

Project Scope - George Street South Pedestrianisation

File No: X027274

Summary

This report provides the scope of work and concept design for the continued implementation of the Sustainable Sydney 2030 vision of George Street as Sydney's civic pedestrian spine (Attachment D). Facilitated by permanent changes to traffic arrangements and streetscape improvements, the initiative is made possible by the reduction of vehicular traffic on George Street as a result of the CBD and South East Light Rail project (CSELR).

George Street South pedestrianisation will occur between Bathurst Street and Rawson Place. Further pedestrian improvements will be made along George Street from Rawson Place to Pitt Street, Hay Street, Thomas Street and Ultimo Road in the City Centre and Devonshire Street in Surry Hills. The streetscape improvement works will deliver approximately 9,000m² of additional public space for pedestrians and deliver on the City's Sustainable Sydney 2030 vision of George Street as a world class civic spine for our city centre. Extension of the pedestrian plaza outlined in the City of Sydney's public domain activation strategy George Street 2020 (10 August 2015), will enable more space for people to walk, dwell and create opportunities for local business.

On 8 May 2020, the NSW Government announced the extension of the pedestrian zone in George Street as a response to new social distancing requirements created by the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the announcement, the City of Sydney (the City) has partnered with the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) to achieve in part the Premier's Priority Greener Public Spaces to undertake a demonstration project. The project's aim is to reimagine south George Street as a space for people, improving its quality and accessibility in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and to support long-term permanent changes to the public domain as envisioned by the City's Sustainable Sydney 2030 and the Gehl Public Space Public Life Study 2007.

Temporary vehicle closures have been implemented and installation of temporary street furniture and road surface treatments (to help activate the space) is underway and is expected to be complete mid-September 2020. The process for permanent closure of the street to most vehicles under the Roads Act 1993 is underway and expected to be complete at the end of 2020. It will enable the permanent works to commence in February 2021. Some vehicular access (servicing and waste management for local business outside of light rail hours, emergency vehicles, construction vehicles for development and existing driveway access) will be preserved. These access arrangements are appended to this report and are currently being finalised with the Sydney Coordination Office (Attachment-E).

A scope of works and concept design has been prepared by the City for the permanent pedestrianisation of George Street south of Bathurst Street and portions of Hay Street, Ultimo Road and Devonshire Street. Permanent works include the conversion of redundant asphalt lanes to widened granite footpaths, installation of additional street furniture and tree planting.

These pedestrian friendly streetscape upgrades are likely to attract more footfall for businesses over time and provide more space for people to congregate responsibly and practice social distancing. This will assist the viability of local businesses such as cafés and store owners, potentially allowing them to trade out onto the public domain in the short term, while attracting investment in the long term. To support the increased freight and servicing tasks the City of Sydney will work with Transport for NSW on innovative and environmentally sustainable approaches to address changes in how the freight and servicing task is conducted within George Street, for example establishing a “micro logistics” areas to support bike couriers/trike/small EV that may be permitted to service the corridor during daytime hours with restrictions to ensure pedestrian safety.

The concept design attached to this report will be presented to the community and feedback sought as per the George Street Engagement Plan. Community engagement to date indicates that the proposal has been well received by the community and businesses alike.

Aligning with the City’s vision for a safer and more people-friendly George Street, this project will provide an opportunity for the City to build on the success of existing pedestrianised sections of Alfred and George Streets.

Recommendation

It is resolved that Council:

- (A) endorse the scope of works for the George Street South Pedestrianisation as described in the subject report for progression to detailed design, documentation and construction of works;
- (B) note that works will not proceed unless and until approval has been obtained under the Roads Act 1993 in relation to the permanent changes to traffic arrangements.

Attachments

- Attachment A.** Project Site Plan
- Attachment B.** Concept Design
- Attachment C.** Communications and Engagement Summary Report
- Attachment D.** Photomontage
- Attachment E.** Local Access Plan

