

December 13, 2012

Major Projects Assessment  
Department of Planning and Infrastructure  
GPO Box 39  
Sydney 2001

Dear Minister

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Environmental Impact Statement for the replacement of the Windsor Bridge.

I recently had the opportunity in my capacity as the Shadow Minister for Roads to meet with concerned residents' onsite at Thompson Square, Windsor. Residents expressed their significant concerns in relation to where the new bridge will be constructed and the impacts this will have on the surrounding heritage area.

The following provides an outline in relation to the traffic and roads concerns that residents have raised with me.

## **1.0 TRAFFIC AND ROAD CONCERNS**

### **1.1 The condition of the current bridge**

There have been questions raised as to the actual need for the existing bridge to be replaced. I understand that the Roads and Traffic Authority (now known as the Roads and Maritime Services) carried out investigations into the condition of the existing bridge and the report stated:

*"If the RTA intends to decommission the bridge in near future, the bridge in its present condition and loading will be safe for some time" (Samal, B and P, (2011) Inspection and Structural Assessment for Windsor Bridge, AssessUTS Pty Limited, p 6)*

This report reveals that there is not an urgent need to have the bridge replaced due to safety risk and as such more time could be given to look into alternate options such as the bypass that many residents are in favour of more detailed examination .

In relation to the movement of freight, it is clear that there is considerable movement in the area of heavy vehicles. To look at the alternate of the bypass option would mean keeping these heavy vehicles directly out of the often narrow streets of Windsor.

## **1.2 Traffic Modelling for future bridge**

The Traffic Modelling that has been formulated by RMS based on a new bridge has indicated that it will reach capacity by 2026.

By the time the new bridge is constructed and opened to traffic, it can be assumed that it would be viable for around only 10 years. To spend such a considerable amount of money on a project that will only be suitable for a decade does not seem to be in the best interest for locals or the taxpayers of NSW in general.

## **1.3 Negative Impacts on existing businesses**

There are a number of local business owners who are extremely concerned about the impacts this new bridge will have on their businesses. Some business owners have expressed their fears that they will have to close should this new bridge option go ahead.

Many business owners believe that far from improving local trade, the new bridge could lead to a reduction in business for those operators in and around the affected area. It has been noted that:

*"in order for the George Street/ Bridge Street signalised intersection to operate sufficiently, three of the existing right hand turns would need to be prohibited. This includes prohibiting the southbound right hand turn from Bridge Street into George Street, the northbound right hand turn from Bridge Street into George Street and the eastbound turn from George Street onto Bridge Street." RTA (2011) Windsor Bridge Over Hawkesbury River. Options Report August 2011, p 44.*

Many of the businesses are small, family run enterprises and they are concerned that access to their shops, restaurants and/ or offices will be reduced by the current proposal.

Further adding to the stress of these business owners is the impacts during the construction period (approximately 12 months) that have been acknowledged as being unavoidable.

I am sure you can understand that when a customer is unable to easily access a business, it means that they will find an alternate place to shop, inevitably meaning the local businesses will have to cease trading.

Given the very legitimate and serious concerns by residents and small business operators in the area, I am requesting the Government re-consider this proposal and do more detailed planning, consultation, design and costings for a better long term solution to traffic movement in the area by way of a bypass.

As this project is being assessed as a project of State Significance, the concerns for maintaining the integrity of the Heritage of the area are increased as the Heritage Act is not considered during assessment of the project.

## **2.0 HERITAGE CONSIDERATIONS**

The EIS report shows the proposed project will have a significant and negative impact on important heritage areas of Windsor. Windsor is one of only five Macquarie towns and as such has important historical significance. The proposed bridge and road (called Option 1 in this submission) will have a direct impact on Thompson Square which is on the State Heritage Register and is the oldest public square in Australia. Option 1 will dominate the precinct and is visually inappropriate for Australia's first civic square. The decision to demolish Windsor Bridge which is a State significant structure will also destroy what is widely recognised as a rare historical and technical structure. There are also significant effects on Aboriginal sites and archaeological resources.

The EIS clearly supports the NSW Heritage Councils view that Option 1 does not respect the unique history and State heritage significance of the area. As the Heritage Council has stated, Option 1

"would have significant impacts on heritage in and around Thompson Square including impacts on the setting, views and relationships of the buildings around the Square and their relationship to the Square as a planned urban space; negative impacts on heritage buildings; the likely disturbance and destruction of archaeological evidence of the 1790's town.....and impacts on maritime archaeology related the early settlement of Windsor"

(NSW Heritage Council, letter 9 September 2011, B466969).

### **2.1 Negative Impacts on the heritage values of the town of Windsor, particularly Thompson square and foreshore areas**

The impact of the proposed project on the historic and visual setting of Windsor is of prime importance. As the EIS notes,

'the visual setting of a place is a key component of its cultural heritage significance. How significant items are viewed and how they visually relate to each other and the surrounding landscape is crucial to cultural significance and sense of place" (EIS: 156).

The classic view of Windsor includes the river, development on its northern banks, Thompson square and the bridge as a compositional group that has evolved but has remained relatively stable since early colonial times.

The Thompson Square Conservation Area represents a rare 'palimpsest of the past' (EIS: 167, 182). It is rare for its historical, associative, research and social values (EIS: 182). Not only does it contain Aboriginal artefacts showing archaeological evidence of pre-colonial use, but also:

"visible and archaeological evidence of early colonial life. ***A setting such as this is rare in an increasingly urbanised environment...Rarer still is the survival of such early and legible historic landscape within the confines of the greater Sydney region***". (EIS: 167, my italics).

