

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTERN HARBOUR TUNNEL AND BEACHES LINK

Organisation: Anzac Park Public School P & C Association

Date Received: 14 June 2021

Mr Mookhey, Mr Banasiak, Ms Boyd,

Mr Farraway, Mr Kahn, Mr Mallard and Ms Moriarty,

Committee Members

Inquiry into the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link Project

Public Works Committee

Legislative Council

NSW Parliament

Macquarie Street

SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Mookhey, Mr Banasiak, Ms Boyd,

Mr Farraway, Mr Kahn, Mr Mallard and Ms Moriarty,

**RE: SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE WESTERN HARBOUR TUNNEL & BEACHES LINK
PROJECTS BY ANZAC PARK PUBLIC SCHOOL P & C ASSOCIATION**

Thank you for conducting this important inquiry, a much needed effort to gain greater transparency and better outcomes for those affected by these Projects.

We are glad to see a diverse membership of the committee and hope this inquiry is a truly collaborative exercise and not a theatre of partisan politics.

We are the organisation representing concerned parents of children attending Anzac Park Public School, the building housing the School is a Government created 'state of the art' educational facility where there are rooms with large, always open, windows and fans creating passive environmentally friendly heating/cooling but leaving the School extremely sensitive to external air and noise pollution. There is also a 5 storey unroofed atrium within the School building which adds to the exposure to external elements.

Up until now these Projects have been potential future adverse events with the P & C rigorously and vigorously objecting at all possible times through official channels, our members of parliament and the media. They are now very real with the early works presently causing adverse impacts on the School for school children, staff, parents and the local community.

Whilst the P & C objects to these Projects and ideally they do not progress with the Government proceeding with better options, the P & C are realistic and realise the Government is moving ahead so it is now critical to get the best outcomes and reduce adverse impacts. The committee members of the P & C are not in occupations that would enable them to provide a lot of technical responses to the Terms of Reference, our responses outline the parents and local community's concerns and issues with these Projects.

With the Terms of Reference in mind we make the following submission-

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

As there has been no disclosure to the general public of the 'business case' for the Projects it is hard to comment on whether it is adequate or not. Likewise there has been no business cases for alternative options disclosed to the general public. If there had been disclosure we could see the benefits and liabilities of all the options and be in a position to have consultations with the decision makers and comment. Therefore there has been a total lack of transparency, disclosure and consultation on the business cost aspects of the Projects (and other options).

By chance we have recently seen documentation from Infrastructure Australia which purports to be a discussion of the NSW Government's business case for the Projects.

Without accounting or actuarial backgrounds the viewing of the data in the documentation from Infrastructure Australia is that of a lay person.

The issues we observed-

- i. there is a failure to adjust the figures and assessments for the long term effects of the COVID pandemic, that is the work from home ethic, the 'satellite' work place close to home, the stagnation of population growth thru the loss of immigration and foreign students. The cost benefit ratio needs to be reworked with that change incorporated.
- ii. the travel time savings figure is not a net figure. There is no allowance for the additional time incurred by all those using local roads which are adversely affected to facilitate the tunnels and their traffic. There needs to be a net figure with the purported time saving data being adjusted for increases incurred by adversely affected local traffic.
- iii. there is no allowance for the additional time and damage caused by those travellers who avoid the tunnels/tolls and use 'rat runs'. There needs to be an estimated cost for this cost to the community.
- iv. there is no allowance for the inevitable situation post opening of the tunnels (as seen in all the other projects in Sydney) where use when operational increases and purported time savings evaporate with congestion returning. This needs to be considered and included.
- v. the figure for 'road use externalities' which is defined to capture a multitude of issues (air pollution, emissions etc) has no breakdown or explanation as to how that figure was reached. With the greatest respect to the authors of the business case and the Infrastructure Australia report what were they thinking when devising a figure so small to cover such a huge area of adverse impact, the figure is 45% of the figure for vehicle operating cost savings, how absurd and disrespectful to those who will absorb the negative impact of the Projects. The figure provided needs to be rethought and reconsidered and a figure truly reflective of the actual cost be included.
- vi. the figures do not include the potential benefits for filtering the pollution stacks, a cost plus. Why not? It is due to the Government's failure to incorporate filtration of pollution stacks in the Projects, a huge miss for them.

The authors need to go and rethink their figures and come back with something more realistic and closer to the true position.

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

The Projects main documentation, that is the EIS, and, in the case of the Western Harbour Tunnel Project, the Approval documentation, there is little included in relation to alternative options.

There are oblique references to the somewhat half-hearted inclusion of public transport as an afterthought when there should have been a detailed analysis and costing of a public transport option.

