

Windsor Bridge Replacement EIS Submission SSI - 4951

I wish to state that I am strongly opposed to this proposal.

I have based my objection on my concerns regarding the heritage of Thompson Square, and on the failure of the RMS to meet project objectives, as listed below.

To improve safety for motorists, pedestrians and cyclists.

One of the criteria to improve safety for motorists that is spoken about in the EIS is for the new bridge to meet current design codes in relation to lane widths. Whilst these codes should not be immediately dismissed, it is interesting to note that the lanes on the existing bridge are as wide, or wider than the Sydney Harbour Bridge, ANZAC Bridge and Gladsville Bridge. None of these bridges are currently being touted as being so unsafe they are in need of replacement. It is also interesting to note that the lanes on Buttsworth Creek Bridge, which is on Wilberforce Road, are considerably narrower than the lanes on Windsor Bridge.

The EIS also states that the current bridge is suffering from structural weakness. As there is currently no load limit on the bridge the argument that the bridge is disintegrating seems to be somewhat lessened. The RMS is not in favour of repairing the existing bridge, quoting it will be at a cost of \$18 million, and the bridge will be closed to traffic for the duration of the repair (EIS Vol.1, Ch 4, pg 45). I believe that Arengo Pty Ltd, an Australian Bridge contractor, has estimated that Windsor Bridge can be repaired to meet relevant Australian standard for \$2.3 million, and can remain open to traffic whilst the repair work takes place.

Another point to consider when looking at the safety of the bridge is the crash history on the bridge and the approach roads. The EIS states that "Crashes recorded along Wilberforce Road between Freemans Reach Road and the eastern end of Windsor bridge for the five-year period ending 2009 were analysed. Of the 16 reported crashes during that period, the majority were recorded at Wilberforce Road near Freemans Reach Road and most of these crashes occurred when vehicles were approaching from adjacent roads." (EIS Vol. 1, Ch. 7.3, pg 228). Given that it is the approaches to the bridge, and not the bridge itself that poses the greatest safety issue, this can be addressed independently without the need for a new bridge.

One aspect of safety that does need addressing is that of pedestrian safety. At the present time there is limited pedestrian access at the intersection of Bridge Street at George Street. Whilst Option 1 would address this issue (by having pedestrians and cyclists sharing a wide busy road with heavy vehicles), simply removing the current roundabout and adding traffic lights would be a far more cost effective method of achieving this goal. Alternatively, a bypass would ensure that all current safety standards are met, not only by building a road that meets current design and safety standards, but by also removing heavy vehicles and through traffic from a tourist and recreational area that has high pedestrian activity.

When looking at these arguments, and considering the \$60 million plus budget, the pressing need for a new bridge lessens considerably. If the RMS was able to repair the bridge in the short term, further and full investigation into a bypass would be able to occur,

which would then provide a safe, effective and long term river crossing, without the destruction to our unique civic square.

To improve traffic and transport efficiency.

On the Questions and Answers page of the RMS website for August 2012, the question is asked "Why select a preferred option that provides very little traffic improvement?" The answer includes "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 the EIS the Macquarie Street/Bridge St intersection has not been included in traffic forecasting. Due to existing buildings it would appear that there is little scope to improve this intersection. In my experience, this is the intersection that has the most traffic congestion in afternoon peak.

In the EIS, comments on the existing bridge say that "The predicted growth in traffic numbers using this river crossing would result in even greater delays and congestion at the existing bridge and intersections in the future." (EIS, Vol. 1, Executive Summary, pg. XII). The proposed bridge will initially only have one lane each way which is what we have now, and as noted above the existing intersections will not cope with increased traffic volumes. The repainting of the lines on the bridge to provide a third lane will allow an increase in the volume of traffic on the bridge, but again, there is no improvement to the intersections. A possible 'No Right Turn' from Bridge St north into George St indicates that the intersection will not cope with the additional traffic. Surely restricting traffic movements cannot be seen as progressive, and improving traffic efficiency? Any improvements in traffic flow will come from the replacing of the George St roundabout with traffic lights, and a roundabout at Freemans Reach Rd. Both these elements could be implemented without the need for a new bridge, and destructive earthworks in the square.

The RMS justifies the poor traffic capabilities by claiming that "While traffic performance of the options considered is an important consideration, on balance the preferred option performs best on value for money." (Q & A , Aug 2012). Yet is this enough to justify the cost to the history and heritage of Thompson Square?

The current bridge can be restored to a condition that would allow time for a full investigation into a bypass that would provide improved traffic and transport efficiency for many years into the future, just not the next ten.

In future years when Option 1 and the surrounding intersections can no longer cope with increased traffic, what then? A second bridge? A bypass perhaps? We are being asked to settle for a second rate bridge, when we should be demanding that all bypass options be fully investigated now.

To improve the level of flood immunity.

Early plans for the bridge indicated that Option 1 would accommodate an 1 in 5 year flood event. This has been revised down to less than a 1 in 3 year flood event. Of course, the argument of improved flood immunity is a moot point due to the fact that the approach roads on the northern side of the river also flood, meaning residents in the communities of Wilberforce, Freemans Reach and Glossodia etc will still not be able to access the bridge.

To meet long term community needs.

As I have argued above the modest and relatively short term improvements in traffic flow and increased capacity hardly meet the demands of our expanding community. That point alone fails this objective.

