

REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 6 - TRANSPORT

ROAD TOLLING REGIMES

CORRECTED

At Bexley Manor Hall, Bexley, on Tuesday 24 May 2022

The Committee met at 10:15.

PRESENT

The Hon. John Graham (Acting Chair)

The Hon. Wes Fang
The Hon. Shayne Mallard
The Hon. Chris Rath

The ACTING CHAIR: Welcome to the sixth public hearing of the Portfolio Committee No. 6 inquiry into tolling regimes. Before I commence, I acknowledge the Bunurong people, who are the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today. I pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. Today at this hearing we will hear from local business owners, councils and residents affected by the tolling arrangements for the M5 motorway.

Before we commence I will make some brief comments about procedures. Today's hearing is being broadcast live via the Parliament's website. A transcript of today's hearing will be placed on the Committee's website when it becomes available. In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, media representatives are reminded that they must take responsibility for what they publish about the proceedings. While parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses giving evidence today, it does not apply to what witnesses might say outside the evidence of the hearing. Therefore, I urge witnesses to be careful about comments they may make to the media or to others after they complete their evidence.

Committee hearings are not intended to provide a forum for people to make adverse reflections about others under the protection of parliamentary privilege. In that regard, it is important that witnesses focus on the issues raised by the inquiry terms of reference and avoid naming individuals unnecessarily. All witnesses have a right to procedural fairness, according to the procedural fairness resolution adopted by the House in 2018. If witnesses are unable to answer a question today and want more time to respond, they can take a question on notice. Written answers to questions taken on notice are to be provided within 21 days. If witnesses wish to hand up documents, they should do so through the Committee staff. In terms of the audibility of the hearing today, I remind both Committee members and witnesses to speak into the microphones. Finally, everyone should please turn their mobile phones to silent for the duration of the hearing.

Mr ANGELO ELLIOT, Proprietor, Forest Inn Hotel, sworn and examined

Mr JEFFREY TULLOCK, President, Bexley Chamber of Commerce, affirmed and examined

Mr AHMAD SLEITINI, Proprietor, Scotts Chemsave Pharmacy, sworn and examined

The ACTING CHAIR: I welcome our first witnesses. I will note that we have an apology from the Chair, Ms Abigail Boyd, which is why I will be chairing the hearing today. I will ask the witnesses to start by making a short statement of a couple of minutes. I will start with you, Mr Elliot.

ANGELO ELLIOT: I have been in Bexley as the licensee of the Forest Inn Hotel for 44 years. It was quite a nice place then, better than it is now. After about 10 years the traffic got a little bit more so we fought hard to get a Bexley bypass put in. We went to a lot of trouble, a lot of meetings, a lot of everything and it was a lot of work. All the properties were earmarked for the bypass and then all of a sudden the M5 came along. We all got behind the M5 and that fixed up most of our problems when that happened. Since what has happened with the tolls, you have really strangled us in that area. There is no parking, there are no people, there are no shoppers and the shops are all poor. They are all going broke and they haven't even opened.

As well as that, I've had to redesign my whole hotel to reverse it so that the entrance for people to get in was more at the rear than at the front. The streetscape with all the trucks going past is so annoying. They are very off-putting for women who want to drive up there. Why would you want to drive up there with all those trucks? It is scary to drive near those trucks. They drive those trucks like they are sports cars half the time so it's even more dangerous. We have had a lot of accidents in the area, which is not good. To me personally it has been a huge cost because to redesign my pub is really expensive. I had to organise parking for my hotel but there was no parking, so I ended up buying three or four houses at the back of the pub so I could supply parking for my customers. That wasn't easy because it wasn't earmarked for parking. I had to get the zone changed, which I did with a great big expense. When I did that, the council charged me \$300,000 after I changed the zoning.

Also in the hotel we supply about 20-something rooms for budget accommodation for people, with budget meals and things like that. I am lucky that I have a late licence. That helps me survive through this period because no-one wants to travel before nine o'clock. There is too much traffic. If you're going to get in your car, you might as well drive to Hurstville or somewhere else; you won't come to Bexley. I think that is what I wanted to say. It is really killing us. That is all. For the sake of a few dollars, I mean, you are killing us with the M5. It is just killing us. Thank you.

JEFFREY TULLOCK: My concerns relate to Bexley town centre roads being used as a free alternative route for the M5 and M8 motorways. On opening of the M8 in June 2020, traffic through Bexley grew instantly to a degree never seen before. This is contrary to one of the key promises of motorways to take traffic away from surrounding streets, not build on it. The alignment and width of our town centre road is essentially unchanged since it was built in the early 1900s. Our traffic is regularly stop-start in nature and our road is a poor choice for the motorway volume of traffic that it presently takes. Motorists diverting through our centre are understandably frustrated with traffic congestion. This is reflected in driving conduct, with running of lights, queuing across intersections, erratic lane changing and abusive horn use. Accidents are frequent. This is a daylong concern for pedestrians, shoppers and business owners.

Shortly before the opening of the M8, shopfront parking through our centre was drastically reduced by the introduction of extended no-stopping zones at intersections as well as a bidirectional morning and afternoon clearway. This was clearly a preparation for use as a free motorway alternative and was strongly opposed by the community at large. It has left some businesses as if they were trading on a traffic island. As a condition of approval for the M8, there is a Road Network Performance Review Plan underway by a consultant to Transport for NSW. A key part of this is an analysis of traffic impacts to the adjoining road network as a consequence of the M8. Our business community is looking forward to this report, including any proposed mitigation measures for adverse impacts. Finally, I would like to thank Committee members for agreeing to meet in Bexley and also allowing me to show them around Bexley earlier today. I would like to table the document given to members this morning, which contains further details. Thank you.

The ACTING CHAIR: If you could just hand up that document that you are tabling—on behalf of Committee members I'd like to thank you, Mr Tullock, for showing us around this morning. I think it has certainly been helpful.

AHMAD SLEITINI: I've been the owner of Scotts pharmacy for about 12 years. In the last eight years I've been actually living in the area. So I sort of know the area quite well now. Being part of my business—our demographic is a little bit different. We deal with a lot of old or frail people, young families, young children—a lot of parents use to come to us. After the clearways were put in, the M8 opened up. A lot of my patients cannot

come and see me anymore. They cannot actually walk around where the parking—the council's parking has been placed. It is just too far for them and sometimes that was the only time they would actually come out and see people and talk to people.

Parents are not even coming in because they feel it very unsafe on Forest Road when you have a 40-tonne truck coming straight past their children. They just don't come to the area anymore. Our once thriving baby section, children's medicine has all diminished. We are actually doing a quarter of what we used to do two or three years ago. Even with COVID, pharmacies should've been thriving. We should've been doing major sales because we did not close for one day. When everybody closed, we stayed open and operating and that has still diminished. We just could not bring that back. There were no parents. Every time I spoke to parents—they just do not want to come to the local area. Our elderly population—we had to go and start doing six days delivery service because they just could not come and see us. If we didn't do that, we would've lost a good chunk of our business just from that.

We could never hold a conversation in the pharmacy and have it as a private conversation anymore. The noise was just so loud. We could not say something in confidence to them without other customers hearing. That led us to actually increase the thickness of our glass on our front door to make sure we can actually have some privacy. That also meant—the trucks coming so close to our doors the sensors went off. And I was actually mentioning it to a lot of the Committee members. This is actually a lot worse than before the M5 opened up. It's a lot worse. We never used to have trucks going flying by and making so much excessive noise. What has happened has actually poisoned the community and has poisoned the local businesses and it's just very unhealthy and very unsafe.

The ACTING CHAIR: I might start off by asking about the accidents that a number of you have referred to. You are all living or operating very close to the key intersection here. What have you seen by way of accidents since these changes were made?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: Perhaps it might be appropriate for Mr Sleitini to answer because he has vision of the centre every day. I am not there all the time.

AHMAD SLEITINI: When the clearway started opening up, we were realising that cars are driving a lot faster through the corridor now. When there was parking there was a little bit of a bottleneck, so cars were slower. It was safer for pedestrians to cross through. Now when everybody is just zooming past, we've seen people changing lanes, trying to go onto Stoney Creek Road and trying to bypass traffic. That's led to one person actually getting killed last year because of that. Only about a few weeks ago there was something very similar when a car jumped in front of a motorbike and he was severely injured. It's just the pace of the traffic now. People are just going too quick. They are going around the bends too fast. Trucks are going too quick. They are crossing the red lights now. It's just the wild wild west out there.

ANGELO ELLIOT: The other thing is that stop-start of those trucks in front of our shops. It's noisy. It's pollution. I mean, all that pollution finishes up on us—we breathe it—and on our food. And once people start thinking about that, why would they want to come to see us? I mean, it's just ridiculous.

JEFFREY TULLOCK: I can only add what I've spoken on before—just the frustration of motorists driving through our centre, queuing across intersections, running lights, aggressively changing lanes. I have only personally seen one accident, which was a car going inside a truck making a left-hand turn, but I am aware of many other similar accidents. Some are resulting in injury; some are not. I haven't personally seen the accidents but I'm certainly aware when they do happen.

ANGELO ELLIOT: With the trucks being so long—they've got a trailer on the back of them now, all right? I have seen—just a few days ago the head of the truck was in front of one set of lights and the back of it was on another set of lights for the other side of the street. They are just too long. So this one truck was blocking two sets of lights and crossings at one time. It's just not built for those trucks. Nothing is.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Thank you for coming along today and thank you, Mr Tullock, for the tour this morning—

JEFFREY TULLOCK: It is a pleasure.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: —and introducing us to the local coffee shop. I appreciate that. I'm totally sympathetic and empathetic to the issue of how much stress this traffic causes you. I live in the Blue Mountains—Great Western Highway. I know trucks and vehicle traffic, but this is going through the heart of a suburban area. I wanted to ask you first of all, Mr Elliot, how long have you owned the hotel for?

ANGELO ELLIOT: For 44 years.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Right. I remember as a young man, before the M5 was opened, struggling up through here to go south. What was it like before the motorway was opened?

ANGELO ELLIOT: The motorway fixed everything. It fixed everything nearly straightaway. It's the trucks. Even if you go to Newtown where it's busy, it's just cars.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Yes, you don't see many semis there.

ANGELO ELLIOT: Cars are not the same as trucks. They are not the same.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: We saw that today. We saw it when we came here in the bus and we saw it while we were walking round with Mr Tullock. First of all, there needs to be research done to see where the trucks are going. But one assumes the semis with the shipping containers are going through to the south-west of Sydney and not to local businesses. That would be a correct assumption, yes?

ANGELO ELLIOT: Yes.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: So NorthConnex has a system where trucks that go on the local roads are captured by the camera and if they exit the local roads at the other end and basically avoid the toll—the tunnel, NorthConnex—they get fined and the fine is greater than the toll. Do you think that approach, if it's able to be done here, would be able to force the trucks back onto the motorway?

ANGELO ELLIOT: I think it would help but it's not going to solve the problem because everyone wants to dodge the toll. Everybody.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Well, I don't dodge the tolls and I drive on them a lot. And the M5 is very busy, I can assure you. But I don't want to have an argument about that.

ANGELO ELLIOT: No.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: We always provide a toll-free alternative. Of course, that was the case before the M8 was opened. But the trucks seem to me to be the big problem and then you could probably address the clearway issue if you could get the trucks out of the major suburban road system here. Is that what we need to be talking about?

ANGELO ELLIOT: Jeffrey, that would help, wouldn't it?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: It would certainly help but, I guess, if you're comparing it to what has happened at Pennant Hills, I think that is more containable in the local road network.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Yes.

JEFFREY TULLOCK: The question is if a truck wants to divert around the M5 or the M8, they will go far enough to do so. If they don't divert through Bexley, maybe they will divert through other suburbs and spread the issue elsewhere. To me, the real solution is to have a very close look at the tolls and I've always suggested having a variable toll structure. Perhaps consider having them abolished over the weekend, maybe late at night, so people can have a decent night's sleep and then just have them as full priced during perhaps clearway times—as a suggestion.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: That is an interesting suggestion. Overseas and I think in Queensland they have half-price truck tolls at night to encourage the trucks to use the motorways at night. Is that the sort of thing—

JEFFREY TULLOCK: That's true and it's not unusual in Sydney. I know that the Sydney Harbour Tunnel has a variable toll system. The Sydney Harbour Tunnel has a variable toll system, and it may encourage people to do their heavy consignments at night through the M5 or the M8 tunnels, thereby saving money.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: You are the president of the chamber of commerce?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: Yes, I am.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Has your chamber made a submission to the road performance review that Transport for NSW is doing?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: I beg your pardon?

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Are you making a submission or are you engaged with the review that is going on with Transport for NSW?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: I don't believe it is open for submissions, is it, at this stage?

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: I was just asking if it is a process that you will engage, if you can, with that.

JEFFREY TULLOCK: The conditions of approval only require consultation with councils. There is no requirement to consult with the community, in my understanding of the conditions of approval.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: This is the performance review that is going on?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: The performance review plan, yes.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: It might be something that we might talk about, then, with the council.

JEFFREY TULLOCK: I think Bayside Council has written to—I will just see if I can find it—the Secretary of Transport for NSW and highlighted the fact that consultation at the moment is only with councils and not with the community. The community would be very interested in contributing to that review.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Thank you for that.

The Hon. WES FANG: I appreciate the audio issues we have today, so I will just make sure that I speak hopefully in a very clear manner. Thank you very much for appearing today. I have a great deal of sympathy for what it is that I have heard about the issues. I think what I would like to do is, I guess, understand each of the issues in isolation just so that we can look at them and see what impact they might have, if we are able to find a solution to that. From my understanding, it would be that there are issues around parking and the availability of people to be able to find a park and access, for example, the chemist or park and have dinner or a drink. Would that be a fair assumption?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: Yes, that's true. There are two types of parking that customers in our centre seek. One is perhaps off-street larger council parking, which is appropriate for people, I suggest, attending a medical appointment or meeting with their solicitor. There is also shopfront parking, which is more opportunistic—people passing on their way to work or the way home wanting to stop for something to eat, go to the bank, go to the post office, go to the pharmacy. I know myself if I am in need of shopping, if I am going through the centre, and I can't find parking immediately, I tend to drive on, especially if I am unfamiliar with the area. So there are two degrees of parking, and we have had some increase in council parking as a result of demolition of a couple of council buildings. That has been helpful but not by any means a replacement for shopfront parking.

