

**Michael Berkman MP**  
*For Maiwar ▲*

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Green Bridges Program  
City Projects Office  
Brisbane City Council  
Via email: [GreenBridges@brisbane.qld.gov.au](mailto:GreenBridges@brisbane.qld.gov.au)

### **TOOWONG AND ST LUCIA GREEN BRIDGES SUBMISSION**

I write to make a submission on the proposed Green Bridges in Toowong and St Lucia. Given both bridges are proposed to land in my electorate of Maiwar, I have taken a keen interest in this proposal and am grateful for the opportunity to provide detailed feedback on behalf of residents in my electorate.

While my feedback focuses on impacts and consultation for residents in my electorate, this submission should be read alongside the submission of Amy MacMahon MP and Cr Jonathan Sri, who represent the inner-southern suburbs. In particular, their submission addresses flaws in Council's consultation process, and considers the need to design and land these bridges in such a way that minimises impacts on existing public spaces and native trees. I won't focus on these matters in as much detail, but strongly agree with the position laid out in their submission.

It is very encouraging to see Council adopt the Greens' long standing proposal for new walking and cycling bridges, particularly at the Toowong - West End location. As I've made clear in previous submissions and correspondence with Council and the Lord Mayor, the west side desperately needs better active & public transport infrastructure to ease traffic congestion and better connect our community. New active transport connections across the river are an important part of that story.

Taking into account the feedback I've received through various forms of consultation, a majority of locals are in favour of a green bridge at both Toowong and St Lucia to connect our suburbs to West End, with Option A the preference from residents for both bridges. Despite overall majority support, some residents have

concerns about the proposal for any new bridges. There is more opposition to a bridge for St Lucia (at any location), while there is overwhelming support for the Toowong bridge. For the St Lucia bridge, many locals have specific concerns about loss of green space and the proposed design. Given this, while I support Option A for the Toowong-West End Bridge, I cannot take a strong position on any of the St Lucia options, without more information and detail from Council.

## **Community Consultation**

I appreciate the efforts taken by the Council for community consultation on the location of these green bridges. However, I remain of the view that the Council ought to have provided more information about the possible bridge options from the very outset of the consultation process, to facilitate higher-quality, better-informed public feedback. In particular I have some concerns about the veracity of Council's usage estimates, which were provided with very little context or information about the modelling methodology. My understanding is these trip estimates assume neither bridge exists, and that the modelling is skewed quite heavily to favour proximity to existing active transport facilities public and transport routes.

The consultation undertaken by Brisbane City Council also has some notable gaps and deficiencies. For example, it's not clear whether there were adequate protections against someone filling out the anonymous online survey multiple times on different devices, and the questions posed didn't distinguish between opposition to particular locations and general opposition to all bridge proposals, which diminishes the quality of the feedback. Additionally, by constraining the consultation to an analysis of 3 options for each bridge, residents who entirely opposed one or both of the bridges were unable to properly articulate this feedback.

It was commendable that BCC extended the time-frame for consultation, but many residents were unhappy with the very minimal interaction with Council staff, and the limited opportunities for direct discussion. As I've submitted many times, Council's consultation processes would benefit from more proactive outreach, in particular with often underrepresented groups such as younger people, people from multicultural backgrounds and people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

In determining my position on these projects and as the basis for this submission, along with Jonathan Sri, Councillor for the Gabba Ward and Amy MacMahon, MP for South Brisbane, I have also facilitated additional community consultation outside of that taken by the Brisbane City Council. This included:

- A doorknock in St Lucia on 6 March 2021, that surveyed 116 local residents at their door;
- A forum in King George Square on 27 February 2021, with approximately 150 residents interested in both the Toowong/West End and St Lucia/West End bridges, during which approximately 100 voted on their preferred option via an interactive manual voting system;
- Email correspondence and phone calls from hundreds of local Maiwar residents; and
- An online community poll, facilitated by Cr Jonathan Sri, and co-hosted and promoted by Amy MacMahon MP and myself. I'd note that the online poll has already received more than 500 votes, the results of which are summarised below. However, this poll isn't due to close until mid-April.

