

**Submission
No 497**

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

Name: Mr Ken Wilson

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(resubmitting as I forgot to include the Inquiry name (Inquiry into the Impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link)

18 June 2021

The Hon. Daniel Mookhey MLC

Chair

Public Works Committee

NSW Legislative Council

Parliament House

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<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=2767#tab->

Submission to the Inquiry into the Impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link

Dear Members of the Public Works Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to an inquiry regarding these troubling projects. I strongly object to the Western Harbour Tunnel (including the Warringah Freeway Upgrade) and Beaches Link (including the Gore Hill extension) projects and urge you to recommend that the NSW Government abandon these plans immediately.

First, a little about me. I live in the South Willoughby Area close to the Willoughby Leisure Center. I keep a sailing dingy at Balmoral Sailing Club which I access in the summer months by bus or bicycle. My work is based at Macquarie Park which I access by Bicycle and or Metro and Lidcombe which I access via bicycle or bus and T1 train. I am studying at UTS which I access by bus and light rail. I sing with Willoughby Choir based in Roseville and play with a concert band in Lane Cove, both accessed by car or bicycle. My wife works in the city and is also involved in band and choir, we have 3 children, the oldest (a boy) has moved out and the younger two (twins) divide their time between living at home and studying at ANU and CSU in Bathurst. We have lived here since 1992 and were attracted to the area by the amenities and bus services, especially the 257 bus which afforded direct access to sailing, removing the need to own a second car. For a short time we were running two cars, but one vehicle is now used by our daughter in Bathurst where public transport is very poor and uber is not yet established.

I have been involved on and off with the Willoughby South Progress Association and the promotion of alternatives to the car as transport, including an initiative where real estate agents were encouraged to mention public transport options in their advertisements for properties, the introduction of a cycle to school licence, and an annual walking bus competition at Willoughby Public School. Points in the competition were always awarded first for safety, but there were

bonus points for entertainment value (some great marching bands appeared) and/or famous people travelling on your bus. Over the years, Peter Collins, Joe Hockey, Pat Reilly and Gladys Berejiklian all participated in the event and while Gladys was always a CBD bus commuter, we did convince Peter to switch from his vintage jag to the 272 when heading to Macquarie Street after he was soundly beaten in a race to town by a group of bus commuters. When the walking bus competition was abolished by a new principal at the school I actually cried and was overjoyed this year to see its return this year at the school under new administration.

One of my sailing buddies was involved urban road planning in the early 1990s and recently made me aware of the Mogridge Principle and how improvements to city motorways only cause more congestion if they are not accompanied by public transport improvements. From this I understand the important difference between the Sydney Harbour tunnel and the proposed WHT and Beaches link tunnels is that the former allowed the introduction of the very successful bus lane on the Warringah Freeway and Harbour bridge, whereas the new tunnels include no such provision and appear to be linked to a substantial reduction in public transport (buses and ferries). My personal experience with the bus lane includes (in 1998) dropping our son at Willoughby Public school when playground duty commenced at 8.30 am, hoping on a 272 bus and being seated at my desk in the city by 8.45. I recently arranged for Michelle Ziebots and Matthew Housell to cover Mogridge at the February meeting of Willoughby South Progress Association. Michelle appeared from Little Hartley on zoom and you can view much of her presentation on vimeo here: <https://vimeo.com/510234364>

I am currently recovering from a cycling accident that occurred whilst I was riding to sailing after the 257 bus Balmoral was cancelled late last year. I have spent many hours with petitions and questions to government about the recent cancellation of no less than 4 Willoughby Road bus services (257, 340, 343 and 272). While we do have two new services (120 and 115), they both terminate in the CBD and my research shows a 50% reduction in services to Crows Nest and a rearrangement of freeway services to times outside peak hour with the result that commuters are being left stranded in Naremburn and South Willoughby. In addition, there is the loss of direct services to Balmoral (257), Bondi (340) and Kingsford (343) which have increased travel times for many commuters. A signatory to the 340 and 257 petitions is a disabled lady who had found independence by purchasing a unit right on a bus stop for the 340 and 257 which she had used to travel to work in eastern Sydney and visit friends and family in Mosman. She no longer feels confident about her ability to, independently, make either trip. Transport for NSW has advertised the changes to the bus network as being part of a program to introduce thousands of new services, however I can find no evidence of additional resources being employed and suspect their accounting is very dodgy as many trips now involve two shorter bus routes allowing them to double the count of services without employing additional drivers or purchasing additional buses. For example, from Chatswood to Kingsford your trip is now performed by two buses (the 115 and 343), it takes longer, uses the same resources (buses and drivers) but the stats would indicate that the number of services have doubled.

