

18 September 2019

ATT: Director, Transport Assessments Planning Services, Department of Planning, Industry and Environment GPO Box 39 Sydney NSW 2001

Re: Private submission on the "WestConnex M4-M5 Link MOD 2 - The Crescent overpass and active transport links".

Appreciation:

NB: This submission is not an objection to the idea of an RMS traffic overpass – it is an appeal to do better.

I am a resident of the Balmain Peninsula. I have watched the development of the Government's WestConnex project for years, with concern. Concern, because despite massive and vocal opposition across the Inner West community, it has continued to roll on. No one has managed to stop it and now WestConnex is operating in areas (ie. the former Rozelle Rail Yards, Rozelle and White Bay) which could clearly be transformed into amazing places for people, with multiple functions, but for all intensive purposes, they now appear surrendered to road-centric Government agencies for one purpose only; the expansion of a private toll-road network.

The Rozelle Interchange threatens to perpetuate our long-held car-dependence in the northern Inner West, by neglecting to improve active and public transport connections which could otherwise help to create a properly activated, beautified and interactive shoreline, with more trees – not less - and essentially making The Bays a place which investors want to invest in and which will help Government to procure their investment.

It is the worst kept secret in Government planning circles, that Google pulled out of the refurbishment of the White Bay Power Station, because of a lack of transport connectivity and the coming construction onslaught which is the Rozelle Interchange, beginning now. This submission is about trying to claw back the potential, and leaving a better outcome for the community than what is currently proposed with this Modification.

Again, this is not an objection to the proposed overpass. It is a deliberate statement urging RMS (now a sub-branch of TfNSW) to take guidance from the Department of Planning and indeed a call for intervention by the Planning Minister, Rob Stokes, to build a better active crossing over the former Rail Yards site than is currently being proposed. A better one could be built adjacent to the overpass, involving a wider flyover – dominated less by traffic alone and rather, holding space and support to accommodate a future light rail link toward White Bay and comfortable, streamlined active transport connections as well.

Singing in tune with Government Policy

It is no secret that existing resident groups across the nearby suburbs of Leichhardt, Annandale and Rozelle have for some years been engaged in opposing the implementation of WestConnex (and in particular, its surface works) within their local areas. It is also now a bitter pill for them to swallow, that those works have indeed been approved and are furthermore quite clearly underway.

The Rozelle Railyards was coveted by most in the Inner West community as an opportunity to greatly expand local recreational green space, provide new active transport connections and even be a place that could provide better public transport connections in the form of light rail to The Bays. This would of course provide a classy interchange with the future West Metro station to be built at White Bay too. It should be noted that all these things (which the community has been coveting for years) have now been written into strategies as current State Policy. A light rail extension to The Bays (for example) is discussed as an 'initiative for investigation in ten to twenty years time', according to:

- * TfNSW's *Future Transport 2056* (2018);
- * INSW's *The State Infrastructure Strategy* (2018); and
- * Greater Sydney Commission's *Easter City District Plan* (2018).

These State strategy documents also talk about the importance of good active connections to public transport and improved rapid bus services on Victoria Road and Parramatta Road to the CBD and beyond. The Inner West Council and City of Sydney have long encouraged better active connections through the future parkland RMS plans to build on top of the coming Rozelle Interchange...

My concern is this: In every artist's impression which has been released of the forthcoming Rail Yards' Parkland (to be built above the Rozelle Interchange), NONE have depicted a future light rail to The Bays, or a reserved corridor which could be relied on to host one. Instead, what RMS suggests will be built are the most indirect elevated active bridges imaginable, where people would be forced to u-turn or zigzag unnecessarily just to cross the CityWest Link! This smacks of the same previous folly now standing in Moore Park - the Albert Tibby Cotter Bridge. Anyone who still believes following that fiasco, that pedestrians and cyclists are happy to use really indirect and unnecessarily long active links over

roads, has failed to learn the expensive lesson of that build and failed to understand the basic human logic behind desire lines.

The problem

With so many indirect pedestrian and cycling bridges proposed for the Rozelle Interchange parkland – it would be helpful to re-assess the latest Modification application and approach the active community's needs in a far more direct and elegant fashion.

There may not be a single corridor as yet openly reserved for a light rail extension through the former Rozelle Rail Yards, but there are plenty of artists' impressions showing new surface watercourses, more than we have ever witnessed on this site before... These will become mosquito breeders, no doubt - but they also appear to make light rail harder to deliver in future, so why doesn't DPIE get RMS to rethink their modification and integrate a corridor for light rail now as part of this parkland build? This really does make sense, as there are multiple split levels in the park's proposed terrain and three ventilation stacks built on top of a motorway control centre which RMS somehow expects people will find appealing to walk between. This will be unpleasant, and misses an opportunity... How about providing a reserved surface corridor for all active modes and light rail. Then we might have a real chance to deliver on the State Strategies listed earlier in this proposal earlier, and active needs.

