

# Western Harbour Tunnel?

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## 1. Overall Objection

The Western Harbour Tunnel comes straight out of 1950's thinking when Eisenhower's concrete roadways across America were built as a Cold War defence initiative. The corresponding period in Australia occurred about 2 decades after the US effort, which resulted in a necessary highway to the North and more recently to the South and West. Unfortunately, it also created abortions such as the Falcon St. bridge over the Warringah Expressway in Sydney which has increased congestion and pollution.

The major US thinking as of November 2019 was that building new roads attracts more vehicles. Their collective experience is 13x greater than the Australian experience and this is demonstrated in the (unfortunately, more a fait accompli than) proposed Western Harbour Tunnel and the Warringah Freeway Upgrade.

The first misleading clue is the name - Western Harbour Tunnel and the Warringah Freeway Upgrade – no naming of where the major impacts on residents caused by increases traffic, increases in noise, and massive increases in pollution (despite the claims otherwise in the projects proposal) in Neutral Bay, Northbridge, Cammeray, and residences across the Spit Bridge. The NSW Environment Protection Authority and the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment are NSW Government wholly controlled entities and presumably the NSW Government is their only funder and can change funding arrangements at the drop of a hat. The other named environment entity is the independent Office of Chief Scientist and Engineer – as far as I can determine the Chief Scientist and Engineer's report has not been made public and, I presume, that this Office is funded by the NSW State Government. I did not find a link to either of these suppositions and would be pleased to be provided with them.

There are 2 statements that compromise the independence and influence of the OCSE wrt the proposed Western Harbour Tunnel:

- The NSW Government manages the assessment, **determination** and compliance of significant road tunnels (and associated ventilation systems) – hardly an independent group.
- The EPA currently licenses tunnel construction activities under the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997 (POEO Act). The EPA will license emissions from tunnel ventilation facilities once the NSW Government initiative, announced in February 2018, to strengthen the approach of addressing air quality issues associated with road tunnels is fully implemented.
  - I presume this implementation will be post hoc with regard to the Western Harbour Tunnel decision.

## 2. A Rational Approach to NSW Transportation Upgrade

In summary, an additional roadway is counter-productive in the effort to reduce traffic. Australia is not magically different from other countries such as the USA where, in a number of states, building more roads is regarded as counter-productive. Replacing city road traffic with modern electric trains having comprehensive area coverage that have stations in walking distance in heavily populated areas (such as, Eastern suburbs, inner Northern suburbs, northern peninsula, inner western, southern suburbs, etc.) is the local answer that Japan, South Korea, China and even London, Munich, Stuttgart, Paris, etc. have embraced. NSW and Australia need to do the same. Sydney's sprawling Western suburbs are counter-productive in regard to efficient transportation. It is known that current train transport from the outer Western Suburbs to Sydney or Paramatta take 1.5 -3+ hours in each direction daily, with some significant proportion of travel time being from home to local station, and vice versa.

Japan, South Korea and China have not only provided high quality local train transport within their major (and many minor) cities but long-distance trains – running at 200 km-500 km per hour - between major cities. Contrast this with Australian, NSW and Victorian Governments' collective folly funding an AU\$10bn dollar airport 50 km from Sydney city in lieu of building a high-performance train link between Sydney Central and Melbourne Central (via Canberra). By the time it takes people who will likely heavily use the Sydney ↔ Melbourne air-travel link, they will likely (i) travel by car directly to the airport 50km from the cities' major suburbs (~45 mins -1.25 hrs), (2) go through security and wait to get on a plane (~1.5-2.5 hrs), (3) fly to (Sydney ↔ Melbourne) (~1.5 hrs), (4) travel by car from airport to city (~45 mins – 1.25 hr) in peak hour and the reverse from Melbourne ↔ Sydney, they will have wasted (approx. 9 hours in travel. High-speed train travel would have gotten them there and back (Central Station Sydney ↔ Central Station Melbourne – with a stop in Paramatta) in ~4 hours @ 300km/hr. If Japan is a proxy, the cost of high-speed rail travel will be less than 50% of the cost of plane travel.

Irrationally, this NSW Government - nor any of its predecessors - appears to be – or have been - interested. The question is why?

The point of the above paragraph is to point out that the Western Harbour Tunnel proposal is grossly inferior to proposals that have proven to mitigate the issues with travel congestion, pollution, and degrading local residential areas in terms of increased congestion and pollution. If this is the case, what explanation does the NSW State Government have for proposing this fiasco. Sydney city does not require more car transport. Sydney (including wider Sydney) should seize the opportunity to diminish both car and bus transport, not increase it.

I have little faith in the experts who suggest that stacks will mitigate the noxious effluent from trucks and cars travelling through the tunnels. When the wind blows there will be a broadening of the path of pollution – it will not be less pollution that is a fallacy. Over time, due to wider dispersion, more people will have health effects from constant pollution. When the wind does not blow – early mornings during morning peak hour primarily – the pollution will not magically vanish, it will settle locally around the stacks. This was the case with collieries and steel works in the Hunter valley, Newcastle and Port Kembla – and not all from burning coal, but from truck and hybrid (electric-diesel) train transport. And it will be the case for this project, this is simple physics.

### **3. Reality**

Electric and hydrogen powered vehicles including trains - essentially powered by the sun and the earth's rotation (solar panels and wind turbines) - is what all government should be advocating, acting and legislating with the highest priority.

If the NSW Government was in anyway serious about abating pollution it would have accelerated the establishment of solar panels + batteries on all state and local government building roof-tops as one of its highest priorities – certainly higher than rebuilding a sporting stadium at a cost of AU\$1bn. And legislating financial support for all NSW residents to do the same.

This is no waiting for Godot time – this is reality not fantasy.

It is time to act and kill this highly polluting car and truck project and pursue the goals that expand and accelerate efficient mass transit rail transport using high performance electric trains – in the very proposed tunnels - that the Berejiklian government has fostered to date. That is the way forward.

It is time to also foster the earth's repair by reducing both terrestrial vehicle and plane travel.