

Submission
No 409

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 17 June 2021

Partially
Confidential

17 June 2021

The Hon Daniel Mookhey MLC, Chair
The Hon Mark Banasiak MLC, Deputy Chair
Ms Abigail Boyd MLC
The Hon Sam Farraway MLC
The Hon Trevor Khan MLC
The Hon Shayne Mallard MLC
The Hon Tara Moriarty MLC

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

Dear Members of the Parliamentary Inquiry into the impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link,

I write to express concerns regarding the Western Harbour Tunnel and Warringah Freeway Upgrade. My chief concerns are as follows:

- The project has not been properly benchmarked against alternative solutions such as public transport projects;
- The business case; almost every Tolloed Tunnel project constructed in Australia to date has fallen well short of their target objectives and, in some cases, projects have been disastrous financially.
- Whether it is likely to achieve its stated goal of addressing long-term traffic congestion in Sydney;
- The significant impacts on the community, especially noise, air quality and health impacts for local residents both during construction and operation;
- The risk of damage from vibrations, settlement and ground movement to homes and businesses;
- The risk to public health as the project currently does not require the filtration of exhaust stacks;
- The pollution of Sydney Harbour with toxic sediment putting marine life at risk; the EIS scope of work ignored detailed scientific information which is key to making the public fully aware of impacts, including the toxicity of sediments in WHT proposed area;
- The impact of the project on nearby public sites, including Yurulbin Point and Dawn Fraser Baths;
- The compulsory acquisition and demolition of a number of homes.

From a personal perspective I am extremely concerned about the impacts of tunnelling, including significant noise and vibration, ground movement and settlement, potential for damage to homes, potential for changing tunnel depths and increased truck movements. The EIS does not adequately address these impacts and fails to address critical details such as the zone of influence (which identifies the area of potential impact), compensation measures, and methods of vibration monitoring. The WestConnex experience has demonstrated that far more residents were impacted and to greater degrees than originally projected, e.g. the assumption that only properties within a 50 metres distance from tunnelling would be impacted by noise and vibration whereas residents as far as 300 metres away said they were affected, some significantly.

Additional areas of concern includes loss of amenities during the construction phase (originally estimated at 2.5 years, and possibly more if the project blows out), including the closure of the Birchgrove Ferry Wharf, loss of green space, destruction of trees and loss of parking in our vicinity.

Health Risks and Potential Impact To Sydney Harbour

Additionally, there are health risks and potentially dire impacts to Sydney Harbour (which currently supports a great diversity of marine life), through the dredging and transportation of significant volumes of sediment. Dredged sediments will contain toxic contaminants including dioxins, tributyl tin, polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons, and heavy metals. While the EIS provides the volumes of sediment that will be dredged, it does not provide the concentrations of these compounds meaning that the risk to human health and to the marine ecosystem of Sydney Harbour cannot be adequately assessed. The dioxins are of special concern. I refer you to the front page Sydney Morning Herald article dated 19 March 2020, where Bill Ryall, who worked as an EPA accredited auditor and has expert knowledge in the field expressed serious concern about dredging as past studies have shown the tracts of sediment are among the most contaminated in the world. Transparency by government in relation to the details of contamination has been poor, with details being classified as “commercial in confidence” in the early stages of exhibition of the EIS for the project. Having improved the quality of water in our prized harbour, we should not put the harbour in jeopardy for this project.

Impact To Air Quality

There is also the concern of ongoing impact to air quality. Research demonstrates that there is no safe exposure level to particulate matter generated by traffic. The EIS fails to fully evaluate the long-term health impacts of the Project. It especially neglects the increased susceptibility of children, the elderly and people with chronic disease who are particularly at risk of the health effects of traffic related particulate matter. With two-thirds of people in NSW living in metropolitan Sydney relatively close to major roads, vehicles are one of the most important sources of particulate matter exposure in NSW and are a significant contributor to negative health impacts including increased mortality, respiratory and cardio-vascular disease, and adverse birth outcomes. The EIS proposes to install a double exhaust stack at Cammeray and vent pollution to the exhaust stacks already planned for Rozelle Goods Yard. At the very least, the proposal should commit that the stacks will be filtered according to the world's best practice to reduce the impact on air quality and human health and to prevent further impacts to our health system.

Environmental Impacts

The EIS has not sufficiently assessed the alternatives - i.e. including improved public transport – or benchmarked these alternatives against the proposed tunnel and roads. The community deserves to see the facts. For a project of this magnitude and cost a thorough business case should be provided, which should include details of the proposed solution vs. other viable alternatives such as public transport. This is standard in commercial business practice and the same approach should apply for public works – with an open, transparent and objective review of alternatives, costs and benefits.

Additionally, the EIS is a lengthy and laborious document and is difficult to navigate when it should be the opposite to enable public scrutiny.

The NSW government has publicly expressed its desire to lead the way towards net zero emissions by 2050. This proposal is counter to that expressed intent – it will result in more cars on the road causing a significant increase in emissions and further contribute to climate

change. The current WHT proposal, along with similar projects be reassessed in the context of this intent. The last bushfire crisis highlighted the need for us to take concrete and serious action on climate change; at that time the NSW government expressed willingness to accept that climate change is a key part of the issue. Better public transport is the key to minimising climate impact - public transport projects can provide a genuine, long term solution to road congestion without significantly increasing greenhouse gas emissions.

Large progressive cities all over the world like London and Singapore have moved to minimise the use of cars in preference of good public transport. We too should be embracing this approach. In summary, the money for this project would be far better spent on creating better public transport that will see us well into the future - and that is what many in the impacted electorates actually want.

Yours sincerely,