

Submission
No 579

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTERN HARBOUR TUNNEL AND BEACHES LINK

Organisation: North Sydney Combined Precincts Committee

Date Received: 17 September 2021

Follow up submission to the Upper House enquiry into the WHT and Beaches Link projects by the Combined Precincts Committee of North Sydney

The Combined Precincts Committee was invited to be witnesses to this Enquiry and did so on 14 September. In the closing remarks, the Chair of the Enquiry invited us to follow up on questions we had been asked, but did not have the time to reply fully.

We welcome the local initiatives of the proposal which benefit the public, such as wider pedestrian and cycle bridges across the motorway at Ridge Street, Ernest Street, and High Street, together with promised parkland improvements at Berry Bay and the Coal Loader wharf. Lighter traffic on parts of Military Road also creates a brief opportunity to improve this corridor.

However, decisions about the placement of portals leads to a set direct and permanent impacts on our communities which far outweigh any benefit the project brings. Even with the portal positions as proposed, there are a set of obvious improvements to access and egress points, which have been missed. We believe the project developers should adopt a stance of 'do no harm' and deliberately leave the parts of city it touches in better shape than before they came. We note that for North Sydney this project 'solves' a non-existent problem, yet inflict massive harm in our municipality.

There were three items where we would like to take up that opportunity to augment our responses

- Traffic Changes
- Green Space
- Other Transport Solutions

Traffic Impacts

We focused in our answer dominantly – and appropriately – on the main problem which will be peak hour gridlock, predicted in the EIS, to occur right along Berry St in the North Sydney CBD and at several nearby intersections. The other intersections move to 'Fail' status because of the backup of vehicles seeking to traverse Berry St.

We noted the effect of that anticipated traffic chaos on residents, workers and students within the CBD. We noted the new Metro station, discharging an expected 15,000 people per hour in peak hours, fronts onto Berry & Miller Streets.

We noted that all traffic going into the western Harbour Tunnel from surrounding suburbs to the East, North, West and South will be made to go on city streets through the heart of the CBD into, Berry Street, to get into the WHL tunnel as shown in the diagram below. This is a basic design error.

It totally fails the normal design principles of keeping through traffic out of crowded CBD streets.



That focus in our reply did not allow us time to inform the Enquiry on the other lost opportunities and traffic impacts in the North Sydney municipality which also will be caused.

In places where the proposal temporarily causes traffic become lighter, such as parts of Military Road, the proposal should explicitly present opportunities to locally improve amenity and walkability before traffic returns to fill the corridor.

Outside of the North Sydney CBD, the proposed changes eliminate several existing access and egress points onto the motorway system, without creating new ones. The existing motorway connections collectively distribute the traffic across a number of local streets. This connectivity helps mitigate the impact of the motorway on the quality of life and the amenity of our neighborhoods.

The removed of connections will cause local traffic to have to cut across suburbs more to get to the fewer remaining points of access to the Sydney city CBD, the airport, or to their home when coming home from across the Bridge or through the Harbour tunnel. This 'rat running' will artificially increase traffic on local suburban streets when currently they travel on major local or arterial streets to the various nearby intersections. The closure of the Brook Street link to the Harbour Bridge is only one example. This will push traffic off the motorway, across West Street into Amherst Street and the heart of the village at Cammeray Square.

Where there is extra vehicle load within our streets, traffic will compete for space against bicycles, local parking, and room for people. Traffic noise and presence of moving vehicles will discourage people from riding bicycles, children from walking to school, and people from using our streets.

Looking into the future, this will prevent improvements for walkability along the whole corridor from Tunks Park to Lavender bay and Waverton. Traffic will work against pedestrian priority at intersections (traffic light phasing, shared zones, zebra crossings, reduced speed limits, traffic lane narrowing; curb extensions etc). It will limit our ability to integrate cycle routes and prevent improvements such as wider footpaths, nature strips, and public seating within our streets.

The redesign of local streets that is under way in many places around Sydney and the world generally relies reducing traffic. The tunnels design should be modified to prevent the worsening traffic in the town centres (such as Amhurst Street in Cammeray and Berry Street in North Sydney) to permit improvement in amenity and accessibility for people on street level.

