

**Submission  
No 7**

## **INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE ROZELLE INTERCHANGE**

**Organisation:** Action for Public Transport (NSW) Inc.

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# Action for Public Transport (N.S.W.) Inc.

Haymarket NSW 1240  
17 March 2024

Secretary  
Portfolio Committee No. 6 - Transport and The Arts  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney 2000  
*Submitted via inquiry website*

Dear Secretary,

## NSW Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No. 6

### Inquiry into impact of the Rozelle interchange

#### Submission

#### **Introduction**

Action for Public Transport (NSW) Inc. is a transport advocacy group which has been active in Sydney since 1974. We promote the interests of beneficiaries of public transport - passengers and the wider community alike.

We remind the inquiry that the Rozelle interchange is a part of Westconnex. That project, with the western harbour tunnel, was supposed to have a beneficial effect on mitigating traffic congestion in an area stretching between perhaps Parramatta, Concord, Drummoyne, Glebe, St Peters, Hurstville and Bankstown with an extension to KFS. It is difficult to extricate Rozelle from the greater Westconnex solution. We suggest there could be benefits from relating this inquiry to many other parts of Sydney, including both short-term and long-term actions.

We would be pleased to appear at hearings if desired.

#### **Discussion of each term of reference**

**a. the planning, design and development of the Rozelle Interchange project and its impact on traffic flow, including the prioritisation of traffic from toll roads including WestConnex over local traffic**

We understand that any form of metering of M4 traffic where it enters the interchange tunnels has been precluded. This could be to minimise the risk of traffic bank-ups in other WestConnex tunnels which might exceed the capacity of the clean air supply. But unsurprisingly it has the same effect as granting priority to WestConnex traffic over trips starting from closer locations including important bus services.

Meanwhile, traffic signals immediately east of the Iron Cove inbound lanes are operated so as to control traffic entering the tunnel. These signals also control the bus lane. We cannot understand why buses must be lumped in with other traffic at that point. Buses should be able to drive up the bus lane towards Darling St.

**b. all traffic modelling that was undertaken, including for WestConnex, all surrounding arterial roads and all local roads**

We make no comment on this term.

**c. design decisions that restricted or compromised traffic flows, including any changes from the original plans or modelling**

We make no comment on this term.

**d. the planning, design and development of the Rozelle Interchange project and its impact on the efficient and on-time running of buses, ferries and all other public transport**

Traffic congestion has worsened around the inner western suburbs since the opening of the Rozelle underground interchange. Much more M4 traffic now travels via the Anzac bridge than formerly. In morning peak there is serious inbound traffic congestion on Victoria Rd through Drummoyne back toward Gladesville.

We are very concerned that a traffic measure that was supposed to speed up road traffic has worsened bus services.

**e. the communication and consultation processes undertaken by Transport for NSW and other relevant stakeholders throughout the lifespan of the Rozelle Interchange Project**

We make no comment on this term.

**f. the social, environmental and economic impacts of the Rozelle Interchange project on impacted communities**

There are reports of motorists trying extraordinary (and sometimes illegal) measures to reduce their exposure to the Victoria Rd traffic jam; Balmain residents complain that bus trips take longer and that traffic is queued up Mullins St back to Balmain Town Hall. The delays are significantly reduced on days when police are enforcing transit lanes and bus lanes. The delays are unpredictable, adding a complication to an already-bad situation.

A few days after the Rozelle interchange opened on 2nd December, there was a well-attended public meeting at Balmain Town Hall which made local feelings on the issue clear to anyone who listened.

The extra fuel burned by the majority of these stalled vehicles of course has an adverse effect on the global community by exacerbating climate change

**g. the impact on foot traffic and active transport options, including due to the closure of Rozelle Parklands**

We make no comment on this term.

**h. the cause of asbestos detected in the Rozelle Parklands and the adequacy and appropriateness of the responses by government agencies and contractors to reports of asbestos in and near the Parklands**

We make no comment on this term.