The Hon. WES FANG: I note, Mr Elliot, you said that you purchased some houses that were adjoining your hotel and demolished them in order to increase the off-street parking for your patrons. That was obviously a cost to you to be able to relieve some of that parking load. But that shorter-term parking where you might park to pop into the chemist on the streets is problematic when it is a clearway. That parking has reduced of late, which has created issues. Is that a fair assumption?

AHMAD SLEITINI: Yes, that's true. You can't just park and pop in and pop out, so to speak, especially in my industry where you might want to come in for five minutes, pick up your medication and go. That's not even possible any more. The parking that the council has done is on one side of the town centre, too. So it has relieved a bit of pressure, but in reality it is just outside the centre. It's useless to us, to be honest.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr Elliot?

ANGELO ELLIOT: Just now I opened a car park, but now I have a job policing it because everybody parks in there. I've done the council's work for it, and I don't want to get into a fight with everybody who wants a park in my park. It becomes more problems again.

The Hon. WES FANG: As I said, I have a great deal of sympathy for the issues that you have as a small business owner.

ANGELO ELLIOT: You try to do the right thing, and it bounces on you.

The Hon. WES FANG: And I appreciate that. I guess the parking is one discrete issue. That is a result of the increased clearways, which have been a result of that traffic movement that we are seeing through Bexley. What was it like before those clearways were in activation? How did it differ to the way that it is now? I'm just trying to get a picture of, say, maybe a decade ago or two decades ago. Mr Elliot, you said you've been here 44 years, so you will be a font of all knowledge as to what has happened around this area.

ANGELO ELLIOT: It has varied over the years, but nothing is as bad as it is now. With the M5 and the tolls—I mean, the traffic was probably less—like, half as good or even better than half as good. Would you say, Jeffrey?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: Yes, Bexley has always had in my time here a unidirectional clearway. We used to have, before February 2020, 40 opportunities for shopfront parking. Under the unidirectional clearway system, we lost half of those in the morning and half in the afternoon. We always had 20 more or less shopfront car spaces during the day. With the changes that were introduced in February 2020, under the bidirectional clearway system we lost all shopfront parking, morning and afternoon. With the extension of no-stopping zones at intersections to free the intersections up, we lost a further 24 spaces. So between the morning and evening clearways, we only had 16 spaces and previously, by comparison, we had 40.

The Hon. WES FANG: That is between 10.00 a.m. and 3.00 p.m.?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: That is correct.

The Hon. WES FANG: So it gives you a five-hour window where people can actually pop in to grab their scripts or whatever it is that they used to do but it is outside of those peak hours.

JEFFREY TULLOCK: Yes, that's true. The other point to make is that whilst the clearways don't extend to the weekends, the extended no-stopping zones do. So we only have—

The Hon. WES FANG: Twenty-six parks, was it?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: Sixteen spaces.

The Hon. WES FANG: Sixteen.

JEFFREY TULLOCK: We have lost 24. We only had 16 shopfront spaces at any time, maximum—apart from night-time, I believe, after 7.00.

The Hon. WES FANG: That is the issue with the clearways. I guess the third issue would be that the traffic itself is more dense through Bexley now. Would that be a fair assumption?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: It is more dense, more aggressive, because there are—

ANGELO ELLIOT: Noisier.

JEFFREY TULLOCK: More noisy, because there are less spaces to park. It is very intimidating to do a reverse park when there is a truck bearing down on you.

The Hon. WES FANG: If we break down those three issues, that is how I look at it. It has almost been a convergence of the three of them. Given that we are constrained by buildings that are obviously already there and we are constrained by the hours of operation of peak times, what do you see as a solution to resolving the issues here? I know you have spoken about the issues around tolling, but do you see any other opportunities that there might be for council or the Government to work together to try to alleviate some of those issues?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: I think the true solution would be in reviewing the toll structure to encourage people to use these wonderful assets, the M5 and the M8, and make them more affordable. Bexley Town Centre goes back to the early 1900s. As I said in my submission, it is a very old road network, very heavily constrained by two major State road intersections at each end into a pedestrian crossing, bus stops. Traffic is, by nature, stop-start in characteristic. Short of bulldozing the whole centre, there is not a lot you can do other than discouraging cars from using the centre.

ANGELO ELLIOT: If we had some really large car parks on the edges of the car park, it would be fantastic so people could park and then walk into the centre, but someone has to design that. We've had 100 years to do that, and we haven't done anything about it. That's the way it is. Now it's so expensive.

The ACTING CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Elliot. I might just turn to that question about the review you have talked about, the Road Network Performance Review. It was promised when residents raised concerns about the trucks on Forest Road and Stoney Creek Road. It was promised within 12 months of the M8 tunnels being opened. That was mid-2020, July 2020. We are now much further on, mid-2022, but there is no sign of that review. What is going on with this review? How important is it to find out what is going on on these roads and what might be possible to do to solve this problem that you are seeing?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: My understanding of the conditions of approval is that it requires the Road Network Performance Review Plan to be commenced within 12 months but, unfortunately, there is no time frame for completion of that. The only time frame is for publishing it, after consultation with council. I am just reading through it. If I can just read through clause E40 (a), which I am happy to table as well, one of the things required of the review plan was:

an updated analysis, including modelling of traffic impacts to the adjoining road network (including impacts on local roads and rat-running) ...

Many people, especially motorists, don't like that term "rat-running", but it is interesting that the approval does actually refer to that. So that is the most important thing for us: the quantification, I guess, of the impact of people driving around or using local streets as a free alternative for the M5 and M8. That will be very telling, I think, once the results come through.

The ACTING CHAIR: As you have pointed out, that was a requirement of the approval conditions, but when residents have written to the Government, they have been told this would be released 12 months after the M8 opened. That has not happened.

JEFFREY TULLOCK: I understand.

The ACTING CHAIR: How important is it to see this plan, this review, in public? Is that one of the things that the Committee could do to support your concerns about these trucks on suburban streets?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: It certainly would be, because the conditions of approval also include analysis of potential mitigation measures for any impact on local roads. So, certainly, an answer sooner rather than later would be better. But keeping in mind, of course, that COVID has confused traffic through our area and what you saw this morning is perhaps not traffic at its peak; people are still going back to work.

The ACTING CHAIR: Mr Sleitini or Mr Elliot, do you have any views on that review?

AHMAD SLEITINI: Yes, it is very important to have that review because after 12 months—well, once the M8 opened you put a toll on the M5 that was never there. That was built for free for the public to use and then, all of a sudden, we get a clearway and the M5 gets tolled. And then, Bexley, Arncliffe and Beverly Hills all got penalised for what the Government has done—and that is not our fault. We live in an area that had a nice, good village atmosphere, we had a good flow of traffic, parking. It was a great place to be and a great place to shop. Then, all of a sudden, we get penalised and we get shafted because of what the Government or Transurban decided to do with the M8—whatever the deal was—and we're paying the cost. So the review is actually very, very important. We want to know what is going on, yes.

The ACTING CHAIR: One view that has been put publicly is that it is almost like going back to the future to before the M5 East existed as a road—you've got to rewind back 20 years to see this many trucks coming through the centre of Bexley. Is that an accurate view?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: It is relatively accurate. But, in my observation, I would say traffic is much worse than what it was prior to the opening of the M5 in 2000—I believe it was 2000, maybe 2001.

AHMAD SLEITINI: Sydney has grown in the last two decades, so there are a lot more trucks and a lot more of everything going through. There are a lot more people living out west, there is a lot more traffic flow that needs to go through Bexley now.

The ACTING CHAIR: The promise of these toll roads was it would take trucks off suburban streets and into the toll road tunnels. The opposite seems to have happened here. One of the views that has been put to us by some of the freight companies is simply that the price is wrong to get those trucks in the tunnels. Mr Tullock, you have put some views to us about that already. Do you agree one of the issues is that the price that has been struck to drive through the M8 tunnel or on the M5 East seems to be wrong and that's one of the reasons why these trucks are on suburban streets?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: I believe that is quite correct. If one motorway opens with a toll and a defined route or alternative to that toll, perhaps that can be accepted by the community. But when one motorway opens and you all of a sudden have a toll on two motorways—one that was always free, although very congested—it's a double-whammy effect, so you're getting people who had used the M5 and people who would have used the M8 now diverting through the streets of Bexley. There's no other way they can really go other than through Bexley. It is on two major intersections.

The ACTING CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Sleitini or Mr Elliot, did you want to comment?

ANGELO ELLIOT: No, I agree with him.

AHMAD SLEITINI: Yes, I think that's right.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Obviously, the new road is the M8. I don't know if you have looked into this—do you think that when the M8 and M5 eventually connect up to the M4, the sort of missing link part of it, would that change the traffic flow at all—the final bit of WestConnex? At the moment the M8 just comes to an end, but that's not where it will end.

ANGELO ELLIOT: Chris, I think it's all about the money. It's the money, it's the toll—that's what is killing everything.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Yes, I understand.

ANGELO ELLIOT: It's the toll. It doesn't matter how far you've got to drive, it's the toll.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: But won't it make the traffic flow better if, as at the moment, instead of the M8 and M5 coming to an end, they can link up to the M4 as part of WestConnex? At the moment the network is not fully complete, so it might only be a short-term problem, as bad as it is.

JEFFREY TULLOCK: I think, as Mr Elliot says, the question comes down to tolling. I don't know if there has been any consideration as to how much the toll will be to go from, say, Beverly Hills to—you said the M4, I think, in that closing link. To use the M8 at the moment from King Georges Road is close to \$10.00 each way, and if you're adding another \$10.00 to that to get to the M4 it's \$20 each way per day per motorist. As I said to some of the members on our walk around, you have to remember that a lot of the people using the M5 and the M8 are coming from south-western Sydney, where they've moved to be able to afford real estate, and for them an extra hundred dollars a week is a big deal—that's after tax. It may or may not have an impact, but I do firmly believe that it depends on the toll that's being charged.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Do you think there's any opportunity on the M5 and M8, in terms of the exits, to try to direct traffic onto the toll road rather than people—in particular, trucks—trying to bypass the toll road? Obviously, we would like to see the trucks stay on the toll road rather than avoid it. Through improved signage, exits et cetera, is there any way of redirecting the trucks back onto the toll road?

ANGELO ELLIOT: Chris, they're just avoiding the tolls. That's what they're doing. No matter how you say it to me, you can go the cheapest way—that's it. That's the way I think. I don't know if—

AHMAD SLEITINI: Yes, that's true. Everybody is trying to earn a living, so no matter what you do, if they can save a hundred dollars—like what Jeff just said—a week, why not let them?

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Let's be frank. Again, I travel the M5 a lot—I used to work at Liverpool—and right now if I went down the M5, there are a tremendous number of semitrailers and container trucks using it still. So it's a minority that are—I know it is annoying. It's a problem; we've seen it. I mean, the M5 and the tunnels are functioning and diverting huge volumes of trucks out of the suburban areas. They used to, years ago, go through here all the time. It was horrible. We have got to address this minority of trucks that are avoiding the toll, because the majority are using the motorways. You go down there now, it is full of semitrailers and shipping containers going through those tunnels. So we have to work out a way to address the minority. It comes back to what I was talking about before, some sort of gantry system that puts in a penalty. Hopefully, this study will look at that. We acknowledge there is a problem, but it is a minority of trucks that are doing it. You are presenting a position that sounds like all the trucks are not going into the tunnel. I can tell you, it is packed full of trucks. It is a very viable transport solution. We have just got to address this minority. Would you agree with that general observation?

AHMAD SLEITINI: No, I don't agree with that. I totally—

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: If you close the tunnels then you would have 10,000 trucks an hour.

AHMAD SLEITINI: Why did the Government put a clearway throughout the whole Forest Road?

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: That is a good question.

AHMAD SLEITINI: They knew very well what was going to happen, and what was going to happen to the communities there.

ANGELO ELLIOT: They were planning for it.

AHMAD SLEITINI: They knew. They planned that from the beginning. They knew what was going to happen once the tolls went in. That is why we got the clearways. Is that not correct?

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: I don't know the answer to that question. It is a good question. But I will ask—

AHMAD SLEITINI: One would assume that that would be correct.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: We will ask that. We might also ask the council, because the council is usually engaged in those decisions. But it is a very good question.

ANGELO ELLIOT: You have got a point there. I mean, most trucks do use that. But the blokes that can't afford it will go the way that they can afford. It is as simple as that. It still goes to what they can afford to do. Like, big companies are paying it. They are paying it; they just pass the costs on. But not everyone can do that. Not everyone is in that position.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: You were saying before that you almost want a bottleneck to exist so that the cars and trucks are slower. It is what you said before, that you almost want the clearways to be removed, which will create a bottleneck. And then, as a result, all of the vehicles will be travelling at a much slower pace. I think that is what you said before?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: I think that may have been Mr Sleitini.

AHMAD SLEITINI: Yes. Well, not much of a bottleneck, to slow down. We do want traffic to slow down a little bit, but we wanted the parking back.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: What is the speed limit on those roads? Is it 50?

AHMAD SLEITINI: Sixty.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Would you support a reduction? I mean, the City of Sydney is down to 40. King Street, Newtown, is 40. You know, in the Blue Mountains, where I live, it goes up and down. You're constantly looking at your speedometer but, generally speaking, it is 50 and sometimes 60.

ANGELO ELLIOT: Shayne, the worst part is they're stopping and starting. That is the worst. The braking and stopping and starting—that is the most annoying, isn't it?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: Mr Mallard, I don't think they could reach 60 kilometres an hour through our centre because of the two major intersections, the internal pedestrian crossing, bus stops and so on. I really don't think a truck could get up that fast through our centre, so reducing the speed is—

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: It was flowing fairly freely this morning, when we inspected it.

JEFFREY TULLOCK: It certainly was, yes.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: The intersections were functioning quite well. They weren't blocking across intersections this morning. But a bus went across and nearly got caught on the Princes Highway, down that end. It was pretty heavy down at the airport end there.

The Hon. WES FANG: This may or may not be a question that you can answer, but I have just been doing a little bit of back-of-the-napkin research. I am wondering, just having had a look at the tolls between, say, the entry of the M5 to King Georges Road on that new M5 East section—it is about \$27 if you are a truck, if you went the whole distance. I live in the regions. I use the M5 to go home a lot, and that tunnel was basically standstill from sun-up to sundown. But it has obviously improved now that the M8 has opened.

I wonder if anybody has actually done the calculations as to how much a vehicle, whether it be a car or a truck, would save by actually using the tunnel with the less fuel use, given that you are not sitting and idling as much. And also perhaps there would be less maintenance, given that it is more free-flowing, less work on the brakes, et cetera. Has anybody discussed it with you? Or do you have any idea of how much time is spent travelling through the Bexley route that you are on, versus what you would have done on the tunnel, and how much, in a dollar sense, that would actually be costing to avoid the toll?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: I am personally not aware of costing, but I would imagine it would have been covered in the cost-benefit analysis as part of the environmental impact statement, which either justified or ruled out the possibility of the construction of the motorway. So my answer is I'm not aware of what the savings would be.

