

INQUIRY INTO WINDSOR BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Portfolio Committee No 5

Inquiry into the Windsor Bridge Replacement Project

Dear Chairman

I welcome the State Government's Parliamentary Inquiry into the Roads and Maritime Services' Windsor Bridge replacement project, and I make this submission in line with the Terms of Reference, particularly relating to:

The replacement bridge project, including:

ii) post construction strategic outcomes, including traffic benefits, transport and network service capacity

I am a single parent, currently residing in the Hawkesbury, an area that has limited public transport options and is bridge reliant. I work, and my child attends a local school.

My work takes me all over the Sydney region; on both sides of the Hawkesbury River, Sydney CBD and the Blue Mountains.

Commuting is stressful and becoming more unpleasant. My long commutes increase my household bills and I have become susceptible to increasing petrol prices.

Because I am solely responsible for my child, I am limited in how many hours I can commute for.

The proposed replacement of Windsor Bridge doesn't address the current traffic issues we have in the Hawkesbury, nor does it plan for future development and use. This new bridge will increase traffic flow, causing congestion to appear further down the road.

Local politicians regularly spruik the benefits a replacement bridge will provide for traffic congestion:

- In November 2016 Dominic Perrottet said *"the Government has delivered, or is the process of delivering, extensive infrastructure to bust congestion, such as the new Windsor Bridge"*
- Dominic Perrottet, December 2016: a third lane will *"operate with three traffic lanes when it opens in 2019 to reduce congestion for Hawkesbury drivers. This extra lane will save time on the road especially in peak hour. That means less time in traffic and more time doing the things that you want to do."*
- Dominic Perrottet Community Update sent to constituents December 2017 *"Both the **Urban Design and Landscape Plan** and **Strategic Conservation Management Plan** will be finalised by the Department of Planning in April 2018. These plans have been carefully formulated to maximise traffic reduction through Windsor"*

However, the RMS disagree:

- In August 2012 the RMS admitted that *"The replacement of a bridge alone is unlikely to improve capacity, as there are other constraints beyond the scope of this project that would need to be addressed."*
- In April 2016 in an RMS Q&A, they say *"congestion is currently caused by the intersections on approach to the existing bridge."*
- In March 2017 I attended a community display at Windsor Riverview shopping centre where staff confirmed to me that the proposed bridge was not designed to help with traffic problems.
- In 2016 it was announced an extra lane would be added to the bridge design. This will be of little or no benefit either. The RMS have admitted any third lane will provide *"more vehicle storage on the bridge"*

Often the afternoon peak hour queue extend to a halt at McGraths Hill, sometimes as far back as McDonalds at Groves Ave, this is almost 3km from the George St intersection at Windsor. My commuting experience indicates that the current bridge itself is not the problem, but the intersections at either end are the cause of the traffic congestion. Fixing all of the intersections is not in the scope of this project. The major cause of the congestion is the Macquarie and Bridge Street intersection.

The congestion caused by building the replacement bridge will increase traffic flows through Thompson Square and cause social diseconomies including the cost of wasted time, vehicle maintenance, loss of business and air and noise pollution.

“Through” traffic will still be mixing with local traffic and different sizes of vehicles will be mixing together eg: cars, motorbikes, buses and trucks, just as it is now.

There will still be delays because of breakdowns and accidents. It will be a new bridge with narrow lanes, 2 closely situated signalised intersections, pedestrians, increasing traffic volumes and a reduced maximum speed of 50 km per hour.

Economic Consequences of replacing the Windsor Bridge

Congestion is a job and productivity killer. Not only does it harm the quality of life for families, it makes it more difficult for small businesses to make a profit and to expand their business. Local businesses spend money on covering the costs of congestion and not on hiring more staff.

Congestion:

- Wastes time of motorists
- Reduces regional economic health
- Causes delays which results in employees arriving late for work or school which results in lost business
- Causes traffic queues which interferes with the safe and timely passage of emergency vehicles
- Causes unnecessary wear and tear on vehicles
- Causes collisions due to tight spacing and constant braking and acceleration

A Bypass as a solution

I was living in Goulburn in December 1992 when the Goulburn bypass became operational. I understand that Goulburn is a highway town, although I believe that the benefits the community in Goulburn enjoy would also be applicable to Windsor if a bypass was offered.

By taking the flow of 'through' traffic away from the town centre they now enjoy benefits such as:

- Less traffic congestion
- A reduction of noise, traffic pollution and vibration
- Improvements in pedestrian and traffic safety
- The removal of bottlenecks

Goulburn not only survived the bypass, but thrived, becoming a destination town in its own right. It is my belief that Windsor and surrounding villages could become much more attractive to visitors if we had a bypass.

