

Submission
No 326

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

SUBMISSION TO PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY ON THE BEACHES LINK TUNNEL

Introduction

Objection to the Beaches Link Tunnel

We are a local Seaforth family who appreciates this parliamentary inquiry into the Beaches Link Tunnel. We strongly object to the tunnel and hope this inquiry stops the Beaches Link Tunnel from progressing. We hope it is replaced with:

- clean, green public transport solutions
- increased post-COVID support for working from home
- more flexible public transport including an increase in peak time bus capacity.

We have the amazing privilege of living in one of the most beautiful areas of the world. We utilise our local beaches, creeks, bushland and dam almost daily and want to see this unique area, and its flora and fauna, preserved for generations to come. Not diminished like for this proposal.

We also appreciate living a community where we can breathe fresh air (relatively) free from pollutants and utilise roads which function efficiently and safely. We enjoy sending our children to local public schools where we know they are not near major construction sites or tunnel exhaust stacks. We have major concerns about the safety of the northern beaches community during and after construction of the proposed tunnel.

We like to know tax funds are being utilised efficiently for projects which will have a strong and positive impact on the community. Not wasted on inefficient tunnel projects which have little business case support.

We believe the new Western Harbour Tunnel needs to be assessed independently from the proposed Beaches Link Tunnel since they are different projects which can occur in isolation.

General overview of objections relating to the terms of reference of the inquiry.

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

There is no business case for the Beaches Link Tunnel. It has been assessed alongside the Western Harbour Tunnel project, when it requires a separate analysis (as it is a separate and distinct project). In fact a community member has produced the best source of information on the cost-benefits of the Beaches Link which showed that there was little merit in the project. The funds would be far better spend on NSW projects which would produce a real gain in transport solutions. A key point is that the tunnel project was proposed before COVID and uses traffic data from 2016. As we now know there is a high proportion of our beaches population who now work from home at least part of the week. I now fully work from home post- COVID, when I used to commute to the city, and will continue to do so on a permanent basis. There are many others like me.

The Beaches Link EIS also makes exaggerated claims of saving 38 minutes travel times on journeys that currently only take around 30 minutes at peak times. This public information is flawed and served only to try and support an unjustified proposal.

(b) the adequacy of the consideration of alternative options

We are in an age where people want to see clean, green public transport systems and a move away from cars. Cities across Europe are moving away from cars. This proposal for Sydney's northern beaches is totally against what the public want and what other countries are doing. We need to explore options for improved (and

preferably green) bus services , rail options to link Chatswood and Dee Why and light rail/tram alternatives. Having visited Zurich and other parts of Switzerland pre-COVID I was impressed by their lack of reliance on cars and their impressive tram systems. As an environmentally supportive community, the beaches voters would get behind options which enable them to travel without having to use their cars.

It is also worth noting that there is increased support for bike/e-bike transports as well as creating de-centralised business hubs. Frenchs Forest is expanding, Brookvale is expanding, Mona Vale and Warriewood are expanding. All present opportunities for northern beaches residents to stay close to home and commute via bike or public transport. We should be looking at new innovative ways to work, not relying on the old, outdated system of people driving to the CBD.

(c) the cost of the project,

The Beaches Link Tunnel is the most expensive of any road tunnel in NSW (at cost per km) despite there being no proven need for it. It has highly complex engineering which means there are likely to be hidden problems/costs with timelines and budgets blowing out. The recent infrastructure project at Frenchs Forest blew out in timeline and cost and created havoc for years for the local community and commuters. There are better ways to spend our tax funded dollars including on new bus networks, or a rail/tram project.

Whilst other toll-financed tunnels take vehicles through or around parts of Sydney, the Beaches Link Tunnel channels traffic to a 'dead-end'. The Beaches Link will not generate enough traffic for the project to be funded from tolls as per other tunnel models and will need a multi-billion dollar subsidy from the NSW government and taxpayers. This is not a good use of government funds.

Locals have already said they will not use the toll tunnel since it is too expensive. It is not something that is thought to offer value for money, especially since it will not save much (if any) travel time. People will continue to use free travel along Military Road. The project will not fund itself.