On February 20, members of Willoughby South Progress Association met with the Member for Willoughby to raise the concerns of around 4000 constituents regarding the advertised “improvements” to our bus services. We provided the Premier with details of their concerns raised in 5 petitions and on social media in a spreadsheet:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1DvkOaAqKu3GRY0KrKY4l4yOvHi5fYrEtrkYY Y80ZDQ/edit#gid=2020458511>

Gladys promised to take up the issues with the transport minister and get back to us. We have followed up with Vicki at her office and have been assured they are all working very hard on this. It is now June 18, and we still await a response.

I do not believe the governments (apparent) approach in quietly replacing good public transport with 20 billion dollars' worth of toll tunnels will work for a number of reasons. Most importantly they appear to assume that folk will be able to travel in the tunnels and then find parking, which is often impossible at Palm Beach, Balmoral or our local netball courts where fights regularly erupt between motorists. I much prefer the earlier approach by Transport NSW involving a Chatswood to Dee Why Metro as well as another line leading south to the CBD.

My reasons are further outlined in relation to the Committee's Terms of Reference.

I have previously submitted a submissions as to why I object to these Projects but without the detail given in this submission, as part of the EIS process for both projects.

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

As I understand the long-term benefits of the project they are actually negative (without any improvements to public transport). I note that given the need for more cars to use and fund the roads with tolls, any improvements to public transport are unlikely to be initiated by any government once these roads under construction. Against a negative benefit you have an estimated \$20 billion dollars in cost. So there is a very good business case for spending the money on something else.

I note Westconnex represents two new radial motorways and that the WHT and Beaches Link will be a third. While I have no confidence in radial motorways in cities at least the Westconnex roads lead somewhere and have the potential to generate enough toll revenue to excuse the poor old tax payers from footing the bill for poor government planning. The southwest arm goes to the airport and Canberra/Melbourne) and the west arm leads to Olympic park and Penrith/Blue Mountains/and the Central West. The beaches link only leads to Palm Beach, end of story, so unless they are planning bridges or tunnels across or under Broken Bay, the toll revenue will never go close to covering the huge cost and taxpayers will end up footing the bill.

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

The options to address congestion via a dedicated mass transit solutions have been, without explanation, ruled out or ignored. Typically, they are labeled the "Do nothing" option by the WHT document.

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

The project admits that further testing and risk assessment is required to fully assess multiple levels of risk including serious contamination found in the Harbour and at Middle Harbour dredge sites and dive sites such as Flat Rock Gully (ex-landfill). Cost blow outs and delays associated with other projects have occurred due to unexpected or unmitigated contamination eg West Gate Tunnel, Victoria.

I note that North Connex opened recently with a build cost of \$3billion and a toll of \$4. I wonder what the toll for the WHT and Beaches link will be and am amazed that the projects are underway before this is worked out. I estimate the two tunnels will end up costing between \$20 an \$30 billion dollars so a user pays toll might be around \$40 one way. Clearly the toll will need

subsidising to ensure people drive in the tunnel and this means additional burdens on taxpayers and a less affordable transport system being imposed on voters who are already struggling with the unaffordability of housing in Sydney. No doubt they are looking at raising tolls on other roads to help pay for the most expensive toll tunnels ever built. Our great grandchildren will likely be burdened with debt from these projects and may first have to pay this lot off for us before they even can dream of buying a house to live in.

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

I wish to raise issues concerning the “EIS” consultation for both the WHT and Beaches Link. I argue that instead of consulting with communities, the WHT and Beaches link team have focused on trying to convince people that these projects will have little impact and make a big difference to traffic congestion, when nothing could be further from the truth.

1. WHT

I have raised issues with the WHT EIS team regarding the lack of modelling of traffic on Willoughby Rd and the intersection with Mowbray Rd. I did this as I noticed that the Warringah freeway upgrade includes new restrictions on traffic going to and from the Sydney Harbour tunnel and proposed WHT so that such traffic will not have access to ramps at Miller and Brooke St. Being that Willoughby Road is the next exit on the freeway it would seem reasonable that traffic would take that exit instead, leading to more traffic on this important corridor, however the WHT group in their emails and phone calls have continually maintained that this would not be the case and that even Willoughby Council agreed. When I contacted Willoughby Mayor Gail-Gidney she informed me that council, in fact did not agree with the WHT group on this and had also asked for Willoughby Road to be modelled and that they too were dismayed at the behaviour of the WHT group and transport for NSW. At the same time, I was regularly contacted by a “Shannon” from the WHT group by telephone who kept asking if I had any questions yet she was rarely able to answer any of my questions.

