

Central Square - Structuring Principles

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Summary

High quality public open space is essential for the environmental, economic and social resilience of a global city. Delivering great public spaces is one of the Premier's priorities. In Central Sydney, high amenity public spaces help make Sydney competitive and attractive. They provide space for workers and visitors to gather, enable active and passive recreation, mitigate the effects of climate change and improve health and wellbeing. As the population in the city increases, there will be an increased demand on existing and new open spaces.

Jan Gehl's 2007 Public Space, Public Life study first envisaged a major new square at Central connected to other new squares at Circular Quay and Town Hall by the George Street spine. It has since formed part of Sustainable Sydney 2030 (2009), the draft Central Sydney Planning Strategy (2016) and the Local Strategic Planning Statement (2019).

The NSW Government is planning to develop Central Station as part of the innovation precinct, 'Tech Central'. The precinct will support tech start up, scale ups and innovation ecosystem partners. A major new public place at Central is a critical part of the re-envisioning of this area of the city. High quality open space will help to attract and retain talent in the new precinct and support the younger demographic including university students.

In 2019, Central Station and its immediate environs was identified as a State Significant Precinct (SSP). An SSP is an area deemed to have state or regional planning significance as a result of social, economic or environmental qualities. The SSP boundary includes the Western Gateway sub-precinct on Lee Street (western edge of Central Station) and the over station development down to Cleveland Street. The precinct also includes the area the City has identified for Central Square and accommodates Central Walk West (currently unfunded) which connects the areas east and west of Central Station below track level and the new Sydney Metro platforms to the rest of Central. The land identified by the City for Central Square is owned partly by Transport for NSW (TfNSW) and partly by the City.

This report describes a set of structuring principles and the indicative staging to guide planning for Central Square and realise the City's vision. These principles and stages will be used to communicate the City's position on Central Square to key government and non-government stakeholders. The structuring principles will create a public space that:

- supports the safe and effective movement of people,
- is vibrant and active day and night,
- focuses on youth activities and places for visitors, public transport users, the university population, workers and others surrounding the city,
- is cool, green and comfortable, and

- celebrates a builds on the unique heritage and carefully balances change with broad public benefits.

This report seeks endorsement of the structuring principles and indicative staging for Central Square and for staff to continue to collaborate with the NSW Government towards its implementation. Without this endorsement there is a risk that the 'State Significant Precinct' development may proceed under government process and the broader benefits of coordinated private development and public domain improvements may not be realised.

Recommendation

It is resolved that Council:

- (A) endorse the indicative approach and indicative staging for Central Square; and
- (B) endorse the continued collaboration with the NSW Government, including Transport for NSW as substantial land owner, towards the implementation of Central Square.

Attachments

Attachment A. Central Square Indicative Staging Diagrams

Attachment B. Central Square Preliminary Transport Context Analysis Report (Pentelic Advisory November 2019)

Background

1. A major public place at Central Station has been identified in the City's planning strategies since Gehl's Sydney-Public Space Public Life (2007) and Sustainable Sydney 2030 (2008). Central Square was envisaged as one of three new major public spaces in Central Sydney connected by a pedestrian friendly spine along George Street. This is shown in Figure 1.

