



Transport for NSW

Beaches Link and Gore Hill Freeway Connection

Executive summary

November 2021



Executive summary

The Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link program is a major transport infrastructure program that would make it easier, faster and safer to get around Sydney. As Sydney continues to grow, faster and more reliable trips are essential to reducing congestion and providing new levels of access to jobs, recreation, and services such as schools and hospitals. By creating a western bypass of the Sydney CBD, the Western Harbour Tunnel would take pressure off the Sydney Harbour Bridge, Sydney Harbour Tunnel and ANZAC Bridge; while Beaches Link would create an alternative to the Military Road and Warringah Road corridors to relieve traffic pressure on the North Shore.

The program has been designed as part of an integrated transport network, with a focus on new public transport connections and improved journey times and reliability for buses. It would also provide improvements to walking and cycling routes, providing more shared transport options.

Transport for NSW is seeking approval under Part 5, Division 5.2 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* to construct and operate the Beaches Link and Gore Hill Freeway Connection project (the project).

The project is part of the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link program of works, which include:

- The project, which comprises a new tolled motorway tunnel connection across Middle Harbour from the Western Harbour Tunnel, the Warringah Freeway and Gore Hill Freeway to Balgowlah and Killarney Heights including the surface upgrade of Wakehurst Parkway from Seaforth to Frenchs Forest and upgrade and integration works to connect to the Gore Hill Freeway at Artarmon
- The Western Harbour Tunnel and Warringah Freeway Upgrade project which comprises a new tolled motorway tunnel connection across Sydney Harbour, and an upgrade of the Warringah Freeway to integrate the new motorway infrastructure with the existing road network and to connect to the Beaches Link and Gore Hill Freeway Connection project.

A combined delivery of the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link program of works would unlock a range of benefits for freight, public transport and private vehicle users. It would support faster and more reliable travel times for journeys between the Northern Beaches and south, west and north-west of Sydney Harbour. For example, with the combined program of works, journeys from Dee Why to Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport are expected to be 56 minutes faster. Delivering the program of works would also improve the resilience of the motorway network, given that each project provides additional capacity and an alternative to heavily congested existing harbour crossings and their approaches.

The project would provide an opportunity to improve travel times on peak express bus services by re-directing bus services from the Northern Beaches through the new motorway to North Sydney, the north-west and the Sydney Central Business District (CBD). In addition, it would provide a fast, reliable link between the Northern Beaches and other key centres including St Leonards and Macquarie Park via the direct Gore Hill Freeway Connection.

It would also provide an opportunity to introduce new express bus services that would use the new motorway and road connections to deliver increased direct public transport access between strategic centres across the region, reducing reliance on private vehicle travel.

The development of new or improved active transport links is part of the project, including the provision of new or upgraded shared user paths in Artarmon, Balgowlah, Killarney Heights, Seaforth and Frenchs Forest, as well as a number of new shared user underpasses and new shared user and pedestrian bridges which would provide connectivity across the Wakehurst Parkway. These links would improve connectivity between communities, open space areas, public transport modes and the existing active transport network.

The project and the Western Harbour Tunnel and Warringah Freeway Upgrade project are subject to separate but coordinated environmental assessment and approval processes.

The Beaches Link and Gore Hill Freeway Connection project would comprise two components:

- Twin tolled motorway tunnels connecting the Warringah Freeway and the Western Harbour Tunnel at Cammeray and the Gore Hill Freeway at Artarmon to the Burnt Bridge Creek Deviation at Balgowlah and Wakehurst Parkway at Killarney Heights, and an upgrade of Wakehurst Parkway (the Beaches Link)
- Connection and integration works along the existing Gore Hill Freeway and surrounding roads at Artarmon (the Gore Hill Freeway Connection).

The project is part of a complementary integrated multi-modal strategy being implemented by the NSW Government to enable and accommodate future growth. The project would address urban congestion on Sydney's road network. It would take pressure off Spit Bridge and Military Road – improving amenity in Mosman, Cremorne and Neutral Bay and relieving traffic flows on the Warringah Road, Roseville and on the Eastern Valley Way through the suburbs of Willoughby and Northbridge. It would provide direct access from the Northern Beaches to the Warringah Freeway for fast and reliable access to North Sydney, the Sydney CBD and beyond. It would also provide a fast, reliable link between the Northern Beaches and other key centres including St Leonards and Macquarie Park via the direct Gore Hill Freeway connection. For public transport it would relieve congestion on surface roads for existing and new routes and would provide opportunity for express buses to use the Beaches Link tunnel, additional express bus services plus improved local bus services along Military Road, and improved connections to the Sydney Trains and new Sydney Metro rail networks. For freight and heavy vehicle movements, it would provide a more direct and safer access to and from the Northern Beaches via the new tunnel. This would deliver greater efficiencies for business when accessing the Northern Beaches area.

