

**Submission  
No 310**

**INQUIRY INTO WINDSOR BRIDGE REPLACEMENT  
PROJECT**

**Name:** Mr Jon Mills

**Date received:** 28 January 2018

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The Director,  
Portfolio Committee No. 5,  
Parliament House,  
Macquarie Street,  
Sydney NSW 2000.

## **Re: Inquiry into the Windsor Bridge replacement project**

Dear Director,

I am writing this letter in submission to the Inquiry into the Windsor Bridge Replacement Project. I wish to emphasise my objection to the Windsor Bridge Replacement Project as it stands.

I lived in the Hawkesbury for over twenty years, and continue to spend significant time in the region. I believe the current project cannot be justified in terms of its cost and its projected effectiveness of a replacement bridge falls short of being a sound long term solution for Windsor and the Hawkesbury LGA. I believe that the Hawkesbury region is best served by maintaining its existing two crossings, and building a third crossing to provide a bypass of the major towns and access to the far side of the Hawkesbury River, whilst alleviating the traffic volume on the existing bridges. I also have serious concerns of the impact of the proposed bridge works on the integrity of Windsor as a historic town, in particular on the historic Windsor Bridge and Thompson Square.

In addressing the issues that the Committee will report on, I would like to make contributions on a number of these.

*a). the **current** Windsor Bridge, including its maintenance regime, renovation methods and justification for demolition,*

It is my understanding that the existing bridge is not in an un-repairable condition, and a refurbishment would result in it meeting modern standards and be useable for at least the next fifty years. I acknowledge that the RMS' position is that the bridge is too far deteriorated and uneconomical to fix. However Peter Steward Consulting P/L's 'Report On Structural Condition of the existing Windsor Bridge' states "the bridge is safe for current use", that it "has not exhibited any signs that it is about to fail", and "it would not be cost prohibitive to refurbish the bridge, thus not a solid justification to demolish it." Furthermore, "the bridge can be refurbished at a cost such that it can function for the next 50 years with little ongoing maintenance", and the report further states this could be done to a load limited to 16T for approximately \$12.5m, or to meet current specifications for approximately \$14.5m. Given this projected cost compared to the as yet un-finalised cost of the Replacement Bridge, it would appear that refurbishment is a viable option.

Should a third crossing of the Hawkesbury River be built in the near future, there would be another crossing besides North Richmond Bridge by which to divert traffic, and so the level of refurbishment as outlined in the RMS's EIS of 2012 could be conducted with less disruption. I believe this would be an ideal solution.

Cambray Consulting's 2013 report on the Windsor Bridge Replacement Project states "if the current bridge was to be retained for local traffic, this could offer a good result all-round. The new bridge could take B-doubles and heavy vehicles away from town, allowing a load limit to be imposed on the existing bridge to possibly extend its life, minimise the effects of heavy vehicles on the town, and retain local connectivity."

Between these two reports, it is apparent that the existing bridge could serve its purpose as a functional crossing of the Hawkesbury River for decades to come. It has potential longer term uses, such as for local light traffic with a weight restriction, which would extend its life as a vehicular bridge; further into the future it could serve as a pedestrian/cyclist bridge and a recreational area. Furthermore, the bridge itself has been on the State Heritage register, its significance being already recognised by experts in that field. Referring to other historic bridges around the world, I believe there is no reason why Windsor Bridge could not be maintained indefinitely for such recreational purposes, thus becoming a major tourist attraction in it's own right and providing continued benefits to Hawkesbury residents.

*b). the **replacement** bridge project,*

It is my opinion that rather than replacing an existing bridge, the Hawkesbury is much better served by maintaining existing bridges at Windsor and North Richmond; and building a third bridge crossing the Hawkesbury River, ideally as part of a bypass network that connects to major thoroughfares and gives direct access for through traffic and heavy vehicles. In terms of addressing traffic flow and congestion, a third crossing is desperately needed to address future traffic needs and relieve current bottlenecks.

I believe that the Replacement Bridge will meet some short term needs, however the money would be better spent going towards long term solutions.

*i. options presented to the community*

I believe the options presented to the community by the RMS were inadequate and failed to thoroughly explore the long term needs of the Hawkesbury region. I am of the opinion that a number of Options presented by RMS were just clearly unsuitable, such as bridges with alignments with Kable or Baker Streets, which made Option 1 look the most suitable by comparison. I also believe the RMS' report on the current

bridge's condition and the cost and inconvenience of repair also have similar effect of justifying Option 1. My opinion is backed by Cambray Consulting's statement in their 2013 report:

"In summary, based upon the information provided to us, it appears that the scope throughout much of the duration of the project has focussed on justifying the preferred option, as opposed to undertaking a thorough investigation into alternative options. In our opinion, there may be other options which were discarded prematurely, or for which 'sub-options' may be feasible. Additionally, there may be alternatives which offer a better long term solution, which can be staged, and perhaps make better use of the funds being invested into the construction of a new bridge."

It is also apparent in the RMS EIS, which revisits their Options presented and the alternatives presented by members of the community, that the latter alternatives better reflect the need to maintain the integrity of Windsor and its most historic area, balancing this with the region's future long term needs, including alternatives that preserve the existing bridge and offer a third crossing that also functions as a bypass and flood evacuation route.

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

I believe that replacing Windsor Bridge with a bridge of only slightly improved capacity will meet short term needs, and a third crossing will have to eventually be built regardless. As Cambray Consulting reports in 2013, "RMS does state however that 'an alternative route around Windsor may be considered in the future depending on growth in traffic numbers and local congestion.' In our opinion, such a route should be considered as part of this project." I agree with and support their opinion on this.

