Submission No 317

INQUIRY INTO WINDSOR BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 29 January 2018

Dear Chairman,

I am submitting this submission in support of the RMS project to replace the Windsor Bridge, I am a local resident that lives on the west side of the river and use the Windsor bridge regularly. I also have over 17 years' experience in traffic management and incident response, and have worked on roads throughout Sydney and therefore have a great grasp on the merits of the project from a traffic standpoint.

Furthermore I submit this submission with the request that my name not be made public as unfortunately the repercussions of submitting a positive submission supporting the proposal draws unwanted negative abuse from those that oppose it.

I base my support for the replacement on a number of points as follows.

1. The bridge is simply no longer fit for purpose to carry modern traffic, the bridge itself is too narrow and the approaches to it are both dangerous and do not allow for smooth flow of traffic. I have had to stop and wait behind heavy vehicles which have stopped to give way to other heavy vehicles to cross the bridge in the opposite direction. This is not so much a hinderance but somewhat dangerous due to the approaches to the bridge as traffic has limited approach line of sight to slow down and avoid tail end collisions due to the sweeping blind corner on the West side or the cutting on the East side.
   Heavy vehicles travelling East over the bridge need to swing out wide to line themselves up so as to cross the bridge and avoid trailers striking the bridge barriers on the North West corner which shows signs of damage (refer attached photo). My wife has had a semi-trailer cross onto her side (westbound) to approach the bridge straight on and has had to move over to the shoulder on the western side to avoid a collision.
   Many of those who do not support the replacement project would argue that the lane width is the same as those on the Sydney Harbour Bridge, however they fail to take into consideration the fact that the Windsor bridge is only two lanes wide and not 8 like the SHB. In my experience drivers or at least those that lack confidence tend to feel constricted or hemmed in and will naturally slow to a speed less than that of the posted limit. You also see this as people approach road tunnels as they brake before entering despite nothing to warrant slowing as they hesitate as to enter the darker tunnel with close up walls.
   The proposed bridge replacement will rectify this by being wider with three lanes (2 Eastbound and 1 Westbound).

Eastbnd – Nth-West corner showing repaired guard rail with pedestrian walk behind it.

2. The proposed replacement will have improved road alignment and better approach line of sight for traffic which will improve traffic flow. The East side will have a straight approach road alignment instead of dropping down into a winding road cutting, with traffic signals instead of a roundabout. The West side of the proposed bridge will have a roundabout to allow smooth flow of traffic and the intersection will allow traffic at Freemans Reach Rd the ability to see approaching traffic instead of what is now. Waiting at Freemans Reach Rd to turn right and travel East over the bridge one has to wait for a gap in traffic which is made difficult as Westbound traffic approaches from around a sweeping blind corner at speed, and traffic turning into Freemans Reach Rd indicate late or not at all. There have been a few collisions at this intersection as a result. It is of note that the AM peak period is less an issue as drivers actually show great courtesy, with the traffic Eastbound on Wilberforce Rd allowing traffic out of Freemans Reach Rd to turn on a one for one basis if there is no Westbound traffic. This courtesy would not change as the proposed roundabout has two lanes for Eastbound traffic.

3. Those that are opposed to the replacement bridge claim it will destroy historical items from the areas colonial past. These items are and have been buried under between 1-3 metres of dirt. The brick barrel drain that runs under the Thompson Square is designed to be buried and has been since it was built over 100 years ago. Seriously how much can be learnt from a sewer drain which there are several all over Sydney which have greater accessibility to view and study, the Tank Stream being one of note. Those that want these items saved for tourist attractions have failed to provide any detail on how exactly you can showcase a drain that is buried, how much cost is involved to build some purpose-built building so as to protect the exposed earthworks from the elements. But more importantly where will all these supposed tourists park, as parking in the area of Thompson Square at present is limited and will not change even with the proposed bridge or if a bypass were built. Which I will say is one of the reasons why I could count on one hand with fingers left over, the number of times I have visited Thompson Square in the past seven years I have lived in the Hawkesbury.
   Ask yourself this, why if these artefacts are so important have those that are screaming to protect them now, had not done so years ago and want to dig them up and preserve or show the artefacts off?

