

**Submission
No 274**

**INQUIRY INTO WINDSOR BRIDGE REPLACEMENT
PROJECT**

Name: Mr John Fitzgerald

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I am writing 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 and is an ineffective measure to address traffic issues:

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

Windsor deserves to have its heritage assets protected and a third crossing, a bypass route, is the most appropriate course of action for the long-term future traffic and flooding needs of the region. The current traffic through Windsor has far too many trucks and other heavy vehicles which should not be forced to go through such a historic town. The best location for the new crossing should be determined in conjunction with government plans for the Outer Sydney Orbital and the Bells Line corridor to ensure the most effective transport solution is provided. The current bridge proposal is not the answer, never has been, and will do nothing to improve the current traffic.

i. options presented to the community

The options presented to the community in July 2009 were lacking in sufficient detail to allow an informed opinion to be made. The changes since the initial information was provided 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 windsor-bridg-cu-july2009.pdf and A1 poster X7_FINAL 030709.pdf). Most of the options were ludicrous in their attempt at viability and performed even worse against the project objectives. The intent appears to have been to divide the community and make the RMS preferred

option the “sensible” choice, as people were put under the impression these were the only options available. The RMS actively encouraged residents to object against other options in favour of Option1. The location of the new bridge was even announced in Parliament more than a year prior to any options being presented.

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 RMS own online Traffic Volume Viewer data, which shows volumes at the Bridge Street counter (station ID 88046) alone averaging 20,620 vehicles in 2015, exceeding the forecast levels used for project analysis.

The road network is approaching capacity and incorporates a B Double route, indicating a bypass of the town centre is required to provide any sensible strategic outcome. Table 4-5 of the EIS Working Paper 4 shows the level of service for the Bridge/George Street West intersection ot fall below Level C as early as 2021, indicating the project has insufficient capacity to provide a long term solution.

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.

Thompson Square is the oldest town square in Australia and authoritative bodies such as the Heritage Council and the National Trust are strongly opposed to the project due to its significant and irreversible impacts on the heritage values of the area. The mitigation measures proposed are disastrous, and no amount of “interpretive signage” can repair the damage that will be caused.

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 EIS 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. The assessment “pumps up” Option 1 and dismisses all other options presented.

vii. cost benefit analysis process

The reported analysis process appears badly flawed, firstly in making the base case consist of removing the current bridge to massively overstate the costs, and secondly in not following the relevant guidelines. 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 in particular leaves the process looking like it will not stand up to public scrutiny.

This project is not supported by the Hawkesbury City Council, is opposed by Community Action for Windsor Bridge (an organisation which has held a vigil in Thompson Square 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 effectively spoke at the last local government elections and overwhelmingly supported those who opposed the Option 1 project, with the vote for the supporting Liberal party amounting to less than 29% which was a significant swing against previous voting patterns. Similarly, the incumbent Federal Liberal member was voted out of office and a vocal opponent of the bridge project elected in her place.

It appears that the people of the Hawkesbury are waking up to the misinformation that has been reported, particularly by politicians who support the project, and are actively researching and investigating the facts behind the falsehoods.

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.