The Hon. WES FANG: Are you able to give an indicative time frame difference between, say, if you were to enter the M5 tunnel at the start near the airport, and then coming out at King Georges Road, versus the time that you would take from the same position coming through Bexley, I'm assuming, up to King Georges Road and then back to the same point? Do you have any idea of the difference in the time? I am not a local and I don't travel that route very often.

ANGELO ELLIOT: It depends what time of day, too.

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes, and that's the other thing I was about to address. Would it be about 10 minutes or 15 minutes extra, do you think?

ANGELO ELLIOT: Normally, probably 10 minutes.

JEFFREY TULLOCK: The motorway certainly would be much more expensive.

ANGELO ELLIOT: Is your 10 minutes worth the toll? I don't know.

JEFFREY TULLOCK: I know, talking to members of our group who are more time poor, and perhaps more able to do so, they are quite happy to pay the toll.

The Hon. WES FANG: I just wonder if perhaps it feels like a saving, but perhaps the saving isn't quite the full \$27, given the extra time that they spend travelling through Bexley, given the extra fuel use, given the start and stop. We all know that a vehicle that is at a constant speed uses a lot less fuel than a vehicle that is starting and stopping. Perhaps it is also about an education process from the Government's side to advise people how much they would be saving in time and money should they actually go through the tunnel. That would assist your area. Would that be a reasonable thought?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: That is a very good point, Mr Fang. I think if, in the light of increasing petrol and diesel prices, truck drivers in particular could be convinced that it is much cheaper to travel via motorways than not, maybe you can convince them to use motorways.

The Hon. WES FANG: And that is the thing, isn't it? At the moment, that price of fuel—petrol or diesel, whatever it is that you operate—is quite high. And also the time of day. As you said, Mr Elliot, the traffic on the road can vary quite considerably. You could actually potentially save a lot more around those peak hours if you were perhaps to use the motorways. I was just curious if anyone had spoken to you about it. Because, just by looking at it and looking at the aerials, I would think that it's at least a 10- or 15-minute, if not more, detour around. When you are talking about dollars per hour of operation of some of these larger vehicles, I would've thought that that would make it much more cost effective to go through the motorway.

The ACTING CHAIR: To return to the question about the road network performance review, you have said that it is very important. That study is necessary; you would like to see the results. It is nearly 12 months late now. Have any of you been given any indication about when that review will be released? Do you have any idea about the timing?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: We have had no correspondence with Transport for NSW, or any other government body, telling us when the timing may be.

The ACTING CHAIR: My colleague asked about consultation with the community. I think you've signalled that you would be very open to engaging in that consultation. If you were given the chance to provide your input directly into that review, you would be happy to do so, and let the community of Bexley and surrounds have their say through that process?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: I certainly would be, personally, and I'm sure the overall business and residential community would as well.

The ACTING CHAIR: Returning to the issue about the clearways, as my colleague again has pointed out, often there would be consultation with councils before a decision like that was made. And we will certainly put that question to the councils. In terms of the local community, when those clearways were driven through and when those decisions were made about the 40 parking spaces that were so fundamental to people coming to visit your businesses, was there any consultation with your businesses and with the community?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: Yes, there was. It was actually a two-stage process. The initial proposal, to be honest, was for a 12-hour clearway on both sides, which was strongly opposed by the business community and by Bayside Council as well as our members for Rockdale and Kogarah.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: What is it now? Is it four or five hours? How many hours is the clearway?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: It has basically gone from what was a unidirectional clearway to a bi-directional clearway.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: But how many hours? It is 7.00 a.m. to 10.00 a.m.?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: I believe it would have been 7.00 a.m. to 10.00 a.m.¹

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: And then in the afternoon again from 3.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. or something?

AHMAD SLEITINI: It is 3.00 p.m. to 7.00 p.m.

JEFFREY TULLOCK: Yes, that is right.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: But it was going to be 12 hours, so that is a big difference.

¹ In correspondence to the committee dated 8 June 2022, Mr Jeffrey Tullock clarified that the correct hours were 6.00 a.m. to 10 a.m.

JEFFREY TULLOCK: I believe it was going to be 12 hours. I do not have the document in front of me. But it was watered down due to community concern and rejection of the proposal.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: It is a big difference.

JEFFREY TULLOCK: As an addition, the extension of no-stopping zones was introduced as well. So in answer to your question, there was consultation with the community, which was reported by the authority at the time.

The ACTING CHAIR: Mr Sleitini, do you want to contribute?

AHMAD SLEITINI: No.

The ACTING CHAIR: I might just finally ask about the businesses. You have talked about how hard it is to operate businesses under these conditions. Have we seen businesses close? Have we seen an impact on how easy it is or how long it has taken to get people into some of these businesses that are along these roads that have been affected?

JEFFREY TULLOCK: When people start a business they do everything they can to make it survive. They borrow from banks, from friends and from family. They forgo holidays and they forgo luxury. So when adverse conditions come up, they do not close their business immediately. There have been business closures but, to be honest, I could not honestly say if they were a result of the traffic conditions, a result of COVID or part of the natural succession. We have about 140 shopfront businesses in Bexley. I would say that vacancy rates are probably up around about 10 cent. The more telling point is that once a property is vacant, the time taken to lease it and the conditions that the future tenants are seeking—feedback to me from local real estate agents is that potential tenants are being tougher in the deals they strike. They are paying less money for a lease and they are going into shorter lease periods. They are basically putting the risk back on the landlord.

The ACTING CHAIR: Was there anything either of the other witnesses wanted to add?

AHMAD SLEITINI: All I would add to that comment is that all the businesses in Bexley actually had to work really hard to survive in the last two years. Everybody had to almost reinvent themselves. Everybody is doing extra hours and extra services just to bring back the customers again. Like Angelo did to put in the car parks behind him at great expense to himself, we actually had to pull extra delivery services and phone consults that we have never had to do. Every other business is doing the same as us just to survive again.

The ACTING CHAIR: Unless there are any other questions from our Committee members, I will bring this session to a close. I thank you all for attending the hearing. The evidence you have given us has been particularly helpful to the Committee. We have come out here because of the evidence we have received about the M5 corridor in particular, so I thank you for the evidence. I also thank you, Mr Tullock, for showing the Committee around so that we could see directly what is going on.

JEFFREY TULLOCK: Thank you for coming to Bexley.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: I will add that Minister Natalie Ward—the new Minister for Metropolitan Roads—is aware that we are here today and asked us to come along and make sure your views are heard. I assure you that we will relay them directly to her.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

Ms SUE WEATHERLEY, Director, City Strategy and Innovation, Georges River Council, sworn and examined

Mr JEREMY MORGAN, Manager, City Infrastructure, Bayside Council, affirmed and examined

The ACTING CHAIR: I will ask both witnesses if they would like to make an opening statement. I will invite you to do so first, Ms Weatherley.

SUE WEATHERLEY: Thank you very much to the Chair and the Committee for the opportunity to present today. I'm going to feel as though I'm an outsider in this conversation today because I will be here encouraging the Committee to think broadly about road pricing and how it is used to fund infrastructure and better manage traffic in a fair and equitable way. Any discussion to do with tolls and road use should be a discussion about transport and traffic in our city and how best to meet increasing needs with a comprehensive conversation about road pricing. Sydney has the most congested roads in Australia. Two of those roads pass through Georges River—King Georges Road, which is the A3 corridor, and Silverwater Road, which is the A6 corridor. Therefore, these are important issues for the Georges River community.

In New South Wales we've almost exclusively used tolls as a road pricing mechanism and these tolls have been used to fund the construction of—almost exclusively—new roads. The problem with this is it becomes the reason to build new roads when investment in integrated transport solutions for freight and people movement is required. Building more roads will rarely solve congestion problems and, when the method of road pricing becomes part of the decision-making for building that road, our transport decisions can be skewed. Placing tolls on some roads may encourage the wrong outcomes, with drivers diverting to local streets to avoid roads and creating local congestion, which I assume is what the previous people giving evidence spoke about—the impact on their local businesses.

Tolls are also inherently inequitable, with some commuters able to do all necessary travel without using toll roads—as the roads have been funded by a broad tax base or they are able to use alternate travel methods such as rail—while others, especially in the communities in the outer areas of Sydney, have little option but to regularly use roads where they must pay a toll. Why is there a cost of using some roads but not others? Why have we decided that some users, in particular the current generation, have to pay for roads that will also be used by future users of those roads? International and even some more local examples demonstrate that putting a price on roads will change behaviour. Therefore, the challenge for New South Wales is to ensure that this is the behaviour we want.

There are many world examples of other mechanisms of road pricing: distance- and time-based fees, for example, lower in off-peak areas and higher road charges in areas where there are public transport options; lower charges on motorways and higher charges on local streets; congestion charges; and charging all users based on the distance and roads used. In the past a simple flat toll on certain roads was the only practical solution we had to road pricing, but technology provides us with a whole suite of other solutions to managing both congestion and also funding future infrastructure. I don't propose there is a one size that fits all solution, but there is a need for a more comprehensive and equitable approach to the way we go about road pricing.

JEREMY MORGAN: Thank you, Chair and Committee members, for the opportunity to appear before you today. As I've mentioned, my name is Jeremy Morgan and I'm appearing on behalf of Bayside Council. In my capacity as the manager of city infrastructure, I have direct oversight of our traffic and road safety team. I've also had the opportunity to sit on council's M5 East traffic management working party as technical lead. Central to the Bayside local government area is a major logistics and transport hub. We are home to Sydney Airport and a substantial part of Port Botany. Bayside is a node for the movement of people and goods around New South Wales, Australia and internationally. Motorway linkages are key to this connectivity. The M5 East, M8 and the future M6 toll roads all intersect the Bayside area.

Council officers have heard from representatives of the elected council, business owners, the Bexley Chamber of Commerce and residents about the negative impacts to our local area following the introduction of tolls on the M5 East in 2020. My team has fielded many petitions, emails and phone calls from people negatively impacted by increased traffic on alternate toll-free roads throughout Bayside. We've seen significant changes in the volumes and mix of traffic on numerous roads. There is a noticeable increase in heavy vehicle traffic. I've read the terms of reference for this inquiry into road tolling regimes, and I encourage you to consider the costs associated with toll avoidance.

Our community has laid witness to the traffic diverting from the M5 East since 2020 onto alternate toll-free routes like Stoney Creek Road, Forest Road and Bexley Road, to name a few. Toll avoidance brings costs on alternate routes associated with noise insulation for homes and businesses, repairs to property from vibration damage, accelerated road deterioration, increased accidents, rat-running through our residential areas, increased

congestion and travel delays for local trip generation, general reduction in amenity, and loss of convenient on-street parking in local shopping strips. We often hear, "Tolled or untolled, the choice is yours." It's an approach that relies on motorists selecting a toll road option based on travel timesavings compared to toll-free roads.

During morning peak—and this is using the Linkt website—a timesaving of six minutes on the 9½ kilometre section of the M5 East comes at a cost of \$7.52 for a car or \$22.56 for a truck. For those that can't afford the additional costs—and that is each way—they divert to toll-free surface roads, where a local community bears the cost of their choice. Bayside Council simply wants to see motorways that are designed and constructed to improve transport efficiency used for their intended purpose. We want to see genuine incentives for using motorways and deterrents for using local connections. We want to see local roads returned to local communities, improving air quality and road safety and reducing congestion and noise. Thank you.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Thank you both for coming in today and presenting to us. Were you here during the last session?

SUE WEATHERLEY: I was a little bit. I think Jeremy was here—

JEREMY MORGAN: I did hear part of it.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: I am sure, Mr Morgan, you are very familiar and versed with the views of your chamber of commerce—your good council public servants.

JEREMY MORGAN: Excellent local representatives.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Yes, indeed. First of all, Ms Weatherley, I'm totally on board with your opening statement regarding the whole nature of road pricing and the macro opportunities. We're here looking at the localised problem and trying to drill down on what should be the approach. We've heard from other witnesses in the past about really looking at toll structures—and we have ruled out congestion tax. Let us just make that clear. That is a political reality. But I want to ask more specifically around what engagement the council has had with the State Government over a period of time—not just now but in the past—regarding local traffic management plans. Then how is the council engagement in regards to the changes to intersections and parking and removal and those standing clearways? Can you go through that process for us?

SUE WEATHERLEY: I'll do it very quickly.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Take your time.

SUE WEATHERLEY: Principally people behaving in response to a price and therefore diverting into local roads is generally an issue more in Bayside than it is in Georges River. Certainly all the data we have doesn't indicate any significant change to the traffic levels on Georges River roads, but sometimes the boundaries are very—you know, it is just a line on the map, but it hasn't been significant. In the time since the tolls were introduced we've only had one complaint, which really wasn't about the tolls. The biggest impact has been in Bayside.²

I will pass it on but, if I may, because you acknowledged my broader comment—be careful of solving a problem and creating another one. There is a local issue here. NorthConnex, which I know quite well—I live out that way. That process of saying, "It's a whole lot more expensive to use local roads for trucks than it is to use the tunnel"—that may be a solution here but, again, it just needs to be tested. That is that issue of saying tolls are cheaper and quicker but not much. My final comment I would make is the proposal to extend the F6 is touted as this magnificent improvement to road transport. It saves five minutes. It's an issue about—we've got to be very careful about the roads we're investing in as well.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Mr Morgan, can you perhaps just step us through briefly the history of engagement—the local traffic management in conjunction with the infrastructure?

JEREMY MORGAN: Sure. Transport for NSW officers have been engaging with council officers over a number of years about different improvements right throughout Bayside area: things like clearways, clearway programs, the congestion improvement—so where they modify intersections. They certainly have been. We are aware that they've been looking at lots of options over the last couple of years. They have actually undertaken several projects to improve and reduce congestion and improve traffic flow.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Are they acknowledging that the toll avoidance has created a problem or—to be frank, I remember these roads before the M5 was even built, the first tunnel. It was just

² In [correspondence](#) to the committee dated 7 June 2022, Ms Sue Weatherley clarified her evidence.

horrendous, like the old Parramatta Road—just trucks bumper to bumper all the time, never moving. Is this a legacy traffic issue still—because these are pretty seriously major roads through your community—or is it caused by avoidance, or is it a bit of both?

