

INQUIRY INTO WINDSOR BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT

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SUBMISSION

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The longevity of the Windsor bridge replacement project is remarkable when one considers how fatally flawed it is. The stamina of the bridge, on the other hand, is no surprise. Those fatal flaws were evident in 2010 when, as the NSW Government's senior adviser on Heritage I walked into my first Windsor Bridge meeting.

At that time I didn't know about the comprehensive advice the RTA had already been given opposing this project. I didn't know the Minister's office was invited because the Heritage office had been resisting the project for well over a year.

What I did know, as a former Hawkesbury schoolteacher, was the historic significance of Thompson Square and as local I had an understanding of the Square's topography.

In 2008 the RTA (now RMS) were advised by the Government Architect's Office (GAO) a bypass was the superior option for a new river crossing of the Hawkesbury in the vicinity of Windsor, saying:

"In terms of future traffic demands, urban growth and the historic context of Windsor Town Centre, option 8, to develop a new bridge in a more appropriate location on the periphery of the town centre and more closely related to future urban growth is considered preferable by GAO."

In December 2009 the GAO prepared a Landscape and Visual Investigation for Bridge Options at Windsor Stage 2 Report. In the Introduction it says:

"The RTA briefed the Government Architects Office (GAO) in 2009 to carry out an investigation of visual impacts and urban design issues to help develop the preferred option and to develop an urban design strategy for the ongoing development of the design for the new Windsor Bridge and approaches. "

A curious position to take, given community consultation for the project only commenced in July 2009. Nonetheless, the GAO continued to encourage the RTA to look elsewhere to locate the crossing.

Whilst I knew nothing of tensions and pent up frustration when I first entered it was quickly evident the proposed project did not represent a quality outcome for either the town, or travellers... Nor, I might add is it a quality outcome for the State. Aside from the oft-stated and very obvious heritage consequences for heritage, it didn't deliver much in terms of network capacity, flood immunity was negligible and regardless of the age of the Square there would be a regrettable diminution in its functionality as a civic space.

These matters all remain considerations of some concern today. However there are, perhaps, less obvious issues of considerable significance. Over the past five years I have witnessed the power wielded by a government agency. I have witnessed their willingness as an organisation, to manipulate people and I have seen the price a community can be forced to pay to defend the place they call home. I have watched peoples' health deteriorate. I have seen businesses decline and I have seen relationships broken.

I have also had the inestimable privilege of working with some of the most remarkable people I have ever met. That has been a great joy. However, I have deep concerns about the capacity of the RMS to develop and execute high calibre, sensitive, nuanced and appropriate transport plans for the 21st century. I am concerned about their commercial practices and I'm not convinced that their commercial dominance is in the best interests of the community of New South Wales. I am concerned about their procurement practices.

The plan to put a replacement bridge across the Hawkesbury River below Thompson Square and demolish a functional Heritage asset reeks of incompetence. It is not good asset management and it is very poor network planning. If it is the best that we can hope to achieve through the skills and talents of the RMS, then we are in a very poor place indeed.

I oppose the plan to put a new arterial road through Thompson Square. I oppose the destruction of the 1874 Windsor Bridge. I'm horrified by the arrogance I've witnessed. I support the right of every community to shape its future and have a voice that is heard and respected. I support a public service that displays levels of competence, skill, intuition and integrity and I aspire to a public service that finds within itself moments of brilliance and some humility. Allowing agencies almost unbridled power is good for neither the agency nor the state.

I offer the following thoughts to the committee for their consideration:

This inquiry is as much about the agency as it is about the decision. We need a robust, innovative and confident public sector, committed to serving the people of New South Wales.

As a community we need to be able to trust and admire our public sector.

Windsor needs a bypass AND its historic bridge.

The potential of the Hawkesbury needs to be better understood.

We do not need to solve this problem at the expense of someone else.

I would like to thank the committee most sincerely for the time and effort you have undoubtedly already put into this inquiry and for your considered and perhaps creative, response to the issues.

Kate Mackaness