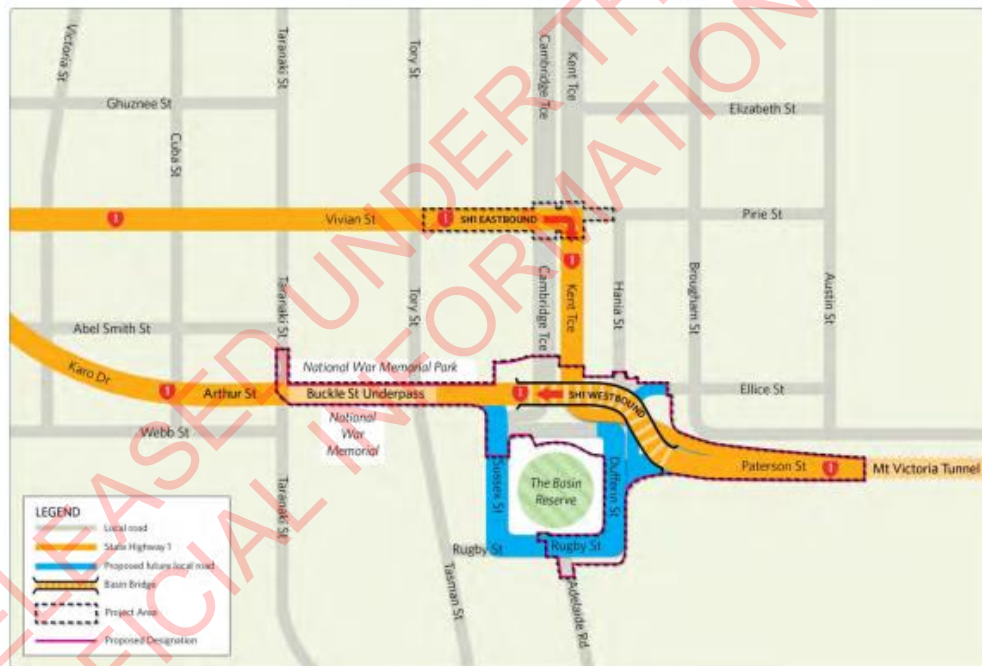


# NZTA Lessons Learnt Review

## Basin Bridge, Wellington

### Report – Final Draft



**26 November 2014**

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## Executive Summary

The NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) has commissioned a Lessons Learnt Review (LLR) for the Basin Bridge project (the project) and associated AEE documentation.

The LLR process of interviews, a workshop and documentation review identified widely held support among the project team and key partners for the option on which the application was based, and for the quality and rigour of the technical work, including option identification and evaluation. Therefore this LLR report does not focus on the technical aspects of the project.

This LLR report should not be interpreted as a guide to why the decision of the Board of Inquiry (BoI) was not in support of the application. The lessons learnt from this review would be of value to NZTA and its partners regardless of the BoI decision.

The LLR process did not identify any single issue or learning point which on its own could have resulted in a different outcome from the Hearing. A number of learning points have been identified which could be helpful for future projects, not only to improve the likelihood of positive outcomes from decision-makers, but also to support success in later project phases.

The lessons learnt have been grouped under the following headings, listed in order of significance to this project:

### **1. Alignment of Key Strategic Partners**

- Establishing and Maintaining a Partnership Approach
- Project Responsibility and Allocation of Resources
- Co-ordination of Partners

### **2. Stakeholder Engagement and Communication**

- Public Transport and multi-modal messages
- Demonstrating merits of each Option
- More effective methods of communication and engagement
- Co-ordination with key partners
- More proactive approach to media

### **3. Integrated Programme Management of Complex Urban Projects**

- Management of the Basin Bridge project in a more integrated way with the T2T projects
- Co-ordination with the Memorial Park Alliance

### **4. Project Management, Resourcing and Leadership**

- Resource Levels
- The changing project environment
- NZTA Roles
- Managing issues affecting the Basin Bridge Project and the Memorial Park Alliance

## 5. Technical Matters

- NE Quadrant Study
- Multi-modal designation
- Property Negotiations
- Options Generation, Analysis and Illustration

There are many aspects of this project, its social and political context, its interdependency with associated projects and the changing environment and deadlines which made it more complex and difficult to manage than most projects. Given the environment the project team was operating within, it is important that NZTA and its partners learn from the positive achievements of the team, as well as from the areas in which the LLR team view that the project and other associated projects could have been managed better.

