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Our Ref: 01443489

Mr Stuart Coppock
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Dear Mr Coppock

Thank you for your correspondence to the Minister for Metropolitan Roads about the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link project. I have been asked to respond to you.

I note the concerns you have raised on behalf of the Federation of Willoughby Progress Associations about this project and appreciate the reasons which prompted you to write.

The NSW Government recognises that building a project of this scale and significance does not go without impact. You may be assured that managing risks and reducing any potential impacts to the community is important to Transport for NSW. Transport for NSW is also committed to working with the community to identify and implement measures that serve to reduce any potential impacts to the maximum extent possible.

Transport for NSW has prepared a submissions report to respond to the issues raised by the community during the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) period. In addition, Transport for NSW has prepared a Preferred Infrastructure Report (PIR) to provide further information, to describe design changes and provide further assessments in response to a request from the Department of Planning and Environment (the Department).

Transport for NSW expects to have a decision on the project in the second quarter of 2022. If the project is approved, it will be built and operated in accordance with the Conditions of Approval set by the Minister for Planning, which will be informed by the Department.

Further, Transport for NSW understands the importance of the natural environment and is committed to minimising the impact, protecting the local plant and animal life and implementing monitoring programs. In managing water quality during work in Middle Harbour, Transport for NSW will employ a range of well understood and effective management measures to safely work in the sensitive marine environments, including Middle Harbour and Manly Dam.

I am advised that, following extensive assessment and associated impacts together with consideration of community feedback, the area on the eastern side of Flat Rock Drive was selected as the preferred location for the temporary construction support site.

As described in the EIS, selection of the Flat Rock Reserve site enabled Transport for NSW to avoid direct impacts on nearby residential or commercial properties and the Flat Rock Baseball Diamond, and is further from the Willoughby Leisure Centre indoor facilities, netball courts and car park.

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Investigations of potentially contaminated areas directly affected by the project, including at Bicentennial Reserve, Willoughby Leisure Centre and Flat Rock Reserve, will be carried out prior to construction so that contamination can be adequately planned for and managed.

With regards to air quality, NSW has some of the most stringent protection standards in the world. The ventilation systems proposed to be included in the project will continuously, reliably and efficiently meet air quality requirements for tunnel users and communities surrounding the infrastructure. The independent NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer has recently released a report in relation to road tunnel air quality. The report found that emissions from well-designed road tunnels cause a negligible change to surrounding air quality, and as such, there is little to no health benefit for surrounding communities in installing filtration and air-treatment systems in such tunnels.

Alternative modes of transport, such as rail-based options, were considered as strategic alternatives to the project. While beneficial in helping reduce congestion on the existing road network, they would not be sufficient to resolve the existing road network capacity constraints between the lower North Shore and the Northern Beaches. This is due to the complexity of journey patterns and trip purposes within Greater Sydney and the dispersed nature of origin and destination points for an individual journey.

Due to the high cost and long lead time for a heavy or light rail solution, the alternative approach for public transport improvement is to focus on improving the speed and reliability of road based public transport such as bus services. With a relatively high carrying capacity, rapid or express bus services offer a mass transit solution for bus corridors where a rail-based solution is unsuitable. As such, adequate, reliable and efficient public transport using road infrastructure (i.e. rapid and express bus services) is considered a more suitable and appropriate public transport solution for the Northern Beaches area.

During such uncertain times like these, the NSW Government is committed to keeping major projects going. The pandemic has and continues to present short to medium-term challenges for everyone in NSW. Beaches Link was developed with a long-term view to address the challenges Greater Sydney will face over the next 40 years. It has also been developed to deliver long-lasting benefits for road users, commuters, communities and businesses. Therefore, the need for this project is critical to ensure the future success of Sydney both economically and to meet the demands of a growing population.

Transport for NSW will continue to monitor and analyse the potential long-term effects of COVID-19 on travel demand, including changes to existing travel conditions, as well as future travel behaviours. You can find more information and stay up to date on the project by visiting nswroads.work/whtbl. Thank you for taking the time to write to the Minister.

Yours sincerely



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