4. With regard to flooding issues, the proposed bridge is being opposed by those that say it will not allow flood free access to the area west of it. My answer to this is that it is not solely designed to allow residents to maintain access to properties West of the bridge in the event of flooding. For one the current bridge, the proposed bridge and even the wanted by-pass all have the same failure in this regard, and that is the height above sea level of the west bank is the same so if the ground to the west is flooded residents would not be able to get home by any means even if the bridge was above the water level. However, in the past 5 years the bridge has been closed on two occasions and neither time has the water gone over it but it

has come up to the deck of the bridge. I totally understand the RMS's call to close the bridge once a set point has reached as in my experience a call has to be made at some point to avoid any possible danger to the public. The proposed bridge would firstly allow the bridge to stay open longer then the current bridge as it is higher by at least 1-2 metres. Also, this would avoid the added cost to the RMS of paying for traffic control crews to be on site to close it and maintain the closure until such time as it is deemed safe to re-open. And more importantly the cost of Engineers having to attend and inspect the bridge is safe would be limited than with the current bridge which has many fixtures and fittings such as pipe work supported by brackets (refer attached photo) which can be impacted by debris and be damaged which then requires repairs which costs money.

Fixtures/fittings attached under the current bridge showing potential for flood water debris to damage or get caught up in.

5. The proposed bridge allows for better and safer pedestrian access, the current bridge has a narrow pedestrian walkway which is no more than a metre wide with little protection from traffic except a steel barrier railing which is barely knee high (refer attached photo). Pedestrians at present need to cross the road at a blind sweeping bend on the West side to access the Macquarie Park which is a popular area for families to picnic and swim in the river. The proposed replacement solves all these issues by having a wider walkway to allow safe passage of pedestrians and cyclists and it is located on the south side of the bridge as opposed to the north side with the current bridge thereby allowing safe access to Macquarie Park.

Pedestrian walkway on Nth side of bridge, note actual walkway is covered in loose plywood sheets.

6. Maintenance of the current bridge is problematic due to its age and design; the guard rails have been struck and scraped by traffic (refer attached photos) and I seriously doubt the ability in a worst-case scenario, to stop a vehicle going over the edge and into the river considering they are less than a metre high. The design and construction of the current bridge clearly limits the RMS' ability to safely make effective modifications to rectify these short comings.

Eastbnd approach – Nth-West corner.

Eastbnd departure – Nth-East corner.

Westbnd approach – Sth-East corner.

Westbnd – Sth-East corner damaged guard rail. Pic 1 of 2.

Westbnd – Sth-East corner rear of damage guard rail. Pic 2 of 2.

Westbnd – Sth side guard rail.

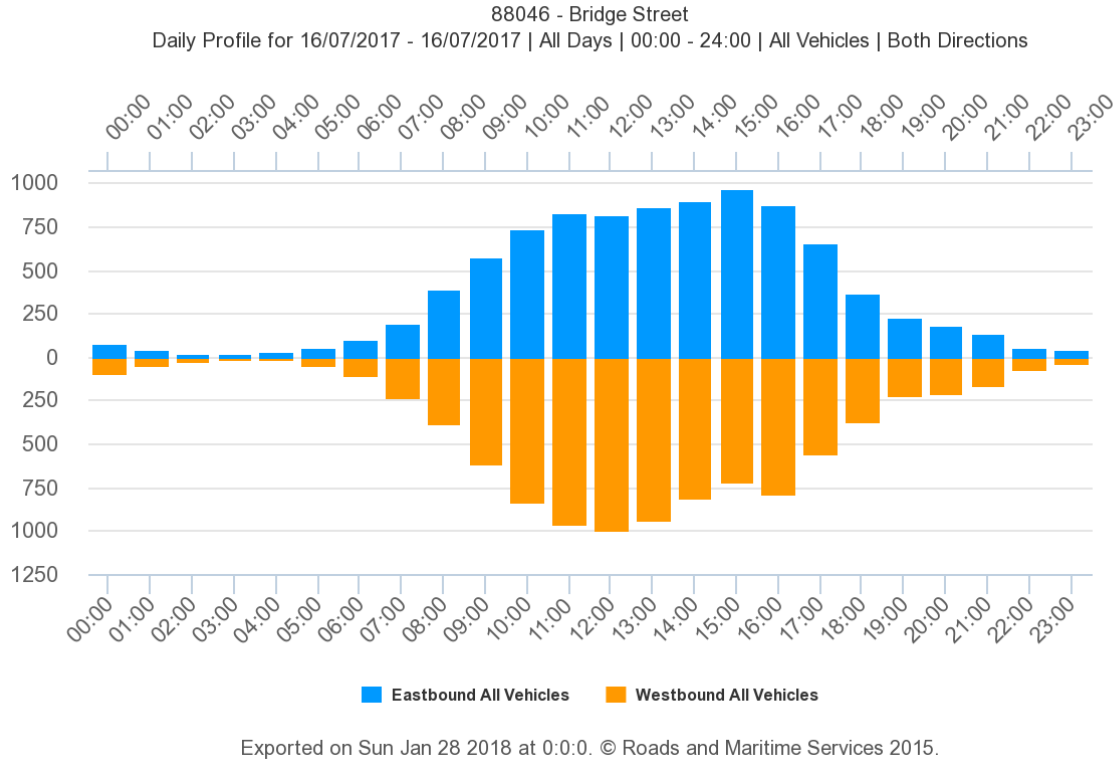
Westbnd – Sth side guard rail.

