

Engineering Heritage Sydney Response to Sydney Harbour Bridge Cycleway Northern Access proposal - Review of Environmental Factors

Introduction

This response to the REF is from Engineering Heritage Sydney (EHS), a divisional group within Engineering Heritage Australia (EHA). EHS comprises members of Engineers Australia and others who have a keen interest in the recognition, preservation and promotion of engineering heritage in its many forms, and the people associated with those important items of engineering.

EHS has made a previous submission about the proposed cycle ramp. We support the need for improved cycle access to the bridge and the need for a cycle ramp, as active transport is important, but strongly disagree with the proposed linear ramp.

Heritage Registers

The Sydney Harbour Bridge is listed on the State Heritage Register and other heritage listings, but it is also on our Engineers Australia Engineering Heritage Register. In 1988 it was jointly recognised by Engineers Australia as a National Engineering Landmark, and by the American Society of Civil Engineers), as an International Historic Civil Engineering Landmark.

The EA Register provides a number of reasons for listing, including:

The bridge is one of the most remarkable feats of bridge construction. At the time of its construction it was the longest single span arch bridge in the world. It has been an important factor in the growth of Metropolitan Sydney, particularly since World War Two. The bridge, its pylons and approaches are all important elements in the townscape of areas both near and distant from it. The curved northern approach gives a grand sweeping entrance to the bridge with continually changing views of the bridge and harbour (Walker and Kerr 1974, Modified) (Register of the National Estate 1978) (NSW State Heritage Register updated 2003).

Thus, the SHB is an extremely significant piece of engineering and architectural heritage, which we consider should be preserved as far as possible in its original state. However, the proposed linear cycle ramp will seriously detract from this heritage, scarring across the “curved northern approach” and “grand sweeping entrance” cited in the above quote.

Impact on Milsons Point Station Façade

One of the key objections to the linear ramp is its impact on the northern viaduct and the entrance to Milsons Point Station. To date, these have fortunately been preserved in their original condition and provide an incredible viewpoint of what the SHB was like in 1932 when it was opened, and demonstrates the confluence of engineering and architectural design. Constructing a long linear

cycle ramp across this façade would seriously detract from this view and ruin this key heritage element of the SHB.

The façade and entrance to Milsons Point Station still retain 90 years on Dr John Bradfield's original design elements, including the decorative Art Deco lighting. The proposed linear ramp will interrupt and significantly detract from this remarkable heritage.

Impact on Bradfield Park

As well as the structure itself of the SHB, EHS also considers it essential to retain as much as possible of the original setting of the bridge and station, for these are also important to view the SHB in its environment.

It is noted that the radial layout of the station entrance forecourt still retains the landscape features designed by Dr J.J.C. Bradfield. Alterations to this layout and its plantings will only detract from its aesthetic and heritage significance, and should be avoided.

There is a lot of detail in the REF about the alterations to Bradfield Park where the linear ramp lands. However, it is clear that cyclists are given priority over the local community, commuters, for it would obviously be far better if the ramp landing was located far clear of this busy pedestrian area of Milsons Point.

North Sydney Council Proposal

As noted earlier, it appears that submissions by local and heritage groups have been ignored in the selection and development of the linear ramp proposal. North Sydney Council proposed a foldback ramp, near the current stairs and removed from the key heritage areas of the SHB and Milson Point Station. EHS supports this proposal, and consider that it would provide improvement to cyclists using the SHB.

It is accepted that it may not suit all cyclists, but it is definitely workable. One of our EHS members, Bill Phippen OAM, has extensive experience in design and construction of disabled facilities and he considers the foldback ramp concept to be quite feasible.

It appears that while North Sydney Council and other groups urged consideration of this option, there were no serious consultations on it. It is strongly recommended that this and any other options should be workshopped with the local communities, for it does have the potential to significantly reduced the heritage impact on the SHB and its approaches, which is a key concern of EHS.

Lane 8 / Cahill Expressway Scheme

Looking beyond the question of the site for a cycle ramp at the northern end of the SHB, one could also take a much broader vision as befits 21st Century Sydney. In the 1920s, John Bradfield was a

visionary in his design of the SHB, so it would surely be appropriate to take a similar visionary approach to the cycle ramp.

Up to around the mid 1960s, one could easily ride across the SHB in the road lanes, whereas now cyclists are restricted to the relatively narrow pedestrian pathway. It is understood that North Sydney Council has proposed converting lane 8 into the cycleway and taking it across Circular Quay Railway, with closure of the Cahill Expressway.

EHS strongly supports this proposal, as:

- Use of Lane 8 does not impact on the engineering and architectural heritage of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and Milsons Point Station.
- It provides much better access for cyclists, and allows for increased usage, which one would expect with the current focus on improving active transport.
- It opens up the current Cahill Expressway over Circular Quay Station to cyclists and pedestrians, which would significantly improve the overall environment in the Circular Quay area.

This is very much a win-win-win outcome.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Engineering Heritage Sydney strongly disagrees with the concepts behind this REF and the outcomes it reaches. The linear ramp proposal has significant adverse impacts on the engineering and architectural heritage of the SHB and Milsons Point Station, which are unacceptable. Equally important, the linear ramp has adverse community impacts and these appear to have been overlooked or disregarded.

It is suggested that the current REF should be shelved, and serious consideration given to available options, including workshopping these with the community and other relevant groups. Options could include the North Sydney Council's folded ramp but consideration should also be given to the more visionary Lane 8 proposal.

Finally, the Sydney Harbour Bridge will reach its Centenary in 2032 and we believe every effort should be made to preserve the bridge so its engineering, architectural, environmental and community heritage are all clear for all to appreciate at that time.

If any further discussion or comment is required from Engineering Heritage Sydney, I can be contacted on frank@johnsons.id.au or 0418 406 798.

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