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## Introduction

### Scope

The NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) has commissioned a Lessons Learnt Review (LLR) for the Basin Bridge Project (the project) and associated AEE documentation.

The review is to identify learnings that will assist future NZTA projects by understanding aspects of the project that went well and those which could have been better.

NOTE: The balance of matters relating to legal / statutory 'lessons learnt' are recommended to be considered after resolution of the NZTA's Appeal to the High Court.

### Context

This project and adjacent associated projects have been considered over an extended period. Early work started around 2001, with more detailed work from 2006 as part of the Ngauranga to Airport Corridor Plan (adopted October 2008). The work was then resourced from 2010 for the purposes of seeking statutory approvals.

This project sits at the centre of an adjacent series of urban transport projects which have progressed within a fluid, complex, and somewhat challenging social and political environment.

The political interest has been intense with the nature of political engagement varying over time as the project life has spanned several successive terms of office of local, regional and central government.

The interdependency of the Basin Bridge project and adjacent projects, which have been subject to externally generated decisions, resulted in the project's timeframes being adjusted considerably.

This circumstance-specific social and political context and the interdependency of this project with others has resulted in a high level of complexity which required tailored project responses.

### Learnings Summary

The LLR interviews and workshop identified widely held support among the project team and key partners for Option A, the option on which the application was based, and for the quality and rigour of the technical work, including evaluation of this and other options considered. Therefore this report does not focus on the technical aspects of the project as there is general positive consensus from the team on these.

It is important to note that the lessons to be learnt from this project would be of value even if the Board of Inquiry decision had supported the application. While achieving a positive outcome from the decision-makers is always an objective, it is not the only objective – for successful delivery of later phases of any project it is important that in addition to gaining the necessary statutory approvals, the project has as supportive an environment as possible for achieving positive outcomes throughout the project life and beyond.

The LLR interviews and workshop did not identify any single issue or learning point which, on its own, would have been likely to result in a different outcome from the Hearing. However, there are a number of learning points for future projects which could not only maximise the likelihood of positive outcomes from decision-makers, but would support success in later project phases.

Learnings identified from this LLR process can be grouped under the following headings, which are listed in order of significance:

1. Alignment of Key Strategic Partners
2. Stakeholder Engagement and Communication
3. Integrated Programme Management of Complex Urban Projects
4. Project Management, Resourcing and Leadership
5. Technical Matters

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## Alignment of Key Strategic Partners

The key lessons in this area are summarised below and then discussed in some detail.

- Insufficient emphasis was given to establishing and maintaining a partnership approach with WCC and GWRC, especially given the political complexity of the project.
- More effort could have been invested in understanding the contribution which could have been made by each of the key strategic partners: NZTA; GWRC and WCC, and allocating resources accordingly.
- Although co-ordination between the key partners was good at times, it was not consistently so, and was lacking in the build up to the BoI Hearing.

### Establishing and Maintaining a Partnership Approach

Strong project partner alignment is important to 'project health' to ensure that as changes occur during the project's lifetime, a consistent approach can be maintained.

Ideally a project will have full support and alignment with the key strategic partners throughout its life. In reality this can be the exception for a number of reasons ranging from differences over organisations' mandate and focus, matters of technical detail, or having to advocate or represent particular views within the community. Effort is required to maintain relationships and project alignment consistently over a project's lifecycle.

Factors affecting this are highly circumstance specific. A tailored approach is therefore needed for individual projects. This needs to span people dynamics from governance to technical officer level, processes enabling and promoting dialogue and resolution of issues, and giving clarity as to timeframes and resourcing for parties to appropriately provide inputs and make decisions.

Feedback from the LLR interviews and workshop and review of documentation for the project indicates that a greater focus on achieving strong alignment between the key strategic partners would likely have strengthened the EPA application and improved the project's chances of success through its future project stages.

There were many reasons why achieving a good partnership approach would have been more difficult on this project than on many others. These reasons include:

- Not all levels of authority within WCC and GWRC supporting the project and this varying throughout the project life.
- Local Body elections changing the Mayor in 2010 and Councillors in 2010 and 2013.

