

Submission
No 290

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 18 June 2021

Partially
Confidential

Dear Public Works Committee,

I am grateful that the Western Harbour Tunnel (including the Warringah Freeway Upgrade) and Beaches Link (including the Gore Hill extension) projects have been referred to an inquiry as they are troubling projects being bulldozed through the planning process without a strong business case or proper community consultation or environmental consideration. As both a citizen of NSW and a resident of North Balgowlah I strongly object to this project and the way the planning process has proceeded so far.

The project seems like a thinly veiled “traffic management solution” that seeks to plug a region that is currently not facing many road tolls into the road toll, money making network run by Transurban at the expense of community, the environment and the NSW taxpayer.

Following are some comments for your consideration according to your terms of reference.

- (b) the adequacy of the consideration of alternative options AND
- (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

I have not seen a publicly available business case satisfying me that other non-tunnel or non road widening options were considered and costed. The people of NSW will be saddled with an expensive and environmentally damaging, unsustainable option for at least the next 50 years if this project goes ahead. The EIS points to significant risks to health and safety while delivering poor outcomes. The people of North Balgowlah and surrounds will have their suburb irrevocably damaged. Where are the details of alternatives that provide the opportunity to transform Sydney into a world class, healthy and sustainable city with a strong public transport system? Building bigger roads and tunnels has been shown to simply attract more vehicle trips (and toll revenue) and this is not the outcome we seek.

At the very least, an alternative public transport feasibility study should be undertaken and a new, post COVID traffic study modelled on more people remote working and having greater flexibility to commute at off peak times. Friends and family members that live locally on the Northern Beaches are reporting they are not going to be returning full-time back in the office post COVID. I personally have now adjusted to an active commute that involves more walking plus bike riding and public transport combinations to get to work in the East of Sydney each day plus have flexibility to change my start and finish times too. So many people bought bikes during lockdown – it would be a missed opportunity not to capitalise on supporting bicycle (including e-bikes) users to use their bikes for more trips.

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

As a resident of an affected community I feel that the residents have not had time or expertise even to digest the huge amount of documents that were generated just by the EIS alone (some 22kg worth if you got the printed version). I also know that many people feel helpless in the face of well funded proponents and unwieldy documentation and information available and are suffering submission fatigue and overwhelm.

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

In particular, I object to the project due to the disastrous climate and sustainability outcomes and the negative impact on our precious waterways and green spaces.

- I object to this project because it does nothing to address our rising greenhouse gas emissions and associated climate crisis. We need innovative solutions and support for mass transit and sustainable transit options. The project overall seems to deliver motorists to new places to experience traffic congestion without actually reducing the problem - the traffic itself – all those one-person car trips.

- I object to the continued loss of biodiversity in NSW this project will cause both during construction and operation through removal/ destruction of habitat and pollution of habitats (dredging / disturbance of toxic marine sediments for example). Pockets of green space in urban areas provide food and shelter for many native animals as well as a place where people can connect with and recreate in nature at their local community level without having to travel far. At the Beaches Link end of the tunnel project the destruction of bushland connecting Manly Warringal War Memorial Reserve (Manly Dam) with Garigal National Park will kill flora and fauna (many threatened and endangered species live there) and put at risk the gene pool in both areas by cutting off an important and already tenuous wildlife corridor.

- Water pollution to both freshwater and marine environments (in the harbour as well as offshore thanks to dumping) is not justified for the purported benefits to the community.

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

I also consider the construction and operational risks are far too high for residents and school children along the route at both geographical ends of this massive project.

- For instance, the cohesive, community-minded suburb of North Balgowlah will be surrounded top and bottom by tunnel exit/entry points and construction sites. Impacts to children and local people from ongoing noise and vibrations over many years during construction, pollution, increased heavy traffic movements, lost community land/green spaces and direct destruction of environmental assets (swaths of bushland removed to widen Wakehurst Parkway) as well as ongoing damage to the environment (such as water runoff impacting on water quality in Manly Dam) is not worth the benefit of a few less minutes on a car trip to the city. Further, there are 2 primary schools and a high school all sited very close to construction areas, tunnel stacks and entry / exit points. Using the precautionary principle these stacks should not be sited anywhere near schools or residences without world class filtering technology.

