

**ITEM 3.1 PROTECTING THE CITY FROM WESTCONNEX TRAFFIC AND ALTERNATIVES****FILE NO: S051491****MINUTE BY THE LORD MAYOR**To Council:

A few weeks ago, Councillors were briefed on the City's alternative proposal for the NSW Government's WestConnex toll motorway.

Since then, the Premier has announced further extensions to the WestConnex network which could see up to 100,000 extra vehicles driving into our city every day. Given the congestion we already face, even half that number would be devastating for our future economy and liveability.

I am concerned that, as SGS Economics pointed out last year, the Government is rushing to build an incredibly expensive motorway which significantly impacts on our city without properly examining alternatives.

***In the last few months City staff have developed a credible proposal that offers a direct route from the west and southwest to the airport and Port Botany with better freight travel times and would save NSW taxpayers billions of dollars, reduce congestion and the need for expensive new tolls.***

With stage two of the current project only about 30 per cent complete and the third stage still in planning, there is still time to rectify this looming disaster.

Of all the destructive projects former Prime Minister Abbott and Premiers O'Farrell and Baird visited upon our city, WestConnex is the worst when you look at the facts around its cost and destructive impacts versus any benefits.

***Since the current project was first announced in 2012 there have been constant changes.*** It began as a tunnel for trucks to get from Western Sydney to the Airport and to the port at Botany, Australia's second biggest container terminal. But in the last five years ***it has morphed into a revenue led network of privatised tolled commuter roads and two massive spaghetti junction style interchanges in Rozelle and St Peters which Minister Ayres claims are the biggest in the southern hemisphere.***

Designs have been scrapped, extra lanes and tunnels added, major intersections moved and removed, tolls introduced, construction sites proposed and abandoned and there still isn't a detailed final design of stages two or three.

What is clear is that the current proposal doesn't serve its original purpose and now proposes to deliver trucks to St Peters, more than seven kilometres from Port Botany. Vehicles will travel on local roads, past homes and hotels and along a freight rail line to get to the port.

It will also deliver 60,000 vehicles per day onto a seven lane freeway that will go through our densely urbanised neighbourhoods at 75km per hour all the way to Moore Park. Traffic is expected to double by 2021, rising to 85,000 vehicles in 2040 – including more than 30,000 trucks and vans. And this is before the F6 southern connector is built.

At Dacey Avenue and Anzac Parade, alongside Moore Park, Roads and Maritime Services is consulting on building a 12 to 15 lane wide intersection, stretching over 300 metres in length.

From the west, coming out of the Rozelle interchange and choking the already overloaded Anzac Bridge and Western Distributor, will be nearly 80,000 vehicles per day, while Parramatta Road will have 20 per cent more traffic, despite the motorway.

I am aghast that nearly 60 years after Jane Jacobs was fighting this battle in the 60s, we are now dealing with Minister Ayres bragging about building the biggest interchanges in the southern hemisphere to direct traffic into the already congested global city.

It is an unmitigated disaster for our global city. As a key driver for the national economy, Sydney's future is vital to Australia's future and the future of NSW. More than \$110 billion is generated each year within our local government area representing over seven per cent of Australia's economy and 24 per cent of the State's GDP.

***One of the most significant risks to the future economic viability of our city centre is congestion. The business case for WestConnex makes clear it will dramatically increase congestion which is a significant threat to our future liveability and to investment in the city centre and Green Square.***

***In stark contrast last week London Mayor Sadiq Khan launched the City's new transport strategy saying:***

*"As London's population is set to increase beyond 10 million, our future health and prosperity is more and more dependent on us reducing our reliance on cars."*

*"We have to make not using your car the affordable, safest and most convenient option for Londoners going about their daily lives. This is not only essential for dealing with congestion as London grows, but crucial for reducing our toxic air pollution and improving the health of all Londoners."*

WestConnex is a failed 1950s solution for tackling congestion and the very opposite of what leading cities around the world are doing. It is also not the solution for helping people in western Sydney move around.

***Last week Blacktown Mayor, Councillor Stephen Bali, President of the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (WSROC) called on the Government to use the sale of WestConnex to fund a public transport network to allow western Sydney residents to move around without needing to pay expensive road tolls. He said:***

*"We are all aware that the current public transport situation in western Sydney is dire. Around 80 per cent of western Sydney residents do not live within walking distance of a train station, yet commuter parking is full by 7am."*

*"NSW Transport Minister Andrew Constance recently admitted the Western Rail Line is overcrowded. Western Sydney's bus network is limited making it an impractical alternative to driving in many cases."*

*"The majority of western Sydney's employment hubs and industrial centres are not serviced by public transport, forcing locally employed residents to drive. The NSW Government needs to address these gaps."*

WestConnex will not address those gaps and the Government's argument that the project is being built to reduce congestion for people in Western Sydney is blatantly false.

The Government's own business case and data shows:

- WestConnex will save most western Sydney users only five minutes or less;
- it will reach capacity in just eight years;
- in many cases, catching public transport will remain a faster way to move around; and
- public transport use is growing rapidly.

The business case also shows that only one per cent of daily trips in the Sydney region will benefit from WestConnex, but absurdly our Government is investing billions in the project. In fact, it is shaping up to be the most expensive road project in the world.

The cost has grown from 10 billion to 17 billion dollars. And it will keep rising - Dennis Cliché, the CEO of the Sydney Motorway Corporation, recently said '*mega projects are mega difficult to deliver on time and on budget.*'

The City recently identified \$28.5 billion worth of extra costs, bringing the total cost to a staggering \$45.3 billion. The costs relate to the hundreds of millions of dollars of publicly funded road upgrades needed for every exit and entrance plus the new stages announced that are needed to keep moving congestion around.

Even if the Government manages to sell the whole project, NSW taxpayers will still be paying tens of billions of dollars in tolls for at least the next 43 years and quite possibly beyond – an irresponsible use of public money to prop up private toll operators.

***It is the worst example I have ever seen of revenue-led planning - designed to induce the highest number of vehicles to pay a toll to use a road that otherwise would have no reason to exist.***

It is an outrageous abuse of public process and the history of its gestation illustrates how major political parties in Australia currently do politics and projects.

***During the 2013 Federal election, both the Liberal and Labor leaders*** promised \$1.5 billion dollars to kick start the project despite the fact that Infrastructure Australia had put it in its lowest priority category and no business case had been prepared.

***It is the sole survivor of three controversial road projects*** that Prime Minister Abbott supported in his first Budget. None had been originally ticked off by Infrastructure Australia.

Despite promising that he'd make the Infrastructure Australia Board independent of Government, when he became Prime Minister, he sacked most of the people on the Board and made a former State Liberal Party Minister the Chair.

***The new Infrastructure Australia then re-rated all three of Prime Minister Abbott's toll roads as high priorities.*** The other two toll roads, Melbourne's East West Link and the Perth Freight Link have since been axed as a waste of public money, but we've been left with WestConnex.

***In 2014, Prime Minister Abbott gave WestConnex a \$2 billion loan on very favourable terms,*** well below market rates. And the Federal Infrastructure Agency threw money at the project whether milestones were met or not.

Last week the ***Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit criticised the Federal Government for departing from the usual process of obtaining full assessments*** for projects when they announced a loan for WestConnex.

The Committee said that approach 'reduced evidence bases for decision-making' and said they were concerned at the Government's lack of consideration in designing and negotiating the loan and in the management of project payments and milestones.

In the last few years, ***both the State and Federal Auditor General have raised serious concerns*** about conflicts of interest and a lack of an independent assessment of the business case for WestConnex.

***So what has the NSW Government done? They've made WestConnex into a private company - beyond the scrutiny of Parliament, the Auditor General, ICAC or the public.***

It is frankly unconscionable that a project of this size and impact can be hidden from public oversight and I believe the Premier must immediately establish an independent WestConnex Ombudsman who can inform the community about what is really going on.

***The City's plan shows a way forward that saves billions of dollars which can be better spent improving public transport in western Sydney*** – 90 per cent of people travelling to the city from the west are on public transport - and it achieves better freight travel times from the west and southwest to the airport and Port Botany.

***Our plan calls for the unnecessary and expensive Stage 3 connection between Rozelle and St Peters to be scrapped.*** We've proved there's no 'missing link' between the M4 and M5, as there are already multiple links between the two motorways that could be upgraded with less financial risk to taxpayers, road users and investors.

