WINDSOR BRIDGE REPLACEMENT EIS RESPONSE

Introduction

Given my naivety and simplicity, I live in hope that the Department of Planning and Infrastructure in reviewing the Environmental Impact Study responses to the Windsor Bridge Replacement project prepared on behalf of the Roads and Maritime Services will:

* be totally independent
* act as a check and a balance
* provide natural justice in that the review would be free from bias or the appearance of bias
* make the right decisions, free of short-term political bias or ideological opposition
* not simply carry out a clerical function but realise the decisions made will have a major impact on the local community
* visit the site to gain a clearer understanding of the project and impacts
* understand and accept the importance of protecting the local Hawkesbury community
* understand and accept the importance of protecting the historical and heritage values of Thompson Square as the oldest remaining civic square in Australia not only to the local community but also of New South Wales and indeed, Australia
* consider this project in light of the recently release Infrastructure NSW report and other Government strategies
* recognise the proposed option will not provide improved traffic flow, including haulage vehicles
* recognise the need for a well planned bypass that will improve traffic flow and remove through traffic from the Windsor township as per many other towns on arterial roads
* recognise the need for well planned and co-ordinated river crossings of the Hawkesbury rather than a simplistic and initially cheap option that will forever change the character of the most unique aspect of Windsor - the historical precinct of Thompson Square.
* recognise the RMS slogan for this project, “Honouring the Past and Building for the Future” does neither.

This response is an evaluation of the stated objectives for the project. The objectives are from the Windsor Bridge replacement State Significant Infrastructure application report October 2011. P6. Some evaluations of additional aspects are included in the response.

OBJECTIVES	CRITERIA	RESPONSE
To improve safety for motorists, pedestrians and cyclists.	Meets the various design codes (eg traffic lane widths, shoulder widths and shared path widths).	Agreed. So would a bypass option. It is interesting to note that the lane width on the current bridge is wider than (some) lanes: on Buttsworth Creek Bridge, Wilberforce Road in George & Macquarie Streets, Windsor on Windsor Road on Parramatta Road on Victoria Road on the Iron Cove Bridge on the Sydney Harbour Bridge etc It is also interesting to note that truck widths have not got any wider over at least, say, the last 25 years
	Meets a road speed of 60 km/h.	This will not be achieved. The RMS has reduced the speed limit to 50km/h. This is sensible and supported, due to the road passing through a commercial, residential and recreational precinct of the town and brings it in line with local roads in towns. This was made necessary due to the proposed bridge being lowered from 5.1m over The Terrace to 3.6m over The Terrace. However, the RMS is currently in negotiations with the Hawkesbury City Council which wants the road raised a metre to allow coaches to have access to the wharf. This would make all current traffic, noise and pollution studies invalid.
	Ensures pedestrian safety.	Agreed in respect of access to Macquarie Park but not Wilberforce. A well planned bypass would do the same.

OBJECTIVES	CRITERIA	RESPONSE
To improve traffic and transport efficiency.	Minimises queue length/delays.	In the Windsor Bridge over the Hawkesbury River Traffic modelling and evaluation of options - preliminary report August 2011 Piii Executive Summary it said, “The study has found that **little improvement could be made upon the total vehicle travel time and speed for each option as compared to the existing conditions.** In the Windsor Bridge replacement project Questions and answers Updated June and August, 2012 it said, “Question: “Why select a preferred option that **provides very little traffic improvement?”** Answer: “ 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. Substantial improvements would be required on both routes to cater for the forecast growth in traffic.” Question: “Will any of the bridges proposed actually make a difference to traffic flow?” Answer: **“The replacement of a bridge alone is unlikely to improve capacity.”** There is no traffic modelling of the Macquarie/Bridge Street intersection in the EIS for the future. It is the bottleneck. It is believed another submission will deal with the question of traffic flow more precisely. It is claimed the traffic flow improvements made in the EIS may be difficult to be verified. If traffic flow is not significantly improved, the only practical reason for the proposed bridge to go through Thompson Square becomes null and void.

