

ITEM 3.3. REVITALISATION OF OXFORD STREET**FILE NO: S051491****MINUTE BY THE LORD MAYOR**To Council:

I recently met with residents and businesses in Paddington to find a sensible, long term solution for parking in Area 15.

Residents were concerned the parking changes agreed in March by the Local Pedestrian Cycling and Traffic Calming Committee (LPCTCC), from 2P to 4P on Greens Road, were affecting their ability to park because visitors and students were taking advantage of the longer time limits.

Businesses had welcomed the 4P parking changes for the purpose of attracting visitors to patron local cafés, the cinema and shops. However, there was recognition that better compliance and parking enforcement was required to prevent visitors from overstaying the prescribed limit on Greens Road, particularly for those attending local sporting events.

Paid parking in other areas of the Local Government Area has shown to improve compliance and has increased parking vacancy rates. It was agreed at the meeting that the City would undertake an occupancy demand survey to see if paid parking would help the situation on Greens Road.

The residents and businesses I met with also agreed that two of the biggest impediments to Oxford Street's future are the NSW Government's clearway and the traffic speed limit. We agreed to work together to reactivate the campaign to call upon the Government to reduce the speed on Oxford Street to 40km per hour and to remove the clearway.

Research and community consultation with residents and businesses by both the City of Sydney and Woollahra Council, over many years, has identified removing the clearway as an essential part of revitalising Oxford Street.

The Paddington Business Partnership and resident groups have long supported its removal and a trial a few years back, of reduced clearway hours, commencing at 4pm rather than 3pm, caused no traffic problems.

The clearways currently operate during peak periods from 6am-10am in the westbound direction and 4pm-7pm in the eastbound direction.

The clearways remove kerbside parking at a time when there are many people in the area who may wish to shop, eat or spend time on Oxford Street. Fast moving cars and buses create a hostile environment for pedestrians and reduce the likelihood of the large number of commuters walking along Oxford Street choosing to stop at one of the many cafés and shops.

Speeding vehicles also impact significantly on safety and amenity. There is a 40km/h speed limit zone in central Sydney and in many areas surrounding Oxford Street.

As Lord Mayor and formerly the Member for Bligh/Sydney, I repeatedly asked the Government to remove the clearway. Most recently in 2014, I joined State MP for Sydney Alex Greenwich and Woollahra Mayor Toni Zeltzer to again ask the Government to remove the clearways and to reduce the speed.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that all these calls for changes to the road rules are strongly backed by businesses on the street, the NSW Government refuses to act.

The opening of the Eastern Distributor in 1999 provided an alternative road that would direct traffic away from Oxford Street. The change provided the then NSW Labor Government with the opportunity to remove the clearway on Oxford Street. It was not taken.

Most recently, in a letter to me outlining why he didn't support the changes in October 2014, Roads Minister Duncan Gay MP said that Oxford Street was "*an important State Road link between the City and the Eastern suburbs.*" He expressed concern that it was already operating above capacity and causing significant delays for roads users.

In that letter, the Minister indicated that RMS would be undertaking an independent strategic review of the corridor, with input from the City, within this financial year. A proposal to move the bus lane in the centre of Oxford Street and longer term options, including bus rapid transit connecting the CBD to Bondi Beach, were to be included within that review.

Moving the bus lane to the centre of Elizabeth and Castlereagh Streets, as part of the Sydney City Centre Bus Plan in October last year, had a marked improvement on pedestrian safety and amenity within the CBD.

To date, the City has still not received any information from the RMS about the independent strategic review and we are urgently seeking further information about other plans announced by the Government to introduce a new, rapid bus transit system on Oxford Street linking Bondi Beach to the CBD and other changes to the bus network. It is believed these proposals will be outlined as part of the update of the Long Term Transport Master Plan and the Greater Sydney Commission District Plans.

It is very disappointing that the NSW Government continues to prioritise Oxford Street as nothing more than a thoroughfare for traffic moving in and out of the Eastern suburbs.