(e) the extent to which the project is meeting the original goals of the project,

The goals of this project were to reduce congestion and make journeys quicker. However there is no proof provided that is the case. In fact the EIS stated that many increases in travel times would be seen due to increased traffic at intersections e.g. Warringah Rd, Military Rd, Warringah Freeway due to the proposed tunnel. There would also be an increase in traffic due to people travelling to the beaches at weekends and holidays, putting significant pressure on local infrastructure, beaches, parking and communities who are not set up to accommodate up to 30,000+ extra vehicles in peak periods.

The objectives can be more easily achieved through increased support for working from home, more flexible public transport and an increase in peak time direct bus routes.

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

The public consultation through the EIS process was not adequate. Most people remain unaware of the impacts of the tunnel since there has been minimal publicity on its impacts. There was a COVID lockdown during the EIS consultation period so people were distracted, and if interested they could only attend virtual information sessions with little opportunities for meaningful two-way engagement. There was also little time for the public to submit their submissions. Design changes have further impacted the consultation opportunities with design plans changing during the process.

(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.

Significant changes in travel have occurred since COVID. These are permanent in many cases with people working from home more. There is less need for a tunnel to be build since commuter numbers have decreased significantly.

(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 NSW Government should absolutely publish the finance model and benefit cost ratio for the project to justify why it is needed. There are many other projects across the state that are in need of financing. For example regional areas often do not get funding, as it is skewed towards major cities. This project needs to be justified, particularly given the high budget and significant possibility that more funds will be needed due to project blow outs. There is also a likely need for the NSW Government to subsidise the project at a future date and this needs to be acknowledged publicly too.

(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,

To date, no information has been released that justifies to us that this project is needed. We need to see a strong business case and cost-benefit analysis. We need to be sure the EIS concerns will be met. We need to ensure this is not just a political project headed by Minister Andrew Constance in advance of the 2023 elections, as it currently appears to be. Unfortunately, what Andrew Constance and his counterparts eg. MP James Griffin do not realise is that the local beaches community do not want this project (only 3% supported the project during the EIS project) and the liberal government are likely to lose many voters over this project.

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

The Beaches Link tunnel will lead to the destruction of the Burnt Bridge Creek which would lose 96% of its water flow through this proposal. Our family regularly uses this area to connect with nature, exercise and to travel between Seaforth and Manly. It is an area of environmental significance which should be protected at all costs. This proposal would result in significant hydrological and ecological impacts resulting in permanent loss of habitat and associated biotic communities. Instead of a beautiful creek ecosystem we would have a series of disconnected pools with poor water quality and reduced ability to support flora and fauna. The impacts on the creek will also likely have devastating impacts on the biological communities further down the creek down to Queenscliff Lagoon.

The Beaches Link tunnel will disturb toxic chemicals at Middle Harbour during dredging, posing a major threat to the marine environment. Important and successful work has been done to improve the quality of Sydney Harbour in recent years. This proposal goes backwards for the work to protect our harbour environment and its marine life. The Australian Marine Sciences Association has raised risks to marine life due to the dredging of contaminated sediment for the Western Harbour Tunnel, and the same concerns would be relevant for dredging in Middle Harbour.

I object to the removal of 39 football fields of bushland along with approx 2,000 trees for this project. Our environment, home to important plant and animal species, should not be removed for road infrastructure through this project. These areas are home to threatened species such as the Eastern Pygmy Possum and well as many other native species.

I object to the ongoing pollution coming from the Wakehurst Parkway widening, impacting Garigal National Park and Manly Dam potentially resulting in the extinction of rare flora and fauna. These areas should be managed to preserve their health so the community, and wildlife which use them, are not adversely impacted. Our family regularly uses Manly Dam and would be one of thousands of families who would suffer if its environmental quality is impacted and it was no longer safe for swimming activities.

I object that during construction, 425,000 litres of waste water will be washed into Manly Lagoon every day, affecting its biotic community, the water quality of this important area and impact the thousands of people

who utilise this popular beach area.

