



Michael Berkman MP
Greens State Member for Maiwar ▲

Green Bridges Consultation Team
Brisbane City Council
Via email: GreenBridges@brisbane.qld.gov.au

9 December 2019

Submission on new Green Bridges in Toowong and St Lucia

To the Green Bridges team,

I am writing to make a submission on the proposed Green Bridges in Toowong and St Lucia.

I would like to extend my thanks to your team for agreeing to accept this submission today. I would also like to thank the team for your time at the community information sessions in St Lucia and Toowong over the last month.

Overall, it is very encouraging to see Council adopt the Greens' plan for new walking and cycling bridges, particularly at the Toowong - West End location. As I mentioned in my previous correspondence with former Lord Mayor Graham Quirk and Lord Mayor Adrian Schrinner about this issue, the west side desperately needs better active & public transport infrastructure to ease congestion and better connect our community. New active transport connections across the river are an important piece of that story.

Community vote in early 2019

For the past year, together with the Gabba Ward Councillor Jonathan Sri, I have been calling on Council, the State government and the Federal government to buy back the former ABC site at Toowong which was sold to a private developer about a decade ago. It would make the perfect spot to land a bridge to West End and build an incredible new riverside public park.

As part of this push, we held an online community vote on that proposal. We were aiming for 1,000 responses, but ended up with more than double that number, with 2,500 residents from both sides of the river participating, sharing their visions for a bridge and for the ABC site. Of those respondents, 1,071 were from my electorate of Maiwar, while 661 were from the Gabba Ward.

A summary of the results, some quantitative analysis and a full transcript of all comments received about the bridge and the ABC site are available here https://www.michaelberkman.com.au/abc_site_results

I have previously provided the results of the community vote to the Lord Mayor on 4 June 2019, but I think your team would find them useful. Of the 2,477 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.

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1/49 Station Road, Indooroopilly
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Tel: (07) 37374100
maiwar@parliament.qld.gov.au
www.michaelberkman.com.au

- 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.

As well as the community vote, my office organised a community meeting in Toowong in April 2019 to provide an opportunity for detailed discussions about both the bridge and the new proposed park. More than 100 local residents attended to share their ideas.

I hope the results of our previous consultation will be useful for your team. My feedback in this submission is informed by the results of the above community vote, and discussions with local residents at the community meeting in Toowong. It is also informed by the feedback I have received over the last few months since Council's plan for green bridges was announced.

Buy back the former ABC site

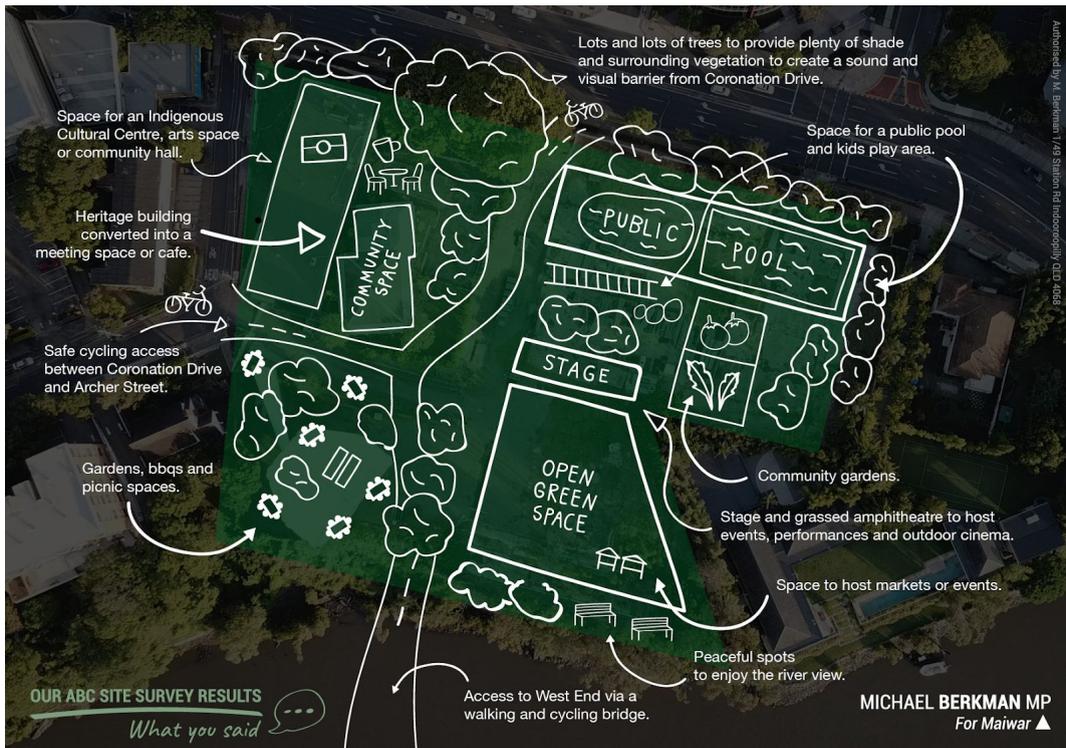
I strongly urge Council to work with the State and Federal governments to bring the ABC site back into public hands to create a riverside park. This proposal is not directly related to the plan for a green bridge landing at this site, but for many local residents, the usefulness of a bridge would be greatly enhanced by a new public space on the west side akin to Southbank or New Farm Park.