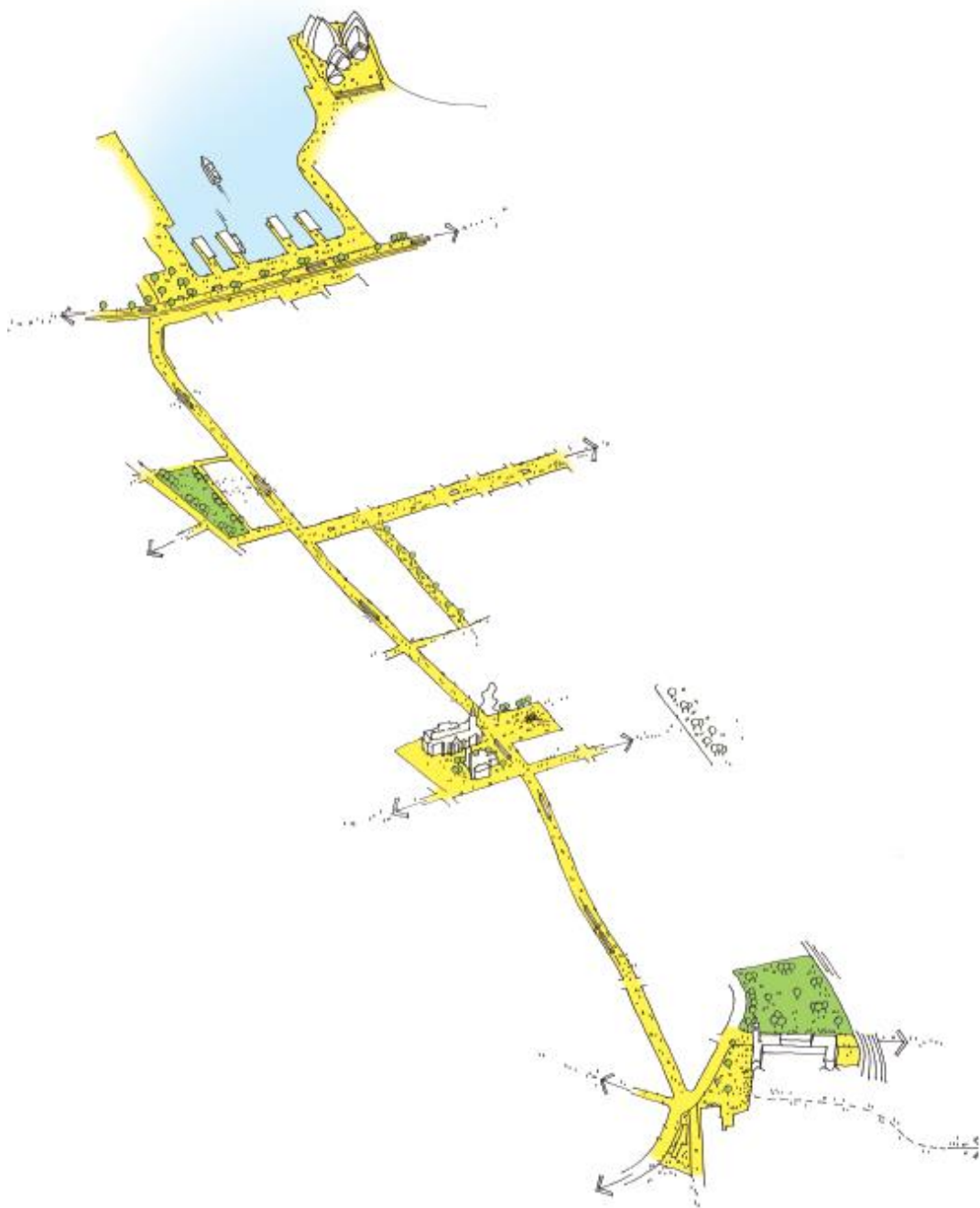


Figure 1: George Street public domain spine connecting three public squares (draft Central Sydney Planning Strategy 2016)

The identification of Central as a State Significant Precinct

2. In June 2019, the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces announced that Central Station will be investigated as a State Significant Precinct (SSP), as a key part of the planned technology and innovation precinct between Central Station and Camperdown, now known as 'Tech Central'. The SSP boundary includes land identified as the 'Western Gateway sub precinct' on Lee Street (western edge of Central Station), as well as the future over track development down to Cleveland Street.