In 2008 the Government Architects Office stated a bypass would be the best option for a new bridge in Windsor. They preferred a bypass *"in terms of future traffic demands, urban growth and the historic context of Windsor Town Centre"*

Cambray Consulting, August 15 2013 (page 24) *"Rather than constructing a three-lane (ultimate) bridge which has more traffic capacity than the roads and intersections feeding it, we would suggest considering alternate bridge crossing locations which may provide adequate traffic capacity for a longer period of time (eg: a bypass)"*

Cambray Consulting, August 15 2013 (page 24) *"RMS does state however that an 'alternative route around Windsor may be considered in the future depending on growth in traffic numbers and local congestion'. In our opinion, such a route should be considered as part of this project."*

Cambray Consulting, August 15 2013 (page 67) *"If the current bridge was to be retained for local traffic, this could offer a good result all-round. The new bridge could take B-Doubles and heavy vehicles away from town, allowing a load limit to be imposed on the existing bridge to possibly extend its life, minimise the effects of heavy vehicles on the town and retain local connectivity."*

Cambray Consulting, August 15 2013 (page 70) *"we suggest it may be prudent to 'step back' and undertake a broader study to investigate long term solutions, and once a preferred long term solution is identified, consider a staged approach or interim treatments to progressively deliver*

that long term solution. This would avoid investing substantial funds into a traffic route which will have a limited 'life' due to constrained intersection capacity on the roads feeding the bridge"

In the 2012 Windsor Bridge EIS the RMS predicted traffic volumes would increase by 17.3% by 2021. A 2017 traffic count showed that heavy vehicles have increased by over 100%. With this traffic data showing that Windsor Bridge has almost **3000** heavy vehicles crossing it per day, it is astonishing that Windsor would miss out on a bypass.

As a comparison, the Government data shows that the:

- Moree bypass has removed **1700** heavy vehicles per day
- Berry bypass has removed up to **1600** heavy vehicles per day
- Kempsey bypass has removed up to **2000** heavy vehicles per day

Community Consultation Process

There was no community feedback taken into consideration, as the RMS said was happening in 2009. Option 1 was decided in 2008. Tax payer dollars were used to pay a consultant with the full knowledge of the RTA that their expert recommendations would be ignored.

In **2008** an internal RMS report on the status of the project states *“the option for the location of the new bridge has been finalised and preferred location selected”*.

In July **2009**, the RMS released a report on 9 design options for a new bridge. Feedback was invited to determine a shortlist of preferred options. *“Once a shortlist of options has been determined the community will be consulted again to provide feedback so a preferred option for Windsor Bridge can be chosen”*

In this same report a question of whether a preferred option had been identified was asked, *“currently the RTA has no preferred option. The preferred option will be decided after the community consultation has been completed”*

In **2013** an independent report on traffic was prepared for the Government by Cambray Consulting. I am not aware of how much this cost the taxpayer. The recommendations put forward by Cambray Consulting were ignored by the Government.

Cambray Consulting stated *“in summary, based upon the information provided to us, it appears that the scope throughout much of the duration of the project has focussed on justifying the preferred option, as opposed to undertaking a thorough investigation into alternative options.*

In our opinion, there may be other options which were discarded prematurely, or for which ‘sub options’ may be feasible. Additionally, there may be alternatives which offer a better long term solution, which can be staged, and perhaps make better use of the funds being invested into the construction of a new bridge.” (page 70)

Conclusion

No serious efforts have been made to consider a bypass or other alternate route which will help with traffic congestion.

The traffic congestion is due to inefficiencies within the traffic flow system and the demand that is placed on the system. This will not be eased by replacing the Windsor Bridge.

I would like the government to invest in the Hawkesbury region by providing a road system that benefits all road users and the Hawkesbury community, by retaining the current bridge to be used for local traffic and a bypass to be used for through traffic and heavy vehicles.

Contrary to what politicians say, the RMS themselves and traffic experts say this project will not ease traffic congestion. The traffic data shows that 3000 heavy vehicles per day cross the current bridge. Lesser numbers have been used by the government as an excuse to build bypasses for other towns.

This congestion can be reduced significantly by creating a new route in the form of a bypass.

Recommendations

- That the Windsor Bridge replacement project be stopped
- The current bridge to be retained and investigations into a bypass begin
- That better use of available funds be used to ease traffic congestion through Windsor and surrounds
- That genuine transparent standards for appropriate development are put in place so residents and communities know exactly what is planned for their community and can have their say about it
- That the RTA remain transparent and release accurate, factual information to the public
- Tax payer dollars are not wasted on reports that are written for no reason
- Policy put in place to prevent political interference with the approval process
- Policy put in place to prevent politicians lying to constituents so only accurate information is provided