



## PEOPLES WESTCONNEX INQUIRY

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

### Session 4: Governance - WestConnex planning, contracts and business case

**Jo Haylen MP, Member for Summer Hill**

Thank you, Jenny, and good afternoon everyone. I want to acknowledge that we meet on the land of the Gadigal Wangal people and I pay my respects to their Elders, past and present. I want to thank Jenny for coordinating the People's Inquiry today. There has been a desperate need to get this information together, to have it on the public record, and I think this is a wonderful initiative, and thank Jenny very much. We've had somewhat sort of parallel paths here in New South Wales Parliament and we've been fighting the Government on a range of issues and of course, mostly fighting against WestConnex.

The destruction which started in Haberfield and Ashfield this week is just devastating and I want to thank the residents who have taken a stand, who have been there last weekend and some weekends before, trying to protect these heritage houses in our communities. Like you, I'm deeply concerned about the impacts of WestConnex and that's why today is really important. We need to put people back into the equation. The Baird Government has completely cloaked this project in secrecy. They've refused to justify the expenditure of \$16.8 billion of public money. Most galling of all they have wilfully ignored the concerns of residents—wilfully ignored thousands of submissions and people and your voices, again and again.

I want to use my time here today to put on the record some of the key violations of good governance when it comes to WestConnex. This is by no means a definitive list, but I think it might help frame some of the discussion this afternoon. Confusion and chaos have been at the centre of WestConnex from the very beginning.

Wendy went a little bit further back, and I'm sure you could go decades back, but I'm going to start in 2013 when the WestConnex Delivery Authority was formed to construct, finance and manage the project, but it was sidelined, of course, a year later with the creation of the Sydney Motorway Corporation. In that process, the Chief Executive of RMS and the Secretary of Transport New South Wales were ousted, meaning that the State's largest infrastructure project—sorry, largest transport project—was no longer being overseen by Transport officials.

The Office of the Auditor-General slammed the early governance of the project, arguing that, and I quote: "There were a number of deficiencies in the governance and independence assurance over the early stages of WestConnex project. The process as applied to WestConnex to provide independent assurance to governance did not meet best practice standards."



The Report also noted an inappropriate lack of Gateway Reviews and conflicts of interest in providing assurance and also criticised the first Business Case noting it, quote: “had many deficiencies and fell well short of the standard required for such a document.” That’s basically a bureaucratic way of saying it was a complete mess. The Updated Business Case, of course, was released the day before Parliament rose last year, again shielding it from any public and Parliamentary scrutiny.

The Government handed responsibility for WestConnex to the City Motorway Corporation, a private entity, excluding the project from the Government Information Public Access Act that’s FOIs. This means that despite being built with \$16.8 billion of our public money, the community can’t access crucial information about its governance and operations. The Shadow Minister for Transport, Jodi McKay, Member for Strathfield, introduced a Bill to reverse this decision and ensure that WestConnex would be subject to Freedom of Information requests. The Greens, Labour and Independents of course supported this Bill—the Government, unsurprisingly, did not.

Labour and Anthony Albanese, the Member for Grayndler, have called for a full national audit conducted by the National Auditor-General, obviously citing the multi-billion dollar cost blow-outs as proof of very poor planning, to say the least.

Last month, I wrote to the Senate Economics References Committee urging them to investigate allegations of corruption at Leighton Holdings and their involvement in WestConnex. We know the Leighton’s group is involved in all three Stages so far of the project, and we have a right to know whether these allegations have any bearing. My letter was referred to the Committee and evidence will be taken on the matter but of course we have a Federal election intervening, but I do have commitments from Senators of multiple political persuasions in Canberra that any reconvened Committee post-election, regardless of the result, will continue to take up the issues. We absolutely have the right to know whether or not the evidence received by this Committee of corruption allegations in their off-shore practises are indicative of a broader cultural practise within the Leightons Holdings Group. I’ll be moving a motion in the New South Wales Parliament calling for all work to stop, pending an investigation into these matters.

Most galling for all of us has been the utter disregard of the Government towards local residents throughout this whole project. I’ve sat in people’s kitchens, like I’m sure many of the other MPs have done, and local representatives, and those residents have told us how WestConnex has robbed them of everything.



The truth is that the chaos and failure in Government have a real and devastating impact on people. Acquisitions in Ashfield and Haberfield have been shambolic, to say the least, with home owners forced to accept offers hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth less than their properties are worth, meaning basically they can't buy in the area; they can't stay in their community. Acquisitions began before the project was even given planning approval, before an EIS was released, or even a Business Case was made public.

In my mind, the EIS was an empty gesture towards consultation. The Government offered little mitigation for residents, even though there were a number of very, very sensible and reasonable suggestions; very little of them were taken up. They ignored the community's fundamental opposition to the project. The consistent lack of information has caused debilitating stress and anxiety for residents. Last week, Haberfield residents were reportedly told only days before construction ... they're calling it 'clearing of houses' but basically demolition of houses was to begin in their back yards. I am pursuing a series of complaints that conditions of approval have already been breached.

The Government continues to reject calls for a Public Inquiry and it's pretty obvious why, because we know a Public Inquiry would show gross mismanagement, deception and secrecy and utter arrogance in pushing through a project without any public support or justification.

Look, I want to thank you all so much for being here today, to be giving a real honest appraisal of this project, and I want to assure you all I will continue to fight alongside with you.