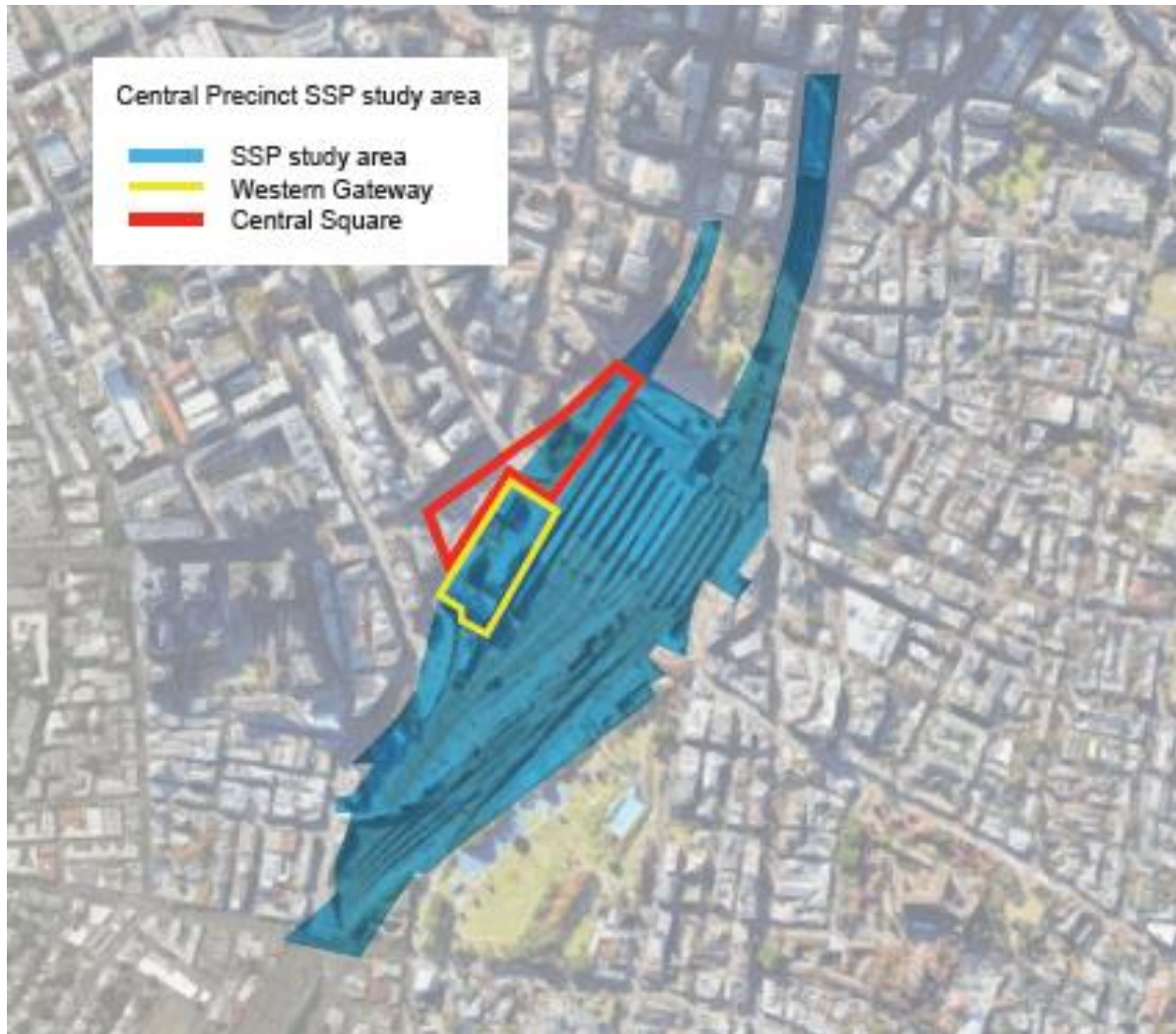


Figure 2: Central SSP study area in blue with Central Square outlined in Red

3. The SSP is being investigated in two stages. Stage 1 is a Strategic Framework for the whole precinct along with the rezoning of the 'Western Gateway sub-precinct' along Lee Street, which houses the Atlassian and the Dexu/Frasers proposals. The second stage will consider the significantly larger over track precinct, including development over the station and the rail corridor.

