

PREMIER'S ELECTORATE SUBMITS PETITION WITH 10,000+ SIGNATURES TO STOP THE WESTERN HARBOUR AND BEACHES LINK TUNNELS 26th May 2020

A petition started in the Premier's electorate of Willoughby has gained momentum as new information has come to light about the huge impact of the Western Harbour and Beaches Link Tunnel projects. Community groups across the Inner West, North Shore, Willoughby and Beaches have been carefully researching and assessing the impact of the proposed tunnel projects and there are substantial concerns.

"We knew even from the very beginning of the project proposal that there was going to be significant impacts," said community spokesperson Larissa Penn. "We were surprised by the chosen route which cuts through residential areas dense with schools and sensitive catchment zones."

The tunnel route runs along the largest school district in Australia – more than 26 schools sit along the tunnel route and dozens of pre-schools and child care centres all stand to be impacted in one form or another.

"The EIS vastly underestimates risk with the number of children in schools being assumed to have only 100 pupils whereas most schools sit somewhere between 600-1000 on the North Shore."

Community groups are concerned that construction vehicles will be moving and parking in and around thousands of school children whilst carrying dangerous goods and potentially contaminated spoil for the 5 or more years over which the project will take place. More than 4000 construction movements per day will be needed across the North Shore including a vast amount of night work due to the need to completely reconfigure the Warringah Freeway. More than a dozen support sites will be built - removing hundreds of trees, bushland and precious green spaces which are already in very short supply across the area, particularly for children.

"The prospect is just frightening in high density areas where children are moving between home, school and sport. We have estimated that over 10,000 children will be directly impacted by noise, dust and serious loss of amenity. To make matters worse, these are very old areas of Sydney and a risk of contamination has been identified by the government - further testing commenced after the close of consultation"

"The long-term outcomes are not much better for communities across the route, the projects will create more local traffic and increased pollution around schools, homes and parks. Parents and school communities find it hard to accept these risks when alternatives such as public transport solutions have not even been considered"

"We communicated our concerns to Transport for NSW during the initial consultation period and both the Premier and Felicity Wilson MP have received thousands of letters of objection to the plans but it is clear that these have not been listened to. The 9000+ page EIS for the Western Harbour Tunnel and Warringah Freeway Upgrade was released as the COVID-19 crisis broke. The timing of consultation and complexity made it very difficult for school communities to engage in genuine consultation and our requests to suspend were dismissed"

"The thought of coming out of COVID-19 and into a poorly consulted, high impact 5-6 year construction project, is just frightening. We need to see the business case for this project and have time for proper consultation including substantial amendment. Our community groups were formed to ensure that the voice of those who are most impacted by the tunnel project - is heard. We want to see due consideration given to our very large residential and school communities and that may mean investing in healthier, more viable solutions for all. Ultimately we are rightly asking is a supposed ten minute time saving (born by yet another expensive toll road for Sydney) worth handing over the childhoods of a generation and the future of our local communities for?"

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