A broken promise

In 2018, Minister Stokes, as a condition of approval for the WestConnex 3B EIS (an 'indicative only' proposal, it should be added), demanded that RMS provide a 'Green Link' active bridge to sweeten the deal for the local community. This was to be built across CityWest Link and former Rail Yards' site, providing a direct, tree-lined interface for active locals between Rozelle and Annandale, that allowed them to avoid interaction with traffic below, and access the foreshore at Rozelle Bay.

Now, the new overpass modification (as much as it may be needed), appears to have reduced the extravagance of the Minister's vision. Put simply, what RMS is now proposing as an 'active and green bridge' doesn't hold half the appeal of what Minister Stokes' original plan invoked within the minds of the nearby community. This is a poor outcome, given it should never be forgotten the nearby community is being asked to wear all else that goes with the broader Rozelle Interchange approval.

The new plan, as it is designed, brings traffic back up to the level of the active green bridge and no longer allows Green-Link users to interface directly with Rozelle Bay. Instead it starts at the Rozelle Bay Light Rail stop and spans a mere 100m or so, to the roof of RMS' proposed motorway control centre - right between two looming ventilation outlets. This will be quite ominous and unappealing for locals, and would seem RMS is the Minister's once excellent condition of approval, remembering the community, as an afterthought.

I would request that the Minister insists that RMS go back and design something better. They could still have their overpass, ideally, they wouldn't need one for cars at all - but this one appears to be on the cards regardless, so why not allow it to serve active and public modes too?

The shock and awe of now...

In the last two weeks leading up to final submissions on this modification, RMS has cut down every single tree that stood alongside the Crescent and CityWest Link, even those east of Victoria Road! This visual impact has certainly got the community's attention, like a campaign of 'shock and awe'. We get it, the Rozelle Interchange is indeed proceeding and the Government's policy is not for turning. We don't like it – but we get it...

What it means though, is that day by day, its becoming harder for local people to imagine their long-held community ambitions for the former Rail Yards, fulfilled alongside this all-encompassing road expansion program...

The problem the Government faces is that this community is already angry and now it will have to stare at the immense loss of urban trees, suffer noise pollution and pass through this mega-construction program for the next five years. That's a very long time to test the local community's patience, especially when their opposition to these works was on record but effectively ignored, despite a record number of submissions. Now, all of a sudden, so much established greenery has been swept from local streetscapes – and all of us are asking how could this happen, without first improving our access to the remaining local green spaces? Yes – we *will* want to utilise them and gain better access to them.

Big Question: What is RMS actually going to do for active connections to existing green space, during its build – and how long will it take to give us that access?

Suggestion: Don't allow RMS to do what it is currently proposing. Make it a condition of consent that they do something better!

I am appealing to DPIE, the Minister and RMS to redesign this Crescent Overpass, so it can also deliver on the original condition of consent as put forward by Minister Stokes – for a serious Green Link between the suburbs of Annandale, Rozelle and the Rozelle Bay foreshore – and yes, this should also provide access to the existing Rozelle Bay light rail stop – it can do all.

Make it a 'Rozelle Highline'!

I am suggesting the overpass should be expanded in scope – not opposed. It should include a light rail spur from the existing Rozelle Bay light rail stop, across the CityWest Link, which could be achieved in the form of a Y-Junction viaduct.

This viaduct would be multimodal, successfully carry pedestrians, cyclists and light rail across the City West Link into the new parkland above the Rozelle Interchange. The viaduct would be designed deliberately wide enough to also accommodate green plantings (ie. trees). These would provide shading and comfort for pedestrians amidst an eventually pleasant, elevated outlook – a bit like the New York High Line. The High Line has become a very appealing place for tourists and has led to billions of dollars in unforeseen urban renewal nearby, simply by becoming an attraction and a place people wish to be.

This 'Rozelle High Line' suggestion can satisfy the Minister's original Condition of Consent, because it would incorporate a direct active Green-Link between Rozelle (Gordon Street) and Annandale (Rozelle Bay Light Rail stop). By starting in Gordon Street, it could not only serve the people of Rozelle – but arguably Balmain as well, given it is the most direct line of site for those in Balmain or near Victoria Road, wishing to use the existing light rail.

Just east of the suggested Gordon Street active link onto the viaduct, the viaduct itself would turn northeast and gently descend in an elegant fashion to allow its light rail, cyclists and pedestrians to pass through the Victoria Road underpass, which still has rail tracks heading north to the White Bay Cruise Terminal, on the other side. These tracks (or the corridor which hosts them) could be reconditioned in future to carry light rail to the future Bays West Metro site which would allow everyone along the Inner West Light Rail network to access the West Metro in 15-20mins (or less!) From there, a new light rail could go to either Glebe Island or to the Cruise Terminal, even servicing eastern Balmain.

