

Submission
No 249

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 18 June 2021

Partially
Confidential

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Inquiry into the impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link

Dear members

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this project which I strongly oppose.

I write as a concerned citizen and long term resident of Cammeray from my own personal experience and information from various local community members and groups.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

That the Public Works Committee inquire into and report on the impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link Project, including each of its constituent parts being the Warringah freeway upgrade, the Western Harbour Tunnel and the Beaches Link, including:

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

No comment can be made on the adequacy of the business case as, it is to my understanding and great concern, a business case including the costs benefits ratio for this major public works project has as this late stage of the process still not as yet been published.

A properly informed decision on this project requires a detailed business case to be presented for due consideration.

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

Alternative options , particularly public transport alternatives were not given anywhere near an appropriate or adequate level of consideration in the EIS.

Improving Public transport services to the Northern Beaches should in my opinion be given close consideration as an option. The area is poorly served and sensible improvements in services could potentially could solve the problem at much lower costs to communities, environment, and taxpayers. Yet this essential option seems to have been dismissed without any near an adequate level of consideration.

A reliable and properly informed decision on this project would require a detailed examination of all other alternatives before any work commences.

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

No comment. But as is typically the case as with other recent major public works such as the Sydney Light Rail and the Westconnex unpredicted overruns can be of significant magnitude resulting in huge liabilities to NSW taxpayers and reducing funds for other services.

We cannot be certain whether this is the best use of public money when there is no business case or cost benefit ratio .

(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,

No comment. Has the goal been defined?

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

I am a long term resident of Cammeray, an affected area.

Personally, I was only made aware of the project by another resident while walking home through our Cammeray Golf Course. Until that time I had completely unaware of the alarming extent of what was being proposed for our home suburb. And in subsequent conversations with others at our local park, Tunks Park, found that very few had likewise heard anything much about it and if they had it was only through the unofficial local grapevine.

Since then I have made the effort to keep myself informed by joining our local council precinct group and keeping in touch with other local resident groups.

At no time whatsoever have I received any information or been made aware form of consultation process with any local or state authorities.

In conclusion I would have to say there has been very little evidence of any significant effort by our authorities to inform or consult with members of our local area about this major project.

(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,

Since Covid my first hand experience in my commute to work in the CBD is the traffic patterns have totally changed. Now more people are working at home and having flexible hours the peak hour traffic seems much lighter and moves much faster across the bridge from Cammeray.

Many of these changes brought about by the Covid pandemic such as flexible working hours and changed traffic patterns are very popular and likely to persist as Covid is probably with us for some time yet meaning these lifestyle changes will continue to be an essential component of our public health response.

Such significant changes in population, work and travel patterns since the Covid pandemic definitely need to be taken into consideration now in assessing the transportation need for the Northern Beaches. Any conclusions or recommendations based on previous data may no longer be valid and should be reassessed under current conditions for a reliably informed decision to be made on the project.

(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,

The Project Business Case Evaluation Summary, published in April 2021, shows a benefit to cost ratio of between 1.2 and 1.3.

But this does not take into account the costs of the “dis-benefits” mentioned in the Infrastructure Australia summary, namely:

“Road use externalities, which include air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, noise and water pollution, impacts on landscape, urban separation, and road damage” and “The reduction in consumer welfare from the charging of tolls on users of the Western Harbour Tunnel.”

Full disclosure of this base case financial model should be published as part of a proper business case where it can be closely analysed and publicly scrutinised .

I think we are entitled to assume this would be the case for any major government project.

(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,

When a full and comprehensive business case has not been published there is obviously not the appropriate level of transparency or accountability that would be expected of a public sector body.

The residents and taxpayers of NSW are entitled to be included in any such major public project involving significant impact on our transport system, local communities, environment and the public purse. Our authorities are entrusted with serving our best interests. Flawed decision making processes can lead to costly mistakes and irreparable damage. All of which could have been avoided had the process been subjected to the highest standards of transparency and accountability that our community expects and deserves.

In my opinion strong consideration should be given to reviewing all outdated data in view of the significant changes to population, work and travel patterns since the Covid pandemic. It is essential to good governance that these processes be transparent and above reproach. We expect our public sector should be held accountable for decisions made on our account.

If there is a strong case for the tunnel then there is no reason it should not be transparent and subject to close scrutiny.

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

Local Bushland and wildlife

I am informed that this tunnel project will result in the clearing of over 16 acres of bushland habitat at the top of a catchment with flow on effects to the rest of Flat Rock Gully, Tunks Park, Middle Harbour, the Sailors Bay foreshores, and local and regional north-south and east-west wildlife corridors.