Therefore the results in this submission should be considered interim. I understand Cr Sri will send through the final results once they're determined.

We had also planned to undertake surveys of students and staff at UQ, and host a second forum on campus at St Lucia on Monday 29 March, however those plans were cancelled at the last minute due to the current COVID-19 lockdown. I'd note that with more than 40 RSVPs to that forum there are clearly many staff and students keen to be involved in the discussion about footbridges, and it's disappointing that Council doesn't seem to have undertaken any targeted consultation with the UQ community.

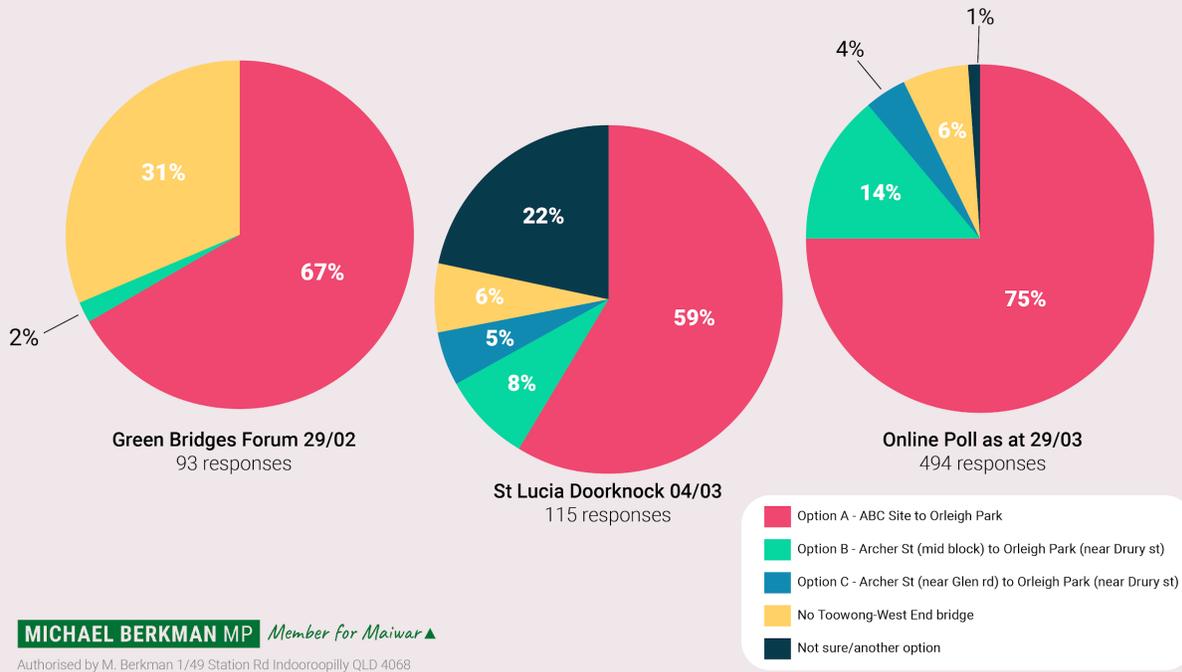
In addition, I have communicated with my email list of about 5,000 local residents, and included information in a number of printed newsletters to all residents in the electorate, encouraging them to share their thoughts. I have also engaged with a number of resident and community groups active in my electorate, including: St Lucia Community Association, Friends of Guyatt Park, Park It, Space4Cycling and Brisbane West Bike User Group.

The results from these events and consultation are outlined below in more detail.