**i. solutions to ease the congestion and gridlock that the opening of the Rozelle Interchange has created, including the impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel after opening**

We suggest that bus route 445 from Lilyfield which formerly serviced the Balmain ferry wharf but which was cut back to Gladstone Park be restored. By improving an alternative to road travel, it could mitigate the adverse effect that the Rozelle interchange project has had on Balmain. Further improvements to that route would result from reducing the Balmain-Barangaroo fare and/or by running more ferries, perhaps with a shuttle service at peak hours.

The present NSW government announced soon after election that there would be no peak-hour road access pricing under any name. It is regrettable that unpopular policies cannot be implemented even if there would be significant benefits from their introduction. For instance, see Hensher's article in The Sydney Morning Herald on 11 March 2016<sup>1</sup> which said:

We need to begin a journey away from fixed charges, such as car registration, to use-based charges. At the Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies we showed a while ago that for the Sydney metropolitan area, if you halved registration charges and introduced a 5¢ per kilometre peak period charge, then almost every driver would be better off financially (as would state Treasury, though the federal government would lose out on some fuel excise due to reduced distance travelled by cars).

It would result in a 6 per cent drop in peak traffic (similar to traffic drop during school holidays), which makes a huge difference to the performance of the road network. It also a way of ensuring that those who benefit for the time savings under the new reform also pay.

To convince people we are talking sense, take a simple example of typical peak period kilometres in Sydney per year (4000 kilometres out of the typical yearly average 12,500 kilometres for private cars). Halving registration charges should save on average \$200 a year and 4000 kilometres with a peak charge at 5¢ per kilometre is \$200 so it is cost neutral. We could reduce registration charges even more, as per the view of Infrastructure Australia, and then saving to motorists is greater than \$200 (possibly as great as \$500).

Road access pricing had already received attention in Macquarie St. There was a Legislative Assembly committee inquiry in 2011-2013<sup>2</sup>, chaired by former NRMA senior executive Charles Casuscelli MP. Unfortunately, the inquiry had not reported by the end of that Parliament in 2015 so we don't have the benefit of its wisdom

Road access pricing has also received attention in Canberra<sup>3</sup>. An article published in The Conversation dated 12 September 2016<sup>4</sup> by Marion Terrill and Owain Emslie states:

Road user charging is probably the best idea we have to reduce congestion and to enable better decisions on road investment. Average travel speeds in our cities are decreasing, and congestion is only likely to worsen as our population continues to grow.

Former Urban Infrastructure Minister Paul Fletcher recently gave an important speech<sup>[5]</sup>, albeit largely unnoticed, in which he made the case for a universal road user charging scheme. Charging people to drive has previously been the dream of transport and economic policy wonks - serving politicians tend to see the idea as political poison.

Fletcher trod gently, cautioning his Sydney Institute audience that "there is a lot of work to do" and that any move in this direction would be "a ten to 15-year journey". It is still remarkable that a federal minister even took these first steps.

Another paper on the subject is "Stuck in traffic? Road congestion in Sydney and Melbourne" by Terrill<sup>6</sup> (October 2017) which recommends inter alia:

The NSW and Victorian governments should introduce congestion charging. People who want to drive on congested roads in the peak should pay a small charge to do so. The revenue should be returned to the community as discounts on car registration, and improvements to public transport. And as more toll roads are introduced, state governments should ensure they have the flexibility to adjust future tolls to manage traffic flows.

A later article by Bagshaw<sup>7</sup> gives further arguments for the benefits of a road-user charge but concedes the politics would be awkward. Bagshaw cites a Parliamentary Library<sup>8</sup> estimate that "during the morning peak period, over 20 per cent of Sydney road users travel for discretionary reasons". In the afternoon peak that rises to 39 per cent. However, the heavy congestion around the Rozelle interchange in peak hour is such that not many people would venture into it without a good reason and the above estimates should be discounted as irrelevant.

We agree with Hensher's suggesting that a usage charge should be seen as revenue-neutral, with the funds going to reduce vehicle ownership charges or perhaps to develop public transport.

