

## **Introduction and General comment.**

I write this response as a concerned resident of the Hawkesbury district, having lived here almost all of my life (in excess of 50 years) and being a 5<sup>th</sup> generation “Hawkesburyite” whose family has a long association with the area.

Thompson Square is a tangible representation of what Windsor is to its residents and to all Australians, it represent a continuum of what has been a very distinguished place in Australia’s history for Windsor and the Hawkesbury. It is irreplaceable in this context.

The significance of the buildings and public space that make up the Square, its connection with the River and the place that the Bridge occupies within this overall context are well documented and in fact are well made within the EIS document itself.

As that document expresses, within the Project Precinct :

*There are 21 items within and adjacent to the project study area that are recognised as having State and/or local heritage significance (page 176 of EIS). These items are listed and protected under the following NSW legislation and statutory environmental planning instruments:*

- *Heritage Act 1977 (Heritage Act).*
- *Hawkesbury Local Environmental Plan 2012 (Hawkesbury LEP).*

Over and above the significance of the buildings and structures is the Social Significance of the Precinct and its place in the narrative of the formation of the Australian ethos of egalitarianism and a fair go which is demonstrated through the association of Macquarie and Andrew Thompson himself.

The destruction of the above seems indeed a very high price to pay for a Project that offers so little in return and for which viable alternatives so obviously exist.

## **The Process.**

For all its attempts, the project has failed to involve and then to take heed of Community concern.

Evidence suggests that the preferred Option 1 was indeed preferred from day 1 with utterances from both politicians and RTA/RMS representatives favouring Option 1 pre dating any community consultation that was instigated. Having undertaken community consultation, it would appear that much more credence was given to any proponents of the Option (eg citing a petition of 500 citizens) compared to any opponents of the Project (eg Petition of over 12,000 signatures – dismissed by RMS and Politicians).

Local voices in on-line petitions, Rallies, Letters to the Editor etc were ignored by those supposedly representing their interests

Politicians and the RMS have continued to make misleading statements to the public over the project with politicians being quoted in Hansard and in Electoral Office Newsletters as stating that the project would deliver such things as:

- Flood free access to people and villages north of the river.
- Thompson Square restored to that envisaged by Macquarie over 200 years ago.
- Solve the traffic issues associated with the current bridge
- The current Bridge is in danger of collapsing.

Any alternatives that were offered were quickly dismissed without any real investigation. For example:

- alternative bridge repair methods were originally derided as not possible but subsequently grudgingly agreed with.
- Costings for such repairs were questioned when coming from reliable sources.
- Alternative routes were originally derided for being impractical and not achievable but subsequently grudgingly agreed that it could be done.
- Costings for such alternatives were questioned when coming from reliable and experienced sources.

Local property owners and business owners that were directly impacted by the project were not consulted until late in the process and only after approaches by them.

All in all the process was designed to funnel public opinion down a predetermined path rather than take account of the public concerns with the project.

### **The Preferred Option 1.**

By its own admission in the EIS document *“The project would have high physical and visual impacts on Thompson Square.”*

Despite this the RMS Preferred Option is being promoted as the solution that best meets community Needs and Objectives. In fact Option 1 will have little or no benefit for the community whilst having a permanent and highly detrimental impact on Thompson Square and surrounds – a place of extremely rare state and national heritage significance.

### Cost of Repair of the Existing Bridge.

The Preferred option 1 places much importance for its need on the basis that the Current Bridge is in need of urgent repair, is in danger of falling down and that the cost of repair is prohibitive.

Highly experienced bridge Engineers have questioned these findings and whilst the Old heritage listed bridge is in need of repair and maintenance, they contend that this could be achieved for less than \$4m – a long way short of the estimate of \$18m made by the RMS.

### Traffic Benefits of Option 1.

The EIS document contends that Option 1 will have benefits for traffic management and flow. Given that it would appear that traffic flow is dependent on the performance of the traffic flows at Bridge and George St and Bridge and Macquarie streets and the resultant competing traffic flows that come from North of the river over the Bridge and that coming from Macquarie street heading south, then the overall positive effect on traffic flow of a new 2 lane bridge in place of an old 2 lane bridge is highly questionable.

Indeed independent traffic analysis (Chris Hallam and Associates Pty Ltd) contend that any improvements to traffic flow and management are achieved by the modifications at Freemans Reach Rd and Traffic Light co ordination which could be achieved without the need for construction of a new Bridge at all.

In contrast, Option 1 has the effect of cementing ongoing through traffic and heavy vehicles through an historic precinct and town centre that is used for recreational, tourism, residential, dining and commercial activity.

This would seem to be in direct contrast to overall government traffic management policy.

Other alternatives such as a Bypass and retention of current bridge option would offer much better performance in this regard.

#### **The Alternative.**

The local community has proposed an alternative to Option 1 which entails the retention of the current Heritage listed bridge and a Bypass that travels from Wilberforce Rd through to the current flood free escape route of Hawkesbury Valley way.

The RMS has derided this option as being too costly and impractical, but has not adequately evaluated its viability or cost.

Again independent Bridge engineers have estimated that such an alternative could be achieved at similar cost to option 1 of approximately \$65M.

It would seem that such an alternative needs to be further investigated as it offers the following advantages:

- Much improved outcome in regard to impact on the historical integrity of Thompson Square and on vista and outlook.
- Removes through traffic and heavy vehicles from Tourist, Residential Heritage and Commercial centre.
- Improves traffic flow over and above that achieved by Option 1 (Chris Hallam and Assoc P/I)
- Improved Flood Immunity overall.
- Better regional connectivity.
- Retains Historical Windsor Bridge.
- Provides a second river crossing over the Hawkesbury river at Windsor.

#### **Conclusion.**

The current preferred Option 1 is a Project that:

- Has a highly detrimental impact on possibly the best and most significant colonial heritage precinct in the country.
- Provides very little traffic improvement (if at all)
- Places arterial and heavy vehicles through a town centre of rare historical importance.
- Takes little account for future traffic increases and needs.
- Will have short and long term impact on the commercial viability of Thompson Square

Whilst alternatives exist that will:

- Retain the historical and heritage integrity of Thompson Square.
- Will enable the improvement to the Thompson Square precinct by removing through traffic and heavy vehicles from the precinct.
- Provide an economically viable alternative.
- Improve Traffic performance

I would respectfully submit that the proposed Option 1 is not in the best interests of the community and does not best meet current and future community needs and objectives and the project should be rejected and investigations commenced for the construction of an alternative Windsor Bypass and the retention of the current heritage listed Windsor Bridge.

