

# Submission by Paul Fletcher MP, Member for Bradfield, in response to the public exhibition of the NorthConnex EIS

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## **1. Executive Summary**

As the Member for Bradfield, I seek a decision concerning the NorthConnex EIS which best meets the needs of my constituents. I support NorthConnex proceeding because I believe there is a need to reduce congestion on Pennant Hills Road; NorthConnex will deliver that outcome, and it is the only realistic option that will. I also believe the project should only proceed if it meets appropriate health and safety standards, and this should be assessed by the Department of Planning and Environment drawing on advice from appropriately qualified independent experts.

## **2. The need to reduce congestion on Pennant Hills Road**

There is a clear need to reduce congestion on Pennant Hills Road and provide an alternative route for through traffic which presently travels along it.

### **2.1. Pennant Hills Rd is highly congested**

Pennant Hills Road is highly congested. It carries large volumes of traffic, with two-way average annual daily traffic in 2011 of about 80,000 vehicles per day, average speeds of 31 kph during morning peak, and large numbers of heavy vehicles. In addition, the road carries a mix of different types of traffic, including through commercial traffic, local traffic, bicycles and pedestrians. This makes it difficult to configure the route to best serve its users.

This level of congestion has a detrimental effect on communities along its route, including Thornleigh, Normanhurst, Waitara and Wahroonga. Pollution, noise and vibration impact these areas.

### **2.2. Completions of NorthConnex will deliver significant benefits**

There are several ways that the construction of NorthConnex will benefit my constituents.

#### **a) Improved community amenity**

NorthConnex will deliver improved community amenity for communities along Pennant Hills Road, due to reduced traffic and congestion and in turn reduced emissions, noise and vibration along the route. Reduced traffic volumes and a higher proportion of local traffic will also result in improved land use.

### **b) Improved travel times**

NorthConnex is expected to reduce travel time along the route by as much as 21 minutes, as well as improving speeds along Pennant Hills Road.

### **c) Improved Safety**

The completion of NorthConnex will see a significant volume of traffic shift from Pennant Hills Road to NorthConnex, and in particular there will be a marked reduction in the number of trucks travelling on Pennant Hills Road compared to the scenario in which NorthConnex is not built.

By shifting a significant volume of traffic from Pennant Hills Road to a grade and carriage separated motorway there will be a reduction in the number of motor vehicle accidents and in turn the number of fatalities and injuries.

## **2.3. NorthConnex is the only realistic option to reduce congestion on Pennant Hills Road.**

If reducing congestion on Pennant Hills Road is a desirable public policy objective, the only realistic option to achieve this objective in the foreseeable future is NorthConnex.

### **a) Ten year journey**

It has taken a ten year planning and consultation process to reach this point with the NorthConnex proposal, including the F3 to Sydney Orbital Link Study, published in 2004, the Pearlman report in 2007 and now the current process. To bring any alternative proposal to fruition would be likely to involve a lead time of at least ten years.

### **b) Specific opportunity created by Transurban proposal**

The NorthConnex proposal would not be viable if it were not for the proposal by Transurban, and its willingness to take the commercial risk that the cost of construction will be recouped through tolls charged to users. The total capital cost of the project is around \$3 billion; with a little over \$800 million having been contributed by the State and Federal Governments. It is my judgement that there is little prospect of government having the capacity to fund the total cost of this project. In other words, the Transurban Proposal offers a specific (and in my view unlikely-to-be-repeated) opportunity to relieve congestion on Pennant Hills Road at a cost to government which is affordable.

## **3. Project should only proceed if it meets appropriate Health and Safety Standards**

Notwithstanding the benefits of NorthConnex, the project should only proceed if it meets appropriate health and safety standards.

### **3.1. Concerns raised by constituents**

Concerns have been raised with me, particularly by residents of Wahroonga, about the proposed location and design of the emission stack at the northern exit of the tunnel.

These concerns include:

- That the stack's emissions will concentrate chemicals and particulate matter from the length of the tunnel in to a small area
- That the stack will fail to adequately disperse emissions
- That the surrounding area is largely residential in nature, and includes schools, medical facilities and a large elderly population
- That the air quality inside the tunnel will be poor
- That the data on which the modelling was based was insufficient, in that it uses wind and climate data from locations removed from the location of the stack, and uses terrain data that is not of sufficient resolution
- That certain scenarios have not been examined in the EIS which, if they were to occur, could lead to emissions exceeding safe levels.

### **3.2. Concerns must be properly and scientifically assessed by qualified experts**

The arguments based on the health impacts of NorthConnex involve complex medical and scientific issues. While I personally am not qualified to assess them, I want to be satisfied that in its assessment of the EIS, the Department of Planning and Environment is advised by experts with appropriate scientific and medical qualifications, and that these experts have a full and unconstrained ability to examine the evidence and draw their own conclusions.

The evidence in the EIS suggests that the health impacts of the ventilation stack are modest (around a one percent increase in the level of PM2.5). However, the EIS has been prepared by the project proponents. It is important that these claims are independently assessed by appropriately qualified experts.

I therefore urge that:

- The analysis and assumptions in the EIS be subject to rigorous examination by the Department of Planning and Environment, advised by appropriately qualified experts;
- Concerns raised by community members be given serious consideration and addressed in detail; and
- The project should only proceed if it meets appropriate health and safety standards.

It will also be important that the Department of Planning and Environment is in a position to impose conditions or changes to the design, should these be required in the opinion of independent appropriately qualified experts – for example regarding such matters as the height of the ventilation stacks.

## **Conclusion**

I support NorthConnex proceeding because I believe there is a need to reduce congestion on Pennant Hills Road, and it will deliver this outcome. However, it should only proceed if it meets appropriate health and safety standards, and the assessment as to whether it meets those standards must be made based upon advice from suitably qualified independent experts.