Further, for the Beaches Link no other options eg diverting traffic through Chatswood rather than across the Harbour were not detailed in the EIS documentation.

All of these other options were made known to Transport for NSW and the Planning Department early on in the investigation process but not considered and a case for/against provided or required to be considered by those authorities.

If we as a community are going to get to a desired and necessary position on emissions and reduce climate change, serious consideration is required now of the public transport (as electrified by Minister Constance) option over and above the present plan.

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

The estimated cost as disclosed so far is massive, and we have not seen in any documents where it has been stated how the Projects are going to be funded.

As the alleged benefits of the Projects are estimated in 'minutes' being saved (with no reference to what has happened in all the other motorway/tunnel projects, that is the benefits last a very short time and the congestion they hoped to alleviate is then occurring in the motorways/tunnels constructed to remove it) then it is hard to justify the massive cost. Further, that does not allow for the ongoing cost to everyone's health and wellbeing arising from the adverse impacts of the construction and operation of the Projects.

Given the huge overruns and additional costs in previous major infrastructure projects, notwithstanding what may be said in documentation about overruns and related cost, there will be massive additional costs incurred after they start to get them to completion. The drain on the community from the initial cost and subsequent likely additional costs is another reason to not progress the Projects.

The cost of the Projects do not include all the other costs which arise during construction and operation in particular the health impacts. These additional costs need to be properly estimated and included so the community and parliament know the true cost.

- (d) *the consideration of the governance and structure of the project including the use of a development partner model-*

As with the business case, the consideration of other options and cost, there is little to nil disclosed as to the governance and structure of the Projects nor the use of development partners (we assume you are referring to the Government co-opting others to either assist with the financing or way the Projects are delivered) so it is hard for us to be able to comment on those aspects.

The provision of information in clear, concise and easily digestible terms for this and other aspects would be greatly appreciated and assist in assessing whether the Projects are really any good.

Also there is little in the detail of how the Projects during construction and operation will be reviewed, assessed and altered if there are negative outcomes arising. What little there is, is vague and conceptual in form and given the failure to adequately deal with issues arising in other completed projects this aspect should be clear with those assessing, reviewing and altering being independent of Government and given strong legislative backing to make the required decisions for the health of the community, regardless of who owns the project at the time of the decision.

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

We believe the express goal was originally to substantially improve the flow of traffic across the Harbour. We would suggest that tied into that goal were additional goals to improve local traffic in North Sydney, Inner West and Northern Beaches local areas and not adversely affect those areas (with air and noise pollution) when implementing those Projects.

The Projects now indicate 'minutes' improvements only with no accounting for expected return of congestion after a short period of operational use (as has been the case in every other major road infrastructure project in metropolitan Sydney).

The implementation of the Projects will cause massive congestion to local traffic in all the areas we list and create numerous rabbit runs further adversely affecting the flow of local traffic.

During construction and in operation the Projects in their current form adversely affect the communities in the local areas with substantial health risks for both noise and air quality.

The Projects cause massive permanent adverse damage to areas of environmental significance eg Middle Harbour etc, that was not part of the original goal.

If one is to take the Government's actions in proposing the original project, that action included a number of implied goals directly connected to the express goal. This assertion is made on the basis of the altruistic and philanthropic mission statements of politicians. Those implied goals relate to not adversely affecting the community, nature and places of historical and/or environmental significance. As it stands none of those implied goals have been met.

So in response the Projects are not meeting their original goals.

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

Up until recently, consultation consisted of Transport for NSW representatives attending meetings telling the community what they were doing, not answering questions and not altering their position even in the light of widespread opposition. The local community were not heard and felt dejected with no possible recourse against the juggernaut that was and is Transport for NSW.

So up until recently, consultation as the lay person would define it never happened and the exercise purely facilitated the Transport for NSW's ability to tick a box and move forward with plans unaltered.

Whether there has been a change to that version of 'consultation' we must wait and see but there are signs of change for the moment as Transport for NSW did engage with our Principal and P & C Association in relation to safety issues affecting their use of local roads near the School. It is early days, one hopes it is a permanent change but as we said time will tell.

We are concerned that optimism is premature as we have encountered an issue with the early/initial works and Transport for NSW is not yet engaging with us to work out a resolution satisfactory for all affected. As it relates to contamination which will be a major issue going forward with the main construction and operation, our concern is growing that Transport for NSW is retreating to its former self.

- (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*

The COVID pandemic has created a shift in the way the community conducts their lives, particularly where we work with many people now working from home.

