



RESPONSE TO EIS FOR STAGE 1 WEST CONNEX

by

10,000 Friends of Greater Sydney (FRoGS)

10,000 Friends of Greater Sydney (FRoGS) presents this submission in response to the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) released by the Department of Planning on 13 August 2014 for Stage 1 of the proposed WestConnex project - the widening and upgrade of the M4 Motorway from Church Street, Parramatta to Homebush Bay Drive, Homebush.

The submission is presented in two parts:

1. The WestConnex concept as a strategy for future development of transport for Sydney; and
2. The specific proposal for Stage 1 widening and upgrade of the M4 from Church Street, Parramatta to Homebush Bay Drive, Homebush.

The WestConnex Concept Strategy for Transport for Sydney

The WestConnex concept aims to address the increased future demand for passengers and freight between western and eastern Sydney identified by the Transport Master Plan. Over the next twenty years, morning rush hour traffic will increase and the EIS reflects this.

However, FRoGS has three concerns.

1. Justification of the proposal

The concept for the entire WestConnex represents a \$11.5 billion massive road structure, which has a solution that is difficult to justify both on traffic amelioration grounds or cost benefit analysis.

The road proposal does not seem to tackle the primary issue of passenger movement to the CBD along the east west corridor. Instead, it focuses on movements from north and south of the corridor with destinations other than downtown Sydney.

Furthermore, the EIS does not appear to have taken into account current or proposed developments along the route nor the future Airport at Badgerys Creek, which could significantly reduce travel from Western Sydney to the existing Airport. Is the basis for analysis already outdated?

2. Consideration of Alternatives

While the EIS presents some alternatives, there are other options that should be considered. Three proposed alternatives are discussed below.

Extra Rail Tracks Parramatta to CBD - addition to WestConnex Concept Strategy

It is estimated that the work force in the CBD will increase by 54% from 260,000 to about 400,000 in 40 years' time, leading to a major increase in travel demand in the a.m. peak period.

The best way to address this huge growth in demand is through the expansion of rail between Parramatta and the CBD, as it is estimated that capacity on these existing tracks is already near saturation.

While some expansion can be accommodated with upgraded signaling and other improvements, the combination of an expected increase in demand and anticipated growth calls for an additional rail corridor, which is designed for fast Metro transit. Based on the

previous private sector proposal for a fast Metro line, it would appear that the cost could be largely funded from the fare box.

A new fast rail line connecting the CBD to Parramatta in less than 15 minutes has other benefits. It would attract investment and hence employment to Parramatta thereby moderating peak west to east travel demand by moving jobs closer to Western Sydney, which is where the majority of Sydney's population will be living.

If additional rail tracks were included in the WestConnex concept, offering a movement capacity of 48,000 persons per hour compared to 4,800 person per hour on a four lane freeway, the scale of the road structure could be reduced, making the proposal a more viable and more easily funded scheme.

The attached paper by 10,000 Friends in December 2010 "Why Fast Metro to West?" provides more detail on the new rail tracks proposal.

Freight rail connection from Port Botany to Moorebank Intermodal Terminal

The east-west freight connection can be fixed by duplicating the existing freight line. Putting more freight on rail would make the most impact on congestion. This alternative means there may be no need for the proposed M5 work, resulting in significant cost saving.

Queens Road Route for extension of M4 to City West Link

The completion of the missing link from the end of the M4 at Concord to the City West link at Homebush is sound and accords with previous plans for this route. Expansion of transport capacity from the west to east is vital for the City's growth. But are proposed plans for a costly tunnel the most viable solution?

Some years ago the extension of the M4 was planned along a route immediately north of Parramatta Road generally following the alignment of Ada Street, Burton Street and Queens Road to link with Dobroyd Parade at Homebush as part of the City West Link. An alternative above-ground route for the M4 extension along this route should be considered as it would obviate the extensive tunneling and thereby reduce costs considerably. Furthermore, there would be little impact on residents - the majority of this route is lined by industrial premises.

With the possible introduction of additional rail tracks for passengers, the scale of the M4 extension could be reduced, making this alternative even more viable.



Already transport is responding to inner city growth with daily traffic flow on Parramatta Road east of the M4 declining daily (albeit not in peaks hours) as car space in the City is taken up by residents closer to the CBD

3. Ability of CBD and environs to accommodate future traffic induced to the new road facility

Modelling from 20 years ago showed that building another high capacity road from west to east would create major congestion in the CBD, at the Airport and in eastern Sydney. As a result, the Sydney Orbital freeway was developed. With growth in traffic and the numbers of people travelling to the city, why build a road which is delivering more cars?

