

**Submission
No 513**

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

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

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 ill-conceived and short sighted projects. I strongly object to the Western Harbour Tunnel (including the Warringah Freeway Upgrade) and in particular Beaches Link (including the Gore Hill extension) projects and urge you to recommend that the NSW Government abandon these plans immediately.

I am a 45 year old, recent cancer survivor and mother of one. My family has resided in North Balgowlah since 1980 and our household currently contains myself, my partner, our 8 year old son and my 84 year old mother. Three of our household are asthmatic. My mother suffers from COPD and chronic bronchitis. My son had Acute Central Apnoea as a baby and toddler and required CPR on 5 occasions. The idea of living between two unfiltered stacks spewing pollution and known cancer causing, life limiting particulates frightens me. The health impacts this will have on my family terrify me.

I grew up using Burnt Bridge Creek as my extended playground and made the decision to move back and renovate my family home to create a multigenerational household when I was pregnant so my child could have the same experiences. We utilise this area daily, using the bike track for rides, tadpoling in the creek, turtle and eel spotting and as an adventure playground where my son and his friends' imaginations come to life. Over the years we have seen echidnas, frogs, turtles, tawny frogmouths, water dragons, blue tongue lizards, snakes, brush turkeys, ringtail and brushtail possums, bush mice, bandicoots, grey headed flying fox, numerous native water birds, kookaburras, lorikeets, rosella, king parrots, cockatoos and one lone wallaby. It is a thriving ecosystem and a much enjoyed, well used community greenspace. We often go Mountain biking and picnicking at Manly dam and hunting for aboriginal shelters and artefacts in the bush along both sides the Wakehurst Parkway. It is a fantastic natural and historically relevant resource within walking distance of our home. My son plays weekly seasonal cricket and soccer at both Seaforth and Balgowlah Ovals.

It would be fair to say over the last 25 years that I have travelled, via the Spit Bridge and Military Rd, into or through the city on average at least once every week (sometimes less, sometimes more) For university, for work, to visit my parents when I lived in the inner west, for entertainment, for appointments. Via public transport and private car. My partner still utilises it daily for work. We are aware of the congestion issues and still can't see that the irreversible ecological, health and lifestyle sacrifices required for the current plans are worth, what according

to the NSW state govt's own modelling will be a short term time gain at most. We personally would not use the tunnel once built as both geographically and financially it makes no sense for us to.

This project could be a fantastic opportunity to transform Sydney into a world class, healthy and sustainable city with a strong public transport system. I would much prefer to see a Metro running North/South or train running East to West from Dee Why and or Mona Vale, stand-alone bike lanes as seen in Copenhagen and other European cities. More direct buses to popular destinations (Universities, Industrial Parks, Employment Hubs). There are so many other options that will take cars off the road and will actually increase the communities' wellbeing that need to be investigated.

I have submitted previous objections to the project and have used many of those objections below.

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

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

No business case has been released to the public. As a tax payer whose taxes are helping to fund this project this is both unacceptable and deeply disturbing. One can only assume that either there is no existing business case or the cost/ benefit analysis for a recently reported \$15 billion spend of tax payer money does not bear out. This is at best bad practice and at worst corruption. Especially as it is not high on Infrastructure Australia's priority list.

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

This project could be a fantastic opportunity to transform Sydney into a world class, healthy and sustainable city with a strong public transport system. I would ask that an alternative public transport feasibility study be published before any further planning occurs so that impacts and outcomes can be fairly compared. The fact that alternative options to deal with congestion have not been adequately researched such as a dedicated mass transit solution like a rail or metro is both negligent and not in the best interests of the electorate. Also the Option of a standalone Western Harbour Tunnel without the Beaches Link although still not ideal would greatly reduce the ecological harm and reduction of existing greenspace and should also be scoped as an alternative.

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

Without a published business case it is hard to have a thorough understanding of the costs/ benefits but the project itself 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. It is logical to assume that overruns will occur during this project too. At almost \$1 billion per km it is already an excessive cost to the tax payer and any overrun of this figure is likely to be excessive based on the problems likely to occur further putting any cost/ benefit ratio at risk.

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

I am fundamentally against the development partner model. Infrastructure should not be owned by private companies looking to make a profit. Sydney already has an excessive number of privately owned toll roads and has no need of any more. The developmental

partner model always seem to benefit the private company with traffic being filtered towards such roads and the needs of the community often being ignored.

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

This project impacts the largest precinct of schools in Australia and passes through highly residential areas. Due to Covid families, community groups and schools had been under a huge amount of strain throughout the exhibition stage. Meetings had to be cancelled and we have been social distancing as instructed. Trying to read these documents without access to other likeminded citizens created more anxiety. The EIS for the Beaches Tunnel was so large that it was virtually impossible for the layman to wade through all of it. It seemed a cynical attempt to drown objectors in information, demotivating people from submitting objections. In an ideal world this project would be re-exhibited now that the COVID-19 crisis seems to have stabilised and some semblance of normal life has returned allowing the general public a chance to understand the planned impact. Failing that, existing objections should be listened too. In a recent Transport for NSW update it has been stated that no changes to the design have been made following the EIS submission process. How is this possible with the amount of legitimate environmental issues brought up if this is anything but a check box exercise?

(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,

Work and travel patterns have changed dramatically since Covid-19. The existing survey from 2016 needs to be redone with this in mind so that all forecasting is based on the most up to date information and the resulting the cost benefit analysis is accurate.

