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COMMENTS ON OPTIONS FOR GLEBE ISLAND BRIDGE REPORT

The Glebe Society is pleased to be given an opportunity to comment on the options put forward by ACIL Allen Consulting in their report: *Options for Glebe Island Bridge (September 2013)* (ACIL Allen Report)

Summary of Glebe Society Position

The Glebe Society strongly supports the restoration and adaptive reuse of the Glebe Island Bridge (GIB) as an important and valuable transport asset linking the Bays Precinct, the CBD and the adjoining suburbs. It has the capacity to provide increasingly necessary low level cycle and pedestrian commuter access and light rail public transport.

The Glebe Society strongly affirms the heritage value of this 1903 structure and would oppose its demolition on these grounds alone. After many years of active discussion on the Bridge's future we sense that this is a strongly supported view in our community. The two community representatives on the Bays Precinct Taskforce have similarly reported that this was their experience across the wider Bays Precinct communities.

The Glebe Society is absolutely opposed to the demolition of the Glebe Island Bridge (GIB) on utility and heritage grounds. These longstanding community positions are strongly supported by both local councils.

The implied preferred option for full demolition in the ACIL/Allen report ignores the weight of these combined community and Council informed views.

Bays Precinct Strategic Planning Vacuum

The push to make a decision on the GIB is occurring in a strategic planning vacuum.

The GIB is a significant piece of transport infrastructure within the rapidly transforming Bays Precinct. Any decision about GIB is of central importance to future development options for the Bays. To make a decision to demolish this infrastructure in the absence of any integrated strategic vision - let alone plan – is an irresponsible and short sighted approach to planning and contrary to the public good.

Successive Governments –including the current Government- have recognised that such a strategic plan is an essential prerequisite for a good Bays Precinct planning process. In practice, however, the *ad hoc*, one-off, short sighted approach to planning decisions appears to be alive and unthreatened in the Bays Precinct- and this process in relation to the GIB is just the latest example.

No decision to demolish the GIB should be contemplated before an integrated strategic plan for the medium/longer term has been developed for the Bays Precinct.

The ACIL Allen Report

The ACIL/Allen Report is no substitute for a strategic planning framework. And its validity and usefulness as a cost-benefit analysis is fatally compromised by its short term perspective and its total lack of any future planning scenario for the Precinct. After all we know that around 80 hectares of publicly owned foreshore and much of the waters of the bays are in play for future uses/development. This is not the fault of the consultants; rather it reflects the continuing strategic planning vacuum for the Bays Precinct.

The independent and ‘neutral’ cost benefit analysis report leads the reader to a strong inference that the rational and economically sensible option is the full demolition option over the restoration option. While the immediate costs of full demolition and restoration are comparable¹, the difference in the Net Present Value between the full demolition and preservation options is \$125m.1 over 30 years.² This is converted into a \$ value of \$62.5m for heritage factors and \$15.20 per cyclist/pedestrian trip.³

The core problem with this analysis is not just that it is narrow, but that it has of necessity been developed without any serious consideration of likely/possible development on Glebe Island, White Bay, Blackwattle and Rozelle Bays (including the Fish Markets) and White Bay Power Station beyond the short term (10 years). Instead, the report relies upon current cycle and pedestrian use of the ANZAC Bridge for its calculation of transport benefit. It does not recognise that safe pedestrian and cycle ways generate increased demand if they interconnect with a wider transport network –even if there is no significant new development.

Given that there is already strong private developer pressure for significant high rise residential and high density commercial/ entertainment uses in the Precinct, the report’s projections of 1000 pedestrian and cyclist commuters –and no light rail – are most certainly a huge under-

¹ Restoration and demolition costs are \$37.5 and \$37.3m respectively . ACIL/Allen Report pvi

² ACIL/Allen Report p10.

