

Submission
No 255

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTERN HARBOUR TUNNEL AND BEACHES LINK

Organisation: North Sydney Community Independent Councillors

Date Received: 16 June 2021

Councillor Zoë Baker, Wollstonecraft Ward, North Sydney Council
Councillor MaryAnn Beregi, Victoria Ward, North Sydney Council
Councillor Tony Carr, Tunks Ward, North Sydney Council

The Hon. Daniel Mookhey, MLC
Chair, Public Works Committee
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

16 June 2021

Dear Chairperson,

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

We refer to the Terms of Reference in respect of the above Inquiry and are grateful that your Committee has established the Inquiry into the impact of these road projects.

We are truly independent councillors on North Sydney Council and make the following submission to the Inquiry as individuals.

The Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link (WHT/BL) projects will not deliver any amelioration to traffic congestion and will have devastating environmental, health and social impacts at significant financial cost to the State.

We urge the Committee to recommend that the WHT/BL not proceed and that the funds be expended on public transport infrastructure and other much needed transport and community infrastructure across the State, particularly in rural and regional areas.

We submit the following summary of our concerns and objections to the projects:

Terms of Reference (a), (f), (h) and (i) – business case, consultation, transparency

- (a) the adequacy of the business case for the project, including the cost benefits ratio,***
- (f) the consultation methods and effectiveness, both with affected communities and stakeholders,***
- (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,***
- (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,***

Business case: The State Government has not published the business case for the projects component parts, including any costs benefit analysis. The estimated costs of the projects are approximately \$14-16 billion, or approximately \$1billion per kilometre.

The absence of the business case and any costs benefits analysis is unacceptable for a public works infrastructure project of this size and scope.

The business case ought to be published to provide transparency and accountability and to allow the public to make informed submissions. The projects are purportedly for a public purpose using public funds and ought to be open to public scrutiny.

It seems reasonable to conclude that, in the absence of such scrutiny, the “business case” may be inadequate or conclude that the costs of the project are unjustified in the context of alternative projects.

Inadequate notification: The notification of both projects has been flawed and inadequate since inception. To conduct “community engagement” on an infrastructure project of this size and scope under the cover of COVID-19 demonstrates utter contempt for both the process and the residents, students, businesses and workers affected by the proposal.

The notification periods for the EIS’ provided too little time for the community to digest and respond to voluminous and technical documents (more than 9,000 pages of each project EIS). It was clear that many people significantly impacted by these projects were unaware that the consultation was underway and were, consequently, unable to participate.

Furthermore, the separation of the projects into components with staggered and separate notification would appear to be deliberate in order to make it very difficult for the (non-expert members of the) public to properly understand the details of the project in its entirety.

Finally, part of the utter inadequacy of the notification and community consultation is the inadequacy of the documents on exhibition. For example, the proponent failed in both projects to meet the requirements set out in the Secretary’s Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs)

The State Government has an obligation to be a “model applicant” in submitting any State Significant Infrastructure application. The project applications do not meet the standard expected of a model applicant.

There are internal inconsistencies within the submitted documents and a failure to meet the requirements of the SEARS. For example, the proponent has failed to demonstrate any adequate analysis of “how alternatives to and options within the project were analysed to inform the selection of the preferred alternative / option”, including public transport options. Furthermore, both EISs are littered with numerous mistakes and inaccuracies in the various technical reports.

Terms of Reference (j) and (l) – environmental impact/impact on public sites

***(j) the impact on the environment, including marine ecosystems,
(l) the impact of the project on nearby public sites, including Yurulbin Point and Dawn Fraser Baths,***

Devastating environmental and social impacts of the projects: The environmental impacts associated with dredging and cofferdam construction in the harbour are significant, unnecessary and will result in adverse and permanent impacts on water quality and marine biodiversity.

The proposed submerged tunnel construction method across Middle Harbour requires significant dredging and sediment disturbance of the harbour floor.

As the project facilitates private vehicle travel and will result in induced demand, there will be consequential environmental impacts from increased traffic movements along the tunnel corridor.

The projects will have devastating adverse impacts on the environment including, but not limited to:

- disturbance to the Middle Harbour floor and consequential impacts on maritime ecology and heritage;

- water quality in Middle Harbour and throughout the entire catchment along the tunnel corridor, marine biodiversity, foraging habitat as well as known roosting sites of threatened species;
- loss of Council's stormwater harvesting and filtration facility in Cammeray Park;
- loss of thousands of trees with adverse impacts on flora and fauna and biodiversity of the project corridor;
- on-going impacts of "induced demand" as motorists take advantage of increased capacity and the congestion problems, over time, continue to be replicated on an increasing scale leading to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions and particulate matter.

Air quality: Existing air quality in the North Sydney Local Government Area is poor – the community health impacts due to the proximity of a highly dense and sensitive population to the existing Warringah Expressway will be adversely and significantly exacerbated if the project proceeds.

