

Submission on M4 East tunnel (WestConnex)

Date: 29 Oct 2015

Sent to: majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au

I attended a number of information sessions held by interested locals, Ashfield Council and WDA (WestConnex Delivery Authority, which I understand is now configured differently and has a different name) and spoke with WDA staff on the phone, and the following are my comments on the information I gathered.

Air Pollution:

WDA said that it was prohibitively expensive to filter the air from the emissions stacks as it would cost \$200 million per stack. Given that the tunnel is a \$15 billion plus project this is strange and suggests that local lung damage is to be the collateral damage of this project.

WDA also said that they couldn't filter for the most dangerous elements (PM2.5) anyway as the technology doesn't exist to do it. I don't know whether this is true or not but I think this would be a good reason to reduce the number of cars being introduced into densely populated areas (whether as cars accessing the tunnel or as through traffic).

The National Health and Medical Research Council states that no more large roads should be built into densely populated areas due to the fact that air pollution from the emission stacks is concentrated and causes a number of cancers (lung and bladder particularly), and breathing difficulty in the young and elderly (who will also suffer an increase in heart disease and stroke).

A great concern is the pollution that will be emitted from the portals. It appears that addressing this is not within the scope of the project for WDA. This should be included in the project as there is the risk of high levels of pollution that will have been created by the project. Stage 3 may never be built; otherwise I imagine planners would have begun with that section and then joined stages 1 and 2 onto it. This means that we will have a pool of pollution sitting at the portal on Parramatta Rd near Bland St while the traffic banks up at traffic lights further toward the city.

Every day many people walk and cycle across/along or in the vicinity of Parramatta Rd and wait at bus stops on Parramatta Rd. At the bus stops near the Bland St intersection just west of the portal many of these are primary school age children. The air is already very polluted and a portal will only exacerbate this. I am very concerned that local children's health is being sacrificed for a project that will not deliver the less trafficked and so less polluted Parramatta Rd we are being promised.

Healthy Transport:

Physical activity is essential to good health. Active transport (a walk to the bus or train, a cycle to work, a walk to school), is a great way to integrate movement into the day thus making it a habit. Obesity, Type 2 diabetes, depression, and back pain are all increasing health problems, and are increasingly costly to government in rising health costs and to the individual and business es through lost productivity. It is embarrassing that in Sydney we are designing such an old fashioned solution to moving people around when we have so many examples overseas that show what mass transit can deliver: the connections people need at the speed they require and at a cost both the

gouvernement and the public can bare. With the planned densification of housing along Parramatta Rd it is mystifying that mass transit appears to be an afterthought.

This is not only an immediate concern but also relates to our children; a generation who we hope to encourage into an active mode of living so that they can avoid the obesity and attendant chronic health problems that we as adults face now partly due to our sedentary lives.

There is the opportunity to provide off-road cycle paths along Parramatta Rd. This would not only speed up the trip the city but provide excellent (and healthy) links for locals to access the shopping strips and schools/daycare situated just off Parramatta Rd. In addition it would connect densely populated Ashfield with the Taverner's Hill light rail stop. WDA staff said that there wasn't enough room in the road corridor to have any cycling infrastructure; a clear statement of the priorities of this project and the solution it will not be for a Sydney that needs to get up and move.

It appears that the information feeding into the cycling section of the EIS was flawed. It seems to be based on an online map from NSW Transport, a map that doesn't contain the Ashfield Council designated cycle routes. For example it shows Alt St as best for cyclist use but in reality all the cyclists use Bland St as it allows cyclists to cross Parramatta Rd at traffic lights and go north to link up with the Anzac Bridge and on to the city. Bland St is an official Ashfield Council cycle route but this is not acknowledged in the EIS.

WDA said that Bicycle User Groups were consulted and that all popular routes were to be kept active and made better. I don't know how this will happen if the information as to where these popular routes are is incorrect and routes already designated as official cycle routes are ignored.

Connecting communities:

The EIS identifies the lack of signalised crossings of Parramatta Rd and recommends that these be installed to assist the transit of pedestrians and cyclists. For example the local government area of Ashfield has a (approximately) 2.5km frontage to Parramatta Rd and only 5 sets of traffic lights. Between the Frederick St lights and the Dalhousie St lights there is only one set (at Bland St). This is a 500m distance between lights and results in an unrealistic distance for pedestrians to walk simply to cross the road.

We need more signalised crossings and yet in my conversation with Urban Growth representatives at Ashfield Bowling Club they said that no more traffic signals would be put in this stretch of road because it would slow traffic down too much. This makes it fairly clear that whatever traffic is removed from Parramatta Rd through traffic will still be given the priority and local traffic (car, bicycle, and pedestrian) will continue to be ignored.

One of the parents at our local school is a nurse and she made a good point: that we have an ageing population and that this growing proportion of society will be either unable to drive or would be better off not driving for the safety of others. Yet they (we) will still need to be able to get to the places they have previously enjoyed for social connection or activities, and to the health care providers to get medication or check ups, and to the shops to buy food. This large group will not benefit from a large road unless it has some decent 7 day a week mass transit along it and some well designed footpaths/cyclepaths integral to it.

The Process:

It is worrying that the company (AECOM) charged with doing the traffic assessment of current road users and then predicting traffic volumes within the tunnel has been found negligent to the point of being successfully sued by shareholders for work they did in Brisbane. WDA dismisses these concerns saying that because this company is only involved in some areas of the project that it's okay. It is hard to accept that they be involved at all.

The fact that the contract for construction has been awarded prior to the consultation period being finished or the EIS completed is wrong. That the EIS is 5000 pages long and yet ordinary people were expected to be able to understand it and read it in just over one month is unfair and

indicates that any consultation with the general public may be tokenism. The EIS was not translated into the languages of those it will most immediately affect (many of my neighbours have a Chinese language or Indian language as their first language) and this effectively excludes the comments of a major portion of those affected.

Justification for spending over \$15 billion on a road has never been given. As a society it is difficult to imagine that this is the best use of our money given the great need in our hospitals and schools and that public transport and active transport are much cheaper to provide and, one would imagine, would be worth exploring before committing to such an enormous road project. I was told by the WDA that mass transit was not considered because 90% of people on Parramatta Rd are already commuting to work on public transport and for other trips the demand was not high enough to make mass transit viable. This is difficult to believe and from the parts of the EIS I read doesn't seem to be substantiated. In any case transport is not simply for those commuting to and from work but is just as important for the times when we're going everywhere else we go but work, these desire lines would not be difficult to identify: for example swimming pools, sports grounds, shopping centres, entertainment precincts. For the less common trip active transport such as cycling or a combination of cycle/bus or walk/bus would be worth exploring. None of this seems to have been given serious consideration in the EIS.

It has been disheartening to be exposed to the denigrating language and dismissive comments of the Minister for Transport Duncan Gaye. I am simply a local resident who is involved in many ways in seeking to create a healthier local community. WestConnex is only the latest area that has drawn my attention and to be described by a high level professional who holds office in government as nothing more than a trouble maker is insulting. Many people of all ages and backgrounds recognise the need to be active and healthy and also have the desire to integrate this into their daily trips, whether to work or not, by using a combination of mass transit, walking, cycling and the car; this is not a fringe group.

Thank you for your consideration of these points.

Kind regards,
Rachel Davies
78 Bland St
Ashfield 2131