Background

1. In 2007, Gehl Architects made the recommendation to transform the full length of George Street into a pedestrian boulevard in their Public Spaces, Public Life study. Adopted as a project idea in Sustainable Sydney 2030 vision in 2008, the City in partnership with the State government was able to realise the vision for George Street between Hunter and Bathurst Streets as part of the CBD and South East Light Rail (CSELR).
2. The CBD and South East Light Rail from Circular Quay to Randwick and Kingsford was opened to the public in stages in December 2019 and April 2020.
3. The City contributed \$220 million to the project for public domain upgrades and improvements, which included pedestrianisation of Alfred Street between Loftus and George Streets, pedestrianisation of George Street between Hunter and Bathurst Streets and other public domain improvements in Surry Hills.
4. Introduction of the CBD and South East Light Rail through Sydney's city centre has facilitated the removal vehicular traffic off Sydney's George Street spine and its city centre. It has enabled the creation of a 'car-free' zone limited to local access between Hunter and Bathurst Streets.
5. The pedestrianisation of George Street has attracted significant investment in private development adjacent to and surrounding George Street.
6. Governance of the light rail corridor post-construction is shared between the City of Sydney and Transport for NSW. The road corridor along the Light Rail Route is comprised of two parts:
 - (a) the Permanent Light Rail Corridor (PLRC) which includes the light rail stops and the light rail track form or 'transitway'; and
 - (b) the remaining public domain surrounding the Permanent Light Rail Corridor.
7. Accepting handover of the surrounding public domain from Transport for NSW and its agents on 3 July 2020, the City now performs the Roads Authority function for the public domain and is responsible for its maintenance.
8. Transport for NSW remains the Road Authority for the Permanent Light Rail Corridor portion. Transdev (Transport for NSW's light rail operator) maintains the Permanent Light Rail Corridor.
9. During construction of the CBD and South East Light Rail, several temporary road closures were implemented to facilitate delivery of the project.
10. Temporary southbound lane closures for vehicles on George Street between Bathurst and Campbell Streets and the lane closure on Devonshire Street between Chalmers and Elizabeth Streets have been in place for around four years.
11. On 8 May 2020, the NSW Government announced the extension of the pedestrian zone in George Street as a response to new social distancing requirements created by the Covid-19 pandemic; to be implemented as a trial then as a permanent measure.

12. The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, as sponsor of the Premier's Priority Greener Public Spaces which focuses on improving the quality and walkable access to public space across NSW, has partnered with councils to undertake a range of demonstration projects as part of its approach to achieve the Priority and is supporting the City with the pedestrianisation of south George Street through the following funding agreements:
 - (a) Places to Love – Public Space Demonstration Projects program:
 - (i) July 2020 - \$130,000 funding deed to trial temporary road closures and undertake associated community engagement activities to help build the case for permanent change.
 - (ii) August/September 2020 - \$1 million funding deed to build on the outcomes from the temporary demonstration project and contribute towards the permanent closure of south George Street, with the design responding to findings from the initial trial and community engagement. The Public Spaces division is currently working with City Design within Council to establish requirements so that the deed is ready for execution in October.
 - (b) Streets as Shared Spaces grant program:
 - (i) August 2020 - \$100,000 successful grant application for funding towards cultural activation and enhancing the temporary closure for pedestrians. This funding will enhance the deliverables from Places to Love rather than duplicate them.
13. A Traffic Management Plan (TMP) was prepared by the City and approved by Transport for NSW on 3 July 2020 for temporary changes to the following streets:
 - (a) George Street - southbound lane closure to most vehicles between Bathurst Street and Rawson Place.
 - (b) George Street - northbound lane closure to most vehicles between Ultimo Road and Bathurst Street.
 - (c) Campbell Street - closure of its George Street intersection and conversion into a two-way road between George and Pitt Streets.
 - (d) Hay Street - road closure to most vehicles between George and Sussex Streets.
 - (e) Ultimo Road - conversion into a one-way westbound road between George and Quay Streets.
14. Since July 2020, Transport for NSW and the City have worked together to implement temporary street closures. Transport for NSW have installed temporary road barriers and adjusted traffic signals. The City is installing seating and surface treatments on closed vehicular lanes. Completion of temporary works is expected mid-September 2020.

15. All proposed works are similar in nature to village main street construction works. The works will include removal of existing kerbs and extension of granite footpaths to the light rail corridor. Construction will be managed to allow local business to continue trading during construction, with the existing footpath to remain in place and so providing wide and clear access. The City will work with the contractor to mitigate impacts on local businesses.
16. No permanent construction works will commence until permanent changes to the traffic arrangements have been approved in accordance with the Roads Act 1993.
17. Vehicular access for emergency vehicles, cash transit vehicles, construction vehicles and existing driveway access along southern George Street is detailed in Attachment E and is currently being finalised with the Sydney Coordination Office.

