

Council's "Tunnel Vision"

- .. Toll nightmare
- .. Poisonous pollution
- .. More traffic jams
- .. The "Airport Road" is back



Communities Against the Tunnels
(CATT) www.rag.org.au/tunnel/

The tunnel will increase congestion: Analysis of the North South Bypass Tunnel Environmental Impact Statement Traffic and Transport Technical Paper

Above the tunnel

The EIS shows in Table 10.6 that travel time on the surface network will take longer with the tunnel built than it will take without the tunnel. The EIS also states that this is a requirement of the project to ensure that enough car drivers use the tunnel. Buried in page 178 of the Traffic Appendix is the statement:

"A criterion for the proposed capacity restrictions (*on the surface network*) was that they should be sufficient to offset this decongestion effect and make travelling on the surface arterials no more attractive than without the tunnel."

This guarantee to not reduce congestion between the tunnel portals is for the benefit of the private operator who builds the tunnel and collects the tolls. Before investing, they need to be assured that they will receive a sufficient return on investment and potential for profit. They will insist on a contractual guarantee that the Council will implement a range of identified treatments to the surface network to ensure it remains congested for cars and, to a lesser extent, also doesn't give buses any significant advantage through time savings. They ideally want to force people to use the tunnel and pay the toll to maximise their profit, but fortunately they have to settle for a compromise. The contract also means that Council will not allow anyone else, including the state or federal government, to implement congestion reduction strategies on the Council roads in the area, as this would trigger hefty penalty payments to the tunnel operator.

So the tunnel will not relieve congestion above ground and we have a further guarantee that Council will stop anyone else from relieving congestion in the future.

Getting to and from the tunnel

No-one lives on the tunnel portal or works at the other portal. Every trip using the tunnel will have to approach it from somewhere and leave it to get to the destination. The EIS is happy to report a forecast of up to a 10 to 14 minute saving between the tunnel entry and exit. The EIS is however, too shy to report on travel time changes on the approach and exit from the tunnel.

This brings us to the other part of the story, congestion levels outside of the tunnel portals.

The tunnels add capacity between Woolloongabba and Bowen Hills and save time for tunnel users for this portion of the trip. This will encourage more people to drive on the approaches and exits from the tunnels. No major roadworks are proposed to add to capacity on the approach and exit roads despite the modelled increase in traffic. Table 10.2 of the Traffic Appendix reports the following increases in traffic because of the tunnel:

- Lutwyche Rd traffic increases 13%
- Shafston Ave traffic increases 26%
- Wellington Rd traffic increases 32%
- Ipswich Rd traffic increases 25%
- O'Keefe St traffic increases 31%
- SE Freeway traffic increases 8%

These traffic increases are quite significant and occur on already heavily trafficked roads, so it is very likely that they will create some delays. In fact, it is reasonable to assume they will add significant delays.

The vast majority of inner city traffic that does not use the tunnel will experience additional delays because of it. The extra delays on the approaches and exits add to the guaranteed congestion above the tunnel to expand the congested area.

Even more interesting is that it is quite conceivable that the extra approach and exit traffic will create 5 or more minutes delay at either end of the tunnel. This would mean that even most of the tunnel users, who save 10 odd minutes on the tunnel part of their trip, still actually end up taking longer for the whole trip. Thus we may really be looking at investing in a project that will delay almost everyone. The EIS chooses not to report the data required to confirm or deny this, even though it could easily have been determined.

Unfortunately the EIS only presents the good news half of the story in detail and we must interrogate and decipher to try to find out where the problems might lie. Proponents of the NSBT like to quote the 10 minute saving. They conspicuously neglect to point out that this saving is only for the few, and to get it they need to also experience a traffic delay that could be more than 10 minutes. This is a cynical exercise in manipulating public opinion through selective quoting of misleading information.

Comparing apples and oranges

Comparing a 'with tunnel'¹ and a 'without tunnel' scenario without making clear the costs of the tunnel and possible alternative uses for the money is unfair.

The 'with tunnel' scenario is expected to cost Brisbane City Council \$570 million cash. They will not receive any toll revenue to pay for this as the tolls go to the private operator that funds the rest of the cost (probably an additional \$1 billion). The cash will be from budget revenue and from a \$450 million loan from the state government. This one project will thus increase Brisbane City Council's (BCC) total debt by about 50%, use \$120 million over several years from the budget, and add an annual \$30 million debt bill for the next 30 years. This all gets paid for by the ratepayers of Brisbane so we have the right to ask what else could be done with all this money - or would we rather have it in our own pockets.

For example, \$120 million is more than enough to provide grade separated through traffic on Ipswich Road across the Stanley and Vulture Street intersections and for grade separated through traffic on Lutwyche Road from O'Connell Terrace to north of Newmarket Road. Unlike the tunnel, this would relieve some congestion and leave money available for other projects.

These projects, or similar, need to be identified and included in the 'without tunnel' scenario so that we are closer to comparing apples with apples. Otherwise we are trying to compare a major investment in transport against no investment at all. Not fair.

Most Brisbane residents, if given the opportunity to express their opinion on the question, would most likely rather BCC didn't increase our debt by 50%. If the money must be borrowed, use it to fund projects that give a return to all Brisbane residents – projects like suburban centre improvement programs (for example, Nundah and Stones Corner) increased bus services, traffic calming, bike paths and local road projects across the whole city, not just in the middle.

We need to find out what other services will not be delivered if the tunnel goes ahead so that we can make an informed choice. Either that, or how much extra will BCC put on every rates bill.