

# Wolli Creek Update

From the Wolli Creek Preservation Society Inc.

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## F5 FREEWAY? If it goes in, it goes under!

In 1988, following a campaign by environmental groups and residents the incoming state Liberal government announced that almost all the land in the Valley previously zoned for freeway construction would be "guaranteed permanent preservation for community enjoyment".

Despite this, the DMR, with the government's backing, has now announced that it will present in May an Environmental Impact Statement on two options for alternative road links from Beverly Hills to St Peters.

One involves a tunnel beneath the Earlwood ridge, leaving the Valley untouched.

The other is a barely concealed revival of the old Wolli Valley Freeway option. It is the DMR's preferred option.

If adopted it would represent a complete breach of faith by the Greiner Government to the residents of this region.

*The two options are assessed on the next pages.*



Editorial:

## Quality of life is the issue

Southern Sydney is an overcrowded, over-industrialised collection of suburbs including Marrickville, Earlwood, Rockdale, Arncliffe and Kingsgrove. Pollution, noise, congestion and urban blight are the daily reality of the citizens of this region. They suffer the greatest concentration of industry in Sydney, a terrible lack of open space\*, urban blight, and casual environmental vandalism. The region has been long neglected by government, with ill-planned, piecemeal industrial development, and little evidence of vision or commitment to the quality of life of its 500,000 residents.

The wealth of New South Wales pours through Port Botany. Much of this wealth is generated in the surrounding industrial estates, by workers who live in the region, and pay taxes that are spent elsewhere. Very little is given back for what is taken. Virtually none of the original beauty of the region has been saved for the present generation. The "perfect wilderness of flowers" (E.C. Booth, 1870) has long since vanished. A largely despoiled industrial landscape remains.

Yet some politicians and bureaucrats still wish to continue the process of thoughtless neglect and vandalism.

The Wolli Creek Valley, a thin sliver of forests, heaths, wetlands and picnic grounds, runs through the centre of the region. It is the last natural bush in the area and as open space it is absolutely precious.

Our region must not continue to be victimised by visionless planners and petty bureaucrats who would rob the generations of the future by refusing to invest in the present.

\* The Wolli Creek Valley lies largely within the Canterbury Municipality, which came a poor 31st out of 40 Sydney local government areas on a listing of open-space-to-residents ratios released by the Department of Environment and Planning. The nearby municipalities of Marrickville, Leichhardt and Ashfield have the three worst ratios in Sydney. The Municipality to the south of Wolli Creek, Rockdale, came 29th on the list.

## The two options -

### 1. The Tunnel option

This route involves a tunnel starting in the Valley just north of the Bexley North railway station, traveling beneath the length of the Earlwood ridge and emerging near Tempe Street adjacent to Waterworth Park. The freeway would then cross Wolli Creek opposite Waterworth Park and head east through open ground. This route has the following important characteristics:

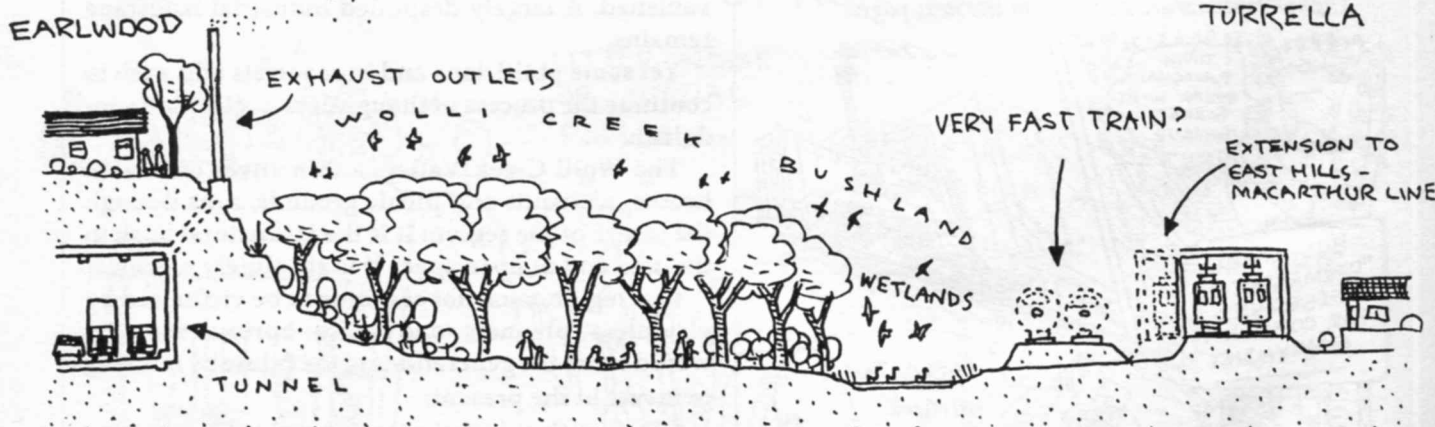
1. The Wolli Creek Valley is the last chance for a bush park in inner southern Sydney. The tunnel option would preserve this unique area for future generations by bypassing it altogether between Tempe and Bexley North.
2. There would be virtually no noise pollution from the freeway from Waterworth Park to Bexley North. West of this point the topography lends itself to noise reducing measures.
3. The tunnel has the best available mechanism for the dispersal of traffic fumes. These would be pumped from the tunnel and dispersed through chimney-like points which would ensure that fumes were dispersed into prevailing winds.
4. Visual pollution would be minimised. The unique bush tracks and scenic vantage points of the Valley would not have their recreational value destroyed by the looming presence of a six lane freeway.
5. Risk of a spillage of toxic chemicals into Wolli Creek and thence into Botany Bay would be minimised by a route away from the creek where spills could be more effectively contained.
6. Social disruption and physical and psychological division of communities would be minimised.
7. The Bardwell Park RSL club is preserved. This is the only community recreation resource of its type in the Valley.

