NSW GOVERNMENT
The Hon. Melinda Pavey MP
Minister for Roads, Maritime and Freight

Mr David Blunt
Clerk of the Parliaments
Clerk of the Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Blunt,

Please find attached the NSW Government Response for the Windsor Bridge Inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

The Hon. Melinda Pavey MP
Minister for Roads, Maritime and Freight

Received at 12:55 pm
Thursday 20 December 2018

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NSW Government response

Inquiry into the Windsor Bridge replacement project

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Introduction

In 2008 the NSW Government committed to replacing the Windsor Bridge. Following extensive investigation and community consultation, a decision was made that the most cost-effective solution to meet the community's long term needs was to replace the bridge with a new, higher structure, 35 metres downstream of the existing bridge.

The decision to proceed with the replacement bridge option was not taken lightly. The decision balances the benefits and impacts across a number of factors, including providing a safe and reliable crossing of the Hawkesbury River, being sympathetic to the heritage of the area, providing more open space, providing access and connectivity to Windsor and its businesses, improving traffic performance and providing value for money.

The project will enable the upgrading of an essential local and regional road link across the Hawkesbury River. The lower pier sections are 145 years old, upper pier sections 121 years old and the deck 96 years old. The bridge is deteriorating as a result of age and heavy use. The level of rehabilitation and maintenance required to keep the bridge serviceable is no longer cost effective. The bridge has reached the end of its structural and economic life and requires replacement to ensure a safe, efficient and cost effective crossing of the Hawkesbury River at Windsor.

The new bridge will provide improved traffic flow by providing wider lanes and improve safety through improved intersection arrangements, substantially reducing the crash risk. In addition, the replacement bridge will provide a three metre wide shared pedestrian and cycle path that provides a safe, efficient connection across the river and conforms to current standards. The new bridge will improve flood resilience of both the bridge and the surrounding roads, and will allow the unification of open space within the Thompson Square heritage precinct.

Inquiry Findings

Finding 1

That the failure to subject the Windsor Bridge replacement project to a comprehensive independent assurance process has undermined the justification for the project and the credibility of the chosen design, thereby exacerbating community opposition to the project.

Response

Early development for the project pre-dated the commencement of the NSW Infrastructure Investor Assurance Framework and for that reason, the project was not assessed at Gate 1. It has however been assessed at Gate 2 and Gate 4 with all of the findings and recommendations of the independent review team satisfactorily addressed.

Roads and Maritime worked within the project management guidelines in use at the time of commencement of the project and recognised that replacement of the bridge close to its present location would have a high level of community and stakeholder interest. The level of community interest and pockets of opposition guided the extent of development activities. It was important to ensure that the investigations were comprehensive and adequate opportunity for community and stakeholder input was provided. After a rigorous project development process, the project is now proceeding to construction.

Finding 2

That the options presented to the community for the Windsor Bridge replacement project presumed a preference for the replacement of the existing bridge infrastructure.

Response

Roads and Maritime completed a thorough assessment of alternatives for both the repair or replacement of the existing bridge to meet the community's long term needs. An assessment of the maintenance requirements of the bridge was completed prior to consideration of replacement. The bridge is deteriorating as a result of age and heavy use. Due to the increasing maintenance and the ongoing issues of safety and efficiency, Roads and Maritime decided that replacement options needed to be developed. Options included nearby crossing locations as well as bypass locations. A thorough assessment of the Rickabys Line proposal was also carried out to ensure the preferred option was the optimum solution.

Finding 3

That the options developed by the Roads and Traffic Authority in 2009 to replace or rehabilitate Windsor Bridge were too narrow in focus.

Response

The issue that initiated the project was the condition of the existing bridge. The cost of ongoing maintenance and the width and design of the bridge were not appropriate for long term retention. Roads and Maritime assessed a wide range of options to meet the project objectives and after a rigorous evaluation process selected the bridge replacement option now under construction.

Finding 4

That the Roads and Traffic Authority should have given further consideration to alternative options to address the structural integrity of Windsor Bridge. This would have enabled the agency to more comprehensively assess the merits of all options so as to leave no doubt that the option chosen was the best available for the Windsor community and other users of the bridge.

Response

Assessments of refurbishment options developed by Roads and Maritime and others have all been assessed as costing (in 2018 dollars) between $12.1 and $13.7 million (for light traffic

and/or pedestrians and cyclists) and between $16 and $18 million for full traffic loading (see response to Recommendation 6 below for more detail). The relatively small differences between these estimates do not indicate that Roads and Maritime has failed to evaluate options for the retention of the existing bridge including alternative methods of repair.

Finding 5

That the flood mitigation impacts of the new bridge design will be minimal, and traffic congestion will remain an issue in the streets leading to and around Windsor Bridge. While the project to replace the bridge may never have provided the necessary panacea to address these issues, the committee agrees with stakeholders that the opportunity to creatively address these issues has now been lost.