It is the LLR team's view that given these difficulties the project team should have placed even greater emphasis than would normally be the case on the partnership approach, and even more so given the interdependency of the project with others in the area and the significance of public transport (PT) and multi-modal benefits.

Greater priority could have been given to maintaining person to person relationships and engagement with multiple levels of staff and politicians than to relying on a written MoU (which proved ineffective). Given the extensive history of the project, significant changes in direction, and the inevitable change of personnel in partner organisations over time, extra care is required to keep all relevant relationships current and staff informed.

## Project Responsibility and Allocation of Resources

A shared responsibility for the project between the three key partners could have been beneficial, given that the project would have been beneficial to the Plans and Objectives of all three key strategic partners. WCC's *Central City Framework*; GWRC's *PT Spine* to Newton and Berhampore; NZTA's transport objectives; and the *Ngauranga to Airport Corridor Plan* all relied on a Basin Reserve solution to give effect to these plans.

It is the view of the LLR team that insufficient attention was given to understanding each partner's objectives, appreciating their strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities for each to lead in different aspects of the project, and the potential downside if any partner was not sufficiently engaged. It is understandable that NZTA wanted to take the lead on this project, given its criticality to NZTA and the nature of the project itself. However, in the view of the LLR team, a more partnering approach could have reduced the likelihood of either GWRC or WCC officers being disengaged at critical times. If a more partnering approach had been adopted, including identification of key contributions from each partner, this may have increased the likelihood of a positive representation of the project to media and the community by politicians and officers at GWRC and WCC, which would have been helpful given the importance of the PT message.

## Co-ordination of Partners

It was raised during the LLR workshop that GWRC had assumed NZTA had done more PT and multi-modal research and analysis, while NZTA assumed that GWRC would have done this research. This misunderstanding was not resolved until very late in the process of preparing for the Hearing.

GWRC had worked with GWRC NZTA's P&I team on the *Ngauranga to Airport Corridor Plan* and with HNO on the associated projects. Whether or not these two arms of NZTA need to maintain independence from each other in their respective roles with partners, it was not helpful that some officers in GWRC may have assumed that HNO and P&I had a shared understanding of the Corridor Plan and its PT and multi-modal focus and of the project design. Better co-ordination with external partners may have identified this communication gap at an earlier stage.

There were some gaps in communication over where responsibility lay at various stages of the project. Better co-ordination of partners would have minimised the confusion which resulted.

In the LLR process it was raised that at times the project team and the Memorial Park Alliance were not fully aligned, particular examples relating to the Buckle St third lane and the moving or not of the Home of Compassion Crèche building. These matters caused confusion for the project team at critical times in their work.



## Stakeholder Engagement and Communication

The key lessons in this area are summarised below and then discussed in some detail.

- The public transport and multi-modal messages were not communicated as clearly as they could have been.
- More significance could have been given to demonstrating to the community and other stakeholders why an at-grade solution would not be workable and why a bridge would be preferable to a tunnel.
- More effective methods of communication and engagement could have been adopted, rather than a “standard NZTA project approach”, especially given the complexity of this project and its linkage with other associated projects.
- More could have been made of the extent and quality of option analysis undertaken rather than only presenting two bridge options to the public.
- A more co-ordinated approach with key “partners” such as GWRC might have resulted in supportive messaging from them.
- A more pro-active approach to media communication might have assisted with communication of key messages to the wider stakeholder base.

### PT and multi-modal messages

In our discussions as part of this review it has been clear that all those participating in the project agree that there would be strong PT and multi-modal benefits if the project is implemented. Although the information relating to this is contained within the relevant documentation, including the AEE and written evidence, it was not presented in a way to enable the wider stakeholder base to hear the message. There is a strong learning point here, that making the information available is not sufficient – it is recommended that NZTA considers how to communicate complex technical information in a way that the message is not lost in the detail.

### Demonstrating why an at-grade solution would not be workable, why a bridge would be preferable to a tunnel, and explaining the options identification and evaluation findings

In all the interviews the LLR team has carried out and in the LLR workshop there was strong support for the bridge option, Option A. However, it is clear that proposing a bridge in this area of Wellington would be likely to draw strong opposition. Given the confidence the project team had in the options identification and evaluation work, it is surprising that the project team didn't do more to demonstrate to the community and wider stakeholders why an at-grade solution would not be workable and why a bridge would be preferable to a tunnel.

It is understood that NZTA decided not to consult on options it did not intend to consider further. The driver of honesty behind this is to be applauded. However, the interpretation of this decision which resulted in consultation material saying very little about the options which were explored and only presenting two options, one of which was considered by some of those interviewed by the LLR team as unworkable, needs to be learned from. In the view of the LLR team, when consulting on bridge options, being clear that at-grade or tunnel options would not be taken forward, it would have been advisable to explain why in a way which demonstrated transparency and highlighted the confidence the project team had in the

options evaluation work it had done. It should be noted that such an exercise would have required an approach to messaging that went beyond making the information available, as highlighted elsewhere in this report.

The LLR team also question whether more engagement of the community at an early stage, before tunnelling options were ruled out, might have helped some stakeholders to understand why a bridge would be required and might have demonstrated transparency and that NZTA welcomed stakeholder input. The LLR team is aware that there was some early stage engagement but questions whether it was sufficient.

### **More effective methods of communication and engagement**

It is understood that a “standard NZTA project approach” to communication and stakeholder engagement was followed for this project. This affected the timing and nature of engagement processes, the style of communication and the people or organisations the project team was communicating with.

The LLR team recognise the sensitivity of NZTA to this topic. It is important that NZTA is not seen to be “over selling”. However, it is also important that NZTA communicates in a positive, proactive way which would assist the community and other stakeholders to form opinions based on a balanced presentation of information.

The LLR team recommend that NZTA reviews its approach to communication and engagement including the following items relevant to this project:

- Equipping others to provide messages supporting the project – e.g. did the project team engage a broad enough stakeholder group (e.g. bus operators) or was it focussed on more ‘typical’ stakeholders for a highway project?
- Engaging with the community and wider stakeholders earlier, more positively and creatively.
- Selecting people to represent the project to stakeholders who are not only technically knowledgeable but who are skilled communicators.

A further communication learning point relates to the decision to apply for approvals for the bridge rather than the wider network. The point in question here is not whether that decision was the right one, but whether sufficient emphasis was given in planning for communications and stakeholder engagement on the wider context within which this project sits. Placing more emphasis on points such as how this project fits with the wider transport programme, how it is critical to delivering the PT improvements required, how it supports land use planning, might have helped the messaging regarding PT and multi-modal benefits to have been heard.

Given the extensive history of the project and significant changes in direction over its lifetime, stakeholders were unlikely to keep abreast of the changing project context. The team could have done a better job at communicating context to stakeholders in terms of the timeline of what was done when, how and when decisions were made to keep stakeholders accurately up to date and help them engage meaningfully.

### **Co-ordination with key partners**

This subject is addressed in *Alignment of Key Strategic Partners* above so the comment on it at this point will be limited to communications and stakeholder engagement. It is clear from the LLT interviews and workshop that better co-ordination, and more of a partnership approach with key partners such as GWRC could have enabled them to more proactively

communicate in support of the project. This could have had a number of advantages, including:

- It would have demonstrated that this wasn't just about a NZTA highway / RoNS project.
- It might have made it easier for some stakeholders to see the linkage with wider transport initiatives and PT benefits.
- GWRC may have brought a more "locally appropriate" style and approach to communication with this community.

#### **More proactive approach to media**

It should be noted that the comments here do not only relate to the time of the BoI Hearing although it is clear that during the Hearing there was a lot of media coverage which gave attention to the messages that those opposed to the project were putting forward. For understandable reasons, NZTA is very careful not to be giving the appearance of wanting to be too persuasive in terms of how it communicates with the media, especially during the course of hearings. However, one of the topics discussed at the LLR workshop was the idea that in future during hearings, weekly briefings might be provided to the media so they are aware of what is likely to come up.

The LLR team also consider that in the years of project work which led up to preparation of applications for approvals, NZTA might have taken a more pro-active approach to media, in line with recommendations for a new approach to communication and stakeholder engagement, made earlier in this report.

## Integrated Programme Management of Complex Urban Projects

The key lessons in this area are summarised below and then discussed in some detail.

