

SMOKE AND MIRRORS

Despite a tsunami of local opposition and scientific data, the premier is still ploughing on with plans to build unpopular smoke stacks in built-up areas.

By Jenny Byrne

In the face of enormous local opposition, NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian is pressing ahead with the controversial plan to build three unfiltered smoke stacks right in the middle of the lower North Shore for the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link.

While the design blueprint is still at the community consultation stage, plans to put the stacks in crowded areas – two in Ernest Street on the Warringah Freeway and one in Artarmon – has incensed local residents.

The catalogue of serious concerns about stacks include catastrophic health impacts, devalued properties, streets clogged by trucks carrying millions of tonnes of spoil, and parks used as construction sites spewing out poisonous dust.

Furious residents allege the premier has lied over the proposed stacks' positions.

"She said in a letter in late July to her constituency that no stacks would be located near schools," says Carlos Crowley, an engineer, economist and parent from Cammeray-based Anzac Park School's P&C.

"Yet two weeks later, Roads and Maritime Services officials came to the school and told parents two of the stacks would be just 200 metres away."

This pair of stacks next to each other on Warringah Freeway have been dubbed Gladys' 'monster stacks' as they will serve both the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link and spew out more pollution than the other stack. As there are three lanes on each 13.5-kilometre stretch, that means there's 40.5 kilometres of unfiltered pollution raining down on residents.

The other will be on Punch Street in Artarmon's industrial zone – home to Royal North Shore Hospital and North Shore Private Hospital, 18 day care centres and numerous schools.

Another major concern is the stacks won't be filtered – despite it being world's best practice to filter – as filters reduce the toxic nature of vehicle pollution particulates by 90 to 95 per cent.

The upshot is the shafts will spew into the atmosphere what the World Health Organisation (WHO) deems Class 1 carcinogens that will be belched out over homes, schools, childcare and medical facilities and businesses across Naremburn, Cammeray, Northbridge, Crows Nest and Artarmon. "Not filtering is just short-sighted, second-rate infrastructure – we don't build factories spewing out pollutants anymore, so why build these?" says a furious Emma Wright from Schools Against Stacks and Northern Residents Tunnel Action Group (NORTAG), whose home will be just 230 metres from a stack.

"The premier has lied to her electorate saying they won't be near schools and now we find they are."

Research shows these PM2.5 particles are a serious health

risk as they can't be expelled by the lungs and can enter the bloodstream, causing serious harm.

Children are particularly vulnerable when it comes to air-borne pollution and over 10,000 local school kids will potentially be affected.

A mountain of scientific data has catalogued health impacts of vehicular pollution: one study by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found a clear link between spikes in pollution in Sydney and hospital admissions in babies to 14 year olds.

Another study by cardiologists at Queen Mary University of London found even what are dubbed 'safe' levels of air pollution are linked to heart abnormalities like those exhibited in the initial stages of heart failure.

When North Shore anaesthetist Dr Ray Nassar was looking at the potential health effects of NorthConnex near his home, he produced a lengthy science-based document rounding

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Carlos Crowley from Anzac Public P&C

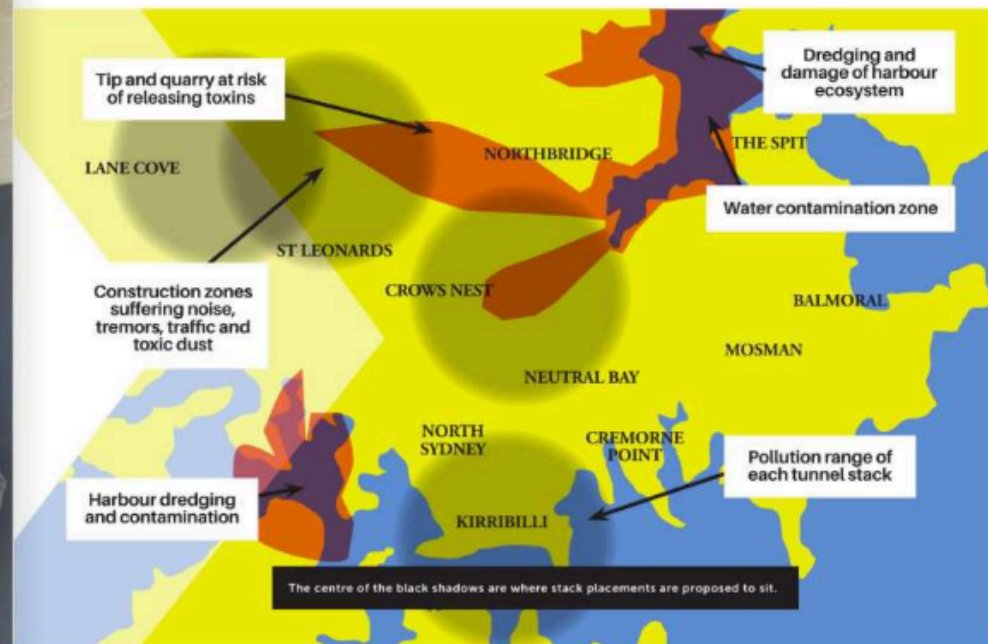
up all relevant research from the World Health Organisation, The Lancet and the American Cancer Society. His findings state, "Air pollution produced by vehicle emissions consists of chemicals including lead and arsenic, which cause cancer, asthma, strokes, cardiovascular disease and heart issues."

His document, signed by 200 Sydney doctors, the Australian Medical Association, and the Asthma Foundation, includes studies revealing a third

greater chance of stroke in moderate traffic pollution, links with lung and bladder cancer, low birth weight babies and an accelerated onset of dementia.

When it was submitted to the state government, it did not respond to the document.

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Cycleways, child care centres, community centres and cafés are all located in close proximity to the proposed stacks.



Fast facts

- Filtering stacks cuts down toxic pollutants by 90% to 95%.
- Anzac Park Public School in Cammeray will be just 200 metres from two stacks.
- The other stack in Artarmon's 'industrial area' is near 18 daycare centres and two hospitals.
- One of the stacks will be ventilating 13.5 kilometres from two three-lane tunnels, equating to 40.5 kilometres of unfiltered pollution.
- Children are particularly susceptible to airborne pollution and there are over 10,000 school kids in the area.



Cammeray-based Anzac Park School's P&C working on its Impact Report into the stacks' effects if they get the all clear.

"Like asbestos, there's no safe level of exposure," says Dr Nassar. "The key message in the research is that, even at levels considered 'safe', adverse health effects occur."

While there's no safe limit for small particles known as PM2.5, the WHO sets guidelines for governments to target reductions of 10 mcg/m³. Environmental impact statement figures for NorthConnex showed carcinogenic emissions would be pushed and accumulated for the last kilometre each way and then expelled unfiltered and measure 500 mcg/m³ - a staggering 50 times more than WHO guidelines.

So why put stacks near residential areas and why fail to filter?

Ted Re, a spokesperson for the parents and residents pressure group Stop The Tunnel, has a theory: "If the premier filters them, then filters would have to be retrofitted to every tunnel across Sydney," he states.

"If she concedes the health impacts are too devastating for people in the north, then what about people in the south and west? It's cheaper and easier not to filter."

Further health concerns are emerging around spoil sites and transport corridors on the North Shore such as Flat Rock

Drive, Cammeray Oval, Artarmon Reserve and Clive Park. According to Cammeray Public School P&C's Impact Report, the WHO classifies silica dust from sandstone and granite processing as also carcinogenic.

Property values are another potential casualty. Property expert Chris Curtis from Curtis Associates told a meeting of North Shore residents in March that devaluing would happen during and after construction because noise, uncertainty around pollution, compulsory acquisition and traffic conditions would concern potential buyers, as well as the physical presence of stacks and tunnels.

Domain Group Data, which studies house prices across Sydney, found prices in Haberfield and St Peters (the site of a WestConnex interchange) fell by 17.2 per cent and 9.2 per cent respectively compared to the rest of the inner west, which grew by 3.2 per cent in the same six-month period.

"People are unsure of what WestConnex will do to the area. That's the key that will influence whether buyers will purchase and that will impact prices," said Domain Data scientist Dr Nicole Powell.

Both the route of the two tunnels, their design and stack details are at the public consultation stage and this is set to finish this month, after which the RMS will complete its Environmental Assessment Study before the state government reveals its final blueprint in 2019.

So what's being done by the residents? Stop The Tunnel is "pulling together a Google map that looks at proposed stack placements and their ranges and overlaying those with schools, hospitals and day care centres," says Mr Re.

"It's plain to see from this map the negative impact on our community of these unfiltered stacks is extreme.

"We're also doing a parliamentary petition for schools, residents, business and daycare centres to sign to make our voice heard."

Their message to the premier is "Stop lying to the electorate and look at international best practice on filtering," says Carlos Crawley.

"If the NSW premier puts in unfiltered stacks, that will be her legacy - not the benefits the tunnels will bring."

However, the premier has responded to these claims, telling *North Shore Living*. "We have released a concept design for the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link. The position of the ventilation outlet in the design is based on community feedback and it's in the middle of the Warringah Freeway.

"I want to stress we will continue to listen to the community. Even the improved plans in the concept design are subject to further community consultation and change."

Further, she adds that "when Liberal came to government, we moved to address the impacts around ventilation outlets for motorway tunnels by establishing the Advisory Committee on Tunnel and Air Quality (ACTAQ), which advises the government on tunnel ventilation design and operation.

"ACTAQ will coordinate a scientific review of a project's air emissions from ventilation outlets and the Minister for Planning will not approve a motorway tunnel project until the ACTAQ's scientific review is considered." ■