### **Toowong to West End green bridge**

The Greens have been calling for a walking and cycling bridge at this location since the 2016 Council election, and it's been featured in every set of our policy initiatives for both Council and State elections since. I believe this bridge will provide a popular and well-used connection across the river, between two densely populated parts of the city. This bridge is overwhelmingly popular with the west side residents I have spoken with, and Option A is clearly the preferred alignment. Option B was the next most popular alignment, but by a long way. Of the people we surveyed through our various consultation activities, 59-75% wanted a bridge at Option A, which represented more than 70% of respondents overall. Though the portion of attendees at the forum on 29 February had a significant number of "no bridge" votes (31%), this dropped to 6% via consultation at the doorknock and through the online poll, which represented less than 10% of respondents overall. The full results from these consultation processes about the Toowong bridge are below:

# Toowong to West End bridge



The feedback I've received supports Option A because it presents the best opportunity to provide new greenspace, and offers the the most gentle bridge gradient and the most direct connections at the Toowong end to other cycling and walking paths. Option B was the second most popular for west side residents, largely because of the direct connection to the train station and overpass walkway in Toowong.

### ***The former ABC Site***

During the consultation process for the bridges, I heard from hundreds of residents who support Option A primarily because they want to see a new park at the former ABC site at 590-600 Coronation Drive, Toowong, and believe this to be one avenue to make this a reality.

I have been campaigning for more than two years now to see this unused riverfront land to be returned to public hands. In 2019, Gabba Ward Councillor Jonathan Sri and I ran an online community vote on a proposal for the Council, State and Federal governments to buy back the former ABC site. 2,500 residents from both sides of the river participated, sharing their visions for a bridge and for the ABC site. Of those respondents:

- 90% supported a new bridge for pedestrians and cyclists between Toowong and West End, with 5% opposed and 5% unsure.
- 88% supported the Federal or State government or Council buying back the ABC site to create new public space in Toowong, with 8% not sure and 4% opposed.

- 87% supported a levy on large developers who build new residential projects in the Toowong and West End area in order to fund public infrastructure like a park at the ABC site or the new bridge, with 8% not sure and 5% opposed.
- 82% agreed that the federal government should not have sold the ABC site to a private developer in 2013, with 15% not sure and 3% disagreeing.

I first laid out the case for a new public space at the ABC site to Brisbane City Council in a letter to former Lord Mayor Graham Quirk on 12 March 2019. Toowong has almost doubled in population in the last 50 years, and continues to densify. Even without any residential development on the former ABC site there are approximately 3,050 bedrooms in high rise apartments, within a 500m radius of the location, taking into account existing apartments and those approved or under construction.

As Brisbane expands and densifies to accommodate our growing population, we are simultaneously seeing our public spaces incrementally sold off to private companies, and new public space is rarely acquired. During the last few decades, almost half the public green and recreation space in Toowong has been lost. This includes most of Moorland Park, the Toowong Pool, and the Toowong Library and associated park site. No new recreational space has replaced any of these sites, and no new green space has been created to accommodate the significant increase in residential apartments. Council has a responsibility to ensure these residents have access to high quality parkland within walking distance. Given the size and location of this parcel of land, public space here could serve as a landmark park, particularly in conjunction with the connection to West End. This would also be an opportunity for the Council to replace the well-loved Toowong Pool, which was located just across Coronation Drive before it was sold by Council and demolished just over 20 years ago.

I understand that this site was recently sold to a private developer to build 200-250 luxury apartments. Despite this, I remain firmly of the belief that Council should commence the process for compulsory acquisition of the entire site, land the bridge there, and create new parkland, community facilities and potentially a public pool at this location. At \$43.5 million, I acknowledge this land isn't cheap. However, Council's own feasibility study anticipated a cost of over \$14 million for acquisition of 600 Coronation Drive, and over \$21 million for alignment 2A which intersects with both 600 Coronation Drive and 20 Archer Street. If the State or Federal Government's contributed to the purchase, this expense could be easily met and a far greater benefit enjoyed by the whole community.

I'd also note that, while it's encouraging to see that the developer is claiming they'd like to use some of the land for a park and the heritage building for community use, it's important that Council acquire these sites and manage them. We have seen time again that private parks are designed to minimise use, and don't allocate members of the public anywhere near the same utility and rights as would normally be enjoyed on publicly owned and managed parkland. I urge Council also ensure the heritage-listed Middenbury House is a public venue owned and operated by Council, available to the local community for performances, events and community groups - not a privately-run enterprise.