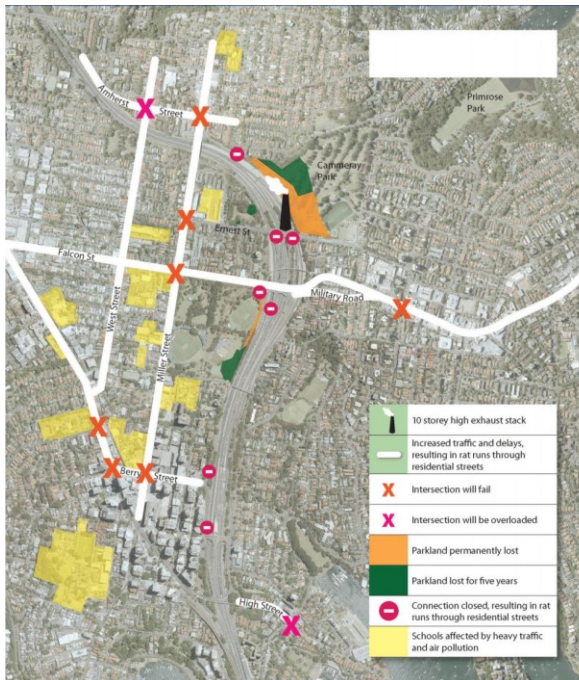
Different scenarios of the possible streetscape are shown visually in the below illustrations :



Source: Global Street Design Guide, Island Press



Details of where these road closures are - and the projected impacts of the change on each of the affected remaining intersections - are displayed in the below table. The table also explains where existing access and egress points are, which will be closed off in the currently proposed plans.



DEGRADE LIVING ENVIRONMENT

- Funnel new traffic into NS CBD
- More traffic in villages
- Remove parkland
- Close motorway links (create rat-runs)
- Walking to school (10,000 children)
- Concentrate vehicle exhaust
- Disturb contaminated land
- Aboriginal Heritage

TRAFFIC IMPACTS LOCAL ENVIRONMENT (PEOPLE)

INTERSECTION	EXTRA DELAY
Amherst Street/West Street	+80%
Amherst Street/Miller Street	+81%
Miller Street/Ernest Street	+76%
Military Road/Ben Boyd Rd	+327%
Falcon Street/Merlin Street	+46%
Berry Street/Walker Street	+66%

Data source: WHT&WFU EIS p. 9-23 to 24

SLIDE 2

Lastly, we mentioned in answer to a query about alternatives to the design of the current proposal that entry and exit points are always best located above the major arterial roads ... in this case, the busiest arterial road in Australia (the Warringah Freeway) which is immediately to the east of the CBD. Traffic experts suggest to place the access/egress links there should be the approach - not divert road traffic into, and across, and then out the other side of the centre of the CBD. If tunnel

traffic must traverse the CBD, the suggestion from our local residents is to keep it underground and so leave the surface for genuine CBD traffic and for pedestrians.

Green Space

The limited time did not allow us time to develop properly with the committee the concept of how to reconnect the parklands in this area which were severed by the building of the Freeway in the 1960s, as part of this project.

We focused in our answer on the projected loss of significant open space at and around Cammeray Park (Golf Course). We understand that existing ground levels makes the motorway widening difficult to solve, however, the WHT also plan to locate their service sheds in this parkland. The sheds and exhaust stack should be located in an industrial area. Further, we note the proposal leaves the parkland with a 'dead edge' of fences and sheds (requiring screening) and it does not integrate a green roof system on the motorway buildings, like the WestConnex tunnel buildings at Rozelle.



PROPOSED STRATEGY

- Remove Green Space
- Disconnect green grid
- Air pollution
- Water pollution
- Discourage walking
- Industrial in residential area

SLIDE 13

If some facilities must be located in the parkland, they could be designed to virtually disappear: create new green space and shield the existing parkland from the motorway. Any buildings or facilities could be designed as green roof buildings (like at Rozelle) and be set at the level of Ernest Street. The north-eastern edge of any proposed buildings (the area is currently and the direct path connecting Cammeray and Neutral Bay also golf holes 7, 8 & 9). This edge, which must resolve the level change from Ernest Street could connect the wider parkland with a landscaped bank and steps. It could also be sleeved with a use such as a café, club facilities or community facilities. The position has a lovely prospect and is an important walking and cycle link.

The proposed 10 meter widening of the Ernest St road bridge could instead be expanded to become a real land bridge. This would be made more useful by connecting it to a green space covering the new facilities buildings. The highway is already cut down into the rockface at these points – the covering simply needs to go over those foundations and instantly the suburbs and parks reconnect.

A further value-add could be achieved with a pedestrian crossing of Ernest Street connecting Anzac Park to Jackson Reserve, which itself could be widened and improved as the motorway is below the level of this reserve. Together these improvements would link Cammeray Park to St Leonards Park. This would replace the parkland lost to motorway widening and would join up all these open spaces.