JEREMY MORGAN: No. Most of the projects I am speaking about were projects identified prior to M5 East tolls were introduced. A lot of the analysis goes back several years, on roads like Rocky Point Road, Forest Road and Stoney Creek Road. It was prior to M5 East tolls.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Just taking out parking—you probably know that I was a councillor for 12 years. Council's traffic management committee was always the holy grail with the traffic planners. I recall parking spots being removed or clearways being changed always went through that process. Police were there, the council was there, the State Government was there, RMS had a veto power in those committees; if it is still the same, I do not know. Did that process go through even just as a consultation with regard to intersections and "no standing" being put in and some parking being removed? Was there a process?

JEREMY MORGAN: In terms of the consultations through a local traffic committee, because most of the roads we are talking about are State roads, the local traffic committees are not delegated to consider State roads. Most of that consultation has been not through the traffic committee; it has been direct approach. It is often more notification than engagement. It is notifying that there will be some public engagement on the proposals. We certainly have seen some background studies that gave the justification to Transport to consider some of these parking restrictions, looking at travel time delays during certain days of the week. We have seen—

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: I noted this morning and said to the witness earlier that we went for a walk and, frankly, the traffic was flowing pretty smoothly. Even big trucks that clearly shouldn't be on these streets were—it was moving quite well; it wasn't congested heavily. Is it that those improvements have had a benefit to moving traffic through the area?

JEREMY MORGAN: I would say, yes, they have. There certainly has been introduction of parking restrictions, which has eased congestion through some of these centres and traffic is moving freer. But I guess the issue is that we are seeing the increase in traffic as well. To add to your earlier question about some of those parking restrictions being brought in before the M5 tolls, it freed up some extra capacity. We are seeing the traffic move, but that has come at the cost of the on-street parking.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: You mentioned that you were a member of a technical group.

JEREMY MORGAN: Yes.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: What was it called again?

JEREMY MORGAN: The M5 East Traffic Management Working Party. That was a party formed by council.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Okay. Was the State represented on that?

JEREMY MORGAN: No, they weren't. It was a local council committee with councillor representatives, local chamber of commerce and some community members.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: So did you feed your views back into the State Government either via your MP or direct?

JEREMY MORGAN: Yes, we did.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: The road network performance review, which I'm told is underway—but we have a different view on the Committee, apparently. Are you engaged with that?

JEREMY MORGAN: We have had a briefing from Transport for NSW on some of the early data that they have gathered. They have asked us to provide some comments on that, but at this stage it appears the report is not finalised. It is still in draft.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: You didn't make a submission; council didn't make a submission to it. It's not that type of process.

JEREMY MORGAN: No, we were actually given five days to make comment, so a very short time frame.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: I am sure you cut and paste pretty quickly.

JEREMY MORGAN: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIR: I might stay with that issue about the road network performance review. This is nearly a year late, after residents were promised this would be released. You're saying that for this review, which has taken two years and should have taken 12 months, you were given five days as a council to comment?

JEREMY MORGAN: Yes, that's correct. We met with Transport for NSW. They provided a briefing and offered five days to comment. At the time, it was just before school holidays were about to commence. They did extend that period for us to comment for an additional five business days, but, yes, it was a very short time frame to respond.

The ACTING CHAIR: You have said that you don't know when that will be released. It's in draft form at the moment. Can you give us any sense of when that might be released? Have you been given any indication by the Government about when that might be released?

JEREMY MORGAN: No, we have actually asked that question. We have asked when it's likely to be released. From my perspective, something that the M5 East Traffic Management Working Party had requested was engagement with the community. When we met with Transport, they made it very clear that that was not part of the plan preparation. We think that is a huge disbenefit to the local community. They have a lot of input that they would like to share, and that's not part of that plan.

The ACTING CHAIR: If the chance was there for the community to contribute, is your view that it certainly will be very welcome?

JEREMY MORGAN: Yes, absolutely. Council has that view that it should be open to the public to comment on this review plan.

The ACTING CHAIR: Ms Weatherley, I might just turn to you on that set of questions about the network performance review. What would you like to contribute on this question?

SUE WEATHERLEY: We have had the same sort of initial briefing on that, which was indicating no significant trace of traffic levels on the key roads through Georges River. Certainly from the point of view of the local community, making sure their input is also considered, I think, is absolutely important. Sometimes as this happens, the local government feels we're perhaps not given quite enough time to respond to matters, particularly if we think it is a matter that needs input from the elected councillors and/or our community. This is such a sensitive issue, particularly in and around Bexley. I think not to do so would cause far more angst. Sometimes it is better to take an extra two months and get it right than rush it through and miss that opportunity to engage with the community.

The ACTING CHAIR: Again, I will ask you. This is nearly a year late after when it was promised. Do you know when this review will actually be released?

SUE WEATHERLEY: I don't know. I don't have that information. I am only aware of the initial briefing at the same time that Bayside received theirs.

The ACTING CHAIR: When did that interim briefing take place? How long ago was that?

SUE WEATHERLEY: I haven't got the exact date.

JEREMY MORGAN: It would have been the last school holidays. I can't think what that date was.

SUE WEATHERLEY: Was that in March or—

JEREMY MORGAN: March, April.

SUE WEATHERLEY: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIR: Perhaps if you take that on notice, that would be helpful for the Committee.

SUE WEATHERLEY: Yes.

JEREMY MORGAN: Yes, we will take that on notice.

The ACTING CHAIR: Obviously, there are increasingly toll roads all around Sydney but it really is in this area that we have seen this issue to be most severe. I think that is fair; we haven't seen these issues in other bits of the community where there have been toll roads to this degree. It has really been these communities that are being most impacted by this issue about suburban streets being flooded with trucks after the toll roads open, the opposite of what was promised. Why do you think it is worse here compared to other areas in Sydney?

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: I could answer that.

The ACTING CHAIR: Then I will invite Committee members to respond.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: It always was a truck route. That's the problem.

The ACTING CHAIR: Perhaps you first, Mr Morgan.

JEREMY MORGAN: Sure. In my opinion, I think it is a combination of factors: the fact that we are so close to some of those logistics hubs where the initial nodes are located within the area; and, secondly, that it was previously untolled, so motorists are not seeing that benefit for that cost that we have discussed and I've mentioned this morning. They're probably not seeing the benefits. They are choosing to go the alternate routes. When you add that cost, particularly for—there is a lot of discussion about heavy vehicles. The cost for trucks moving from Port Botany to the west, when we're talking an extra \$22.50 each way on each trip when they are doing multiple trips per day, I think that has a big impact on their choice of diverting to an alternate.

SUE WEATHERLEY: I probably would agree with Jeremy on that that the issue is really a case of the cost-benefit analysis. A direct price is always seen by consumers in a different way—if you have to put your hand in your pocket almost immediately to pay as opposed to long-term savings. I've never been a truck driver but the thought processes—or if I am the operator of the logistics firm, I am going, "So I'm saving 10 minutes, but I can't use that 10 minutes in another way. I'm making five trips a day; that's how many I need to make. Saving 10 minutes doesn't mean I can make six if I haven't got business with six trips. I can't make that money back." It would be interesting to see how people and how the firms actually think about it in terms of the cost.

The Hon. WES FANG: I think that was the point that I was covering off earlier with the witnesses; there is, clearly, a timesaving and I suspect there is also an operational cost saving by using the motorways over the surface roads, but it is that immediacy of having the tolls taken out of your account versus the longer term wear, tear, operational or fuel cost savings that aren't really factored in. In relation to some of the figures, Mr Morgan, I noted in your opening statement you said the saving was about nine minutes?

JEREMY MORGAN: It was 9½ kilometres, but it was six minutes and that was using the Linkt website.

The Hon. WES FANG: That is on the M5 component; is that what you were saying?

JEREMY MORGAN: Yes. That is between King Georges Road and Marsh Street. I checked that again this morning—it is 10 minutes at the moment. So it does vary depending on the time of day.

The Hon. WES FANG: I think that is probably part of the education process—that we have to impart to people that at different times of day and different surface settings the time taken will be longer and the savings perhaps aren't as great. Turning to the recognition that the surface roads have largely been in place, I will say, since the development of these areas—they tend not to move, houses and lots are sold and then that's your boundary—the road distance you can have is really constricted because of those physical property boundaries. It's one of those instances where we see—for example, in the Sydney CBD now, cycleways are going in and we are losing a lane to traffic.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: No, just parking.

The Hon. WES FANG: It means that we are constricting the traffic into small areas to then allocate something else. It would be the same here if we were to make changes around the road surfaces; we are really constricted by what we've got. Noting that there has been a lot of commentary about the increased traffic here, have you had any projections as to what the traffic and surface roads will look like in, say, a decade, or 25 years, 50 years, 100 years? Obviously, it is hard to predict, but if we go back a hundred years it was certainly a different outlook to what we are seeing now. I just wonder if there's an opportunity to make things better or if it is just going to get worse from now. Do you have any thoughts about that?

JEREMY MORGAN: Yes. I do have some thoughts around that, certainly. I guess, in terms of looking at traffic generation over time, there are a number of things that get factored into that. Certainly, with the increase in population in a certain area, background traffic increases. There are certainly factors that we look at in terms of estimating an increase in traffic over time. But that also needs to coincide with other transport improvements—public transport, building centres around destinations so that people have less distance to travel—so, keeping the idea of the 30-minute city for the Greater Cities Commission. So there are a lot of factors to include. Over time, yes, there will definitely be more traffic—but trying to manage that with other strategies to reduce the demand on cars.

SUE WEATHERLEY: Can I offer a positive future, because I think we've moved to a situation where technology provides a whole lot of solutions in this area. I mean, I'll talk forever, but if you build more roads you get more cars. But we also need to provide sufficient transport routes, particularly for freight—the movement of freight—because that's never going to be moved any other way, other than either on the back of a truck or on a train. We're not going to move freight any other way. If you think, for a future, if there were autonomous freight vehicles on motorways, whatever the toll system is for that—if you actually said it couldn't go on a residential

street, you must travel on the tollways, they're autonomous, they're electric vehicles—we would find a much more efficient use of our existing road system. I might also add that part of that solution will be bicycles. Having bike lanes is a great solution—

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Hear, hear!

SUE WEATHERLEY: —particularly in an environment where many of those could also be EVs, so when you get to 60, you get to 70, you get to 80 even, you can still use a bike.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: I thought you meant speed limit.

SUE WEATHERLEY: No, that was just me saying that technology can solve some of these solutions. But if all we think we can do is build more roads and have more cars, well, that will not be the solution. Jeremy is right—the issue about building a city that means you don't have to travel as much—but we still have to build transport corridors and freight corridors, and we've got to build them in the way that they easily translate to an autonomous environment where they are constrained to be on those tollways. That's the positive future, and there are long steps between now and then. If I can quote a Liberal Party representative from the election, "It's going to get worse before it gets worse", but we actually need to start thinking about what those solutions are and build the infrastructure to support that longer-term solution.

The Hon. WES FANG: I very much support and am pleased that you're talking about a positive future because I think that is sometimes lost in a lot of the conversations that we have—that there is a very positive future for not only Bexley but the State. The other thing I note is that a lot of what I have seen in the past couple of days on these issues—I live in Wagga and it makes me very pleased to be living in the regions. It seems to me that what you're proposing is more of a satellite idea of Sydney, where everything that you need is closer to where you live and if you do need to travel there are those interconnecting links to take you to the next satellite where you would need to go. Is that a broader scale view of where you would see that progressing?

SUE WEATHERLEY: I would love to share some ideas that Georges River has developed about the future of Sydney. But even if you focus on the vision created by the Greater Cities Commission now, which is the notion that we all should be able to live within 30 minutes of all our needs, by public transport, and those links are really strong—at the moment those links aren't particularly strong if you're going north and south. It connects pretty well east-west, but some of the public transport links aren't particularly good north and south. But, yes, within that there has to be a set of motorways, tollways—whatever they might be—that support freight and people movement as well. So it is not just one solution. There are multiple solutions and, yes, it is about creating places where people can work close to home or get there relatively quickly.

The Hon. WES FANG: I guess I am tying this all up into a nice bow now that we've managed to explore a couple of the options—the reason we're here today is because business owners in Bexley are struggling to find somewhere for their customers to park, they're struggling with the traffic and they feel as though some of the identity of their area, their little CBD, has been lost to clearways and the like. I think that would be a fair assessment of this morning's evidence, if I was summarising it. So, in that instance, noting the positive future that we are going to get to at some point, how do we now try and resolve some of the issues that we've got in the present day, noting that in the future we might be able to have those problems alleviated? Is there a structural solution—i.e. more parking spaces around that CBD area? Is it a reduction in the size of the clearways and trying to funnel more people into motorways? Is it a difference, perhaps, in the way that we toll?

I know, Ms Weatherley, you actually indicated at the start of your opening statement that you had some thoughts about that. We have the opportunity now to hear from two people who are actually involved in the planning of these areas but also have a lot of training in that broader picture. I would love to know your thoughts about what we can do now while also keeping in mind that view to the future.

SUE WEATHERLEY: I might have a bit of a go at this, and then I'll allow Jeremy to talk specifically about Bexley because he is the expert on Bexley. But I'm happy to have a go at the future of Sydney because I do have a little bit of a background in that. The problem of the Bexley businesses is not unique in Sydney. There are many strip shopping and main streets that are affected by simply through traffic. People are just passing by and they are being given priority over people who want to do business in those areas or the people who already live in those areas.

The Greater Cities Commission, the metropolis of three cities, together with the future transport strategy, started to address this issue. Some of the answers are already in those documents. There is a place and movement continuum which talks about the role of streets through the motorways. We are, far too often, down the end of turning all our roads into a means to go somewhere else or go past things. We actually need to start thinking about creating the roads as places as well. To do that, we need to get some of the traffic, where we can, off those roads and onto those dedicated motorways. Having a tolling system that almost punishes people for using those roads—

and they almost, in their own thought process, say, "It would be easier for me and cheaper for me to use local roads." That is a consequence of that. Having better transport, so people don't always need to actually get in their car to go places, would also be helpful.

Perhaps it might be a good question to ask the Greater Cities Commission. What are some of the solutions to this? Some of their documents have actually started to look at that issue. The NorthConnex solution is, of course, has-been. It's \$24 to use NorthConnex, the tunnel; it's a nearly \$200 fine if you don't. I am not suggesting that is necessarily the solution here, but it is a bit perverse that it costs you more to use the tollway and save local streets than it does to use the local streets. I think that is the challenge. Somehow, we've got to find a way to turn that around, where people see the value in a tollway. A number of people will say to you, "Yeah, I don't use the tollways. It's not just the price. One accident, and I'm held up." You know, it's not necessarily always a saving of an extra six minutes; it may very well be a delay of two hours.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: That's a risk on any road system—

SUE WEATHERLEY: It most certainly is. But if you're on a—

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: —or train, for that matter, or light rail.

