

**Submission
No 565**

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

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SUBMISSION FOR THE NSW PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT OF THE WHT AND BL

18 June 2021

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While my home is not directly impacted by proximity to the construction site and the proposed tunnel entrance, as a Northern Beaches resident I AM directly impacted by the results of the environmental devastation, the burden of the cost of this project to taxpayers, the impact of both heavy and light traffic congestion during the lengthy construction period and the detrimental effect this will have on individuals and communities within the area over a prolonged period. For these reasons, and others detailed below, I am strongly against the Beaches Link Tunnel.

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

The EIS failed to take into account the option of the Western Harbour Tunnel being constructed WITHOUT the Beaches Link, with no subsequent evaluation of this scenario. Each project should be evaluated separately with a cost-benefit analysis, and by an independent review, to enable clarity and transparency for the residents and general public.

A cost benefits analysis was done by some local community experts (published on <https://viabletransportsolutions.com.au/>) who estimated the cost-benefit ratio to be 0.8 which is far below the 1.20 considered to be the minimum level required to justify an infrastructure project.

The travel times estimated in the EIS for a trip from Balgowlah to the city claim the journey would save approximately 38 minutes with the BL tunnel, which is a ridiculous proposal as a 'normal' journey time in peak hour is around that duration, so a prospective journey time of 1-2 minutes is exceedingly unlikely. As the traffic estimates were done in 2016, this doesn't allow for the continuing effects of the pandemic on peak hour traffic flows. As future working day structures and workplaces are evolving to include working from home for some of the time and business hubs for those unable to work from home, this suggests an 'old' prediction of the necessity of the BL tunnel to alleviate traffic congestion requires an urgent review and overhaul of estimates and possible benefits.

The suggested influx of population to the Northern Beaches is not fully qualified and the proposed high-density population of around 10,000 people in the small area of the Northern Beaches Hospital precinct seems to depend on the Beaches Link tunnel going ahead, which adds a layer of complexity/obfuscation to this proposal.

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

There appeared to be no consideration of alternative options, notably the exclusion of a public transport option. With the success of the introduction of the B1 express bus route and the proposed, but currently stalled, suggestion of a similar direct bus between Dee Why and Chatswood, the proposal of a car-only tunnel is flying in the face of recent public transport improvement as well as ignoring climate change/sustainable and beneficial practices.

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

With the current cost quoted at \$14 billion (already escalated) and a proposed construction period of 5-7 years, this is an enormous cost to residents; financially, socially and possibly physically. The complexity of such a construction project, including both land and aquatic excavation, management of massive heavy traffic movements, difficulties in protecting/preserving local habitats, proximity to residents, schools and main roads as well as local anger with the inconveniences/damage caused, is likely to increase estimated time-frames and thus extend both the construction duration and costs.

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

Assuming this 'development partner' model means private investment in conjunction with government funding, I believe this is not a valid proposition as companies such as Transurban have expressed no interest in investing; only in the collection of future tolls. This means the project would be fully funded by the Council and NSW government; effectively the taxpayers. This implies that taxpayers and residents should have more influence in the project.

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

The goals of improved safety and reducing traffic congestion and rat runs have been refuted by transport expert Dr Michelle Zeibots, who states that our existing traffic problems will return to the same levels we now have within 2 years of the tunnel being opened. She feels improved public transport is clearly the best option for the Northern Beaches. Already the B-Line bus has made a huge positive difference to the commute to the CBD, however it seems that buses will not be permitted in the BL tunnel as they would take up too much of the area proposed for private/toll paying cars. The \$14 billion cost of constructing the tunnel would negate any chance of investment in public transport for the Northern Beaches for the next several decades, resulting in a massive private toll road system with no development or improvement to mass public transport. The fact that Council is keen to increase the NB population, especially in the hospital precinct, indicates a higher usage of private cars as there will be insufficient public transport improvement to cater for this growth. The ongoing costs to the residents (as if the \$14 billion isn't enough!) will be the high cost of the tolls; a projected \$8 one-way for the tunnel and an incredible \$23 round trip per day to get to the city. This project may suit Transurban (or whichever company will be the 'toll collector') and the construction companies, but will not provide any benefit to residents of the Northern Beaches.

