

ITEM 3.5. WESTCONNEX**FILE NO: S051491****MINUTE BY THE LORD MAYOR**To Council:

Failure to build essential transport infrastructure is frequently identified as the greatest obstacle to Sydney delivering on its potential, so new transport to get our city moving is a priority.

Congestion currently costs Sydney over \$5 billion annually and that is projected to double by 2021. A recent conference linked the amount of time people spent in traffic with health effects such as obesity.

However, decisions about what infrastructure to build and where to build it must flow from a coherent, publicly accepted plan. Housing development, transport, education, health and jobs need to be considered together in a transparent process based on credible evidence and good long-term planning.

I am extremely concerned that the State Government's WestConnex motorway project is increasingly disconnected from any freight and urban renewal rationale; is being rapidly progressed without sufficient public information or consultation to adequately assess the extent of its impact; and could undermine Sydney's future prosperity and liveability.

WestConnex Project

WestConnex was announced in the State Infrastructure Strategy 2012-2032 ("First Things First") to integrate an M4 extension, M5 East expansion and inner west bypass.

The project was originally framed as a single integrated scheme with dual objectives:

- To link Sydney with its international gateways at Port Botany and Sydney Airport, and enable efficient transfer of freight to Western Sydney and regional areas.
- To support the transformation and urban regeneration of the Parramatta Road corridor and secure public transport improvements.

The project has changed significantly since its announcement in 2012.

The new M5 is stage 2 of the WestConnex project to be completed by 2019, alongside the M4 (Stage 1, Parramatta to Haberfield), and before the M4-M5 link from Haberfield to St Peters (Stage 3), which is scheduled to be completed by 2023.

Last week, the NSW Government announced changes to stage 3 to bring the motorway closer to the CBD by linking the M4 with Victoria Road and the ANZAC Bridge. No further information about the impact of this change, particularly on the connection to the airport and Port Botany, is available.

A major new interchange at St Peters for the M5 expansion is expected to require the widening of Campbell Street and Euston Road to four lanes, including loss of parkland, and the creation of a major new road across Alexandra Canal to Bourke Road and Gardeners Road.

Based on the information available, the project is fundamentally motorway widening and extensions. Financing is based on private vehicle tolls and the roads are expected to carry more than 90 per cent private traffic. This reflects concerns previously raised by Infrastructure Australia that motorways proposed as freight routes are being designed for private traffic.

There will be tunnels, ramps, portals, ventilation stacks and four lane roads with fast moving traffic on peoples' doorsteps. The WestConnex Delivery Authority has indicated that a ventilation stack is likely to be located at the St Peters end of the tunnel.

As WestConnex will be a tolled motorway, further growth in surface traffic through local neighbourhoods is likely, especially where there is surface road widening, clearways and changes to signalised intersections to increase capacity.

The Commonwealth Government has committed \$1.5 billion funding and is providing a \$2 billion concessional loan for the project. The NSW Government will contribute \$1.8 billion. This totals \$5.3 billion committed to date for the project.

The initial estimate for the project was \$10 billion, although City staff have recently been told the project is expected to cost up to \$15 billion for all three stages. State 3 funding has been reported to be dependent on the State Government's proposal to sell assets.

The WestConnex proposal raises serious concerns that need to be addressed.

No connection to port or airport

The project was created as a freight solution and the Project Overview forecasts daily trucks movements to Port Botany will more than triple between 2011 and 2030. There will be a near doubling in the number of airport passengers.

However, the current proposals are not connected to the port and airport. The important link to Port Botany and Sydney Airport (known as the 'Sydney Gateway') is currently unfunded and there are no guarantees the project will be built by the scheduled completion date of 2023.

Disconnected from urban renewal

The WestConnex project has been separated from the proposed housing, public transport and economic benefits that might be secured from the renewal of Parramatta Road. Work on Parramatta Road is being undertaken by UrbanGrowth NSW, while the motorway is being developed by the WestConnex Delivery Authority.

As the Committee for Sydney recently reported, the arrangement separates the project investment from the housing and economic benefits along the Parramatta Road corridor that were to be the project's driver.

At a NSW Parliament transport summit on 2 December, former Premier Nick Greiner and former Sydney Lord Mayor Lucy Turnbull both expressed concern that the Westconnex project had become disconnected from new housing and urban renewal.

