

SUBMISSION TO M5 EIS

Ben George

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I strongly object to the proposed New M5.

westCONnex will divert billions of dollars of NSW and Federal taxpayer money into a tollway that only 1% of people in NSW, most of whom are based in Sydney, will use. The currently estimated cost of \$16.8 billion invested across the state would go a very long way towards improving existing regional and city roads, public transport, schools and hospitals. Spending it on a tollway that so few people will use is both wasteful and deeply unfair.

Experience and research from independent experts here in Australia and overseas has shown that these kinds of toll road mega-projects are hugely expensive and do not ease congestion over the long term. If anything, such projects make congestion worse by increasing overall traffic volumes as the new road capacity quickly fills up – a process known and recognised internationally as “induced demand”.

The EISs produced also fail to adequately consider the Alexandria/St Peters local area and future known changes to this area.

The roads around the St Peters interchange are already at an unacceptable Level of Service and are getting worse because of in-fill developments not allowed for by the EIS:

- * Green Square: 61,000 residents
- * Ashmore: 6,000 residents
- * Waterloo Estate: 30,000 residents
- * Central 2 Eveleigh: 56,000 residents, 25,000 workers

With an extra 150,000 people in an area of a few square kilometres, this is going to be the most densely populated area in Australia.

There is no evidence that the traffic models have factored in this huge increase in density that will occur in the area.

The EIS clearly demonstrates that the traffic on roads in the Alexandria area will deteriorate as a result of WestConnex. But it also predicts that Level of Service will improve at many intersections even if nothing is done – in the case of Euston Rd/Sydney Park Rd, from D to A, in the PM peak. This is clearly wrong - so wrong that it suggests that the traffic modelling is broken (the EIS does acknowledge that "modelling is probably optimistic") and it suggests that the level of service on local roads will be several levels worse than predicted, either with or without the project.

According to the business case, Euston Road is supposed to handle 61,000 cars on 3 lanes each way. This is almost 10 times what it can handle on 2 lanes. There is no way it can handle 61,000 cars, however many lanes are added to it. Adding extra lanes to Euston will not help because the roads that Euston Road feeds are also gridlocked. Traffic does not simply dissipate once it leaves the M5. It will only increase the damage done to the area and cause rat-running.

Meanwhile, usage of the M5 is not growing, and has not grown for some years. This project only makes an existing road more expensive for commuters. It will save little time, if any, and at an exorbitant price. As the EIS acknowledges, the tolls are going to force drivers off the M5 and onto local roads, and no wonder. The Updated Strategic Business Case shows that for almost all of its users, the Value of Time saved is less

than the cost of using WestConnex.

This project will carve 11,000 square metres from Sydney Park and expose the rest of the park to vehicle fumes and noise. This damage is particularly felt, because this area already has one of the lowest amounts of public open space per person in Australia, even without considering the future in-fill projects that are already in progress.

Alexandria residents are already exposed to levels of PM2.5 particles that exceed national guidelines, yet the EIS predicts that these levels will only worsen.

The new M5 is an unfair waste of taxpayers' money that could be better used elsewhere, such as on projects that improve transport infrastructure out west or in the regions, or in our area to help us cope with the massive rise in density that we are facing over the next ten years.

Finally, I strongly object to the quality of the EIS. There is too little information on the traffic volumes that will occur in Alexandria, there has been no noise assessment for any buildings above two stories, despite the fact thousands of residents are already living in apartment blocks in Alexandria and St Peters and there is also conflicting information on possible mitigation strategies.

Roads, especially tunnels, are expensive, and move relatively few people - perhaps 2,000 vehicles per hour per lane. This is a fraction of what can be moved by heavy rail, or light rail, or bicycles. Even pedestrians can move more commuters per lane than can be moved by car.

The EIS business case says that with toll roads, "losses to investors [are typical] due to traffic demand forecast being overly optimistic. This has led to a situation where it is likely the private sector sponsors will be unwilling [and the NSW Government is likely to have] to take on all or part of the development and start up traffic risk".

Furthermore the business case that was finally released by the government has so many redactions that it can not be interpreted by independent analysts. It should go without saying that a project costing almost \$17 billion, much of it funded by taxpayers, should be transparent.

Why does the NSW government think that WestConnex can be profitable when the private sector does not?

I call for the M5 EIS not to proceed. As a NSW taxpayer, I want better value for money.

I have not made a reportable political donation.