

Brisbane Central Business District Bicycle Users' Group (CBD BUG)

Submission on the

Hale Street Link Draft Impact Assessment Statement

13 October 2006

The Brisbane Central Business District Bicycle Users' Group (CBD BUG) has serious concerns about the proposal to build a motor vehicle bridge across the Brisbane River connecting South Brisbane with Hale Street. The grounds of our concerns are two-fold: firstly because we believe the bridge will contribute to, rather than solve, traffic problems; secondly in the details with respect to cycling amenity. This submission will address those areas of concern in order. Finally we would like to comment on the approach to consultation with the cycling community.

Effects of the HSL on traffic

The Draft Impact Assessment Statement (IAS) states that the reasons for the bridge are:

- to cater for the increasing traffic expectations between South Brisbane and Milton; and
- to contribute to the Lord Mayor's desire to move through-traffic away from the CBD.

The CBD-BUG is concerned that these objectives are not sufficiently clear to justify this substantial piece of infrastructure and that they require further consideration.

The general position of the CBD BUG in relation to the use of cars is that all journeys that can reasonably be made by alternative transport, such as buses, trains, cycling and walking, should be. Our affluent society is able to afford to use cars at whim and this has the consequences of congestion leading to enormous expenditure on infrastructure, pollution leading to disease and global warming, noise and traffic danger leading to community harms, and physical inactivity leading to obesity. These costs are economic externalities that are not being sheeted home to their cause, the use of cars, so the free use of cars is a market failure. One of the key responsibilities of governments is to address market failures. Governments are failing to meet this responsibility by continuing to support the paradigm of the ready use of cars. Governments, including Brisbane City Council, must adopt and actively foster the alternative paradigm of promoting alternative transport.

The HSL would certainly facilitate the use of cars for moving between South Brisbane and Milton and surrounding areas. With the construction of new high density housing for many thousands of residents, it is superficially easy to see the need for this extra outlet. However, this should be examined more closely.

The direct distance for most trips between South Brisbane and Milton would be no more than two kilometres (Figure 6). It does not make sense to provide a substantial motor car bridge for this purpose. Most travel would be done best by a combination of walking, cycling and light public transport, such as a high frequency small bus or light rail system. We also question whether the volumes of expected commuting traffic between these districts make a car bridge appropriate. If the volumes are low, a bridge could not be justified, and if they are high enough to warrant a new toll bridge, then the effects of traffic on surrounding areas would be very detrimental. Hence, this stated objective for the HSL is not especially plausible, except for commercial goods transport (our comments do not necessarily apply to commercial goods transport, which on the local scale have little choice of alternatives to motor vehicles).

The second objective of diverting traffic away from the CBD is a more plausible outcome for the HSL. In other words, the purpose is to provide a thoroughfare alternative to the Riverside Expressway. The HSL would serve as a link from South Brisbane and beyond to the Western Freeway and the Inner City Bypass to the Sunshine Coast and airport. It would also link Milton to the south side of the river. It is reasonable to assume that the toll, to some extent, will discourage through traffic from further afield than the local feeder suburbs; this traffic will continue to use the Riverside Expressway.

The CBD BUG notes the proposal to place a toll on HSL. As discovered in Sydney, drivers will tend to avoid the toll by using alternative routes, so devices will need to be used to direct drivers onto the HSL. This will result in political uproar and pressure to reduce or remove the tolls or to remove the restriction devices, with the cost of the bridge to be met either through rates or by all tax payers of Queensland. This should be acknowledged at the beginning as a failed strategy, and properly planned for. The toll will need to be set so that it does not discourage the stated objective, and it is questionable whether the required revenue could then be raised.

The HSL needs to be considered in the context of the current construction of the Eleanor Schonell Bridge. This bridge is planned to relieve the incredible use of cars and buses from all parts of the city to access the University of Queensland (UQ), via Coronation Drive and Indooroopilly. The HSL will provide an alternative route for students and staff to travel by car to UQ, and thus undercut the Eleanor Schonell Bridge and partially undo its objectives by maintaining high traffic on Coronation Drive and Sir Fred Schonell Drive.

The CBD BUG would be extremely concerned if the proposal was for an alternative thoroughfare for other than local traffic. South Brisbane has not been planned for high traffic volumes and what could be a foot-based and cycle-based community served by light public transport is already seriously blighted by the number of cars that are taken

into and through it. Increasing traffic volumes will cause great damage to the environment, character and safety of South Brisbane and surrounding areas.

In conclusion on this point of the effects of traffic, the CBD BUG considers that the HSL is an undesirable initiative. It supports the paradigm of freely available road space and time for cars, that is so detrimental to our way of life, our health, our wealth and the sustainability of our environment and community. We believe that the objectives stated for the HSL should be met by measures to address the previously stated market failure, by making it preferable to use alternative transport means. For example, all arterial routes in Brisbane should be restricted at peak traffic hours to bus lanes, T3 or T2 and the public transport network should be greatly enhanced to make it faster and more convenient, relative to cars. Only then will enough people choose alternative transport to make a real difference to the damage done by too much use of cars.

