

**Submission
No 152**

INQUIRY INTO WINDSOR BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT

Name: Mr Russell Stapleton

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Dear Members of the committee I am writing to you to put forward my objections to Windsor Bridge Replacement program and will address the inquiry's points .

A. The current Windsor Bridge, including its maintenance regime, renovation methods and justification for demolition.

A report from Peter Stewart Consulting Pty Ltd, as commissioned by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure

This report addressed the completeness of the EIS and associated documentation submitted justifying the demolition of the existing Windsor Bridge based substantially on its current condition. Relevant 'Submissions' documentation was reviewed particularly in regard to the existing Windsor Bridge. Gaps in documentation were identified and further information sought to close those gaps. This was obtained through requests for information from RMS through the DP&I for information along with meetings to clarify the requirements as well as to receive submissions from RMS. External sources were also consulted for information. Once all documentation was received it was analysed to assess the justification for the demolition. Windsor Bridge has several important heritage engineering features which demonstrate the innovative culture in our engineering profession dating back to 1875. These features are well stated in the documentation and should therefore serious consideration should be given their preservation in some form or another. While the bridge is deteriorating from various ailments it is not about to collapse in the short term. Each ailment can be treated and this has been plainly demonstrated by RMS and others. It is acknowledged that it would be uneconomic and unrealistic to expect the existing bridge to satisfy current standards and codes as well as provide the desired level of service, especially as it was built in 1875 and upgraded in 1922 for far lessor loading. Strengthening by the RMS method would destroy most of the heritage value in the bridge. The bridge can be refurbished at a cost such that it can function for the next 50 years with little ongoing maintenance. However this refurbishment would not permit the level of service required by RMS into the future hence the need for a new bridge. Refurbishment would permit alternative uses for the existing bridge such as either a pedestrian bridge or a load limited bridge (16 tonne). This reports shows that it would not be an exorbitant cost (approx. \$12.5m) to bring the bridge up to an 'as new' condition for an alternative use. It appears the optimum option is some combination between the RMS and the Pearson Wedgewood options which will be able to provide a viable option to refurbish and strengthen to carry T44 loading with a load factor of 2 which will be sustainable for the next 25 to 50 years, and not build a new bridge at this stage. Then at some time in the future a bypass alignment can be identified, approved and built which avoids all the damage to property, heritage values etc. So with a relatively modest expenditure (approx. \$14.5m) the bridge can be serviceable for the next 50 years within which time an alternative route will have been identified and agreed. It is clear however that the documentation does not show a strong resolve to preserve the existing bridge for an alternative use, with a continuing theme throughout the documentation that it will be replaced by a new bridge. This was clear when a decision was main within the then RTA (now RMS) to replace the bridge sometime before 2003. Subsequent to this decision no expenditure on maintenance or repair of damaged fabric is evident except where public safety might be endangered. Despite this neglect it is remarkable that no great deterioration has taken place in the last 10 years.

Page 23 of this report also remarks that there has been no maintenance on this bridge, RMS records show no records of maintenance between 2002 – 2013, yet truck movements and load limits have increased. Is it possible that the RMS and State Govt want this bridge to become so compromised that there is no alternative?, is there a **duty of care** by the RMS and State govt regardless of future projects? if they are really concerned about the condition of this bridge they would be doing routine maintenance to ensure the safety of the 21,000 vehicles that cross it everyday

**b) the replacement bridge project, including:
i. options presented to the community**

When this project was presented to the public of Windsor it seemed to almost disappear without a trace, but from memory there were 9 options presented to the community, none of which seemed like proper well researched alternatives. There was much uproar from the water skiing community regarding an option that would interfere with the length of the bridge to bridge and be a problem for their water skiing activities.