### 2. The Valley Freeway option

This is a partly elevated six lane freeway immediately to the north of the East Hills rail line on the floor of the Valley. At present this is the DMR's preferred option. It has the following disadvantages -

1. It destroys the recreational value of the only remaining bushland in the region. It requires re-routing the creek through most of the Valley, destroying the wetlands and mangroves (and hence the crucial bird-life corridor).
2. Noise pollution in Bardwell Park and Turrella would be maximised. Traffic sounds would be captured and magnified by the steep valley walls. Residents have already suffered a great increase in noise pollution because of the Macarthur rail line.
3. This is the worst option for dispersal of traffic fumes. Vehicle exhaust would remain in the valley, a densely settled area. Fumes would be trapped by atmospheric inversion and may reach toxic levels.
4. Visual pollution would be appalling.
5. Toxic chemical spills would flow down Wolli Creek into Botany Bay, where they would enter the food chain through the fish breeding grounds, where they would remain for an immeasurable amount of time.
6. The social costs are unacceptable; the loss in home values alone would be approx. \$48 million, the medical costs from stress and pollution to the Valley's many residents would be immense. The destruction of quality of life, something which cannot be given a monetary value, would be enormous.
7. The Bardwell Park RSL club is lost from its present site.

The tunnel option



#### Neither option will reduce traffic on Forest Road, Bexley.

The DMR's own figures show that even with a freeway, peak traffic flows in Forest Road, Bexley will increase from 2800 to 3800 vehicles per hour by the year 2000.

In fact freeways are simply not effective long term solutions to local traffic problems. Effective solutions must involve innovative public transport options, such as light rail, as US cities are now recognising.

## The Valley freeway option



### The difference

There is only one shortsighted attraction in the Valley option from the DMR and Government point of view: *relative cost.*

The DMR estimates the tunnel option cost at \$370m and the Valley freeway at \$270m.

This is a difference of \$100m. Over the 5 years of construction, this is \$20 million per year. For comparison here are some other figures -

1. amount of taxation paid by local residents over 5 years: \$230m\*
2. cost of Deputy Premier Wal Murray's proposed tourist development at Kingscliff on the NSW north coast: \$700m.
3. Cost of the harbour tunnel: \$401m
4. Cost of the monorail: \$70m
5. Cost of flag pole at newParliament House, Canberra: \$25m
6. loss of home values due to the Valley freeway option: \$48m\*

The cost difference between the two proposals is a wholly justifiable investment in the quality of life of our hard pressed and long neglected suburbs.

### They are not going to stop here.

The Wolli Creek battle is just part of the fight for a decent living space in southern Sydney. The DMR's future plans include a Southern Freeway which would eliminate Barton, Bicentennial, and Scarborough Parks in Rockdale. The third runway proposal at Mascot is being forced on residents by powerful commercial interests. These indecent proposals show a wanton disregard for basic human values.

### A Clear choice

The choice is between preserving open space and quality of life, on one hand, and loss of open space and continued degradation of the region, on the other.

### How we can win

No matter what its Environmental Impact Study says, DMR is likely to recommend a Valley freeway on the grounds of cost. The issue will only be resolved by residents demonstrating a will to stand up for their quality of life, rather than simply taking what the bureaucracy and politicians dish out. The residents of this region must show the government that they will not tolerate further erosion of their quality of life.

### What you can do

1. Sign our petition. It will be widely circulated in your suburb in coming weeks.
2. Publicise the issue as often as you can.
3. Personal letters to politicians are most effective.

Write to the following members of parliament:

The Hon. Nick Greiner, M.P., Premier, C/- Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney 2000. Electorate office: phone 498 4109.

The Hon. Bruce Baird, M. P., Minister for Transport, C/- Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney 2000.

The Hon. Tim Moore, M. P., Minister for the Environment, C/- Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney 2000

Phil White, M.P., Member for Earlwood, C/- Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney 2000. Electorate Office: 310 Kingsgrove Rd, Kingsgrove 2208, phone 502 4934.

