

Submission
No 481

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTERN HARBOUR TUNNEL AND BEACHES LINK

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I am a concerned resident of Balgowlah and would like to address some of the points to be considered by this parliamentary enquiry.

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

Governments used to have limited amounts of money and made decisions that gave value for money. My limited understanding is that these sorts of decisions are based on business cases. I have sat through several presentations over the last two years where business cases for the Beaches Link tunnel have been presented by people such as a former mayor of Mosman and a retired engineer. They both concluded, that from the assumptions they needed to make, they could not see the project as economically viable.

I do not believe a business case has been put forward in the EIS and I believe that if such an expensive project is put forward it should, amongst other things, make economic sense.

This government does not seem to like to produce business cases. When questioned where the business case for the Newcastle Light Rail was, the Premier attached the journalist for asking the question rather than answering the question.

What also should be a concern to us is that, when the Government sells this tunnel off and the revenue is not up to the expected volumes, the tax payer will be forced to top up the revenue under secretive provisions that the public does not have the right to see for twenty or thirty years or more.

(b) the adequacy of the consideration of alternative options,

Throughout the consultation process it has been impossible to find out what alternatives were considered. At community forums, I believe RMS representatives stated that these would be revealed in the EIS. I do not believe these have been disclosed.

One only needs to look at the traffic flows across the Spit Bridge before the Covid-19 pandemic hit to see that public transport options such as the highly successful B-Line were having a considerable effect on traffic numbers. Another B-Line from Dee Why to Chatswood was proposed but has yet to be implemented. These public transport options need to be considered.

Proper consideration of alternatives should have been made and the impact of 'Work from home' should be considered fully.

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

Nearly every Government infrastructure project appears to go over budget. I understand that there can be many reasons for this. There are only a limited number of companies that can tender to do the work. This means, that by my simple knowledge of economics, when supply is short the price goes up. So we pay a premium and cost overruns are just added to the original price. I believe that this has been the case in the Eastern Suburbs Light rail, The Newcastle Light rail and the Sydney Football stadium rebuild amongst a few.

Work on the tunnel alongside the Westgate Bridge in Melbourne was stopped last year because of contaminated soil, adding delay and extra expense to the project. This may happen here, with the added cost left for the end user to pay.

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

The project is based on the need to provide more housing in all parts of Sydney which will include population growth for the Northern Beaches.

My understanding is that most transport out of the Northern Beaches is not city bound with much being east west flow. This would suggest that this project is not necessarily meeting all of the goals that it should be. Funneling cars through the tunnel to then be spewed out on to Condamine St, which is already at capacity, is not great transport planning.

If the population density of the Northern Beaches is to increase with Sydney's growth, proper transport planning should be undertaken. Maybe a Metro spur line starting at Chatswood and passing through French's Forest, Dee Why, Brookvale and Manly Vale would be possible. It seems that these four areas have been identified as possible high density population centres.

The NSW Planning Minister spoke about Sydney being choked by roads. What will probably happen is that little suburban strip shops like Manly Vale, Brookvale, Collaroy will become totally unviable locations for commerce as the roads through them will be carrying so much traffic. The RMS tried extending the clearway times along Manly Vale two years ago. This would have made those services, including medical services that do not have off street parking, totally unviable. Development should enhance existing structures not kill them off.

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

I attended a number of RMS sessions at the start of the process. At the first session I attended at the Balgowlah RSL one of the RMS presenters at the displays did not know what he was talking about. He did not know where the ventilation stacks were.

At other forums that I was unable to attend, I was reliably informed questions asked were often not directly answered or ignored. A question that was often left unanswered was regarding a right hand turn at the northern end of Northern Beaches Tunnel at Balgowlah. This turn is likely to cause traffic backup. The bank up of traffic every afternoon turning right off the Warringah Expressway onto Falcon St shows that this may not be an insignificant problem, yet the RMS personnel refuse to acknowledge that this may be a problem.

The Northern Beaches Council facilitated the production of alternatives to the link road that would originally have passed metres from my house. Northern Beaches Councillor Grattan facilitated a meeting at the Balgowlah RSL to hear the opinions of local residents. I spoke at that meeting and felt the employee who wrote her report for council listened and considered my concerns. The council ended up supporting the proposed beaches link with reservations.

I will be greatly affected by any construction and have not had any direct contact from any RMS personnel. I will have a direct view of the proposed construction site with all the associated noise, dust, and associated pollution.

(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 world is changing and will continue to change because of the Covid-19 pandemic and its effect on working people. Many people who used to work in the city are not just working from home but also relocating out of the city. This is happening throughout the world. This will continue as more and more, particularly 'white collar jobs' are performed 'work from home'.

Anecdotally, I have spoken to many companies' enquiry desks over the last few months and I now ask whether they are working from home. Often the answer is yes.

Travel patterns that may have been relevant 5 years ago are out of date now. The Covid-19 pandemic and better public transport options such as the B-Line have changed the urgency for this development and should allow for considered and thorough planning, looking at all options.

The two year pause in migration also gives the government a chance to thoroughly investigate all options. The cost benefit has changed.