Scope of Works

18. The scope of permanent pedestrianisation works include:
 - (a) Removal of existing temporary water-filled traffic barriers, kerbs and bollards currently used as part of temporary street closures.
 - (b) Demolition and removal of existing kerbs, gutters, asphalt and base course in roadway.
 - (c) Construction of new concrete slabs and sub-bases to accommodate footpath extensions across former roadways and new granite paving.
 - (d) Installation of new granite paving (new paving will be trafficable).
 - (e) Installation of stormwater drainage under existing kerbs.
 - (f) Installation of new flush trench grates in line with existing gutters.
 - (g) Extension of George Street Non-Potable Water network from Rawson Place to Pitt Street.
 - (h) Modification of existing pit lids to suit new public domain levels.
 - (i) Associated traffic signalisation works.
 - (j) Installation of additional City of Sydney street furniture.
 - (k) Tree planting.
19. The scope of permanent pedestrianisation works does not require the following:
 - (a) Light rail shutdown.
 - (b) Contamination and site remediation.
 - (c) Existing service relocations (Minor service relocations allowed for on Hay Street only).
 - (d) Replacement of existing footpath slabs and pavers.

- (e) Smartpole replacement or relocation and low voltage electricity network upgrades and relocations (except on George Street as required from Rawson Place to Pitt Street and Quay Street to Ultimo Road and on Hay Street from Sussex Street to Harbour Street).

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030

20. 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. This is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
- (a) Direction 1 - A Globally Competitive and Innovative City - the project creates a high quality public domain that supports a city centre that is competitive, attracts investment and ensures ongoing liveability.
 - (b) Direction 2 provides a road map for the City to become A Leading Environmental Performer - the project implements environmental actions such as increasing tree canopy cover and utilising recycled water as part of its irrigation strategy.
 - (c) Direction 3 - Integrated Transport for a Connected City - the project compliments an efficient transport mode such as the CBD and South East Light Rail.
 - (d) Direction 4 - A City for Walking and Cycling - the project improves pedestrian amenity and safety through provision of enhanced high-quality footpath treatments, footpath widening, continuous footpath treatments and increased street furniture amenity, such as seats and bins.
 - (e) Direction 5 - A Lively and Engaging City Centre - The project delivers a welcoming public domain that encourages people to stay and enjoy and creates space to support a diverse 24-hour city economy.
 - (f) Direction 6 - Vibrant Local Communities and Economies - Vibrant Local Communities and Economies – the project will provide an improved public domain that meets the needs of a wide variety of user groups and creates more space for social interaction and business to trade out into (should they choose to).
 - (g) Direction 7 - A Cultural and Creative City - the project creates a variety of spaces could allow for diverse cultural offerings such as busking or creative pop-ups from adjacent venues, facilitating a city identity and encouraging people to come to the city for leisure beyond work and business activities.
 - (h) Direction 9 - Sustainable Development, Renewal and Design - the project will potentially facilitate additional tree planting, increasing urban canopy in the city centre.
 - (i) Direction 10 - Implementation through Effective Governance and Partnerships - the project will facilitate an effective partnership with the NSW State Government and its agencies to realise organisational strategic directions and benefits for the public.

Organisational Impact

21. The Current City Transformation and City Design team will design and deliver the works with the input of key area across the organisation.

Risks

22. The scope of works pose minimal risks given that George Street has already closed to most traffic and that the scope is similar to previous City of Sydney streetscape upgrades. The City has experience in managing works of this nature, although there are risks relating to services and other latent site conditions.
23. There are some third party risks in relation to the approval of the final design and traffic arrangements by Transport for NSW and other stakeholders.

Social / Cultural / Community

24. The project will provide improved amenities for residents and visitors to Sydney.
25. Road lane closures and footpath widening will encourage active transport and social and community interaction.
26. The project will improve the material quality of the public domain, complimenting the logical extension of the existing pedestrianised section.

Environmental

27. A review of existing trees will be undertaken with the City's arborist during the design development stage of the project to establish a construction methodology to protect existing trees and maximise tree root health during construction.
28. Investigations will be undertaken during the design development stage to scope out new tree locations where possible. The City notes that due to the presence of overhead light rail power lines, ability to plant new trees will be restricted. Design development will investigate the appropriateness of low-level planting as a hazard mitigation measure while creating more permeable surfaces, assisting in flood mitigation.

Economic

29. New streetscape upgrades are likely to attract more footfall for businesses over time and provide more space for people to congregate responsibly and practice social distancing. This will assist the viability of local businesses such as cafés and store owners, potentially allowing them to trade out onto the public domain in the short term, while attracting investment in the long term.

Financial Implications

30. In June 2020 Council approved funding in the Capital Works Budget of \$34 million for George Street South Pedestrianisation and \$5 million for Hay Street Footpath Widening to deliver this project in the 2020/21 and 2021/22 financial years. The project's budget may be further refined following the detailed design phase.

31. The City has received additional funding through funding deeds with the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment to achieve the Premier's Priority Greener Public Spaces. They include:
- (a) Places to Love – Public Space Demonstration Projects program:
 - (i) July 2020 - \$130,000 funding deed to trial temporary road closures and undertake associated community engagement activities to help build the case for permanent change.
 - (ii) August/ September 2020 - \$1 million funding deed to build on the outcomes from the temporary demonstration project and contribute towards the permanent pedestrianisation of south George Street, with the design responding to findings from the initial trial and community engagement. Public Spaces division is currently working with City Design within Council to establish requirements so that the deed is ready for execution in October.
 - (b) Streets as Shared Spaces grant program:
 - (i) August 2020 - \$100,000 successful grant application for funding towards cultural activation and enhancing the temporary closure for pedestrians. This funding will enhance the deliverables from Places to Love rather than duplicate them.
32. Transport for NSW has also funded and installed temporary road barriers and adjusted traffic signals to enable the temporary and permanent traffic arrangements.

Relevant Legislation

33. Local Government Act 1993 for construction procurement.
34. Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EPA) (Part 4 and 5). A planner will review the scope of works and Review of Environmental Factors and assess consent requirements for the permanent works under the EPA Act.
35. Roads Act 1993 for permanent changes to traffic arrangements.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

36. Key dates for the project are as follows:
- (a) Review of Environmental Factors (REF) submission September 2020
 - (b) REF approval October 2020
 - (c) Appointment of Design and Construction Contractor October 2020
 - (d) Detail Design Commencement October 2020
 - (e) Traffic Changes – Local Pedestrian, Cycling and Traffic Calming Committee / Central Sydney Traffic and Transport Committee / Council Endorsement December 2020

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| (f) Construction Commencement | February 2021 |
| (g) Construction Completion in Stages | June 2022 |

Public Consultation

37. Following the media announcement by the Minister for Planning on 8 May 2020 that the George Street pedestrian zone would be extended south of Bathurst Street, the City had conversations with affected stakeholders prior to implementing the temporary street closures. Information and briefing invitations were sent to:
 - (a) 33 affected stakeholders;
 - (b) 24 businesses were contacted as part of a doorknocking exercise; and
 - (c) 8 face-to-face meetings were conducted.
38. Prior to temporary street closures being implemented, the City also mailed out 14,471 notifications to property owners and building occupants and emailed 131 stakeholders.
39. The City also hosted a George Street south stakeholder briefing on 21 July 2020; 30 stakeholders were invited and 11 attended.
40. The City received 31 enquiries via telephone, email, online project update registrations and Facebook. All enquiries were responded to directly by the City's staff. Of those enquiries:
 - (a) 17 were residents,
 - (b) 10 were businesses/ organisations; and
 - (c) 4 were property owners.
41. Community sentiment to the temporary project based on doorknocking and enquiries received post engagement with staff was 8 were positive, 38 neutral and 6 were negative. A further three negative comments were received but were not directly linked to the George Street closure project, such as bike riders on George Street, footway dining fees and grant information not received. These issues have been referred on to City staff for investigation and response (Attachment C).
42. Key community and business issues included property access, loading, parking and servicing access. Other issues included timing of closures, concern regarding construction impacts, traffic impacts, emergency service access, safety and a request to retain concrete blocks.
43. Key community and business interests are in outdoor dining, street activation and events and design of permanent road closures.
44. City staff are currently observing and documenting the temporary closures, including pedestrian counts and onsite activity using a quality evaluation tool for public spaces, developed with the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment.

45. In September 2020, the City is planning community consultation on its proposal to permanently close and upgrade streetscapes. The consultation will seek feedback on the concept design and proposed traffic changes.
46. The City will then invite key stakeholders, local businesses and residents to a follow up briefing and 'George Street Walk'.
47. An engagement report will be compiled in late 2020, compiling online feedback and feedback from key stakeholders and the community.
48. Ongoing conversations with affected stakeholders will continue ahead of construction.
49. If the permanent closure designs are approved, the City will work with George Street businesses and residents to minimise impacts during construction.

KIM WOODBURY

Chief Operating Officer

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