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Twin sites eyed for tunnel exhaust stack

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By Alexandra Smith

The cross-city tunnel is so far ahead of schedule that its controversial exhaust stack will be built near Darling Harbour's IMAX theatre but is likely to be later moved to a site where it can be hidden in a building.

Government documents reveal that the Roads and Traffic Authority and the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority have not ruled out relocating the stack and are still searching for a new site.

The foreshore authority and the Darling Harbour Business Association want the stack masked in a building on Darling Walk, preferably the Sega World building, to protect the "commercial viability of the cafe strip".

But the tunnel project is so advanced that time has run out to change the stack's location, so it will be built as planned but possibly moved to appease the foreshore authority and the Darling Harbour businesses.

A delay to the project, which could be finished as early as May, would cost the Government \$135 million, according to the documents, which were tabled in State Parliament after a motion by the Greens MP Sylvia Hale.

"Notwithstanding . . . the RTA will continue liaison with the foreshore authority regarding future opportunities for relocating the stack within a building," a question time briefing note says.

The 60-metre free-standing stack was approved for the IMAX site in December despite Department of Health concerns that its height would not achieve "adequate pollutant dispersion".

An assessment by the department's public health division shows the stack would need to be 20 metres taller if pollutant levels were to be acceptable.

Based on this assessment, the department advised it would support the relocation of the stack to Darling Walk if it meant "overall pollution exposures are lowered".

But Ms Hale, the Greens planning spokeswoman, said a CSIRO expert had given independent advice that showed pollution would be worse if the stack was relocated and masked by a building.

"From what we have been told, pollutant levels at ground level would be worse because the plumes from the camouflaged stack could not be as well dispersed by cross winds," she said.

The cross-city tunnel, which is almost a year ahead of schedule, is one of several tunnel projects under construction.

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