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

One of the concerning aspects of this project is the lack of heed of the people. 80% of residents have stated their opposition to several aspects of this project, including the polluting exhaust stacks, and alternative solutions have been suggested by community groups. When the EIS reports that the modelling shows, relating to air toxins in the atmosphere close to the stacks, that not enough people will suffer medically as a result of the increase in air toxins to justify the additional expenditure on installing filtration in order to reduce those additional health problems/deaths, this reveals the governments'

value of its people versus the 'value' of development and growth. Although a government is ideally 'of the people, by the people and for the people', with regards to this project, seemingly a continuation of the WestConnex issues, the government is *not* representative of the people and is certainly not acting *for* the people.

(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,

This is a major influencing factor in reassessing any original cost-benefit ratio. Although traffic on the Northern Beaches has certainly increased in 2021, the city is not back to its full prior-to-Covid capacity and many businesses have already closed down or relocated to smaller premises, sometimes outside of the CBD. With many companies considering working from home for at least part of each week for their employees and some of these workers reluctant to return to working in the city full-time, along with the growth of business hubs in the suburbs, it is likely that we will not see a return to the pre-Covid levels of peak hour traffic.

(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,

Yes, definitely.

(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,

I believe the project has not, thus far, been as transparent and accountable as it should so the parliamentary enquiry is certainly welcome and will bring greater accountability to the general public.

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

The EIS describes the Burnt Bridge Creek as a 'vital ecological corridor of ...habitat'. With the proposed project comes a litany of environmental destruction and degradation;

- A reduction in the natural water flow by 79%,
- removal of the Balgowlah Golf Course dam,
- discharge of 400,000 litres of wastewater per day into the creek which then flows through to Queenscliff Lagoon,
- 2,000 mature trees removed from a National Park (!),
- Manly Dam and its rare flora and fauna polluted by the construction wastewater run-off,
- forecast increases of 15% to air pollutants,
- Burnt Bridge Creek groundwater flows reduced by up to 96%,
- toxic sludge disturbed in Middle Harbour which would spread to the Spit and harbour beaches,
- uncontrolled water flows during heavy rain,
- devastation to many endangered species of both flora and fauna, including the 60 million year old Gondwanan Climbing Galaxias Fish, the Little Penguins, grey.

How can this destruction be justified by a tunnel encouraging more transport by private car?

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

I have a number of friends who live nearby the construction site and they will be directly impacted during both construction and after completion. To my knowledge they have not been offered any compensation nor, more importantly, any access points for complaints or a path for negotiation. Admittedly this is an early-ish stage in pre-construction and I am hoping this parliamentary enquiry will expose a unified, non-partisan consensus on the lack of consideration for residents.

(l) the impact of the project on nearby public sites

This project will heavily impact;

- Burnt Bridge Creek riparian corridor; with almost complete destruction of this habitat
- Balgowlah Golf Course and its associated, dependent wildlife and 24/7 public use
- Manly Dam, with flow on effect to waterways like Queenscliff Lagoon
- Middle Harbour beaches health (including Clontarf and its recreation/picnic area) and underwater habitats, aquatic wildlife
- Balgowlah Boys High School, Seaforth Public School, St Cecilia's Primary School, Northside Pre-school
- the Spit to Manly bush/beaches walk
- Garigal National Park

(m) personal perspective & prospective alternatives

Our own proximity to and regular walks around Manly Dam, visits to Clontarf with both elderly and very young family members and walking/kayaking/swimming around Middle Harbour will all be affected by the huge amount of daily wastewater and expected increase in water toxicity and aquatic degradation. The unqualified noise pollution and damage through vibration during drilling is also concerning and warrants independent assessment.

A few alternatives that I believe have already been proposed are;

- The B-Line express bus along the east-west corridor; already proposed but stalled thus far.
- Electric trams (such as those used in Newcastle) without the need for overhead lines.
- A mass transit 'spine' with feeder routes to access points.
- Boost the ferry system between Manly and the CBD (having just decommissioned several of them!), an affordable public transport route not dependent on, and a good alternative to, the road systems.

In summary, given the many problems listed here that would be caused during the lengthy construction period of the Beaches Link Tunnel and those continuing after completion, the enormous cost (financial, environmental and to the community) with **NO** long-term benefit, there seems to be no comprehensible reason to warrant the construction of the Beaches Link Tunnel. Alternatives must be considered and compared with the Beaches Link proposal in order to properly assess the best solution(s) for our transport.