

**Submission
No 18**

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE ROZELLE INTERCHANGE

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Thank you to the Committee members for conducting an Upper House Inquiry into the impact of the Rozelle Interchange.

WestConnex has had a profound effect on so many communities in its footprint. Although this is a Parliamentary Inquiry focuses specifically on the Rozelle Interchange, you cannot divide this part of Westconnex from the other sections.

The traffic impacts at the Rozelle Interchange are very marked, yet they have been caused by the same planning factors that have resulted in similar impacts on other sections. The impacts were predictable.

The WestConnex programme of works needs to be referred to the Independent Commission against Corruption (ICAC) or (better) a Royal Commission. The investigation ideally will cover all aspects of the program, as the financial and opportunity costs, the failure to meet stated objectives as well as the long-term negative impacts on so many communities deserves closer inspection.

The investigation needs to include why the original NSW Transport Master Plan 2012 which contained significant public transport improvements (*such as linking the rail lines to become and orbital rather than radial system*) were removed. These initiatives were replaced with every single road project envisaged since 1948. Who was in the room and what influences changed the original concept?

Impacts from the M5-M8 – Section 2

The Proponent, RMS, was required to conduct a study of the traffic impacts as a result of the New M5 (M8) Section 2. The “WestConnex M8 Preliminary Road Network Performance Review Plan”¹ dated April 2023 identified many local arteries have been adversely affected. Given that it was the Proponent that conducted the study, one can hardly expect a fully frank and honest assessment. The study only covered the peak periods – not the impacts of increased traffic volumes during the day and all night which has had a marked reduction in livability, safety, amenity as well as impeding the performance of the local bus routes. Further, the local roads included in the study were limited, ignoring many others similarly adversely impacted by rat-running.

It was stated in this study, and the various EIS that “*WestConnex will congestion on surface roads and improve productivity and efficiency for all road users, including buses, freight and light commercial vehicles*”. This statement contradicts content contained in the Traffic Modelling Appendix in the various EIS that local traffic conditions will worsen, particularly off peak.

For example, in Volume 1B Traffic Modelling for the New M5 it stated that traffic volumes will increase by up to 40% on Stoney Creek Road (and surrounds) once tolls were introduced on the M5 East section. As it was expected that the local roads parallel to the M5 would be crushed with more traffic, the RMS introduced clearways along Stoney Creek and Forest Roads as well as removing

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https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/system/files/media/documents/2023/RMS12837_M8_Preliminary_Road_Network_Performance_Web_PDF_V1.pdf

traffic calming measures like the pedestrian crossing at Tooronga Terrace Beverly Hills and (initially) refusing to reinstate the speed hump on Cooalongatta Road bridge.

The impact on communities have been profound.

Beverly Hills:

- The King Georges Road volumes have significantly increased due to the mis-match between the M5 West cash back and the fully tolled M5-East. As a consequence clearways were introduced and more public funding diverted to road widening works between Stoney Creek and Forest Road (that have dragged on with progress seemingly very slow)
- The King Georges Road clearways spelt the inevitable death of the Town Centre. It was once a thriving local shopping and restaurant precinct. Now, the typical indicators of dereliction include the multiple Thai massage joints, vape shops, mobile phone repair shops and even a Pole Dancing joint. Long standing family restaurants have closed as the Town Centre is now an area to hurry through, rather than the destination it once was.
- The community is deprived of a local town centre that can meet basic daily needs. Residents are forced to drive to alternate locales, which deprives those that don't drive, such as the elderly trying to remain in their own homes, of their independence as well as a local destination.
- Children are deprived of independently navigating through the suburb on foot or bike to visit (non-existent) shops or school. The roads are simply too dangerous, with speeding rat-runners through the locale.
- Cooalongatta Road – became a speedway for rat-runs. This local road became too dangerous for pedestrians to walk to the local primary school or public transport. It was only when three serious incidences (occurring within a time-frame of 5-minutes) that it was Council that listened to angry residents and took action to reintroduce the speed hump.
- Bus performance has significantly declined as they are caught up in a single occupant private vehicle traffic jam on King Georges and Stoney Creek Roads.
- No safe separated cycle routes. In fact, difficult walking routes as well, such as footpaths disappearing.

