

**Submission
No 502**

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

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Inquiry into the impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link TERMS OF REFERENCE

That the Public Works Committee inquire into and report on the impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link Project, including each of its constituent parts being the Warringah freeway upgrade, the Western Harbour Tunnel and the Beaches Link, including:

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

There has been no business case or cost-benefit analysis done or released to the general public for scrutiny or comment. The initial assumptions in 2016 for the business case or traffic modelling need to be updated to include the impact of working from home as a result of COVID 19.

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

There has been no consideration of or respect to the alternative tunnel designs presented by independent engineers on the Northern Beaches, independent of Transport NSW, that is. These designs were supremely superior and did not have such significant and dire impacts on the Balgowlah precinct, such as the complete demolition of the Balgowlah Golf Course, the creek, the destruction of the water table and the resulting 'wipe out' of animal species such as frogs, ducks, birds and a bat colony reliant on the habitat of the creek, trees and flora. There is also the complete demolition of 550 trees on the golf course, which currently provide habitat for the animals and provide oxygen and protection from CO2 emissions generated by present traffic on Burnt Bridge Road. The removal of these trees will result in dire health hazards for people living on the fringes of the tunnel and even beyond – Manly Vale, Balgowlah, Seaforth and Frenchs Forest. This will be even more prevalent with the construction of two unfiltered stacks at the bottom of the current Golf Course and at the top of Wakehurst Parkway (close to the 'shiny new' Northern Beaches hospital).

Other transport options which would be far more efficient and cost-effective such as rail, tram, light rail or even increased bus services, more flexible work hours which avoid peak times, have not been considered and one has to ask the question, "Why"?

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

Currently, the cost of the project is at a cost of 10-12 billion dollars yet just this week, one tunnel project in Sydney has gone 5 billion above the initial cost and we all know what happened with the 'slow' new tram from the city to Randwick. It went way over its budget.

4. (d) the consideration of the governance and structure of the project including the use of a 'development partner' model,

Locals are already talking about avoiding the use of the tunnel, once it is built because of the exorbitant cost of the tolls. There will not be enough traffic and tolls required to fund this project via the 'development partner model' and tax-payers via the NSW government will have to subsidise this extravagant and ineffective transport enterprise, which is estimated to save just 10 minutes of travel time to the city.

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

The stated original goals are to reduce traffic congestion along Military Road, Warringah Road and Warringah Freeway. However, it seems that the unstated reason is to funnel traffic from West Connex through the Northern Beaches Tunnel, in order to generate more tolls for Transurban.

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

While there was consultation with the community and Transport NSW representatives, it was ineffective, top-down and decisions had been made prior to these so-called consultations. In retrospect, these consultations were just a smokescreen as none of the community recommendations were adopted at all. In fact, the opposite of what the community wanted was regurgitated back to the community, like a fur-ball.

7. (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 impacts and resulting life changes to residents, likely to remain for many, such as working from home, have not been incorporated into the original cost benefit ratio, with the government claiming this (working from home) will only be temporary.

8. (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,

There has been no transparency in either the publication of the base-case financial model and benefit cost ratio for the project. The public have been provided with no tangible facts and figures, nor a true impact statement on the residents or the environment. In fact those residents who have remained complacent and think they will be unaffected by the construction of the tunnel will be in for a rude shock with 7-10 years of construction, the closing of Burnt Bridge road, apart from one lane for buses, resulting traffic congestion compounded by an exponential amount as it slithers up one lane on Condamine St onto Sydney Road and along the Link Road – both of these running back onto Sydney Road. One cannot even fathom the gridlock which awaits these unsuspecting residents. We know the NSW government has shown little empathy for anyone affected by the inconvenience of construction, because for them the end(more tolls?)justifies the means.

9. (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,

There has been no transparency or accountability for this project. It seems to be that the transport minister wants this signed off before the 2023 election, without disclosing the all-important cost-benefit analysis, and the true impact on residents and the environment.

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

This is perhaps the worst aspect of the impacts of the Link Road and the Northern Beaches tunnel, all for 10 minutes saved travel time.

- The complete destruction of the Balgowlah Golf Course, which in its current form is like a temperate rainforest of indescribable beauty and is the only natural ‘green space’(government speak) for the residents of Balgowlah. The 2550 trees are to be

demolished to make way for a Link Road, construction site, car parking for construction workers, removal site for drilled up rubble, mobile toilets etc. At the end of the construction, what is left will be converted into “Green Space” as basketball courts, and playing fields for children. The question is, what clear-thinking parent would allow their children to play next to an unfiltered stack wherein the particulate matter is smaller than asbestos and rather than sitting on the lungs, will enter directly into children’s and residents’ bloodstreams, causing all manner of illnesses from cancer, to asthma to lung disease, to stunted growth down the track.

- The damage to the biodiversity of flora and fauna living on/in or nearby to the creek and trees.
- The water table in Seaforth and North Balgowlah will fall, natural groundwater flowing into Burnt Bridge Creek will fall by 96%.
- The creek will no longer have enough water to run off into Manly Lagoon and even for large trees remaining in the suburb and in residents’ gardens.
- The dredging in Middle Harbour will stir up toxic sediments and will make swimming dangerous for visitors and residents of Clontarf Beach.
- Cofferdams in Middle Harbour will destroy the marine ecosystems and be unsightly for the residents of Seaforth, Beauty Point and Mosman. They will also no doubt interfere in seafaring, yachting and rowing which is an established and expected leisure activity for many who currently use Middle Harbour facilities.
- Restaurants, cafes and business currently based along the Spit and Middle Harbour are likely to have unmitigated business losses and threats to their livelihood which they have not anticipated because of the building of the tunnel in Middle Harbour.

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

Thus far Transport NSW has not sufficiently offered any significant protections for those living or working close to the construction site in regards to noise, vibration, dust and particles and traffic congestion and gridlock along Sydney Road. There will also be increased pollution from the unfiltered tunnel exhaust stacks (apparently too expensive for the government to filter) and resultant health concerns for up to 4,000 residents.

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

- the destruction and loss Balgowlah Golf Course. I defy the Premier to visit this golf course and then not be able to instruct Transport NSW to design or adopt a better design for the tunnel, comparable to the ones submitted to Northern Beaches Council from independent engineers living on the Northern Beaches. These were far superior and had less environmental impact and did not find the need to destroy the natural Green Space already God-given and in existence in the form of Balgowlah Golf Course.
- The negative impacts on Clontarf Beach and Middle Harbour
- The negative impact on Manly Dam War Memorial Park from construction run-off water
- The impact on Wakehurst Parkway and the destruction of the ecosystems and flora and fauna at Clive Park

13. (m) any other related matter.

The likelihood of increased traffic congestion, lack of parking(already a problem) with an extra 30,000 vehicles every weekend because of a tunnel.