

HSTY3902 Project Diary:
Student no. 310216222

Entry 1:
26th August 2015

Today I met with Mat Hounsell, president of the No West Connex Action Group, at the University of Sydney. After briefly telling him about HSTY3902 and my desire to create a public history project that could be of use to the No West Connex campaign, he gave me an impressive and comprehensive run-down of the history of road planning in Sydney. Being a Planning honours student himself, he was able to suggest possible directions for my project with an academic eye. He ear-marked The Johnston's Creek Extension, an extension of the F6 that was proposed to be built through Newtown and Randwick in 2004 but which was stopped by campaigners, as an overlooked slice of Sydney's road and campaigning history. I was immediately drawn to the history of this road as it would have occurred just a few streets away from my own house in Newtown. Matt also gave me names and contact info of people I may want to contact, and the name of possible helpful resources & where to find them - all off the top of his head! I couldn't write down everything he was saying fast enough - he was a real goldmine of information.

Entry 2:
8th September 2015

Since meeting with Mat, I've emailed Greens senator Lee Rhiannon and organised a phone interview with her. I was pretty nervous talking to someone of such high profile! Luckily she was lovely, but wasn't able to remember too much about the JCE specifically. Lee did however send me the documents the Greens received from the Labor government from their "call for papers" on JCE. These are important pieces of evidence in the JCE story as they show how the Greens and community groups were trying to get the Labor government to admit that the JCE was going ahead. I'm increasingly realising how one sided my understanding of the JCE is. I would love to hear Carmel Tebbutt's version of events, as she was ultimately responsible for lifting the road reservation along the JCE in parliament. However, she has since retired from politics and I'm finding it difficult to get in touch. I have sent an email to Jo Haylen (the current Labor member for Marrickville), and my email has been forwarded to Carmel, but I am yet to receive a reply. This is not surprising as Mat tells me that the proposed JCE was not one of Labor's proudest moments as it caused so much community outrage.

Entry 3:
13th September 2015

Still on word from Carmel Tebbutt despite me sending several emails... This is a shame but not wholly surprising due to her high profile. I've been thinking of the form my project should take. I know that creativity is encouraged in this course, and a friend of mine suggested I create a Monopoly board of all the different roads in Sydney being bought up by developers. I briefly know the philosophy behind the original game of Monopoly was to highlight the destructive power of capitalist greed on relationships - something which could tie in nicely with the moral of the JCE. Although this project sounds fun, I don't think it would reach a wide audience. My other idea involves creating a self-published picture book, which would include maps, pictures and text recounting the JCE campaign. Perhaps I would have a section with the personal histories of families whose homes would have been destroyed if the JCE had gone ahead. I know that some of the businesses ear-marked for demolition, such as Emma's on Liberty Lebanese restaurant, are long-standing institutions in the community and may have interesting personal histories attached. I would like to show-case the importance of small scale histories, that are often forgotten in large scale urban planning.

Entry 4:
20th September 2015

On Mat's recommendation, I met with Michelle Zeibots today. Like Mat, Michelle was VERY informative. Being an academic, she already saw the JCE through a historical lens. She wrote out a time-line of events for me, found old documents and leaf-lets from the campaign, and gave me the numbers of people I should talk to. Unfortunately I had some technical issues though. I had set up my phone to record our conversation, but I didn't have enough storage and my phone recording stopped 3 minutes in! I was devastated!! Particularly as Michelle spoke of the death of her friend Mary Jane Gleeson, who played such a key role in stopping the JCE, but sadly died from melanoma in 2007. Another comment I'm upset to have missed was when, at the end of my visit, Michelle told me how much she loved being a planner and campaigner as it made her feel like a fairy godmother, walking around the streets with nobody knowing how she and individuals like Mary Jane had saved their area. She found it very rewarding. I wish I'd caught this comment on tape as I would have loved to have included a direct quote in my book as my way of publicly acknowledging the tireless work she and her fellow campaigners do to save the character of the Inner West.

I'm really feeling my inexperience at interviewing, as I should have asked explicitly whether she could repeat what she said as I wrote it down. But somehow even acknowledging I was trying to record what she was saying felt awkward, unnatural and like I was just using her emotions for my project. This experience has given me insight into the predicaments journalists face. You genuinely want to share the story of others, but are also motivated by your own selfish desires to obtain "juicy" material.

