

INQUIRY INTO WINDSOR BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 25 January 2018

Partially
Confidential

I am a resident of the Hawkesbury, and I am becoming increasingly concerned about the increasing levels of traffic that are forced to use Windsor Bridge on a daily basis.

I am opposed to the Windsor Bridge Replacement Project for many reasons including the lack of traffic benefits, heritage impacts and for socio-economic reasons.

I am not alone in my concerns, yet the Government and the RMS appear to be determined to push this project on to the community at all costs. It certainly appears to me that political influence has been a driving factor behind the approval of this project.

- Duncan Gay (Hansard 35 May 2013) stated in regards to this project that *"there a few in the chattering class and a few on the losers lounge from the Labor Party who are against it"*
- Bart Bassett (Document 51 from Windsor Bridge CFP, email from Bart Basset to Lee Dixon 3 May 2013): *"the ongoing delays provide more time for the constant attacks on Kevin Conolly, Ray Williams and I from the anti-bridge people who are mostly aligned to The Greens and Labor."*
- Dominic Perrottet called people who were opposed to the project a *"fringe group"*

At present I can count myself in the company of the Government Architects Office, the NSW Heritage Council, Engineers Australia, 200 000 plus members of Australian Heritage and Historical Associations, the Governments own experts in Traffic Engineering and Heritage, over 45 000 community members who have signed letters to the Premier, various petitions and over 10 000 members of a Facebook page all who oppose the current Windsor Bridge Replacement Project.

In July 2013 CAWB commenced their 24/7 occupation of Thompson Square and have managed to continuously man their protest tent for over 1650 days and held numerous rallies and protests with full support from heritage experts and individuals' country wide. I do not consider myself to be part of a fringe group, nor part of a noisy minority.

A common thing I read by supporters of the Windsor Bridge Replacement Project is that the current historical bridge is unsafe.

The RMS (Q & A RMS website May 2013) have stated that the *“current bridge does not meet current road and engineering standards such as lane widths”*

While Windsor bridge, like sections of Parramatta Rd and Victoria Rd has no median strip, the bridge has wider lanes than either of these roads. At a width of 2.8 metres, Parramatta Rd is a Class 2 heavy vehicle route carrying traffic with smaller lanes, has no shoulders and has no median strip.

The historic Windsor Bridge is cleared to carry unrestricted loads and large trucks can pass each other without incident. This is no different from many other RMS assets across the state that are accepted as functional and fit for purpose. In March 2008 a test was conducted with RTA officers in attendance, on Windsor bridge. A bus and a B Double truck passed each other without incident. The B Double was able to remain within its lanes during the crossing.

“Windsor bridge was constructed in 1874 and although it represents an aging asset, it continues to perform adequately” Hawkesbury Gazette, page 1, 19 March 2008

The heavy vehicles that use Windsor Bridge have not become wider. The bridge has not become narrower. Classification 9 semi-trailers have been passing each other while crossing Windsor Bridge for the past 40 or so years.

All Class 2 heavy vehicles that cross Windsor Bridge heading north towards Putty must cross a bridge over Buttsworth Creek (lane width of 2.7m) which isn't scheduled for demolition despite being 10% narrower than Windsor bridge and while all these bridges and roads are functioning on a daily basis not one achieves the Austroads Standards.

The RMS also claim work completed on the bridge 120 years ago is the “costly, ongoing maintenance” being used to justify the demolition.

There are no technical issues that warrant the demolition of Windsor Bridge.

“The condition of the bridge is such that it is not in a dire condition and could relatively economically be refurbished and strengthened” Peter Stewart Consulting, 2013 page 31

In regards to traffic, the RMS itself say that this project will not provide traffic improvement, and that the congestion is not caused by the Bridge itself, but rather the intersections.

“The traffic performance of the preferred option is largely related to the Macquarie Street/ Bridge Street and the Windsor Road/ Hawkesbury Valley Way intersections”

RMS Q&A, April 2016 *“congestion is currently caused by the intersections on approach to the existing bridge”*

Modelling shows that these key intersections cannot accommodate the predicted future traffic volumes and the models indicated traffic congestion.

Cambray Consultants handed the Government their independent traffic review in August 2013, and they were heavily critical of the RMS proposal, saying the intersections will be operating outside of acceptable limits by the time of opening.

Roza Sage said in Parliament on the 1 May 2013 that *“the Windsor bridge will be replaced with a similar looking bridge. There will be no new traffic and it will be situated along the same corridor”* (side note: we actually don’t know how the Bridge will look as the RMS have released a disclaimer on their documents saying that their Windsor Bridge project illustrations should not be relied on for any purpose)

There has been over a 100% increase in heavy vehicles through Thompson Square since 2012 with almost 3000 heavy vehicles passing through the square daily.

