

Audit condemns Tibby Cotter bridge cost blow-out

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The NSW government could have saved up to \$25 million on the cost of the \$38 million Albert "Tibby" Cotter Walkway had it followed different procurement processes, a damning audit into the bridge has found.

The Acting Auditor-General, Tony Whitfield, has identified multiple deficiencies in the business case and contracting for the walkway, which is [rarely used](#) outside event days at Moore Park.

Mr Whitfield's report, released on Thursday morning, highlights the government's failure to plan for the bridge's construction before the 2015 World Cup.

When the government eventually realised it wanted to have the bridge in place for the World Cup, the subsequent rush to build the project came at significant extra expense to taxpayers.

And the report says that at one stage Transport for NSW estimated the bridge could have been built for as little as \$10 million, if it had been built alongside the light rail line scheduled to be constructed in the area in the next couple of years.

"Transport for NSW and RMS [Roads and Maritime Services] could not provide evidence of a compelling economic or financial argument to support the construction of the walkway or for the tight deadline," Mr Whitfield's report says.

"Also, the processes they adopted to provide assurance of the project's value for money were not adequate," it says.

Many of the problems associated with the construction and contracting of the bridge stem from [the state government's failure to realise](#) it wanted the structure in time for the Cricket World Cup.

When the former premier, Barry O'Farrell, announced in February 2014 that the bridge would be in place for the World Cup, no business case had yet been prepared for the structure.

At about that time, Mr Whitfield's report said, RMS should have warned the Roads Minister, Duncan Gay, about the risks of trying to build the bridge in a rush.

Moreover, RMS had already told the minister that if the bridge had been built alongside the light rail line, it could be constructed for \$10 million to \$15 million.

"The project was under severe time stress from the outset and RMS was aware of this," the audit report said.

"The allocated timeframe for the walkway was 14 months, while a typical timeframe for a truss bridge is at least 20 months."

To be able to build the bridge in time for the World Cup, RMS had to enter into an "alliance" contract with Lend Lease, which was already working on a number of projects in the Sydney central business district.

The government "therefore did not test whether the walkway could have been delivered more economically" through either different types of contracts or with a different partner. The audit report found fees paid to the alliance contractor were "relatively high".

Mr Whitfield's report also [dismisses Mr Gay's excuse](#) that the cost blow-out of the bridge from \$25 million to \$38 million was the fault of changes imposed by the Heritage Council.

The audit said the Heritage Council was the authority authorised by law to determine the types of structures suitable for a heritage site.

"It is more appropriate to attribute the additional costs arising from the changed design and approval process to the deadline and the compressed project timetable than to the Heritage Council," the report says.

In response, RMS accepted some of Mr Whitfield's recommendation, but rejected the idea the bridge could be built for as little as \$10 million if built at the same time as the light rail line. Transport for NSW came up with the \$10 million when it was considering building light rail on a viaduct through Moore Park, not a tunnel.

The audit report, which is the [second damning assessment of a major project overseen by Mr Gay](#), has been seized on by critics of the structure.

"The report proves this was nothing more than short-sighted monument building, that came at a great and unnecessary expense to the tax payer," said the Member for Sydney, Alex Greenwich.

"The report has vindicated the community outrage about the project," he said.

Greens transport spokeswoman Mehreen Faruqi said: "Sadly, this is indicative of a general approach to transport planning by the Baird government which prioritises the ribbon-cutting and delivery of projects over the attainment of actual transport benefits for people.

"There's no point in 'getting on with the job' if the job is going to be a complete waste of money and distraction from building genuine transport projects that will work for people," Dr Faruqi said.

The Labor opposition and City of Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore also used the report to criticise the government.

"The government has rushed a project through at the expense of the taxpayer," said Labor's transport spokesman, Ryan Park. "What's worse is the project didn't even need to exist."

Cr Moore said: "By stuffing up the much smaller Tibby Cotter project, this report raises serious questions about Duncan Gay's ability to manage the massive \$15 billion WestConnex project."

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/audit-condemns-tibby-cotter-bridge-cost-blowout-20150917-gjokug.html>