OBJECTIVES	CRITERIA	RESPONSE
	Improves performance of road network (level of service).	The intersection of Freemans Reach and Wilberforce Roads will be improved in a similar manner as for a bypass option. The current roundabout at George & Bridge Streets will be replaced with lights including pedestrian lights on all crossings. There will be a no right turn from Bridge Street into George Street from the south. Traffic wishing to access that part of town will have to turn right at Court Street. There will be a designated turning lane which would result in reducing Bridge Street to one lane before Macquarie Street for cars travelling north. It is distinctly possible this will result in increased traffic delays. Although the lights at Macquarie and George Street intersections will be co-ordinated for vehicles travelling south/north, the same cannot be said for cars travelling along Macquarie Street from the west. Currently at p.m. peak hours traffic can be backed up for over 2 klms to the south and a klm to the west. The EIS also says that in the future if traffic gets heavier the right hand turn for vehicles travelling south at George/Bridge Street intersection will be banned. Vehicles from the north wishing to access Windsor will have to go to the Macquarie/ Bridge Street intersection and use Kable Street or Hawkesbury Valley Way to access Windsor. If the aim is to plan for the future then that aim will not be achieved. Plan a bypass that improves traffic flow now and well into the future.
	Enables two heavy vehicles to pass on the bridge without waiting.	"Some drivers choose to wait on one side of the bridge while an oncoming heavy vehicle passes which can delay traffic behind the waiting vehicles." Most however choose to pass on the bridge. This is verified in another submission.
	Improves load capacity of the crossing to meet current load standards.	The current bridge does not have a load limit. In fact it has been assessed/approved safe by the RMS to be able to carry the heaviest load by current B-doubles. Not bad for a bridge that is assessed by the RMS as being in poor condition. Which assessment is correct? This is one of the main core reasons for the project. If this is not correct then the whole project should be reassessed.

OBJECTIVES	CRITERIA	RESPONSE
To improve the level of flood immunity	Provides a crossing that is above the 1 in 5 year flood event.	This will not be achieved. The EIS states the proposed bridge will provide a little less than a 1 in 3 flood immunity. When the RMS was asked what is the height at Windsor Bridge of a 1 in 2, 1 in 3 and 1 in 4 flood it did not know. This brings into question the accuracy/validity of the document. On page 365 of the EIS it says,"The bridge would connect Bridge Street in Windsor to Wilberforce Road and Freemans Reach Road. The project would have a minimum road level of RL 9.8 metres AHD This would result in the replacement bridge being a similar height to the lowest level of Freemans Reach Road and higher than around 60 per cent of Wilberforce Road, from the bridge to Wilberforce." Those who live in Freemans Reach, Glossodia et al need to access mainly Gorricks Lane or very rarely Hibberts Lane as Freemans Reach Road ceases on the flood plain at the T intersection with Hibberts Lane. Gorricks Lane has a low point of 6.001 metres and Hibberts Lane, 8.076 metres. Hibberts Lane is seldom used due to its sharp bends and would be unsafe for trucks or heavy traffic use. The low point of Wilberforce Road is at 8.4 metres which is considerably lower than the proposed bridge. This makes a mockery of the above quoted statement. On P358 of the EIS it says the proposed bridge would potentially increase flood levels due to the new bridge and road modifications. In the channel just above the bridge in a 1 in 5 flood the projected additional flood level would be 0.12m. It is therefore possible there will be little or no improved flood immunity at all except for the 20 houses on Freemans Reach Road. An email from the RMS said the RMS received some of the information given above from the Hawkesbury City Council. In a reply to a request to the Council for that information it indicated a map would have to be purchased but the information gained would be an approximation only.
To meet long term community needs	Provides an efficient connection for local and regional traffic.	Long term for the RMS appears to be 10 years. In the RMS documents cited above the RMS states the preferred option would provide very little traffic improvement in the short term rather than the long term. It is argued that retaining local and through (including regional) traffic through Thompson Square is hardly an efficient connection in the short term let alone for the long term community & regional needs. Build a bypass.