Increased Congestion

The WestConnex Business Case Executive Summary states that the project will improve motorway access for origins and destinations in the CBD, directing increased traffic onto already congested inner city arterial roads and residential streets. The proposed portal at St Peters, in particular, will deliver thousands more cars onto streets the City's southern suburbs, which are already overloaded and physically constrained.

Traffic modelling forecasts and the expected additional traffic on local roads have not been provided.

In the absence of the Sydney Gateway link to Sydney Airport and the M4-M5 link, there will be substantial traffic overflowing into King Street Newtown (one of Sydney's most successful and liveable main streets) and other surrounding local streets and neighbourhoods in St Peters, Alexandria, Green Square and Erskineville.

The adjacent urban renewal areas at Green Square and Ashmore, which are expected to grow by 50,000 and 6,300 more residents by 2023 respectively, will be particularly impacted. There is no evidence that traffic modelling has addressed impacts on this precinct in the light of existing inadequate public transport and roads that are at capacity.

Extending light rail to Green Square is a priority to meet the needs of this existing urban renewal area project.

Impact on Sydney Park

The major new motorway interchange at St Peters will result in the widening of Euston Road to four lanes and the loss of landscaped parkland 12 metres wide along Euston Road.

Sydney Park, the significant regional park for increasing numbers of inner city families, will be effectively surrounded by major four lane highways on all sides, potentially reducing pedestrian access from surrounding residential areas.

Over the past decade, the City of Sydney has invested millions of dollars transforming the former waste dump into a major regional park. Nearby residents should be able to walk or cycle to their local park without long detours or overhead walkways to navigate motorway ramps and access roads.

Inadequate project information

The first stage of the WestConnex is underway and the tender process, including design development, ***is running in parallel with the planning approval process.*** The WestConnex Delivery Authority has reported that the design of the tunnel portals at Beverly Hills and St Peters is well advanced.

The NSW Government expects to select a preferred tenderer and design in mid-2015, ***before the release of the Environmental Impact Statement in late 2015.*** This means that contracts could be signed determining the location of portals, ventilation stacks, tunnel alignments and other important details before the Environmental Impact Statement is publicly released. The published business case summary does not contain usage estimates, which are critical to determine impacts on local streets.

It appears that the timing could prevent any significant modifications to the proposal as a result of community feedback raised in the planning process. Alternative public transport and rail solutions have not been adequately considered.

The State Government must provide local councils and the community with sufficient information to assess the project before signing key contracts - traffic modelling and impact analysis, the full business case, the location of stacks and portals, the role of the private sector, and the impacts on local streets and neighbourhoods.

Conclusion

What is being proposed is a standard motorway that will relocate and compound congestion by disgorging thousands of cars onto already overloaded, physically constrained and congested inner city streets, creating serious impacts for residents and businesses.

The lesson from cities globally is that the urgent priority for Sydney is more transport choice and investment in public transport. We need to free up our roads and find more efficient solutions for business, services, deliveries and freight. Building more and larger motorways is a short-term fix that creates rather than solving congestion.

RECOMMENDATION

It is resolved that Council:

- (A) note that, based on the inadequate information currently available about the proposed WestConnex project, the stated objectives of the project – additional freight capacity and urban renewal - will not be achieved;
- (B) note that the project as currently configured and funded will have unacceptable impacts on the City of Sydney, including:
 - (i) massively expanding private vehicle traffic flowing into already congested inner west streets; and
 - (ii) destroying sections of Sydney Park, an important and much loved regional park;
- (C) request that the Lord Mayor write to the Premier and the Minister for Roads informing them that, for the reasons outlined above, Council opposes the WestConnex project in its current form and requests them to:
 - (i) revisit the configuration of the project in the context of its stated objectives;
 - (ii) defer any moves to finalise tenders or contracts for the project until standard planning and approvals processes are complete;
 - (iii) publicly release all relevant information associated with the project including the full business case, all traffic modelling and impact assessments, and the proposed locations of portals and ventilation stacks;
 - (iv) release information on any further potential road widening, clearways and changes to signalised intersections within the City of Sydney; and
 - (v) establish an ongoing working group consisting of the WestConnex Delivery Authority and the City of Sydney to share information, resolve identified problems and develop alternative solutions where necessary; and

- (D) request the Chief Executive Officer prepare an independent assessment of the impacts of the proposed WestConnex project on the City of Sydney, including traffic modelling and the feasibility of alternatives such as rail freight linking Port Botany and Sydney Airport to the western suburbs.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor