

**Submission  
No 8**

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

**Name:** Ms Kobi Shetty MP

**Date Received:** 17 March 2024

---



**KOBI SHETTY MP**

**MEMBER FOR BALMAIN**

201-205 Glebe Point Rd, Glebe NSW 2037  
02 9660 7586  
balmain@parliament.nsw.gov.au



## Submission to Portfolio Committee No. 6, Inquiry into the Impact of Rozelle Interchange

**Sunday, 17 March 2024**

Cate Faehrmann, Chair  
Portfolio Committee No. 6 – Transport and the Arts  
Parliament of NSW

Dear Ms Faehrmann,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Transport and the Arts Committee Inquiry into the Impact of the Rozelle Interchange.

As you know the interchange is located entirely within my electorate and I have been closely monitoring issues arising from the project since I became the Member for Balmain in March 2023. Prior to that I was, and continue to be, a Balmain-Baludarri Ward Councillor on Inner West Council and I have paid close attention to the matter in that capacity as well.

I have had thousands of conversations and exchanges with constituents regarding the various impacts of the interchange during my time as a local representative. Concern within the community has been particularly heightened since the interchange was opened to traffic in November last year.

I note the extensive terms of reference for this review. I will limit my contribution to matters that are of concern to me as a representative and advocate for my community. Broadly, these will cover the community's experience of the interchange, the inadequacy of the Labor Government's plans to fix issues that have arisen regarding traffic flows, de-prioritisation of pedestrian and cycling amenity throughout the project, problems that have arisen with the delivery of Rozelle Parklands including the discovery of asbestos contamination, and the need to apply world's best practise and filter the exhaust stacks.

I will attach a number of documents that will add further detail to my submission.

Should you wish to discuss the matters raised here in any further detail please do not hesitate to contact my office on (02) 9660 7586 or [Balmain@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Balmain@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

## **1. Community Experience**

### 1.1 - Construction

Our community suffered a great deal of disruption and interference throughout the construction of the Rozelle Interchange, ranging from tunnelling noise and ground-borne vibration, air-borne dust, noisy night-works, road closures and traffic diversions, increased pressure on local street-parking, loss of local street trees and damage to property along the tunnelling route.

Much of this was experienced during the covid-19 lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, while people were confined to their homes and attempting to work and study throughout these disruptions. In recognition of the community's suffering the government's contractors would sometime offer affected households some level of compensation, ranging from token gift vouchers to noise-cancelling headphones and the occasional stay in alternative accommodation depending on the severity of the impact. These offerings were accompanied by non-disclosure agreements that many in the community felt uncomfortable entering into, but felt they had little choice but to sign.

### 1.2 - Opening

It was with much anticipation and relief that our community approached the opening of the interchange, as it represented the end of this difficult period of construction. The shock and disbelief throughout the initial two-week period of operation is a reflection of just how dismayed people were across the affected area, discovering that the interchange had not only failed to improve our lives and that the promised benefits of this new toll-road would not actually eventuate, but that the traffic chaos it had created would now keep them locked in their suburbs.

My office was inundated with calls, emails and messages during the interchange's first weeks of operation. These involved concerns with signage, hugely increased travel time, being unable to use the Iron Cove Link to head West, bottlenecks where Victoria Road and the City West Link joined the Anzac Bridge, ramp metering traffic lights further slowing traffic coming from these arterial roads, local street impacts along with general feedback.

I passed a selection of these on to the Minister for Roads on 1 December 2023, and I include a copy of that document along with this submission for the Committee's reference.

### 1.3 - Holiday period

As was anticipated by the Labor Government and Transport for NSW, community concern seemed to dissipate throughout the summer holiday period, as traffic volumes across Sydney were significantly reduced. This reduction in traffic would

have been the ideal time to identify major flaws across the interchange and implement a plan to address them. This opportunity was not taken.

The time was instead used to implement a number of minor interventions, including:

- Removing spoil haulage trucks and other large vehicles from local streets during the morning peak
- Changes to the merging lane along the City West Link ahead of the junction with the Johnston Street overpass
- Re-implementation of the right-hand turn at Johnston Street into The Crescent
- Placement of temporary signage along Victoria Rd to indicate the Iron Cove Link is toll-free
- Adjusting traffic light phasing at a number of locations including Johnston Street, Darling Street, Evans Street and Robert Street, as well as further upstream in Drummoyne and beyond
- Resolving issues with online maps and GPS systems adjusting to the network changes
- Collaborating with Inner West Council's traffic management team
- Promoting mode shift and increasing public transport options in nearby areas

The effect of these interventions has been to maximise traffic flow through the interchange and spread the traffic congestion around from one place to another, rather than addressing the core issue of prioritising cars coming from the privatised tollways onto the Anzac Bridge, at the expense of local traffic.

