

Submission
No 233

INQUIRY INTO WINDSOR BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I am making this submission to address the terms of reference for the Portfolio Committee No. 5 –Industry and Transport, specifically that the committee inquire into and report on the expenditure, performance and effectiveness of the Roads & Maritime Services' Windsor Bridge replacement project, and in particular:

- a) the current Windsor Bridge, including its maintenance regime, renovation methods and justification for demolition,
- b) the replacement bridge project, including:
 - i. options presented to the community
 - ii. post construction strategic outcomes, including traffic benefits, transport and network service capacity
 - iii. economic, social and heritage impacts
 - iv. flood immunity benefits
 - v. project assessment process
 - vi. planning and procurement strategies and associated project costs
 - vii. cost benefit analysis process, and
- c) any other related matters.

I consider the Option 1 project should not go ahead as it does not meet the project objectives established in July 2009:

1. It fails to provide for a 1 in 5 year flood event,
2. It fails to deliver the required objectives regarding traffic and transport efficiency,
3. It does not meet community needs for the long term,
4. It has not adequately or appropriately addressed the costs and benefits,
5. It does not minimise impacts on heritage and the character of the local area,
6. It is opposed by the community at large due to its detrimental effects, and
7. Better alternatives have been identified and not properly or fully investigated.

I believe Windsor deserves to have its heritage assets protected and that a third crossing, a bypass, is the most appropriate course of action for the long-term future traffic and flooding needs of the region. The exact location of the new crossing should be determined in conjunction with government plans for the Outer Sydney Orbital to ensure the most effective transport solution is provided.

- i. options presented to the community

The options presented to the community were lacking in detail to allow an informed opinion to be made. The changes since the initial information are substantial and have effects not apparent from the original information, which varied depending on whether you looked at the Community Update sent to residents or the A1 poster used in presentations (attached as A1 poster X7_FINAL 030709.pdf). Most of the options were laughable in their vague attempt at viability. The RMS intent appears to have been to divide the community and make their preferred option the “sensible” choice as people were under the impression these were the only options available.

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

Traffic reports provided by the RMS show no significant long term improvements in traffic, with intersections remaining at below optimal performance, queue lengths measured in metres when they currently are always in kilometres, overstating pedestrian impacts despite limited pedestrian activity (as with cyclist numbers) and relying on modelling rather than observation. The reported traffic counts themselves are contradicted by the online Traffic Volume Viewer data, which show volumes at the Bridge Street counter alone exceeding 20,000 vehicles as far back as 2015.

The road network is approaching capacity as a B Double route and a bypass of the town centre is required to provide any sensible strategic outcome.

iii. economic, social and heritage impacts The impact of the proposed bridge has not been assessed in terms of the effect on tourism and social identity, particularly with the uncovering of significant heritage assets which would be a bonanza for regional tourism much like Port Arthur capitalises on its assets. The heritage impacts of “salvaging” colonial and indigenous archaeology are immeasurable and risk severe damage to the identity of the locale as a heritage conservation area.

iv. flood immunity benefits

The increase in flood immunity from a 1:2 year current level to “just under” 1:3 is far below the stated objective of providing for 1:5 year immunity. The project should not have proceeded past the options analysis on this basis alone without looking at alternatives to meet the required levels. The impact on upstream flooding has been identified in the hydrology working papers and is further cause for the project to be discontinued, as it increases the flood effect on hundreds of homes for a marginal increase in immunity.

v. project assessment process

It appears there was never a process to assess this project as it had already been announced in State parliament over a year earlier. The process has the appearance of a sham and hopefully this Inquiry will reveal it for what it was.

vii. cost benefit analysis process

The reported analysis appears badly flawed in making the base case consist of removing the current bridge to massively overstate the costs. There is no comparison of all options, no sensitivity analysis and no detail of the supporting calculations which are usually published for all significant RMS projects, including recent bypasses constructed at Singleton, Macksville and Bolivia Hill. The failure to carry out the analysis under the guidelines of the Economic Appraisal Manual, or the NSW Government Guidelines for Economic Appraisals leaves the process looking like it would not stand up to public scrutiny.

This project is not supported by the Hawkesbury City Council, is vehemently opposed by Community Action for Windsor Bridge (an organisation which has held a vigil in opposition for almost 5 years), was highly criticised by the Heritage Council and National Trust, and lacks the apparent support of any registered body other than the RMS and the Liberal Party. The people of the Hawkesbury spoke at the last local government elections and overwhelmingly supported those who opposed the Option 1 project.

The NSW Government would do well to heed the message they are ignoring and move to stop the project and proceed with a bypass for a long term solution.