Bexley Town Centre

- The Bexley Town Centre is located on Forest Road – heavily impacted by the additional traffic and the ongoing pressure for more clearways. The decline of the Town Centre is expected to continue, but maybe they also might be “lucky” to get a Pole Dancing joint too!
- Stoney Creek and Forest Road residents (and nearby other local road residents) have had all amenity destroyed. These roads suffer a significant increase in heavy vehicles 24-7 and rat-running. There have been many complaints from this community who were deceived with the advertising that “WestConnex will take traffic off local roads, returning these streets to the community”
- No safe separated cycle routes

Kingsgrove Town Centre

- Traffic volumes on Kingsgrove Road continue to increase, heavily impacted by traffic moving between Stoney Creek and Canterbury Roads. A further extension of clearways (for the convenience of motorists) will contribute to the further decline of this community asset.
- The increasing traffic is impeding the performance of the bus services – particularly to the main hospital at Kogarah.
- No safe separated cycle routes

Earlwood Town Centre

- The traffic volumes on Homer Street have increased as a result of toll avoidance spreading across the areas. Some residents have stated a fear that 24-7 clearways on this road will also be introduced – thus spelling the death of a community asset, the Earlwood Town Centre.
- Bus route performance has been impeded by the additional traffic volume.
- No safe separated cycle routes

Marrickville Town Centre

- The traffic volumes on Illawarra Road have likewise increased as a result of toll avoidance spreading across the areas. Again, there is a fear that 24-7 clearways will be introduced on this road thus impacting the Town Centre.
- Bus route performance is likewise impeded
- Minimal safe separated cycle routes

Canterbury Road

- The traffic volumes on Canterbury Road have been impacted by spillover from both the M4 and M5. This road is also a traffic sewer containing many derelict shops and unlivable conditions for residents.
- Bus route performance is likewise impeded
- No safe separated cycle routes

Parramatta Road and Victoria Road “Boulevards”

- Returning local arterial roads to communities with an active and public transport focus was promised as part of the WestConnex program. This included the Parramatta Road “boulevard”. This has not eventuated, nor will it ever.
- The Communities at Balmain and Rozelle will only ever see a Victoria Road traffic sewer rather than the Boulevard envisioned.

Adequacy of Transport NSW planning.

There is long term evidence that increasing road capacity will inevitably increase traffic. Building ourselves out of congestion is best achieved by enhancing public and active transport links.

Unfortunately, tNSW seem to operate in silo's with obviously no holistic understanding on the dependence and interaction between the five modes of transport - walk, cycle, bus, rail and road. For decades the majority of transport capital spend has been directed to roads, forcing many Sydney communities to be car dependant and congested.

It is basic mathematics that a single road lane can move a maximum of 800 cars per hour (est 1,200 pax) vs a single rail line moving some 25,000 pax in the same period. This raises the question why the RMS was permitted to push WestConnex and be granted SSI status, yet this was the least efficient use of public funds and real estate and highly criticised by independent transport experts.

The majority of our wonderful heavy rail system is near 100-years old. Despite the decades of financial neglect, it continues to serve the public well. We have lost 10-years of conducting very real improvements to the rail/metro/light rail network.

Conculsion

The impacts of the Rozelle Interchange, as well as along the wider route, are not acceptable. Sydney was already at toll saturation. The traffic, noise and pollution impacts of more toll roads on local roads were known, as disclosures were contained in the various appendix of the EIS.

The Proponent, RMS, was well aware that WestConnex was a local environment traffic inducing programme but pushed on despite of the impacts to the natural and built environment.

We have wasted a decade in improving the mobility of people and freight on an infrastructure asset for the benefit of the private tollroad operator Transurban. This was never a transport plan to benefit the public.

Those that are responsible for the WestConnex decision need to be brought to account with an integrity inquiry. Those that mislead the public by advertising overstated benefits whilst understating the disbenefits also need to be held to account.

Kathryn Calman