OBJECTIVES	CRITERIA	RESPONSE
	Provides a pedestrian and cyclist connection to surrounding locations.	Agreed in respect of access to Macquarie Park but not Wilberforce. So would a well planned bypass.
	Minimises impacts on recreational spaces.	Constructing a 15.2m wide bridge and an even wider approach road with high abutments through Thompson Square will not minimise the impact on recreational space, it will in fact maximise the impacts. The impact on visual aspects will be enormous. It will be similar to having a picnic beside and below the M7. The impact on the grassland of Thompson Square will be even greater. The plan by the RMS is to reshape the grassland into a “gentle slope” to the foreshore. (It is assumed the RMS means The Terrace which is about 6 metres above the river. To slope Thompson Square to the river would mean the removal of The Terrace and a very steep slope.) The current road does that and that slope is not “gentle”. However that road curves down to The Terrace so the slope is minimised. A better example would be the road to the wharf. Now that road is certainly not a gentle slope. However, the grassland area portrayed in the RMS diagrams retains a flatish area at the top so the slope has to start nearly half way along the grassed area. Therefore the “gentle slope” become steeper. The RMS intends to terrace the slope which will provide some flatish land and some embankments. Section 4.3.1 on page 50 of the EIS states in part: “While The Terrace could be lowered to achieve the required clearance under the replacement bridge this was considered undesirable due to the potential disturbance of terrestrial and maritime archaeological sites.” Yet to totally reshape Thompson square is considered appropriate. Although a value judgement only, it is argued that this reconstruction will have a major negative impact on the public use of this space. In addition this means the oldest civic square in Australia will be totally reconstructed and not restored to the vision of Governor Macquarie as claimed by the RMS. Fewer people using the park will reduce business activity.
	Minimises impacts of noise	EIS P12 “noise mitigation measures at these properties are likely to be required. These measures may include architectural treatment which will require impact upon historic building fabric and may change structural heritage aspects or the appearance of the buildings.” It is also understood the placement of sensors in the square did not include a number of residences above commercial premises and therefore did not reach minimal standards for such information gathering. In addition the open space criteria appears to be glossed over. A bypass would not have any of these issues.

OBJECTIVES	CRITERIA	RESPONSE
	Minimises impacts to businesses and the shopping environment.	If the argument that the reshaping of Thompson Square will reduce patronage turns out to be correct then the negative impact on the commercial precinct of Thompson Square would be enormous. Why do day trippers and tourists flock to Thompson Square especially on a Sunday? Because of its heritage environment. Take that away and the current businesses will suffer considerably, even to the point of terminally. Take the opportunity available. Build a well planned bypass that takes through traffic out of the Square and return it to the people. This will not only please the locals but also the through traffic especially heavy vehicles.
	Minimises impacts on property access and need for acquisition.	The proposed road maximises the impact on the only two properties over and above the current situation. Access to those properties would be from the north only. Egress would be to the south only. So the negative access impact would be considerable. In the proposed option there would appear to be only one property to be acquired and that would be on the north-eastern side of the river. A bypass may require more land acquisition but most of it appears to be crown land.
	Provides a 100 year life span for the bridge structure	So would a bypass.
To minimise the impact on heritage and the character of the local area	Minimises impact on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage and conservation areas.	Thompson Square is the oldest civic square in Australia. The proposal is to replace an existing 6.1 metre wide bridge with a 15.2 metre wide bridge and a much wider approach road through that square and to have an intersection controlled by lights. There is no way the RMS can minimise the impact on the heritage and character of that square. It will have a major impact. It is appreciated the existing approach road built in 1934 and indeed the bridge should not have been built where they were. Locals have been complaining about that as reported in the local Gazette and Sydney Gazette over that time. The reason given by the Works Department at the time as reported in the Gazette was that is where the wharf was. We are now repeating the same mistake and not “Honouring the past and building for the future”. A well planned bypass as provided to many other towns on arterial roads would be the only solution that would meet the RMS’s slogan.