It is a view that I strongly reject. I believe Oxford Street is one of our most important main streets with plenty going for it - creative businesses, the National Art School and the College of Fine Arts, Notre Dame University, Paddington Town Hall precinct, St Vincent's Hospital, the Courts and the historic Army Barracks, cafés, cinemas, bookstores, secret gardens in the Paddington Reservoir Gardens, Saturday markets and popular day spas.

The City has invested around \$42 million to improve Oxford Street since 2006, including upgrading footpaths, installing new lighting and providing new seating for property upgrades, public art and landscaping and to support Mardi Gras.

In the last six years, we've provided grants worth \$229,750 to the Darlinghurst Business Partnership and \$202,000 to the Paddington Chamber of Commerce and worked with them to promote Oxford Street as a key strip for retail, fashion and dining. Staff are currently reviewing the Business Support Policy to better ensure it better meets the needs of all our business chambers and associations.

To encourage the growing creative industry and a more vibrant day time economy on Oxford Street, the City provided our own properties as affordable work spaces to over 150 artists and creative entrepreneurs.

Since the program began, these tenants have attracted more than 79,000 visitors to the area and held 585 events including artist talks, workshops or masterclasses, VIP customer nights, industry gatherings, exhibition opening nights and meet-ups.

These tenants are eating and shopping locally and, since the program began, they've spent about \$2.2 million on local goods and services. This works out to be around \$47,000 per month of new money brought into the precinct.

The City has also secured new commercial tenancies, negotiated long term leases and cleaned and resealed 8,100sqm of footpath space. We created and have activated Paddington Reservoir Gardens and developed resources and tools to work with private property owners and to encourage them to activate their street frontages.

Our work is transforming the section of Oxford Street that we have responsibility for, so much so, in 2014 a major property owner on the strip called for the whole street to be handed over to the City of Sydney to manage.

Two years later and Oxford Street remains under the care of two local government authorities. I am committed to continuing to work with Woollahra Council to support business activation on Oxford Street which has struggled since the Street became book-ended with Westfield shopping developments as well as the rise of online shopping.

Worryingly, it was reported on the weekend that the home of the National Art School, the historic former Darlinghurst jail, has been transferred from the Department of Education to the control of Property NSW, raising the possibility it could be put up for sale. Identifying State-owned property for sale is one of the key functions of Property NSW.

The school has been in the area for decades and significantly contributes to the area's identity as a cultural hub.

I have long supported retaining the National Art School as an independent institution with its studio-based learning model. Diversity of educational approaches in the arts is vital to encourage creativity and initiative. I am opposed to the National Art School being subsumed into a large institution, with the community losing a unique approach to learning and the arts.

Such a step would mean losing an institution that has nurtured many famous Australian artists and sculptors, and a school with a history linked to the early Arts and Mechanics Institutes in Sydney.

If the property were sold and the Art School lost from the area, it would be a shocking and debilitating loss not only for Oxford Street, but also the cultural life of our city. I call on the NSW Government to rule this out.

The NSW Government has responsibility for the solutions that will trigger the biggest changes on Oxford Street and I call on them to listen and respond to both business and residents. The current clearway and speed limit on Oxford Street do not deliver a balanced solution. They prioritise fast traffic movements over parking, pedestrian safety and amenity, and the needs of local businesses. This must change.

RECOMMENDATION

It is resolved that Council:

- (A) support businesses and residents in their campaign calling for changes to the road rules on Oxford Street, and ask the Lord Mayor to write to the NSW Minister for Roads and Freight, Duncan Gay, requesting:
 - (i) the Roads and Maritime Service (RMS) remove the clearways on Oxford Street and reconsider introducing a 40km/h speed limit on Oxford Street;
 - (ii) the RMS resolve to undertake an independent strategic review of the corridor, with input from the City of Sydney and Woollahra Council, to investigate relocating the existing bus lane to a centre lane; and
 - (iii) information be provided about the Government's plans to change the bus network on Oxford street, including introducing a rapid bus transit system to link Bondi Beach to the CBD; and
- (B) strongly oppose any move by the NSW Government to sell the home of the National Art School

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor