

Committee for North Sydney

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Submission of the Committee for North Sydney to the Public Works Committee's Inquiry into the Impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link.

The Committee for North Sydney welcomes the Inquiry into the Impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link.

This appears to be the only legitimate avenue where this massive investment in road infrastructure will receive an essential public airing.

The Committee for North Sydney objects to the Western Harbour Tunnel (WHT) and Beaches Link (BL) proceeding until the NSW Government meets expected standards for major public works investments:

- a genuine response to community concerns (rather than marketing);
- reasonable tests of scientific credibility (instead of marketing);
- a credible financial assessment of the benefits and costs (instead of marketing);
- independent expert assessment of the many assumptions, estimates and forecasts relating to technology, social preferences, urban development and local amenity;
- peer review of the many specialist assessments of environmental impact;
- peer review of the profound social, economic, environmental and urban-management consequences of converting some of our most critical public goods into private profit centres.

The Committee for North Sydney is primarily concerned about the disastrous impact of the tunnels, as presently planned, on the North Sydney city centre.

Because of fatal flaws in the planning, the entire North Sydney city centre becomes a freeway interchange.

The Committee for North Sydney sees this impact on the North Sydney city centre as symptomatic of the bad planning that has been applied to the whole project.

We understand that the tunnels were announced during the 2017 by-election for the NSW seat of North Shore, to counter the risk that an independent candidate might win the election. This announcement seems to have bedevilled the process, the planning and the urgency of this project ever since.

This submission is in response to all of the terms of reference.

We frame our response under two questions.

The first gives examples of the corrosive effects of making the planning process deliver a political priority within a relatively short timeframe.

The second focuses on specific and very negative impacts on the **North Sydney city centre**.

1 Why is the NSW Government about to let contracts for CBD-radial road tunnels, when we know so little about the costs, regional and local impacts, and environmental effects?

The Committee for North Sydney objects to the rushed, secretive, unscientific, unprofessional, partisan and politically-driven process used for a major, long-term investment in city-shaping infrastructure.

The effects of building the Western Harbour Tunnel (WHT) and Beaches Link (BL) will last for generations.

The cost is unknown – some estimate it to be \$30 billion, including the cost of the Rozelle interchange connection (maybe the cost of the Rozelle interchange should be included since it may not have been accounted for in the WestConnex investment). Whatever the cost, it can

only be spent once. There is clearly an enormous opportunity cost if this turns out to be an investment in the wrong tunnels, on the wrong alignment, for the wrong mode.

This investment will potentially skew and distort the long-term economy, society and environment of the Sydney region and therefore the state and the nation. It favours road transport over other modes. It favours the east over the west. It favours the Sydney CBD over everywhere else. If the priorities are seriously wrong, the negative impacts will be long-lasting.

That the priorities *are* wrong has been suggested by nearly *all* of the 3000 submissions to the two EISs.

The Committee for North Sydney has concluded that the process has been fundamentally compromised. Only this conclusion explains the decision to – in effect – start the tunnels in Berry Street in the heart of the North Sydney city centre.

We give four examples.

(i) Wrong problem, wrong solution: the response to the two EISs show clearly that the tunnels in this form, for this mode, in this alignment, at this time, appear to meet minimal demand.

The following table is taken from the submission of the Wollstonecraft Precinct. There was a big response during the exhibition of the EISs. A mere 2% of submissions supported the projects. This is not the basis for committing to the present proposal, essentially unchanged.

	Submissions	Objected	Supported	Comments
WHT & WFU	1454	1327	20	107
Beaches Link	1549	1365	42	142
Both projects	3003	2692 (90%)	62 (2%)	249 (8%)

It is unacceptable that there has been no serious response to well-researched, well-informed information provided by scientific and technical experts, organisations and members of the community; and no consideration of alternative priorities expressed by those who made submissions.

(ii) Underwater devastation: WHT EIS is not scientifically credible

Most of us have never seen below the surface of Sydney Harbour or been to Flat Rock Creek Gully, and have no idea about the impact of enormous concrete structures being placed in huge trenches dug in the harbour bed, so we accept the assurances of the proponents. But the equivalent works on land, where we can see the effects, would be like building a freeway interchange in Centennial Park. There is irrefutable scientific evidence that the chosen route is highly destructive in the long term, and will be seen as inexcusable by future generations.

It is shocking and unacceptable that Dr Bill Ryall has been able to make a very clear case that the WHT EIS is not to be believed.

<https://committeefornorthsydney.org.au/docs/#DrBillRyall>

(iii) Traffic-generated air pollution: the BL EIS is inadequate and not credible

Tunnel traffic is not primarily cars. Tunnel traffic includes cars but also SUVs, trucks, vans, tradies, semitrailers, buses, everything. It is likely to be heavier than now, due to growth and to traffic 'induced' by the toll roads. The NSW Government's plan is to divert a proportion of this traffic into six and seven kilometres of tunnels, concentrate the highly polluted air, and spill it out over the neighbourhoods near each of the tunnel entrances. Despite this, we are supposed to believe that the tunnels will reduce air pollution! The NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer's submission to the EIS showed clearly that the traffic forecasts are inadequate, and that the claims of reduced air pollution are not based on evidence.

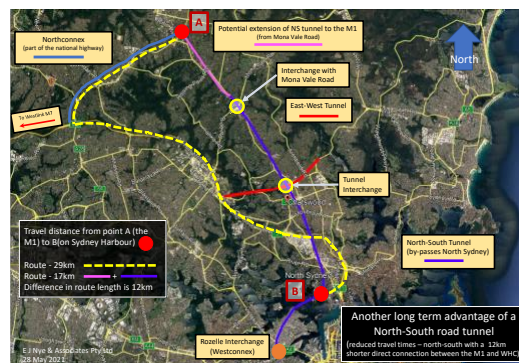
It is shocking that a public, legislated process has been so compromised that the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer has to call it out.

<https://committeefornorthsydney.org.au/docs/#ChiefScientist>

(iv) Lack of comprehensive planning, lack of a regional strategy: the tunnels do not solve the well-understood transport issues of the North Shore, and set back alternative transport solutions for the peninsula.

The Beaches Link was sold to the North Shore electorate as a solution to congestion on Military Road. The EIS makes it clear that any relief is minor and transitory. Besides, within a decade of the BL being built, the impacts of traffic on Military Road (electric, smart, safer and calmer) will be far less than they are today. So the BL is not only ‘a road to nowhere’, it is the wrong answer to a temporary problem. If it were needed, the responses to the BL EIS would be very different: see (i) above.

Many transport planners and others agree with Ted Nye, that the peninsula needs better public transport and an east-west connection into the regional highway system, while the mid North Shore needs a north-south connection, ultimately to the M1. The east-west tunnel would interchange with the north-south tunnel near Chatswood. Ted Nye’s submission to the Inquiry (see the map to the right) has well-informed proposals that must be considered in a rethink of the WHT and BL.



It is shocking and unacceptable that a proper planning process, with independent expertise and peer review, has not been undertaken before at least \$20 billion is committed to transport infrastructure for one sector of the Sydney region.

2 Why is the NSW Government about to write off the North Sydney city centre as a viable component of the ‘Harbour City’ in contradiction to the Greater Sydney strategy?

The Greater Sydney Commission has determined that the two city centres of Sydney and North Sydney constitute the ‘Harbour CBD’. The trajectory that North Sydney is on will offer alternative and diverse economic, cultural and urban opportunities for the region, in a great location with excellent accessibility. A rapidly improving environment for pedestrians, as in Sydney, is essential for this future. One of the justifications for the tunnels, according to the Greater Sydney Commission, is that they will ‘reduce through traffic in the Harbour CBD’ ([source](#)). That’s true, for Sydney. It’s the opposite in North Sydney.

The North Sydney Council has plans to reduce through traffic in the city centre and to reduce the arterial function of Berry Street. Council officers are in talks with the NSW Transport Department to provide or improve access to the two tunnels from the southern end of the Pacific Highway.

Unfortunately the threat to the city centre comes from an extraordinary flaw in the planning of the tunnels: the plans provide no access to the tunnels from the arterial roads where the traffic already is, and where anyone wanting to use the tunnels would want access.

In turn, the failure to provide proper arterial-road access to the tunnels comes from the equally extraordinary decision to feed both tunnels into the middle of the Warringah Freeway, already one of Australia’s biggest, busiest, most complex roads, and one of the places with the worst air pollution (see (iii) above).

The consequences for the North Sydney city centre are intolerable. The EISs and North Sydney Council’s submission to the WHT EIS recognise that most intersections will fail. Of course they will: peak period traffic from across the Lower North Shore will have to fight its way to the city centre and queue through multiple intersections to join traffic in the Warringah Freeway and then on to one or other tunnel. Over the page, we show ‘Before’ the tunnels, and ‘After’.

For the NSW Government, the entire North Sydney city centre is to be a freeway interchange.

There are already two major interchanges on the Warringah Freeway: at High Street-Pacific Highway, and around Miller Street and Falcon Street-Military Road. Access to both tunnels can be provided at both intersections, where traffic wants access, instead of forcing the traffic to divert to and through the city centre – inevitably looking for rat runs and local streets to avoid the heavy traffic fighting its way to Berry Street.

New points of access will be difficult and expensive to build – but that is because these tunnels were chosen in this form and on these alignments. Instead of a half-finished design, bedevilled by the complexities of the Warringah Freeway, construction should not begin until proper access is provided. If the many other flaws in this proposal are resolved (see 1 above) there will be time and resources to address this critical, regionally-significant issue.

BEFORE

This is the intended future of Berry Street: a people-friendly, sunny, leafy city street in the heart of the city centre, at the new Victoria Cross Metro station. This is essential following the massive increases in office floorspace built and planned, and tens of thousands of new workers in the city centre.



AFTER

This is the result of the failure to provide normal access to the tunnels from arterial roads: four one-way lanes of heavy congested traffic fighting its way onto the Warringah Freeway, to access the Western Harbour Tunnel, the Beaches Link, the Bridge, the Gore Hill Freeway and all points beyond.