It is important to note that this area has been classified as of state significance and under the Burra Charter (used in NSW heritage assessment criteria) fits all 7 categories of importance. For example, it is associated with significant activity or historical phase and maintains the continuity of historical process or activity; it has landmarked qualities; is associated with a significant event, person or group of persons; is a fine example of type, amongst other things.

Thompson Square is not just important for its aesthetic and historical value, but also its social significance. It began to develop as a focal point for local community in the 1830's and became the site of a weekly market. The EIS notes 21 items within the project area are recognised as having State and or local heritage significance (EIS: 176).

The EIS shows there will be serious impacts on existing historical views and vistas. Views from the north side of the river and the area around Thompson square have repeatedly used over time to represent the town of Windsor. Importantly this includes the bridge as a key landmark. (EIS:171). Significantly, the bridge is a central subject in over two thirds of these representations (EIS: 171). The bridge is the earliest bridge crossing of the Hawkesbury River and important in the identity of the town of Windsor itself. It is on the RMS Section 170 Heritage and Conservation Register and assessed as having both local and State significance.

The project will have high physical and visual impacts on Thompson Square and the classic view of Windsor. The EIS notes that it could damage exceptional archaeological evidence that gives an understanding of the pattern of early European settlement (EIS:193) and notes that surviving archaeological sites of comparable age "are restricted to a handful of locations in Parramatta and Sydney...Norfolk Island and Tasmania". (EIS:193).

The road construction will disturb land within Thompson Square and impact these archaeological resources. Further the visual and traffic impact of the proposed southern approach road will be substantial. As the EIS makes clear, the new road and demolition of the Windsor Bridge will irrevocably change the setting of Thompson Square by

- Impacting the relationship of the buildings that border the eastern side of the square to the reserves and the western side of the square.
- Creating a permanent visual impediment to views across Thompson square
- Impacting views from Thompson Square to the river and across to the northern bank".
- Introducing a focal point across the front of Thompson square when viewed east of Freemans Reach Rd
- Change the outlook of Thompson Square across to the northern bank, and
- The bridge no longer framing the extent of Thompson Square open space across the expanse of water
- Removing the visual cues and linkage with Thompson Square (cf. EIS, 195).

The EIS notes that the height of the bridge has been modified. This will not undo the damage however. As noted above important heritage vistas will still be lost. The proposed roundabout, raised bridge and significant road will be visually dominating and the traditional view of Windsor will be lost forever with the destruction of the historical alignments to the bridge and old wharf through the project. The whole composition of the historical setting will be destroyed.

It is important to look at the heritage impact of this project holistically. This is now just about an impact on individual heritage items, but an entire and rare heritage precinct.

## **2.2 Impacts to Aboriginal and Maritime archaeology**

As the EIS notes, before European settlement, the Hawkesbury region was home to a large Aboriginal population who were supported by the river and surrounding fertile land (EIS: 166). The EIS makes clear the project will impact negatively on Aboriginal archaeology particularly on the southern bank area (EIS:212). Important maritime heritage such as the 1814 wharf and punt landing will also be negatively impacted

with the installation of a pier on the southern side of the river and filling and installation of the rock scour on the northern side of the river.

### **2.3 Community opposition to project**

It is very clear that residents of the region have a strong interest in maintaining the cultural and built heritage. The strong community opposition to the project is shown by the fact that well over 10,000 signatures have been delivered to the NSW expressing opposition to Option 1. As the EIS says:

"The opposition to the project, despite the clear community need for a new bridge to provide a safe and reliable river crossing, is a clear indication of the strength of concerns about heritage impacts" (EIS:186).

### **2.4 Specific concerns**

The Opposition is particularly concerned about the lack of visual information showing elevations of the bridge and road. Such visual representations are vital in helping community understand the impact of the bridge and road and need to be made publically available before any proper assessment of the extend of the impacts of this project can be made.

## **CONCLUSION**

The fundamental object of this proposal appears to be to facilitate the movement of large volume of through-traffic past Windsor. Given plans to increase density in housing developments around Windsor will only increase traffic, it is totally inappropriate for such through traffic to be going through the centre of such an important heritage area. Not only will this plan fail to significantly relieve traffic congestion, the scale of the bridge and road location is totally inappropriate for such a significant heritage precinct. Furthermore, as the Shadow Minister for Roads points out, the bridge will not effectively meet the traffic needs into the future. The EIS is quite clear on the significant heritage impact of this proposal. The wide ranging negative impacts will constitute a significant and irretrievable loss to all who value the importance of our heritage and social history.

It is impossible to adequately mitigate the impacts of this development in the light of the unique heritage precinct and setting at Windsor.

An alternative river crossing would allow for a bridge that will meet the increased traffic needs, higher flood immunity and provide a throughway past Windsor and does not negatively impact the rare and highly valued heritage setting of Windsor.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ryan Park". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ryan" and the last name "Park" clearly distinguishable.

**Ryan Park MP**  
**Member for Keira**  
**Shadow Minister for Roads**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara Perry". The signature is written in a cursive style, with the first name "Barbara" and the last name "Perry" clearly distinguishable.

**Barbara Perry MP**  
**Member for Auburn**  
**Shadow Minister for Heritage**