Transport for NSW has requested that the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces declare the project as critical State significant infrastructure. Section 5.13 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* provides for the declaration of critical State significant infrastructure by means of an environmental planning instrument. Clause 16 of State Environmental Planning Policy (State and Regional Development) 2011 declares development listed in Schedule 5 to be critical State significant infrastructure. Transport for NSW's request is that the Beaches Link and Gore Hill Freeway Connection project be listed in Schedule 5.

Environmental Impact Statement

An environmental impact statement was prepared for the project in accordance with the provisions of Division 5.2 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*. The environmental impact statement addresses the environmental assessment requirements issued by the Secretary of the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment on 15 December 2017 and reissued on 22 April 2020, and the relevant provisions of Schedule 2 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000. A copy of the Secretary's environmental assessment requirements, and where they are addressed in the environmental impact statement, are provided in Appendix A (Secretary's environmental assessment requirements checklist) of the environmental impact statement.

In accordance with Part 5, Division 5.2 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, the environmental impact statement presents an assessment of all potential environmental issues identified during the planning and assessment of the project. The assessment considers the areas

directly or indirectly affected by construction and operation of the project. Prior to it being finalised and placed on public exhibition, the environmental impact statement, including detailed technical studies, was reviewed by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and its independent technical reviewers as well as key NSW Government Agencies, to confirm that it addressed the Secretary's environmental assessment requirements.

The environmental impact statement was placed on public exhibition on 9 December 2020, with an exhibition closing date of 1 March 2021. This equated to a total exhibition period of 61 days, noting that the period between 20 December 2020 and 10 January 2021 (inclusive) was not included within the 61 days as part of the official exhibition period. Public exhibition of the environmental impact statement provided the community, interested parties and other key stakeholders (including government agencies and councils) with an understanding of the project and the opportunity to comment on the environmental impact statement.

During this time, a range of engagement activities were carried out to continue the engagement with stakeholders and the community which had been carried out since 2017. A range of engagement activities were carried out with stakeholders and the community on information in the environmental impact statement, to encourage engagement in communications activities and to provide guidance on the submissions process.

The release of the environmental impact statement coincided with the global COVID-19 pandemic and in particular the outbreak of the Avalon, Northern Beaches cluster, which presented a unique set of challenges for any face-to-face engagement. As such, the engagement strategy was adapted to focus predominately on digital engagement tools such as the online publication of the environmental impact statement and community guide, interactive portal featuring an interactive map and virtual information room, virtual information sessions, and targeted virtual street meetings and stakeholder briefings.

Submissions on the project were received by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment during the exhibition period and were provided to Transport for NSW following the close of the exhibition period. The Secretary of the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment then requested Transport for NSW to respond to the issues raised in the submissions.

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment also requested Transport for NSW on 14 May 2021 to prepare a separate preferred infrastructure report. The preferred infrastructure report provides further information, describes design changes and assesses the environmental impact of these changes. Refer to the separate preferred infrastructure report for details on the further assessments and information requested by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, noting that in a number of instances, information contained within the preferred infrastructure report further addresses a number of issues raised in stakeholder and community submissions. Appropriate cross-references have been included between this submissions report and the preferred infrastructure report to assist the community and key stakeholders navigate between each document.

Submissions report

This submissions report outlines Transport for NSW's response to submissions received on the Beaches Link and Gore Hill Freeway Connection environmental impact statement during the public exhibition period. To prepare this submissions report, Transport for NSW has reviewed all submissions and prepared clarifications and responses to the issues raised.