***Landing at 600 Coronation Drive***

There are many advantages to the bridge landing at 600 Coronation Drive aside from the opportunity to create new parkland. For one, Option A provides clear access to the Bicentennial Bikeway, giving West End residents access to this excellent infrastructure. This landing location also provides direct access to the Regatta ferry terminal for residents of West End.

Further, the fast-growing population in Toowong, who have access to scarce and fast-disappearing local green space, would greatly benefit from a direct connection to Orleigh Park. Considering the Council's goal of every resident in this area being within 750m of recreational parkland, this access would greatly benefit many Toowong locals.

Additionally, this landing location also does not include any property resumptions for existing homes.

### ***Design of the Toowong to West End bridge***

Council has so far provided little public information about the proposed designs, and I know many residents have some concerns about the artist's impressions provided. It's my view that Council should use these bridges as an opportunity to create new public space rather than just a transport connection. I know residents are keen to ensure the design of this bridge is sensitive, artistic and practical, and incorporates design features to encourage use.

During my community vote in 2019 about this bridge, many residents were eager for the bridge to have safe, separated bike lanes, include recreational features and greenery along the way, implement heat sensitive features, minimise excessive concrete at the landing points, and provide shade from the elements. I look forward to the Council holding detailed feedback about the design of the bridge and urge you to consider these issues throughout the design and further consultation.

I understand from preliminary plans created by GHD that a linear design is feasible for this bridge, and submit that this should be the objective, rather than a design that creates unnecessary visual bulk. I also encourage Council to ensure the design is considerate of the adjoining heritage listed Middenbury House, which, as outlined above, would ideally become a public venue for local performances, events and community groups.

### ***Improved public and active transport for landing sites***

It is essential that excellent public transport, including a 'turn up and go' bus service, be scheduled at both the Toowong and West End landing sites. On the west side, this could be achieved by increasing the services which stop at bus stop 12 on Coronation Dr near the Regatta. It's essential these services are frequent to encourage residents on both sides to leave the car at home, walk across the bridge and use public transport to reach destinations including UQ, the CBD, Indooroopilly, South Bank and more. It is essential that Council undertakes detailed analysis into the public transport routes that the Toowong bridge would open up, and ensure these opportunities are realised.

Additionally, I'd like to reiterate my support for safe, separated bike lanes to be installed on Sylvan Rd as a priority before this bridge is finished. Council should plan and deliver protected on-road cycle lanes on Sylvan

Road between Milton Road and the Bicentennial Bikeway as soon as possible to cater for the growing demand for cycling in the area, and in preparation for additional cycling demand this bridge will encourage. This is a crucial missing link in the west side's cycling network, and essential to ensuring bike users of all ages and abilities are encouraged and feel safe to take up active transport.

### ***Concerns about the Toowong to West End Bridge on the west side***

As noted, broadly speaking there is widespread support for this bridge. However, I have had contact from some residents who are firmly opposed to any of the options for a Toowong to West End bridge, or who don't support Council building any new green bridges on the west side. As noted above, these sentiments were especially prominent at the bridges forum elected Greens representatives held in the CBD. These opponents' concerns generally fell into one of the below themes:

- Resistance to seeing more "blue space"/river lost or impacted, including concerns about impacts on rowers and other recreational river uses;
- Lifestyle impacts on the residents living in West End, who would be most closely impacted by the landing point of Option A;
- Impacts on the uninterrupted view of the river for residents from both sides;
- Didn't think there was justification for the expense required to build the bridge, or needed to see more information about usage and modelling before they could consider supporting the bridge at the expected expense; and
- Would only support a car bridge.