The proposed extension of the M4 to the south to bypass the CBD will provide some relief if extended north to pick up Victoria Road traffic. But this will not change the fact most workers are travelling to the CBD. The consequence is likely to be a massive increase in traffic congestion with the inner portion of the M4 through to the Glebe Island Bridge becoming nothing more than a huge car park!

Recommendation:

1. Consider adding extra fast Metro rail tracks between Parramatta and the CBD and the alternative of a lower scale road for the M4 east of Concord such as extension of the M4 along the Queens Road route.
2. Review the cost/benefit analysis for the current proposal and include an economic assessment of the rail alternative
3. Duplicate the Botany freight line.

Stage 1 widening and upgrade of the M4 from Church Street, Parramatta to Homebush Bay Drive.

The detailed proposal for widening the M4 from Church Street, Parramatta to Homebush Bay Drive, Homebush appears soundly based. Widening of this section of the M4 appears justified on a localized basis as it accommodates travel demand, largely cars and commercial vehicles, with destinations on either side of the M4, north and south, accessed via James Ruse Drive (Route A40/A28), Rookwood Road (Route A6) and Homebush Bay Drive (Route A3).

However, aspects worthy of further consideration are discussed below.

1. Trip Time Savings

It would appear that the trip time savings quoted as benefits from the Stage 1 work are unduly generous as they assume free traffic flow at either end of the project, which will not occur until the entire project is completed. Even then, queuing back from the City West Link may simply result in a speedier trip to join an even longer queue. This scenario occurred when Victoria Road through to Drummoyne was widened a few years ago with little to no overall saving in the total commuter trip time.

2. Impact on Feeder Roads north and south

Travel demand on the north-south route is of equal importance to the east-west. It is thus crucial that the impact of these north-south routes be assessed. In this respect, consideration should be given to the traffic impact of development planned within the precinct adjacent to the M4 including the Cater Street urban activation precinct, at Wentworth Point, Sydney Olympic Park and Newington as well as the planned Parramatta Road corridor urban revitalization project.

3. Tolling Issues

The toll charges foreshadowed in the EIS are high with trucks paying three times what a car will pay. This could lead to user resistance which we have seen with the Cross City Tunnel.

The lower traffic volumes will result in reduced revenues, which will ultimately impact on the Government – this won't be a first for Sydney.

These concerns about financial viability could also lead to a reluctance by private proponents to participate in the project. The government may have to provide substantial guarantees to ensure a return on investment.

4. Impact on Parramatta Road

The M4 upgrade and widening and in fact the WestConnex road scheme seems to rely on Parramatta Road carrying more traffic, especially with a toll being reinstated along the upgraded M4 route. This would seem at variance with the concept of enhanced development along Parramatta Road.

The Warren Centre submission of 2004 indicated that –

“The M4 east, on its own, actually promotes poor urban planning by encouraging car trips to the CBD. While financial viability can be proven through road tolling, the economic soundness of the investment must be questioned.

Providing additional capacity in this corridor could offer the opportunity to turn Parramatta Road back to an urban link road rather than a defacto highway through proper planning.

The M4 East should not be built ahead of public transport options in the area; nor ahead of specific plans and actions to change the nature of Parramatta Road; nor before more important road projects are carried out especially further west in the city.

Any proposal of this nature must include a detailed study addressing land use issues and identifying a balanced review of all transport modes. Specific actions for the broader community area that will be directly affected by this project must be proposed and included as part of the actions to be carried out.

Therefore, the M4 East connection must be reviewed and considered as an urban planning solution not a response to a transport congestion problem. It should be the last element in the urban re-development of this area. “

Recommendation:

- 1. Review impact of proposed Stage 1 widening and upgrade of M4 on north-south routes A40/A28, A6 and A3 and plan to ease pinch points prior to opening of Stage1.**
- 2. Review forecast of traffic, financial viability and the benefits of widening the M4.**
- 3. Review the M4 upgrade and WestConnex proposal to ensure the scheme does not adversely impact on land use proposals for enhancement of the Parramatta Road precinct.**

In summary

Sydney has a powerful case to build more new infrastructure like WestConnex but it seems we could deliver much more with \$11.5 billion that just build a new road.

There is concern that the WestConnex project may not prove to be as successful as claimed for transport in Sydney and result in more traffic congestion around the CBD and Airport, as well as not living up to the economic and financial predictions.

FRoGS believes in an alternative solution as follows:

- Build new rail tracks for fast Metro rail between Parramatta and the CBD.
- Upgrade the freight line from Port Botany to Moorebank Intermodal Terminal.
- Downgrade the road tunnel scheme and include a surface route along Queens Road between Concord and Haberfield.

We believe this alternative could deliver the nucleus of an efficient transport system for Sydney and be part of a viable, strategic plan that would exploit complementary modes. This would accelerate the proper redevelopment of Parramatta road, which is a blot on the Sydney landscape.