

**Submission
No 130**

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**

Background

I have been a resident of the Hawkesbury for six years. My appreciation of the area's importance in Australia's history, visible in the "Macquarie towns", drew me here. I live in Wilberforce, about six kilometres from Windsor and travel across Windsor Bridge at least twice daily, including during peak hours.

Issues

This submission is organised around three areas of concern I have which relate to the following terms of reference:

- a) The current Windsor Bridge, including its maintenance regime, renovation methods and justification for demolition – in particular, contradictions in information available to the community relating to the condition of Windsor Bridge and the Government's failure to address these
- b) The replacement bridge project, including
 - ii) post construction strategic outcomes – in particular, the project's limited capacity to improve existing traffic issues
 - iii) economic, social and heritage impacts – in particular, the planned destruction of Thompson Square.

Comment

- a) **The current Windsor Bridge: contradictions in information available to the community relating to the condition of Windsor Bridge and the Government's failure to address these**

Information available to the community on the state of the existing Windsor Bridge is contradictory:

- On the one hand, the Report on the Structural Condition of the existing Windsor Bridge prepared by Peter Stewart Consulting, is reassuring, stating that "The condition of the existing bridge is such that it is not in a dire condition and could relatively economically be refurbished and strengthened." (p. 31)
- On the other hand, an RMS representative at the Community display for the Urban Design and Landscape Plan in Riverview Shopping Centre, Windsor early in 2017 stated that the existing bridge was in such a poor state of disrepair that it could not be preserved for any traffic.
- The Report on the Structural Condition of the Existing Windsor Bridge prepared by Peter Stewart Consulting in 2013 also indicates that interventions to refurbish and reinstate the fabric of the bridge have been "notable by their absence" since 2003.

This information gives rise to the following questions:

- What is the impact of the increases in heavy vehicles on the condition of Windsor Bridge? (See reference to Community Action for Windsor Bridge 2017 traffic survey below.)
- Why has the RMS neglected to refurbish Windsor Bridge since 2003?
- What are the risks this neglect poses to motorists and pedestrians who use the bridge regularly?

b) The replacement bridge project: limited capacity to improve existing traffic issues

The traffic bottleneck at Windsor is an increasing problem.

- The six-kilometre journey from Wilberforce to Windsor in the morning peak (between 7:00 and 8:30 am) often takes 45 minutes.
- An extra lane on the new bridge will not alleviate the traffic issues.
- A 2017 traffic survey conducted by Community Action for Windsor Bridge indicates that from 2012 to 2017 heavy vehicle movements on the bridge increased by 48%, rigid trucks by 45% and articulated trucks by 59%.
- A report prepared for NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure by Cambray Consulting, dated 15 August 2013, suggests that the RMS has acknowledged that 'an alternative route around Windsor may be considered in the future depending on growth in traffic numbers and local congestion.' However, Cambray Consulting recommended that "such a route should be considered as part of this [current Windsor Bridge Replacement] project." (p. 24)
- There is evidence in many towns that the NSW Government builds by-pass roads which enable these towns to thrive.

A by-pass around Windsor is required in the short term.

c) Economic, social and heritage impacts: the destruction of Thompson Square

The history of Thompson Square is living history: encompassing events long past such as Philip Cunningham's execution, as well as present-day family picnics and community gatherings.

- "Thompson Square comprises a series of interrelated components – the setting, historic plantings, monuments, fencing, roadways, surrounding

buildings and connections to the River. Such squares are rare in NSW and in Australia." (Heritage Council of NSW Submission for the Windsor Bridge Replacement Project)

- All of the components of Thompson Square have been shaped through events in history and currently exist in relationship to one another.

Dr Kate Grenville's words portray a powerful image of the value of Thompson Square:

No one would dream of running a road through Old Government House in Parramatta, or even of Elizabeth Farm where John and Elizabeth Macarthur developed the merino. These places give reality to important aspects of our past: the beginning of our government, the beginnings of our international economy. Being able to walk on the actual places gives us a sense of connection to those abstractions. It makes the past real in a way nothing else does. Rightly, we protect those places.