4. The 'Western Gateway sub-precinct' includes the YHA leasehold (Atlassian), Lee Street office leasehold (Dexus/Frasers) and Adina leasehold (Toga) on Lee Street. The Strategic Framework for the entire SSP area has been prepared and exhibited concurrently with the rezoning proposal for the 'Western Gateway sub precinct'. The 'Western Gateway sub precinct' rezoning was approved by the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces on 13 August 2020, with the planning changes modifying the Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012. Two of these sites, Atlassian and Dexus/Frasers, have recently completed full architectural design competitions. The Dexus and Frasers Property Australia site, now known as 'Central Place Sydney', is the subject of a Stage 3 Unsolicited Proposal with Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC), which amongst other things, involves the transfer the leasehold to freehold.
5. In 2019, Terms of Reference were established between the City, Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE), Greater Sydney Commission (GSC) and Government Architects (GA) to form a Project Working Group (PWG) to jointly assess the Stage 1 process. A Project Review Panel (PRP) was also established to review the assessment process at key milestones, Graham Jahn, Director City Planning, Development and Transport is a member.
6. The exhibited Strategic Framework identified the future Central Square was conceptually in alignment with the City's previous work. Detailed work will commence over the coming months in preparation for the rezoning of the remainder of the SSP. To assist in contributing to this process, the City has developed key priorities, structuring principles and indicative staging to guide to inform planning for Central Square.

Central Square Priorities

7. The structuring principles and indicative staging for Central Square have been developed through an intensive workshop process. Key collaborators included external consultants Spackman Mossop Michaels, Tonkin Zulaikha Greer and Pentelic Transport Advisory Services. Internal collaborators included Strategic Planning And Urban Design, City Projects and City Access and Transport. External collaborators included TfNSW and the DPIE.
8. The key priorities for Central Square include:
 - (a) ensuring safe interchange and movement to and through the space for people
 - (b) creating a vibrant place, active 24 hours per day, with a focus on youth activities and places for visitors, public transport users, the university population, workers and others surrounding the city
 - (c) supporting the City's environmental objectives of being cool and green
 - (d) creating a collection of high amenity spaces, with environmental comfort conditions suitable for sitting, and
 - (e) celebrating the unique heritage of the place and carefully balancing heritage intervention with broader benefit to the public.

Central Square Structuring Principles

9. Central Square is envisaged as one square with a collection of four connected spaces: Central Walk (Western Walk), lower Square, upper Square and Railway Square. Each of these spaces is described below and is indicatively illustrated in Figures 3-11.



Figure 3: Illustration of Central Square showing the collection of spaces looking south east