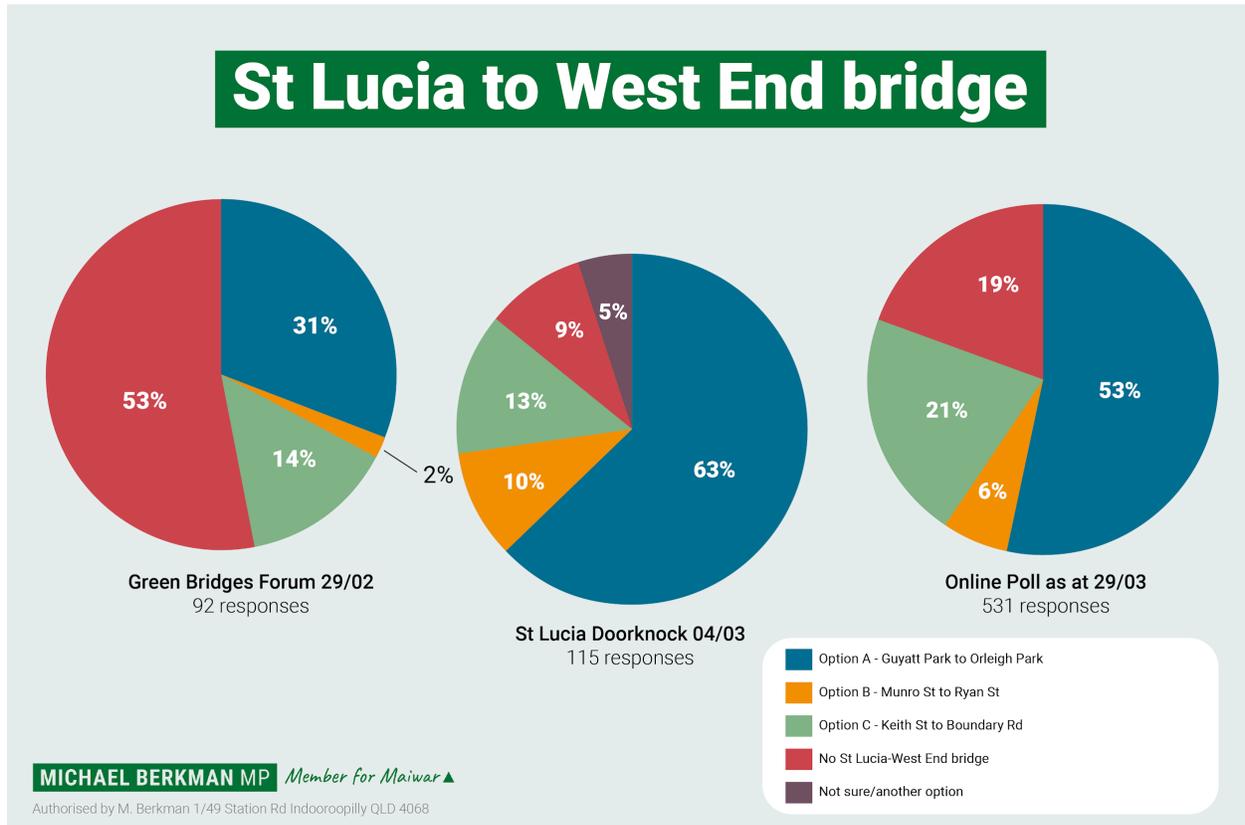
### **St Lucia to West End green bridge**

Based on conversations with hundreds of local residents through my office, our doorknock in St Lucia, and the online poll, it appears that most residents do support a bridge, and there's a significant preference for a location at or near Guyatt Park (Option A). Despite this, given the considerable concern from some residents, I cannot offer my full support for any option until the results of our online poll are finalised after 12 April. Further, I am unable to endorse Option A without considerably more information from Council regarding design and proposed landing points, and addressing concerns about impacts on Guyatt Park.

Though there is still significant support from residents for a St Lucia to West End bridge, the community is more divided on this bridge than for the Toowong options. Option A was also the most popular alignment for people who supported a St Lucia bridge, and a majority of residents consulted wanted a bridge at this location (including factoring in "no bridge" votes). This option was particularly popular with St Lucia residents surveyed at the doorknock, with 63% supporting this alignment.