The proposed area of Flat Rock Gully, Tunks Park is right beside a popular well maintained walking track winding through a beautiful area of natural bushland that is in regular daily use for recreation, exercise, bush walking, bike riding, dog walking and general enjoyment of nature. Personally I have walked that track a few times a week for the past 20 years and the park it's a great local meeting place

It's a peaceful natural reserve, a scarce commodity in our local area and highly valued by the community which has fought hard to protect and preserve this precious natural bushland reserve on other occasions. Yet there has been no consultation regarding the devastating impact of this massive project which will clear a significant area of that bushland removing over 300 trees, dump large volumes of toxic waste in a fragile environment beside a popular walking track which also happens to be adjacent to popular sports fields used regularly by local school groups.

This area is also a vital wildlife habitat, a commodity in very short supply in the area. It is home to many local species including many threatened species, some which we have been fortunate enough to see and hear at times including the Powerful Owl. It is home to a wonderful variety of bird life, we see water dragons, ducks and eels along the river. The destruction of habitat, noise and disruption will be devastating for the local wildlife.

As a volunteer with our local North Sydney Council Bushcare group I have learnt a lot about our local wildlife and environment and appreciate the need to care and maintain these vital residual reserves to ensure the survival of our local species. We are so fortunate to live in a city where we still have the opportunity for close contact with the natural environment and need to work hard

to preserve this precious element of life in Sydney from the ever present threat of over development which has rendered so many other cities of the world less liveable .

The experience of nature has been a vital community resource to the community during the Covid pandemic benefiting both physical and mental health. Daily Tunks Park and the Flat Rock Gully walking track is in regular use for by schools and sports clubs, dog walkers, locals exercising, families, kids playing riding bikes. And during the pandemic lockdown it was of huge benefit providing vital and safe access outdoors for all.

You cannot replace a vital and popular community resource such as this with mere offset credits.

Marine

Pollution from dredging the harbour floor , dispersion of contaminated sediment , destruction of foreshore areas and increased marine traffic involved in this project will be devastating also for the local marine environment, particularly when so much has been done to restore the health of these waterways

Climate Change

Environmental impacts such as the climate change impacts of increased green house emissions from greater car use and traffic congestion compared to public transport have not been considered.

Air Quality

The benefits of alternatives such as public transport on air quality should be considered . Particularly important when it is proposed to place air ventilation stacks in close proximity to children in local primary schools.

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

I am very concerned about the potential toxic effects of this massive construction on our local residential area. It will bring a lot of noise, traffic and air pollution to our area for many years during construction.

There's potential for toxic dust from the dumping site in vicinity of houses , recreational areas, playing fields, waterways and wildlife habitat which all needs to be monitored prevented and protected.

Personally I think we are entitled to demand that our government take all necessary precautions to prevent any harmful impacts on our local community and environment.

Furthermore the details of any such proposed safeguards and the process of enforcement needs to be presented for community consultation. To date I have not been informed of any such process.

Government should be working towards improving our quality of life.

Inflicting years of noisy dirty construction on families of a residential area to build a tunnel which will potentially bring permanent traffic congestion and air pollution to our area, destroy vital bushland and pollute waterways without even a proper business case or due consideration of vital environmental impacts is not acceptable and I certainly hope the committee will hold this project to proper account.

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

It has been determined that the impact of the projects on nearby public sites includes the permanent loss of 2.8 hectares of community green space, equivalent to four soccer fields, in Cammeray Park; and the impact on areas such as Bicentennial Reserve, Flat Rock Gully, Northbridge Baths and Clive Park mentioned above.

The BLT also poses contamination risks to Tunks Park which is at risk from contamination emanating from the old tip site in Flat Rock Gully, as notified to the EPA by Willoughby Council in February 2021 pursuant to section 60 of the Contaminated Land Management Act.1979. Tunks Park is in regular use by school and other sports groups .

Parents have a right to informed of any health risks their children may being exposed to, as do the many other recreational users of the park and walking tracks. Of particular concern is the fact that many users are local state primary school children where I would have thought the state government has a direct duty of care to exercise and should be held accountable.

(m) any other related matter.

No comment

I thank the committee for their consideration of this submission.

Yours sincerely

PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE

Committee membership

The Hon Daniel Mookhey MLC The Hon Mark Banasiak MLC Ms Abigail Boyd MLC

The Hon Sam Farraway MLC The Hon Trevor Khan MLC The Hon Shayne Mallard MLC The Hon Tara Moriarty MLC

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