



PEOPLES WESTCONNEX INQUIRY

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

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

Pauline Lockie, spokesperson, WestConnex Action Group

Thanks, Jenny, and thank you to you and the Greens for your continuing support in our opposition to WestConnex, as well as for organising today to give communities a voice. What I'd like to talk about today is why our campaign to stop WestConnex is about more than just stopping a toll road. It's about what kind of city we want to create and how we go about creating it. Many of you here will have heard of Jane Jacobs, who would have turned 100 this week. She of course, was the wonderful but ordinary citizen who helped save much of Lower Manhattan from freeway destruction in the 1950s and 1960s. She said that cities have the capability of providing for everybody only because, and only when, they are created by everybody. Of course, this is the very opposite of what we're seeing with WestConnex.

We've got a situation where as taxpayers, we are being forced to hand over billions of dollars to private companies to build the thing because after successive tollway failures, including the Cross-city and Lane Cove Tunnels, no private company will touch it. Yet there has been no transparency around this huge hand-over of public funds into private hands, as the Baird government has refused to release the full and un-redacted Business Case and has handed over responsibility for building WestConnex to the Sydney Motorway Corporation, a private company that's unaccountable to the public.

Construction contracts were signed and thousands of people forced from their homes and businesses before any planning approvals were granted and we now know that companies that won these contracts, including Leighton and Samsung, have been engaging in massive corruption to win similar contracts overseas. And far from being a project that was created by everybody, community consultation on WestConnex has just been a series of box-ticking exercises rather than a genuine attempt to find out what people need and designing solutions to cater for that.

Even when people sent in record-breaking numbers of submissions opposing WestConnex, the Baird government barely broke stride as it rushed to rubber-stamp these projects. This complete breakdown in transparency and democracy is now forcing residents to engage in civil disobedience to stop WestConnex before we all pay for it through tolls and taxes and pollution and destruction. It shouldn't be this way and for this alone, we deserve a full public inquiry into WestConnex.



But we should also be demanding better when it comes to the kind of city we want to create because there are not many world cities nowadays that still regard building huge destructive motorways that dump thousands of cars into the inner city, as progress. The idea that you can build roads to solve congestion has been tested to destruction and the proof of this can actually be seen in WestConnex's design. Most of it duplicates roads we already have, like the M4, the M5 East, the City-West Link, which in turn were once touted as solutions to congestion on other roads and now, of course, Sydney's traffic is still in gridlock.

And of course, motorways like WestConnex cause other huge problems—pollution-related diseases, climate change, inefficient sprawl, community destruction, environmental destruction, lost opportunities to build knowledge economies, loss of the vibrant city centres people want to call 'home'—the list just goes on. And it's for this reason that cities such as Seoul, Paris, New York, San Francisco are now tearing down their freeways instead of building new ones because what they're finding is this doesn't cause traffic chaos, instead it reduces traffic as people switch to other modes of transport and these former roads become spaces for people again and not cars.

Now if Sydney were to combine an approach like that with other initiatives, such as better public transport, better cycling and walking facilities, proper investment in creating jobs and vibrant centres in our west, then we could have the beginnings of a wonderful new vision for our city. It would cost a whole less than \$16.8 billion, too.

Now, I don't believe it's too late to stop WestConnex and start moving towards this kind of vision for Sydney, but we've got to act now, because if we don't stop WestConnex, we won't just end up with a gigantic white elephant of a tollway that's destroyed vibrant communities and sold people in Western Sydney out to toll road operators, if the Baird government gets away with this, it's going to become the way things are done in New South Wales, with no transparency, no accountability, no consultation and no long-term benefit for anyone except the companies that are paid billions of public dollars to build it, and that's no way to create a liveable city for anyone. Thank you.