Also the pandemic has reduced immigration and travel to this country to nil, which will take years to recover to pre-pandemic levels if it ever does.

We assume (noting the Government has not provided the cost benefit ratio to the public) the cost benefit ratio is based on pre-pandemic work, immigration and travel arrangements which would have involved far greater levels of travel by the community, which in turn would have added to the positive side of the ratio (the time saved by all those people in travelling through the new tunnels) adding to a total which justified the Projects.

As things have changed dramatically and we would argue permanently the Government needs to redo the cost benefit ratio calculations taking these changes into account and we then see if it is still a positive go forward scenario.

- (h) *whether the NSW Government should publish the base case financial model and the benefit cost ratio for the project and its component parts*

Yes the Government is spending \$15billion plus of our dollars so we have a right to see the justification for the Projects.

- (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*

The Projects are not subject to any levels of transparency or accountability close to what should apply to such huge state infrastructure projects with such major financial and human cost involved.

It is entirely inappropriate for the public to hear snippets of information via news reports or the mining of reams of obscure papers issued by Government to try and glean bits of information which might when combined provide something approaching what we should be told and know about the Projects.

The Government needed to be transparent and accountable in that they need to provide clear concise digestible information about the Projects before committing to them so the public can determine if the Projects are an appropriate and good way to spend the public's money.

If one were to be less diplomatic, one might say the Government has been able to get the Projects thru as is due to its failure to provide transparency and accountability in a clear concise and easily digestible way (from local colloquial information the number of members of the public who are positive about the concept but are totally unaware of its short and long term adverse impacts is large).

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

As the Government is taking a short cut in those parts of the Projects where the tunnels cross water with the tunnels not being constructed under the harbour bed but rather sitting on the harbour bed, the impact on the health and wellbeing of marine ecosystems in the harbour is hugely adverse and permanent.

Marine ecosystems will be adversely disturbed and years of toxic material that has settled on the harbour floor will be then mixed through the harbour waters creating environmental havoc to the harbour areas from which there will be no recovery.

With the pollution to be emitted thru the use of the tunnels it beggars belief that when presented with an opportunity to create a massive reduction in emissions and pollution by filtering pollution stacks the Government opts to rely on the incomplete, defective out of date 'science' to not filter. Even if one accepts the 'science' (we do not) it does not say there will be no pollution just it will be dispersed over a wider area, the pollution will still happen when it could be reduced. This would be a big plus for the environment and the community.

Whilst construction occurs there are massive health impacts in dust and disturbing toxic areas amongst other impacts. Both above and below water level, releasing toxins in the air and water. There are no adequate (at a minimum) measures to eliminate or even properly reduce those risks. To date endeavours to ensure at least minimum protections have not been responded to, to assure the community there will be no risk to their health.

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

With respect to construction aside from sensitive stakeholders, like Anzac Park School, where there has been some concessions in early works for the freeway upgrade in relation to safety issues, the processes have largely been on the basis, this is what Transport for NSW are doing, its going to make noise and vibrations potentially at all times of the day and night, so get used to it. We understand there has been some attempts to reduce impacts eg double glazing and alternate accommodation, but the strict manner in which that has been processed has meant people miss out or need to pursue a reasonable outcome because they missed out due to the black and white interpretation of the option provided by transport for NSW.

These issues are arising at the initial stages so it does not bode well for the adversely affected public going forward with the construction process.

The School has been seeking EPA approved air quality monitors be installed now in the School grounds to have base line information ahead of the major air quality issues coming with the works across the freeway at the Cammeray Golf Course site so it can be properly assessed whether the School is adversely affected by pollution from that site and earlier works undertaken to widen Warringah Freeway (the pollution includes vast amounts of silica dust which is extremely harmful to humans and being light is easily airborne forming part of the School's ambient air intake). Discussion has been deferred which is unhelpful plus it would appear Transport for NSW will want to monitor near the Golf Course site not the School which is contrary to what the School needs to get a real figure for the adverse health impact on the School population. Also we are unsure how that method will assist in assessing actual contamination impact with the Freeway widening contamination occurring above ground and in many locations. Hence the need for monitors now on the School site.