There were advertisements in the Gazette and courier on the 15th and 16th July advertising the fact that there was information available on the project at

1 display stand in Windsor Riverview 26th July - 140 people *visited* this stand (ropey figures unless you have evidence)

1 community consultation evening on the 1st August - 90 people attended - Who were they? they then took **140** submissions from interested parties given the population of the Hawkesbury is estimated at 62,000.

ii. post construction strategic outcomes, including traffic benefits, transport and network service capacity

The traffic performance of the preferred option is largely related to the Macquarie Street / Bridge Street and the Windsor Road / Hawkesbury Valley Way intersections... Modelling shows that these key intersections could not accommodate the predicted future traffic volumes and the models indicated traffic congestion." In short, the issue of traffic flow relates to the intersections rather than the bridge itself.

The independent traffic report from **Cambray Consulting, who were commissioned by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure**, is particularly damning in their report on the Bridge St intersections. When looking at the traffic modelling for the Bridge St/George St intersection, they found the "...intersection is expected to be operating very close to acceptable limits of operation at the assumed year of opening of the project (2016)" (pg 24). Similarly on page 25, it states "The Bridge Street / Macquarie Street intersection is expected to be operating outside of acceptable limits of operation at the assumed year of opening of the project (2016)." There are no plans to address the issues of the Macquarie St intersection as it is outside the scope of the project.

In Stage 2 of the project, the bridge lanes will be remarked to allow two southbound lanes, but only one northbound lane. These will not be contraflow. Cambray responds to this on page 11: "And whilst the proposed ultimate configuration of the bridge is one northbound lane and two southbound lanes, the highest volume forecast by RMS is in fact the northbound volume during the PM peak. This implies to us that the additional southbound capacity may be intended to accommodate the southbound queue back from the George Street intersection, rather than purely to provide additional capacity over the bridge itself..."

Added to this is a finding from Cambray that the traffic count for the Freemans Reach/Wilberforce

Rd intersection and the George St / Bridge St intersection was carried out during the school holidays. "We note that these counts were undertaken on 12 July 2011, which we understand was during the NSW school holidays. Generally school holiday periods should be avoided when doing traffic counts, as the traffic conditions are generally not representative of 'typical' conditions." (pg.30). Concerns were also noted in regard to the method of collection of traffic data for the Macquarie St intersection; "...loop detectors which collect SCATS data (which we understand was used for modelling of the Bridge Street / Macquarie Street intersection) typically undercount in congested conditions. It also appears that there is no SCATS data for the northbound left turn movement at this intersection (one of the heaviest movements), due to the lack of a loop detector in this lane."

So what do Cambray make of project planning? **"In summary, based upon the information provided to us, it appears that the scope throughout much of the duration of the project has focussed on justifying the preferred option, as opposed to undertaking a thorough investigation into alternative options."** (pg. 70)

In their concluding statements on page 70, Cambray states **"We suggest that it may be prudent to 'step back' and undertake a broader study to investigate long term solutions, and once a preferred long term solution is identified, consider a staged approach or interim treatments to progressively deliver that long term solution. This would avoid investing substantial funds into a traffic route which will have a limited 'life' due to constrained intersection capacity on the roads feeding the bridge."**

A large percentage of the traffic and most of the heavy vehicle movements are passing through the town and have no business there - only contributing to the noise and chemical pollution as well as creating ever-present safety concerns .

Option 1 will not improve traffic congestion and amenity through the heart of Windsor . The proposed traffic lights threaten to even worsen the current backlog and the no-right turn will seriously inconvenience residents to the north . Please don't tell me that modelling has shown that traffic flow will improve . I lived on the other side of the Hawkesbury for 16 years and know traffic congestion there very well - it will not improve !

iii. economic, social and heritage impacts

Bypasses have been the preferred solution for a long list of NSW towns in the last 40 years. Why does this not apply to Windsor ? - especially when you take its unique cultural and historic significance into account ?

At the International Cities, Town Centres and Communities Conference in Melbourne, a paper was presented that stated the

"Two factors most likely to kill off towns are increased traffic and loss of heritage and identity".

