

ITEM 3.2. WESTCONNEX**FILE NO: S051491****MINUTE BY THE LORD MAYOR**To Council:

On 21 April 2016, the NSW Minister for Planning, Rob Stokes, approved the New M5 section of the WestConnex toll road project. The New M5 includes the massive St Peters spaghetti style interchange.

IMPACTS ON THE CITY OF SYDNEY

The New M5 and in particular the St Peters Interchange will have a significantly negative impact on residents and businesses located in the City of Sydney:

1. The new toll on the existing M5 and the increase in road capacity on Euston Road from four lanes to up to six lanes, and Campbell Road from two lanes to six lanes, will see **tens of thousands of additional cars** pouring into already congested areas such as Ashmore, Erskineville, Alexandria, Redfern, Green Square and the CBD of the global city.
2. Air quality, even at existing levels, is close to the allowable limits, and will only get worse with a major interchange, road upgrades and ventilation stacks at the St Peters Interchange and surrounds putting thousands of young children and the elderly at risk. If new air quality standards as proposed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2012 are implemented, the New M5 will **exceed allowable air pollution levels**.
3. The proposed project will have **unacceptable impacts on Sydney Park**. As well as surrounding it on three sides with large, high-volume roads, and the removal of hundreds of trees, the Government will take land on the southern side of the park for a construction compound.
4. **It will endanger one of the best and most successful main streets in the country** - King Street in Newtown – and in the event that clearways were introduced would destroy it.

FLAWED PROCESS

The huge, multi-volume EIS for the New M5 St Peters Interchange was placed on public exhibition in late November 2015 with a deadline for submissions of 31 January 2016.

Over 12,000 people made submissions – with 99.91% critical of the project.

Less than two months later, the Government released its report in response raising doubts about whether all 12,000 submissions had been properly and adequately considered. It is increasingly clear that the public consultation process is a sham and the Government had its rubber stamp at the ready before any public feedback had come in.

As additional components of the project become public, the serious impact of the project on our city becomes clearer. Recently released plans include a massive Los Angeles-style interchange planned for Rozelle that would threaten the future of the Bays Precinct urban redevelopment.

AN APPALLING INVESTMENT FOR TAXPAYERS

At \$16.8 billion, WestConnex is nearly triple the combined cost of recent motorways built in Sydney – the M4, M5, Harbour Tunnel, M2 and Eastern Distributor would cost \$6.1 billion in total in today's dollars. Additional stages of WestConnex under development could see the total cost reach more than \$30 billion.

This would make it the world's most expensive road project yet it is clear that the project will not deliver its stated objectives as presented by the NSW Government. In summary:

1. ***WestConnex won't increase Western Sydney residents' access to jobs and economic development.*** Only a small proportion of workers from western Sydney commute to inner Sydney and, of those, 89 per cent rely on public transport, not cars. Consistent with the NSW Government's Metropolitan Strategy, Western Sydney needs more jobs close to where people live, and better public transport within and to the key centres in that area. Public money spent on WestConnex would be better spent on public transport in Western Sydney.
2. ***WestConnex will not provide a connection to Sydney Airport and Port Botany.*** The New M5 would divert traffic north to the St Peters Interchange where it would have to make its way back to the airport and/or port on the existing road network. ***Given the existing M5 provides a more direct connection, it is unlikely that freight and commuters will choose the new route.*** The proposed Sydney Gateway connection will not be completed when the New M5 is completed, and might never be. Even then, the existing M5 will provide a much more direct link to the port and airport. ***WestConnex also does not take into account the second airport at Badgerys Creek,*** as the Federal Government's commitment to a second airport was made after WestConnex was announced. ***This on its own is sufficient to warrant a review of the merits of WestConnex.***
3. ***WestConnex will not deliver urban renewal for Parramatta Road.*** The intention to deliver renewal and improved liveability along Parramatta Road seems to have been abandoned with the M4 East extension shifted to a more northerly configuration. ***New designs for a portal at Camperdown would see the sections of Parramatta Road and Broadway, east of Sydney University swamped by increased traffic.***

The public rationale for the project is contained in the Updated Strategic Business Case, released last year. In February 2016, Council endorsed an SGS Economics and Planning analysis of the Strategic Business Case. SGS was damning about the Business Case and the project. SGS said the document did not meet the proper standards of a final Business Case and is "a confused document filled with contradictions."