#### 1.4 - Post-holiday period

Once schools reopened and the majority of Sydney residents wound up their holidays and returned to work, traffic congestion on surface roads resumed and constituents once again began contacting my office with concerns. I note that this has not been at the same level as the pre-holiday period, however it is clear that a large part of the community remains engaged on this issue and that their concerns have not been satisfactorily addressed. My sense is there is a growing sentiment among the community that these issues are intractable and that there is little to be gained by asking the government to consider further solutions.

I have continued to pass community feedback on to the Minister for Roads and I have included further examples of this for the Committee's reference. I note in particular that there have been several occasions where issues further along the network have resulted in congestion back at Victoria Road, The Crescent, the City West Link, Johnston Street and the new flyover. It is clear that the opening of the Rozelle Interchange has introduced a degree of fragility to the network, and that road users along its route are more susceptible to distant interruptions, in places like North Sydney, than they previously have been.

## **2. Labor's plans to fix the interchange**

### 2.1 - More motorways and changed driver behaviour

To date the Labor Government has shown little interest in moving beyond its original approach of minor tweaks and gentle interventions to fix the interchange. From the outset they have relied on departmental advice that these traffic impacts were expected and should improve when the Western Harbour Tunnel is completed in 2028. In the meantime, they have said that people becoming more familiar with the network changes and altering their behaviour as road users will assist in managing the impact.

### 2.2 - Ramp metering from the M4

I have written to the Minister for Roads on several occasions, seeking to discuss more impactful interventions. In particular I have raised the need for our community to understand what arrangements the Government has entered into with TransUrban about the prioritisation of traffic coming onto the Anzac Bridge from the WestConnex tunnels. This seems to be what is preventing the potential solution of metering traffic coming from the M4 onto the Anzac Bridge, or removing the metering that further slows un-tolled traffic entering the Anzac Bridge, to restore some equity in traffic flow.

The Minister has referred to safety advice that the government has received, suggesting that it would be disadvantageous to hold traffic inside road tunnels and that there is a need to keep all tunnel lanes moving freely. This would appear contrary to the installation of traffic metering lights inside the Iron Cove Link tunnel, although I do note that to date these have not been made operational.

I have requested a copy of the government's safety advice. These discussions have not progressed.

### 2.3 - Regular discussion with senior Transport officials

I have been put in regular contact with the Transport for NSW Controller General, and the team at the Traffic Management Centre. These discussions have proved useful for passing on detailed feedback and hearing almost in real time about how these interventions have been applied. I have appreciated these meetings.

It is worth stating that the Transport for NSW officials and crews who have been tasked with managing the interchange have done a great job. They appear to be constrained by Government policy. My meetings with senior Transport Officials have unfortunately not enabled any frank discussion about the structural issues that would need to be addressed if any serious attempt were to be made to fix the interchange – the design of various surface road alterations, ramp metering onto the Anzac Bridge, and the prioritisation of tolled traffic over local streets.

## 2.4 - Public transport solutions

But even additional interventions that might be pursued within these constraints do not appear to be on the table. Encouraging people to change their behaviour as road users, for instance, will yield slow results without significant investment in public transport services. Buses such as the 441, 442 and 437 that get stuck in traffic, or buses such as the 445 that do not connect with nearby ferry services to the city, are hardly likely to encourage people to leave the car at home and consider these alternative options. These services require quick improvements, including the extension of bus services from Gladstone Park to the Balmain East ferry wharf, the resumption of ferry services to Elliot Street - West Balmain, and the expansion of the F-10 service to include a stop at Annandale.

## **3. Pedestrian and cycling amenity**

### 3.1 - Missed opportunity

A major new transport infrastructure project like the Rozelle Interchange presents an opportunity to review and improve nearby pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. It is disappointing that the focus has been on active transport links provided with the development of the Rozelle Parklands, and that options outside of this footprint have been limited to the impractical cycle route along Gordon Street, Quirk Street and Red Lion Street. These streets are steep and narrow, Gordon Street is used by drivers trying to avoid excessive traffic on arterial routes, and this route requires cyclists to cross busy roads such as Evans Street and Darling Street without traffic lights or safe places to cross. Red Lion Street is particularly narrow, without a lot of space for pedestrians to move safely along it. The route is unsuitable and is unlikely to encourage active transport.

Where new paths and cycle lanes have been introduced within the Parklands footprint, failure to provide for access ramps from Lilyfield Road has made them inaccessible, and potentially dangerous for some users. The Victoria Road underpass is now the only genuine crossing for cyclists and pedestrians between The Crescent and Gordon Street. This has discouraged cyclists and pedestrians and created a 450-metre "dead-zone" for pedestrians throughout this strip. What is particularly concerning is reports of pedestrians taking serious risks to run across six lanes of traffic to cross Victoria Road at Robert Street to avoid a 700-metre alternative route that takes approximately 10 minutes to walk. This is especially worrisome with the Biennale running at White Bay Powerstation from March until June this year, which will bring additional pedestrians to the area.