³ ACIL/Allen Report pxi

estimate of likely future needs and usage. We do not know what the detailed terms of reference for this report were, but the Bays Precinct Task Force Report was explicit in advising that an independent cost benefit analysis must be ‘comprehensive’ and have ‘regard to future transport needs associated with urban renewal scenarios.’⁴

The ACIL/Allen report is presented as an independent analysis. This would have carried stronger credibility if the constantly reiterated requests from community representatives⁵ for ‘independent’ studies to have broad (including community) input into the terms of reference had occurred. This report was commissioned by an agency with strong interests in the outcome and well known views favouring demolition –and most significantly without community input.

Astonishingly, the list of ‘stakeholders’ ACIL/Allen consulted includes (appropriately) most businesses, including elite leisure users (superyachts) - some of the relevant government agencies and the Heritage Council. No community groups are listed. The two councils are listed – this is appropriate, but of course not an appropriate substitute for community views. It is not at all surprising that the report is closely aligned to the Government agencies’ views on the future of GIB as set out in the Bays Precinct Taskforce report.⁶

As a counter we cite the community and Council perspectives on GIB from the Bays Precinct Taskforce report:

“Both councils and the community have been clear in their support for the retention and refurbishment of the Bridge. The City of Sydney has identified a long term opportunity to provide a pedestrian connection cycleway over the Bridge. This is noted in the Draft City of Sydney Development Control Plan 2010 and in the Leichhardt Council Bicycle Strategy 2007. The City of Sydney has identified the bridge as providing a future bi-directional light rail connection from Glebe Island and potentially Balmain East and the Cruise Passenger terminal to the City via the Fish Market Station. The bridge was originally designed to carry a tramway and standard gauge rail lines exist throughout White Bay wharves connecting them to the former Rozelle Rail yards about one kilometre away which may provide stabling for the future light rail network. The community seeks to retain the Bridge for a mix of reasons including its heritage value; for its protection of small recreational craft (kayaks, row boats and dragon boats) in Blackwattle Bay and Rozelle Bay; its ability to be upgraded for pedestrian and cycle access and for potential light rail connectivity. The bridge provides protection of the waterway in that it restricts the size of vessels that can enter the Rozelle and Blackwattle Bay area and the Bridge abutments may provide waste protection from Sydney Harbour”⁷

Lack of Government Coordination

This Government promised effective coordination of traffic and transport planning. It is therefore frustrating for community groups to be asked to comment on Transport NSW’ s City Access Strategy which highlights the importance of increased pedestrian and cycle access into

⁴ Bays Precinct Taskforce Report August 2012 p87

⁵ Generally and in the recent Bays Precinct Task Force.

⁶ Bays Precinct Taskforce Report August 2012 pp87-8.

⁷ Bays Precinct Taskforce Report August 2012 p87

the CBD network. By its analysis integrated networks pull demand from roads. Within such a plan, as the councils and community have recognised GIB is a vital potential link. The NSW Long Term Transport Plan has a similar focus.

The anti-adaptation/pro-demolition perspectives pushed by Maritime Services and Ports agencies over the years and in the Bays Precinct Taskforce – and apparently reflected in this ACIL/Allen report - are inconsistent with these broader plans.

The Heritage Value

It is not surprising that a cost benefit analysis fails to allocate tangible value to heritage concerns, nor reflect much understanding of heritage concerns; especially if its authors did not consult directly with the community to gauge the level of support for a restoration option that respects heritage value as a public good.

So we are left with the simplistic, slightly absurd and generally unhelpful finding ⁸that if we want to argue for the restoration and adaptive integration of the Bridge into the future transport network ‘the community must value the heritage aspects of the Glebe Island Bridge at more than \$62.5 million in 2013 dollars...’

Protection of the heritage items was an important issue within the Bays Precinct Task Force. After considerable debate the following planning principles were endorsed to guide future development decisions in the Bays Precinct:

“Recognise the significance of the Bays Precinct as part of Sydney’s maritime, port and industrial history” and

“Conserve, interpret and adaptively re-use existing and potential key heritage items.”

