

# Tunnel vision bill: \$391m a kilometre

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**By Alex Mitchell and John Kidman**

Sydney's next motorway tunnel will cost \$1.8 billion but still won't be long enough to prevent crippling bottlenecks as traffic tries to enter and leave the city centre, the State Opposition warns.

Roads Minister Carl Scully unveiled plans yesterday to extend the M4 East motorway tunnel an extra kilometre to avoid dumping traffic in Haberfield in the Labor-held marginal electorate of Drummoyne.

But Opposition Leader John Brogden derided the revised plan, saying traffic would still have to pass through four sets of lights before reaching the Anzac Bridge at Glebe.

Mr Brogden called for another kilometre to be added to the tunnel so it finished at the foot of the six-lane bridge leading to the city.

"Why spend all this money and slug motorists \$10 a day in tolls and still leave four sets of lights and not do the job properly?" he said.

The proposed 4.6-kilometre link will connect the existing M4 at Concord with the city at Dobroyd Point. This will give motorists the benefit of avoiding 15 sets of lights by paying a \$5 toll in each direction.

Construction of the tunnel is due to be completed by the end of 2009 or early 2010 - just in time to do away with the M4's existing \$2.20 toll and replace it with the \$5 levy.

Following a public outcry, the original plans for a shorter tunnel have been scuttled so that the underground road will now "substantially bypass" the affluent riverside suburb of Haberfield, Mr Scully said.

But it means construction costs have now blown out to an estimated \$1.8 billion and yet another expensive toll for western Sydney's battling commuters for 30 years to come.

"It's an incredible amount of money," Mr Scully said, "but it is a viable project."

While the blueprint was yet to undergo further environmental impact scrutiny and community consultation, Mr Scully said, he was confident it would become reality.

"It is up to other agencies now to tick this project off, but . . . motorists have been given an option and it won't cost one taxpayer dollar.

"These motorways are popular when they are opened and there is no point waiting the 10 or 20 years for them to be government-built. It will be better for motorists and it will be better for the Haberfield community."

Mr Scully faces a struggle with local community organisations and EcoTransit, the widely regarded transport lobby group whose patron is Professor Peter Newman, the newly appointed Sustainability Commissioner.

"The M4 East will be a disaster for Sydney's inner west," an EcoTransit spokesman said. "It doesn't matter which version you look at."

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