Back in March, Council announced that it would *consider* buying back part of the ABC site as a landing point. Currently the draft location seems to avoid the ABC site, which is disappointing.

On top of the above consultation which my office conducted, I have received emails every week about the idea of buying back the ABC site since we first started raised the idea last year. What this huge result tells me is that residents feel really passionately about that block of land, because they can see its potential.

There is very limited public support for Council's existing plan under the Toowong-Auchenflower Neighbourhood Plan which would see (at a minimum) 15 storey apartment towers on the site. The vast majority of locals want to see this site bought back for public space, and used as a landing point for a new bridge to West End. As part of the community vote, locals have supported options including a new public pool, gardens, a new community hall, and other recreational facilities that could be enjoyed by residents across the city.

I have included an artists' impression of the feedback we received in our community vote:



My view is that Council should commence the process for compulsory acquisition of this site, that process can take some time.

I laid out the case for a new public space at the ABC site 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 6,000 bedrooms in more than 3,500 apartments within a 200m radius of the location, taking into account existing apartments and those approved or under construction.

At the same time, almost half the public green and recreation space in Toowong has been lost in the past few decades. 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.

As Brisbane expands to accommodate our growing population, we are incrementally seeing our public spaces sold off to private companies, and new public space is rarely acquired.

I will continue to advocate strongly for the State and federal governments to put forward funding to support both the new green bridges and acquiring the ABC site. If those attempts are unsuccessful, Council could impose a special levy on large residential developments in the West End and Toowong area to fund this vital public infrastructure.

The ABC site is the last remaining opportunity for riverfront public space in Toowong and surrounding suburbs. The site is 15,000 square metres in size, and in a flood prone area. It has a 130 metre river frontage, a heritage listed building, mangroves, and a number of Moreton Bay figs and large blue gums. All of these factors make it an ideal location for a public recreational space. I urge BCC to consider this opportunity to invest in something that all Brisbane residents and visitors could enjoy for generations to come.

Toowong - West End Bridge

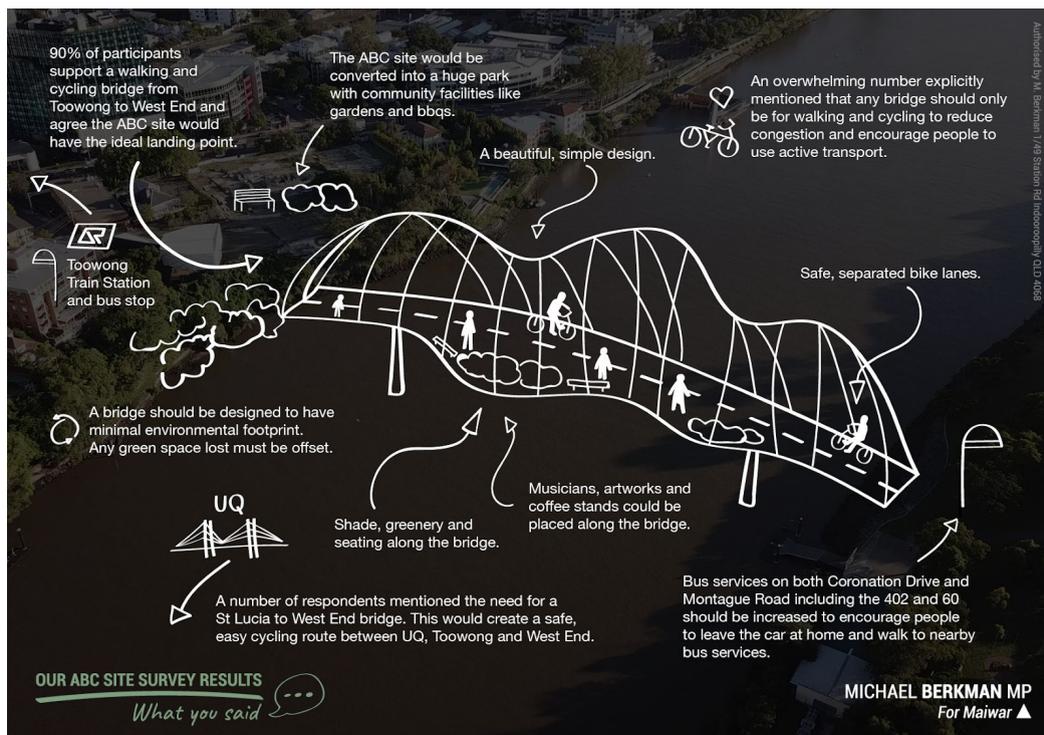
As part of our community vote in early 2019, my office gathered a wide range of feedback about a Toowong to West End Bridge. As noted above, 90% of respondents supported a new bridge for pedestrians and cyclists, with 5% opposed and 5% unsure.