We note Hensher's suggestion of GPS-based devices to measure vehicle kilometres and thereby assess his usage charge. However, that was some years ago and we point out that nearly all cars, certainly those on WestConnex, are fitted with toll tags. It would be a simple matter to toll the Rozelle interchange or any other stretch of road. We attach a map which we prepared for an earlier inquiry showing that only a limited number of new toll points would be needed to impose peak-hour usage charges on most of central and eastern Sydney's main roads.

Road pricing under another name could be smuggled into the issue by withdrawing M4 cashback during peak hours. That would presumably reduce peak M4 traffic by a few percentage points, possibly enough to make a visible difference at Rozelle.

**j. the adequacy of Transport for NSW planning, resource allocation and public communication in the period leading to and directly after the opening of the Rozelle Interchange**

We make no comment on this term.

**k. the cost of the Rozelle Interchange and the total cost of WestConnex**

We suggest that the money would have been better spent on public transport.

**l. any other related matters**

We respectfully remind the inquiry that transport and land-use are closely related; land-use changes affect the demand for transport and cannot succeed unless appropriate transport is available. A project such as WestConnex which facilitates high-speed car travel for long trips across the city thereby encourages land-use patterns that depend on those trips. But if there are policies to encourage public transport (and there are, although there sometimes seems to be more rhetoric than action), land uses which depend on easy short trips focussed on local centres will thrive. Those trips fit public transport well.

## **Conclusion**

We think that allowing the WestConnex project to take over Sydney's inner west was a mistake and that attempting to rectify the mistake by amplifying WestConnex makes things worse. We think that the time for appropriate road-user charges has come; Fletcher's (or Hensher's) journey can commence.

## **Recommendations**

We suggest that bus route 445 should be restored to its original route, with its northern terminus at the Balmain East wharf in Darling St.

We further suggest that ferry fares between East Balmain and Barangaroo (880 metres) be reduced relative to longer trips.

We suggest that policing of bus and transit lanes should be stepped up immediately and held at an effective level.

We recommend that the traffic signals controlling eastbound entry into the new tunnel be modified to have separate white B indication for the bus lane, reducing unnecessary delays for buses.