Entry 5: 1st October 2015

On Michelle's suggestion, I emailed and then called Colin Hessey, who was one of the ten volunteers who went out door-knocking to inform residents that their homes could be demolished. As Michelle had already given me a very thorough and evidence based run down of events, I was really hoping for Colin to provide some more personal reflections about how residents reacted, and how he felt giving such alarming news when it hadn't even been confirmed that the road WOULD be built. Yet (as with everything in this project!) Colin had different ideas. He didn't wait to hear what aspects of the JCE history I needed filling in before he launched into his own version of events, how it reacted to the battle to save Wolli Creek and the broader activism scene in Sydney. While I found much of this interesting, it wasn't exactly what I was hoping to include in my project. Also I noticed that he had mis-remembered some facts. For instance, he remembered that Gavin Gateby, not Michelle, was the first person to instigate the JCE campaign, whereas I know Gateby was on leave at the time. I'm still learning to be more assertive with my questioning. I've noticed I feel guilty for "wasting" other people's time. I also felt young and under qualified when Colin started talking about quite complicated aspects of Sydney road planning and campaigning philosophy. However, despite all this, I did get a, albeit short, answer to my original question about how residents reacted to the door-knocking campaign. Lastly, I'm finding phone based interviews difficult as I have to quickly type out quotes whilst they are talking, which is not very accurate. Furthermore, I feel uneasy about using phone quotes in my book. The answer to these dilemmas would obviously be to speak up early on, and ask permission to quote my interviewees over the phone. Alas, next time!

Entry 6: 7th October 2015

This week, I completed my 10 hours of community service. When I had originally spoken to Matt counsel about what I could do for community service, he was at a loss as to how I could help. So, I decided to just look up the No West Connex Facebook page and attend the nearest event. I discovered there was a sit-in currently occurring at the site of some geo-technical drilling for West Connex on Walker Street in Haberfield so grabbed my camera and headed over there. There I was

introduced to a number of campaigners, including Sharon Laura who would go onto mentor me through my community service. She told me that educating myself, taking pictures and compiling a collage of the houses ear-marked for demolition were the most useful things I could do. The next event I attended was a community picket at the Alexandria Landfill in St Peters on October 3rd. There I listened to numerous speakers including Lee Rhiannon, Jenny Leung and Wendy Bacon. One reoccurring comment was that far and away, the most common comment they received from members of the community was “but really, what hope do we have in stopping this road?”. I must admit I have thought this as well - it was the first thing I said to Matt when I met him; “but isn’t West Connex already in the bag?”. It made me realise how important stories like the JCE really are, as they show that all these pickets, sit-ins, leaflet dropping and petitions actually CAN change outcomes. I think I’ll start my video acknowledging this widespread pessimism towards the effectiveness of grass roots campaigning as it might engage people that have been disillusioned and provide hope.

Finally, on the 6th of October, I attended a West Connex consultation meeting at the Canada Bay Club. There, Sharon directed me to question the West Connex representatives about issues such as air quality, human impact and their general planning philosophy. The representatives were able to make a very compelling case in support of WestConnex which swayed my previously unshaken opposition to it. I discovered that King Street was not to be effected, and that the large trucks that I see frequenting small roads in my area would be redirected. Also, I was surprised to hear that air quality will IMPROVE after West Connex as there will be less surface traffic. Furthermore, a representative raised an interesting ethical dilemma to me, which was that surely the loss of a few homes is a necessary evil if it means better transport for the vast majority of Sydney. However, even with all of this in mind, I’m still against the NSW governments current philosophy of road building, as nearly every other developed country is increasingly investing in public transport. Also, I was shocked by how large and “ LA style” the multi lane Westconnex entrance in St Peters will be. The suburb will be destroyed. Either way, the consultation made me question my allegiances and feel uneasy about my decision to participate in the West Connex campaign without hearing both sides of the debate.

The consultation also raised the sticky dilemma of creating my project for a political action group. Occasionally campaigning can feel like advertising, and advertising requires moulding the truth to fit a certain message. I don’t feel like I’ve been stretching the truth, but occasionally the political nature of my community group makes me uneasy. However, one could argue that all history has an argument behind it, mine is just perhaps more explicit. Perhaps my project will document the issues around the changing landscape of Sydney’s neighbourhoods and roads in the early 2000s, which will in of itself become history for future generations.