Connectivity with the Coronation Drive bikeway, the Toowong Station overpass, the 402/412 bus stop and any new park at the ABC site should be planned well in advance, including by engaging with developers currently pursuing projects nearby and those who hold existing development approvals. This could occur via a master-planning process which includes the purchase of the ABC site.

It is important to make sure impacts on local residents and heritage properties in Archer Street are minimised.

Many people had innovative suggestions about what the bridge could include, both from a practical standpoint and from a creative and design point of view. In general, locals were eager for the bridge to have safe, separated bike lanes, and include recreational features along the way, as well as be shaded from the rain/sun. There was a strong sentiment that it should be a “simple” but “beautiful” design.

Council should view this as an opportunity to create new public space rather than just a transport connection. The bridge should be shaded, and should include greenery as well as facilities such as shaded seating, public art, and spots for buskers or a coffee stand. The below is an artists’ impression which aims to showcase the major points of feedback we received.



Any loss of green space should be offset by creating new public parks within 800m of the landing point of the bridge. This feedback applies equally to both the St Lucia and Toowong bridges. I wish to echo submission from Councillor Jonathan Sri that the business cases must include the capital cost of these parks, and the costs of directly replacing any established trees lost in the nearby area.

St Lucia - West End Bridge

It is very welcome news that the vital public green space at Guyatt Park will not be touched by this proposed bridge. As noted above, I believe the new green bridges should aim to *create* new public spaces rather than take them away.

Where community facilities are impacted on either end, these must be offset or replaced in the nearby area. One possible solution to any loss of space near Keith St would be for Council to purchase the site at 160 Macquarie St to convert into public park, as local residents have been calling for for some time.

I am strongly supportive of further community consultation with local residents and community organisations in St Lucia on the alignment of the bridge.

In planning the alignment for this bridge, I encourage Council to consider the long-term planning requirements for the cycling connection from Toowong - St Lucia, and aim to improve that connection if possible. 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, bike lanes on Sir Fred Schonell Drive, or potentially via a corridor connecting through West End.

Again, 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.

Should the bridges carry public transport?

Council has announced that both the Toowong-West End and the St Lucia-West End bridges *may* carry public transport, with the final decision to be based on community consultation and a detailed business case and transport planning process. It is disappointing that Council's online survey did not include any questions directly on this topic, which is clearly a controversial one for some local residents.

Bus bridges are significantly larger and more expensive, but they do offer some benefits. **For the St Lucia - West End bridge, I am not convinced that there would be adequate demand to justify the added expense.** In particular, the catchment area on the West End side is fairly small, since the existing South East Busway already carries high-frequency buses to UQ from South Brisbane, Mater Hill, Dutton Park and Boggo Rd.

For the Toowong - West End bridge, my view is that buses would be very difficult to integrate on both sides without major intrusions on any new public park at the ABC site and Orleigh Park, including Cranbrook Place. On the West End side, Montague Rd, Vulture St and Hardgrave Rd are all fairly congested, meaning that cross-town buses would face significant congestion.

I encourage Council to make public the results any further transport planning, to give locals and other stakeholders an opportunity to provide further feedback.

Based on the above considerations, and on the results of the community vote, I believe a walking and cycling bridge at Toowong would be preferable. It would do wonders to tackle congestion, by doing the only thing that actually works: getting people out of their cars and using other modes of transport. My position is that bus routes (especially the 60 to the city and 402/412 services to UQ) should be significantly increased to encourage residents on both sides of the river to walk to bus services.

A far cheaper and more efficient way to make west side buses more frequent and reliable would be to create dedicated bus lanes on Moggill Rd, High St and Coronation Drive, as envisaged in both the State government's 2009 Western Brisbane Transport Network Strategy and the draft 2018 [SEQ Regional Transport Plan](#). This would also allow Translink, the Department of Transport and Council to create more cross-town services running via the Go-Between Bridge

Further community consultation

As noted above, I believe that detailed and meaningful consultation should take place during further stages of the planning process. This consultation should be informed by Council data on the key

destinations the bridges will connect, existing traffic volumes along Coronation Drive and Montague Rd, and current and projected population growth.

The consultation should take place as part of the business case process, rather than Council embarking on a business case and presenting the results to residents as a fait accompli.

Don't wait 10 years

Finally, I also urge Council **to start planning and detailed design work as soon as possible, to make sure construction can begin by 2024**, rather than waiting 10 years as is currently proposed. I believe that new green bridges in Brisbane could be a game-changing achievement, to help reduce reliance on private vehicles and make our city a better place to live.

Please feel free to contact me on 3737 4100 or Maiwar@parliament.qld.gov.au to discuss this matter in more detail.

Kind Regards,



Michael Berkman, Greens MP for Maiwar