SUE WEATHERLEY: Mr Mallard, I would also say that in the case of a tollway or a motorway, when it is three lanes fixed and you cannot get off it once you are on it, some people weigh that risk. It has never particularly bothered me. You know, if I am going to use a tollway, I accept I might get held up, but I also accept the advantage of it.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: I think, Ms Weatherly, you and I agree on most things. With that, or the traffic management that you talk about—the utopia.

SUE WEATHERLEY: I don't like the word utopia. It suggests something else.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: I have been in public office since 2000, and the City of Sydney and now moving further out, Parramatta—we've seen the treatment of streets and roads as destinations in themselves. One of the utopias I would like to see is Parramatta Road, when the WestConnex is finally done, being pacified, in a sense, to try to reduce it. What I'm getting at is that thinking, and the resources that have to go with that, starting to move out into areas like Parramatta and elsewhere. It goes a bit to what my colleague Mr Rath asked the previous people about in terms of their comment around congestion. It was actually that flying so fast was more of an issue now, sometimes around here. The nirvana here would be, and I guess that's more Mr Morgan's area, is ultimately to reduce the width and to provide more parking, beautify the streets, get the trucks off the roads.

SUE WEATHERLEY: Well, create good congestion. People often think of congestion as only a bad thing, but sometimes congestion, where it is slower traffic, people coming into an area because they are visiting the area and they are wanting to do business in that area, so—

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: The Mayor of Bogotá said congestion is our great friend, when he came to the Sydney and gave a talk.

SUE WEATHERLEY: Yes. Congestion, when it is slowing down the delivery of freight, or whatever, costs us. It costs us if we are travelling somewhere else. But if it is actually to slow vehicles down and deliver a better place as a consequence, it can be a very positive thing. A mad solution might be to remove clearways.

The Hon. WES FANG: I am just noting that Mr Tullock has re-entered the building. It might be a good opportunity for Mr Morgan to answer the question I had about what might be able to be done around the Bexley CBD area.

JEREMY MORGAN: In opening response to that question, I have not worked with a chamber of commerce anywhere, across a number of local governments, who haven't wanted extra parking. So that's obviously one of the things that is in high demand for most local businesses. Parking is one part of the issue. But a comment from Mr Mallard about pacifying Parramatta Road—that's really what we need to see through Bexley. Just to give you some idea of metrics, Harrow Road, which is just down the road from the Bexley local strip, in a section that the council is responsible for, in a five- to six-year period—the number of heavy vehicles on that section has gone from 610 per day to 2,695. That is over 2,000 extra trucks in that section in a six-year period.

The Hon. WES FANG: That is a 300 per cent increase.

JEREMY MORGAN: Those trucks are also predominantly coming through Bexley Road, through Forest Road—

The ACTING CHAIR: Can I just get you to repeat those figures?

JEREMY MORGAN: Sure. In 2015 we had 610 heavy vehicles a day. In 2021 we had 2,695 on the same stretch.

The ACTING CHAIR: Per day?

JEREMY MORGAN: Per day. Those vehicles are coming through these local areas. Whilst parking is definitely an issue, council has taken some action to try and increase the number of parking spaces through Bexley town centre. We have demolished a former community centre and library to provide additional parking, modified some other parking spaces to increase the numbers, put time restrictions to generate turnover in some of the other off-street parking—so we have taken a number of initiatives to try and improve parking in Bexley. On-street parking is convenient for visitors—we know that. Having greater access to on-street parking immediately in front of businesses will help, but it's the impacts on the local amenity in the centre that's probably the biggest issue.

It's unpleasant. There are so many trucks coming through at a constant rate. It is not somewhere that's pleasant to sit down and have a coffee, when you've got trucks rumbling past two metres or a meter and a half away from where you're sitting. The noise, the vibration—it's unpleasant. Even for our local residents who don't need the parking directly in front of the shops, who would walk there, it's not pleasant for them to do it. Yes, I agree parking is an issue that we would like to see addressed with the clearways, but it's those traffic volumes that really are the biggest limiting factor.

The Hon. WES FANG: Are those truck number increases related to, for example, the construction of the M8 or WestConnex? Is that part of what has seen that increase over 300 per cent, from my quick back-of-the-napkin figures? In six years, that seems like an awful lot. Where is the source of that coming from? Is it also Botany and the like? Or is it a localised issue—i.e. the M8 that, once it's completed, will see a reduction in that number of trucks?

JEREMY MORGAN: That is a good question. It is one specific example that I've used because it is such a dramatic increase. There is no obvious connection from when council officers looked at the traffic generation. There is no obvious connection with M8 traffic works. It is not the route that they choose on their traffic management plans. It is not part of their route. In terms of the reason for that increase, we don't have a specific answer. We are certainly drawing conclusions that at some point there is some association with the tolls on the M5 east. We have just seen significant increases in heavy vehicles right through the network.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: I just wanted to tease out a bit more of the volume increase in traffic that you reported. First of all, this council and previous councils will have a record of studies. I guess there has been some natural truck growth since 2015 to now because the warehousing has just exploded in south-west Sydney. That would be a little bit of it. Have you got any research on destinations? We were watching the container trucks here today. You made a reference before to local transport hubs. Have you done a sampling or tracking of where these container trucks are going that are seen going through here?

JEREMY MORGAN: We haven't done the origin-destination on those movements. This specific example was in response to concerns from residents about the number of trucks they have witnessed going past. We were very surprised when we saw the results. We were expecting an increase but certainly not to that number. It is not all container trucks. Container trucks are part of the increase in volumes but it is also the truck and dogs—the construction trucks that are transporting spoil. We are seeing the pantech trucks, which are delivering to supermarkets and the like. So it is quite a mix of different trucks. It is not all container trucks.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: I would be interested to know, are those pantech trucks delivering to local supermarkets or are they going through to the distribution warehouses in south-west Sydney?

JEREMY MORGAN: There wouldn't be a need for such an increase in volume in local supermarkets. There has not been that scale of development in the area. It is a good question about what the origin-destination is, but we just do not have that information.

The ACTING CHAIR: You have addressed some of this in your evidence but I might just highlight one view that has been put to us by the freight companies, large and small, that has contributed to the issue here on the M5 corridor. I will see if you would like to respond to it. They have put the view to the Committee in evidence previously that the price that has been struck here for the tolls on this corridor is wrong. That is one of the things that has really put these trucks onto suburban streets, rather than on the tollways where they were promised. You have ranged freely in your contributions about what some solutions might be here, but I am interested in your response to that specific evidence from the freight companies. I will ask Ms Weatherley first and then Mr Morgan if either of you would like to comment on that.

SUE WEATHERLEY: I suppose the question I would ask the freight companies is what would the price have to be for them to be on the motorway? I think that is the answer. Everyone wants to pay less, but does

them legitimately paying less mean they will be on it or not? I would ask them the question. The tolls on roads vary so much. That goes back to that issue about the equity of different tolls and if that is the fair way to collect the funds to fund either construction or future infrastructure. Jeremy might have a far better sense of the tolls in this area and the impact.

JEREMY MORGAN: I have certainly seen a lot of media articles and interviews on television from business operators talking about the costs of the tolls and the impact on their business. I have spoken to friends who operate businesses in the local community about the cost increase for them. One of the hot topics certainly seems to be the actual price point of using the toll. There was a question earlier about whether you get a benefit on return for that outlay. That is hard to know without seeing the overall cost for that business. But someone will be paying the price. If the transport operators can't pass it on to their clients, it is hitting their bottom line. There is price elasticity in a lot of things in society and the tolls, I guess, is one of them. Certainly from what I have heard over the last couple of years, the toll is too high.

The ACTING CHAIR: One of the suggestions that has been made so that people can make that decision is to have signage at the entryway to toll roads that indicates perhaps how much time you might save and the cost of the tolls.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Who made that suggestion? Labor policy.

The ACTING CHAIR: Is that the sort of thing that might assist as people are making those decisions?

JEREMY MORGAN: In terms of the timesavings, it needs to translate into a real dollar benefit to that business. With the saving of 10 minutes per trip, if they can't get that \$22—I think it was \$22—in return for that 10 minutes, they are still not going to take that option. It is about understanding what the benefit is to those businesses. For some business operators, trying to articulate what that real cost-benefit to them is might be difficult. Having access to that information I certainly think would help.

SUE WEATHERLEY: I know I came out with a utopia—sorry for using that word—and the notion that road pricing can be approached in lots of different ways. But actually one of the ways it can be approached is to adjust the price based on usage. There is a parking system that is used in San Francisco and it always sets the price for parking in a particular location so that within that block there are always a few spaces available. If it is a really popular area, they keep putting the price up until they get to that stage of the price point and the elasticity where people say, "I'll park a bit further away where it's slightly cheaper. I am prepared for that."

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: That is not very equitable, I would suggest. You were talking about equity before.

SUE WEATHERLEY: Yes, okay, but perhaps there is an option, Mr Mallard, to do something to test what the toll needs to be to make sure more people use it. If more people use it then perhaps the return is the same than leaving it as it is. If the aim is to get those trucks onto the tollway, we need to have a price signal that that's what they should do. You can move the toll. One of the terms of reference—and I did go back and double-check the terms of reference—was to look at how the prices of tolls are set. At the moment we set it based on an expected number of trips and therefore a return. When that is not being met, the return is not being generated because there is a commercial decision about that. But if there are not enough people using the tollway, I am not sure why the prices aren't being adjusted to encourage more people to use it so that the saving of 10 minutes is only costing us \$5, not \$22. I think you have to be looking at a lot of solutions, and one of them is that price needs to be adjusted based on the usage of the tollway. With technology it is not like you have to get your money in your pocket and stick it in the little bucket. It is an automatic thing.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: It still hurts. It is a very small minority of trucks—because we can pick them out—that are avoiding the toll and coming through here. I live in the Blue Mountains and I use the M5 a lot. It is chock a- lock full of semitrailers and trucks. I am just making the observation that the pricing seems to be right for the vast majority; it is the minority that are diverting around.

SUE WEATHERLEY: Then the solution would be to price the local roads for those trucks.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: That might come back to NorthConnex.

SUE WEATHERLEY: That is the NorthConnex solution. As a resident of those northern suburbs—I live in Hornsby—I used to travel that trip every day when I worked at Parramatta. I can tell you, when I go there now there are no trucks.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: You would have to have a look at the knock-on effect on other parallel major roads that diverge further around.

SUE WEATHERLEY: That is exactly right. You still have to look at that.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: That is where I think the complexity is with this one. NorthConnex is pretty simple in regards to one road.

SUE WEATHERLEY: We have technology that I think could solve that issue in terms of where trucks were travelling.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: You should come work for Transport for NSW.

The ACTING CHAIR: Thank you for your evidence. Unless there are any other questions from Committee members, we might conclude there. I want to thank you though for the evidence you've given us. It has certainly been very helpful. I think you may have taken one question on notice. We'll ask that that is returned within 21 days. The secretariat will contact you in relation to the question you've taken on notice. Thank you for that. We will take a short break now until 1.00 p.m. when the Committee will resume.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

Mr FAJID KHAN, Private Individual, affirmed and examined

Ms YASMINA KOVACEVIC, Private Individual, affirmed and examined

Mr OSMAN KAROLIA, Private Individual, affirmed and examined

Mr EUGENE McFARLANE, Private Individual, sworn and examined

Mr LES CROMPTON, Private Individual, sworn and examined

Mr DANIEL EGLI, Private Individual, affirmed and examined

The ACTING CHAIR: I now welcome our witnesses. You will have the opportunity to make a short statement. I will ask you to keep it reasonably brief, just to a minute or two minutes. Feel free to tell us exactly where you're coming from. Then we will move to questions from the Committee. Mr Khan, I might start with you and invite you to make a short opening statement.

FAJID KHAN: I have written everything down so I don't forget anything. So sorry for reading of a piece of paper. I'm a local resident, a pedestrian, a cyclist and vice-president of Bexley Public School P&C, as I mentioned earlier. I'm a father of two little girls, living and working from my family home on the Stoney Creek Road intersection at Medway Street. Today I'm before you in these capacities as a parent and community representative carrying the voice of the local school. I also have a short video that I will present later on, I suppose, given the opportunity.

The ACTING CHAIR: Sure.

FAJID KHAN: I'm affirming to express the negative impact the toll increases—on the traffic conditions, including pollution, dangerous driving and the risk imposed to all members of the community by trucks and trailers running through an otherwise progressive residential area. The damage to the surrounding buildings, infrastructure, community, local businesses and standard of living is evident to anyone visiting the area. Almost every week, increasingly, our streets face accidents and near misses that have become so commonplace. Heavy goods vehicles and cars speed through our streets with complete disregard to the impact caused on this community.

The ACTING CHAIR: Thank you for that statement. Ms Kovacevic?

YASMINA KOVACEVIC: Thank you, Chair. I'll try and not read off my notes. I'm Yasmina. I'm a local resident and I also am the partial owner, partially the bank, of a commercial building. The objective I have today is to talk to you about the impacts this is having on my local community, and the local community includes residents, retail tenants and single people trying to rent in the area in shop-top housing, which is no longer suitable due to the intense noise pollution and chaos caused by ongoing congestion. I've also prepared a document that I wish to submit for the Committee, but I would like to make some recommendations as part of my submission. The recommendations recognise that we're not experts in this area because it's this whole issue of "should we fix one problem at the expense of another group?" It's a difficult and complex question. I don't profess to be an expert. I certainly hope I don't get asked questions about the toll regimes because that's not my area of expertise, but what I have witnessed firsthand—as have my tenants, both the retail tenant that has recently given notice and my residential tenant, which I have great difficulty in keeping for longer terms—is that we need a solution and we need it fast. We needed the solution yesterday really. So that's really what my submission is about.

OSMAN KAROLIA: Being the school leader, I am here not just on behalf of the staff and students but also their parents and local residents who aren't at our school, our neighbours we have a wonderful rapport with. The impact has been more than just a trickle of new traffic. It has been a significant increase in new traffic, particularly heavy vehicles, as can be seen by anyone who travels along Marsh Street over at Arncliffe and Mascot and sees the huge lines of trucks. We are moving off the Eastern Distributor to get onto Stoney Creek Road or Forest Road. The impact it has is beyond just added noise, and the added noise is a real concern for not just residents but schools that face onto Stoney Creek Road. It's unrelenting, and it goes on all day, well after school hours.