(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,

I think as a resident of NSW I should be able to see this. Unfortunately, transparency seems to be a disappearing part of all Government in Australia today. Hopefully, a parliamentary enquiry such as this one will allow us to have an insight and prompt the release of modelling and costs and benefits.

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

I have huge concerns about the effects on the environment.

Living beside the Balgowlah Golf Course I am concerned about the unfiltered ventilation stack that will be close by. It is not World's Best Practice to spew unfiltered exhaust fumes from a 7km long road tunnel the way that it is proposed. In many countries, air is "scrubbed" no remove toxins not just funneled to the end and pumped out.

The EIS states that there will be reduced water flow in Burnt Bridge Creek. The project will do great damage to the water table. Many of us will not see the effect of such damage immediately. I believe the DPIE and the Northern Beaches Council have made mention of the ground water problems that will arise.

There will enormous loss of native habitat in Willoughby, Balgowlah and the Manly Dam reserve. There is an abundance of animal habitat that will be destroyed with the resultant damage to fragile ecosystems.

Dredging of Middle Harbour for the construction of the tunnel will stir up many toxins. The work at Flat Rock Gully through a previous Garbage Tip will do the same.

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

I had a flier put in my letter box in December last year. It was about the temporary construction support site. When I entered one of the interactive portal links it could not be found.

This flier indicated that my house was within the construction footprint. I have no idea what this means and am concerned.

Communication has never been forthcoming about who I should contact if I have concerns about Noise, Vibration, and any other disruptions during the construction phase. I am all too familiar with night work that happens on the Burnt Bridge Creek Deviation now and can only expect that it will be for longer periods and for the whole 6 to 8 years of construction. Videos shared on Sydney News of work on other road projects in Sydney fills me with dread for the future.

(m) any other related matter

My personal circumstances.

One lives one's life as best one can. Throughout my working life I have been more a giver than a taker. I have endeavored to make the world a better place. I don't think the government is doing the same for me- in fact it will make it far worse.

I live in a wonderful neighborhood. We know all the people in our street. Most have lived here for over 20 years. We have street parties and other ad hoc gatherings. We can rely upon each other. Certainly, as a single parent, I have occasionally called upon neighbours to help. One occasion I recall, pre mobile phones, when I was at work and my son had not arrived home, I called one of them who drove the path that he would have taken back from school and found him. None of these neighbours have moved out of Paris St yet. I imagine that this will be a consequence should the Beaches Link Tunnel proceeds.

I am a keen golfer, and like my father before me, have enjoyed a number of rounds of golf in my retirement years at Balgowlah Golf Club. The tunnel will take this away from me. Some will say, there are plenty more golf courses around, which is possibly true. If one can join one, it does not mean that the friends you have played with for 40 years will be going with you. When you are a part of a community like this you develop friendships.

I have been gardening around the course for many years. As a Director of the club in the early 2000's, I was involved in many working bees planting native trees that had been provided by Manly Council. I was also part of the Manly Council Bushcare team that worked along Burnt Bridge Creek. Most work involved removing noxious weeds. This provided handy knowledge with the constant weed eradication that is required on the course. As a member of the Balgowlah Golf Club there are many of us who do voluntary work and gardening, maintaining its appearance, as well as planting trees and shrubs. As I look over the golf course I dread what will happen to it without this constant care. What will we have if there is 6 to 8 years of construction on Balgowlah Golf Course? This is my home and my environment, and it is full of bird life and native animals. There may be lots of golfers who use it but there are others who use the open space for dog walking and exercising.

Although not the highest of priorities, at the moment, I expect one day that I will need to sell and downsize. It would be nice to be able to stay in the area I have called home for nearly sixty years. When the last of my children leaves home, this house will be too large for me to rattle around in. Neighbours in Brighton St put their house on the market last year and were unable to sell it for the price that they had bought it for about 3 years earlier. I spoke to a prospective buyer who loved the house but was concerned about the construction of the Beaches Link tunnel and decided to look elsewhere.

I feel great uncertainty for my ability to receive the true value for my property when it is beside a construction zone for 6-8 years rather than the open space of a golf course. What will this do to the prospects of staying in the Manly area when I sell? Or will I have to live through the construction chaos and disruption?

I think possibly the greatest grievance I have is the realization that one cannot stop bad decisions. I see the EIS process as a tick and flick exercise rather than a process that protects the environment. There was so much misinformation in the EIS and yet the Government is not made to correct this information. Major problems are being ignored.

I am sure that the amount of money that is going to be spent could be used to provide the sustainable transport infrastructure that is needed for the future of the Northern Beaches. The dependence on a car to get about will require further road widening. The topography of the region does not allow for parallel roads to be built as happens in many other cities. There is basically one road from Balgowlah to Dee Why. It cannot be made infinitely wide without destroying what is the Northern Beaches. The bottle necks that occur now will just be moved further out and will probably be greater as the alternatives have not been built.

In conclusion, when alternatives are not considered and a government doesn't have to explain why, we might as well live in Communist China.