It is a significant weakness of the IAS that it fails to present and discuss alternatives to the HSL. Serious consideration should be given to alternatives including no bridge, and a bridge (such as the Eleanor Schonell Bridge) that provides no car access but rapid and frequent public and active transport options. Has there been any consideration of alternatives such as a light rail system or high frequency small buses?

The HSL as planned is a significant initiative for the amenity of cycling, which is addressed further below. If, as CBD BUG prefers, the HSL is not built, the needs for improved cycling access would remain. As the draft IAS notes, the present cross-river routes need to be enhanced. We consider that the construction of a bridge for alternative transport is highly desirable. This could be either solely for cycling and pedestrians, or could also be used for buses and/or light rail, although this should not be necessary given the proximity of the William Jolly Bridge.

Cycling amenity of the HSL

The CBD BUG applauds the attempts shown in the IAS to improve cycling amenity as an integral part of the HSL proposal. Notable aspects are the stated attempts to link existing cycling routes, and to apply the standard of AustRoads 14 to the design. We will address these points below.

A substantial concern we have is that the HSL will increase conflict between cyclists and pedestrians on the Bicentennial Bikeway, by increasing volumes without addressing the presently inadequate design. The Bicentennial Bikeway is a major cycling commuter route, and this is expected to grow. We note that in recent years the use of the Bikeway by pedestrians, commuters and exercisers, has increased sharply, giving rise to the abovementioned conflict. The reasons for the increased pedestrian traffic include:

- Coronation Drive has been widened and to enable this, the footpath has been greatly reduced and even been removed in some sections. This has forced pedestrians onto the Bikeway;
- Council has approved the construction of numerous high-rise buildings in Milton, without consideration for the exercise desire of the residents. The Bicentennial

Bikeway is one of the few opportunities in the area to take long walks or runs, furthermore it is scenic. It is self-evident that it will be used by the many new residents for this purpose.

The advent of the HSL, particularly with the high-rise living being constructed in South Brisbane, will lead to many more walkers, runners, rollerbladers and cyclists emerging to use the Bicentennial Bikeway. Many of the South Brisbane residents will use it to commute to UQ and other areas by bicycle. The present Bikeway can barely cope. The CBD BUG contends that the HSL project must include a major upgrade to the Bicentennial Bikeway all the way through to Toowong and then the dreadful section to St Lucia, and also to the winding, narrow and undulating section from Cribb Street to the pontoon at North Quay.

A further point on the Bicentennial Bikeway is that it absolutely must not be closed at any time during construction works. It is the most heavily used bikeway in Brisbane and there is no real alternative, since Coronation Drive will only be used by the most confident of cyclists.

We regret that the Report has not taken up the opportunity to improve cycling linkages to the north of the CBD. Frequent representations have been made by the CBD BUG and many others in regard to the deficiencies of cycling access to the CBD from the north. The HSL project presents the opportunity to take a range of measures to remedy this situation. The HSL will be an important link in all directions from both its ends. Two applications that could be addressed are cyclists from the south trying to access the QUT Kelvin Grove Campus, and cyclists from the north side trying to access the Bicentennial Bikeway to ride to UQ. At the north side, the present design has cyclists crossing several changes of lights. This needs to be reconsidered with a greater scope, to make the flow of traffic to the north side easy. There will be heavy motorised traffic, and it is important to design cycling access well to minimise risks.

The CBD BUG considers that every road is a cycling road and opposes the design of roads that do not cater for, or exclude, cyclists. Many cyclists are comfortable to ride on roads that are designed sufficiently for them and this is particularly the case for recreational riders who ride in bunches. The HSL itself, and the linked roads, must be designed with the expectation that bunch riders and also solo riders will use the road. It is unrealistic to think they will move from the road to the path and back to the road. The bridge design should be such that riders can seamlessly use the road network without being perceived to be holding up motorised traffic.

With the rising popularity of cycling and increasing motorised traffic, there has been an increase in conflict between the two sectors. This will not be solved by attempts to move cyclists off the road. It can only be solved by improving road designs to accommodate cyclists, by making alternative transport more attractive than solo car travel, and by publicity campaigns promoting tolerance of cycling.

The CBD BUG applauds the application of AustRoads 14 as a standard for design of the cycling component of the HSL. We would like to see more detail of the design elements, so we can ascertain the standard is being applied in all parts of the project.

We note that bicycle awareness zones do not appear to be provided for Merivale and Cordelia Streets or other direct routes and it is not clear how cyclists are intended to travel through South Brisbane, except by circuitous routes. The reality is that commuting cyclists, perhaps even more so than motorists, prefer the most direct, safe route. All roads and particularly thoroughfares in South Brisbane should be designed to encourage cycling.

Approach to consultation on the HSL

The CBD BUG notes the opportunities it has had to comment on the HSL proposal to date. We reiterate the major role we are taking in consultation on cycling amenity relevant to the CBD of Brisbane, including access to the CBD and point to our positive, effective and locally relevant contributions to date. We request to be given a key role in future consultation through the design and construction stages of the project and seek specific representation on working and/or consultative groups, should it be decided that the project will proceed.