Comments on Mixed Use Development, Including In-Fill Affordable Housing, Five Ways, Crows Nest

State Significant Development Application Number SSD-66826207

Summary

I am a resident of Crows Nest. I live very close to the Five Ways proposed development site. I have taken a close interest in the State Significant Development Application Number SSD-66826207 and its predecessors.

I feel that the proposed development has both positive and negative implications for the neighborhood, but I don't propose to argue either for or against the development. However, as I and other members of my family regularly drive along Alexander Street bounding the proposed site, I feel particularly competent to comment of the likely traffic implications of this development.

I think that the Traffic Impact Assessment contained in Appendix 27 of the project EIS, and summarized in section 6.1.3 of the EIS, is fundamentally flawed. I think that the immediate local area, and in particular Alexander Street between Pacific Highway and Burlington Street, have unusual traffic flow patterns that been completely ignored in the analysis.

Overall, I think that putting driveway access to/from the site in Alexander Street will be totally unworkable. I appreciate that there are issues due to Pacific Highway being a State Classified Road (as acknowledged in the EIS paragraph 6.1.3.2) with high-use bus stops in the Falcon Street to Alexander Street block, but I think that putting the driveway there would at least have a chance of working.

Peculiarities of traffic flow in Alexander Street

Alexander Street between Pacific Highway and Burlington Street has a number of unusual characteristics. In particular:

1. Although southbound traffic in Alexander Street generally flows quite well, northbound traffic is commonly highly congested. The congestion does not correspond to typical "Peak Hour" times – more likely it corresponds to times when people are going to the Woolworths supermarket. In fact, probably the busiest time of the week is late Sunday afternoon when the young people of the neighborhood (the typical demographic) are on their way home from their weekend activities and are stopping at the supermarket to buy groceries for dinner. Lunchtimes on weekdays are also sometimes a problem.

   The traffic counts in the TIA Table 8 are all taken at "AM/PM/Sat Peak" times, and so will likely have totally missed the times when most congestion occurs. Thus, the Traffic Modelling reported in the EIA paragraph 6.1.3.3 and the TIA Appendix A in general appear to lack any real validity.

2. The roundabout at Burlington Street is a severe pinch-point for northbound traffic in Alexander Street. There are effectively 3 lanes of traffic converging here – 2 from Alexander Street and 1 from the Woolworths carpark exit – all converging into a single lane onto the roundabout. This is compounded by the fact that exit from the roundabout is severely hindered: in Burlington Street by a pedestrian crossing close to the roundabout and by cars

waiting for pedestrians on the footpath slowing entry to the Woolies carpark; and in Alexander Street by the pedestrian crossing immediately after exit from the roundabout. Note that traffic exiting the carpark is forced to turn left into the roundabout, irrespective of where they want to go.

As a consequence, it is quite common to have traffic backed up in the roundabout and back along Alexander Street all the way to Falcon Street and beyond. Traffic queues form eastbound in Falcon Street wanting to turn left, and in Alexander Street south of Falcon Street wanting to go straight ahead. The queue in Alexander Street commonly goes all the way back to Pacific Highway, and there are even occasional queues northbound in Pacific Highway waiting to turn right into a blocked Alexander Street.

It is not uncommon for traffic northbound in Alexander Street to have to wait several cycles of lights in order to cross Falcon Street, with often only one or two cars, sometimes none, getting across each light cycle. There can be extended periods when Alexander Street northbound (at the proposed entry/exit from the Five Ways site) is blocked by traffic which does not move.

3. Even when traffic is not backed up from the roundabout, traffic northbound on Alexander Street at the Falcon Street lights has an additional problem. There are 2 lanes of traffic. However, there is usually at least one car wanting to turn right into Falcon Street blocking the right lane, and often a car wanting to turn left into Falcon Street blocking the left lane. The cars turning right have to wait for the oncoming traffic to clear – often most of the light cycle – and the car turning left has to wait for the pedestrians to clear the crossing – again often most of the cycle.

   As a result, even when Alexander Street beyond Falcon is clear, it is common to get only a handful of cars through each light cycle.

I appreciate that the TIA has concluded that the number of vehicles entering and leaving the 5-ways site will only be a minor increase on the current traffic (eg see the TIA paragraph 3.9.2), however the above peculiarities in the traffic flow Alexander Street will most likely lead to some particular problems:

a. Traffic leaving the Five Ways site will commonly have difficulty leaving the site due to extended periods of stationary queued traffic at the exit. Even when they leave, the options are limited: turning right will most likely have to be prohibited; turning left but getting into the right lane to turn right into Falcon Street will be impractical; turning left and heading towards the Burlington Street roundabout will be highly unattractive due to likely congestion; and tuning left and then left into Falcon Street will just add to the issues of blocking traffic flow waiting for pedestrians in Falcon Street.

   The analysis in the TIA Appendix B appears to ignore any difficulties in leaving the site. For example, Section 2.4 has no consideration of the impact of vehicles banked up within the site waiting to leave. This makes the analysis of driveway traffic flow and loading dock use in the TIA difficult to accept.

b. If it is permitted for traffic southbound on Alexander Street to turn right into the Five Ways site's driveway (which appears to be expected by the analysis in the EIS paragraph 6.1.3.3), then there is a scope for a significant traffic deadlock situation to occur.

   Southbound on Alexander Street the left lane has permitted parking for much of the day. If a vehicle is waiting to turn right into the Five Ways site driveway, it may block all southbound traffic in Alexander Street. For the reasons explained above, the vehicle may not be able to turn right for extended periods – perhaps several cycles of the Falcon Street lights. Meanwhile the traffic will back up along Alexander Street back to the Burlington Street roundabout, around the roundabout, and further restricting traffic northbound in Alexander Street likely back beyond Falcon Street and into Pacific Highway.

   This scenario will rapidly create a total deadlock with no traffic able to move over that 2-block area with no obvious way out.

Flaws in the building site traffic analysis

The EIS paragraph 6.1.3.3 acknowledged that during construction the site will be accessed by vehicles up to and including Articulated Vehicles (AVs), and refers to the Construction Management Plan in the TIA section 4 for more analysis (actually this appears to be a typo – the correct reference is to TIA section 5). However, the analysis in the TIA section 5 seems to be lacking in serious consideration and is clearly out of date.

Of particular note is the analysis of "Construction vehicle routes" in the TIA paragraph 5.5:

1. The map in Figure 17 shows vehicles coming northbound on the Warringah Freeway leaving westbound at the Falcon Street exit and proceeding to turn left into Alexander Street. But:
   a. Due to changes related to the Warringah Freeway upgrade, this exit was closed some time ago and will not be re-opened. (It is to become an exit from the new Western Harbor tunnel.) Northbound traffic on Warringah Freeway will need to use the Miller Street exit. There is no right turn from Miller Street to Falcon Street, so the only options will be circuitous routes through the local streets.
   b. Even assuming the construction vehicles can get into Falcon Street and turn left at Alexander Street, they are now creating the deadlock situation described in item 3 above.

2. The map also shows vehicles southbound in Pacific Highway turning left into Alexander Street. This is an extremely tight turn. I have seen MRVs misjudge it and have to reverse back into the Pacific Highway traffic. It is a challenge for an MRV, but likely impossible for an HRV or AV.

3. The map also shows vehicles leaving the site turning left into Alexander Street and then into Falcon Street. For the reasons described above this will be almost impossible at some times for HRVs and AVs.

The TIA needs a complete rethink on construction vehicle access.