



Late agenda item

C2006-23

Ordinary Meeting of Council

Wednesday, 24 June 2020, 6.00pm

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Meeting date: 24 June 2020
Responsible officer: Manager City Design and Projects
Decision making authority: Council
Agenda attachments: Nil
Additional information: Nil

SUMMARY

The City welcomes the Federal and State commitment of \$230m to fund the Swan River Crossing project. It is noted that the life-expectancy of the new bridge will be in excess of 100 years and therefore it is important that this project is equally far-reaching in providing a strategic and resilient solution for the future.

The City acknowledges that the project is complex, high profile and needs to satisfy wide-ranging issues from multiple stakeholders. As a key stakeholder, the City will be seeking assurances that the following aspects are adequately addressed in the final project design and deliverables:

- strategic planning and transport;
- bridge alignment(s) and connections;
- excellence in design;
- heritage;
- Whadjuk Nyoongar cultural significance;
- public realm and place-making.

This report recommends that Council adopts a series of key principles based on the above to guide the City's analysis and feedback to Government regarding the Swan River Crossing. It also recommends that community engagement is commenced as soon as possible and that community opinion is used to assist the Council in reaching its final position regarding various aspects of the project.

BACKGROUND

The replacement of the Fremantle Traffic Bridge has been in discussion for many years. The City has been consistent in its opinion that the location is a key entry point to the historic port city as well as closely connected to the North Fremantle community and Townsite. As such, any proposed bridge replacement project needs careful consideration with regard to broader issues of transport planning; future port scenarios; place-making; and matters of cultural significance – both in terms of bridge heritage as well as recognising the importance of this particular location to the Whadjuk Nyoongar people.

In 2015, the City released *FREO2029 Transformational Moves* that identified the Northern Gateway – including this river crossing – as one of 5 key strategic projects for the City. This document anticipated a replacement bridge to the west of the existing one, enabling the old bridge – either in its entirety, or substantive part – to be retained and re-integrated into the movement system and improvements to the foreshore as places for people.

The City welcomed the announcement in 2019 that the Federal and State Governments agreed to commit \$230m funding to the Swan River Crossing project. The funding is to include a new traffic bridge; a dedicated rail for freight (to avoid current sharing with passenger rail); and improvements to cycling and pedestrian facilities. It is noted that the infrastructure associated with the Swan River Crossing will remain assets of the State Government.

Over the past 6 months, Main Roads Western Australia (MRWA) – the lead agency for the project – has been developing concept work and feasibility studies in the lead up to community consultation, which is anticipated to commence in coming weeks.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications for the City to this Report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications for the City to this Report.

CONSULTATION

There has been no specific engagement or consultation with the community so far on this project. The City anticipates that the State Government, through MRWA, will commence this process in the near future.

OFFICER COMMENT

The following discussion points are key considerations for 100-year infrastructure investment:

Strategic Planning and Transport

Strategic issues that need clarity and direction by Government to adequately frame the context and planning for the Swan River Crossing include:

- Future port scenarios undertaken by Westport Taskforce as well as Government's current preferred option and timeframes.
- Curtin Avenue extension / future regional road network.
- Long-term assumptions regarding regional land-use, transport demand and modal split that inform the two points above.

Alignment and Connections

The City is aware that the Public Transport Authority and MRWA are heavily involved in the engineering solutions for rail and road. Whilst these authorities have clear jurisdictional and technical expertise in these areas, the City is keen to receive reassurance from the State Government over the following matters:

- That any new rail and road infrastructure is planned on alignments that will facilitate, rather than hinder, the long-term planning scenarios of the region.
- That the alignment of any new rail and road bridges will take into account the adaptive re-use of the Fremantle Traffic Bridge and how it will be integrated into the overall design of the Swan River Crossing project.
- That the State's metropolitan cycling network, the Principle Shared Path (PSP), will be incorporated within the project, with grade-separated uninterrupted connections:
 - North, through to North Fremantle train Station; and
 - South, through to Beach Street and Fremantle Station.
- Pedestrian and low-speed cycling connections are made not only across the river, but down to the foreshores at either end of the bridge as well as across the roads.

Excellence in Design

The Swan River Crossing is more than a simple traffic bridge replacement project. It involves multiple transport modes as well as being a symbolic gateway into Fremantle. It will inevitably have a people-centred function and an architectural presence. There is an opportunity here to ensure a multidiscipline design process produces excellence in design that celebrates innovation in structural and civil engineering of bridge design. Any associated landscape re-design of the foreshores should also be to a high standard and draw from context and cultural understanding of place.

Heritage

The Fremantle Traffic Bridge was completed in 1939 and is now over 80 years old. The current bridge is the fourth in this general location at the meeting of the Swan River and Fremantle harbour. The structure is listed with the highest level of significance on the Municipal Inventory and is also listed on the State Register of Heritage Places, Heritage Council of Western Australia. The following is an extract from the State Register:

Fremantle Traffic Bridge (1939) demonstrates the continued use of timber in bridge building in Western Australia into the 1930s, where its cost was low, relative to other materials, and its qualities well understood. Fremantle Traffic Bridge (1939) was designed by engineer E.W. (Ernie) Godfrey, who was in charge of the Bridge section of Main Roads from his arrival in Perth from Victoria in 1928 until his retirement in 1957, and was responsible for the design of all the bridges built in Western Australia in this period, and construction of the major ones.