Entry 7: 17 October 2015

I was quite set on my project being a coffee table book, but the difficulty of executing this properly is starting to dawn on me. I find that when I’m explaining the JCE story to friends in a few minutes they find it interesting, but I don’t think the story translates well to a book. It would be quite dry. Also, as I was talking to my fellow HSTY3902 friend Steph Beck (who is publishing a cook book and already has a lot of experience in the book industry), she alerted me to that fact that publishing can take two weeks, bringing forward my deadline by quite a lot!

Furthermore, looking at No West Connex’s facebook page, many of the campaigners are quite media savvy and turn to social media for updates, not books. Their facebook page already has a few short videos from various academics talking about road planning. So, I think a short video explain the story of the JCE intercut with excerpts from filmed interviews would be most effective. Except, I’VE NEVER MADE A VIDEO BEFORE. Luckily I have lots of friends in the media industry who talked me through some basic filming tips and leant me a proper digital SLR Canon 550D camera, a professional standard microphone and various tripods. I also got a few tips from another

HSTY3902 classmate, Mike (who is completing a very similar video project for another political action group, the Parramatta Female Factory) who said that time lapse footage is a very easy and effective technique. I'm planning to film the JCE route and time-lapse it in my final video. Even with all this help, I still feel quite overwhelmed! Particularly as it means contacting Michelle, Colin, Lee Rhiannon and Fiona Campbell AGAIN so I can re-do their interviews, this time on film. I'm not sure all of them will be available as I know they have busy schedules, but I'll send out some emails and hope for the best!

Entry 8:

19 October 2015

I have started on my video! It's so nice that my project has actually finally taken a physical form! Such a relief! Following Mike's recommendation I did begin with a time-lapse of the JCE route. However, the original route runs through houses, so the route I have filmed isn't exactly where the road would have gone. Actually creating the timelapse with my footage was harder than I had anticipated. I downloaded two different programs, ClipGrab and iStopMotion, but after a lot of playing around I realised that iMovie itself could time-lapse just as well. I also spent a while wrangling with the settings on my camera and computer trying to get my video into iMovie. Luckily, I got a lot of help from my boyfriend. I couldn't have done it without his tech knowledge. I then started to have fun playing around with all the settings, adding some voice recordings, maps and pictures. I also added footage of famous campaigner Jack Mundy from a documentary on the Rocks created by the Department of Infrastructure and Planning. I am concerned about copyright infringement, but have heard that it's fine to use footage without permission as long as it's for educational purposes or you aren't making profit from it. I have settled on stating "Footage courtesy of the Dpt of Infrastructure and Planning" in the bottom left corner. Anyway, despite the issues, I'm just currently enjoying having mastered a new skill!

Entry 9:

1 November 2015

Since my last entry I have completed two of my planned video interviews; one with Colin Hessey and the other with Mat Hounsell. Sadly Michelle Zeibots, who was the most knowledgeable about the JCE, has had to undergo surgery, thus postponing our interview indefinitely. I met with Colin at his Skid Radio studio on Addison Rd in Marrickville on Thursday the 29th of October. From the get-go I realised that my interview with Colin would be testing. Whilst he was very enthusiastic, he didn't let me explain that my video was very narrow in scope; almost solely focused on recounting the JCE campaign. Instead, Colin spoke at length about the philosophy around road building and the campaign for Wollli Creek, and little about the JCE. He also seemed to find my questions simplistic when I referred to the JCE campaign as a "success", as he believed road campaigns were never really "won". I left feeling dispirited regarding both my interviewing skills and my ability to draw out the information and I needed from my interviewees. Luckily my next interview, with Mat Hounsell, was a greater success. From the outset Mat was very keen to hear exactly what I was hoping to achieve with my video. He also gave me many helpful interviewing tips, such as pausing after each question to allow for editing, and also repeating himself when he believed he could phrase things better. Mat also warned me of his habit of going off topic and told me to make sure I kept him on track with my questions. Due to Mat's thoughtfulness the interview went very well. However, I did manage to make a huge technical mishap when I forgot to turn on my microphone, thus making the first 30 minutes of interview useless. We had to film the entire thing again!! Luckily this turned out to be a blessing in disguise as Mat and I were both better prepared the second time around.