It should be noted that the volume of surface traffic along Victoria Road has significantly decreased since the opening of the interchange, as the toll-free Iron

Cove Tunnel nears full capacity. But due to the failure to give priority to the surface traffic and the ramp metering constraints that are now applied between Victoria Road and the Anzac Bridge, this stretch of road remains an unnecessarily congested traffic sewer.

#### **4. Problems with Rozelle Parklands**

##### 4.1 Asbestos contamination

The Rozelle Parklands was seen by many in our community as compensation for the years of disruption during construction of the interchange. Indeed, there are some local residents who are still waiting on the outcome of property damage claims that are being assessed by the Independent Property Impact Assessment Panel. This has been a painful time for many residents, as I have noted above, and the offering of 10 hectares of new open space would have gone some way towards helping our community to heal. The disappointment, frustration, and despair in our community when mulch contaminated with asbestos was discovered three weeks after the park was opened, forcing its immediate closure for the containment and removal of hazardous materials cannot be overstated.

Given the nature of the asbestos fragments and the way these were discovered, it is hard to imagine there were no concerns raised prior to the Parklands being signed off and handed over to Transport for NSW prior to opening. There are serious questions here regarding the rigour in which mulch product was assessed – even just visually – as safe prior to laying it across garden beds and children’s play areas in the park.

In saying this I note that the garden beds at the corner of Callan Street and Victoria Road were spot tested and cleared for the presence of asbestos soon after to Parklands were closed, however six weeks later a member of the public noticed building material in the beds and alerted Westconnex, and it was confirmed that there was friable asbestos in that location. This undermines confidence in the testing procedures that have been applied and adds to the uncertainty that our community is feeling with respect to the safety of the Parklands.

I also note that the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) has been concerned for some time about the prevalence of contamination in recovered fines and recycled mulch products. Recommendations to tighten the regulatory framework were made by the EPA in 2022, but these were rejected by the former coalition government. I am looking forward to seeing the current government taking this issue on in light of this scandalous situation in the Rozelle Parklands and across Sydney.

##### 4.2 - Synthetic playing field

The failure of Transport for NSW and their contractors to deliver a synthetic playing field within the Rozelle Parklands has left local sporting clubs without a key piece of sporting infrastructure. This has left the Inner West Council searching for an

alternative location for this field, causing unnecessary conflict within the community over the future use of much needed local green space.

While I have concerns about the environmental impacts of synthetic turf, I understand it would have been preferable for such an inclusion on the engineered surface above the interchange tunnels, upon which the Rozelle Parklands have been constructed, as compared to the more sensitive locations where natural grass fields are currently located. Regardless, the current upheaval over this issue could have been avoided if Transport for NSW had delivered a synthetic playing field as part of the Rozelle Parklands.

## **5. Unfiltered exhaust stacks**

The three unfiltered exhaust stacks located above playing fields and a children's playground at the Rozelle Parklands, and the unfiltered exhaust stack at Iron Cove Bridge that is within proximity to Rozelle Public School are causing a great deal of concern in our community.

The current Labor government has persisted with the former coalition government's policy of enabling unfiltered traffic emissions to dissipate around these sites. They have relied on the NSW Chief Engineer and Scientist's study of road tunnel air quality to justify this inaction, however new evidence from medical scientists has become available in the time since that study was completed.

It is now understood that the health risks associated with transport emissions may be up to ten times worse than previously considered. In light of this I have asked the government to review the findings of the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer, which they have agreed to do. This review must be completed as quickly as possible, and the government must take whatever reasonable precautions are needed to ensure the health and wellbeing of our community are prioritised.

## **6. Recommendations**

I make the following recommendations:

6.1 - Resolve local traffic bottlenecks limiting access to Victoria Road from the Balmain peninsula and Rozelle and improve traffic flow from Victoria Road onto the Anzac Bridge by reconsidering the choice to prioritise traffic from the privatised toll-roads ahead of local streets.

6.2 - Improve pedestrian safety at key Victoria Road crossings including Darling Street, and between Roberts Road and Evans Street in particular

6.3 - Resolve impacts to local streets across Annandale, Lilyfield, Forest Lodge and Glebe, flowing on from traffic flow being limited where Johnston Street and The Crescent merge onto the flyover in order to access the Anzac Bridge. This must be



done in consultation with local residents who are best placed to offer the most practical and simple solutions.

6.4 - Improve local public transport services, including the extension of 445 bus services from Gladstone Park to the Balmain East ferry wharf, the resumption of ferry services to Elliot Street - West Balmain, and the expansion of the F-10 service to include a stop at Annandale.

6.5 - Complete the review of the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer's findings on road tunnel air quality and reconsider the policy of allowing transport emissions to dissipate within the vicinity of local playing fields, children's playgrounds, and several local public schools, including Rozelle Public School and Annandale North Public School.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present this submission to the Committee's Inquiry into the Impact of Rozelle Interchange. Should you wish to discuss the matters raised here in any further detail please do not hesitate to contact my office on (02) 9660 7586 or [Balmain@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Balmain@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Yours sincerely,

**Kobi Shetty MP**  
Member for Balmain