I object that there will be a long-term loss of groundwater in the catchment. This would impact our green spaces, including local trees.

The last mainland population of little penguins live on the Middle Harbour foreshore in Seaforth and Castlecrag, where coffer dams will be used in construction. The EIS acknowledges that the penguins will most probably be forced to leave the area permanently. Their habitat must be protected at all costs.

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

Residents and schools will be affected by noise pollution, increased traffic and rat-running. Residents and schools in the areas around the tunnel stacks will suffer increased pollution from the un-filtered and dangerous tunnel exhaust stacks. Our children go to school right by one of these unfiltered exhaust stacks placing them at high risk of health issues.

I strongly object to unfiltered exhaust stacks being included in the project. These would emit double the maximum limit of particulates recommended by the World Health Authority. covering a 1.2km radius per stack, stretching across numerous suburbs and many schools and childcare centres. The dangers associated with such unfiltered, polluted air includes cancers, emphysema and asthma.

Overseas projects use filtered stacks. It seems as though the NSW Government doesn't want to justify the expense of filtered stacks in this project, despite the clear risks to community health. They should absolutely use filtering systems to ensure the health of our community.

The longevity of this project means that school children eg at Seaforth Public School and Balgowlah Boys would be studying amongst construction, noise, dust and pollution for perhaps all of their residency at the school. The health impacts could be significant. For example children at local schools may have to endure noise at 16-20 decibels over recommended noise management levels.

I object that the construction will have over 3000 vehicles per day and 1.5 heavy vehicles per minute moving across the construction areas. This will result in traffic chaos and safety risks along roads not designed for such vehicles. For example heavy trucks will be potentially lethal if navigating down Frenchs Forest Road with the sharp turn by Seaforth Public School, particularly in wet conditions, surrounded by local, young children coming and going from school. Heavy vehicles moving from the site down Military Road will result in enhanced traffic congestion in this area for the duration of the build.

(l) the impact of the project on nearby public sites

There will be a loss of green space in this area as a result of the proposed Beaches Link Tunnel. This goes against what MP Rob Stokes claims to be wanting to increase.

There will be the loss of Balgowlah Golf Course, the destruction of Burnt Bridge Creek as we know it, a negative impact on Clontarf Beach and its parks from disturbed sediment, run-off affecting swimming at Manly Dam and Manly Lagoon and a negative impact on indigenous sites near Wakehurst Parkway

With MP Rob Stokes claiming to want to increase green space, why are we destroying much loved and used green space through this project?

(m) any other related matter.

I object to this project's proposal to spend \$12 billion dollars on a tunnel that will hugely and detrimentally impact the northern beaches community during its construction over a period of at least 6 years (likely longer), when it has only minimal traffic congestion gains. Estimates are that it will reduce travel time to the city by

only a few minutes. In the meantime our children's health will be impacted whilst they are at school, our ability to move around the area will be impacted by increased construction traffic, our local environment will be destroyed, our green spaces will be diminished and our tax funds wasted on an unnecessary project.

The Beaches Link Tunnel needs to be re-assessed as a stand-alone project, separate to the Western Harbour Tunnel. This will show that the social, financial, health and environmental impacts are not justifiable for the project. Far better solutions do exist using public transport, work from home options and creating local business hubs.

Conclusion

The Beaches Link Tunnel is an outdated and costly concept which has minimal benefit for transport. It will destroy many natural areas of significant beauty utilised by the community, create years of local chaos and present health risks for the local community.

Whilst I appreciate progress is necessary, far more effective transport solutions can be achieved through other means. This Parliamentary Inquiry is so important to ensure that our tax dollars are being spent effectively, and that our elected officials are finding the right solutions to transport issues across our state. They need to be prioritising the correct projects which benefit the community and our environment.

The Beaches Link Tunnel is not a project which should advance. Here is an opportunity for those involved in the Inquiry to make a lasting difference to NSW by disregarding this proposal and instead creating new and more effective opportunities for transport on the beaches.