Thompson Square in Windsor is one of the very few places that gives the same acknowledgement to the "ordinary people" who, although less visible, are just as important. The humble shops and inns of the square, and its identity as a meeting-place for the community, make their lives suddenly real to us. Standing there is one of the few ways we can feel their lives and understand the social fabric they were part of. Keeping that place as intact as we can gives us a way to honour those forgotten people. (The Battle for Windsor Bridge: Personal Stories, 2016, p. 120-121). [The Battle for Windsor Bridge/The Battle for Windsor Bridge - Personal Stories online version.pdf](#)

The Thompson Square precinct should be managed sensitively, with due regard for its value in Australia's colonial past and recognition of its ongoing value in the lives of the local community.

- The Windsor Bridge Replacement Project Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Volume 1 (November 2012) states that Windsor "has developed a high public profile as a historic place" (p.160) and acknowledges that Option 1 "would adversely impact the significance of the State Heritage Register-listed Thompson Square heritage conservation area and the overall historic vistas and values of Windsor" (p. 63).
- However, the proposed replacement bridge described in the Draft Urban Design and Landscape Plan, April 2017 will dominate the landscape and detract from the Georgian buildings and other elements so important in Windsor's and indeed Australia's past.
- If the government genuinely respected "the unique heritage values of Thompson Square and Windsor" as it states in the Urban Design and Landscape Plan, it would not be planning to replace the Windsor Bridge, but

would rather be planning to build a by-pass around the town. This is supported by the opinion of heritage experts who agree that “the proposed impacts on Thompson Square Conservation Area are so major the Windsor Bridge Replacement Project should not go ahead” and that “...the most appropriate treatment of Thompson Square and Windsor Bridge is to avoid any further negative impact and to take the opportunity identified by the Heritage Council to remove through traffic.” (Windsor Bridge, EIS, Historic Heritage Working Paper Part 1, p. v.)

- The arrogance of the NSW Government in pushing ahead with the Windsor Bridge Replacement Project is embodied in Working Paper 1 which states that “the RMS has chosen not to accept this advice” because the decision to explore only Option 1 in the EIS had already been made. (Windsor Bridge Replacement Project Independent Heritage Review August 2013, p. 8.)
- Moreover, the adverse impacts on heritage are acknowledged in the transcript of the Land and Environment Court hearing through the words of Barrister Kirk: "This is going to be bad for heritage, no doubt about it... " (Kirk, Barrister for the Government, Day 2 Court Transcript, p. 53.)
- The inherent truth in the barrister’s words are now coming to light. Archaeological salvage work being undertaken by the RMS has recently uncovered colonial barrel drains, valuable remnants of Windsor’s past.
- Correspondence to the Federal Minister for the Environment, seeking emergency Commonwealth heritage listing for Thompson Square are to date unheeded.
- The Hon Dominic Perrottet, Member for Hawkesbury in the NSW Government is invisible in the community and refuses to engage in the debate around preserving Thompson Square.
- Despite numerous invitations and thousands of letters, the Premier ignores the Hawkesbury community.

Conclusion

The NSW Government’s plan to replace Windsor Bridge is poorly conceived and executed, with little genuine effort to explain to the community why such a destructive plan is better than building a town by-pass – which is standard practice in similar locations in NSW.

Recommendations

1. The highest levels of Government, which to date have arrogantly pushed forward with a flawed, short term option, should explicitly engage with the Hawkesbury community, heed calls for a by-pass, and cease the destruction of Windsor.

2. The archaeological salvage work currently in progress in Thompson Square should cease immediately pending the outcome of the Committee of Inquiry.
3. The existing Windsor Bridge should be refurbished for local traffic as a matter of urgency.
4. Ongoing planning for the Windsor Bridge Replacement Project known as Option 1 should cease and be replaced by planning for a by-pass.

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