We are also concerned that the increased traffic, particularly of heavy vehicles, has not just caused backlog in local areas but often it's cars travelling at speed in what was once a reasonably quiet suburban area, even with Stoney Creek Road on our doorstep. We now have parents almost playing a game of roulette as they try to get access outside of the school. That is due to heavy vehicles coming on. Unfortunately, you always get the fear that there is an accident—and a significant accident—waiting to happen.

We are also concerned about the impact of costs and the cost of living. We have a large catchment of parents and staff who come from different parts of Sydney. Some of our staff come over from Mascot and Eastlakes. There is now an increase in their cost to come into work every day. We have former students who are

students of the University of New South Wales and other colleges in the eastern suburbs, who have had a significant increase in their cost in their commute to university college or their employment. We have elderly residents who have medical appointments, often at the eastern suburbs, and this is a significant cause of stress for them. The impact is at many levels, and it is something which we hope will be addressed.

EUGENE McFARLANE: Thank you, Mr Chair. I thank you and the Committee for allowing me to provide evidence today on the subject of errors and overcharging in the calculation of the Sydney M5 East toll road. I have lived in Sydney for over 50 years, and for over half of that time I have commuted from around Roselands, Beverly Hills to Botany. I have estimated the continuing direct cost of the M5 East toll personally to be about \$3,500 per year. But today I am not here to talk about that. What I would like to do is present the facts outlining the overcharging of the M5 East tolls by WestConnex, Transurban, based on their own tolling formula.

Typically—and WestConnex is no different—toll charges are calculated based on the flag fall in the price per kilometre. Using WestConnex's own tolling formula and the distance from King Georges Road to Marsh Street through the tunnel on the M5 East, we get a number that is \$2 less than the actual amount that is charged by WestConnex. It is a little bit different if you enter at Kingsgrove Road, but the number is still about \$2 in excess of what you would get using their toll formula. I have evidence that shows that they have been weighting the formula since mid-2020 when they started the tolling process and that this overcharging has continued since then.

In summary, or as recommendations, what I would hope is that this Committee looks at this overcharging and that the inquiry makes relevant recommendations that WestConnex compensates those customers for this discrepancy, and acknowledging the error in the calculation that the tolls be changed so that they reflect the existing toll formula at least and this would reduce the cost to people using the M5 East tunnel from King Georges Road by \$2 per trip. I seek leave to tender this document in support of the evidence I have provided.

The ACTING CHAIR: We will get you to hand that up through the Committee staff and table that now. Thank you for that.

LES CROMPTON: My name is Les Crompton. I am a lifetime resident of Bexley. I went to school in the fifties and sixties. I have seen all the changes before there were traffic lights, before there were pedestrian crossings, believe it or not. So we go back a while. I am a former councillor on Rockdale council, and I have represented the State members for Kogarah on the traffic committee first at Rockdale council and Bayside Council for the last 20 years. So I have a bit of an idea of what is going on.

Cutting it short, without taking too much of your time, I recall when the M5 East opened. It was a Sunday prior to Christmas. Carl Scully came out with Cherie Burton. We got our crossing in the middle of Bexley, virtually, between should we say Kingsland Road and Bexley Road. Carl Scully walked out onto the road and said, "Well, there's no traffic. The traffic had gone." That was 20-odd years ago. The current Government has virtually turned back time and brought it all back. That is the concern I have. I had a business in Bexley for some 12 years. That is not a problem for me, but we have had the odd car run into the building as they raced through.

As well as impacting us with bringing all the traffic back, they put the clearways in on both sides—not one side but both. It was always one side in the a.m. and one side in the p.m. They brought it back. As a resident, that took amenities off a lot of our residents. When you look at our shopping centre per se, they took the parking away, which was provided by a previous government. They put more parking in, and it was good. We started a community bank, because we are a close community. But I would say the Government at the moment is trying to divide our community for whatever reason. That is another story.

The worst part as well is that when you have a lot of people at work at the airport, all of those are hand-to-mouth people. They work four-hour shifts. They can't afford the tolls, so they're coming through Bexley and I can't blame them. A lot of owner-drivers come through Bexley with their trucks because they can't pay \$25 to go through to Port Botany, and the residents can't afford to pay \$7.31 to drive through to go to work. That is what we have got back on our roads, and that is a problem that our current Government has created.

Maybe a way of resolving that slightly is to drop the toll by two-thirds. Topping Bexley's school in arithmetic once—if you look at the traffic and you put it back and it is only one-third of what it is now, they would make their money but no-one is doing any counting because the current Government has sold off the road that was free. It was given to the people of New South Wales. The worst thing was it was too successful. Look at the growth, as it was mentioned earlier, out in the west. The grandkids live out at Leppington. The amount that has gone on in there in the last eight years is phenomenal—all of that area—and it is going to keep coming. Why the Government sold off a free road that belonged to the people, I am not sure. I will park it there for now.

DANIEL EGLI: Thank you. I also have my notes. My name is Daniel, and I'm living between Hurstville and Kingsgrove with my family. It used to be a quiet neighbourhood. Our daughter studies at Kingsgrove High School, what used to be a safe and healthy learning environment. But this has all dramatically changed about two

years ago when the Perrottet Government, on behalf of Transurban, imposed a new toll on the old M5 East tunnel. This new and ever-increasing tax is toll mania on steroids. The Perrottet Government, as the puppets of Transurban, are cost-of-living villains that cause a massive health and safety crisis because the new toll is not value for money. It becomes more and more unaffordable with every double-inflation increase and redirects most traffic from the tunnel to suburban streets, like you see out here in Bexley. The fact is that rat-run traffic along Stoney Creek and Forest Road has more than doubled, trucks have increased tenfold, noise pollution is on harmful levels and road accidents, hooning, speeding and dangerous driving have drastically escalated.

I really appreciate that you are coming here today and listening to the suffering communities becoming victims of these mistakes and inaction of the Perrottet Government and the greed of Transurban. It is remarkable that this is the first time in two years of this crisis that somebody is listening to suffering communities. I would like to take the opportunity here again to encourage Dominic Perrottet, Natalie Ward, Transport for NSW and Transurban to follow suit and start listening to people, appreciate the unacceptable situation firsthand, admit their mistakes instead of blaming others and resolve the crisis that they have caused. If last weekend's election result wasn't proof enough that people are fed up with the Liberal arrogance and ignorance of people, what is? People are disgruntled about politics paid by big corporates like Transurban, who pay bribes for crooked deals and ignore people's health and safety in return. Systematic discrimination of south-western Sydney by Dominic Perrottet is a disgrace and must stop.

Already this year there were multiple horrible accidents along Stoney Creek Road, some right in front of Kingsgrove High School where my daughter has to endure not only harmful noise levels every day but also more and more dangerous roads. There was also a pedestrian that was hit by a truck recently in Bexley. It is not the fault of the pedestrian or the truck; it is the fault of the deals of the Government with Transurban and not respecting the health and safety of the people affected. The Premier, Natalie Ward, Andrew Constance, Rob Stokes, Transport for NSW and Transurban are hypocrites if they claim they are concerned about road safety. They are not. They choose to ignore obvious health and safety concerns, they refuse to experience the devastation firsthand, they don't accept accountability and they are unwilling to resolve the crisis they have caused.

I also, quickly, would like to make some comments about the submissions to this Committee and how Transurban and Transport for NSW were very softly treated so far. I looked at some of the submissions at the hearings; Transurban and Transport for NSW just copied and pasted from each other. I am really shocked by the dishonesty, the deception of those reports. They are claiming it is safer now on the M5 East. This is grossly dishonest, because it is not safer if you look at the entirety of the road network of Sydney. Accidents have increased drastically. Just last week, a boy in front of Kingsgrove High School was hit by a truck. This is caused by Transurban. This is caused by Transport for NSW that has become a political organisation that just tries to cover up and it tries to hide the inconvenient truths.

I think there are a lot of solutions that have been proposed. I also have some proposals on that. It really needs to be looked at. I think one of the major problems here is that Transurban keeps on paying big party donations and gets these kinds of contracts in return. They are the cost-of-living villains. They are not willing to be responsible and ethical, and have a moral business that is sustainable for people. So I really would encourage Transurban to look into the mirror and tell us if they are comfortable that they are making their fortunes and their big bonuses on the back of the most vulnerable, like students that are suffering in classrooms under harmful noise levels.

The ACTING CHAIR: Thank you for those opening statements. In opening the questions, I might turn first to that question about the impact on school staff. We have had reports in other places about this potentially meaning people choose to work elsewhere, that the cost of tolls impacts on whether or not it is viable for people to continue working in the place they have. Is it, at the moment, at that level, when it comes to the impact on school staff, or is it really just still stretching the budget for people—

OSMAN KAROLIA: It is very much at that level, Chair, for school staff who have got families and have got added responsibilities and other circumstances. It'll be different for some of the lower staff who don't have those responsibilities. But I can certainly confirm that for some of the staff members who have got young families, who have got these other cost-of-living stressors and pressures—which all of us have to endure—that this added cost to work and away from work is beyond what they can bear. As a result, they now themselves try to move away from using the toll road, to save on those costs, and now actually have the added pressure of not just being late or under stress because of the significant increase in traffic from the Marsh Road exit through Forest and Stoney Creek roads into Kingsgrove. So we are definitely at the breaking point for many individuals.

The ACTING CHAIR: Mr Crompton, you have described this as almost "turning back time". How is it that the Government has spent more than \$4 billion on a new tunnel but it has meant that we are back to having trucks on these roads? How would you explain that?

LES CROMPTON: Originally the tunnel was to take the traffic—the, should we say, outside traffic—off our local roads and put it into the M5 tunnel, and it worked. That is exactly what happened. When I say "turning back time", we've got the traffic back because you can understand why they're not going to pay the toll. Why should they when they can come on our suburban streets? But it would appear as though they've turned their back on our community by doing that. And if you do your sums—which, you know, it's pretty simple—if they reduce it by two-thirds, people probably could afford to use it. But they're not and that's the problem. If we go back to prior to the M5, in the evening the traffic was back to Wollie Creek Road, which is halfway to Arncliffe. In the morning, it was beyond Preddys Road and beyond the golf course. That was just the way it was. Once the M5 tunnel opened, that traffic was gone. That's why Carl Scully was able to walk out into the middle of Forest Road and stand there—"Look, there's no traffic." That was as soon as it opened—that was the Friday after it opened, I'm sorry. It happened on a Sunday, prior to Christmas 2001.

The ACTING CHAIR: Just one question to all of you—the councils have turned up today and given evidence to the inquiry that they'd be open to providing feedback into the transport processes and they believe that the community should have the opportunity to have direct input. I will ask you, firstly, have you had the opportunity? Do you feel you've had the opportunity to have a say directly into these questions and would you be open to having one if you were given that chance?

YASMINA KOVACEVIC: We did have a working group—and I may not call it the right thing. It was related to the transport issues. That is no longer functioning and I believe it's because of the council elections. But I feel that, in terms of our local council, we can have our voices heard. I think a lot of the issues we're talking about here are at State government level. This is the frustration we are experiencing. It is called a State road—and I'm talking particularly about Forest Road in this example—yet, what does that mean? Does that mean it can become a highway through residential areas and through areas where there are schoolchildren?

We have many, many schools on this strip of road along Forest Road, going from Bexley down to Arncliffe, and it is just not tenable to treat that as a highway—in effect, an extension of the motorway, as Les said, without the toll. So the toll avoidance behaviour, this is something that we are really interested in having the State Government and New South Wales Transport evaluate, with a view to coming up with real solutions for our community. There is toll avoidance behaviour going on. I am speaking apolitically when I say that, because I'm not interested in blaming one side at the expense of the other, but it should not be that our community is expected to endure it when you look at other parts of Sydney that are not expected to do the same—and I'm using the example of Lane Cove Tunnel.

The ACTING CHAIR: Finally, Mr McFarlane, I might just ask you to talk a little bit more to your observation about the formula, in fact, making the case that for one part of Sydney—for one toll road, in particular—drivers are being charged more. You say it is \$2.00 a trip. Of course, that adds up over time; that could be a thousand dollars a year when it comes to a regular commuter making the trip. Can you give us any more detail about this discrepancy that you're drawing attention to?

EUGENE McFARLANE: Yes. Thank you, Mr Chair. In the document I tabled there is a simple table and in it it shows the cost of the toll on the M4 motorway. It is, I think, about 7.5 kilometres. The cost on that toll road, for that distance, is about \$5.00-something, and that was \$2.00 less than the M5 East tunnel. So the only question you have to ask yourself is am I right about the 7.2 kilometre-length of the M5 East from King Georges Road to Marsh Street, which is the other end of the toll booth. That is easy to check; I did it myself. I drive there every day—it is about 7.2 kilometres. So why the discrepancy? Why is there a \$2.00 difference when WestConnex itself talks about its formula and uses that, it says, to calculate those toll charges?

I think the question could be asked about why it's like that. Just before I go, you will notice, in that table—for some reason I put a question mark in the table. They don't quote that kilometre distance between King Georges Road and Marsh Street. Why not? I would be over-speculating, but if someone did write that number down, it would be obvious there was a discrepancy.

The Hon. WES FANG: I was just looking at your figures quite diligently, because I find it quite fascinating. But I do wonder if the M5 East component, given that it can be—it's effectively a smaller distance-based tolling regime. That's perhaps because where you join it and where you exit varies on that route, whereas for some of the other ones it does not vary. It's just a single toll. That is perhaps the answer to that. That aside—

EUGENE McFARLANE: I would like to address that, by the way. If you are travelling west on the M5 East, you go through the General Holmes Drive tunnel, and before you get—and you can imagine that could be tolled, but it's not. There's an opportunity to leave the road at Marsh Street before you get onto the toll road; that's where the tollbooth is. So how else do you charge tolls, other than by the tolling booths? I could understand an alternative measure, but I'm quoting the WestConnex methodology when I quote this.

The Hon. WES FANG: I know. I find it fascinating and I am going to go through it in more detail when I get home and have the opportunity to have a look.

EUGENE McFARLANE: I understand. It is there to be looked at yourself.

The Hon. WES FANG: Thank you very much for appearing today and providing the insights to the Committee. We've had the opportunity to hear from business owners and to hear from the councils that have carriage of the issues here. Now it is the chance to hear from residents. The issues that we have heard vary, and this is part of the problem around trying to find a solution. For some people it's an issue of traffic; for some people it's an issue of parking; for some people it's an issue of noise; and for others, who aren't residents of this area, there's the issue of the cost of living. As I look around the room, what do you see as the solution? I know we have talked about the tolls themselves, but what do you see as a practical solution, at the moment, to actually resolve some of the concerns that you've raised? I will allow you to provide a response.