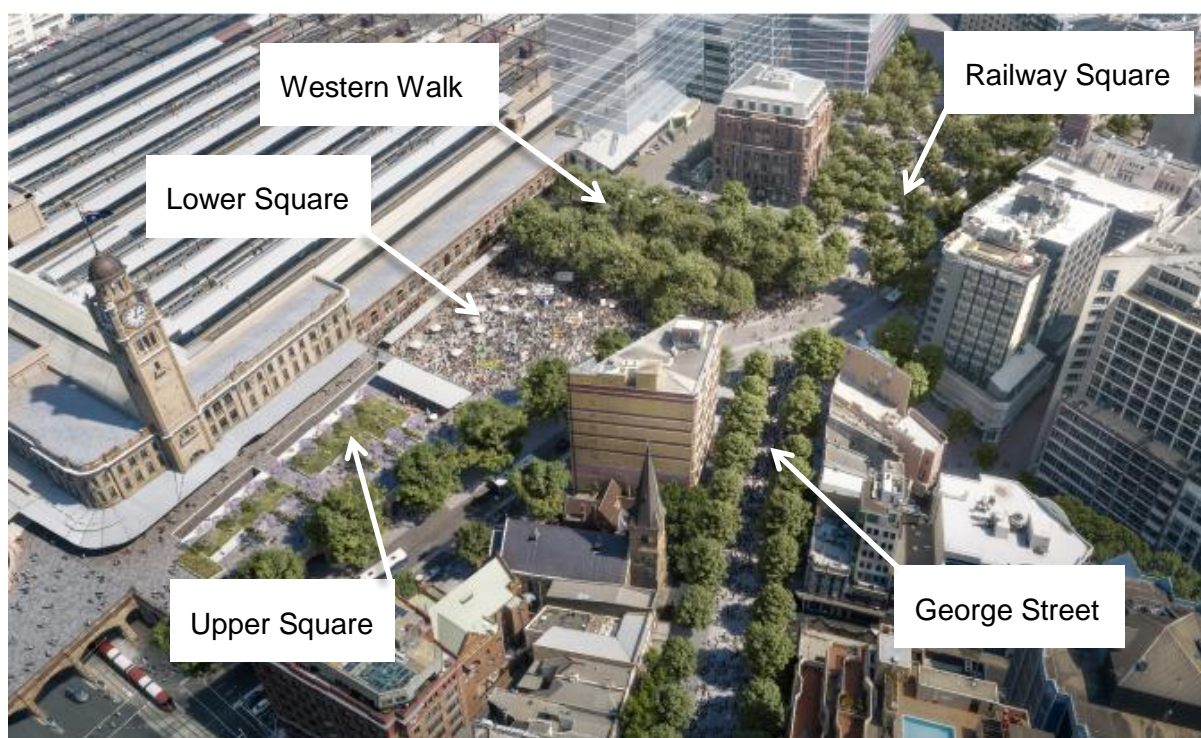


Figure 4: Illustration of Central Square showing the collection of spaces looking south east

Central Walk West (Western Walk)

10. Central Walk West should emerge into a clear and generous path leading at grade between the Station and a wide pedestrian crossing at George Street, Pitt Street and Quay Street. It could be a place of people movement, delineated by significant tree planting. It will be bounded at the north with the western access of Central Walk West and to the south by the heritage sandstone wall adjacent to Upper Carriageway Drive. It will allow large numbers of people to walk comfortably, at grade between Central Walk West, and key destinations north, west or south of the square.

Lower Square

11. The lower square, adjacent to the heritage brick station buildings, will be an engaging space, suitable for activity 24 hours per day. It will be of high amenity and should have environmental comfort conditions suitable for sitting. It will be at grade with Central Walk West. Its northern alignment will be at the junction between the existing sandstone and brick station buildings, the southern alignment will be at the northern line of trees delineating Central Walk West, and the eastern alignment will be the face of the existing brick buildings.
12. The size of the lower square should be maximised. A narrow, awning may be provided parallel and adjacent to the existing brick buildings for weather protection and upper level north south access, but any encroachment into the space below should be discouraged as it would compromise its function and spatial qualities.

Upper Square

13. The upper square, adjacent to the heritage sandstone station building, will complement the upper concourse and Belmore Park and be quiet and passive in character. It will be of high amenity and should have environmental comfort conditions suitable for passive enjoyment and sitting. It will be at grade with the Grand Concourse, with its southern alignment at the junction of the existing sandstone and brick station buildings. It will connect through to Belmore Park, with arcades below to Pitt Street. A stair will connect the lower and upper spaces. Service access should be provided from Pitt Street using the existing driveways in the sandstone wall.

Railway Square

14. Railway Square will be cool and green, an urban setting under a copse of trees. It will capitalise on the increased footpath widths on the east and west sides of Broadway. It will be of high amenity and should have environmental comfort conditions suitable for sitting. It will include a shared zone on Lee Street and will be at grade with the existing streets. It will provide a street address to the developments in the Western Gateway, with a super dock servicing to the Western Gateway from the south end of Lee Street.



Figure 5: Central Square at night looking north along George Street showing activity 24 hours a day



Figure 6: Access to Central Walk West looking north east from Railway Square



Figure 7: Lower square looking north east from Railway Square during Lunar New Year



Figure 8: Lower square looking north from Railway Square during Vivid



Figure 9: Upper square looking south towards the Western Gateway



Figure 10: Looking north east from amongst the trees in the reimagined Railway Square



Figure 11: View exiting Central Walk West into the square looking west and towards George Street

Central Square Indicative Staging

15. Delivery of metropolitan transport infrastructure changes the transport conditions and network surrounding Central Station and creates opportunities to deliver Central Square. In particular, metro and light rail will progressively reduce the number of buses on key corridors that need to access or lay over on the western side of Central.