Fremantle Traffic Bridge (1939) is valued by the community as an important public amenity, as demonstrated by the documenting of maintenance works to the structure in local and State news media. Fremantle Traffic Bridge (1939) contributes to the community's sense of place, both as a landmark in its own right, and for its situation on the site of earlier 1866 and 1898 bridges.

The City of Fremantle acknowledges that retention and re-use of the entire structure may no longer be a realistic option. However, the Swan River Crossing project is an opportunity to preserve, adapt and re-use a significant portion of the old structure as part of the gateway into Fremantle. Importantly, this should be done with authenticity that allows any remnant structure to 'read' as the former bridge and, where possible, still function as part of the movement network (non-vehicle). This would necessitate the retention of abutments, architectural embellishments and timber structures that span across public spaces – such as over Beach Street on the southern foreshore. Unless the 1939 timber bridge is genuinely embraced as part of the design process, a significant risk will emerge whereby a 'tokenistic' heritage interpretation will result.

Whadjuk Nyoongar Cultural Significance

The bridge site and environs are of high cultural significance. The Swan River and Cantonment Hill are registered Aboriginal sites. River crossings at Walyalup (Fremantle) are highly significant and existed for thousands of years, pre-colonial settlement. North of the river is Boorlo Yellagonga's territory and south is Beeliar which is Midgegooroo territory. This location is also significant in terms of the home of the Waugul and the spirit of the dingo. The rich cultural significance and stories associated with this site present a special opportunity for this project to 'layer in' cultural meaning, expression and interpretation into the design process.

Public Realm and Place-Making

With the principle focus being on rail and road crossings over the river, there is a risk that the impact on public realm and place may become secondary considerations. Good public realm design needs to be integrated into the process to ensure that all the public spaces in, on and around the bridges will be safe, attractive, connected and inviting. The design of the Swan River Crossing also needs to be mindful of potential future developments and enhancements on Victoria Quay, the two foreshores and the historic North Fremantle Townsite. Over the lifetime of these new bridges, it is highly likely that the spaces around them and the connections to neighbouring precincts will intensify and grow – with a far greater emphasis on people and places. Included in this, is the need to gain greater space in front of the historic Naval Stores building on Canning Highway, to assist with future reactivation and reconnection to the river.

VOTING AND OTHER SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS

Simple Majority Required

OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATION

Council

- 1. Welcomes the Federal and State funding commitment of \$230m for the Swan River Crossing project, a project that will see major infrastructure delivered that will have an asset life in excess of 100 years;**
- 2. Adopts the following principles to assist with the City's analysis and feedback to Government as the project unfolds and develops:**
 - a. PLANNING – That the State Government provides clarity around how this project supports the long-term strategic planning scenarios for the region and how transport planning is fully integrated within this, and specifically how options will address:**
 - the recommendations of the Westport Taskforce in relation to the future of the Inner Harbour of Fremantle Port;
 - land use, traffic, freight and passenger rail planning options for the areas on the north and south of the proposed new crossing;
 - b. ALIGNMENT & CONNECTIONS – That the new bridge alignment(s) are optimised in terms of:**
 - long-term planning scenarios;
 - uninterrupted flow / connectivity of the state's Principle Shared Path (PSP) to Fremantle and North Fremantle Rail Stations.
 - low-speed cycling and pedestrian connectivity and amenity;
 - cultural heritage and place-making, in particular, impact on Fremantle Traffic Bridge.
 - c. DESIGN – That the Swan River Crossing demonstrates excellence in design – delivering infrastructure through a multi-discipline design process that celebrates contemporary bridge design and creates a memorable gateway experience and a place for people.**
 - d. HERITAGE – That a significant portion of the Fremantle Traffic Bridge is preserved at both ends – especially on the southern end – and adapted in a manner that:**
 - retains pedestrian and cycling functions on its top deck;
 - retains a section over Beach Street, including its abutment and architectural embellishments;
 - is activated, connected and generates a destination for people on the foreshore;
 - remains an asset of the State Government.

- e. CULTURE – That the Aboriginal significance of this river crossing / location is clearly understood, respected and interpreted in the design and deliverables. This could be a major component of the % for Art program associated with this project.**
 - f. PUBLIC REALM & PLACE – That all public realm either created or modified by this project is safe, attractive, connected and inviting – with the potential to be extended and further connected with future riverside enhancements and developments – specifically, that increased curtilage is created in front of the Naval Stores building on Canning Highway to assist with activating this building and connection to foreshore.**
- 3. Requests that MRWA commence community engagement as soon as possible, and that this engagement process includes a full and transparent evaluation of design options and bridge alignments that respond to the principles noted above;**
- 4. Determines a final position on the various aspects of the Swan River Crossing in light of the comments and results that arise during the community engagement process.**