Guy Yeomans, M. P., Member for Hurstville, C/- Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney 2000. Electorate office: phone 570 4683

The Hon. Bob Carr, M.P., Leader of the Opposition, C/- Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney 2000

The Hon. Barry Unsworth, M.P., member for Rockdale, C/- Parliament House, Sydney 2000

Dr. Andrew Refshauge, M.P., member for Marrickville, C/- Parliament House, Sydney 2000

This is only the start of our campaign to convince the government that the tunnel is the only acceptable option. **We need your help and expertise.** If you would like to help please contact Gavin (phone 59 8502) or Sue (59 1546).

**We also need funds to carry on this campaign.** Your donation would be of great assistance. Just write your cheque to -  
Wolli Creek Preservation Society Inc.  
Box 270, Earlwood 2206

\* Figures are calculated on the basis of approx. 2,400 homes in sight or sound of freeway between Bexley North and Turrella; estimates based on local government statistics. The population would be approx. 6,000.

The tax figure is based on multiplying the number of age earners by a \$5,000 tax payment each (a conservative figure) and then multiplying by 1.276 for compound inflation over 5 years, based on an average 5% inflation rate (= \$229.68m).

The figure for lost home values is calculated on an average of \$20,000 per home, based on discussions with local real estate agents.

## Where did the DMR's 'preferred option' come from?

This option (north of the railway line) was **not** an official option put forward to the public in the DMR's 'Public consultation' process last year. The DMR openly admits that of the official options the 'overwhelming majority' of respondents favoured the tunnel option. However the DMR now favours a completely new option.

Because of this overwhelming support for the tunnel option it appears the DMR are relying on a petition collected by an organisation known as ERTAG.

ERTAG, an offshoot of the Bexley Chamber of Commerce, campaigned for a return to the former Wolli Creek Valley route which had been **rejected** by both the authoritative Kirby Enquiry and initially by the Greiner Government because of its effect on the Valley's bushland.

ERTAG carried out a 'fear and anxiety'\* campaign, based on several ludicrous and irresponsible DMR options which would each have destroyed hundreds of homes and which were never in serious consideration.

Speaking in parliament on 20 October, local MP Phil White said of the ERTAG campaign in his Earlwood electorate:

"Residents, including aged persons, have been scared out of their wits. They have been instructed by this group that they will lose their homes if they do not go out and doorknock, make letterbox drops and circulate petitions for signature...The fear and anxiety campaigns that have been generated in the community border on public mischief and must be defused promptly."\*

Many residents for example were told that trucks would not be permitted to use the tunnel. **FACT:** only trucks carrying certain categories of explosive or flammable materials, less than 1% of loads passing through the area, would be barred from the tunnel. Others have been told that their homes would be affected by massive land subsidence. **FACT:** tunneling technology is long established and proven. Tunnels are heavily reinforced and subsidence is not an issue eg. there was no subsidence problem with the Eastern Suburbs Railway.

The shallowness of ERTAG's message is shown by the anti-democratic style of their meetings. Residents with opposing opinions are prevented from speaking or talked down. This fact has received comment in the press.

However at the only meeting in the area run democratically (by an independent group, the 'Homes and Heritage Savers') feeling was running so high against ERTAG that by the end of the meeting the ERTAG representatives did not vote in favour of their own motion - calling for a freeway through the Valley and it was lost 800 votes to 3 (St. George Leader 11.10.88).

The DMR's creation of a new option at this stage and their reliance on ERTAG for support makes a mockery of their own public participation process. The thinly disguised revival of the old Wolli Valley option represents a complete and cynical breach of faith by the DMR.

\* Hansard, 19.10.88

## WOLLI CREEK BUSH PARK: A Breathing Space in our crowded suburbs

Wolli Creek Valley should be developed and managed as a unique bush park, nature reserve and recreation area. Easy access by rail for the whole of inner Sydney gives the Valley enormous potential as a suburban "rail park".

The bush park should include:

**SCENIC TRAILS.** An environmentally sensitive scenic trail from Waterworth Park to Bexley North. This would allow recreationists to walk, or jog, from Tempe Station to Bexley North Station and return by rail (or vice versa). Mid-way access points to the trail also exist at Turrella and Bardwell Park stations.

A feature of the trails would be signs explaining the many fascinating features of the Valley's ecology, Aboriginal prehistory and European history. The trails would improve access for the numerous schools which utilize the valley for

environmental education. Some sections should be wheelchair accessible.

**PICNIC AREAS.** Turrella reserve, Illoura reserve and the open spaces to the West of Hartill-Law avenue should be landscaped as picnic areas with barbecue and toilet facilities.

**A FIELD STUDIES CENTRE** for environmental education should be set up. There are over 120 schools within a five mile radius of the Valley.

**WILDLIFE.** The management plan should aim to maximize wildlife habitats, especially for species that are locally rare or under pressure. Fish and shellfish have returned to the creek in large numbers in recent years, a trend which careful management would encourage as a contribution to the fisheries resources of Botany Bay.