16. The Central Square concept has been structured to be implemented in stages, responding to the key transport infrastructure enablers. There are five stages illustrated and described below and shown in Attachment A, with indicative timeframes. The stages are:
- The opening of the CBD and South East Light Rail (2020).
 - Further pedestrianisation of George Street and Quay Street, with associated reduction in vehicle traffic.
 - The opening of Sydney Metro City and South West (2024).
 - The opening of WestConnex Stages 1-3 (2024).
 - The opening of Central Walk West (2027).

Opening of CBD and South East Light Rail

17. Figure 12 shows the potential reduction of vehicle traffic in Lee Street to two lanes, with access retained to the 'Western Gateway sub precinct'. This is possible as a result of a potential reduction in south east bus volumes resulting from the operations of the CBD and South East Light Rail, which fully opened this year

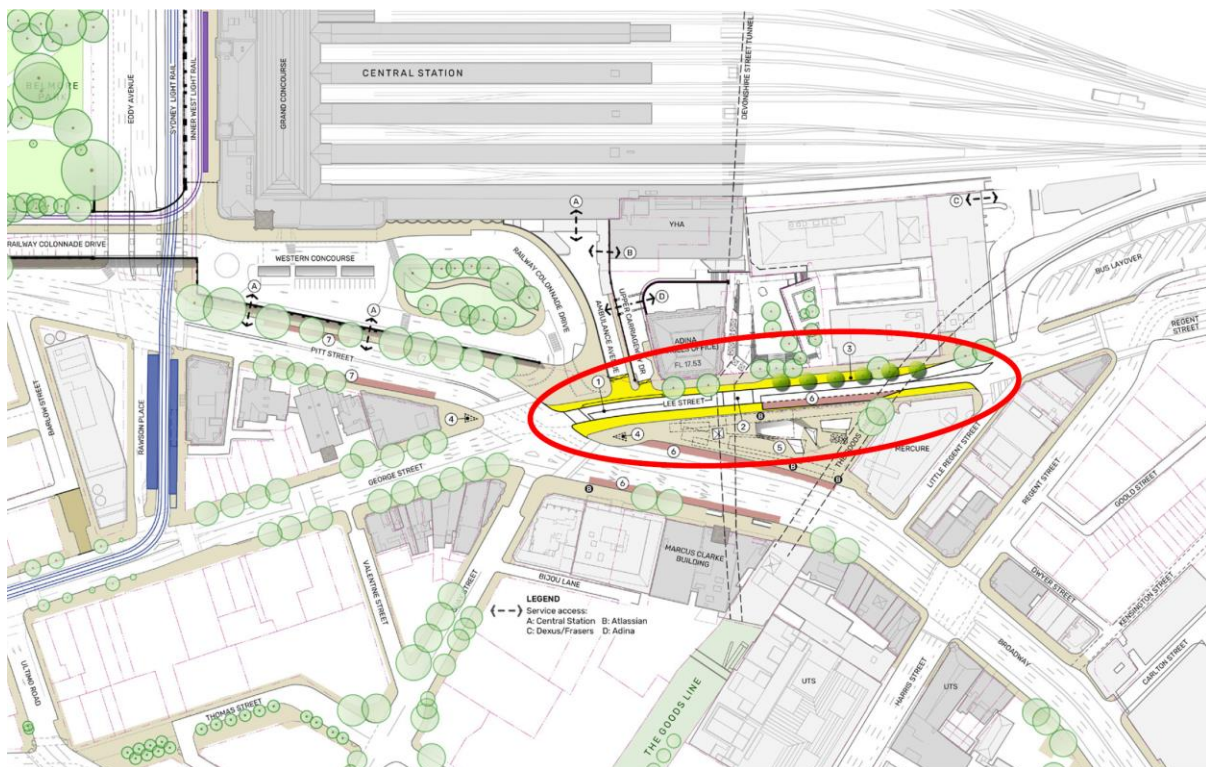


Figure 12: Buses reduced on Lee Street

Pedestrianisation of George and Quay Streets

18. Figure 13 shows the future Quay Street footpath widenings and the George Street pedestrianisation to Rawson Place (committed) with the opportunity to continue this to Pitt Street.