This submissions report sets out the following key information:

- An introduction is provided in **Part A, Section A1** (Introduction and background)
- A summary of community and stakeholder engagement prior to and during the environmental impact statement exhibition, as well as ongoing consultation proposed during the pre-

construction, construction and commissioning phases, is outlined in **Part A, Section A2** (Community and stakeholder engagement)

- A summary of the submissions received is provided in **Part A, Section A3** (Submissions received) and refinements that have been made to the project as a result of submissions received are provided in **Part A, Section A4** (Project refinements)
- Clarifications in response to issues raised as well as minor errors and discrepancies noted in the environmental impact statement are addressed in **Part A, Section A5** (Clarifications)
- Issues raised in submissions received from government agencies and councils are addressed in **Part B** (Response to key stakeholder submissions)
- Issues raised in submissions received from the community are addressed in **Part C** (Response to community submissions)
- An outline of the proposed construction environmental management framework is provided in **Part D, Section D1** (Construction environmental management framework)
- A revised list of environmental management measures is provided in **Part D, Section D2** (Revised environmental management measures)
- Conclusions and next steps are summarised in **Part D, Section D3** (Conclusion and next steps)
- Appendices, comprising additional technical memos to address issues raised in submissions (**Appendix A to J**).

The submissions are available to view and download on the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment Major Projects website (www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects).

Issues raised in submissions

Ten submissions were received from NSW Government agencies and four from local councils. The submissions are responded to in **Part B** (Response to key stakeholder submissions). Council submissions were categorised by key issues.

A total of 1535 community submissions were received by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment from 1468 submitters. Issues raised in each submission were analysed in a database and then extracted for consideration and response by the environmental impact assessment team and proponent. **Part C** (Response to community submissions) presents summary descriptions of issues raised in submissions and the corresponding responses. The subjects most commonly raised in the community submissions (in order of total number of issues raised) relate to:

- Biodiversity
- Air quality
- Operational traffic and transport
- Construction traffic and transport
- Project development and alternatives
- Strategic context and project need
- Socio-economics
- Human health
- Construction noise and vibration
- Hydrodynamics and water quality
- Geology, soils and groundwater
- Land use and property

- Stakeholder and community engagement
- Urban design and visual amenity.

Refinements and clarifications in response to submissions

Based on feedback and concerns raised in submissions on the environmental impact statement, a number of refinements to the project have been made in this submissions report to further minimise impacts on the community and sensitive receivers. Refinements that have been made to the project are provided in **Part A, Section A4** (Project refinements).

A number of general clarifications are also provided in this submissions report, as well as corrections to minor errors and discrepancies in the environmental impact statement. Clarifications are addressed in **Part A, Section A5** (Clarifications).

Revised environmental management measures

A full list of the environmental management measures proposed for the project, including any additional measures, or changes to measures to address issues raised in stakeholder and community submissions, is provided in **Part D, Section D2** (Revised environmental management measures).

Should the project be approved, detailed investigations, planning and surveys will be carried out by the appointed contractor/s. The design presented by contractor/s will need to satisfy all technical road design requirements and road functionality as described in the environmental impact statement, the preferred infrastructure report and this submissions report, and be consistent with the approved scope of the project, including the environmental management measures and conditions of approval issued for the project.

Ongoing consultation with community and stakeholders

Transport for NSW, as the proponent for the project, is committed to carrying out further engagement and consultation with communities and stakeholders about proposed changes to the project and opportunities to provide future input, prior to and during construction. Should the project be approved, certain aspects of the detailed design of the project would be made available to the public for feedback including the urban design and landscape plans.

Further, the construction environmental management plan and associated sub-plans would be prepared in consultation with relevant stakeholders as described in **Part D, Section D1** (Construction environmental management framework) and as required by the conditions of approval.

The appointed contractor/s would also prepare a community communication strategy, outlining consultation with stakeholders and the community during construction. This strategy would include protocols for providing notifications and updates on construction activities and program, responding to enquiries and concerns in a timely manner and minimising potential impacts where possible.

These requirements for further consultation are included in the environmental management measures proposed for the project.

Next steps

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment will, on behalf of the NSW Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, review the environmental impact statement, the preferred infrastructure report and this submissions report for the project. Once the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment has completed its assessment, a draft Environmental Assessment Report will be prepared for the Secretary of the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, which may include recommended conditions of approval.

The assessment report will be provided to the NSW Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, who will then make a determination on the project. If the determination is to approve the project, the determination is anticipated to include conditions of approval considered appropriate.

A copy of this submissions report and the preferred infrastructure report has been made publicly available on the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment Major Projects website and the project interactive online portal (nswroads.work/blportal). The NSW Minister for Planning and Public Spaces determination, including any conditions of approval and the Secretary's Environmental Assessment Report, will be published on the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment Major Projects website following determination.