



## PEOPLES WESTCONNEX INQUIRY

NSW PARLIAMENT, JUBILEE ROOM - Friday 6 May, 10am – 2pm

### Session 1: Liveable Cities - WestConnex impacts on our suburbs and city

**Jude Page, NSW Committee President, Public Health Association of Australia**

Thank you, Jenny, and I have also been introduced as Jude Law [laughter]. I'd also like to thank Jenny and the Greens for organising today and pay my respects to the Gadigal Elders and particularly those here today.

The way cities are designed has a huge impact on people's health. As we know, Sydney is one of the world's most beautiful cities and if Venetians were in charge, we might be complaining about the number of gondolas and ferries on Parramatta River and the 10 million-plus tourists each year, but let's look towards LA and their romance with the automobile. The people of New South Wales can look at LA motorways and only imagine our future. The World Health Organisation Healthy Cities Project advises that the health and quality of life of citizens needs to be given priority in urban planning, not as a peripheral activity, but where the needs of the people and their families are at the centre of urban planning. So the way we build cities affects our health, and you may have heard that Melbourne Uni have identified some links between health and urban design which is linked to the liveability indices. People who live in disadvantaged areas with poor design can expect to live ten years less than their neighbours five kilometres away who have more liveable communities, so liveability requires integrated planning across all levels of government for better outcomes at a local level. It's environmentally sustainable, it's safe, it's socially cohesive and it is well-designed. We can safely walk or cycle to public transport. So communities know what makes communities work and they're the ones that have to live with the consequences.

So who will be the winners and losers from this infrastructure project? Our reliance on cars comes at a cost. Air pollution will be one of our biggest killers this generation, so particulate matter, known as PM2.5, for example, are tiny particles that you breathe in and they lodge deep in your lungs and into your bloodstream and they can be carcinogenic, or cancer-causing. They also increase your risk of stroke, asthma and heart problems, and in cities, they come from diesel engines and road dust—for example, bits from brake pad—and other car by-products. So, more pollution means more strokes, more asthma and more respiratory illness. There's no safe level of these particulate matter and they mostly affect, or affects are mostly seen in children and older people.

So obviously WestConnex will increase road use—that's not up for debate—more cars driving further, more and more pollution, and with 33 kilometres of tunnels, the pollution will be redistributed with some people better off and some people probably worse off. The tunnels themselves, the entry and exit points and emission stacks are likely to have higher



levels of vehicle emissions, and this is difficult to prove because the modelling is questionable and, importantly, when the cars and trucks leave the tunnels, they have to go somewhere, and there will be more vehicles on roads and higher pollution and then they'll need to park somewhere, and I know others will talk more about that.

But Sydney will be one of the most tolled roads in the world. By 2021, according to the WestConnex modelling, drivers will spend more on tolls than ticket sales from the entire Sydney rail network. Some roads that are currently free, will cost, and tolls will hurt the average family. The University of Sydney found there is a point at which people can no longer afford to use toll roads and according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the median income for people in Greater Western Sydney is around \$40,000 a year, with half of the population earning less than \$600 a week and about one-third earning over \$800 a week. After living expenses, few could afford \$90 a week to drive to work on those tolls, so spending on decent food, the dentist and health would suffer.

So in some ... the impacts of infrastructure should be properly assessed, including the impact on people's health and wellbeing, as should alternatives such as rail, and the cost of WestConnex on health systems and local communities in the current form is likely to be enormous. And I'd just like to end with some wise words from Dr John Kaye, who said last year, "If you can't build infrastructure safely, then don't build it." Thank you.