

**Submission
No 100**

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE ROZELLE INTERCHANGE

Name: Mr Les Johnston

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Dear Committee Chair person,

I am a local resident living in Balmain and provided comments on the EIS and associated documentation. I welcome the upper house inquiry and the terms of its investigations.

I have found that NSW Transport as the developer and the NSW Planning Department completed a defective EIS process and failed to seriously consider other options for the proposed interchange and its impact on local residents, the environment and the transport needs of Sydneyiders. The imposed solution was private toll roads. The potential blockage at Rozelle was never considered in the haste to approve the toll road plan.

Just why the western harbour tunnel (WHT) for the northern beaches had to be located at Rozelle to travel to North Sydney remains a mystery. If the northern beaches was to be the end point, why travel to North Sydney given the existing traffic density in that area? We are yet to see the additional traffic issues that will eventuate when the WHT is completed.

For many years, the traffic light network was programmed to feed vehicles on to the expanding toll road network. (Staff who have done the programming.) Independent traffic planners might be usefully engaged to provide comment on the whether removing the toll road priority might lessen the impact of the Rozelle blockage. Independent traffic planners had provided warnings about traffic congestion issues during the EIS process. These warning were ignored by both Transport and Planning. The ability of NSW Planning to accept and act on independent advice on environmental issues is of serious concern.

I regularly travel from Balmain to Newtown for family reasons. Cycling is the most environmentally friendly way to travel. The blockage at Rozelle is unsafe. The Transport cycle route did not consider safety for cyclists. The back streets of Rozelle on the southern side of Victoria Road has steep inclines and cars remain a hazard. Getting from Robert Road across Victoria Road is unsafe. The removal of both overpass bridges for pedestrians and cyclists was done for aesthetic reasons!

It was always known that Anzac Bridge was at capacity. Transport now has plans to add another lane (or two?) to Anzac Bridge. The inquiry might seek independent advice on this aspect in terms of addressing the Rozelle blockage.

As a local motorist on the roads (when I need to), I am finding drivers remain very much unaware with which lane to travel in. I consider that this has caused many additional traffic accidents and contributes to the blockage. The road network design means that many motorists need to cross 4 lanes of traffic to be in the correct lane. This is the case for me when turning left onto the Anzac Bridge when travelling to Glebe. Previously, I remained in the kerbside lane. There is also three lanes of traffic to cross when travelling west on Victoria Road from Wellington Street. It appears that Transport designed the road system with a priority for through traffic. It is through traffic which is blocked on the main roads.

I also question the haste that the proponent obtained a variation to the EIS when it was identified there were technical difficulties with the approved design. This related to the access arrangement

for the Crescent in Annandale. The impact of the change and actual costs of the project would appear to warrant investigation into costs to the NSW Government. What were the savings with the approved variation?

I occasionally use public transport (generally never in peak hour) and my experience has been not been a problem. However, regular commuters have experienced doubling of travel times. It appears that Transport gave little (if any) consideration to the impact of the Rozelle blockage on the public bus transport system.

The management of asbestos waste has been and remains a major issue. Political sensitivity has limited the issuing of fines to persons failing to manage asbestos waste. Local Government has a role to play in the DA process. Inexperience of staff combined with other perceived priorities when handling DAs enables asbestos to fall through the cracks. Private certifiers focus on paperwork and ticking boxes rather than identifying issues. As a former environmental regulator, there is an opportunity for a periodical blitz on construction site waste management as a strategy to shift the mindset of developers and waste contractors.

I have received regular emails from Transport relating to the construction of the Rozelle interchange. The content of the emails has been to provide information on the basis that any response will be ignored. All construction work will take place when the contractor wants to. Were any fines issued to the Contractor? I found the emails and directions re cycling travel routes and signage unhelpful.

In terms of solutions to the blockage, there should be a change to road toll charges to impose an environmental levy on polluters who use toll roads – ie fossil fuel vehicles based on engine size and air pollution. Funds raised would be used to reduce registration and stamp duty costs of electric vehicles. Through traffic on main roads and transfers to toll roads should loose priority. Bus lanes should be prioritised with passenger pickup and depart being off lane.

Transport NSW did a rush job of opening the Rozelle blockage. This should have been delayed till the holiday period when schools were closed. Transport did not appear to have any idea what was going to happen on day 1. They were jumping at shadows. Their response highlighted their focus on toll roads rather than moving people to and from work. NSW Planning equally had no idea of what the traffic impacts would be of its “approved” traffic chaos. They should have required a strategic contingency plan examining implementation issues.

There are other planning issues which should be considered too such as operation of the tunnel ventilation fans. On each of the toll road tunnels, what happens when ventilation fans fail or the required air quality inside the tunnels not met? When the toll road network is prioritised, what happens when the tunnel section of toll roads have to be closed?

The cost of the WestConnex saga needs much greater examination. The initial cost benefit “study” should be scrutinised and compared with the actual costs of the project. What are the environmental costs imposed on residents and how are these provided for?

I am prepared to answer any questions the Committee would like to ask in relation to the above.

Regards,

Les Johnston