SUBMISSION BY THE NSW DIVISION OF THE PLANNING INSTITUTE OF AUSTRALIA ON THE RETENTION OF THE GLEBE ISLAND BRIDGE

The NSW Division of the Planning Institute of Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the report “Options for Glebe Island Bridge-Cost Benefit Analysis of Various Options for Glebe Island Bridge”.

The Planning Institute of Australia is the peak body representing professionals involved in planning Australian cities, towns and regions. The Institute has around 5,000 members nationally and around 1,200 members in New South Wales. PIA NSW plays key roles in promoting and supporting the planning profession within NSW and advocating key planning and public policy issues. This submission has been prepared on behalf of the Institute by members of the PIA NSW Transport Chapter.

The report “Options for Glebe Island Bridge-Cost Benefit Analysis of Various Options for Glebe Island Bridge” September 2013 takes an economic view of evaluating its community value ranging from pure cost of each option to the value in dollar terms of its heritage.

Whilst cost of full restoration, part restoration or demolition can be costed, heritage cannot. As correctly stated (p.32) “the history of this crossing, going back to 1892 is closely associated with the economic and social development of Sydney at the end of the 19th century”. This is enough to put the bridge beyond a cost/benefit analysis given that the economic/social history of Sydney’s industrial beginnings cannot be costed in dollar terms.

Heritage value

Successive governments, State and Federal, to their credit have preserved much of Sydney Harbour’s foreshores and maritime history, the envy of many port cities. This will one day allow people to walk along the foreshores of much of the harbour, the experience enhanced by historic structures like the Glebe Island Bridge.

The value of tourism to the State has not been costed in this study, yet it is recognised in many government documents as a growing industry, one that Australia has not yet fully experienced.

Just as Pyrmont Bridge was slated for demolition, until there was a public outcry, Glebe Island Bridge is in exactly the same category – ask the community whether the Pyrmont Bridge should be demolished and we all know what the answer would be. A long term view needs to be taken of heritage value.

It was only 20 years ago when there was a strong move to demolish the Queen Victoria Building (QVB) then requiring millions of dollars to restore after being neglected by the Sydney City Council for decades. When most Sydneysiders or visitors are told of this strong move to demolish the QVB and build an underground car parking station below a park, they cannot believe that anyone would have even suggested it.

In order to address the arguments by those industries and activities perceived to be affected such as the fish markets, when most of their products are delivered by truck, or that high masted yachts cannot get in and out of their moorings, there are solutions to these issues.
The Glebe Island Bridge can be opened at specific times each day, particularly out of peak hours to allow pedestrians and cyclists to access jobs in the CBD, from a growing “white collar” workforce in the Balmain – Rozelle area and beyond. This form of commuting is heavily encouraged in several government strategic plans.

The Glebe Island Bridge must remain and be fully restored and celebrated as a part of Sydney’s 19th century industrial/commercial/maritime history. It serves as an important everyday reminder to future generations of the history of transport in our City.

**Response on cost-benefit analysis**

NSW has many thousands of bridges, many of them timber bridges in varying states of deterioration. The prioritisation of public expenditure on infrastructure is a complex process in which cost-benefit analysis and ranking is a useful tool, but it is an incomplete basis for making complex decisions.

While it is acknowledged that the report presents a reasonable case within its narrow terms of reference, PIA is fundamentally concerned with representing the interests of future development, populations and amenity.

It is acknowledged that Glebe Island and White Bay is a key facility in the NSW transport and logistics network. It is uniquely and ideally positioned within the Sydney metropolitan area for efficient transfer of cargo between land and sea. Glebe Island and White Bay is Sydney’s principal centre for receiving, storing and distributing dry bulk goods via its seven berths. Glebe Island/White Bay’s 39.7 hectares comprises common user bulk dry cargo discharge facilities, equipped for self-discharging vessels using wharf manifold to pipelines, conveyors and adjacent storage silos; and a total of 1,890m of berth (on measurement of total berth wharf lengths) for general cargo and lay-up berth. In April 2013, the new White Bay Cruise Terminal began operation. This new facility has the ability to host a second cruise ship at neighbouring berth, White Bay 4, meaning that for the first time, Sydney can now host up to three cruise ships alongside at any time. The public will also have pedestrian and cycle access to the waterfront adjacent to the terminal on non-ship days.

Any considerations of the future of Glebe Island Bridge need to be in the same context as arguments for and vindication by the retention of the Pyrmont Bridge. This should be considered in a number of contexts:

- A fundamental tenet of network efficacy is that a “missing link” connecting wider non-motorised transport networks (White Bay, Pyrmont, Central Sydney, Inner West and Parramatta River) has a disproportionately high benefit cost ratio. Complex economic analysis is not required to demonstrate this great benefit.
- The high level path on the ANZAC bridge is not a viable pleasant alternative for most pedestrians and cyclists, similar to the low usage of the Western Distributor paths over Darling Harbour compared to the higher amenity of the low-level Pyrmont Bridge.
- In terms of servicing the future White Bay redevelopment area, while the detailed future use of this area is not certain, the now-defunct CBD Metro proposals, including a metro rail station at White Bay, demonstrated that there is substantial east-west transport demand in this corridor. The studies carried out for this project forecast it would carry 7,000 passengers per hour in 2031, demonstrating a strong underlying demand for travel in the corridor served by the Glebe Island Bridge.
- The Inner West of Sydney is one of the few areas in Western cities with a growing young population demographic (as opposed to a broader ageing population) who aspire to walk and cycle.
Glebe Island Bridge serves as a vital link in a chain of bike paths and pedestrian routes and foreshore paths that currently stretch from the Sydney CBD to Parramatta and beyond.

Active transport is a key part of the NSW Government policy commitment to healthy living, contributing to a reduction in health care costs.

Facilities such as Glebe Island Bridge serve as a catalyst for further development of environmentally sustainable walking and cycling, just as Pyrmont Bridge was a key driver for expansion of links into the CBD and Pyrmont.

The Inner West and Pyrmont face a growing shortage of public open space. Developments such as the WestConnex motorway and redevelopment and revitalisation of the surrounding area will place further pressure on open space and recreation facilities. The retention of the Glebe Island Bridge has the potential to contribute to the area of active open space as well as the whole open space network, the accessibility of open space and the ability of people of all ages, including the young and the mobility impaired, to use open space independently.

In summary, PIA contends that the future benefits of retaining the Glebe Island Bridge far outweigh the comparatively minor costs and the perceived effects on maritime transport. The value to Sydney for its culture value needs to be recognised and if a dollar value is to be put on Sydney Harbour's future cultural/heritage/tourism value, it would far outweigh the cost of restoration as suggested in this report.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback. Should you wish to discuss any of the issues raised within the submission please contact the PIA NSW Executive Officer on telephone number (02) 8904 1011 or email nswmanager@planning.org.au in the first instance.

Yours sincerely,

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