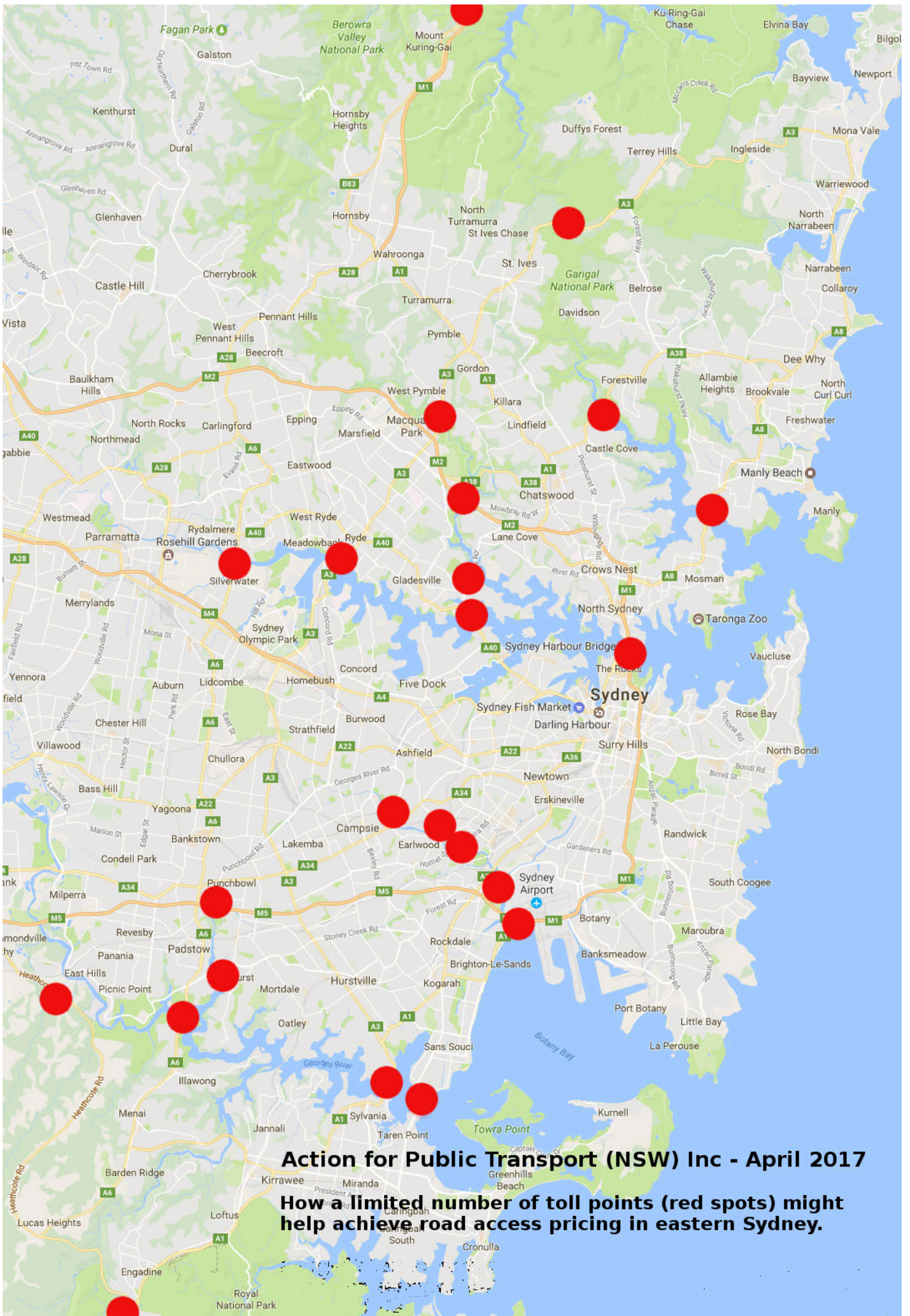
We recommend that the M4 toll cashback be suspended at peak hours in order to marginally discourage M4 traffic, easing congestion at Rozelle. We urge the inquiry to press for road usage charges, sweetened by being revenue-neutral and by applying only in peak hour and, reduced, in shoulder hours.

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## References

- <sup>1</sup><http://www.smh.com.au/comment/a-congestion-charge-will-help-unclog-sydneys-roads-and-save-drivers-money-20160310-gnfksg.html>
- <sup>2</sup><https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=1633>
- <sup>3</sup><http://www.smh.com.au/comment/ministers-suggestion-of-new-road-user-charge-may-seem-outrageous-but-it-makes-sense-20160920-grk1bc.html>
- <sup>4</sup><https://theconversation.com/road-user-charging-belongs-on-the-political-agenda-as-the-best-answer-for-congestion-management-65027>
- <sup>5</sup>[http://podcast.thesydneyinstitute.com.au/podcasts/2016/THE SYDNEY INSTITUTE PAUL FLETCHER 16 AUGUST 2016.lite.mp3](http://podcast.thesydneyinstitute.com.au/podcasts/2016/THE_SYDNEY_INSTITUTE_PAUL_FLETCHER_16_AUGUST_2016.lite.mp3)  
- The Challenge Of Funding Australia's Road System (16 August 2016)
- <sup>6</sup><https://grattan.edu.au/report/stuck-in-traffic/>
- <sup>7</sup><https://www.smh.com.au/business/the-economy/the-traffic-solution-politicians-should-stop-running-away-from-20190711-p526eq.html>
- <sup>8</sup>[https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/4789170/upload\\_binary/4789170.pdf](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/4789170/upload_binary/4789170.pdf)

Jim Donovan  
Secretary  
Action for Public Transport (NSW) Inc.



**Action for Public Transport (NSW) Inc - April 2017**  
**How a limited number of toll points (red spots) might help achieve road access pricing in eastern Sydney.**