

From: Gladys Berejiklian [mailto:Gladys.Berejiklian@parliament.nsw.gov.au]
Sent: Friday, 4 September 2009 5:57 PM
Subject: Re: Meeting Re Suspension Bridge - Monday 31st August 8:30amWilloughby Council

Dear All,

As discussed I delivered a Private Member's Statement in Parliament yesterday about this issue. I have copied the Hansard transcript of the speech for your information (see end of this e-mail).

I also managed to speak to the Minister in between divisions in Parliament yesterday. The impression I got from him is similar to the views held by the RTA ie he essentially said he is more concerned about putting up the safety barrier asap and is not really concerned about other issues. He also indicated that a decision by mid- December was too late as far as he is concerned. It seems he is strongly following the advice he receives from the RTA.

In my humble opinion it is really important that the local councils maintain a direct dialogue with the RTA (including Heritage Council). I will continue to bring views of the community to Minister's attention.

Regards

Gladys

COPY OF HANSARD TRANSCRIPT 3 September 2009

For a number of reasons a significant issue in the Willoughby electorate is the project involving the construction of a safety barrier along the Long Gully Bridge at Northbridge known locally as the suspension bridge. This project arose from the findings of the State Coroner in May 2008 following an inquest into a death by suicide from the bridge that occurred in January 2007. The coronial inquest recommendation reads:

That a safety barrier designed to prevent or significantly impede jumping from the Northbridge Suspension Bridge be erected by the RTA as soon as practically possible taking into account regular planning issues.

That any such barrier erected be designed to take into account the Bridge's significant heritage and architectural values and to harmonise with them.

The Coroner's report found that, in addition to being a magnet for suicide attempts, the bridge was also being used for base jumping, potentially imperilling the lives of those below in the park and even those trying to prevent their jumps. On behalf of my community I commend the Roads and Traffic Authority for the swift action it took following the Coroner's recommendations to establish 24-hour security patrols by guards on the bridge to prevent further suicide attempts. The feedback I have received from many people in the community is absolute praise for the guards in relation to their ongoing role in providing security on and around the bridge. The community is united on the need to ensure that the recommendations of the Coroner are adopted and a safety barrier be erected to prevent further suicide attempts.

I join with my community and with members in this place who continue to be strong advocates for people struggling with mental health issues. I remain critical, for example, of the State Government's position in reducing the presence of community-based mental health facilities in my electorate and throughout New South Wales. In the process of implementing the Coroner's recommendations the Roads and Traffic Authority identified three options for the bridge: first, a steel picket fence; second, a contemporary fence; and, third, a suspension system. In a report commissioned for the Roads and Traffic Authority in June 2009 the first option was identified as the preferred option because:

it was considered to have an appropriate language that deterred people from attempting to scale the structure and it minimised the visual impact of the fence by using thin vertical elements.

... relatively simple and cost-effective to construct and maintain. It also has the least impact on regular maintenance and repair procedures which are essential to the safety and longevity of the Bridge.

The local community is concerned that the three options that were presented were not developed in consultation with the community and do not maintain the historic significance and unique aesthetics of the bridge. Some concern has also been expressed about the first option being chosen because of cost issues. I have been asked by my community to ask the Minister for Roads and the Roads and Traffic Authority to consider other and more appropriate options as soon as possible.

A number of community meetings on this issue have already been held, involving the Roads and Traffic Authority, Willoughby and North Sydney councils, the Heritage Council and many local community organisations. On Monday this week an important community meeting was held to discuss the issue. Many stakeholders, including the mayor, councillors and council officers from Willoughby council, councillors and council officers from North Sydney Council, and representatives from local progress associations and precinct committees attended that meeting. The overwhelming view expressed at that meeting was that the community wished to work with the Roads and Traffic Authority to have an alternative acceptable option determined by mid-December this year at the latest, with the presence of the 24-hour security guards maintained until the safety barrier is erected.

Given the iconic and architectural significance of the bridge, there is also strong support from the community that a design competition be an avenue to determine the best option, with the Roads and Traffic Authority, local councils and the Heritage Council having a direct role in determining the successful option. Some generous locals have already donated prize money to that end. In fact, local councils have already identified a draft time line to meet these critical time frames, including the design competition. The community strongly supports the erection of a safety barrier as soon as possible, but it wants a say in what the final choice should be.

The Roads and Traffic Authority and the Minister for Roads have received a number of representations in that regard and I request them to consider the community's wishes. The community is grateful for the speedy action of the Roads and Traffic Authority in installing security guards, and the community is now seeking to be consulted on the final choice. I thank everyone in the community who has expressed a view on this important matter and I reiterate to the Minister for Roads and to the Roads and Traffic Authority that the community wishes to work with them as a matter of urgency to ensure that the best option is erected as soon as possible.

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