

INQUIRY INTO WINDSOR BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT

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SUBMISSION

To:

Portfolio Committee No.5 – Industry and Transport

Inquiry into the Windsor Bridge replacement project

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BACKGROUND

We are long time residents of the Hawkesbury and in the past 16 years, residents of historic Windsor. We have observed over the last two decades the inadequacies of the road infrastructure as it relates to crossings to the western side of the river. These have become congested to the point of resident frustration and economic cost in terms of wasted time.

We have noted the discussions relating to plans to address the problem but feel strongly that Option 1 (simply replacing an existing bridge with another bridge) will not solve the problem and instead creates additional issues and would be an inappropriate allocation of taxpayer funds.

ISSUE/S

1. Negative impacts of Option 1 relating to Heritage

Demolition of the historic Windsor Bridge which is still structurally sound and as evidenced by RMS traffic count carried out in March 2017 showed 2,400 Heavy Vehicles travelled through Thompson Square daily. A count conducted by RMS accredited CFE Technologies in November 2017 showed on average 2,600 Heavy Vehicles travelling through Thompson Square daily - with up to 3,000 on any one day. There has been a doubling of heavy vehicles in the last 5 years. If the bridge was considered unsafe, the RMS would not allow this.

The demolition of the current bridge cannot be justified. It must be left as a bridge for local traffic with a bypass allowing through traffic (70%).

Option 1 does not integrate the square as has been outlined by the RMS but indeed further adds to the disruption of peaceful activities in the oldest public Town Square in Australia. The high level bridge cutting through the square will impose noise and visual impacts. The square is more than just a grassed area, it includes the buildings in the precinct, all of which are historic.

It is to be noted that Thompson Square is an item of State significance listed on the State Heritage Register and discussion is taking place for its emergency inclusion on the National Heritage Register. Both the National Trust of Australia and the NSW State Heritage Council oppose Option 1 because of the impact it will have on Thompson Square.

Very recent archaeological explorations have revealed a range of early colonial and Aboriginal artefacts. These should be explored and uncovered further but remain in situ as is the accepted practice with historical artefacts today. Option 1 should be shelved because of these significant artefacts.

Option 1 will accentuate the movement of heavy vehicles through this historic precinct due to the continual growth in the numbers of heavy vehicles crossing the river.

2. Limitations of Option 1 as a Traffic and Flooding Solution

Recent communications (September 2017) from the RMS to Hawkesbury residents no longer refers to Option 1 being a traffic solution to congestion or offering a flood free access, it merely states that it will be providing a 'safer and reliable' bridge. Please refer to paragraph above about the increased heavy vehicle usage across the Square intersection.

An independent traffic Report (Cambray Consulting – commissioned by the Dept. of Planning) found severe limitations with the key intersections and their abilities to accommodate predicated future traffic volumes. Modeling shows that problems with traffic flow relate to the intersections rather than the bridge itself. A new bridge therefore does not solve this issue. Traffic starts building up from McGraths Hill (Windsor Road) heading west from between 3-4pm in the afternoons and in the mornings traffic builds up from Wilberforce.

Option 1 will have a bridge that is slightly higher than the existing bridge but the approaches from both sides of the river remain at the same level. Flooding of a serious nature will still require the bridge to be closed and medium flooding will block the approaches.

3. The Need for a long term solution

There are now more cars and heavy vehicle traffic through Thompson Square than was used by the government to justify bypasses of Kempsey, Berry, Macksville, Moree and other places. Predicted increases in traffic flows show volumes that certainly justify a bypass through the town of Windsor.

70% of traffic using the current bridge is through traffic and does not stop at Windsor. This will therefore have little impact on local business if a bypass option was utilised. Areas west of the river are areas of urban growth and so the need for a long term solution that incorporates a third crossing is essential. Spending of up to \$100M in replacing one bridge with another which has no impact on addressing this big increase in traffic needing to cross the river is a waste of resources. This is particularly important as no adequate public transport serves west of the river necessitating households to have multiple vehicles.

CONCLUSION

A third crossing that incorporates a bypass of Windsor will obviously cost more than Option 1 as extensive roadworks and approaches will be required. However, Option 1 is a cheap, compromised and short term strategy that will not address the long term (and even the existing) traffic issues. This growing area on the outskirts of Australia's largest city, will only increase in size and therefore traffic volume. A long term solution involving adequate investment is essential.

Of particular concern is the complete failure and apparent arrogance of the existing government to consult with local residents and our local Council that is strongly opposed to Option 1.

A long term investment in road infrastructure that addresses growing traffic needs is obvious. But also the imperative is to preserve and enhance Australia's colonial and Aboriginal history. There is no second chance to recreate history. This area is not just of local significance but also to the nation as a whole.

Thank you for undertaking this Inquiry. We hope that for the Nation's sake, Option 1 does not proceed any further.

Maree McDermott & Ian Biddle
26th January, 2018.