



## PEOPLES WESTCONNEX INQUIRY

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

### Session 2: Transport - WestConnex modelling, transport issues and alternatives

**Dr Mehreen Faruqi MLC**

Thank you so much Jenny and for that vote of confidence as well. Good morning everyone. I'll start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land we are gathered on and pay my respects to the elders, past and present. This land always has been and always will be Aboriginal land.

As many of you here know, when I entered Parliament almost three years ago, this WestConnex project or rather, unravelling the WestConnex project, has been a real passion of mine. And, if a twenty five career in engineering has taught me anything, it's this: That substance matters far more than spin. That nice brochures and expensive animated fly-through videos do not make a good plan or a good project. Good projects are made by doing the modelling, by doing the homework, by actually working out the numbers, by looking at the evidence, by exploring alternatives and by talking to communities about what they want and what they need.

In this place however and I have to unfortunately come to that conclusion, more often than not, facts are made dispensable and evidence really does become the casualty of very narrow political mandates. And the horror story of WestConnex which you are very familiar with is probably the worst example of this but it is also emblematic of New South Wales governments' thinking, more generally, on transport planning and how radically different this thinking and this point of view is from what we actually need to live good quality lives, healthy lives and prosperous lives. The secrecy surrounding transport decisions is not creating just a democratic deficit but it's also becoming a very expensive strategy for the people of New South Wales.

You know, the now infamous Tibby Cotter Bridge started off at ten million, ended up being forty million. The CBD light rail project stands to be a good public transport project if it had been implemented well. Already has a half billion dollar cost blowout and of course, WestConnex. Originally budgeted for ten billion, now almost seventeen billion dollars and it's quite clear just like WestConnex will be a disaster for the environment, for the community and for transport. It will also be a complete economic basket case.

As Jenny alluded to, according to the tolling numbers that I've done, it's going to be a financial disaster much worse than the Lane Cove Tunnel or the Cross City Tunnel. And because the government refused to release any sound or credible data, about eighteen months ago, I decided to do my own financial modelling and I set out some very conservative assumptions and parameters about rate of returns, used some standard



engineering calculations for maintenance and operating costs. Long story short, I basically found that it didn't add up at all. In fact, my analysis that was eventually published by the Fin Review, found that the toll cap for WestConnex road users would have to be a minimum of twenty six dollars just for the government to break even. This is almost triple the toll cap that the government has announced and this creates a massive half a billion dollar hole annually. And who's going to pay that money? It's not going to be the private tolling companies. It's either going to come out of people who use that road or it's going to come out of all of you, the taxpayers of New South Wales. And these numbers, their financial modelling, remember it was eighteen months ago, it was based on the \$11.5 billion cost of WestConnex which has now been known to \$17 billion so obviously they are going to be even higher.

So two things will happen - they will discourage people from using that billions of dollars worth of toll road or we'll have to bail out the private tolling companies who will, in the end, be the beneficiaries of this work and they are already making huge billions of dollars of profit every year, we know that.

What the modelling also shows though is that the WestConnex toll road will make money on the M4 but it actually loses out money on other sections. For example, what's called the Stage 3 St Peters to Parramatta Road, and this does really raise questions and speculations about whether that section will ever be built at all which would mean that Sydney will be even further gridlocked than it is now and keep sucking money out from much needed public transport.

And I guess the biggest beef that I have with this toll road is also that there are well-thought through plans for effective, efficient and integrated public transport that exist like the Inner West light rail... you know, building park and ride facilities, fast tracking cycleway programs, buying back the Airport line, and scrapping the thirteen dollar access fee for instance, but the government doesn't want to use these plans and that's the question: Why doesn't the government want to invest in these programs?

So one answer is no doubt it's a case of a gambler's addiction to roads but there is more to it than that. Their so-called transport planning is not transport planning at all. It's an agenda led by big money and the insatiable appetite to privatise and sell off New South Wales.

And this is a real toxic mix that we have to stand up and challenge. What we really need to do is also for more politicians to develop more of a spine. To stand up for what is right and to listen to the public. If we are to deliver a sustainable transport agenda and work for the people and the environment and the future of New South Wales, we need the same courage that you all are showing in the streets and parks of Sydney. And to demonstrate that courage more widely in Parliament. Thank you.