(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,

The Government should publish the base-case financial model and benefit cost ratio. The money being used belongs to the tax payer not the Government. Transparency and Accountability are fundamental to a well-functioning democracy and at a cost of approximately \$1 billion per Kilometre there most definitely needs be transparency and accountability.

(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,

As above The EIS for the Beaches Tunnel was so large that it was virtually impossible for the layman to wade through all of it. It seemed a cynical attempt to drown objectors in information, demotivating people from submitting objections. Submission dates were hard to find and portals clunky and difficult to use. The Transport for NSW update stating that no changes to the design have been made following the EIS submission process is both demoralising and indicative of a government that doesn't seem to be concerned about the taxpayers or their accountability to them. Transparency and Accountability are fundamental to a well-functioning democracy and should be seen in any project delivered by a public sector body, the fact that there is no published business case shows an alarming lack of both.

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

As per the governments own EIS the environmental impacts will be large and in many cases irreversible. The devastation is so great that I can only focus on my little corner of the project without being overwhelmed. This does not mean that the damage that is planned to occur at balls head, Flatrock Gully or any of the other untouched greenspaces means less to me.

In our own local area Burnt Bridge Creek where I played as a child and now play with my son will have its water reduced by up to 95%. This will completely destroy the established ecosystem and the wide variety of wildlife that can be found there as they cannot survive without an adequate water source. It will impact the local Grey Headed Flying Fox colony that is established on its banks and as it is the main water way that feeds into Queenscliff Lagoon it will have an extensive knock on effect all the way to the coast.

Manly Dam has species of walking fish not found anywhere else that will be directly affected by the run off and pollution of the building process. The risk of contamination of the Dam is also high. Balgowlah golf course will lose a large number of well-established trees as will Manly Dam and the Wakehurst parkway. Sydney Harbour is likely to be contaminated by dredging where we know there is heavy metals and toxic sediment. This will devastate marine life and likely have a knock on effect on the many harbour beaches and baths. There will be a decrease in air quality. Currently the smoke of bushfires will linger days in the Burnt Bridge Creek basin due to the topography of the area. Putting two unventilated stacks at either end means that the valley will never be free of airborne pollutants. The knock on effect of this and the loss of the creek will be catastrophic for biodiversity in the area. The Western Harbour and Beaches Link tunnels looks likely to produce more emissions than the Southwest Metro (approximately the same distance) even before adding cars. Lighting, emergency systems, ventilation fans and the concrete itself (which is larger than required for a metro or rail tunnel and all this contributes to a far higher level of emissions. The project is ill thought out and rushed, appearing to have been created around election schedules rather than due process and the losses are too high to legitimise it as it stands at present.

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

The planned construction sites at local sports grounds and ovals (Seaforth and Balgowlah) will greatly affect my son's ability to play in local sports comps. The lack of an objective third party that can be contacted to assess and deal with complaints and issues resulting from the construction is a huge problem and leaves the community to vulnerable to further loss, both mental and financial. The planned feeder roads at Balgowlah golf course are unnecessary and are only there to funnel local traffic into the toll roads and the creation of them will be incredibly disruptive to local traffic and the local community. The planned removal and replacement of the Burnt Bridge Creek overpass and the position of worksites on Wakehurst Parkway will result in North Balgowlah residents being virtually landlocked in their suburb.

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

Below are not my words but those of stopthetunnels.org but it lists the problems so succinctly that I have chosen to copy it here " Yurulbin Point and Balls Head (Aboriginal and Natural Heritage), Berry's Bay (large construction platform 5 years), White Bay (location of toxic sludge drying out), Coal Loader (tunnel goes straight under), St Leonard's Park (loss of green space, loss of heritage - first planned park on Nth Shore, contamination concerns, dust and noise), Cammeray Golf Course (loss of space and heavy construction for 7 years, interruption of water supply/ dam for local parks, double unfiltered stack adjacent will be permanent), Flat Rock Gully Dive Site (Aboriginal heritage, contaminated tip area, major water catchment area and flood zone, dive site competes with massive sewage tunnel, loss of trees, feeds out to Tunks and Middle Harbour, Powerful Owls and other species impacted), Middle Harbour and Spit Reserve (contamination 4.5-5 years noisy works, marine life esp breeding grounds interrupted, Northbridge Baths), Clive Park (significant Aboriginal and Natural Heritage), Balgowlah Golf Course (loss of green space and stacks), Wakehurst Parkway (thousands of trees lost and biodiversity concerns), Burnt Bridge Creek (near

elimination of water flow permanent – feeds out to Lagoon) and Manly Dam (sensitive endangered species environment, fresh water, feeds out to ocean, run off huge concern with loss of tree buffer to road).” I think that even just one of these would be a tragedy and reason enough to reconsider the existing plans. The fact that all of these things are at risk of being damaged/ lost/ negatively impacted and that that is being ignored is overwhelmingly sad and short sighted.

(m) any other related matter.

The ongoing health costs of unfiltered stacks and the lack of greenspace for future generations is a major concern. Global warming can only be mitigated by lowering pollutants and increasing green space. By creating a road system that does the opposite we risk making Sydney an unliveable and inhospitable city in the future. This project could be a fantastic opportunity to transform Sydney into a world class, healthy and sustainable city with a strong public transport system. I would ask that you request an alternative public transport feasibility study be published before any further planning occurs so that impacts and outcomes can be fairly compared.

I am happy to have my name published.

Yours Sincerely,

Brigitta Merchant