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

Manly Dam (Manly Warringal Memorial Park)

I object to the ecological damage that will occur to the Manly Dam park and on the other side of the Wakehurst Parkway too into Garigal National Park.

I object to 20.92 hectares of threatened species habitat including endangered Duffy's Forest habitat will be destroyed including the removal of some 2000 trees.

It is unacceptable that the ex Sydney Water site at Seaforth, that was promised to be returned to Manly Dam, is earmarked for “grubbing, topsoil stripping and bulk earthworks” as a construction support area and then later remediation for return to Manly Dam. This is the equivalent of borrowing someone's family member for a while and then returning their limp and flayed body after torturing them. There will be nothing of the original biodiversity value left.

I object to earth works and clearing at the top of sensitive water catchments feeding Manly Dam and associated creeks threatening water quality in the last place humans in Sydney can go safely swimming in a freshwater lake as well as threatening the fauna such as the Climbing Galaxis fish.

The construction and operation of a 4 lane, 40 m wide freeway (Wakehurst Parkway) across a ridge that is not wide enough to accommodate it will lead to increased nutrient, sediment and chemical loads, increased turbidity which also leads to increased algal blooms and eutrophication in the Manly Dam waterways. This catchment drains to the local beaches, Queenscliff and these impacts will travel down the catchment.

Not considered in the EIS is the issue of increased microplastic load in the catchment. It is estimated that microplastics associated with the wear and tear of synthetic rubber of vehicle tyres could account for some 40% of microplastic loads in waterways – we do not understand the impacts associated with these styrene – butadiene rubber particles.

Manly Dam was gazetted as a State Park in 2017 in order to strengthen its conservation values. This project does nothing but denigrate and destroy conservation values of the park.

It is a living War Memorial and the tunnel construction and ongoing operation will be a grave desecration of this site. The Northern Beaches Council is currently nominating the Manly Warringah Memorial Park for National Heritage listing due to its cultural and environmental values.

The 40m wide 4 lane extension of the Wakehurst Parkway is also untenable in terms of dividing fauna and to a lesser extent flora populations either side, effectively genetically isolating them and thereby weakening their genetic resilience – a few fauna tunnels under the road will not suffice as an ecological bridge and either large scale over passes (wildlife movement systems) such as those used by the Brisbane City Council in the Compton Road project. Even better – pay the money and tunnel straight through to the intersection of Warringah Road and Wakehurst Parkway and reduce the speed on the existing stretch of 2 lane Wakehurst Parkway between dawn and dusk.

Burnt Bridge Creek

I object to the destruction of the Burnt Bridge Creek.

The value of green sites, remnant bushland, trees and the green lungs of our city is only increasing. The proposed damage to the Burnt Bridge Creek will be irreparable and impact not only the local people and bike commuters that use and love the area but also the flora and fauna which depend on this wildlife corridor and reliable source of water to survive. Projected waste water flows are unacceptable as is the water draw downs that will see the creek effectively dry up with baseflow reduction of 69-96% modelled. This effectively leaves the creek as a stormwater drain that only has water in it after large rainfall events.

On a personal note, this creek and its walking bike path may not seem like much but people can walk through the beautiful, vegetated area in shade during summer. Our summers are getting hotter too so having these cool shaded areas to walk through, take our dogs, teach our kids to ride a bike or scooter, show them native animals such as Eastern Water Dragons, Flying Foxes, possum dreys, eels and ducks along the way is such a special thing for a community to have access to. During May this year I came across an echidna searching for food next to the Burnt Bridge Creek bike track.

Middle Harbour and Clontarf

I object to the dangerous plumes of contaminated sediments that have been modelled to impact Middle harbour, Spit West and Clontarf areas of the harbour. This is unacceptable, as is the lack of detail about how these sediments will be dealt with. People use these waters (in and on them via sailing, paddling, swimming, dog swimming) and fish from these waters. Flora and fauna live in or visit these waters – even a whale visited a few years ago.

In summary, this project has missed an opportunity to transform Sydney into a world class, healthy and sustainable city with a strong public transport system. At the very least, an alternative public transport feasibility study should be undertaken and published before any further planning occurs. In this way the impacts and outcomes can be fairly compared and the residents of Sydney can dodge the awful bullet and legacy of environmental destruction and economic waste that is this current project.