

**Submission
No 68**

**INQUIRY INTO WINDSOR BRIDGE REPLACEMENT
PROJECT**

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SUBMISSION

To:

Portfolio Committee No.5 – Industry and Transport
Inquiry into the Windsor Bridge replacement project

Submitted by: Jenni Stapleton

BACKGROUND

As a former Director of the State Archives and Records Authority of New South Wales, and an elected member of the History Council of New South Wales I would like to express my concerns about the planned destruction of a heritage site of national significance by a Government that should see the potential this site offers for educational, cultural and tourism experience enhancement.

Likewise as a former resident of Western Sydney who has worked for many years with Local Government and educational organisations to bring awareness of the rich Indigenous and Colonial history of the region, the Windsor Bridge and Thompson Square precinct offers huge positive opportunities for the residents of the western suburbs and for visitors to the area.

Any development that reduces the heritage values of this unique area will be a massive backward step for the whole of New South Wales, not just the local economy and community.

COMMENTS ON INDEPENDENT HERITAGE REVIEW

The *Independent Heritage Review* (IHR) prepared by Dr Mary Casey and her team is a damning report. It states unequivocally that the heritage assessments and other works prepared for the Windsor Bridge Replacement Project (WBRC) are sub-standard and inadequate.

The IHR outlines many errors of fact and procedural failures in the gathering of the information that shape the final reports to the Department of Planning and Infrastructure (DPI). It is particularly harsh in its criticism of the archaeological documentation and mapping techniques used, which fail to follow standard professional practice.

The IHR notes no attempt has been made to quantify in the WBRP documentation the level of impact on the existing declaration of Thompson Square as an area of recognised State Significance. This is because the necessary analysis of the heritage values of the Conservation Area have not been done as part of the reports presented to DPI.

The IHR's most telling comments relate to the fact that the Heritage Consultants are convinced the existing heritage assessments underestimate the significance of the site they are dealing with, do not adequately document the archaeological potential of the site nor follow the guidelines of the NSW Heritage Manual.

The IHR is clear (page 8) that the Urban Design mitigation measures will not reduce the impact of the proposed development on the site at all. The...

“proposed design is not based on a full understanding of the significance of the heritage values of the place, not on any heritage design principles or conservation policies, on which to base a future design. Therefore it is not mitigating impacts on heritage but an additional impact”

In the view of Dr Casey and her team, this inadequate outcome is the direct result of the fact that the provided archaeological assessments do not adequately document the archaeological potential of the site nor follow the guidelines of the NSW Heritage Manual.

Despite this, the Road and Maritime Services (RMS) heritage consultants state the proposed impacts on Thompson Square Conservation Area are so major the WBRP should not go ahead.

By choosing to pursue only Option 1, the option to demolish the existing Windsor Bridge and run a new major road through Thompson Square, RMS is ignoring its own Consultants' advice.

COMMENTS ON RELEVANCE OF DESTINATION NSW WESTERN SYDNEY VISITOR ECONOMY STRATEGY, 2017/18 – 2020/21

I would like to draw the attention of the Committee to the *Western Sydney Visitor Economy Strategy* released by Destination NSW in 2017.

This strategy is looking to boost the visitor economy of western Sydney by, in particular (page 8), leveraging....

"its rich history, its Indigenous and pioneer heritage and its multi-cultural population and arts and cultural assets"

Destination NSW is looking to develop a cohesive approach to the management of assets which can be linked to provide tourists and visitors to western Sydney with a high-quality experience. The Strategy document notes that in 2016 33% of all visitors to Sydney visited western Sydney, and spent \$4billion in the region.

The Strategy also noted that just under 50% of all visits to the region, whether by domestic or international visitors, were to visit friends and family. As the population of western Sydney grows this 'family' visitation component will increase and be more multi-cultural and contribute more to the State's economy.

The completion of the airport in western Sydney is seen as a game-changer for tourism in the region. The proximity of various Western Sydney University campus also supports the Strategy's priority to expand the Educational tourism sector and capitalise on the needs of primary, secondary and tertiary students to engage in heritage and cultural tours.

There is significant tourism potential for an area such as the Thompson Square Conservation Area, described as one of only 4 pre-1810 localities on mainland Australia, and Windsor is well placed to capitalise on increased tourism as it already has a profile as a picturesque rural and heritage 'village' close to, but not impacted on by, areas of increasing population growth.

Improved transport links, such as a by-pass, would allow Windsor to even further improve its immediate environment and ambience, consistent with offering a heritage, historical (Colonial and Indigenous) experience to the local community and beyond.

CONCLUSION

The Windsor Bridge and Thompson Square precinct is a very rare example of an Indigenous and early Colonial heritage site that is close to a major city with a growing population and with improving international and domestic access.

The site is currently listed as being of State Significance but the Independent Heritage Review prepared by Casey and Lowe makes it clear the site would justify further analysis and is arguably of National and possibly World Heritage status.

This Independent Review also makes it clear that the work done to date to provide archaeological, heritage and urban design assessments has been inadequate and not to accepted professional standards.

It should be noted that the RMS' own Heritage Consultants' recommendation was that the WBRP not proceed.

Instead of seeing the development of this site as a costly drain on the Government I want to draw the Committee's attention to the potential contribution this site can make to the State's Visitor Economy and to the educational, cultural and tourism experience in the western Sydney region and beyond.

This site represents a positive opportunity to enhance the life of those living in western Sydney through exposure to their Indigenous and Colonial past.

It also represents a significant potential tourism, cultural and educational asset if developed correctly with due attention to its existing archaeological and heritage significance.

To destroy a site of such State Significance would be unconscionable when it represents such a potential for positive utilisation into the future.

Jenni Stapleton
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