



# Nature Conservation Council

The voice for nature in NSW

Director, Major Projects Assessments  
Department of Planning  
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By web form: [http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/index.pl?action=view\\_job&job\\_id=6307](http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/index.pl?action=view_job&job_id=6307)

2 November, 2015

## **Submission regarding M4 East EIS (application number SSI 6307)**

To the Director, Major Projects Assessments,

The Nature Conservation Council of New South Wales (NCC) is the state's peak environment organisation, representing more than 150 environment groups. Together we are dedicated to protecting and conserving the wildlife, landscapes and natural resources of NSW. Our members have a strong interest in planning and development issues, and are strongly committed to securing positive environmental outcomes.

NCC welcomes the opportunity to comment on the M4 East EIS. We wish to register our strong objection to the WestConnex M4 East proposal. There are a number of very significant planning issues with the manner in which this project has been advanced, as well as substantial impacts on climate, air quality, habitat and threatened species from the project as a whole.

In December 2014 the New South Wales Auditor-General reported that the government's Major Projects Assurance Framework had not been implemented<sup>1</sup>. He also found that there were deficiencies in the analysis of the risks, cost and benefits of the project, as well as with the governance arrangements and the procurement strategy for the project. To date, these issues have not been remedied and there have been no further independent reviews of the project. We believe this is unacceptable for what is the largest infrastructure project in New South Wales.

The WestConnex project is now proceeding through the planning system in separate 'stages', with justifications being offered about the alleged cumulative benefits of the project, yet the cumulative impacts are not being assessed. NCC refutes the claim that the M4 East can be treated as a "stand alone" project for the purposes of planning assessment, when the project has been conceived as a whole, and the alleged benefits could not be reasonably said to exist without the construction of the whole project.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/news/westconnex-assurance-to-the-government>

In effect, this approach to the planning process appears to be an exercise in building the project by stealth, by effectively “locking-in” initial project stages whilst avoiding scrutiny or proper assessment of the project as a whole. Even within this compromised framework, the government’s approach is to pre-empt outcomes of consultation by tendering and awarding billions of dollars’ worth of contracts for the M4 East tunnels, well before the consultation for the M4 EIS began. All of this points to the government’s desire to build this project being the tantamount consideration, at the expense of good governance, transparency and the public interest.

On the issue of air quality, analysis by Environmental Justice Australia<sup>2</sup>, demonstrates that the EIS assumes that weaker standards for the National Environment Protection (Ambient Air Quality) will be adopted than are currently proposed. Assessment of the environmental and health impacts of the proposed motorway should be based on the strictest standards currently being considered by Australia’s environment ministers, not on standards that are significantly less strict.

The EIS also assumes that fine particle (PM2.5) emissions in the WestConnex domain will decrease by 21%, at the same time as vehicle kilometres travelled in the WestConnex domain will increase by 31%. Since motor vehicles are a significant contributor to these fine particles (accounting for between 12-17% of total PM2.5 emissions), credible modelling should predict that PM2.5 emissions increase proportionally to vehicle traffic, not the reverse. The same can be said for greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles. The assumptions that the project will simultaneously increase traffic as well as reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions are clearly incorrect.

The assessment of M4 East biodiversity assessment is also totally inadequate. This assessment is based on insufficient evidence and very short duration field studies amounting to no more than a few days across a large geographical area. No attempt is made to assess cumulative impacts of the entire WestConnex project on loss of open space and connectivity habitat of species in the project area.

This submission provides specific examples of some of the many deficiencies with the project and its planning and assessment. Given the government’s tokenistic approach to assessment of this project, NCC has no confidence that these issues will be properly assessed or considered. Due to impacts on air quality, open space and wildlife habitat, as well as deficiencies with the assessment of this project, NCC objects to this proposal.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kate Smolski', with a stylized, flowing script.

Kate Smolski  
Chief Executive Officer

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<sup>2</sup> <http://m4eis.org/2015/10/15/environmental-justice-westconnex-and-air-pollution/>