

**Submission
No 132**

INQUIRY INTO WINDSOR BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT

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Leigh Williams

Submission To: Members of the Parliamentary Inquiry into the new bridge through Thompson Square.

With the State government planning to build a new crossing of the Hawkesbury river at Windsor, it may have been a good idea to pause and consider whether a new bridge through Thompson Square could achieve optimum improvements in traffic flow and safety at a reasonable cost. I contend that the option 1 plan fails that test spectacularly.

The existing 1874 bridge was built to suit requirements for that period, namely horses, horse drawn vehicles and pedestrians. But it was also built to support the heaviest loads possible at that time, so it was built to safely carry the weight of two steam locomotives. The fact the bridge was so over-engineered allowed the RMS to increase the load rating of the bridge to carry the largest and heaviest B-double trucks permitted on NSW roads. Which put the lie to the claim the bridge had reached the end of its life. That happened in 2013, which was several years AFTER the government began claiming the bridge had reached the end of its useful life and was urgently required to be replaced!

In 1874, Thompson Square was the location of the wharf, a ferry to the north bank and the central hub of commerce in Windsor, so it was natural to place the bridge in that position. But it is safe to say it was never intended that huge truck and dog trailer combinations, semi trailers and B-doubles would be using that bridge and roaring through Thompson Square at the rate of up to 3,000+ per day, predicted to increase to five or six thousand per day in the near future as new sand mines at Putty come on line. Additionally about 18,000 cars and light vehicles per day cross the bridge and drive through Thompson Square, with upwards of 80% travelling to destinations other than Windsor. So, apart from a few delivery trucks to Windsors two supermarkets, all of the heavy vehicles and approximately 80% of the cars are travelling through the square to other destinations. Those vehicles would benefit greatly by using a bypass rather than the inevitable delays which will occur because of the two sets of traffic lights planned for the upgraded road through the square.

But why continue to impose that amount of traffic on Australia's oldest public square, which dates back to 1795, seven years after the arrival of the first fleet? Thompson Square is sacred to the history of Australia, being named after an emancipated convict by a visionary Governor, Lachlan Macquarie, as a symbol of the beginning of an egalitarian society, free of the class system of England. It is literally the place where the "fair go" began. It is steeped in colonial history and it should be treasured, not condemned to the abuse modern day heavy traffic imposes.

We currently have a rare window of opportunity available, the only chance for the next two hundred years or so, to get things right. Thompson Square in its entirety was heritage listed until the O'Farrell government passed legislation suspending its heritage protections. While technically the protections are removed, Thompson Square's significance to the history of Australia cannot be erased or ignored. It should not be subjected to the noise, disturbance, damage and inconvenience of a construction that could be done with far less inconvenience on a bypass of the town. Nor should a state significant road be imposed on

this sacred place.

The streetscape of the square is more than enough to warrant the return of heritage listing. But now barrel drains and other structures have been exposed by the current "archaeological salvage" works which date back further than any other post-european structures in the country. To continue with the project will ultimately destroy these structures, while the much-resented bridge will destroy any chance Windsor has of returning to the thriving town it once was or capitalising on the tourism to the town.

Please demand all work be suspended until your committee has brought down its findings, which I sincerely hope will be to cancel this state sanctioned vandalism to Australia's oldest town and its historic town square. With another two to three thousand sand trucks per day planned for the near future, a bypass to remove heavy vehicles and all through-traffic from the town must be constructed.

Yours sincerely
Leigh Williams