

ITEM 3. GEORGE STREET 2020: A PUBLIC DOMAIN ACTIVATION STRATEGY**FILE NO: S113048****SUMMARY**

By 2020, George Street will be transformed into Sydney's new civic spine as part of the CBD light rail project. It will be a high quality pedestrian boulevard linking the City's squares and key public spaces. This transformation presents a unique opportunity for the City to ensure that the performance of the street is maximised in terms of both public use, enjoyment, economic and retail strength and vibrancy.

George Street 2020 (see Attachment A) is a Public Domain Activation Strategy addressing how elements in the public domain, as well as building edges and building uses, can contribute to the success of George Street. It delivers on the principles of the George Street Concept Design, which was endorsed by Council on 16 September 2013. The Concept Design was conceived together with the NSW Government's light rail project, which identifies George Street as the north-south light rail route through the city centre. It establishes George Street as the primary north-south pedestrian route through the city and outlines design principles to achieve an iconic, high quality pedestrian experience. This Public Domain Activation Strategy follows on from this, addressing how the street will function following the delivery of the light rail project and the pedestrianisation of approximately one kilometre of the street.

The strategy considers outdoor dining, vending, creative and cultural activities and simply improving the comfort of pedestrians, to encourage people to walk, stroll or dwell and enjoy George Street. This is critical to support the street's long term economic success. Research shows that investing in the walking environment boosts local business activity. In New York, retail rents around Times Square following the closure of Broadway have increased by 63 per cent in the first year, and 119 per cent after a year and a half, which is indicative of increasing overall retail turnover. Both amenity and economic growth were improved by increasing and investing in public space. Ensuring that George Street is an active, vibrant environment with appropriately located pedestrian amenities, is an important layer of George Street's transformation.

George Street 2020 considers activation through the design of the public domain, building uses, and building elements. Public domain elements include both fixed items such as public seating, lighting and street trees, and could include temporary elements such as moveable furniture, outdoor dining, and street vending. The strategy does not attempt to finalise these temporary uses or activities, but allows for them as part of a coordinated and high quality outcome.

Building uses, particularly those associated with the street level, contribute to the activation and use of the street through the inclusion of public amenities, as well as the provision of a fine grain, diverse offering of goods, services and attractions.

Building elements including awnings, signage and materiality contribute to the pedestrian experience of George Street. The strategy identifies principles and opportunities relating to these elements, and makes recommendations for the design of George Street, as well as policy and projects to contribute to the ongoing use and experience of the street.

The strategy includes block-by-block studies of the pedestrianised area identifying potential locations for active uses within the public domain, and proposes a performance monitoring approach to ensure that pedestrian circulation maintains priority over other uses within the street. This performance monitoring will be based on updating the George Street 2014 Benchmarking Study produced by Gehl Architects (see Attachment B).

The strategy includes design recommendations to achieve the desired future character of George Street outlined in the George Street Concept Design, the subject a Development Agreement between the City and Transport for NSW. These design recommendations explain the rationale that underpins the George Street Preliminary Tree and Smartpole Layout, prepared by the City and attached to the Development Agreement between the City and Transport for NSW.

This study will be widely shared upon endorsement with the relevant stakeholders who have the capacity to achieve the City's vision for George Street.

RECOMMENDATION

It is resolved that Council:

- (A) approve the public exhibition of the draft George Street 2020 Public Domain Activation Strategy as shown at Attachment A to the subject report, for a period of three months commencing in mid-December 2014; and
- (B) note the draft George Street 2014 Benchmarking Study as shown at Attachment B to the subject report.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Draft George Street 2020: A Public Domain Activation Strategy

Attachment B: Draft George Street 2014 Benchmarking Study

BACKGROUND

1. On 16 September 2013, Council endorsed the George Street Concept Design, which details public domain improvements along George Street and its adjacent spaces. The concept design was conceived in concert with the NSW Government's light rail project, which identifies George Street as the north-south route through the city centre. The concept design outlined the following principles to be addressed in a public domain activation strategy:

"8.01 Review planning policy to protect and enhance the potential of George Street;

8.02 Investigate opportunities to open up inactive facades on to the street; and

8.03 Encourage outdoor dining and seating."

2. George Street 2020: A Public Domain Activation Strategy addresses these principles by examining how the street will function following the delivery of the light rail project and the pedestrianisation of approximately one kilometre of the street. It includes consideration of the:
 - (a) public domain;
 - (b) building use; and
 - (c) building elements.
3. Gehl Architects have provided input to the George Street 2020 Activation Strategy. Jan Gehl and Henriette Vamburg also participated in an internal workshop held on 24 May 2014.
4. The performance of George Street today has been documented by Gehl Architects in the George Street 2014 Benchmarking Study (see Attachment B). This study provides baseline data to document the current performance of George Street. It establishes a series of key performance indicators to measure the impact of George Street's transformation and the introduction of light rail over time. The intent is to continue to collect data and update this study post light rail.

KEY IMPLICATIONS

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030

5. *Sustainable Sydney 2030* is a vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2030 and beyond. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the city, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. The George Street 2020 Public Domain Activation Strategy is aligned with the following strategic directions:
 - (a) Direction 1 - A Globally Competitive and Innovative City;
 - (b) Direction 4 - A City for Walking and Cycling;
 - (c) Direction 5 - A Lively and Engaging City Centre;
 - (d) Direction 6 - Vibrant Local Communities and Economies; and
 - (e) Direction 7 - A Cultural and Creative City Strategic Alignment.

Social / Cultural / Community

6. As outlined in *Sustainable Sydney 2030*, the light rail project will be the catalyst for a major transformation of the city's public domain, improving amenity and quality of our public spaces and streets, as well as delivering improved transport outcomes. The strategy will ensure that the City's investment in public domain infrastructure translates into a vibrant and appropriately active street. This study is a tool to ensure that the light rail project is guided to support public life. It recognises it is more than a transport project, and is also a city shaping project.

Economic

7. The strategy will be the subject of conversations with landowners, businesses and leasing agents working in George Street, to ensure that the City's vision for George Street (post-construction) is communicated and considered in current private investment, development and leasing strategies.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

8. The project is currently funded within the City Design, Chief Operations Office operational budget for 2014/15. Budget implications arising from the proposed Action Plan will be developed in more detail and will be the subject of future operational budget planning.

CRITICAL DATES / TIME FRAMES

9. Proposed timing for the George Street 2020 Public Domain Activation Strategy is as follows:
 - (a) complete public exhibition and stakeholder consultation on the study – February 2015; and
 - (b) report back to Council with final George Street 2020 for adoption – early 2015.

OPTIONS

10. Council could choose not to endorse the George Street 2020 Public Domain Activation Strategy. This would result in the City having no endorsed position on the performance of George Street following the construction of light rail and limited ability to influence imminent development and retail proposals. Proposed changes to City policy and programs aimed at achieving activation would not be made.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

11. The George Street 2020 Public Domain Activation Strategy is an outcome of the George Street Concept Design. In 2013, extensive public consultation was undertaken to inform the concept design, which included:
 - (a) a public exhibition held at Customs House;
 - (b) concept design pop-up displays and surveys;
 - (c) exhibition period for written feedback responses; and
 - (d) Transforming George Street online forum.

12. Council's Retail Advisory Panel has been briefed on the draft George Street 2020 Public Domain Activation Strategy, noting that detailed discussions will continue following Council endorsement.

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