Response

The new bridge will be at least 2.8 metres higher than the existing bridge. This will result in the flood frequency for the new bridge being around three years Average Recurrence Interval (ARI) compared to two years ARI for the existing bridge. The flood performance of the new bridge compared to the existing bridge in looking at historic floods between 1987 and 2011 would have been:

- Closures reduced from eight to three
- Hours of closure reduced from 43 hours to 19.5 hours

These benefits are not considered minimal, especially as the bridge closure level will match that on other sections of the road network north of the bridge.

The new bridge will provide improved traffic flow by providing wider lanes and improve safety by substantially reducing the crash risk. Further, the project will reduce congestion through improved traffic efficiency by installing traffic lights at the intersection of Bridge and George Streets and a new dual-lane roundabout at Freemans Reach Road and Wilberforce Road. In addition, the replacement bridge will provide a three metre wide shared pedestrian and cycle path that provides a safe and efficient connection across the river and conforms to current standards. All of these factors will contribute to improvements in traffic capacity and safety and reduced congestion.

1 Recommendation 1

That the NSW Government publish the results of all Gateway Reviews and similar assessments undertaken for the Windsor Bridge project to date, appropriately redacted of commercial in confidence information.

NSW Government response

Roads and Maritime ensured that extensive information on the project was available through the planning phase of the project and continues to do so into the present construction phase. This information included:

- Community updates
- Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) documents
- EIS Submissions Report documents
- Questions and Answers
- Reports including options report (including economic analysis), community consultation reports and project management plans
- Technical Reports including traffic studies archaeological testing, hydraulic analysis and other bridge and site investigations
- Strategic Conservation Management Plan
- Approvals related to the project
- Project notifications.

These documents were produced as part of the project planning process, to meet legislative requirements and to ensure information was available to the community.

The NSW Government has adopted the Infrastructure Investor Assurance Framework which uses independent peer reviews of projects or programs at key decision points in their lifecycle. The reviews provide the NSW Government with a level of confidence that programs and projects are effectively developed and delivered on time and to budget, and in accordance with Government objectives.

Roads and Maritime large scale projects are assessed under the Infrastructure Investor Assurance Framework managed by Infrastructure NSW. Smaller scale projects are assessed under a similar process managed by Transport for NSW. In both cases the management of the assessment and selection of reviewers is independent of Roads and Maritime.

Independent review allows Government to be confident when making investment decisions that the project represents value for money.

Roads and Maritime provided Infrastructure Investor Assurance Framework documentation for the project to assist the Committee with its Inquiry deliberations.

2 Recommendation 2

That the NSW Government, in developing proposals for significant capital works, identify and implement an appropriate mechanism through which to communicate the justification and need for such projects so as to foster community trust and promote transparency.

NSW Government response

Roads and Maritime uses a comprehensive project management system in managing all large projects. This system is quality assured and has been implemented for many years. It includes procedures that cover all aspects of the project life cycle including community and stakeholder engagement.

A Community and Stakeholder Engagement Plan is developed for each project to guide the project team in informing the community and gathering input to the project. Extensive use is made of all appropriate modes of communication to ensure community members are aware of and have an opportunity to comment on and provide input to project proposals. It is preferable to engage with the community as early as possible in the project life cycle.

Roads and Maritime will continue to use the processes outlined above and strive to gain community trust and provide transparency during the project life cycle. Roads and Maritime regularly reviews and refines its processes to enhance project outcomes, including mechanisms to foster community trust and promote transparency in project decision-making processes.

3 Recommendation 3

That Transport for NSW and Roads and Maritime Services take immediate steps to ensure that all staff are appropriately trained in and adhere to the Community Engagement Policy.

NSW Government response

Roads and Maritime project teams use the expertise available from communications teams in developing the Community and Stakeholder Engagement Plan for each project. Where consultants are engaged they are required to have appropriately skilled people to manage community interactions.

Roads and Maritime has introduced the *Project Management Framework for Program Offices: A Guide for Project* Managers to ensure that staff members across the organisation involved in development and delivery of projects are aware of and apply appropriate community engagement policies and processes. These changes have been introduced to enable Roads and Maritime to operate more effectively through efficient and transparent practices and tools across the full lifecycle of a project, including as relates to cost, schedule, risk, consultation, contingency and reporting.

4 Recommendation 4

That the NSW Government immediately cease paying participants in community consultation processes.

NSW Government response

During the preparation of the project's Environmental Impact Statement, Roads and Maritime consulted with the community in a number of different ways including community updates, information sessions, an online discussion forum and market research. Roads and Maritime strives to transparently and thoroughly engage with stakeholders and the community to understand their needs and consider these when making decisions.

Given the varied community views regarding the Windsor Bridge project, a market research company was engaged to enable better understanding of local issues in Windsor and the surrounding areas. Roads and Maritime has advised this was an isolated activity and is not a standard community engagement practice.