Why make the investment?

Most people fail to consider that in building places that are attractive to people, investors may then choose to make a conscious effort to invest more heavily in an area. For example, despite the cost of the existing George Street light rail

project in Sydney's CBD (a far more complicated LRT extension than what is being proposed here), private investors decided to invest \$12billion in renewal projects that arguably may not have otherwise happened, because the north of the CBD is beginning to feel more like a place for people, and not so much a cluster of movement corridors only.

The City West Link, The Crescent, Lilyfield Road, Victoria Road and the Anzac Bridge are all undeniably movement corridors by function at present – they are NOT places for people, and therefore they are not capable of attracting high-end investors to help with the Bays Urban Transformation. Google; a perfect case in point...

Because nearby communities are being asked to accommodate so much already, on account of RMS (Government) policy, which may or may not benefit the rest of Sydney – and certainly won't benefit locals over the next five years of the Interchange's construction – I'm urging DPIE to recommend that RMS dig a little deeper and do the job on the Green-Link right.

The community would be happier, you'd be seen as making RMS give back active connections to the surrounding community which their recent proposed concept maps have suggested they're about to take away. In the process, DPIE would also be improving the existing active connections, allowing them to become more direct and better separated from the currently inescapable traffic of the City West Link – which would be vastly safer and reduce stress amongst local cyclists and walkers.

Also, DPIE would be saving money over the longer term for Government, by securing a corridor for light rail now, that can be reserved to White Bay and which everyone will know is there for that purpose. Government Strategies make it clear that this will be investigated in a decade – in fact, that's only five years after the Rozelle Interchange is slated for completion! Thus, it makes very good budgetary sense (given what would otherwise become the price of acquiring land for such a corridor later and the political fall out that would ensue with local people who imagined the new park would never be disturbed again, once WestConnex was finished). Finally, it goes a long way towards avoiding a sense that there is a road-bias within the NSW Transport Cluster, in the minds of already jaded locals. At least with other modal provisions, it would allow them to reduce their car dependence and improve their active and public connectivity between suburbs sooner rather than later.

Put simply, you can really sell this suggested alteration to your flyover design as a positive for the community. The idea of building a serious crossing for both active transport and light rail across the CityWest Link, complete with real tree plantings and quality views of The Bays, will resonate far better with people and replace their currently understandable apprehension.

Suggestions for re-design...

Firstly, build it sooner rather than later.

The light rail track to be built on the viaduct could be implemented as a grassed track, which would reduce the amount of visual concrete and localised heat. This is not unheard of and used in many parts of the world... Grassed tracks are in fact already committed to as part of the design for the forthcoming Parramatta light rail network, so grassed tracks are doable.

Plant shade trees and provide sound barriers (glass separators) between the parts of the viaduct that host traffic and the parts that host everything else. Glass sound barriers have notably been implemented at the WestConnex Concord Interchange, and they're very effective in reducing noise pollution for anyone using the new active connections on the opposite side. Rozelle and Annandale deserve no less – however the glass will need to be cleaned like glass on any building, regularly.

Please scrap the ridiculously indirect and ugly cycle bridge you have proposed, which loops over the City West Link from the head of Rozelle Bay to your ventilation stacks – this is wasteful and clumsy design. To me, it looks like RMS is simply trying to recycle the U-span of the Beatrice Bush Bridge (an asset it owns, currently near the junction of Victoria Road), which it is about to dismantle. Your cycle link could instead be incorporated into my suggestion for an expanded flyover, along with pedestrian access and light rail, and tasteful landscaping.

If RMS or the Government are concerned about community backlash to an expanded flyover design, look no further than the bricked-arch viaducts which exist carrying light rail elegantly across both Jubilee Park and Wentworth Park. These viaducts are quite tasteful; the arches are both permeable and can be utilized for multi-use spaces like cafes, community hubs, or utility storage. An expansion of this style of viaduct could tastefully re-create something that the community will identify with, which will be seen as more than a road, and which could be embraced as sympathetic to the existing urban area, which more locals will accept.

Summary

RMS' current amendment is inadequate. It is obviously traffic-focused with active provisions provided only as a clumsy afterthought that lacks elegance in its design.

Rozelle Bay, Rozelle and Annandale all deserve better. I am encouraging you to do better – the people will appreciate the gesture if you do. This submission has suggested a way forward, and the ball is in your court.

I encourage you to take this suggestion seriously, to weigh up the short term cost for what could be a long-term gain. Isn't now exactly the time to be making these decisions?

Kind regards,

Name Withheld

Resident of Balmain.