However, community needs extend beyond those of the road users. Thompson Square, and in particular, the upper parkland of the square, is very much linked with commercial businesses in George Street, and has proven to be an important tourist precinct. This parkland is an established, popular area for picnickers and other recreational users. Instead of enjoying the present vistas that include mature trees and heritage buildings, visitors will now see the parkland sitting either directly adjacent to a high, wide road that will carry significant volumes of traffic including large trucks, or under the shadow of large abutments and retaining walls. It is also these walls that are cause for concern. Currently in Thompson Square there are very few hard spaces that attract graffiti. What graffiti there is can be found under the bridge, which is well away from the park, and can not be seen by either road or parkland users. The new abutments and retaining walls will potentially attract graffiti artists, which will then impact on the enjoyment of visitors. If we lose these visitors, I would be worried about what other anti social behaviour the square will attract.

The full impact of the proposed road on Thompson Square's visitors is also yet to be determined, as noise studies have not included the parkland of the square. If the square becomes an undesirable place for visitors to stay, the flow on effect will be a downturn for local business owners that heavily rely on the weekend tourist trade. This is certainly not meeting the long term needs of the community.

Not only does this proposal fail to meet the needs of local residents and business owners, but also the needs of the tourists. Removing trucks and through traffic from the public space by building a bypass can only improve the atmosphere of Thompson Square, therefore not only bringing people into the town, but encouraging them to stay.

To minimise the impact on heritage and the character of the local area.

Thompson Square is Australia's oldest remaining civic square, and lies within the third-oldest place of British settlement on the continent.

The proposed design will see a 15.2 metre wide bridge with a high, wide approach road traversing the square. This will be replacing a 6.1 metre wide bridge, with an approach road that sits in a cutting and has minimal visual impacts on the square. There can be no question that the new road and bridge will impact greatly on the character of the local area. Add to this the removal of mature trees and my concerns relating to graffiti and anti social behaviour as noted above, and the ramifications of Option 1 become significant. This doesn't even include the irreparable damage that will occur with construction.

In the Questions and Answer page on the RMS website for August 2012, it is noted that heritage investigations uncovered deposits containing high densities of Aboriginal artefacts, remains of a Macquarie period wharf, a yard or garden surface dating back to the 1820's - 30's, and remains from the road construction of the 1890's.

The Heritage Council of NSW has also expressed concerns in the EIS (Vol.1, Ch.6, pg 131, Table 6-4) by recognising the following points:-

- Exceptional heritage significance of Thompson Square and Windsor.
- Thompson Square is of crucial importance to the heritage of the State and the preferred option is likely to have a long-term irrevocable impact on Windsor as a whole and Thompson Square in particular. The preferred option does not adequately respect the unique history and State heritage significance of this area.
- Any option that passes through Thompson Square cannot be supported on heritage grounds.
- Refurbishment of the existing bridge (option 9) or a bypass (option 6) would be the only acceptable options.
- Consideration should be given to separating local and through traffic.

Not only will the construction of the bridge destroy some of Australia's oldest relics, the grading of most of the square will permanently alter the shape and surface of the area.

I don't subscribe to the argument that as the river crossing has always been in this location, that it is disrespecting the heritage to move it anywhere else. If we were to apply this logic to other historically important sites in Australia we would currently have a maximum security prison in Port Arthur. What a shame our local politicians believe that building a high, wide road through Australia's oldest public square will have better heritage outcomes than bypassing the square altogether, and that recreational activities will be enhanced by having the parkland sitting directly adjacent to a road that will carry significant volumes of traffic including large trucks. Perhaps our local government has been remiss in not promoting just how significant Thompson Square is to the history of not only our town, but also to the whole of the country.

Whilst I agree that the existing road in the cutting was most likely not the vision the Governor Macquarie had for the square, it is now part of the history of Windsor and for that alone it should be treasured. The grading of the parkland, and the high, wide road, certainly will not bring the square back to its original state and the vision of Macquarie. Removing remnants of a Macquarie period wharf and destroying relics is not retaining the heritage values of the square. Remodelling the square is neither protecting it nor restoring it. Merely, we are just repeating the mistakes of the past.

Let's not continue to disregard the importance of this unique town square. The only absolute way of ensuring the heritage and character of Thompson Square and the local area is retained, and most importantly, respected, is to bypass the square altogether.

To be a cost effective and an affordable outcome.

Is the RMS confusing 'cost effective' with 'cheap'? Option 1 might be the cheaper option, but if it does not serve the needs of the community and road users in the long term then it is not cost effective. Also what value do we put on the permanent defacing of Australia's oldest remaining civic square?

The EIS states that if the bridge impacts too significantly on the heritage views and vistas of the square, we can just remove it at a later date (EIS, Chapter 11, pg. 466). Such is the transient nature of Thompson Square. How does that meet project objectives of cost efficiency? We need to not only understand the importance of protecting the heritage

values of Thompson Square, but also the need for responsible long term planning of Windsor's river crossing. Let's get it right the first time.

Preferred Outcomes

My preferred outcomes are simple. Firstly, stop the proposal for Option 1. I would then recommend that

- The high, wide and truck-filled road be moved far away from the public space.
- The heritage of the square be retained, not destroyed.
- We showcase this unique square so as to not only bring people into the town, but to encourage them to stay.
- We allow local traffic to easily move in and out of Thompson Square. This will be good for local businesses, not more traffic restrictions.
- A bypass be built for heavy vehicles and through traffic.
- The current bridge be restored for local, light traffic.

Conclusion

Option 1 does little for current traffic problems, and will perform poorly in the future. In the meantime we will have lost significant and historically important features. We won't get another opportunity to preserve Thompson Square, or the historical bridge.

A full investigation into a bypass needs to occur in order to have a safe and reliable river crossing. Maybe then we will have a proposal that not only meet the project objectives, but serves the community now and well into the future.