



On the opening of the new Windsor Bridge

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*I was privileged to have a sneak peak of the new bridge before it opened with Robyn
Preston MP*

The new Windsor bridge opened to traffic this weekend. This is a major milestone, and the project has dominated local politics for a decade.

After so much ill-feeling and unnecessary delay, I think this is a project the whole community should be proud of, and I say this as a local representative who felt very much [caught in the middle](#) by those passionately advocating for and against.

I didn't entirely agree with those who thought of this project as a rape of Windsor's heritage. But I did agree that building a replacement bridge in the same location condemned a very historic square to another century of heavy traffic, when it offered a wonderful opportunity to build a bypass. I said then and still say that this was a missed opportunity.

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“Slated for demolition”... except it never was.

I also disagreed strongly with those who put out misinformation — saying for example that heritage buildings around Thompson square were “scheduled for demolition” when they never were, and the protesters knew that. They also said that historic brick barrel drains that had been covered up over a century would be destroyed, when in fact the project afforded the chance to do some unique archeology and then cover them back up, just like they have been all this time. We now have a documentary record and a host of artefacts we never would have otherwise had. Piers for the new bridge were moved so that they didn’t disturb the drains.



Some wonderful archeology was uncovered by the project, which never would have been investigated otherwise.

Nor did I see overwhelming merit in retaining a narrow, inadequate bridge whose visible structure was an ugly concrete deck added in 1924. The oldest part of the bridge, best able to be described as having heritage value, were the iron pillars driven into the river bedrock in 1874 — some of which will be retained in the construction of a viewing platform (which the protesters opposed!) These things inflamed passions and tested friendships needlessly.

Of course, any protest started by people who care deeply about heritage or local amenity also attract carpetbaggers — people who care less about the issue, but who beadily seized an opportunity to create political friction for their own ends.

For years, I saw protests in Thompson Square with unsavoury types loitering around the edges — leather clad union thugs, federal politicians who had nothing to do with the project, Greens activists, even the late Jack Munday, former BLF tsar and Communist Party candidate (but otherwise the saviour of The Rocks — see, people aren't all bad).

It became a circus. At the last election, at least three people gained election to Hawkesbury Council on the back of this tide of protest, only to spend the last four years sticking their heads in the sand, opposing reasonable collaboration between Council and the RMS, and almost guaranteeing that the community input they sought election on would rarely reach the right ears. It's been very frustrating. I think many people who genuinely care about heritage have been used.

It's worth noting that today's opening of the new bridge isn't the end of the project. I'm hopeful that the completed landscaping will reunite the sundered halves of Thompson Square caused by the cutting dug in 1934, greatly expanding the useful space to the public, and underlining that Thompson Square has been a changing and evolving space since the beginning.



The opening of the old bridge, 4th November, 1874. This bridge shares only certain elements with the present structure. The whole top deck was replaced in 1920.

I'm confident that once everyone sees the completed project, people will reconsider whether all the noise and hand-wringing were worth it.

Hawkesbury, enjoy your new bridge. Maybe your great-great grandchildren will fight to preserve it as a piece of the area's heritage in 2166, the year in which it will be as old as the current bridge retired at.

This video, courtesy of [Robyn Preston MP – Member for Hawkesbury](#) is a fascinating record of the bridge's construction.

Category

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Tags

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