5 Recommendation 5

That the NSW Government work collaboratively with heritage experts and key project stakeholders to minimise heritage impacts of the Windsor Bridge replacement project and identify how information on the brick barrel drains can be appropriately and meaningfully exhibited on-site, or at a local venue, such as the Windsor Museum.

NSW Government response

The NSW Government is committed to ensuring that our heritage is valued, protected, and enjoyed. As part of this commitment, RMS aims to properly manage heritage items among its large and diverse range of assets of historical significance to the people of NSW (including bridges, roads, buildings), as well as to fulfil its legal obligations under both State and Federal legislation.

Minimising impacts on heritage was, and remains, a key consideration in the design and construction of the project.

The Strategic Conservation Management Plan (SCMP) developed for the Windsor Bridge Replacement Project has received final approval from the Department of Planning and Environment (DPE). It documents strategies, guidelines and actions for the conservation of the heritage significance of Thompson Square.

The Plan was prepared in consultation with DPE, the Office of Environment and Heritage, and Hawkesbury City Council. Consultation on the Plan was also held through a series of workshops with community representatives between May and July 2017.

RMS has worked with Aboriginal stakeholders, who are participating in the salvage work on site, to determine their preferred option for what happens with the Aboriginal artefacts discovered. This will be decided by the Aboriginal Focus Group, which represents eight Aboriginal groups with a cultural attachment and authority in relation to the project area.

RMS is continuing to work closely with the community, heritage experts and other key stakeholders.

A Windsor Bridge Conservation and Heritage page has been established on the project website to keep the community informed of items of interest uncovered and progress with the archaeological investigations.

RMS continues to collaborate with stakeholders to minimise heritage impacts on all Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artefacts, including the brick barrel drains, for the benefit of current and future generations.

6 Recommendation 6

That the NSW Government retain the existing Windsor Bridge for pedestrian, cycling and light vehicle use.

NSW Government response

The NSW Government understands that sections of the community would like to retain the old Windsor Bridge.

The flood impact of retaining the old bridge has been evaluated. The retention of the complete existing bridge combined with the proposed bridge would increase upstream flood levels. There is also the potential for the existing bridge to be washed away by flood waters, which could the damage the new bridge.

Due to the increased flood impacts, retention of the full length of the existing Windsor Bridge is not supported.

An alternative approach proposed by Roads and Maritime in the Urban Design and Landscape Detailed Design Report is for the southern span of the existing Windsor Bridge to be retained as a viewing platform. The retained span would preserve the nature of the design and construction of the bridge, show the 1897 increased bridge height of 2.4 metres at the pier and the 1922 concrete deck. Interpretation signage displaying historical information and site interpretation relating to both Windsor Bridge and Thompson Square would be incorporated into this platform, which would be a key interpretation node within the heritage interpretation strategy for the project.

Flood impacts of retaining the single span have been evaluated. It was found that the inclusion or exclusion of the viewing platform structure would have negligible impacts on the overall flood height results found in the flood model for the project.

The retention of the southern span is considered a reasonable approach to preserving a publicly accessible record of the existing Windsor Bridge.

7 Recommendation 7

That the NSW Government ensure that a Gate 6 Post Implementation Gateway Review is undertaken following the completion of construction of the Windsor Bridge replacement project and publish the results of this review on the Roads and Maritime Services website.

NSW Government response

As noted at 4.37 in the Inquiry Report, the Gate 4 Review recommended that a Gate 6 Review be completed.

Roads and Maritime will undertake the Gate 6 Review following project completion and when relevant safety statistics and data becomes available.

8 Recommendation 8

That, following the completion of the Windsor Bridge replacement project, the NSW Government undertake a review of the current traffic, flood mitigation and other road infrastructure requirements of Windsor and the surrounding towns to determine a comprehensive strategy for upgrading the existing road network.

NSW Government response

The NSW Government has developed Future Transport 2056, a strategy to deliver on a vision of a connected road and public transport network across NSW focused on making trips faster, easier and safer. This strategy is supported by a Greater Sydney Services and Infrastructure Plan, which commits to developing detailed corridor and place plans including for Richmond-Windsor. In addition, Transport for NSW and Roads and Maritime are constantly monitoring and assessing the performance of the road network in relation to safety, efficiency and maintenance standards, including through localised assessments routinely undertaken following the implementation of major projects.

The NSW Government is now delivering Resilient Valley, Resilient Communities – Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley Flood Risk Management Strategy (the Flood Strategy). This long-term strategy is the result of four years of investigation into the best ways to reduce the risk to life, property and community from floods in the valley now and into the future. It contains a mix of measures designed to reduce flood risk and is being delivered with NSW government agencies, local councils, businesses and the community.

In June 2016, the NSW Government committed around $58 million to implement phase one of the Flood Strategy. This phase is being delivered over four years from 2016 to 2020. It includes an environmental impact statement (EIS) and business case for the proposal to raise Warragamba Dam wall for flood mitigation, as well as a range of other important actions to reduce flood risk in the shorter term.

Roads and Maritime will continue to support this broader strategy for the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley.