

**Submission  
No 553**

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

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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:

**A) The adequacy of the business case for the project, including the cost benefits ratio**

The secrecy that surrounds the business case leaves members of the public to assume the business case does not justify the large expenditure required. The funding for this project is public money and there should be a legal requirement to publish the financial plan and the actual costs incurred (without hiding large costs as appears to have been done with the Westconnex Project). The secrecy around the financials leaves the public to suspect misuse of public funds especially in the context of the likely future sale of the infrastructure to a commercial private buyer.

**B) The adequacy of the consideration of alternative options,**

The failure to consider other transport options is a fundamental, and clearly deliberate, flaw in the assessment of the best transport solution and best use of public funds. To the outside observer it appears that the best transport solution is not the desired outcome. This leaves the public to speculate that the objective is to funnel traffic into other toll systems such as Westconnex, to the benefit of the private operator. Before spending billions of public dollars there should be a clear and objective assessment of all options. It is very difficult to believe that the problem of peak hour traffic congestion will be best solved by non-mass-transit options. The government have made no effort to prove this is true.

**C) The cost of the project, including the reasons for overruns,**

Given the large cost over-runs on other large infrastructure projects, and the deliberate omission of multi-billion dollar items from the official cost of Westconnex, it is impossible to believe the government has the ability or intention to provide accurate costings.

**D) The consideration of the governance and structure of the project including the use of a 'development partner' model,**

To a member of the public the delivery model appears to be structured so that as much information as possible can be classified as "Commercial in Confidence" and avoid scrutiny via freedom of information requests.

**E) The extent to which the project is meeting the original goals of the project,**

If the goal is to increase toll revenue for private operators (either directly or by funnelling traffic into WestConnex) then it will no doubt succeed.

If the goal is to substantially improve the flow of traffic across the Harbour, and additionally improve local traffic in North Sydney, Inner West and Northern Beaches local areas (and not adversely affect those areas with air and noise pollution) success is much less clear.

The projects indicate 'minutes' improvements in journey time only with no accounting for expected return of congestion after a short period of operational use (as has been the case in every other major road infrastructure project in metropolitan Sydney).

The implementation of the Projects will cause massive congestion to local traffic and create numerous rabbit runs further adversely affecting the flow of local traffic. During construction and in operation the Projects in their current form adversely affect the communities in the local areas with substantial health risks for both noise and air quality.

To be a success the project also needs to be an affordable transport option for the large majority of the population for many decades. The likely toll level and the rate at which it would likely increase faster than wage increases mean it will be prohibitively expensive for many people.

**F) The consultation methods and effectiveness, both with affected communities and stakeholders,**

Public consultation appears to be extensive but cosmetic. Details are vague at public presentations, no firm details are released to allow specific challenges.

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,

**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,**

Of course they should – it is very surprising this is not a legal requirement for transparent use of public funds.

**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,**

The government appears to put a great deal of effort into avoiding basic standards of accountability. Transparency needs to become a legal requirement for publicly funded projects, including “follow-the-money” powers to prevent corporate structures being used to avoid scrutiny. This would give the public confidence their money is not lost to corruption, political games or incompetence.

**J) The impact on the environment, including marine ecosystems.**

It seems there are very few tunnels around the world of the proposed length that have so few exhaust stacks and that do not employ filtering to remove particulate pollution. The proposed exhaust stacks close to Anzac Park Public School in Cammeray are a great concern. This is an area that already has one of Australia’s busiest freeways running through it. The scientific review of the dispersion of pollution from these stacks appears to be all done by employees of Transport NSW and not subject to independent, international review. It is therefore difficult to believe these assessments are independent.

**K) The adequacy of processes for accessing and responding to noise, vibration and other impacts on residents, during construction and operationally,**

We have seen the trauma inflicted on the people in the vicinity of the Westconnex development. They had the same processes applied. We can only assume we will suffer in a similar way.