Option C, landing at Boundary St was the second most popular option for participants who supported a bridge for St Lucia, as the first preference for 20% of respondents overall. While a majority of people (from both sides of the river) who attended the green bridges forum did not support any bridge at the St Lucia

location (53%), the “no bridge” option was supported by 23% of respondents overall. The below pie charts capture some of the feedback received about the St Lucia to West End options proposed by Council:



There is notably more opposition to any bridge at this location than for the Toowong bridge. Some residents in St Lucia, particularly those living closer to the river, are strongly opposed to any bridge in St Lucia, regardless of the alignment. For west side residents, opposition to any bridge generally fell into two notable points:

- **Don't believe a bridge will be well used, or don't support the proposed expense.** The preferred alternative of more ferries, or a new "KittyKat" was often raised by people who held these concerns. One question that was often posed by residents with this concern was "what problem is the bridge trying to solve?" To address this, I suggest Council should publicise more information about the estimated usage of the bridge and detailed modelling to clarify the target users of the bridge, including how such infrastructure is expected to impact car travel. Concerns of this nature were raised via email to my office by a number of residents, and was commonly expressed at the green bridges forum held in the CBD.
- **Worried about impacts a bridge could have on public green space, views and amenity at Guyatt Park.** This concern was commonly raised, including by residents during our door-knock, by email, in conversations at other events, and via the online poll and forum. I'll address these concerns in more detail below.

### ***Option A***

The basis for preferencing Option A seems to be that residents like the idea of connecting Orleigh and Guyatt Park, particularly to walk for leisure and exercise, and to access work, friends and amenities in West End.

Another key reason expressed by residents in support of Option A is that it encourages active transport for people travelling to the University of Queensland (UQ) by providing an alternative to the existing poor cycle route from Toowong to St Lucia. UQ is one of the largest trip generators outside of the CBD, and it's prudent for Council to be providing infrastructure to disincentivise car travel.

The current cycling routes involve circuitous paths, unfriendly roads, poor connections and hilly topography, hindering people wanting to travel by bicycle and other active travel modes between UQ, West End and the CBD. As I've raised with Council many times, without a proper bikeway on Sir Fred Schonell Drive, there is currently no ideal route for cyclists travelling to UQ. In conjunction with the Toowong-West End Bridge, the alignment at Option A provides a "double jump" option to safely reach the University of Queensland from Toowong and other suburbs, and vice versa.

### ***Concerns about design and potential impacts on Guyatt Park***

If Council moves forward with a bridge at Guyatt Park, **I must reiterate my strong opposition to any net loss of green space in St Lucia.** If Council does proceed with a bridge at this location, the design and landing alignment must be such that the park and established trees are impacted to the smallest extent possible, and Council must replace the lost open green space, with new parkland elsewhere in the park, or within walking distance of it.

Though detailed design has not yet commenced on any of the specific bridge alignments, it's unfortunate that Council's public information hasn't indicated which trees might be under threat from each alignment option. If the community's preferred bridge options do go ahead, I would submit that Council's conventional approach to offset mature tree loss by planting new seedlings is not satisfactory and will not meet the community's expectations.

Additionally, Council should choose an alignment and design that has as small a footprint as possible, lands in a far corner of the park, and doesn't require a significant ramp and landing platform in the park. I understand that prior to releasing these options, Council has actually considered at least 6 alternative landings around Guyatt and Orleigh Park, as recorded in the [Green Bridges Feasibility Study 2020](#). I'd note that some of these appear to have far more impact on the park than others. For example, some of the options in that report land the bridge on the eastern side of the CityCat terminal, where few park facilities currently exist and where a landing would reduce the number of people cycling through the park (something which is of considerable concern to some residents). Yet the design options presented to the community depict the bridge on the other side, which would have a far greater impact on local residents and park users.

For example, in Option 12A, the spiral to reach the required elevation is over the river, there is minimal landing footprint at Orleigh Park, and the landing at Guyatt Park is alongside the unit block on Macquarie Street, shielded by trees and providing a direct path access to the road. This would minimise cycle traffic traversing the most well-used portions of the park and minimise impact on existing facilities, which I understand would be preferable for a number of concerned residents.

