

Impact Assessment submission on Hale Street Link

I am a resident of Brisbane and **oppose** the proposed Hale Street Link (HSL) project on the grounds detailed here.

I acknowledge that the Council is trying to improve transportation in Brisbane—a challenging task given Brisbane's sprawled nature and seemingly inevitable population growth. Good progress has been made in recent years with the public transport system. However, more needs to be done as is evident by the inability of the existing public transport services to meet even existing demand: 75% of residents in Dutton Park and Woolloongabba have been left behind at bus stops; 55% of Annerley, Fairfield and Yeronga residents have been left behind; and 60% of residents from West End and Highgate Hill have been left behind.¹

The proposed HSL is unlikely to deliver on the promises being made about it.

Dealing with population growth

South Bank Parklands is one of the locations best serviced by public transport and accessible on foot or by bicycle in Brisbane. The South Brisbane and South Bank railway stations are very close by, as are the Cultural Centre and South Bank busway stations, and Citycat and ferry stops. It is also a short walk from the city and all the public transport options available there. South Bank Parkland does not need further car access. West End is also well serviced by bus and ferry and is an easy walk to the city.

Continual maintenance and improvement of public transport services to these areas and maintenance and management of the road, pedestrian and cycle networks in and to these areas is most likely, in my opinion, to lead to the best outcome.

River crossings

Traffic congestion is not particularly prevalent at river crossings. The problem is that there is simply too much traffic on the major arterials, especially during peak periods. The solutions are: make fewer trips, make trips at different times of day, and use a mode of transport that doesn't clog the roads.

If the HSL were to be built it would just provide another reason for people to drive into the inner city, an area which already suffers severe traffic congestion during peak travel times. So the bridge would not divert traffic from congested areas; in fact, the opposite. When the effect of generated traffic, inherent in this sort of project, is taken into account, the level of congestion would remain about the same as now at peak travel times. However, the generated traffic will produce other costs, which in my view are unbearable.

Air quality

It is difficult to see how HSL will improve air quality as it will encourage more people to drive instead of using other modes of transport. With more people driving, there will be more emissions and air quality will decrease, which is the opposite of what is claimed. Though I share Mr Newman's hope that future technologies will lead to less-polluting vehicles, it is a completely separate issue. I suspect in the future the acceptable safe levels of air pollution will be lower than presently. Even now our regulations for ultra-fine particles lag behind the US. Reducing levels of these particles in our cities will be a crucial challenge in the future. Experts in the field are warning that the long-term adverse health effects of pollution may be worse than we expect. Dr Michael Kleinman, a toxicologist from the University of California at Irvine says, 'It's much more cost-effective to eliminate pollution than to pay for the doctor bills later.'² I concur with him here.

¹ 'Better Public Transport' survey. Cr Helen Abrahams. September 2006.

² 'Dirty Little Secrets' Catalyst ABC TV Programme. May 2006

Reducing travel times

People think that projects like the HSL are going to reduce route lengths and congestion and hence reduce the amount of time they spent travelling. However, because of the location proposed for this bridge it would not help with either of these issues. The proposed location for the bridge is practically adjacent to the existent William Jolly Bridge. And if HSL were to be build the increase in traffic through South Brisbane would lead to new congestion around the Vulture Street and Mater Hospital precincts.

HSL will not generally improve travel times for Brisbane residents.

Cost and priorities

Council says the HSL will pay for itself. It is a proposed toll bridge—the residents of Brisbane will be paying for the bridge, and for a long time!

I have no confidence in the quoted figure of \$180m and instead see this as a bare minimum which is unlikely to cover the cost of the bridge alone. Road works associated with HSL would probably cost an additional \$120m. The cost of the North South Bypass Tunnel has risen from \$600m to over \$2000m now and it is still years from completion; its eventual cost could well be higher still. The Goodwill Bridge went from \$13m to \$23m.³ Recent experience with major infrastructure has shown that initial estimates are not to be relied upon.

I do agree that the Council should make investments of this magnitude in transportation for the city, but consider where this money could be better spent: on new services in areas without adequate public transport, on more ‘no timetable’ services, on footpaths and bicycle lanes on streets which are currently unfriendly or unsafe for these modes of transport, on more buses and trains so that peak demands can be satisfied, and in some cases simply on drivers’ wages so that more services can be operated on the existing infrastructure.

The real way forward for transportation in Brisbane

Eventually further rail infrastructure will need to be built: rail is the real ‘people-mover’ and is less expensive to build and operate than busways.

In the long term Brisbane’s transportation will only improve if planning towards developing satellite centres in the suburbs succeeds. Satellite centres give people local access to work, housing, services and recreation. Walking and cycling, with the inherent health benefits of the exercise they provide, become more attractive as modes of transport. With increased locality the need to travel will decrease.

With planning and a better transportation system, Brisbane’s quality of lifestyle will improve. I think this is what we’re all aiming for.



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³ Courier Mail 29 December 2001