

Submission
No 458

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

My name I have lived in Balgowlah since 2006. I have 2 children: a 14-y old who attends Balgowlah Boys High School and a 9-y old who attends Balgowlah Heights Public School. I strongly oppose the Beaches Link Tunnel. The main grounds for my objection are: (1) environment impact, (2) health impact, (3) misalignment with transport needs now and in the future.

1. Environmental impact

The Beaches Link Tunnel will cause long term irreparable damage to our precious environment and green spaces. The government has recently declared a green space policy was to be implemented to protect precious open green spaces. Bulldozing Burnt Bridge Creek and Flat Rock Gully to make way for a dig site and a truck turning circle, plus destruction of various golf courses (Cammeray and Balgowlah) are not aligned with the policy.

Burnt Bridge Creek was supported for many years by an environment levy we all paid to the then Manly Council. Manly council called it the 'The Life Spring of Manly'. The de-watering of the creek doesn't occur in isolation, the construction will take the ground water out of an entire suburb forever. What will that mean to our street trees and gardens and local bush reserves? No water flowing downstream will also devastate Manly Lagoon. Our beautiful Manly Dam is home to endangered creatures like the eastern pygmy possum, large-eared pied bat, red-crowned toadlet and even the amazing climbing fish, the Galaxias brevinines, an evolutionary relic dating back to the Gondwana era some 60 million years ago. Just under 2000 mature trees will be felled in this supposedly protected catchment. Within the project's entire construction footprint, the environmental impact statement says 23 threatened fauna species and one endangered population will be impacted. This is unacceptable and unnecessary.

Unfiltered emissions stacks are simply unacceptable. Positioning them near schools (Balgowlah Boys High School, Seaforth Primary School and North Balgowlah PS) and the Manly Dam is irresponsible. These unfiltered emission stacks will spread fumes from the 15-km tunnel over the suburbs of Cammeray, Neutral Bay, Manly, Seaforth, Balgowlah, Manly Vale where there is a high concentration of preschool, primary and secondary schools. This is unacceptable since the increased car and diesel truck exhaust fumes contain several extremely toxic substances including tiny particles that are hazardous for human respiratory and circulatory health. It would be criminal to allow these toxic substances to float above our heads therefore it is unacceptable that the tunnel emission stacks be not filtered and located in such close proximity to schools. Relying on wind flows and atmospheric evaporation remind me of the US MP arguing that a laser from outer space started the bushfires in California.

2. Health impact

Balgowlah Boys High School staff and students will be exposed to unacceptable level of noise, pollution, traffic and other health hazards – both during the construction and for the life of the tunnel operation. The proposed construction and operational phases of the tunnel construction will irreversibly impact on the whole community in terms of noise, dust, vibration, access, disruption, traffic and road safety, air quality and health, and use of open space and sporting facilities.

As an example, the loss of the Balgowlah Oval during the construction is impossible to justify for more than 1,000 school users who have no sports ground on site.

As another example, the noise impact from Balgowlah roadworks is likely to affect over 4,000 homes (sound of loud TV or greater), about 1,000 at the Balgowlah construction site (Bally Boys High School will be directly impacted) and another 1,000 around Middle Harbour. About 1,000 homes are likely to experience sleep disturbance from the Balgowlah roadworks. How can this not affect people's mental health and wellbeing. A recent SMH article about the impact of the WestConnex construction on the residents of Rozelle and Leichhardt provides an eye-opener into what Balgowlah and other impacted suburbs will go through if the tunnel construction goes ahead.

Heavy traffic around schools will create an unacceptable level of risk for school children and their carers. Manly Vale congestion on and around Condamine Street is already horrific and the EIS acknowledges that it will get worse. Many schools will be impacted such as Manly West PS and Balgowlah Boys. Why putting our children at risk for a road that we don't need or want?

I was interested to read NSW Planning Minister Rob Stokes's quote in the paper recently about his intention to implement a policy that aims "to temper demand for driving and car parking by aligning development with public and other transport options, continuous bike paths and end-of-trip facilities" (SMH, Friday 26 February 2021). He must refer to another part of the State or perhaps another State altogether.

3. Misalignment with transport needs

COVID has turned transport needs upside down. The trend has been reversed to make working from home or closer to home the first choice. Population growth slowed and property prices have surged making the northern beaches unlikely to attract a massive influx of new residents now and in the future.

Transport for NSW has responded to these changes by cutting bus lines to the city (e.g. the 171 and x71 lines have been removed). The vehicle flow forecasts for 2037 are outdated and cannot be relied upon. Population growth predictions in the Northern Beaches are outdated and cannot be relied upon.

Having more residents in the Northern Beaches working from home, presents opportunities to increase local public transport options and active transport possibilities like walking and bike riding. It is my understanding that the NSW Planning Minister Rob Stokes wants the government to prioritise cycling over cars, green space, sustainability and working from home etc. This policy is currently in draft form and open for public submission and covers state significant infrastructure like the Beach Link tunnel.

The current pandemic has amply shown that we can successfully and productively decentralise where we work, unclog the roads and revitalise local communities. So why spend so many billions for a tunnel if it's against planning minister Rob Stokes' vision of the future Sydney?

In the document Move - Northern Beaches Transport Strategy 2038 released by the Northern Beaches Council, it states the Council aims to reduce the usage of cars by 30% by 2038 so why do we need the tunnel? It will encourage an extra 50,000+ cars every weekend (refer to pages 12&13, <https://u6095790.ct.sendgrid.net/ls/click...>).

Conclusion

Let's be brave in a post-COVID world and say no to the Beaches Link Tunnel. The government can find another way to secure its legacy without damaging the environment and people's lives.

The NSW Planning Minister Rob Stokes often says that the government doesn't want to build our cities around motor vehicles, or around the buildings, and that we should prioritise the history and the people. To do so, we obviously need to adopt viable transport solutions and not a tunnel that will destroy lives and damage our precious environment and the communities. The Beaches Link Tunnel Project is an outdated transport solution. As cities around the world have embraced car use reduction and local living promotion, what are our politicians thinking in Sydney? Where is the vision?