

**Submission to the Westconnex M4 Widening
By Chris O'Rourke, 10 September 2014.**

The scope of this project (both the M4 widening and the Westconnex itself) must be significantly reduced.

When the project was announced it was done in a manner which assumed that it was the only way to alleviate passenger and freight movement congestion in Western Sydney and to Kingsford Smith Airport.

No evidence has been produced which supports this assumption. In fact the opposite is the case: building / expanding multi-lane carriageways only leads to induced demand and further congestion. If this project goes ahead travel times will initially be reduced but there will not be a sustained improvement. The Downs-Thompson paradox is very likely to apply. In other words the Westconnex will result in

1. short term construction and congestion delays, followed by
2. congestion reduction benefits in the short term (1-2 years), but
3. a return to congestion due to induced traffic.

For most of the time that tolls repay the initial investment in Westconnex, users will actually pay more to drive on a congested road system.

New roads induce demand for roads (eg. The Harbour Tunnel and Harbour Bridge where the number of cars crossing the harbour has risen by more than 30% which is much more than the increase in the size of the workforce in the Sydney CBD).

Time and again the experience of motorways has been an initial reduction in travel times, and then a subsequent rise in the volume of traffic enough to push those travel times back to where they started - \$10 billion is an awful lot to pay for a bigger traffic jam¹

What is Plan B when both the M4 and M5 run full in a few years' time after completion? Except in two notable cases where traffic forecasts were deficient major toll roads have reached practical capacity shortly after opening. Time of day tolling might deter some peak of peak journeys, however many people have little flexibility to alter the time of peak journeys.²

There has been no Cost Benefit Analysis or business case made to support the Westconnex. The M4 Widening Environmental Overview contains many charts and diagrams but references no hard data to support its case.

Roads are a poor way of providing access to the CBD, demand for which is likely to increase as our economy moves even further to a services based economy, concentrating employment in the global arc of Airport-City-North Sydney – Norwest.

¹ <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/editorial/the-puzzle-that-is-parramatta-road-20120807-23sai.html>

² <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/comments-on-the-infrastructure-nsw-report-20121014-27ksl.html>

A more integrated network of heavy / light rail, and buses will allow a greater level of mobility between different parts of Sydney. Public transport provides smaller benefits in the short term but significant benefits in the long term.

Public transport (heavy and light rail, buses) will provide a more cost effective solutions especially when third party externalities are considered (time spent in traffic, noise and air pollution etc).

Toll avoidance will increase congestion on feeder roads in the vicinity of the Westconnex.

Freight Movement from Port Botany:

A more direct, more efficient and cheaper option than an expensive underground tollway would be to put containers on shuttle trains between Port Botany and Chullora / Enfield or Moorebank. This will involve double handling but most of the track work has been done (except at either end) and it will avoid the (already) significant truck congestion around Port Botany. Intermodal facilities at Chullora / Enfield and Moorebank must be fast tracked to facilitate this solution.

There is no evidence that dual carriageway roads, especially expensive underground ones lead to long term decongestion of road traffic. There are many negative externalities associated with this type of project.

Time of day tolling / pricing can also help reduce road congestion.

Improved public transport links for school students to reduce number of journeys taken by parents to deliver/collect children from school which has increased significantly in the past generation.