

Submission
No 539

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

Name: Mrs Ann Sharp

Date Received: 18 June 2021

To: The Hon. Daniel Mookhey MLC, Chair
Public Works Committee
NSW Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Email: Public.Works@parliament.nsw.gov.au

18 June 2021

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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 make a submission to the Upper House Inquiry. I wish to submit my objection to these road tunnel proposals, in particular, the Beaches Link. Following are:

1. Brief responses to selected Terms of Reference
2. Previous submissions with headings relevant to the Terms of Reference.

RESPONSES to selected TERMS of REFERENCE

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

The Beaches Link EIS does not contain a cost/benefit analysis to justify the \$13b expenditure on the project. As far as I am aware, no business case has been provided to support the project. In my view, a greater priority on the Northern Beaches is to invest in public transport to reduce dependence on cars.

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

The Beaches Link is being considered without any alternative options presented. When I attended a drop-in information session the project team from RMS informed me that no other options had been put on the table for them to consider.

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

The \$13b cost for the project is exorbitant. This financial cost does not include the high but immeasurable cost associated with adverse impacts on the environment and health.

By comparison, public transport options on the Northern Beaches, including East-West bus routes, could be improved with modest initiatives and relatively minimal expense.

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

The project has made inaccurate, exaggerated claims re reduced travel time.

Travel times did not take account of increased congestion on local roads, increased car usage and traffic convergence in the vicinity of the tunnel portals.

The likely influx of traffic, local congestion and increased demand for car parking on the Northern Beaches are understated. Car parking demand has not been adequately assessed even though extra car parking would be required, for example, near to beaches during summer.

The Beaches Link will promote high density development. There is a lack of transparency in whether the Beaches Link is a guise to facilitate development, including high density development, for example in Frenchs Forest and possibly Brookvale. This in turn will further increase traffic (cars) and congestion - and change the existing character of suburbs on the Northern Beaches.

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

There has been no consultation on alternatives to address transport issues on the Northern Beaches.

The EIS process has not presented information or considered input from transport planners, including academics, who have raised legitimate concerns about the Beaches Link proposal.

Many residents are poorly informed about the EIS and impacts of the project. Residual support for the tunnel has declined among residents who are better informed.

(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 Beaches Link projections are based on commuter traffic in 2016. Since then B1 and other express bus services to the CBD have captured an increase in patronage for public transport. The bus lane improvements have also reduced travel time and reliance on private cars.

The journey time between Wynyard and Brookvale is around 30 minutes by bus. The Beaches Link will not improve upon this travel time for commuters.

Around 52% of residents live and work on the Northern Beaches. This degree of self-containment has obvious transport benefits for the local workforce as well as local business. The high proportion of residents who work locally means there are fewer residents, proportionally, who would commute via the tunnel.

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

The environmental impacts of the proposal are extensive. Biodiversity offsets would not compensate for biodiversity loss. The mitigation measures fail to protect the environment.

Avoidance of environmental loss and damage is a preferred outcome. This requires alternative transport options that aim to protect the environment as well as promote public transport.

The project involves sacrificing the environment for the dubious saving in travel time for car dependent commuters. Who is benefiting? And at what cost to the environment and health?

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

The potential impacts on health, pedestrian / road safety and local amenity are understated. The construction and operational phases will result in increased air pollution, noise, large truck movement, and a corresponding decline in the quality of life. The increased stress associated with these and other adverse impacts is likely to affect the physical and mental health of residents.

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

The project will have significant and potentially irreversible impacts on Garigal National Park, Manly Dam Catchment and Burnt Bridge Creek environs. The high environmental cost associated with these impacts is unacceptable.

The impact on schools, in particular Balgowlah Boys High School, is also unacceptable. Balgowlah Boys has a wide school catchment area that encompasses Freshwater and Curl Curl.

(m) any other related matter.

The Beaches Link will have a major impact on the Northern Beaches in terms of traffic, increased development, local amenity and especially the environment. Some residents, particularly those living in the northern part of the Peninsula, may support the Beaches Link because they have been informed it will reduce travel time. However, to counteract this assumption, transport planners and academics warn that urban motorways generate more traffic (cars) and eventually more congestion.

The Beaches Link is derived from a 1960's concept plan when car transport dominated urban planning. Since then many cities have replaced urban motorway proposals with public transport networks. A public transport initiative that is appropriate for the Northern Beaches would be a far better investment than a massive construction project for a motorway that will have significant negative impacts on local amenity, health and environment.

Please find attached submissions to the EIS for the Beaches Link.

Yours sincerely

Ann Sharp