2. Beaches Link

I attend an online information session which was part of the Beaches Link “consultation”. The session geographically matched where I lived. A error in the link I was sent meant that I and many others missed the first 20 minutes of the session. No attempt was made to make up for this issue. Once allowed into the meeting we were asked to put our questions in the chat and they then set about answering the easy questions leaving the harder ones to later. Interestingly when they published a recording for the session for those who could not attend it live, the recording was truncated seconds after somebody asked an embarrassing question about climate change, so many never did get to hear answers to the trickier questions. I tried to ask a question about the bike path on the Gore Hill freeway and whether it would be reinstated as I use this path to go to band once or twice a week and also work at Macquarie Park and Lidcombe. Initially they refused to answer the question saying I needed to attend another session that was held a week earlier. Eventually when I asked if people needed to attend every session, they relented and claimed the paths removal would only be temporary, but I cannot really tell if they were telling the truth and I do not have what was said in writing. I came away with the impression that the team had no interest whatsoever in discovering how folk were going to be affected by the project and had been given the job of selling it, design unchanged, to the general public. This notion is currently being reinforced

by emails I receive on progress of the WHT. Every email starts with the same paragraph, and I quote.

The Western Harbour Tunnel and Warringah Freeway Upgrade is a major transport infrastructure project that will make it easier, faster and safer to get around Sydney. By creating a western bypass of the Sydney CBD, the Western Harbour Tunnel will take pressure off the Sydney Harbour Bridge, Sydney Harbour Tunnel, Anzac Bridge and Western Distributor corridors to improve transport capacity at the Sydney Harbour crossing.

I believe it would be very difficult to find an independent transport expert who agrees with this statement, and I wonder why the WHT group regards it as more important than factual information that follows regarding road closures etc.

In conclusion if you consider good community consultation a process where an army of public relations people end up telling different participants different things in the hope that they will come to support a project, then the process is flawless, however I would argue that the whole process has been completely unsatisfactory and has left me, Willoughby South Progress Association, Willoughby Council and a large group of people who became involved feeling they have wasted large amounts of time by becoming involved in the first place.

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

Regarding the specific impacts across a many sensitive areas including Sydney Harbour, Balls Head/ Berry's Bay and the Coal Loader, Cammeray Green Spaces, Middle Harbour, Flat Rock Gully, Balgowlah Golf Course, Wakehurst Parkway and Manly Dam.

These Environmental impacts include marine life, heavy tree losses, contamination risks, air quality,

biodiversity offsets and an overall increase in emissions. The Western Harbour and Beaches Link tunnels will produce more emissions than the Southwest Metro (approx. same distance) before adding cars. Lighting, emergency systems, ventilation fans and the concrete itself (larger than metro/ rail tunnels) all contributes to a higher emissions profile.

The location of unfiltered exhaust stacks near public schools such as Anzac Public school at Cammeray raises the question what other living species (if any) would consider poisoning their own children in this manner.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the Beaches link (other than the destruction of bushland on either side of the Wakehurst Parkway), is the dive site to be drilled through the clay membrane that was installed on the edge of former tip at flat rock gully by Willoughby Council late last century. The interlocking boulders that were built over the membrane recently witnessed a once in 10 year waterfall event brought on by a late summer down pour. The risk of such an event washing contaminated spoil, dug up at this site, into the creek and Middle Harbor must be very high indeed.

(m) any other related matter.

For me the Warringah freeway upgrade is of particular concern. Essentially the project needs to provide interchanges between many existing roads and two new ones (the WHT and Beaches Link). There does not appear the space to do this properly so new interchanges that feed toll booths have been given preference over other interchanges that lead to “free” roads which have then been closed off. For example, it will no longer be possible to exit the Harbour tunnel and connect to Brooke Street and Flat Rock drive. Motorists coming from there and the new WHT will have 3 choices.

1. To exit at Ernest St, drive around Anzac public school to Miller St, and then head north via Northbridge.
2. To exit at Willoughby Rd, drive up Willoughby Road and turn right at Mowbray Rd (where the light sequence allows drivers to proceed through thousands of school children attempting to cross Mowbray Road on route to Willoughby Public School and Willoughby Girls High on their pedestrian walk sequence.
3. To exit at Willoughby Rd and head south past Naremburn School taking the next two left turns leading back to Brooke St and Flat Rock drive.

We are constantly told these projects will take traffic off local roads however the evidence suggests other wise and unless the tolls are made very attractive through government subsidies it is likely that, as folk attempt to avoid the toll booths, traffic on local roads will increase significantly, endangering school children, cyclists, and pedestrians and having knock on effects driven by parent anxiety about their children’s school trips with the net effect that many more children are driven to school in the area.

I am happy to have my name published.

Yours Sincerely,

Ken Wilson

Willoughby 2068



Western Harbour Tunnel and Warringah Freeway Upgrade

March 2020



How to use the new Warringah Freeway Upgrade

