

**INQUIRY INTO WINDSOR BRIDGE REPLACEMENT
PROJECT**

Name: Name suppressed
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Partially
Confidential

**TO THE UPPER HOUSE INQUIRY
INTO THE
WINDSOR BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT**

22 February 2018

**IN SUPPORT - OF REPLACING THE
WINDSOR BRIDGE**

OUR BACKGROUND

We are relatively recent arrivals in the Hawkesbury region, having moved to Wilberforce, on the North side of the Windsor Bridge, in early 2017. Since moving here, and having learnt about the controversy over the Bridge replacement issue, we have endeavoured to find out what the issues are and have seen for ourselves the problems which the new bridge will alleviate.

JUSTIFICATION FOR REPLACING THE BRIDGE

Having read various documents on the RMS website, it is clear to us that the project was initiated more than 8 years ago by the then (Labor) government. In June 2008 that Government announced that \$25 million had been allocated for the purposes of replacing the Bridge, following investigation of various options for rehabilitation or replacement. So the decision to replace the bridge was made some 10 years ago! Various options for a new bridge were put before the community in June 2009, and the decision to adopt the option now under way was announced by the (Liberal) Government in August 2011. We believe that the option selected was the best of those put forward by the then Labor Government.

The fact that the announcement was made public within 5 months of the election of the new Government suggests to us that the decision would have been made even if the Labor Government had remained in power. It seems clear that the RTA (as it then was) had made up its mind on the relevant merits by then.

We have no engineering expertise, but have read what the RMS has said in its website. While we are aware that opponents of the bridge replacement dispute that the bridge is becoming too expensive to maintain, we accept the RMS view that the bridge needs to be replaced. Several factors are obvious to us:

- The existing bridge lanes are too narrow. The fact that trucks and buses cannot pass in opposite directions clearly demonstrates this. Traffic in one direction frequently stops in one direction to allow a truck or bus to pass in the opposite direction. There are even problems with larger private vehicles, such as 4WD vehicles, motor homes or cars towing boats, caravans, trailers or horse-floats.
- Because there are only 2 lanes, any accident or breakdown on the bridge or its immediate approaches inevitably causes delays, and the volume of traffic coming from the directions of Freeman's Reach and Wilberforce frequently causes long tailbacks, sometimes as far as the outskirts of Wilberforce. We might add that these delays are sometimes exacerbated by opponents of the replacement project disrupting traffic.
- We have been told by the proprietor of a trucking firm that his company cannot use the bridge and that he has to travel from Windsor Road to Freemans Reach via Richmond. This suggests to us that the bridge cannot handle very heavy traffic.
- The new bridge will be higher, and hence less prone to closure because of floods. We have been told by locals that, in recent years, the bridge has been closed in times when flooding is expected long before the water level has risen to the level of the bridge deck. This suggests to us that the authorities now have fears about the structural integrity of the bridge in times of high water. The new bridge will be built to modern safety standards. We have yet to experience a flood, but it is reassuring to know that, because the new bridge will be higher, there will be fewer occasions when we will be cut off from Windsor because of floods.
- We accept that costs of maintaining the existing bridge are becoming uneconomical.

For these reasons, we accept the RMS's conclusion that the bridge needs to be replaced.

In this regard, we point out that the project envisaged is not intended to be a substitute for other river crossings in the Hawkesbury region. We are aware that a bridge is proposed in connection with the “Redbank” development if ever the local Council and the developer can agree on a firm design. We support the idea of further crossings, for example at Ebenezer and Richmond, but we note that the opponents of the Bridge replacement, who argue for a “Bypass”, have not put forward any firm option for such a bypass, let alone propose any timeframe for construction.

Even if a site for a bypass were selected today, the current experience would indicate that the need for geological and heritage surveys, compulsory acquisition of properties etc. would mean such a bypass would not be built for 10 to 20 years! Even with a bypass, the Windsor Bridge still needs to be replaced now, for reasons given above.

HERITAGE ISSUES

Those who oppose the replacement of the bridge have raised several spurious arguments concerning heritage. They argued that the project would involve the demolition of heritage buildings but, as far as we are aware, no buildings will be demolished because of the project.

It is argued by some that Thompson Square will be adversely affected but in fact, the moving of the access road to the new alignment will mean a larger continuous area for the square. Prior to the area between Old Bridge Street and the existing bridge access road being closed for heritage digging, we saw very little public use of what is in fact a quite small patch of land. After the works are completed, Thompson Square will be a much improved public asset.

We have heard some express the view that traffic vibration will adversely affect nearby buildings. However, replacing the bridge will not of itself increase traffic flows. Locals tell us that, in fact, in the past, when the Putty Road was the main road to Singleton and the New England Highway, there was a higher proportion of heavy trucks crossing the bridge, including on occasions, army tanks and other heavy equipment. The buildings nearby seem to have survived.

We have also heard concerns expressed about archeological findings including the discovery of “barrel drains.” Clearly the existence of these was not known before the dig, and would not have been known but for the dig. Surely it is preferable for such previously-buried artifacts to be identified and relocated to somewhere where their existence can be explained in a historical context. The Pioneer Village at Wilberforce or the local regional Museum would be two possibilities.

THE MOTIVATION FOR PROTESTS

As previously mentioned, this project was initiated by the previous (Labor) Government to replace a bridge which had passed its use by date. I am advised that the local council voted to support the option selected on 2 occasions before the State Government formally adopted that option. Later, protesters took the Government to the Land and Environment Court, but lost. The cost to Taxpayers was, we believe a six figure sum. A decision has been made, and money spent on the project. The Government is committed to the project. To abandon it now would mean further waste and continued traffic problems.

Those who oppose the project seem to be motivated by political agendas, Prior to the election of the current Government in 2011, there was little, if any opposition – enough said. The silent majority want this project completed, and completed quickly. Further delays will inevitably lead to budget blowouts and increased costs to the community.