

# A Bridge Too Far: Consequences

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In the wake of the opening of the new Bridgewater Bridge earlier this year, the fate of the old Bridgewater Bridge has key consequences for the existing rail network. The Department of State Growth (DSG) is now tasked with the demolition of the old bridge in September 2025. The old bridge is listed on the Tasmanian Heritage Register (THR 618) together with the convict causeway and the ruins of the 1874 and 1893 bridges.

The DSG has the removal project out to tender at cost of \$40m-\$50m. Initially the DSG planned to leave the bridge lifting mechanism raised but it is now planning to remove it.

Removal of the bridge means that the rail link from the Port of Hobart at Macquarie Point will be cut off from Granton as the only rail crossing of the Derwent. The new Bridgewater Bridge has had no rail link added to it. Kristie Johnston MHA has reported that the DSG has informed her that the heritage values of the old bridge would be recorded in an on-site interpretation and a public artwork.

In my 2017 Talking Point (Bridgewater Bridge saga a political football for too long) I noted that in the JMG report of 2016 to the Tasmanian government advised that the bridge span of the old bridge should be permanently raised to allow river traffic. At that time the mayors and general managers of Glenorchy, Brighton and Derwent Valley councils voiced concern that there was a lack of provision for rail on the then proposed new Bridgewater Bridge. They argued that the existing bridge should be retained on a care and maintenance basis as a strategic position if a future business case showed a positive benefit of a rail crossing across the Derwent.

The demolition of the old bridge and the subsequent cutting of the rail link to the Brighton multimodal freight hub and the spur rail along the Derwent up to New Norfolk would stymie any passenger light rail development from Hobart to Brighton as well any revival of freight traffic out of Hobart..

The Derwent Valley Railway Volunteers group has put in a prodigious effort to upgrade the Derwent Valley railway to eventually enable tourist passengers to travel by rail to National Park. The Tasmanian Transport Museum seeks access to the rail network to run excursions on heritage trains but will be blocked by the demolition of the old bridge. Demolition of the old bridge would open the way for yachts and other river traffic to pass right through to New Norfolk. However, I wonder if this justifies the demolition of the old Bridgewater Bridge when it has other serious consequences?

John Livermore is chair of the Chartered Institute of Transport Tasmania and author of Transport Law in Australia. (The opinions expressed above do not necessarily reflect the views of the above organisation).