

## INQUIRY INTO WINDSOR BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT

Name: Name suppressed  
Date received: 27 January 2018

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Partially  
Confidential

To:  
Portfolio Committee No.5 – Industry And Transport  
**Inquiry into the Windsor Bridge replacement project**

Submitted by:

26 January 2018

**Summary** When heritage concerns were raised regarding Thompson Square the community expectation was that viable alternatives would be developed. This failed to occur. Instead options were proposed which deliberately divided the Windsor community and forced support for the RTA's preferred option (Option 1). As a resident of the Windsor peninsula and someone who initially supported Option 1, I have outlined my experience below.

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I deeply regret the part I played in supporting Option 1 of the Windsor Bridge Replacement Project. I now believe that the community was deliberately divided and manipulated by the RTA (later RMS), and that this was done to garner support for the RTA's preferred option (Option 1).

In July 2009, Windsor residents received flyers from the RTA detailing alternative routes for the new Windsor bridge. This "community consultation" process was a sham; not a single alternative to the RTA's preferred option was developed further than a line on a map. There was no regard for topography or built heritage, residential communities, traffic improvements or flood immunity, with many co-opted streets completely unsuited to trucks and commuter traffic. At best the options were grossly incompetent, at worst a deliberate attempt to mislead.

Option 7 showed arterial traffic being directed from Windsor Road/Bridge Street through Windsor's only other heritage conservation area in North Street (an area heritage-listed for its streetscape and home to a number of State Heritage-listed buildings) to low-lying Palmer St; and Option 6 severed the State-heritage listed Tebbutt's Observatory from the rest of the peninsula as it traversed the floodplain joining two highly flood prone points; two further options squeezed their way down narrow 19th century streets through the centre of Windsor.

Aside from an article in the Hawkesbury Gazette, which mentioned the need for alternatives, there had been no prior warning of this potential arterial road realignment, no indication in any of the searches undertaken when we purchased our property only months earlier. Owners of properties flagged for acquisition received no communication. The entire process was designed to cause panic and division within the community, and it did!

The community response was immediate. Within days neighbours had met and discussed a plan of action. Initially we were only concerned with Options 6 and 7; we addressed the criteria stated by the RTA regarding heritage impacts, flood immunity and traffic improvements. As a community we considered that neither Option 6 nor Option 7 met the stated criteria.

As early as July 2009 we believed that a number of the presented alternatives were not genuine options, but did not wish to leave anything to chance. We tried to find out more details, as we felt we should have more information than just lines on a map.

We drafted a petition to circulate to residents, businesses and at a local boat club event on the 18th of July. I have included the wording of the petition here, as I believe it has been used as evidence of support for Option 1.

Wording of petition as follows:

Community Opposition for RTA's proposed Windsor Bridge: Options 6 & 7  
Attn: John Navamani, Senior Project Manager, Roads and Traffic Authority

We, the undersigned, call on the Roads and Traffic Authority to reject options 6 and 7 for the proposed new Windsor Bridge over the Hawkesbury River. It is likely that options 6 and 7 would fail to meet many of the RTA's stated objectives for traffic flow, flood immunity and cost, whilst severely impacting the local residential community, the State Heritage-listed streetscape of North Street and surrounding original farmland of the Windsor township, and recreation and business activities.

Prior to the community consultation held on 1st August 2009 at the Deerubbin Centre, Windsor, John Navamani of the RTA indicated to a Windsor peninsula resident that it would be great if people could indicate their preferred option, as well as those they are opposed to.

Following the community consultation, at least four separate groups of Windsor peninsula residents felt that the RTA had a preference for Option 1, but were seriously considering Option 6. John Navamani indicated that the strongest options were Options 1 and 2, and Option 6, although the actual location of Option 6 seemed to vary during the course of the day. A modified Option 8 also appeared to be a consideration in the longer term (10 years).

Again, at this consultation John Navamani encouraged us to include our preferred option in our submissions; he also suggested that we lobby as a group. I think that it was at this point that we felt we needed to push for Option 1 in order to keep Option 6 off the shortlist, despite the significant shortcomings of both Option 1 and Option 6.

By early August, the group Windsor Residents First (WRF) had been formed and contact had been made with a number of supportive groups and individuals, including the then Mayor, Bart Basset.

WRF wrote a submission dated 12th August 2009, which expressed our strong opposition to options 6 and 7, and, as requested, our support for options 1, 2 and a modified Option 8. In our submission we also considered the duplication of the North Richmond bridge and the need for a properly planned bypass in the long term and offered suggestions. We included our petition of over 600 signatures, but made it clear that this was opposition to options 6 & 7 only. Individual submissions were also made.

On the 4th of August 2011, Option 1 was announced as the preferred option. However, by March 2012 Community Action for Windsor Bridge (CAWB) started to be noticed and our

concern was that they were pushing for some kind of alternative route. Local rumours still wouldn't allow Option 6 to be put to bed.

As CAWB gained traction we felt we needed to push back. In April 2012 a member of our group spoke on the phone to Kevin Connolly and he indicated that he would welcome an alternative lobby group to CAWB. We were concerned that Option 6 was being touted as an "impact-free" solution, when in fact it had huge social, heritage and recreational costs for our neighbourhood.

By June 2012, we had discussed the protection of Thompson Square, but did not want to lend our support when there was no properly planned bypass on the table. At this point I certainly felt that Option 6 had just been thrown together in 5 minutes because the RTA was required to present alternatives.

On the evening of the 1st of November 2012, a meeting was held in a private house on the Windsor peninsula. This was attended by \_\_\_\_\_ of the RTA. Following the meeting \_\_\_\_\_ provided us with a list of points for use in our forthcoming EIS submissions. While I don't have a clear recollection of the meeting and all that was discussed, I do recall that the scrapped proposal to raise the Warragamba Dam wall for flood mitigation was used to illustrate how we had to grab this opportunity for bridge replacement with both hands, that if we didn't take the one flawed bridge being offered, we'd get nothing.

The cost of this to our community has been huge. Windsor is a small town which is extremely proud of its heritage and its community. For the RTA to play members of the community off against one another in this way is unconscionable. There has never been an attempt by the RTA to find a solution for the Hawkesbury community, the options presented were never viable, the many bypass routes suggested by the community have consistently been dismissed.

The bridge issue has dominated the entire time I have lived in Windsor, and while I truly believe it is the right thing to do to make a submission to this inquiry and I know Option 6 was never a real alternative, in the back of my mind is the nagging doubt: What if Option 1 is stopped and they revert to Option 6, how could I continue to live here? How could I face my neighbours? This is how well the RTA played us.