The location of unfiltered ventilation stacks close to pre-schools, primary and secondary schools and hospitals are outrageous for any public infrastructure project and must be abandoned.

Traffic: The projects fail to provide a sustainable response to metropolitan congestion. The provision of such tunnels is counter to all reasonable and sustainable transport and traffic planning evidence and principles. The projects will result in significant adverse impacts including, but not limited to, significant net additional traffic on Berry Street, Miller Street, Falcon Street and Pacific Highway (south of Falcon Street) as well as significant reductions in levels of service.

The occupation of construction site BL1 (the Cammeray Golf Course construction site) will be extended by 2 years to 7 years in total as a direct result of the projects. This will cause significant flow-on impacts on other arterial and local roads in the North Sydney local government area.

The projects will directly and indirectly impact upon numerous adopted and draft State and Local Government strategic projects and initiatives. The proposal will cut a swathe through the North Sydney CBD public domain initiatives without delivering any real benefits to ameliorate or ease traffic congestion within the region.

Loss of public open (green) space: There is an existing lack of adequate public open space in the North Sydney local government area, in particular, and the whole of the project corridor more generally.

The projects will have a devastating impact on existing public open space (particularly green space) in North Sydney and the whole of the project corridor. In North Sydney LGA alone, there will be a permanent loss of 28,896m² of land in Cammeray Park and the removal of Council's stormwater harvesting facility.

There is absolutely no need for the proposed WHT/Beaches Link/Gore Hill Freeway Connection Motorway Facilities Buildings to be located on the surface. The proposed location of these facilities will have significant adverse visual impacts and will result in the permanent loss of precious, highly valued public green space.

The proposal will have devastating impacts on public open space, particularly vital urban bushland, in Flat Rock Creek, Middle Harbour, Seaforth and Balgowlah.

Heritage: The projects will result in unacceptable and significant impacts upon, numerous Heritage items of State and Local Significance including items of maritime and convict heritage. Further, the proposal will have a devastating impact on a number of items of Aboriginal heritage and numerous other remnant evidence of first inhabitants.

The EIS acknowledges these impacts on Aboriginal heritage and heritage items and proposes inadequate management strategies that cannot be relied upon to protect and preserve heritage along the tunnel corridor.

Visual bulk and scale: The proposal will result in unacceptable adverse impacts on visual amenity including the provision of large, ugly acoustic screens along the route and the impacts of the buildings to house the on-going operations of the tunnels.

Public Domain impacts: The proposal will have unacceptable significant adverse impacts on the public domain and permanently alienate public open space across the whole of the project corridor, including but not limited to:

- Impacts on aboriginal and natural heritage at Berry's Bay - provision of a construction platform 5 years and impacts on harbour;
- Coal Loader, Balls Head – proposed tunnel to run under urban bushland with adverse impacts on aboriginal heritage sites and items of State and local heritage significance;
- St Leonard's Park, significant disruption to and loss of green space, loss of heritage. The current preliminary works are causing issues with contamination, dust and noise and sterilising large swathes of the park from public occupation;
- Cammeray Golf Course – permanent loss of public open space and heavy construction for 7 years, loss of stormwater harvesting facility that sustainably services other parks in the local government area. Devastating environmental impacts of the proposed permanent double unfiltered stack adjacent to the Park;
- Flat Rock Gully Dive Site – significant adverse impacts on aboriginal heritage. Disturbance of contaminated former tip site and to a major water catchment area and flood zone. The proposed dive site competes with massive sewage tunnel. Significant and permanent loss of trees with consequential impacts on flora and fauna;
- Adverse and continuing impacts on Tunks Park, Middle Harbour and Spit Reserve, Clive Park (significant Aboriginal and Natural Heritage), Balgowlah Golf Course, Wakehurst Parkway and Burnt Bridge Creek.

Conclusion

These projects will not deliver any amelioration to traffic congestion and will have devastating environmental, health and social impacts at significant unjustified costs to the people of NSW.

In summary, we urge you to recommend that the projects not proceed for the following reasons:

- a) the lack of a business case for the project
- b) lack of meaningful community consultation
- c) the lack of alternative transport options including public transport
- d) the lack of filtering in the proposed exhaust stacks

- e) significant and devastating loss of public open space and future open space, loss of sporting facilities, loss of trees and canopy, loss of stormwater harvesting and water treatment infrastructure
- f) significant adverse impacts on public health and wellbeing, particularly on schools, school children and residents
- g) devastating environmental impacts on waterways, reserves, flora and fauna
- h) inappropriate and untested mitigation measures
- i) significant adverse impacts on aboriginal heritage and maritime environment

There are no tangible public benefits to be gained from this proposal and significant public funds that should be expended on more sustainable and worthy projects.

We agree to have our submission and names published.

Yours faithfully

Councillor Zoë Baker, Councillor MaryAnn Beregi and Councillor Tony Carr

North Sydney Council