Even using what SGS identified as flawed and optimistic assumptions, the Government's own figures estimate that most users will save less than five minutes and that the road network serving the toll road and some sections of tunnel will reach capacity as soon as 2031, only eight years after completion – it is an appalling investment for NSW taxpayers.

SGS reported that any benefit of WestConnex "is likely to be marginal at best and it is quite possible that the actual BCR (Benefit-Cost Ratio) for WestConnex is less than one", that is, the benefits will not exceed the costs.

It also works against the Government's own Metropolitan Plan, which focuses on the need to provide public transport between the city and town centres in the west and south-west, and public transport between those centres. \$16.8 billion on more roads despite the fact that 89% of people travelling to the city from the west do so on overcrowded public transport.

INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT URGENTLY NEEDED

Given that WestConnex is receiving \$1.5 billion in funding and a \$2 billion concessional loan from the Federal Government, it is critical that the Federal Government can point to a rigorous assessment and a high level of quality assurance for the project. The opposite seems to be the case.

The NSW Auditor-General and Infrastructure Australia have criticised the governance, quality assurance and business case of this project, along with many other commentators, members of the public and councils. Key criticisms of Infrastructure Australia, such as the lack of a P90 cost estimate, have still not been addressed.

Last month, I wrote to Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, and urged him to conduct an independent assessment of WestConnex in keeping with his commitment when he became Prime Minister that transport infrastructure funding would be non-ideological.

The letter also went to the Leader of the Opposition and a copy was sent to Commissioners of the Greater Sydney Commission, and the Commissioner for the Central District, in which the City is located.

An independent assessment would reveal what we all know to be true - that WestConnex simply does not make sense and is the result of Tony Abbott's pro-road ideology. This is most clearly demonstrated by the fact that WestConnex has never been adequately assessed against public transport and demand management alternatives to meeting Sydney's future growth and transport needs.

As it became clear that the State Government was determined to push ahead with this project despite the consequences, we received requests from other councils and community groups for assistance in challenging the legality of the project. I asked the CEO to get preliminary legal opinion on what options were available and now that the New M5 has been approved, I am asking the CEO to obtain formal legal advice.

In the meantime, the City will continue to oppose the WestConnex project by not granting Sydney Motorway Corporation and other agencies access to City land for geotechnical and other associated work. We will also continue to oppose any encroachment on City parks and open spaces and assist the many people in the community working hard to stop this project.

Council, there is a Federal election set for 2 July 2016 and polling indicates that it will be close. This project is a critical issue for inner city communities in Sydney and I believe we should also be calling on Federal Opposition Leader, Bill Shorten MP, to formally commit to an urgent, independent assessment of WestConnex and to withdraw all Federal funding for this project if they win Government.

WestConnex is the very opposite of what Governments should be doing in the 21st Century. The infrastructure projects approved now will seriously affect how we will be able to address dangerous climate change and meet our future transport needs. Coming generations will ask: "How did they let this happen?"

I can assure the City community that the City Government I lead will do everything we can to expose and stop this destructive project.

RECOMMENDATION

It is resolved that Council:

- (A) note and condemn the approval of the New M5 section of WestConnex;
- (B) call on the Prime Minister to order an urgent, independent assessment of WestConnex and to withdraw all Federal funding for this project;
- (C) call on the Leader of the Federal Opposition, Bill Shorten MP, to commit to an urgent, independent assessment of WestConnex and to withdraw all financial support for WestConnex if he wins Government;
- (D) approve the preparation of updated information for the community on the progress of the WestConnex project and its impacts on the City of Sydney; and
- (E) ask the Chief Executive Officer to formalise partnerships and seek proper legal advice on prospects for challenging the approvals of Stage 1 and 2 of WestConnex and report back to Council.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor