

Another bridge too far

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Months after its failure to widen the Spit Bridge following five years of promises, the State Government appears to have learnt nothing from the experience. It now suggests that Iron Cove Bridge should be duplicated, supposedly to widen one bottleneck on Victoria Road.

Like widening the Spit Bridge, the plan makes little sense as a road improvement. If the problem is Victoria Road's bottlenecks, this will not solve it. It will move the traffic jam further along to neighbouring bottlenecks - eastwards in the mornings to the Darling Street intersection, westwards in the evenings to Lyons Road. Similar reasons were advanced by some to explain why the Spit Bridge widening was abandoned. (The Government itself said costs had blown out.)

Like widening the Spit Bridge, too, this project forms no part of an integrated transport plan. Certainly more lanes over Iron Cove may allow a dedicated bus lane, but would also bring more cars into the city - up to 2000 an hour, the Roads and Traffic Authority predicts.

The widening was suggested the same day that Jan Gehl handed his widely praised blueprint for Sydney to the City Council, which rightly calls for measures to dissuade drivers from entering the city. Duplicating the bridge may ease congestion for a time, but experience shows that time is short. Its long-term effect is to delay further serious attempts to deal with Sydney's transport chaos. The State Government is already - wrongly - hesitating about plans for vital new rail developments, and has baulked at completing its much promised Clearways program to make the CityRail network more reliable.

Professor Gehl's blueprint for Sydney emphasises what commuters and planners already know: cars are killing Sydney. They are not the way of the future for city transport. This irrational, piecemeal Iron Cove plan should be given lower funding priority than, say, a metro rail service, which would vastly improve public transport along the Victoria Road corridor. The Government appears unable to come to grips with Sydney's transport needs. Not only our roads are showing signs of gridlock; a gridlock of willpower and imagination besets state cabinet, too.