These principles do, of course, apply to the GIB. Its heritage value has long been recognised in many quarters. The Glebe Island Bridge has been recommended for inclusion on the State Heritage Register by the NSW Heritage Council. “The swing bridges [designed by engineer Percy Allan]... at Pyrmont and Glebe Island are among the structures standing as monuments to his skill.”⁹

The Glebe Society is aware that the agencies entrusted with the care and maintenance of the GIB have for years been covertly, and sometimes overtly, advocating its demolition. It is generally accepted that the increasing poor state of the structure has been largely a product of deliberate neglect.

The GIB is one of the most iconic of the existing heritage items in the Bays area. It is also a valuable, and publicly owned infrastructure asset. It will be defended by the community.

Business/Commercial Users Impact

⁸ ACIL/Allen Report pxi

⁹ Percy Allan (1861-1930) by Arthur Corbett, Australian Dictionary of Biography, v7 (MUP), 1979

A key cost factor used in the ACIL/Allen report and constantly raised by the maritime agencies is the negative impact on business/commercial activities in Blackwattle and Rozelle Bays. It is argued that increasingly the boats passing through the bridge are too large (tall) to pass if the bridge is closed.

This raises the obvious question as to which planning decision should have priority. What kinds of maritime (or other) activities are most appropriate for these Bays; what kinds and sizes of boats are most appropriate for these two small Bays.

It is obviously totally possible to encourage profitable maritime business activity in these Bays, which is compatible with a restored GIB functioning as a commuter transport link. Many business activities can function with boats that can pass through the bridge when closed. Others can function with minimum impact around scheduled bridge opening times. This is one example of the linked planning decisions that can only be made sensibly if there is an integrated planning framework.

The Glebe Society argues that the GIB is needed as ongoing transport infrastructure; that Rozelle and Blackwattle should remain safe for 'passive' boating activities; that business, commercial and leisure activities should be compatible with both these uses.

The community accepted the super yacht marina in Rozelle Bay as a temporary and limited development in the context of the 2000 Sydney Olympics. It is now permanent and associated with controversial on-shore commercial development. It is also cited as one of the activities that will object to the closing of the GIB as the largest of these yachts cannot pass unless the bridge is open. It would be totally contrary to the public good, if the GIB were to be sacrificed in the interests of an elite yachting community objecting to the inconvenience of a working bridge and scheduled passage times.

We expect the agencies managing the publicly owned assets in these Bays to ensure all formal arrangements (leases, development approvals, licences) with business, commercial or other private, government or community enterprises contain explicit recognition that the GIB is both a heritage and potential transport asset and all activity will be compatible with a restored and operating bridge.

Glebe Society Recommendations

1. The Glebe Island Bridge should be restored in recognition of its heritage values and for its current and increased future value as a commuter transport link for cyclists and pedestrians and possibly light rail transport. This would be largely consistent with an expanded version of Restoration Option 2.
2. No consideration should be given to the irreversible option of demolition of the Glebe Island Bridge unless it is clearly consistent with an integrated strategic plan for the Bays Precinct including an integrated transport plan – and this plan is supported by the community.
3. The Bays Precinct strategic planning process must be finalised with genuine community participation in a reconvened Task Force or Community Reference Group.

4. Agencies managing the publicly owned assets in Rozelle and Blackwattle Bay must ensure that all formal arrangements with business, commercial or other private, government or community enterprises contain explicit recognition that the Glebe Island Bridge is both a heritage and potential transport asset and all activity will be compatible with a restored and operating bridge.
5. A more comprehensive analysis of ways in which the Glebe Island Bridge can be restored and adaptively used as a transport link be carried out to complement this limited cost benefit analysis report and that the community be actively involved.
6. Transport NSW in the interest of transparency and open government publishes on its website all submissions and comments in response to the ACIL and Allen Consulting Report. CEO.

I hope these comments are of assistance to your agency and the Government in determining the future of the Glebe Island Bridge in the best public interest.

Yours Truly

Dr. John Gray
President