Option 7G also provides a simpler slope more in the fashion of a 'riverwalk' path. While this option minimises the visual bulk of the spiral decline, it does expand on the landing point in Orleigh Park. This option may be preferable to people in wheelchairs, or travelling with a pram.

I would also encourage Council to fully consider a landing point at Laurence St, to minimise impacts on existing trees and green space, while still taking advantage of the significant benefits of Option A.

Further, Council should seek to acquire new land around Guyatt Park to ensure the project doesn't reduce the amenity and size of this much-loved community space. For example, I'd like to see Council explore options to acquire land at 23-25 Macquarie Street and 170 Sir Fred Schonell Drive from the University of Queensland. The old Avalon Theatre and surrounding green space next door to the park has sat unused for many years and Council could seek to assist UQ to transition this into a usable community facility and expansion of the park.

Finally, I've heard from many residents that they are very concerned about the proposed design of the bridge, and how impactful it appears to be on the park. The artist's interpretation images on Council's [St Lucia to West End green bridge webpage](#) portrays an expanse of concrete foreshadows a significant loss of green space. But the landing design included in the feasibility report suggests that this alignment need not require such visual bulk and loss of green space.

Given the design and impact of this bridge in particular is of great concern to residents in my electorate, I'd like to see Council undertake further community consultation focussing on the design and exact location of the St Lucia to West End bridge, and especially Council progresses with Option A is its preferred alignment. Without acquisition of new land to extend and offset any impacts on the park, and to design and land the bridge in a sensitive manner, I would not be able to offer my full support of Option A.

### ***Improvement on active transport connection to landing site***

In deciding and planning the alignment for this bridge, I encourage Council to focus on the clear need to improve the cycling connection to UQ, and especially from Toowong to St Lucia, and aim to improve that connection to the greatest extent possible. This could take place via a broader master-planning process in collaboration with UQ, which takes in cycling, e-bike and e-scooter journeys across Toowong, West End and St Lucia.

Right now, the cycle route through St Lucia via Sandford St though to Hiron St is hilly, winding and dangerous. Fixing this crucial connection could be achieved via safety improvements and bike lanes on Sir Fred Schonell Drive. The primary cycle route from Guyatt Park to UQ is currently also the Macquarie Street

road corridor. As the number of cyclists on this route will vastly increase as a result of a bridge at or near Option A, I ask that this be upgraded as a priority, and I'd encourage Council to work with Brisbane West Bike User Group and Space4Cycling to ensure all road users on Macquarie St are well catered for.

### **Timeframes for green bridges**

I understand that Council has committed to delivering these projects within 10 years. As I've submitted before, I would urge Council to progress work on these projects in a shorter time frame. More people are understanding and enjoying the benefits of cycling and walking than ever before, and it's essential that Council encourages continued use of these modes of transport. Beyond the health and lifestyle benefits of active transport, the positive impact on traffic, pollution and congestion is significant, and makes our city a better place for everyone.

As I noted in my first submission in December 2019, these new green bridges in Brisbane could be a game-changing improvement to help reduce reliance on private vehicles and make our city a better place to live. With population density and traffic congestion at an all-time high, we need to invest in solutions to drive active and public transport use as a priority. I'd urge Council to begin construction, particularly on the Toowong to West End bridge, by 2024 at the absolute latest.

Additionally, expediting the construction of the green bridges would create much needed construction jobs in the city. As Council pursues opportunities in the coming months to help Brisbane recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, it should prioritise projects that provide positive, sustainable outcomes for all residents and create much-needed jobs, such as new parks, facilities and active transport.

I trust these comments are helpful. Given the importance of these projects to residents in my area, I'm very happy to discuss anything contained in this submission with Council. In addition to the consultation about the location of the bridges, I look forward to participating in a detailed consultation on the design of the bridges and their integration with landing sites. Please feel free to contact my office at any point to arrange this, and I look forward to seeing the results of this consultation process.

Kind Regards,



Michael Berkman, Greens MP for Maiwar