Thompson Square holds a special place in Australia's colonial history . The scene of many celebratory and dark stories from our early settlement , it continues to be the beating heart of Windsor - Lachlan Macquarie's picturesque town which fuelled the economy of a growing Sydney . The Square is a pivotal part of the Hawkesbury's tourism industry and is a magnet for day trippers , local families, tourists and history buffs, the recent reveal of some of the very oldest and earliest tunnel systems shows just how much history is stored in the surrounds of Thompson Square, but the processes to retrieve it and catalogue it appear far from satisfactory, with much documentation from various

community groups to show excavators and workers often breaking material, walking over it with disregard and shipping it out fast.

Earlier video from various groups have information regarding the exposing and concreting over of early road structures before this current excavation. If the Hawkesbury community were able to keep this heritage precinct, and keep the bridge for local traffic only, and create a tourist information, local craft outlet, brochures for local businesses/destination across the river on the opposite side, with pedestrian and cycle traffic using this bridge, Windsor could increase its tourist appeal.

The Heritage Council of NSW has repeatedly condemned the Option 1, stating in a letter to the RTA dated 9 September 2011, that the Project is *"likely to have a long term irrevocable and negative impact on Windsor as a whole and Thompson Square in particular."* The Heritage Council considered that *"...the exclusion of through traffic from Thompson square would contribute significantly to re-establishing its heritage significance as one of the last remaining Georgian spaces in Australia."* RTA. (2011) Windsor Bridge Over Hawkesbury River: Options Report, August 2011, p 53.

The **Statement of Heritage Impact** in the EIS states that "From a heritage perspective the most appropriate mitigation measures for Thompson Square and Windsor Bridge are to select an alternative river crossing location that avoids impacts on Thompson Square and to refurbish and retain the existing Windsor Bridge for light vehicles or pedestrians." (pg. 344). This sentiment is echoed in the Casey and Lowe report. One of the recommendations states " Given that the bridge is considered an item of state significance within the EIS, give further consideration to options for the proposed route that retain the bridge to provide either a primary or secondary use."

Socially, it is difficult to measure what cost this has had on the current community and how this will impact in the future, there has certainly been some division between some extreme elements of the debate, future I think the project will economically have an impact on local business in the roundabout zone , current noise levels in the park already make it difficult to hold a conversation, a heritage walk I attended last year was so impacted by current noise levels that the presenter had to cease conversation on very many occasions until the heavy vehicles passed, it's not a good way to profile your heritage, (this was on a SUNDAY!!) and this level of noise would most likely increase if you raise the road level . The layout change of the park is less flat and more of a verge with a slope , the set of traffic lights where the current roundabout sits with trucks screeching brakes to come to a stop at those lights, will make the park very unappealing for sitting and socialising with anyone at that end of Windsor, with the current construction/archaeological works happening now there has already been an impact on numbers visiting that end of town, it's very unattractive, given also that the majority of heavy vehicle traffic is through traffic and not likely to stop at Windsor, the replacement structure will have no other impact than to increase the ability of heavy vehicles to pass each other, most likely at higher speeds than currently permitted.

There is also a possibility of increased traffic accidents and safety concerns.

iv. flood immunity benefits

The flood mitigation level will only be slightly raised , the roads adjoining either sides of new replacement bridge will be at the same level meaning that the approach to the bridge will still restrict access in major floods. The replacement bridge will change the flood rating from 1 in 2 , to in 3, and the bridge height at its maximum would be approximately 2 or so metres above the current level.

v. project assessment process

There have been ever constant changing reasons for the WBRP, they vary from traffic solution, worn and tied bridge, flood mitigation, but in all circumstances the reason for the upgrade is constantly changing, however alternatives have not been properly researched or evaluated
As stated in my response in to B)ii – traffic solutions, Cambrey consulting report.

Currently the rhetoric is this bridge is not meant to be a traffic solution, its purpose is to replace an old bridge in disrepair. Current liberal councillors (Sue Richards- in a post made on the Hawkesbury gazette site) claim " *this bridge needs to built, then we will get a bypass*".
I feel this is a total waste of money, as well as destruction of an important heritage site.

Article written in Sydney Morning Herald Dec 4, 2013

An independent engineer's assessment recommended upgrading and strengthening the existing bridge at a cost of \$14.5 million - \$50 million less than the cost of building a new bridge across the Hawkesbury River.

A traffic review found the proposed new bridge "does not provide sufficient justification (on traffic performance grounds)".

Copies of emails released in a NSW Parliament upper house call for papers show Premier Barry O'Farrell's office put pressure on Roads Minister Duncan Gay and Planning Minister Brad Hazzard to deliver the new bridge project.

*The Department of Planning and Infrastructure on Thursday recommended the project go ahead despite its own assessment finding little justification for the project
The project proposes demolishing and replacing Windsor Bridge and putting a new road through the Thompson Square heritage precinct, which dates back to Governor Macquarie's time.*

Early drafts of the department's report refer to "long-term irrevocable impacts" on the heritage value of the Thompson Square conservation area "and the heritage of Windsor".

But those references have been removed from the final version of the report.

vi. planning and procurement strategies and associated project costs

So far the project has run over the proposed budget and the costs are accumulating.

vii. cost benefit analysis process

The cost-benefit analysis is an assessment of whether the incremental benefits over a 30-year period of the operation of a new bridge would exceed the whole-of-life costs of the new replacement bridge.

The cost analysis done for the RMS doesn't follow RMS guidelines

No sensitivity analysis, no comparison to other options and no price year or evaluation horizon have ever been provided for the Windsor Bridge replacement and other options, in the 2012 EIS the RMS only completed an analysis for option 1, and no environmental costs were considered for damage to heritage, which could be considered as immeasurable due to the priceless nature of what is being destroyed.

c) any other related matters.

The Local member will not communicate with community to address their concerns regarding traffic congestion and heritage.

Dominic Perrottett has however, promised 4 million dollars of spending to the people of Oakville for a bypass so that the community of Pitt Town and its small shopping centre will not be compromised with heavy trucks travelling through it. This was announced on the Oakville Progress Society's FB page. This appears to be unfair, given the significance of the heritage uncovered at Windsor Bridge Replacement Site, why wouldn't nationally significant artefacts be receiving the same recognition ?

Many concerns arise regarding the reasons for the Windsor Bridge Replacement there are concerns regarding SSD sand mining applications in at NSW Dept of Planning,

Approval of Tinda Creek to double its output has been given.

https://majorprojects.accelo.com/public/97ea8f216227f0205f26c66aace3467d/Tinda%20Creek%20Quarry%20Project_%20Development%20Consent.pdf

It is also noted that SSD 15_7120 for the Yengo Road Sand Mine is currently not available on The NSW Planning Depts website, a phone call made to them on the 24/1/2018 resulted in no information being locatable at that time, and further investigations would need to be made as to what has happened to the SSD application, it is possible that the project may morph into another, was perhaps one explanation.

https://majorprojects.accelo.com/public/8c67a17abbc8438e2e19d1ba23d6fd7b/September%202015%20-%20Preliminary%20Environmental%20Assessment_Putty%20Road%20Sand%20Quarry.pdf

I understand the nature of politics makes it difficult to 'back down' on a decision. There are some vested interests who are determined to proceed even though they know deep down that there ARE better solutions.

If the RMS and Govt seriously commit to a bypass option they will find that there has been extensive work put in to some excellent alternatives - including one which provides an extension to Richmond Road to accommodate the heavy sand mining traffic which will be needed to construct Badgerys Creek airport.

If this decision does goes ahead -in years to come people will look at that monstrosity of a road with its belching trucks and say:

" Why did they do that ?"

" Why didn't they build a bypass?"

" How could they ruin this special place ?"

" WHO DID THIS ?"

I look forward eagerly to the findings of the inquiry

Regards

Russell Stapleton