Figure 13: George Street and Quay Street better pedestrian links to CBD and Darling Harbour

Opening of Sydney Metro City and South West

19. Figure 14 shows Lee Street closed to bus movement, closed completely at the northern end and retained only as a shared zone to service the private development sites within the Western Gateway. This is possible as a result of a reduction in bus movement from the north west resulting from the opening of Sydney Metro Stage 1 (Sydney Metro City and South West) in 2024.

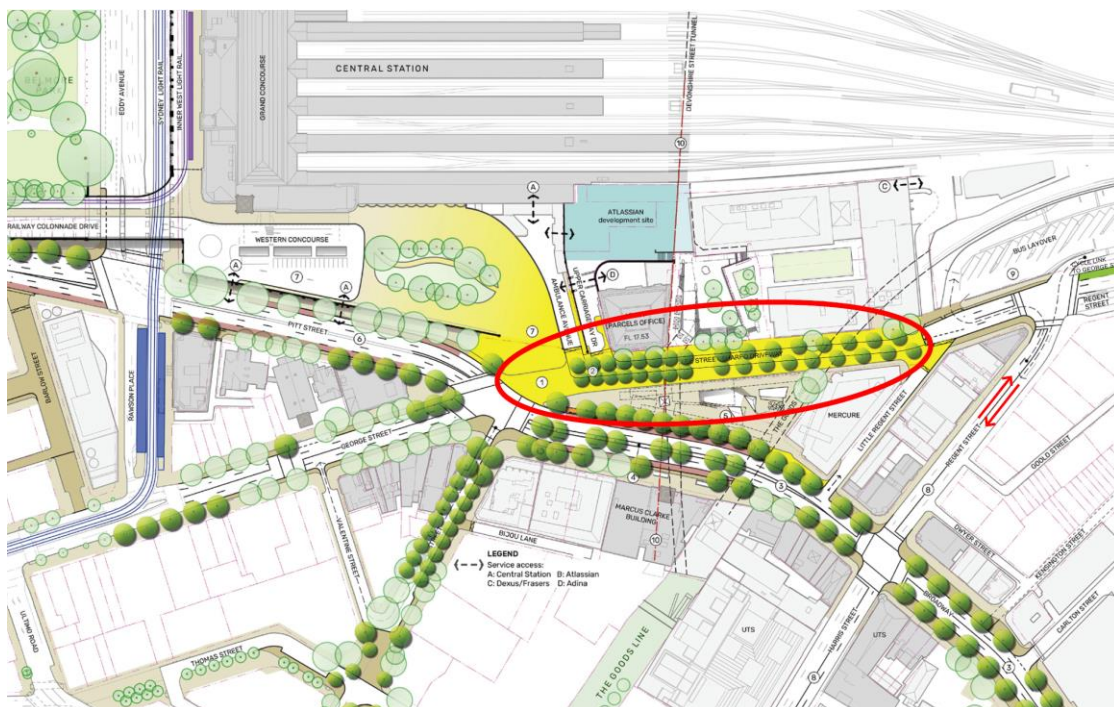


Figure 14: Lee Street as shared driveway

Bus changes

20. Figure 15 shows a reduction of vehicle traffic in George Street and Broadway to four lanes with a new wider pedestrian crossing at George Street, Pitt Street and Quay Street. This is possible as a result of a reduction in through traffic and bus movement in the CBD from the south west. Bus zones in Railway Square are maintained.