YASMINA KOVACEVIC: Firstly, I would state that I don't agree with your assumption that we have varied issues. I think it is quite the opposite. I think the issue is unanimously the same issue, and that is that the toll regime for the M5 East is flawed. It is having massive, possibly unintended consequences on its community—businesses, residents, schools, the lot. The impacts are being felt differently by all of us, and that is something that you're hearing today through the stories we're telling you and the facts that we are presenting. But the issue, I will repeat, is the same issue. In terms of some solutions, in my submission I've got three quite general recommendations. I wasn't sure if we were able to bring recommendations to you.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Go ahead.

YASMINA KOVACEVIC: I am just going to read them out, quickly. The first one is that the Government, and its responsible portfolios, reverse the imposed clearways along Stoney Creek Road, Forest Road, Bexley—I have added Stoney Creek Road—business district and satellite business districts between Wollie Creek Road and Queen Victoria Street. This particular mention relates to my immediate community. This has created a direct incentive for further tollway avoidance behaviour, and this is something we witnessed, where a department knowingly established clearways that were to the detriment of the local communities and local businesses. We know that the Government is interested in supporting small business. So I think that is one recommendation, that they conduct an independent study into this impact, and hopefully they can reverse these clearways.

The second one is a study into the equity of approach to toll avoidance prevention strategies. By that, I mean whatever is in place in Lane Cove, around the Lane Cove Tunnel—and I don't know it in detail. What I do know is that the same toll avoidance behaviour is not happening there. So what is it about our community that is different? Is it that we're undeserving, or less deserving? So the second recommendation is that there is an independent study into the equity of approach to toll avoidance prevention strategies across Sydney and its toll regimes. The third one relates to—again, it's a concept around whether there is a better way to calculate the full length or the greatest distance covered from the south-west to avoid so many exits at Bexley Road. And there are so many people and trucks—small trucks, large trucks, semitrailers and small cars—exiting at Bexley Road to avoid further toll payments. That is a wrap up.

The Hon. WES FANG: Those are actually some very interesting concepts and I think it is admirable that you have brought them here. It is really a shame that the Opposition Leader didn't stick around to actually hear those in person, instead of doing the stunt and then leaving. However, we're here now, and so we will be able to put those—

The ACTING CHAIR: You are at risk of being called to order.

The Hon. WES FANG: I am just making the observation that he made a stunt and then he has departed and not actually stayed to hear from the inquiry—

The ACTING CHAIR: You can ask a question.

The Hon. WES FANG: In relation to the clearway issue that you raised initially, as your first answer, what we heard from some of the business owners was that there was initially what they call a one-way clearway. In the morning one side was a clearway, and then in the afternoon the opposite side was a clearway. If we were to go back to that regime of clearways, or, if I'm reading you correctly, to abolish clearways altogether to enable more parking, is that what you would prefer—or the old regime of clearways?

YASMINA KOVACEVIC: I don't think there's an easy answer to this. I think it needs to be properly evaluated, and I guess some options—an analysis paper with some real solutions for the community. Obviously, we're not expecting a perfect world; we're not that sort of community. We expect it to be a decent amount of hustle and bustle—I guess that's what I would call it. But it is just impossible to get from A to B at the moment, and

those clearways are in place in more cases than not. I'd have to take that question on notice, because I'm not an expert on the clearway hours.

The Hon. WES FANG: I was asking because in the instance, say, that we abolish clearways altogether, can you see a possibility that what would happen is that the Bexley CBD area would be choked to actual local traffic even—that you would actually be constricting the local traffic?

YASMINA KOVACEVIC: My recommendation relates to the recently imposed extension of the clearways, not clearways in an absolute form.

The Hon. WES FANG: Okay. That is one of the ideas that we've got to actually free up the area. In relation to the tolling regime that's in place at the moment, that you say is a discouragement to people operating their vehicles—whether they be transport vehicles or personal vehicles—into the tunnel, do you see, if we were to reduce the cost of the tolls, or change the methodology around the way that we impose the tolls, that there would be a reduction in the surface movements around the Bexley area? Is that the view that you have?

LES CROMPTON: There are two things. First of all, as pointed out by Eugene here, it is 7.2 kilometres from King Georges Road. I believe the toll is \$7.21 or \$7.31, which means it is \$1 per kilometre or part thereof. I think that is a little excessive to start with, which I suggested earlier. If you look at it on a serious note, as Yasmina mentioned, we have a situation with clearways both ways. Let's turn back time again. Prior to the toll on the M5 East, there was in the p.m. a clearway on the eastern side heading west and, of course, in the a.m. on the western side heading east. I speak as a resident. I am also president of Bexley RSL, which is a business in the area, but I am speaking as a resident. A lot of residents are disenchanted because when they put these clearways in, they also, as you have probably heard from the chamber from Jeff, they took 20-odd parking spots away. Why they did that, I don't know. If you've got one car or 20 cars, what's the difference?

That is probably doing two things: It's ruining our CBD and the businesses in our CBD and also making it very hard for residents to drive up, park and shop. We have a lot of elderly residents who might want to do that. They don't have to drive down to Kogarah, Rockdale or Hurstville. They can drive locally and keep their independence. That is gone. When the parking goes, that goes as well. That disadvantages another section of residents that like to keep their independence and stay in their home and not go to a retirement village or a nursing home or whatever it is. That also takes their freedom from them, which also impacts on the businesses. Therefore, I believe the toll is too much and excessive in the fact that it is \$1 per kilometre, if you like. I do not know that that is the case anywhere else.

As well as that, if we were to drop that by two-thirds—because most of the people coming through Bexley now are from the south-west and they come to work at the airport and other such places. They can't afford—because a lot of them might be doing four hours at the airport as Qantas have got rid of all their permanent staff. For a lot of these people English isn't their first language, but they come to our country and they are flogged. They have got to use our roads and be part of our connect because of the disconnect because of the toll. Those people that do work at the airport—and there are some 5,000-odd. I think it's built back up now with all the aircraft flying again. I suppose it was ideal when it first came on because we had the pandemic and the airport was closed and it wasn't a big impact. But since then it has built up and up, as Yasmina said. It is ruining not only the business owners but the ability for residents to park. Why they took the parking away makes no sense at all, and that is out of clearway areas. Why did they do that? Was that a square-up or they thought it was a good idea? If you park one car or 20 cars, it makes no difference. But it does make a difference to the commercial centre of Bexley.

The Hon. WES FANG: When you say "square-up", what do you mean by that?

LES CROMPTON: I don't mean that in a threatening term.

The Hon. WES FANG: In all seriousness, there has been a bit of a theme that has developed in some of the submissions that have been made. When I say submissions, I mean the oral evidence that has been given today. In fact, I was going to provide—and I will do it now—a warning to all witnesses who are providing evidence today that while they are covered under parliamentary privilege now, what they say outside of this room will not be covered by parliamentary privilege if you are giving interviews and the like. I warn witnesses of that because I noticed some of the commentary was perhaps not, I will say, backed by evidence. But you did mention "square-up", Mr Crompton. What did you mean by that?

LES CROMPTON: I suppose you took me out of context. It would make no difference if you had 20 cars parked or one car parked. Do you know what I mean?

The Hon. WES FANG: But by "square-up" you mean to get square at somebody.

LES CROMPTON: That was probably the wrong word to say. I am not apologising because it was not an intent—

The Hon. WES FANG: You said it was probably a square-up.

LES CROMPTON: Yes. If those were my words, that's fine.

The Hon. WES FANG: I was listening very intently. What do you mean? Who was getting square at who? What is it you were putting forward as a proposition here?

LES CROMPTON: It could be because, I believe, in fact, when this was put to Bayside Council the mayor told them, "We're not interested. Get out of here," et cetera. Maybe because of that they took more parking than they were going to take. I don't know. I'm not sure. I'm not a councillor. I don't know. I only heard this because I read it in the paper.

The Hon. WES FANG: So is it your submission to this inquiry, then, that the State Government has, by taking or increasing the clearway distances, attempted to get square with your council and your mayor?

LES CROMPTON: No, not really. It was probably the wrong word to say. What I meant was—

The Hon. WES FANG: No, this is what I'm trying—

LES CROMPTON: I know I said it, but you keep going on with it.

The ACTING CHAIR: I will ask you to let the witness answer, Mr Fang.

LES CROMPTON: I am trying to explain that it was simply just to square up the situation, if you like, and clear it out. If you put one parking spot or 20, the ones you take away are the ones that are ruining our CBD for our residents and for our shop owners.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: To be clear, you meant squaring up the parking alignment.

LES CROMPTON: That is probably better put, yes. Thank you. If you have got one car and all the traffic behind it, that is fine. If you have got 20 cars, it makes no difference, if you know what I mean.

The ACTING CHAIR: I am not sure who wants to answer this question about the issue of noise. We have had some views put locally that the noise is really significant. When we had our tour earlier, that was certainly the case for Committee members. To what extent is that impacting on sleep for people? Who wants to jump in on that question?

LES CROMPTON: I live on Kinsel Grove, which is just off Stoney Creek Road—sorry to steal the thunder, but anyone else is welcome to answer—and you hear the trucks all through the night because they have got their air brakes coming past. I am virtually adjacent to the RSL in the next street and the traffic flows because why would they use the toll or pay a toll? They just zoom through with their air brakes coming into the lights at Bexley.

YASMINA KOVACEVIC: I live on Forest Road, Bexley. My property has a retail shop of some 98 square metres and a shop-top small apartment. I also have a single woman who lives upstairs as a tenant. What can I tell you about the noise? The retail tenant will be exiting and giving up the lease, I guess. The tenant has been paying rent that has been a very cheap rate because of the impact of this situation with the noise pollution and vibration that shakes the building at all hours, not just business hours. In fact, some days it is heavier at night. This tenant is vacating and I am concerned that I won't be able to get another tenant or I will be able to get a tenant but at very, let's say, dirt cheap rent that doesn't match the inflation.

The situation on a personal level is—and I haven't brought it with me today—that I am actually using melatonin which, for people who don't know, is a medicine that helps regulate sleep. I haven't made mention of that in my submission because I think this issue is broader than just myself. But I wonder how many other people are dealing with this. I have also invested in some window shutters that are not doing the job and I have applied for the noise abatement plan through Transport for NSW. Since you asked that question, Chair, I am yet to get an answer. I believe I submitted that application well before Christmas. I recently received a letter to say, "We will come out and do an assessment in June." But the same letter says, "It will be a further 12 weeks after that visit before we can tell you what we decide." That visit is supposed to, I guess, analyse and assess the impact of noise on my building.

The ACTING CHAIR: I can see Mr Egli wants to make a contribution.

DANIEL EGLI: Maybe just to add that there are multiple schools along those routes that are impacted. I can speak for Kingsgrove High School. They tried to get a solution. The principal has reached out to Georges River Council, School Infrastructure NSW and Transport for NSW but they didn't get anywhere. They don't get any help. It is really impacting the classroom. It even impacts COVID measures. They have to choose between noise or ventilation. They can't do both anymore. It is really a heavy impact on schools. They don't get help. I have

to say, Georges River Council is actually not helpful in that whole process. They are just deferring it to Transport for NSW, who also doesn't want to hear about those issues.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Thank you all for coming today. I want to unpack what Ms Kovacevic said. I think you touched on the issue that a solution for one area impacts another area. None of us here, I think, are traffic experts. I have been 12 years on council and seven years in Parliament. I live in the Blue Mountains, Great Western Highway. I was on the city council—Eastern Distributor, Cross City Tunnel, the issues of people avoiding tolls. You mentioned Lane Cove Tunnel, which is interesting too. I use that one quite a bit. The surface road, Epping highway, was reduced in width—bike lanes, speed slowdown to discourage people that use it instead of using the motorway. It's the same with the Cross City Tunnel—William Street reduced. In fact, it was done by Labor. They closed off exits to the Cross City Tunnel and to the harbour tunnel and it was called funnelling at the time.

What I want to unpack is—set aside the tolling issue inside the tunnels. Do you think that we've gone the wrong direction in terms of opening up the roads to try and push to get the traffic moving through faster and not backing up, which it used to do—that is where your clearways come in and your level of parking—or should we be doing the opposite and making it an unattractive route to get round the tolls, narrowing the road, reducing the speed, putting in parking bays and trees like we've done on William Street, and trying and making it unattractive? When the mayor of Bogota came to Sydney, he gave a talk at Sydney Town Hall and he said traffic congestion is our friend in terms of reducing unnecessary traffic on roads. People give up. So what is your comment about taking that approach to the problem?

YASMINA KOVACEVIC: Look, my overall comment is that I don't think there's a simple solution.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: No, there's not; that's why we're here.

YASMINA KOVACEVIC: But I think this community deserves to have something a lot better. The way I'm imagining this solution is to think outside the square. I've heard a lot today about kilometres and breaking down per kilometre trip, comparing methodologies, but I haven't heard a lot and I haven't read a lot about looking to other very progressive countries that have really sophisticated motorways. How do they approach this issue of tolls? Are there other models that perhaps allocate the cost per resident that has a car with subsidies to pensioners and unemployed so that the pain is distributed evenly across the State, for example? I don't know that. I'm not an expert. But I'm challenging the government of the day to have a look into that through a proper, comprehensive study that puts on the table some really workable solutions that don't demonise one community at the expense of another.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: I agree with that. We heard evidence from the council today about the growth in truck traffic on some of the roads—quite dramatic. Just observing this morning—I went down for a walk to get a coffee and was watching the trucks again today. The container trucks and big pantechnicons are obviously going through and the councillor that was here today took me aside and told me what roads they were taking. I make the point I made earlier today. That's a minority of truck traffic compared to what's in the tunnel right now if we were sitting in there watching through a camera. There are still a lot in there that are doing the right thing. We need to discourage the ones doing the wrong thing by going through community streets—back into the tunnel. It's a combination of pricing but also disincentives: narrowing roads or putting in penalties like they've got in NorthConnex. What do you think of the NorthConnex model, which again is complex but where you set out a regime in place that fines truck drivers who don't use the motorway? It's a tough approach but it's one that we are using now in NorthConnex.

YASMINA KOVACEVIC: Sure. I think a solution that is the fairest it can possibly be for the majority of people in New South Wales is something that we should strive for. And if that solution is something entirely different or quite a departure from the current approach or methodology, so be it. I think we are quite used to having some trucks, especially the dangerous goods trucks coming through. We know that. We're not expecting a perfect-world scenario. It's the added small, medium and large trucks; semitrailers; cars; bikes—the lot. It is just an ongoing onslaught and if it means a comparable study to what's happening in the north-west situation that you mentioned, I don't have a view on that. I think it just needs to be a lot better for the community.