Operationally the major issue for processes to deal with impacts on residents (including our school children here) is the failure to have the pollution stacks situated about 250 metres from the School filtered to reduce the release of emissions and other toxins coming from vehicles using the tunnels. The Government is relying on reports (the 'science') which-

- i. are old, and do not include current thought processes and decisions.
- ii. are out of date, and do not include up to date information thoughts and research.
- iii. seek to compare these Projects with others which are very different, comparing apples to oranges. How can a short four lane 3.7 km tunnel servicing a particular area be comparable to a six lane 15km tunnel system servicing most of Sydney.
- iv. are inaccurate and incomplete in their reporting of overseas systems. They refer to a Hong Kong tunnel and say they are unaware if it's pollution stacks are filtered, when at the time of the report that system had filtered stacks and they refer to a Norwegian tunnel system as being comparable where it has unfiltered pollution stacks in a tunnel of comparable length but they fail to note it has stacks every less than 5 km (the distance is 7.5km for these Projects), services 1/5 of the Sydney population and the current sales of electric vehicles is approx. 75% of new car sales (here it is still less than 1%).

- v. has comparisons completed by computer desk top assessment not real world comparisons.
- vi. the authors qualify their results on the basis of assumptions which at the time of those reports were not mandated to happen.
- vii. relate back to earlier reports by the same authors who are therefore unable to alter the starting point of their assessment notwithstanding the world view has moved on to a more emission reduction conscious position.

We are the only country to have tunnel system of this length with the current limited number of unfiltered pollution stacks (only one servicing three systems in the middle), no other country considers it appropriate or in the best interest of their communities.

This process is therefore totally inadequate and needs to be revisited prior to any final decision is made on the installation of filtration systems to the pollution stacks.

Given the way the School at Anzac Park has been built, processes should include consideration for that building, which ultimately if the risk of pollution impacts are not removed may require the retro fit of air conditioning and filters at the top of the atrium along with any other relevant action to reduce the impact of pollution on the children both during construction and in operation.

For other areas the processes are inadequate to remove the risk to the community, evidence of that can be seen by the DPIE requiring a rethink of a number of aspects of the Beaches Link Project where clearly the processes proposed are totally inadequate even for that Department.

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

Public and First Nation Peoples Sites need to be preserved at all costs, we do not feel this has been done and Transport for NSW needs to revisit the plans relating to those places and ensure they are not adversely impacted in any way by the Projects.

(m) *any other related matter*

1. The School needs EPA monitors installed on its site as soon as possible to gain base level figures to then be able to legitimately argue Transport for NSW needs to fix increased pollution during construction and in operation which arises from increases in pollution data post installation and commencement of construction and/or operation.
2. An earlier Legislative Council inquiry about tunnels (I think in 2018) recommended pollution stacks be filtered. This appears to have been ignored. This inquiry needs to pursue filtration and what can be done to require same for these Projects.
3. The Government thru Minister Constance has now pushed for changes to be made in relation to the financial and other assistance to be provided to consumers to promote the purchase of electric vehicles, clearly an acknowledgement the pollution

from the internal combustion vehicles is a major health risk, and in reality until we all drive electric vehicles the pollution stacks should be filtered.

4. The dance farce between the relevant Federal and State Ministers (Taylor & Constance) about the need for the take up of electric vehicles needs to be resolved asap with positive assistance for people wanting to buy electric vehicles and reduce our carbon footprint.

How can the positive pursuit of assistance (subsidies etc) (positive-State) be reconciled with the view, change be market driven with electric vehicles being a luxury item (negative-Federal). Someone is out of step with real world current views.

5. With recent decisions in the UK and here in a federal court where it was decided motor vehicle pollution was determined a cause of death for a child (UK) and the Government's has an obligation and duty of care to children when making decisions that impact on their (the children) health and wellbeing position both now and in the future (here), someone needs to remind politicians daily of these decisions/obligations until these Projects are changed and made safe for the health and wellbeing of our children.
6. At some point the 'no brainer' argument must be considered critical in the decision making processes for the Projects. We are referring to the filtration of the pollution stacks. The inaccurate science the Government seeks to rely on to not filter, indicates the pollution from unfiltered pollution stacks will only increase the already dangerous pollution levels a little bit and most is dispersed higher in the atmosphere not affecting those nearby. We say that conclusion is strongly disputed but even if you put that argument to one side there is still massive pollution belching into the atmosphere directly affecting everyone and adversely increasing climate change and filtration will remove a great portion of that pollution saving the climate and environment from pollution and greatly assisting in reducing the adverse impact for the benefit of our children. We think that is a 'no brainer' but to date that has been lost on Transport for NSW and the Department of Planning. If one were cynical the loss may be due to a need to keep the Tunnels ongoing maintenance costs down for resale purposes so they can fund the next 'what's good for you' project the Government decides the public just needs to have to be happy and prosperous.

Thank you for reading our comments and we look forward to hearing your deliberations and decisions on the Projects.

If you require anything further please let me know.

Kind regards

Rhys Williams

Tunnel Co-ordinator

Anzac Park Public School P & C Association