- Management of the Basin Bridge project in a more integrated way with the associated Tunnel to Tunnel projects may have made it easier for communication of clear messages regarding PT and multi-modal benefits.
- Co-ordination with the Memorial Park Alliance wasn't always as good as it could have been which may have contributed to delays in reaching agreement with affected parties and to the Basin Bridge team being unaware of key facts relating to the Alliance's work.

### Management of the Basin Bridge project in a more integrated way with the T2T projects

As discussed in the *Stakeholder Engagement and Communication* section of this report, the LLR process has identified that the messaging regarding PT and multi-modal benefits was not as clear as it could have been. While it is often the case with highly technical projects, that communication of key messages can be difficult, it is likely that presentation of the Basin Bridge as a project, rather than as part of a wider project, made it harder to get the key PT messages across.

There are advantages in terms of focus and management band-width, of managing individual elements as discrete projects, but it is important to ensure that when doing so, there is enough integration and co-ordination with other associated projects to ensure that the teams are working in support of each other and in particular, that the wider benefits of the programme of projects are not lost in the presentation of each element.

### Co-ordination with the Memorial Park Alliance

Several of the LLR interviews and the workshop identified that co-ordination between the Basin Bridge team and the Alliance wasn't always as good as it needed to be. The LLR team are not of the opinion that NZTA should have formed one Alliance or other project structure for delivery of all associated works, although that was an option for consideration, but they are of the opinion that if the Basin Bridge project and the MPA work were to be managed separately, specific consideration should have been given to ensuring that they were working in support of each other. This can be difficult to achieve when one project is established with a structure and resources designed to maximise fast delivery and achievement of that particular project's objectives, and therefore it would have helped if a specific mechanism for dealing with matters that affected both projects were established.

As noted in the *Project Management, Resourcing and Leadership* section of this report the LLR process identified two examples of difficulty for the Basin Bridge project which related to the work of the Alliance. One was the delay to reaching agreement with affected parties; the other was the surprise caused to the Basin Bridge team because they were unaware of important factors from the MPA's work. These are discussed in the *Project Management, Resourcing and Leadership* section of this report.

Given the complexity and changing environment that the Basin Bridge team was dealing with, there would have been value in NZTA considering specific governance arrangements to ensure that the Alliance's work was able to progress while being better synchronised with the Basin Bridge project.

## Project Management, Resourcing and Leadership

The key lessons in this area are summarised below and then discussed in some detail.

- Resource levels appear not to have taken into account the particular social and political context and the high level of complexity and interdependency with associated projects.
- There would have been value in re-thinking project leadership, resourcing and timelines when faced with the changing project environment in 2012.
- NZTA took on a number of roles which would more usually have been carried out by suppliers without providing sufficient project management and co-ordination resource.
- Specific consideration of how to provide a more stable environment for the team preparing the application could have helped to avoid some of the changes which occurred during the Hearing.

### Resource levels

Concern over the resourcing level for the project was raised in a number of the interviews carried out, and at the LLR workshop. It may be the case that project team resourcing was scaled more to the "size" of a relatively short length of bridge than to one of the more complex, highly politicised transport projects in the country.

There was much praise from those interviewed for the work done by those co-ordinating or project managing the work, and there has been much positive comment on the extent of teamwork and team spirit. However, it is apparent that there were some resource gaps.

The complexity of some of the external stakeholder issues, the criticality of establishing and maintaining constructive alignment with key partners and the interdependency with associated projects would have required project leaders with exceptional relationship and stakeholder engagement skills to have been more successful. It is the view of the LLR team that when planning the resources for this project, equal emphasis should have been placed on relationship and engagement qualities as on knowledge and technical ability.

### The changing project environment

The project has been running in various forms for more than a decade. A lot of knowledge and experience was built up over that time. It is understandable that the leadership within NZTA saw advantages in continuity of approach and resourcing and were admirably committed to achieving milestones, including the timing of when approvals could be given.

It is often the case that project teams have to manage within uncertain environments and adapt to changes as they occur. However, the extent and impact of the changes which occurred in 2012, especially when combined with the complexity described earlier in this report, and interdependency with associated projects might have warranted a re-think in how to manage and resource this project, and a review of whether the milestones were achievable.

It might have been the case that some of the difficulties such as late resolution of matters with affected parties, insufficient alignment with key partners, surprises from the Memorial Park Alliance may have been avoided if resourcing and project planning had been re-considered when the extent of changes in 2012 were understood.

