



Media release: 26 February, 2015

For immediate release

Public Meeting Rejects WestConnex

150 people at a public meeting in Earlwood last night overwhelmingly (one dissenting vote) rejected any government investment in the WestConnex toll road project, calling instead for priority to be given to public transport, and insisting that local bushland and other green space be preserved.

The meeting heard that M5E (WestConnex stage 2) route decisions will be made by the Government selecting one of the options suggested by project tenderers. Once selected, the public will have no say in the route decision or the location of emission stacks. There is no information on where tunnel boring will occur, where portals and ramps will be, and whether homes will be resumed. Also at stake is part of the regionally significant Wolli Valley bushland, threatened with destruction under previous RTA proposals.

Mat Hounsell of community group NoW Public Transport outlined the links between the WestConnex toll road and the Government's Urban Activation program, with likely high-rise development in a corridor along the Illawarra line affecting, among other suburbs, Banksia, Arncliffe and Turrella. "Right before Xmas, the Government announced the takeover of Banksia and Arncliffe for a so-called 'urban activation precinct', hot on the heels of revealing its little publicised plan for three new motorways through southern Sydney," Mr Hounsell said. In his view "If the Government is not promoting its agenda it cannot claim a mandate for these things."

Gavin Gatenby of EcoTransit Sydney showed that there are more efficient and less costly public transport alternatives to duplication of the M5E for carrying commuters along the south-west corridor. In Mr Gatenby's view: "It's crazy policy to spend \$15 billion on a massive tollway system just for a handful of peak-period motorists. Commuters are turning to public transport in unprecedented numbers and our rail system is bursting at the seams in the peaks. For a fraction of the cost of WestConnex we could build a public transport and freight rail system that would cause a dramatic fall in road traffic."

Peter Stevens of the Wolli Creek Preservation Society, which called the meeting reported that in a WCPS survey of ALP, Liberal and Green candidates for the State seats surrounding the Wolli Valley, only the Greens rejected the WestConnex project outright, support substantially increased investment in public transport to address Sydney's congestion issues.

The survey of candidates in Heffron, Newtown, Rockdale, Kogarah, Oatley, Lakemba, Canterbury, and Summer Hill was poorly responded to by Liberals; those who did supported WestConnex but one wanted strong controls to minimise damage to bushland.

Some ALP candidates had difficulty responding ahead of party policy announcements, but they tended on the whole to support WestConnex, while wanting to prevent any impact on Wolli Valley and creek.

"The ALP's formal position on transport and roads issues has committed to finding a new route for the M5E section, avoiding bushland, and to holding an open process to assess it" said Mr Stevens "This may or may not protect the bushland, but at this stage there are clear choices facing local electors concerned about the social, environmental and budgetary impacts of proceeding with WestConnex."

Concerns raised by those attending included health impacts of exhaust stacks, details of ALP policy, and whether the alternative proposals presented had been provided to the parties.

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