OBJECTIVES	CRITERIA	RESPONSE
	Protects the built heritage of the town and its setting.	Windsor was the third settlement in the early colony and arguably the most important due to its provision of food. Thompson Square was a hub of Green Hills. The Bell Post was there, cultural and commercial activities took place in the square. Trials, stocks, floggings and hangings took place there. Thompson Square is not only the grassed area. Thompson Square is the relationship between the buildings and the grassed area and the social activities that took place within the precinct. It is appreciated that others may not have the same concepts and understandings and appreciation of our history and heritage and may not appreciate the cost to the community if the project proceeds. But there is no way the impact on the square can be minimised from what it is today or from what it could become. A well planned bypass could.
	Minimises visual impact and impacts on the character of local area.	Option 1 had a planned height of 5.1 metres above The Terrace. The modified plan (basically option 2) has a height of 3.6 metres above The Terrace. All noise, vibration , visual and traffic surveys have been based on the second option. RMS is currently carrying out discussions with the Hawkesbury City Council to see if the road/bridge can be raised to allow coaches access to the wharf. Studies have found the carpark adjacent to the wharf can be reconstructed to allow coaches to turn around without bottoming. If the bridge is raised the EIS would be invalid. The current road dips down steeply from the roundabout. The proposal is to have a road and bridge level with, or higher than Thompson Square. Therefore anyone in the square precinct would see traffic, including b-doubles at eye level or above eye level. The sight lines between the buildings would be destroyed.
To be a cost effective and an affordable outcome	Provides a cost effective solution in terms of: o Capital cost. o Maintenance cost o Investment on return.	It is difficult for the general public to assess this aspect as no details are provided on the weightings. In any cost effective analysis it all depends on the weighting given to the analysis. Given the unique heritage value of Thompson Square the question arises as to whether enough weighting was given to this aspect. It is noted the predicted cost has risen from $23m to $60m. It is understood other submissions will outline the estimated costs for a bypass option. Given there are some serious doubts about the traffic flow benefits and the flood immunity benefits it is argued the investment on return may in fact be much better for a well planned bypass option.

OBJECTIVES	CRITERIA	RESPONSE
	• Minimises the impact of construction in regards to length and timing.	The RMS builds roads and bridges. It is experienced in that process. It will endeavour to minimise the impact of construction in regards to length and timing. It is suspected the locals, the business owners and the visitors do not appreciate the impact of construction on their lives but they will. A well planned bypass would have none of those concerns.
THE NEED FOR A NEW BRIDGE	Condition of the bridge	It is noted the EIS talks of, “elements of the bridge have deteriorated substantially and RMS has assessed that it is not practical to replace or repair these elements.” However it is noted that larger trucks carrying heavier loads have been allowed use of the bridge since 2008 when the bridge was claimed to be in a poor condition. In the recent Estimates Committee the weight increase was stated to be 50% and this figure was not disputed. It is reasonable therefore to conclude the bridge is not in immediate danger of failing. It is also noted there is currently no load limit in place on Windsor Bridge. Therefore there does not appear to be an urgent need to do anything immediately, so time is available to review the process of evaluating options. This is reinforced by the claim by esteemed retired engineers, Ray Wedgewood and Brian Pearson the current bridge can be repaired for about $3m from underneath without the bridge being closed for any other than minor events. A quotation has been received from the reputable bridge builder Arenco to that effect. It is argued for the need to evaluate bypass options especially the Rickabys Creek line option against option 1.

OBJECTIVES	CRITERIA	RESPONSE
	Lane widths of the bridge	As mentioned above, trucks have not got any wider over say, the last 25 years. The number of trucks crossing Windsor Bridge using Putty Road has in fact decreased since restrictions were put on the use of Putty Road some years ago. It is appreciated roads and particularly bridges should be upgraded to the current standard. It is also appreciated not all such roads and bridges can be done so at the same time. It is also appreciated not all roads and bridges can be modified due to other mitigating factors. Given the impact on the history and heritage of Thompson Square of this project it is argued these are mitigating factors of the highest order. Therefore it is argued it would be good governance to evaluate bypass options especially the Rickabys Creek line option against option 1. The right decision needs to be made.

Summary

* The bridge has been approved to carry heavier vehicles since its condition was first described as poor
* Therefore it is safe to assume to bridge is not likely to fail in the near future
* The lane widths are wider than many other lanes on roads and bridges in the Sydney region
* Therefore there is little need for a rapid response
* The traffic flow improvement claims in the EIS seem strange given the pre EIS documents provided by the RMS
* The flood immunity claims are questionable
* The height of the bridge above The Terrace is yet to be confirmed
* If changed this would need a new EIS to be prepared as the height was the basis for the various surveys
* The impact upon the heritage and history of Thompson square would be immense as recognised in the EIS.

Recommendation

* Repair the current bridge
* Construct a new roundabout at the intersection of Freemans Reach and Wilberforce Roads
* Remove the roundabout at the intersection of George and Bridge Streets
* Install lights as per option 1
* This would allow the assessment of safety and traffic flow

* Evaluate bypass options especially the Rickabys Creek line option against option 1
* Honour the past and build for the future.

All of this can be done for less than what has been spent so far.

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