A third lane for the Windsor Bridge Replacement Project was announced in 2016 by Dominic Perrottet. The Governments independent traffic expert and the RMS say a third lane will provide only *“more vehicle storage space”*

Dominic Perrottet says a third lane will *“reduce congestion for Hawkesbury drivers”* and *“this extra lane will save time on the road especially in peak hour”*

This third lane will flow towards Sydney, while the maximum traffic flow heads towards Wilberforce. The third lane takes away the previously planned breakdown lanes which will block through traffic and cause further traffic delays.

Every heritage expert, including the independent consultants hired by the government, has said this project should not go ahead due to the significant impact on heritage. The Windsor Bridge Replacement Project will have a negative and irreversible impact on Windsor as a whole, and in particular Thompson Square.

Politicians such as Ray Williams, Kevin Conolly and Dominic Perrottet still tell constituents that The Windsor Bridge Replacement Project will enhance the heritage values of the Thompson Square, in direct odds with experts in the Heritage field.

Thompson Square was proclaimed by Macquarie in 1811 making it the oldest proclaimed public square in this country. It is a unique heritage precinct with its surrounding historical buildings still in use today.

The tender documents state there will be direct heritage impacts on the buildings in Thompson Square. In August 2013 a Windsor Bridge Project Independent Heritage Review was carried out by Casey and Lowe for Government. This report is critical of the damage that the project will do to heritage items such as the Windsor Bridge and Thompson Square.

The RMS had previously stated they found no evidence of the brick barrel drains Macquarie ordered be built, well known by the community to exist under Thompson Square and recorded by Edward Higginbotham in 1986, yet they did find them during excavations recently. This is startling that they are allowed to continue to excavate with heavy machinery. Video footage I have seen recently indicates that no adequate care is being taken to the importance of this discovery. To lose the oldest known brick barrel drains in this country is vandalism to the highest degree.

Politicians have been noted saying that the project will improve noise and the greenspace will be vastly improved. Kevin Conolly said on the 23 October 2012 in a private members statement *“noise reduction will enhance the Thompson square amenity and improve the outcome for the town compared with the status quo”*

The release of plans for the greenspace of Thompson Square show that most of it will be graded to have a 1 in 4 slope, which makes it unsuitable for passive recreation. Oddly enough, Dominic Perrottet has stated that the landscaping of the park is what will fix traffic. Plans indicate that the area will have a shared heavy vehicle and pedestrian space which is unacceptable for a community asset of such importance.

Politicians also sprout the idea that this project will improve and revitalise Windsor. The RMS have themselves concluded that *“the location of the replacement bridge would have minimal impact on the number of patrons visiting the Windsor town centre.”* RMS studies have shown that a bypass will not negatively impact local business.

This project has never had a construction budget allocation, with the implication that this project will go ahead at any cost. This project has been, and will continue to be a massive waste of taxpayer funds, for no benefit to anyone.

CONCLUSION

All the independent consults commissioned by the Government have confirmed that the Windsor Bridge Replacement Project is of no benefit to the Hawkesbury, the State of NSW or the nation. It will have a negative effect on heritage and business. It will not meet the Hawkesbury's long-term traffic demands and will result in congestion and traffic queueing. It will also result in the demolition of the historic Windsor Bridge. It is a huge waste of taxpayer funds.

In 2011 legislation was changed to allow State Heritage Protection to be switched off to for projects identified as State Significant Infrastructure. Why was this switched off to allow the Windsor bridge replacement project to go through just a few days later?

We need a progressive infrastructure solution, not only for Windsor, but for the Hawkesbury as a whole.

The current project:

- Will irreversibly destroy aboriginal and European heritage
- Will not improve traffic conditions
- Will not improve flood immunity
- Is a massive waste of taxpayer funds

A common-sense solution would be to retain the current historical Windsor Bridge for light and local traffic and to build a small-town bypass. By excluding large and heavy through traffic away from Thompson Square, the area will be able to re-establish its heritage significance as one of the last remaining Georgian spaces Australia has left, and the potential for future road upgrading.

A bypass will provide:

- A long-term solution for traffic congestion
- Protection of aboriginal and European heritage
- Pedestrian safety
- Minimisation of traffic noise and pollution
- Improvements to the public space
- Respect for river usage

RECOMMENDATIONS

- That the Windsor Bridge Replacement Project be stopped
- Investigate alternate options and refurbish and retain the current bridge
- Create a policy to prevent political interference with projects approval
- Full transparency in the approval process is needed and all documents available for the public to view
- Commence construction of a bypass
- Halt the excavations in Thompson Square to protect the remains of heritage items recently uncovered
- Investigate the true reasons why this project was approved
- Put a policy in place to prevent politicians making false statements to constituents
- That better use of taxpayer funds be used to ease traffic congestion in the Hawkesbury