Replacement Strategy:



REPLACEMENT STRATEGY

- No net loss
- Replace space for widening
- Ridge-top green space
- Connected green space
- Motorway in deep cut
- M'way facilities industrial?
- M'way facilities under park?
- Cut-and-cover

SLIDE 7

We note the Greater Sydney Commission is encouraging the creation of 'green grids' across Sydney to facilitate connectivity on foot or by bicycle; and to therefore enable commuting other than by car. The only way to do this in North Sydney is to either cover the existing freeway over (it is already cut down into the rock at its summit near Military Rd and Falcon St) or by creating a 'land bridge' across the freeway which could create new gardens, sport fields and walking and cycling paths – with fabulous views – which would connect the pre-existing parklands on either side of the Freeway. It is likely you would need 2 connecting routes to link across between pre existing parklands – one near Ernest St as already described above and an elevated one near either Ridge St or near Mount St.

North Sydney does not have a lot of green open spaces compared to other municipalities, but does have some lovely existing pathways and open areas. With this initiative, these could be reconnected and so create many new options for residents to get around easily and to avoid car and bus traffic across most of the municipality. These longer routes would also appeal to tourists, who are already extensive users of similar trails around the headland parks of North Sydney, in particular.

The images below contrast what is currently being proposed as the outcome of the WHL project in the Cammeray area, is illustrates the ridge-top area which could be investigated for a broader landbridge in this same area, to attempt to repair the cleavage created by the 1960's motorway project.



REPAIR STRATEGY

- Connect Green Space
- Ridge-top green space
- Motorway in deep cut
- Cut & Cover zone

SLIDE 8

We also would have raised, if the question had been put to us, that while the landbridge option might also be utilized to create some new cycling linkages, the most valuable addition for commuting cyclists lies in a completely different initiative which has a significantly superior outcome. Developed and then publicly proposed by the Bicycle Institute of NSW and strongly supported by North Sydney Council at the time, the Harbourline concept is a cycleway connected to the rock wall on the western side of the Warringah Freeway and running from Milson's Point – where the Harbour Bridge cycleway ends – up to the crossover cycling bridge at Falcon St, near the corner of St. Leonards Park. We specifically mention this because roadwork is about to commence on this very section of the freeway under the Warringah Freeway Upgrade section of this project, and so the time to construct and install this is ideal over the next few years.

We note the developer has also ignored community suggestions to relocate the tunnel air exhaust outlets away from Anzac Park primary school and into the Artarmon industrial area. We know other community groups, focused solely on these filtration issues, have also addressed the Enquiry and for that reason have not talked about the issue much on the day or in this supplementary paper.

Other Transport Solutions

The consideration of other transport solutions (most obviously public transport options) was raised in the context of a question about what options had been considered for the Beaches Link project. On the day, we did not really have the time to offer any structured response. We did note as a generality that there have long been plans – at least 30 years old but not actioned – to extend the heavy rail line from Chatswood to Brookvale/ Dee Why. We note this is only one suburb beyond where the car tunnel-only Beaches Link option will emerge, meaning that the traffic system and patterns in the rest of the Warringah Peninsula stays much the same under either solution.

As a passing observation, we note that in planning the Harbour Bridge in the 1920's, Bradfield assumed there would be a rail line constructed eventually from either St James or North Sydney railway stations, to Manly. Notwithstanding these long standing ideas, it appears to us that no rail options were considered- and neither were dual use tunnels (like in the English Channel) with a level for vehicles and a level for trains considered.

We also did not have time to answer the question more comprehensively in terms of road traffic. If we had, we would have noted that the EIS states that the Beaches Link would only reduce total traffic volumes through the Military Rd corridor by 10%. In fact, it says traffic will rise by 10% from the existing level and then once the tunnel is complete, drop by 10%. Or, put another way, 90% of the existing traffic problem in the suburbs from Beauty Point to Neutral Bay is caused by LOCAL traffic taking children to school, often in to North Sydney itself. Or it is parents driving to work in the North Sydney or Sydney CBDs and beyond, or local people going to the airport. On weekends this changes to people going to and from the Northern Beaches and going shopping but whichever day it is the traffic problems are there and are serious all through the week.

The Beaches Link tunnel will not even be accessible from any of these suburbs, let alone solve their traffic problems. A different solution and project is needed for this local traffic problem. For this reason, the Beaches Link is not the solution – or, at least, the entire solution. It may help the commuters from the peninsula get to the connecting freeway network around Sydney - and for them that is no bad thing - but very clearly that project will do little for the locals in the North Sydney (and Mosman) municipalities. Clearly, a train option from North Sydney to somewhere like Mosman/ Balmoral area would seem to be the superior answer for the majority of the local road users. It seems this type of other, public transport-based option, was never even considered, let alone costed.

In conclusion, we note that most major cities around the world have stopped building new freeways across their cities and instead are investing in train networks within the densely settled urban areas. Maybe this money should be switched to a more deserving, relevant project than these two?

Ian Grey , Co-Convenor of Combined Precinct Committee of North Sydney 17 September 2021