

# \$1.9b for unwanted freeway

exclusive

**Vikki Campion**  
Urban Affairs Reporter

TAXPAYERS will pay \$1.9 billion for a 12-minute section of freeway between Sydney and western NSW after a massive cost blowout.

It will cost the State Government up to \$100 million per kilometre to build a 19km bypass between Mount Victoria and Lithgow.

A federal Labor election promise in 2007 costed the project at \$450 million. RTA documents obtained under FOI reveal estimated costs for the new bypass included three options: a short tunnel costing \$1.72 billion, a long tunnel for \$1.73 billion or a sweeping bridge for \$1.96 billion.

Locals, who made 3000 submissions against the proposal fearing freight trucks would swamp the route, were shocked by the blowout.

Resident Michael Pang said the Great Western Highway weaved through the Blue Mountains into almost 40 different speed zones, 10 school zones, 21 sets of traffic lights and 17 villages.

"We don't want these 26m B-doubles going through school zones and tourist traffic," he said.

"Put freight on the train or on the Bells Line of Road. Don't run it through a world-heritage-listed tourist area."

Even truck drivers are against the road and have urged the State Government to instead upgrade Bells Line of Road to four lanes.

"The residents don't want us there and we don't want to go there," National Road Transport Operators Association director John Morris said.

Opposition roads spokesman and Nationals MP Andrew Stoner said taxpayers were being punished for Labor's "mismanagement".

"Nothing has changed under Kristina Keneally. Labor have shown they can't manage major infrastructure projects," he said.

The RTA, which began consultation two years ago, said it would release the preferred route soon.

It would balance "social, environmental and functional issues to meet project objectives, taking costs and community into consideration".

"Due to the topography in the area the RTA strategic cost estimates indicate that the full upgrade between Mount Victoria and Lithgow may cost between \$1.7 billion and \$2 billion," an RTA spokesman said.



Taken offence: Apple grower Peter Darley yesterday, whose power bill is now expected to rise by more than

## Electricity 'nonsense' remark r

Gemma Jones

THE Energy Minister's office has dismissed as "nonsense" stories of families' hardship in the face of State Government's electricity price rises.

Government spokeswoman Lucy Muirhead was asked on Tuesday if the Government — not families and small business — should pay for the infrastructure improvements at the heart of the rises.

After answering the questions Ms Muirhead, a media adviser to Energy

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Minister John Robertson, sent a follow-up email asking: "Where will tomorrow's nonsense run?"

The "nonsense" she was referring to was the latest in a series of stories on the impact the 64 per cent power

price rise would have families — "nonsense" far led to 7857 people. *Telegraph* petition again

Her comment of farmer Peter Darley from near Orange, whose bill in 18 months and will than \$10,000 within th

"It is certainly not [is absolutely outrageous office] of a minister o ment," he said yesterd

Ms Muirhead told s