## NZTA roles

A decision was made by NZTA leadership to play more of an expert role than would normally be the case in the phase of the project responsible for producing the AEE, evidence preparation and preparing for the Hearing. An example of this is how expert resources were procured and managed, resulting in their co-ordination directly by NZTA's project management rather than by a lead consultancy which would be the more typical model.

This issue on its own would not normally be expected to be a critical one, but when placed in the context of this project's complexity and the changing environment, it may have been an additional, unnecessary distraction.

## Managing issues affecting the Basin Bridge Project and the Memorial Park Alliance

The level of ownership demonstrated by NZTA managers responsible for the project was high – this is something these managers should be commended for. However, in some of the interviews and in the LLR workshop it became apparent that on occasions the two projects were not working in synchronisation with each other. These have been referred to in *Alignment of Key Strategic Partners* above, where further integration could have minimised the difficulties encountered by this project. Even with a more integrated approach, this project would have benefited from a clear mechanism for managing issues affecting both projects.

Particular examples of this relate to the Memorial Park Alliance. It should be noted that none of our discussions in this review have indicated that professional relationships were poor between the Basin Bridge team and the Alliance.

There are two examples where co-ordination appears to have led to difficulties. The first of these is in seeking to reach agreement with affected parties. Some of these agreements were only finalised well into the Hearing. It seems that those negotiating on behalf of the Basin Bridge project were delayed in resolving issues by the perceived need for the Alliance to be satisfied. It is surprising that this should have resulted in the delays that it appears to have done.

The second example is where the Alliance was progressing with its works, apparently out of synchronisation with the Bridge project's application – this led to surprises in terms of the Bridge team not being aware of the current status of some aspects of the Alliance's work.

It is interesting that these two examples appear to have opposite causes. In the case of the delays to reaching agreement with affected parties it appears that the Basin Bridge team were more concerned to have the agreement of the Alliance than they might have needed, whereas in the case of the Alliance work taking the Basin Bridge team by surprise it appears that the two projects were not sufficiently aware or mindful of each other's priorities.

As mentioned above, better integration between these projects could have helped, but in the absence of more integrated working, a clear mechanism for managing issues affecting both projects would have been helpful. Even with such a mechanism in place, those playing leadership roles within the Basin Bridge project would have needed to be exceptionally gifted leaders in addition to their technical skills to have overcome the difficulties referred to above.

## Technical Matters

There are a small number of potential technical learnings:

- A deeper study of the NE Quadrant could have led to stronger project support.
- A joint state highway multi-modal designation could have been explored.
- Property negotiations could have been initiated earlier.
- It would appear that the illustration techniques employed may not have been adequate for communicating the project features to a wider audience.

### NE Quadrant Study

It was suggested that the NE Quadrant (Ellice St – Hania St with Grandstand Apartments, liquor store, St Joseph’s Church site, etc.) could have been studied more thoroughly, both the urban fabric and the mitigation of effects in that area. This was an area which housed a number of residents who saw themselves as significantly affected.

A deeper study of the urban morphology of this area and an expanded assessment of the impact, and benefits, of the Basin Bridge and its associated cycleway and pedestrian measures may have alleviated some concerns and provided stronger evidence of a lesser environmental impact than was perceived.

### Multi-modal designation

It was mentioned at the LLR workshop that NZTA as the requiring authority of the state highway designation did not have a mandate to designate for public/passenger transport (PT) and so was limited in how much it could design for and include in its notice of requirement (NoR).

A joint road *designation* by collaborating requiring authorities could have been explored. It might have framed a connected PT and State Highway *Notice of Requirement*.

### Property Negotiations

Despite the complexities and restrictions of the property acquisition process, it was suggested by some that property and mitigation negotiations could have begun earlier in the project lifecycle, and therefore potentially have been resolved earlier.

### Options Generation, Analysis and Illustration

The LLR team note that a considerable amount of work was done to generate some 73 route options through the history of this project and that extensive effort was put into analysing and evaluating the options to arrive at the options taken to consultation: Options A and B.

Given that Option A was rejected by the media and the community at large yet fully endorsed by the professionals familiar with the project and its context, it may be that how the options were illustrated and described to the wider audience could have been improved.