FAJID KHAN: I would like to say something.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Sure. And, Mr Khan, did you say you were a cyclist or a cycling advocate?

FAJID KHAN: I'm a cyclist as well, yes. I try.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: I'm a cyclist as well and a big advocate for cycling lanes. I haven't seen any infrastructure—

FAJID KHAN: It's a nightmare. I live on Stoney Creek Road—

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: No cycling lanes there.

FAJID KHAN: —so I wake up at 3.00 a.m. to the trucks. If I could point out one single issue here that disrupts my family and the community I live in, it's the manner that the trucks come through and how—it's obvious that they don't belong. The roads are not made to accommodate these trucks. Now, it's not equitable to have what you mentioned before—fines et cetera—to keep them out. That's great but you need to give them some incentive to use the toll roads, those motorways, the tunnels et cetera that are created for them. It's not fair to just say, "Hey, get off our roads. If you're found here, we'll fine you." Putting up cameras et cetera to regulate all that—that's fantastic. But the issue really is: What do you do with all of that? What do you do with them when you push them to one side? There needs to be a two-pronged approach. There needs to be an approach to catch them—to do right by the truck drivers and to do right by the community that suffers within Bexley.

DANIEL EGLI: Can I also chip in something? You say it is difficult to find a solution. That's certainly true. But it's a man-made problem, right? You go back in time when the tunnel was for free. It wasn't such a problem. The tunnel was proposed as a solution and now it becomes an inverse situation. So obviously you have to go back there and see what you can do. I guess it's wrong to just assume that the price is given and the contracts are signed. I guess you have to bring Transurban to the table and say, "Look, we have a problem." Tolls are very cost-sensitive so you have to go down with the tolls in order to incentivise people to use the tunnel. If you did that—all the traffic through Bexley is not the solution. It's not sustainable. It can't work. There is even inflation set into—increasing that has been promised. It is just getting worse. So you have to bring them at arm's length to the table and tell them there is a problem. It's also their reputation problem because it is assigned to Transurban. They've got their contract, which is very unfair, which are really cost-of-living issues. And then look at how you can bring the volume back to the tunnel by lowering the price—

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: The volume is in the tunnel. We got the evidence on that.

DANIEL EGLI: —and increasing the volumes and reducing the price, right? You can also mandate the trucks. I would absolutely support that but not the—

The ACTING CHAIR: We've just got a couple of other witnesses who want to jump in and make a contribution and then we will come back.

OSMAN KAROLIA: Thank you, Chair. I would like to just pivot the discussion briefly to the human side and the human impact. It's an established area. I grew up in Hurstville myself a long time ago and we've always known that some of those arterial roads have got a lot more traffic. But what we need to also acknowledge is that, as Sydney's planning has moved forward, there are no significant distribution centres as you head out west and south-west in particular. So we are essentially telling the transport companies, "You've got to use those transport corridors", and I get that. But in order to skip the impact on their drivers or on the subcontractors who are providing the transport—they're doing \$25 a trip in tolls. I get why they'd want to get off the tollway for certain sections.

The challenge is that they are now using arterial roads, which have really become highways. And it's not your traditional delivery lorry. We're now talking of significant trucks and shipping containers. If I can use the example again of the little patch where our school is located, we've got a number of independent and public schools. Your hair stands watching the kids before school and after school because those children are not accustomed to growing up in a neighbourhood with such a large increase in the volume of traffic and particularly in the type of traffic. Elderly people as well crossing roads—crossing Stoney Creek Road, crossing Kingsgrove Road. You do have to be really worried.

So I ask that we pivot things back to the human impact because it's often the very vulnerable in our communities—the younger children, the elderly—who are now bearing the brunt of a very dangerous circumstance. I think Daniel mentioned earlier that, even if we look in just the last few months, there have been some horrid injuries to pedestrians. It's just logic that the higher volume of traffic which goes through, combined with a large number of pedestrian traffic, in particular, at the large number of schools—I think we just have a responsibility to have a safer environment for young people.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: It is a very valid point.

LES CROMPTON: Has any modelling been done prior to COVID with the amount of traffic that used to use the free M5 tunnel—M5 East a.m. and p.m.—and the numbers that are currently using it now? I am sure there would be significant figures around COVID and the rest of it. When it all kicked in in 2020, things were quiet et cetera, and it wasn't such a big impact. You would probably say some were using it and some weren't. But if we go back a little earlier prior to that and prior to the toll, was there modelling done on how many vehicles

used it then and how many are using it now? It could be just a fiscal examination. You think, "If we dropped that down, we'd still get our money and we'd take it off suburban roads without fear or favour." It could be a better solution.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: We could put that to Transurban. We're not travel experts, as I said before, and no-one in this room is, I would think. We were essential workers during COVID, so I would go on the M5. It was a ghost town; you could shoot a gun off in there. I don't know if it could be compared.

LES CROMPTON: When COVID was on the airport, it was closed as well. You didn't have the traffic to compare. That's why I say pre-COVID, pre-toll. If you look at that, there may be something in it where WestConnex or whatever—that company—may not be able to pocket. In fact, they may make more money. I don't know. I would add for the last 10 years we've requested, unsuccessfully, through the State member's office to try to get a speed and red-light camera on the corner of Stoney Creek Road and Forest Road. The reason I say that is that we have trucks. It might have been cleaned up by a public bus crossing where the hotel is across the other side of the road. Public buses and private motorists think, "Oh, it's just about to go red." They will shoot through and they fly down as though it is almost—when it is clear to go around Stoney Creek Road in the evening, they fly down there.

Fortunately, we haven't had a death there for some years, but some years back—not to do with the toll or anything—a truck was going down there, and he was texting. The lady got out of her vehicle, who lived next door to St Gabriel's church, and she was smeared along the road and, of course, passed away. That's just another issue that could come up, because it's a safety issue and because of more vehicles using it and they run the red light. There's no-one there to—you can't have police on every corner, but that was just something else to add.

The ACTING CHAIR: Thank you for that contribution. I will just make the observation that one of the things we discussed earlier and we received evidence about previously is that call for the road network performance review to be released, which is one of the things that I think would go towards answering some of those questions that you have referred to. I think we are moving towards the end of questions, so I wanted to give a couple of opportunities here. Firstly, Mr Khan, I think you wanted to perhaps table some evidence or show a video.

FAJID KHAN: I have. Friday last week was "safe walk to school day". I think it is something that the Department of Education requires all schools to roll out. One of the comments made by the kids—a very relevant comment—was, "When you look outside the school, why impose this on us to have a safe walk to school day when you're doing nothing, on the other hand, to deal with the traffic?" It's like a hazard that has been created, and then the kids are expected to pick up and address it by taking extra safety measures. Anyway, the video speaks for itself. There is a video here I would like to present to the panel.

The ACTING CHAIR: If you think that is possible to do now, that is okay. Otherwise you can email it in and the secretariat will circulate it. They are your two options.

Video played.

FAJID KHAN: This is a brainstorming session that the kids had.

The Hon. WES FANG: Can I ask—that's obviously led by an adult.

FAJID KHAN: A teacher.

The Hon. WES FANG: A teacher led it, did they?

FAJID KHAN: Yes.

The Hon. WES FANG: What was the catalyst for seeking to—

FAJID KHAN: It was safe walk to school day.

The Hon. WES FANG: How did you end up with them?

FAJID KHAN: I am on the P&C. I am the vice-president on the P&C. My kids go to that school.

The Hon. WES FANG: So you can understand my hesitancy when I see that you have come prepared with a video, and you have sheets that are said to be from students that have been teacher-led that are somewhat pre-prepared. I understand that there are issues. But I think that—

The ACTING CHAIR: I will give an opportunity for questions. We might just first agree how we are going to deal with this. Mr Khan, I think the suggestion is—I mean, the school is welcome to present whatever it wants to present. If you email the video in, the secretariat will circulate it to members. I think that's more suitable; otherwise, it's a little bit hard to hear here. You are welcome to table—

FAJID KHAN: I have circulated the letter from the principal at Bexley Public School, and a statement has been put together by the teacher from the kids. The video is the words of the kids.

The ACTING CHAIR: You have tabled these. We will circulate those to members. With this information here, are you seeking to table those?

FAJID KHAN: This is actually in the video as well.

The Hon. WES FANG: Of course it is.

The ACTING CHAIR: Okay. All right. We might deal with that.

FAJID KHAN: I think that will have more value to this panel than to the school, so I would like to table this.

The ACTING CHAIR: I think we are open to incorporating that via the video. I think that will be the easiest way to deal with it. Those will be received as evidence and circulated so that members can see them.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: The bottom line is that the kids are concerned about walking to school, and they are scared. That is fair evidence.

FAJID KHAN: Can I just say one more point regarding the school?

The ACTING CHAIR: Yes, then we will come to questions.

FAJID KHAN: The school is based—the rest of the school is from Arncliffe all the way up to Bexley. There is public school zoning. The school zone stops just before Bexley Public. That's where the intersection of Harrow Road, Bexley Road and Forest Road sees a lot of trucks go through, a lot of traffic. There is still a risk because a lot of parents, myself included, walk up to school using that pathway. We're not covered by that. We don't feel protected because we don't have that school zone. School zones also provide—I think it is a government requirement. I don't know the exact requirement but lollipop ladies or lollipop men, traffic wardens—whatever you call them, the official word, lollipop people—can't be placed at that intersection because it's not in a school zone. One of the suggestions or proposals I would like to put forward is if you can extend the school zoning to protect Bexley Public School and the kids and parents who go to that school.

The Hon. WES FANG: I have two things I want to address first. Mr Crompton, usually people declare affiliations, if you like, before they give evidence. Do you have any affiliations you want to declare now?

LES CROMPTON: I am a member of the Labor Party.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: You don't have to say, Les.

The Hon. WES FANG: So you are a member of the Labor Party—you ran as a Labor councillor. Is that correct?

LES CROMPTON: Sorry, I was a Labor councillor.

The Hon. WES FANG: Correct.

LES CROMPTON: That was only for a very short time, quite a long time ago. I was expelled from the party for some seven years, because they didn't agree with—

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: There are more expelled members than current members.

The Hon. WES FANG: Can I ask the other members, does anybody have any political affiliations that they wish to declare, other than Mr Crompton?

OSMAN KAROLIA: Yes. I will declare that I am a member of the Labor Party, but I am here representing our school.

The Hon. WES FANG: Understood. Does anyone else have any declarations they wish to make? Okay, thank you.

The ACTING CHAIR: Has anyone else been expelled?

LES CROMPTON: Only seven years.

The Hon. WES FANG: There is one last thing I want to discuss. Mr Khan, I have this letter from stage three students. I am not too sure if it should be year 3 or stage three, but—

OSMAN KAROLIA: Year 5-6, stage three.

The Hon. WES FANG: Year 5-6, thank you. I note that the language that is used is less like something the children would say and something that would be more, I would say, adult directed. I am going to make some observations. The first is you have come prepared with a video. The second is you have come pre-prepared with handwritten sheets. You've got a letter here, that is unsigned, that is said to be from stage three students but is probably more written in an adult's, I'll say, tone—given the formatting errors and everything that isn't included. I have concerns that perhaps this whole presentation is somewhat being led and that it is not from the students at all. Would that be a fair assumption?

FAJID KHAN: Being led by?

The Hon. WES FANG: Well, somebody seems to be putting a lot of—

FAJID KHAN: If you've been to an Australian school—I assume the chances are that you have—you will probably notice that students don't go to school and teach themselves; they've got teachers. So everything in that—a teacher has written that statement and that has been as, like, a statement from the children. The video that you'll see, though, those are the kids words and I think that's—that will be a lot more true to form. I, personally, am not—

The Hon. WES FANG: Who filmed it?

FAJID KHAN: I am not a teacher at the school. I have my kids going to that school—

The Hon. WES FANG: Who filmed the video?

FAJID KHAN: —so I can't give you too much—

The Hon. WES FANG: Who filmed the video?

FAJID KHAN: Nancy Dibello, one of the teachers at the school.

The Hon. WES FANG: And is that the same person who wrote this letter?

FAJID KHAN: Probably, yes.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: I don't think it's—

FAJID KHAN: To be fair—

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Mr Khan has brought along evidence from the school. We should accept that evidence. I don't know why we're doing this kind of accusational—

The Hon. WES FANG: I am just trying to drill down as to whose voice it is.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: The sentiment is the kids are concerned—and I can understand it—about going to school in the traffic.

FAJID KHAN: Yes, definitely.

The ACTING CHAIR: Just to emphasise, the school is entitled to put any evidence they want and any Committee member can ask questions about it. But you are more than entitled to provide any of this evidence.

FAJID KHAN: Thank you.

The ACTING CHAIR: Mr Fang, did you have any—

FAJID KHAN: I have also my own statement that—sorry, I didn't print out seven copies. I would like to make sure that statement—

The ACTING CHAIR: So that is a statement then from you?

FAJID KHAN: Yes. I didn't read the whole thing out. I kept it brief, so—

The ACTING CHAIR: We are grateful for that and also grateful for the written statement—so you're tabling that. I am finally going to just come back to Mr McFarlane as well, with the submission you have given us on this issue you are raising about the discrepancy. One of the things that the Committee could choose to do is to send that to Transurban and ask them to respond to the facts you have put in your submission. Is that something that might be helpful as a path forward to deal with the issues you are putting in front of the Committee today?

EUGENE McFARLANE: I mention Transurban and WestConnex a number of times in that note and I think they are probably the right people to address that, because they own and operate the websites that most of that information comes from, not counting the kilometre number—

The ACTING CHAIR: Yes. So that is something we might potentially put to Transurban and/or to Transport, but the Committee will discuss that afterwards.

EUGENE McFARLANE: Okay, thank you.

The ACTING CHAIR: If there aren't any other questions, I think we'll leave it there. I really want to thank you for the evidence you have given us today; it has been really helpful. We are here looking at the M5 corridor because of the concerns that have been raised about the impact in this specific corridor. Your evidence has been really important to helping us understand that and the Committee has really appreciated the chance this morning to have a walk around and look at what is going on in your community. Thank you for that. I think there was at least one question taken on notice, in which case the answer will need to be returned within 21 days. The secretariat will be in contact with you in order to facilitate that. With that, I would like to thank you again and bring this hearing, and potentially this inquiry, to a close.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Really?

The ACTING CHAIR: Potentially. Thanks for your time.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee adjourned at 14:14.