7. Sand dredging and river barge access has been mentioned as the reason the RMS wants the proposed bridge. I fail to see how the sand mining companies would wait years for a bridge to be built so as to access sand with river barges as they would have found a far easier and quicker way to obtain the sand if they really wanted it.

8. Those that oppose the proposed bridge want a by-pass to remove traffic from the area of Thompson Square, they fail to understand that traffic volumes do not warrant a by-pass as at present going off the RMS' traffic counts of July 2017, there is an average daily traffic count of between 20-22,000 vehicles a day that use the bridge. Though this figure could be less as the traffic count station is located East of the bridge and Macquarie St and therefore takes into account traffic which has turned right from Macquarie St. to head East away from the bridge. It also counts traffic that heading West may have also turned South into Macquarie St away from the bridge but also does not count traffic that has crossed the bridge Eastbound but also turned South into Macquarie St and therefore not been counted by the traffic counter. When you review the raw data for this traffic counter the daily traffic going through the area during AM/PM peak times is no greater than 6000 vehicles in either direction. With a population of approx. 15,000 located on the West side of the Hawkesbury River and taking into consideration that there are several farming businesses located on the West side, this volume of traffic is nothing compared to other areas of Sydney. Also, you have to take into consideration there is limited traffic that is passing through the area during peak times from outside areas like you would see on say Old Windsor Rd or Parramatta Rd.

Yes, a by-pass would be nice but the traffic volume does not stack up to warrant the cost, also it is not like traffic is passing through Windsor to go anywhere beyond of significance such as the Great Western Hwy, Princes Hwy, Hume Hwy, or Pacific Hwy all of which are major transport routes servicing other areas of the State and interstate. Wilberforce Rd leads onto Putty Rd. which takes you to Singleton via the back way it is not even classed as route for B-doubles.

Please refer to the follow web site for details of traffic count data:
http://www.rms.nsw.gov.au/about/corporate-publications/statistics/traffic-volumes/aadt-map/index.html#/?z=12&lat=-33.62384173647302&lon=150.84569934936533&id=88046&df=1&tb=0



To conclude, although the current Windsor Bridge has history it has outlived its use as due to its age it is not designed for modern traffic or even was designed with the growth of the area in mind or the vision that heavy vehicles would be as big as they are now.
Thompson Square will still be there with the proposed replacement bridge and will not be split by a road cutting as is the case now. As for the buried heritage items of interest they would never have been seen or located if not for this project, which begs to ask would those that are so concerned about the heritage value be even concerned about locating them if the project never came up? The items are not unique as to say they are not found anywhere else in Sydney, brick barrel drains are located in the Sydney city and Parramatta and are far more accessible to view/study. What really can be learnt from broken plates and bottles buried for 100+ years, our early settlers were litter bugs? As for Aboriginal items, the same applies, for the most part they are simply buried piles of their rubbish from fishing/hunting along the river. Will they want to heritage list the Eastern Creek waste facility in 100 years' time to study what we ate or what we threw out?

Eastbnd heavy vehicle, note right side of vehicle is over the centre line with limited room on the left. Heavy vehicle drivers regularly stop to allow heavy vehicles coming in the opposite direction to pass over bridge first to avoid mirror strikes. Pedestrian walkway is also on the wrong side to allow access to Macquarie Park on the left, pedestrians cross the road on a blind bend.