollution from traffic exhaust poses serious health risks. Emissions include nitrous oxides and particulate matter that, when breathed into the lungs, causes respiratory diseases such as asthma and emphysema, and cancer. This has been repeatedly proven across numerous independent studies across the world. Medical experts universally state that there is no safe level of exposure to these types of cancer-causing emissions, and that children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable. You will be aware of the recent court decision in the UK which found air pollution caused by local traffic as a cause of the death of a nine year old girl. As you know, there are several schools, preschools and childcare centres within the vicinity of all of the proposed ventilation stacks and from a parent's point of view, the increased level of pollution is absolutely unacceptable. I would request that if the tunnel were to go ahead that the stacks be equipped with full filtration to minimize these impacts.

Impact of the construction phase on the local area [(k) the adequacy of processes for accessing and responding to noise, vibration and other impacts on residents, during construction and operationally]

I am also concerned about the mental and physical health of my local community as a result of increased traffic in and around the suburb during the construction and post construction phases.

The EIS indicates that during construction there will be:

1. Over 3000 vehicles per day across all sites;
2. 1690 vehicles per day at the Balgowlah Golf Course site alone;
3. 1.5 heavy vehicles every minute or 4.5 vehicles (total) every minute;
4. Over 4000 homes subjected to excessive noise.

As a result, it is anticipated that there will be a significant increase in noise and pollution associated with the trucks and additional traffic that may cut through the suburb to avoid the road works (during the construction phase) and generally (in the post construction phase). This will increase the number of vehicles in the suburb and pose an increased safety risk to the hundreds of children that live in the suburb. There are not many pavements in the suburb and when I walk to school with my children the majority of the way is without pavement. We could not continue to walk that way to school if the traffic significantly increases in the area.

Already many residents are incredibly anxious about how their way of life will be negatively impacted. I am aware of proposed 24/7 construction works and have had little reassurance that North Balgowlah will not end up with a similar situation to that suffered by many residents of the

WestConnex project. I ask that you respectfully consider how you might feel if you lived in our suburb.

I would strongly urge effective traffic restrictions to be put in place, for example, no turning into North Balgowlah on Judith or Kirkwood Street during peak hours, no vehicles over a certain weight or height to enter the suburb at any time, and speed bumps to be installed throughout the suburb to make it less attractive to cut through.

Environmental impact [(i) the impact on the environment, including marine ecosystems]

The area surrounding North Balgowlah incorporates some spectacular bush land, reserves and beaches and will undoubtedly suffer major environmental impacts as a result of the tunnel, including but not limited to:

1. Movement of contaminated sediment to Clontarf and Middle Harbour (The Spit) potentially causing pollution of the neighbouring beaches;
2. Potential destruction of Burnt Bridge Creek and surrounds (e.g. bushland, wildlife etc) due to a possible 96% reduction in water flow;
3. Discharge of 428,000 L per day of wastewater into Queenscliff Lagoon & Beach, resulting in health hazards for people and animals who swim in the waterways (including my husband and son!);
4. Pollution of Manly Dam reserve, resulting in the potential extinction of rare flora and fauna and the last remaining areas of Duffys Forest, and meaning that one of the only swimmable dams in NSW is no longer safe for public use;
5. The forced permanent rehabilitation of the last mainland population of little penguins who currently live on the Middle Harbour foreshore in Seaforth and Castlecrag, where coffer dams will be used in construction.

The damage will be irreparable.

Revisiting the tunnel justification [(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, (b) the adequacy of the consideration of alternative options]

Many of the assumptions for traffic used as justification of the build in the EIS have not factored in changes to travel habits and working from home due to COVID-19 and into the future, treating COVID-19 as having only a “temporary” impact”. There are many new data points to factor in given the impact of COVID-19 on lifestyles long term and there should be a suitable review, with the government required to publicly release the results of the review. The figures put forward in the EIS indicate only a minimal reduction in the traffic flowing through Mosman for a significant and disproportionate use of public funds. Whilst conditions may be attached to the development approvals to mitigate some of the impacts, similar conditions have been shown to have been breached in nearby infrastructure projects with minimal penalty or recourse.

If the tunnel is designed to allow for rezoning and the construction of additional housing to the north of the tunnel, then it seems a little short sighted. Whilst I appreciate that many of the people who will use the tunnel do not work in the City and need to travel across the City for other purposes (eg tradespeople), there does not appear to have been sufficient consideration of alternative options for those who work in the City for whom there is a very limited (and expensive) amount of parking should they choose to use the tunnel. The B-line and creation of bus lanes along Military Road has made a significant amount of difference to the northern

beaches by cutting down on transport times in and out of the City. I would like to see more consideration to rolling out the B line along other routes (for example from Manly/Balgowlah areas to the City), as well as alternative options such as ferry services from the Spit or Clontarf into the City. Electric buses will be quicker and easier to implement than relying on individuals travelling into the City to buy electric cars, which will help to reduce the impacts of climate change. The EIS states rising yearly operational emissions, which is inconsistent with the NSW greenhouse gas emissions reduction policy and the federal government's commitment to achieve net zero by 2050.

Targeted marketing needs to be put into place to encourage people to use public transport. A work colleague and I live very close to each other and it takes me less time door to door to catch public transport than it takes him to drive and park in the building we work in.

The government also ran a marketing campaign a few years ago asking people to consider flexible working arrangements or travelling to and from the City outside of peak times in order to spread out the load on public transport. This had an effect on me because I started going to the gym early in the morning to avoid the traffic such that my journey on public transport was halved from 40 minutes in peak time to 18-20 minutes in non peak times.

Summary

In summary my hope is that the Parliamentary Inquiry will result in:

1. A halt to the process and amendment to the current plans and design to properly and sympathetically address community concerns and minimise the negative impacts on the local community and environment, rather than rush the process in order to get everything through before the next election; and
2. A revisitation of the assumptions for tunnel justification based on living in a post COVID-19 world and one in which climate change contributors are reduced rather than increased.

It seems that whilst the majority of the Northern Beaches will significantly benefit from a tunnel, only North Balgowlah, Seaforth and parts of North Sydney will be severely affected by it. I urge you to please consider whether the tunnel is actually necessary in the long run, or if the money could be better spent on other public infrastructure projects.

If the overwhelming decision is that the tunnel should proceed, I urge you to consider the mistakes and the public concerns that have arisen from the Western Harbour Tunnel. I implore you to support the implementation of relatively easy steps to minimise impact on the North Balgowlah/Seaforth area during the construction stage.

Thank you for your consideration.