

8.1. MM01: Call on State Government to implement urgent design changes to the WFU/WHT projects to avoid another Rozelle Interchange disaster

The opening of the Westconnex Rozelle Interchange has, unsurprisingly, resulted in traffic chaos on local roads. Watching the impacts is a glimpse into both the past and the future for North Sydney residents. For almost eight years, since the announcement of the Western Harbour Tunnel (WHT)/ Warringah Freeway Upgrade (WFU), and Northern Beaches Link (NBL) major road projects, we have been predicting that these “roads to nowhere” will funnel increased traffic on local roads into the same traffic “pinch points” of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, Sydney Harbour Tunnel, and a new toll road, magnifying and increasing existing traffic congestion.

Without urgent modifications and amendments to the design of the WHT/WFU projects, the Rozelle Interchange disaster will be repeated throughout the North Sydney local government area. From Military Road, Ernest, Falcon, and Miller Streets to the Pacific Highway, Blues Point Road, and Berry Street (and all roads leading to those arteries), local roads will be choked with cars and trucks trying to merge into unchanged lanes to the Harbour Bridge.

We, as a community, have been sounding the alarm on the inevitable impacts of these projects since the announcement in 2016. Indeed, Council’s submissions on the WHT/WFU projects concluded, in relation to traffic impacts, that:

The project will see significant net additional traffic on Berry Street, Miller Street, Falcon Street and Pacific Highway (south of Falcon Street) as well as significant reductions in levels of service (i.e. greater waiting times) at several key intersections. The suggested traffic volume increases and network changes are such that numerous State and Local initiatives will either be unable to occur or require significant amendment.

<https://www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au/ecm/download/document-9125585>

Since then, the State Government has cancelled the Northern Beaches Link project. The NBL was the justification for the extension of Westconnex with the WHT project. Circumstances have changed significantly as a result of the cancellation of the project, yet the State Government has not contemplated any consequential amendments to the WHT/WFU.

As Inner West Mayor, Councillor Darcy Byrne, put it:

the traffic chaos caused by the completion of WestConnex and the opening of the Rozelle Interchange is exactly what we have predicted would occur and must be addressed as a matter of urgency. For more than a decade Council has warned that funnelling massively increased traffic flows to the ANZAC Bridge would create a tunnel to a traffic jam. The former Perrottet Government stated repeatedly that traffic flows on Victoria Road would be reduced by 50% when the interchange opened, a claim that is laughable now. Worse still, discovered after the change of Government, that there was not a single dollar in the Budget for the reconfiguration of Victoria Road. Council is instead calling for the complete and transparent disclosure of the traffic data for Victoria Road and the City West Link and

an immediate review of the lane configurations. The massive impact on our local traffic network is unacceptable and cannot be ignored.

<https://www.innerwest.nsw.gov.au/about/news/media-releases/2023-media-releases/rozelle-interchange-public-meeting-called>

Traffic experts continue to criticise the poor planning and inevitability of the Westconnex impacts. For example, in *Rozelle Interchange design issues will be a problem for Sydney's future, experts say* (ABC, 5 December 2023), a number of eminent traffic engineering experts re-state their concerns that have previously been raised (and ignored) by experts, councils, and communities since the announcement of these major road projects: they significantly increase traffic congestion on local roads once opened.

..traffic expert Mathew Hounsell said any solutions put forward would see little or temporary changes in conditions. "The fundamental issue is you still have more cars trying to get on the Anzac Bridge than the total capacity for that to move," he said. ...

Christopher Standen, an urban transport and planning expert with the University of NSW, said the interchange was emblematic of poor infrastructure planning in Australia. "It was always clear that it would be a disaster for Sydney and that's played out," he said. "There were votes to be had in making it easier for people in outer suburbs to drive into the city, even though that's not a great thing from an urban planning perspective. "The last thing we should be doing is building roads that encourage people to drive more and to move further away from work, so encouraging urban sprawl and low-density development."

Mr Hounsell said the lane design should have been addressed in the early planning stages of the interchange. "The three-lane to one-lane merge should never have gotten past the design stage," he said. "And that 400 metres will probably reduce the problem but it's only alleviating the symptoms." The state government has insisted that congestion will ease as time goes on, but the addition of the Western Harbour Tunnel in a few years' time could make things worse. "It's going to put even more traffic when that opens in a few years' time," Mr Hounsell said."

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-12-05/nsw-rozelle-interchange-design-experts/103186410>

It is vital that the State Government urgently act now to amend the WHT/WFU project design to address the inevitable devastating traffic impacts of merging multiple lanes into the same "pinch points" and the impacts of the opening of the welcome and exceptional public transport project, the Metro, in 2024, and the cancellation of the NBL project.

I therefore recommend:

1. THAT Council call on the State Government to:

- (a) commission new traffic modelling to replace the outdated 2015 modelling provided with the EIS and which recognises the impacts of the cancellation of the Beaches Link and imminent opening of the Metro;

- (b) prepare a new business case reflecting the reduced demand on the WHT project as a result of the cancellation of Beaches and the imminent opening of the welcome and exceptional public transport project, the Metro;
- (c) prepare and seek consent for amendments to the WHT/WFU projects to mitigate congestion impacts on local roads informed by new traffic modelling; and
- (d) consider cancelling the WHT and redirection of the project funds to the provision of public transport projects in Greater Sydney region.

COUNCILLOR ZOË BAKER
MAYOR