***We are also calling for the massive polluting St Peters interchange to be scrapped.*** The interchange is currently 27 hectares in area, two thirds the size of Sydney Park with exit and entry roads 38 metres high in a spaghetti junction, designed for truck speeds of up to 100km per hour.

Research shows that local residents near the interchange will be subject to a ***tenfold increase in particulate emissions*** on their doorsteps. These emissions are known to cause respiratory problems, particularly in young children and the elderly, and could lead to more serious health impacts. Some residents on Euston Road have already been warned by the NSW Government to ***keep their windows permanently sealed.***

Traffic is proposed to move at speeds of 70km per hour which will seriously impact on our safe pedestrianised neighbourhoods.

***There are too many taxpayer funded billions at stake, too many threats to communities across Sydney and too many flaws for WestConnex to be allowed to continue without fundamental changes. Especially when there is a better way forward as we have identified.***

***I have met with the Premier, directly outlined our concerns and laid out a series of alternatives for consideration. But a week after the meeting the Government rushed out the design for Stage 3 before it was ready to be released and it has been widely derided for its lack of detail. The Government then announced Stages 4 and 5 and inadvertently confirmed our cost projections in the process. They also announced they are proposing to sell off at least 51 per cent of the Sydney Motorway Corporation.***

I believe that we must protect our residential and business communities and make sure people understand the threat to their health, their homes, their businesses and their investments.

We must work closely with other councils, community groups and individuals fighting to expose the truth about this project and demand local solutions that at the very least minimise harmful impacts.

***As elected representatives of the people who live and work in this area it would be the ultimate act of betrayal to allow this project to destroy our city without a fight.***

***Sydney is lauded around the world for its liveability - we must not allow it to become a 1970s traffic clogged city damned by noise, congestion, pollution and narrow footpaths that destroy community street life.***

***It is not too late for the Government to change the design for stages two and three given they are yet to finalise plans.***

We need a new multi-faceted, broad reaching campaign to inform people who live in the inner city and who access our city for work about WestConnex and its impacts, and the alternatives.

The advice I have received is that the City would need to invest \$360,000 for an effective campaign that includes:

- ongoing transport and planning studies;
- Public Forums and Community Meetings;
- Distribution, including flyers and newsletters; and
- a digital program.

The investment for this campaign is just 0.003 per cent of the \$17 billion the Government is spending on WestConnex and less than 0.1 per cent of the City's total operating expenditure budget.

Councillors, we have also been asked by the Administrator of the Inner West Council to extend our joint funding of the WestConnex Community Organiser position if the newly elected Inner West Council resolves to continue their contribution in September 2017.

The City has shared the funding for this position with the former Marrickville and Leichhardt Councils since August 2015, and I believe we should continue funding this important role.

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is resolved that Council:

- (A) acknowledge the significant negative effects of the current WestConnex project on City of Sydney residents, businesses and investors;
- (B) endorse the City's WestConnex – Alternative Proposal, as shown at Attachment A to this Minute;
- (C) call on the NSW Premier to immediately halt work on the current New M5 tunnel, to scrap the St Peter's interchange and Stage 3, and to undertake a new business case and design review;
- (D) call on the NSW Premier to establish an independent WestConnex Ombudsman;
- (E) approve funding of \$50,000 for the joint WestConnex Community Organiser position with the Inner West Council, such funding to be transferred from the provision set aside for General Contingency within the 2017-2018 Budget;
- (F) approve funding of \$360,000 for a campaign as outlined in this Minute, such funding to be transferred from the provision set aside for General Contingency within the 2017-2018 Budget; and
- (G) request the Chief Executive Officer to:
  - (i) refocus existing community engagement and communication budgets to support a multi-faceted, broad-reaching campaign to inform people about WestConnex and its impacts and to increase awareness of alternatives;
  - (ii) provide the use of City meeting rooms as in-kind support for local WestConnex community groups; and
  - (iii) keep Councillors informed on the progress of the campaign via the CEO update.

**COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE**

Lord Mayor

**ATTACHMENTS:**

**Attachment A:** WestConnex – Alternative Proposal

**Attachment B:** Letter from Inner West Council