

Submission
No 532

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTERN HARBOUR TUNNEL AND BEACHES LINK

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Impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link

Submission by Miranda Korzy

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the NSW government's plans for the Beaches Link tunnel. I would like to address the following terms of reference:

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

The NSW government should release the business case for the Beaches Link Tunnel project, so that the public can see projected usage, other rationale for it and any impacts it is likely to have on public transport and surrounding roads.

Without seeing the business case, we can only assume that the project does not stack up. It is extremely concerning that an economist like by Dr Peter Abelson would forecast that the Beaches Link tunnel is likely to make only a 68 cent return for every dollar spent on it.

It would be totally unacceptable if, to make the tunnel profitable for either the government or a private company, public transport services were reduced, the Northern Beaches population was increased by 20 per cent and/or traffic on already congested roads was increased. This is the prediction of Viable Transport Solutions – an amalgamation of community groups opposed to the tunnel, including a number of professionals with relevant expertise.

Further, research in the US has described the “fundamental law of road congestion”, whereby the bigger you build the road, the more traffic it attracts – so that we could expect the Beaches Link tunnel to be at capacity within a very few years anyway. That Independent transport expert Dr Michelle Zeibots says traffic problems in the area will be back to the same as now within 2 years of the tunnel opening, and that it should not be built, is of serious concern.

(b) the adequacy of the consideration of alternative options

Alternative options such as trackless trams run by the government or other forms of public transport – or even a tunnel designed so that it causes less environmental damage and devoted to public transport - should be modelled and discussed with the public.

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

The continued use of Public Private Partnerships to provide road infrastructure has created effective monopoly control over Sydney's major road system by one company Transurban – so that it is run in its interests rather than those of the public.

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.

It is also of concern that with cuts to the public service and the tendering of major road building projects to the private sector, whether contractors will be properly supervised and construction meets the necessary standard – and how this is demonstrated to the public.

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

The impact of this project on the Northern Beaches Environment would be devastating, which at a time of increasing environmental awareness should rule it out.

Constructing unfiltered exhaust stacks in any city, spewing carcinogenic material and particle pollution that will cause or exacerbate existed lung conditions such as asthma, is not in the public interest – no matter what the business case. It is particularly irresponsible for the NSW government to even contemplate siting stack such as these in the vicinity of schools and homes.

Similarly, at a time when the government says it wants an extra one million trees planted in Sydney by 2022, removing 300 trees from the relatively heavily-populated area surrounding Flat Rock Gully at Northbridge, and 2,500 along Wakehurst Parkway at Manly Dam, is unacceptable. Those trees are important for the role they play in ameliorating climate change, including providing shade, and habitat for vulnerable species, including the Powerful Owl. Simply planting young saplings, which can take more than 100 years to mature and develop hollows for wildlife to live in, does not replace old growth trees – and by the time those trees have grown up, the wildlife has been lost. In the 1960s when many future road corridors were left undeveloped, cutting down trees was less controversial. We now appreciate the importance of canopy and the NSW government’s own climate goals should make this development unacceptable.

Sydney’s population has also increased many times over since the 1960s and the community needs as much green space as possible for recreation and as a green backdrop to the city. Therefore, we cannot afford to lose any part of Balgowlah Golf Course to new roads – or for the remainder to be broken up into playing fields. Neither will playing fields next to unfiltered exhaust stacks and noisy, major roads be a healthy place for playing sport – or simply relaxing.

In terms of marine eco-systems, to reduce the natural flow of Burnt Bridge Creek by 80 per cent would be environmental vandalism – destroying its natural eco-systems. Further, to discharge 400,000 litres of wastewater per day – no doubt carrying sediment and potentially other pollution - into the creek, which runs into Queenscliff Lagoon would be extremely negligent. I used to live next to the lagoon and it already has serious problems with high levels of pollution – to the extent that Manly Beach is closed to swimmers for days after rain when the lagoon flushes out to the ocean. This lagoon’s ecosystem is already severely degraded and should be regenerated rather than further polluted.