Traffic surveys conducted by CAWB and published in 2017 reflect a substantial increase in heavy traffic on top of a general increase of light traffic over the last five years, and this will continue to increase. Taking into account increased residential development around North Richmond; commercial development along Blacktown/Richmond Road and Windsor Road; growth in the Penrith region and the future Airport at Badgerys Creek, I believe that the growth and traffic numbers that would justify a third crossing that bypasses major towns will occur sooner rather than later. If the Windsor Bridge Replacement Project goes ahead, the RMS would have spent these funds and still be left with just two crossings of the Hawkesbury River. If the RMS were to consider a third crossing that bypasses towns and is positioned to be the preferred route for through traffic to access Blacktown Road (and then Northern Road heading South) and Hawkesbury Valley Way (connecting to Windsor Road); and then on the opposing side of the river connecting to existing roads to Freemans Reach (and onto North Richmond to alleviate traffic on Bells Line of Road) and Wilberforce (and onto Putty Road).

*iii. economic, social and heritage impacts*

I believe that the Replacement Bridge Project will have significant impacts on historic Windsor Bridge and Thompson Square, and this opinion is confirmed by numerous reports on the matter. Through the 2012 RMS EIS there are statements such as:

“Option 1 would have a significant impact on historic heritage as it would directly impact the Thompson Square Conservation Area and remnants of the 19th century Windsor wharf. It would also have substantial visual impacts within Thompson Square and for views to and from Windsor along the Hawkesbury River.”

and:

“RMS recognises that the project has the potential to have a range of adverse effects on the environment and community of Windsor, including but not limited to impacts on heritage, traffic and transport, landscape character, and the socio-economic environment. Furthermore, it is considered that the impacts of the project on historic heritage are likely to be significant, with direct impacts on State Heritage Register listed Thompson Square Conservation Area and other State and local heritage items.”

The Heritage Council of NSW has stated “It is unequivocally opposed to the project for the 'irrevocable damage' it will do to Windsor and Thompson Square. The Heritage Council of NSW reinforced its preference for a bypass option. It argues the project should be refused on heritage grounds.”

The archeological salvage operation currently being conducted in Thompson Square proves that the sheer quantity and quality of artefacts and heritage items was severely underestimated by those involved in assessing and approving the project. As a nation we stand to permanently lose heritage structures over 200 years old that have been well preserved in situ. These structures include the foundations and remnants of the Green Hills settlement of the 1790s, the brick drain built on Governor Macquarie’s orders in 1814, the wharf of 1816, the southern approaches both the 1830s punt and the original Bridge (at its original height), and a wealth of artefacts that give valuable insight into late 18th and early 19th Century settlement and beyond. Added to this, the area is rich in Aboriginal artefacts, dating back thousands of years. The heritage value of Thompson Square is impossible to ignore, and the evidence being unearthed on a daily basis further proves this is the case. Unfortunately the methods being used to uncover this evidence is doing further irreparable damage, and I believe that this operation should be halted immediately and this project be reassessed.

Additionally, the demolition of Windsor Bridge would be a great loss to the Hawkesbury in terms of being a functional crossing that could be supplemented by a third crossing, but it is of great heritage value and “is of State heritage significance and listed on RMS’ section 170 register.” (RMS EIS 2012). It has been an integral part of Windsor and its vistas for over 140 years; and it was the first bridge across

the Hawkesbury River and showcases construction methods utilised in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries.

Windsor has and continues to attract visitors based on its historical and cultural value, which in turn brings economic benefit. Should the Replacement Bridge go ahead, the removal of the historic Windsor Bridge, the irreparable damage to Thompson Square, and the continuation of ever-increasing traffic numbers passing through the most historic part of Windsor will have a significant impact on the area. Alternatively, if a third crossing was made elsewhere and less traffic passed through the area, much of the Thompson Square precinct's character would be preserved.

When there are options that would mitigate the massive impact on Windsor's heritage, and these options have the potential to have better long term outcomes for the region, I believe it is irresponsible to continue with the Replacement Bridge as planned.

*iv. flood immunity benefits*

I acknowledge that the the proposed bridge of "Option 1" gives a deck height and northern approach which will give better flood immunity, as per the RMS EIS 2012. However, this does not adequately solve the problem of flooding and I believe a better solution would be a third crossing that can be higher than the Replacement Bridge and connects to Flood Evacuation Routes.

v. project assessment process

vi. planning and procurement strategies and associated project costs

vii. cost benefit analysis process

I have no comment on the above three issues; I do see flaws with these processes and believe that incorrect conclusions were made, but do not believe I have the expertise or knowledge to justify comment.

c). any other related matters.

As this Inquiry into the Windsor Bridge Replacement Project is taking submissions until 28th January, and is due to report its findings by 29th June this year, I find it concerning, disappointing and regrettable that while this inquiry is being conducted, works continue that are doing damage to the integrity of this area. I would hope that works on the project would at least be halted to allow the Inquiry to investigate and report its findings before irreparable damage is done and funds that could be utilised for a more suitable solution are not wasted on this should it be found that the project is unsuitable.

I would like to add that considering the volume and quality of archeological finds, I do urge that there be a halt to the archaeological recovery operation and a further review occur of the Thompson Square precinct and it be granted an emergency National Heritage listing. I understand that these suggestions are outside the scope of the Inquiry, however I am hopeful that this would occur.

In conclusion, I believe there is significant risk to Windsor's heritage which cannot be understated, for little gain in needed infrastructure. The growth and development of the Hawkesbury region and adjacent areas requires a crossing that integrates into existing major roads, bypasses towns and connects to flood evacuation routes, and in turn alleviates traffic to the existing historic bridges. The Hawkesbury is better served by a third crossing that will achieve these needs.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my submission.

Yours sincerely,

Jon Mills