Figure 15: Reallocation of Broadway from vehicles to people

Opening of Central Walk West

21. Figure 16 shows the completion of the square, timed with the opening of Central Walk West, estimated to be opened in 2027.



Figure 16: Completion of the square

Key Implications

22. Endorsement of the principles and indicative staging in this report will enable Council staff to continue to collaborate with the NSW Government and advocate for the best possible public place outcome given:
 - (a) Central Square is essential to support the increase in workers as part of the recently approved rezoning of the 'Western Gateway sub precinct' and Strategic Framework for the broader Central SSP.
 - (b) Maximising the extent and flexibility of the future spaces within the square will support the younger demographics of the area and provide a complementary character to the international character of Circular Quay and more civic character of the future Town Hall Square.
 - (c) A coordinated approach to the delivery of additional public transport, private development and public domain improvements must be realised.

Strategic Alignment - Greater Sydney Region Plan

23. A Metropolis of Three Cities - The Greater Sydney Region Plan is the NSW Government's overarching strategic plan for growth and change in Sydney. The 20 year plan provides a 40 year vision that seeks to transform Greater Sydney into a metropolis of three cities. It outlines how Greater Sydney will manage growth and change and will guide infrastructure delivery.
24. The Greater Sydney Region Plan is to be implemented at a local level by District Plans. The structuring principles for Central Square are consistent with the following relevant directions and objectives of the Plan:
 - (a) Infrastructure – redevelopment of the site will contribute towards the delivery of new community infrastructure
 - (b) Liveability – the proposal responds to the increasing demand for great public places
 - (c) Productivity – the sites' proximity to Central Station, a range of public transport infrastructure, jobs and services is consistent with the 30-minute city concept
 - (d) Sustainability – the proposal will facilitate the redevelopment of the site with improved sustainability outcomes

Strategic Alignment - Eastern City District Plan

25. The Eastern City District Plan sets the local planning context for the City of Sydney local government area and provides a 20 year plan to manage growth. The structuring principles for Central Square gives effect to relevant planning priorities from the Plan:
- (a) Planning Priority E1 – Planning for a city supported by infrastructure
 - (b) Planning Priority E2 – Working through collaboration (increased use of public resources)
 - (c) Planning Priority E4 – Fostering healthy, creative, culturally rich and socially connected communities
 - (d) Planning Priority E6 – Creating and renewing great places and local centres, and respecting the District's heritage
 - (e) Planning Priority E7 – Growing a more stronger and more competitive Harbour CBD
 - (f) Planning Priority E10 – Delivering integrated land use and transport planning and a 30-minute city
 - (g) Planning Priority E13 – Supporting growth of targeted industry sectors
 - (h) Planning Priority E16 – Protecting and enhancing scenic and cultural landscapes
 - (i) Planning Priority E17 – Increasing urban tree canopy cover and delivering green grid connections
 - (j) Planning Priority E18 – Delivering high quality open space
 - (k) Planning Priority S20 – Adapting to the impacts of urban and natural hazards and climate change

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030

26. 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 structuring principles for Central Square are aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
- (a) Direction 1 - A Globally Competitive and Innovative City
 - (b) Direction 2 - A leading environmental performer
 - (c) Direction 3 - Integrated transport for a connected city
 - (d) Direction 4 - A city for walking and cycling
 - (e) Direction 5 - A lively and engaging city centre
 - (f) Direction 7 - A cultural and creative city
 - (g) Direction 9 - Sustainable development, renewal and design
 - (h) Direction 10 - Implementation through effective governance and partnerships

Strategic Alignment - Local Strategic Planning Statement

27. The City of Sydney's Local Strategic Planning Statement sets out the land use planning context, 20 year vision and planning priorities to positively guide change towards the City's vision for a green, global and connected city.
28. The structuring principles for Central Square gives effect to the following planning priorities of the Statement:
 - (a) Infrastructure
 - I1 – Movement for walkable neighbourhoods and a connected city
 - L2 – Align development and growth with supporting infrastructure
 - (b) Liveability
 - L1 – A creative and socially connected city
 - L2 – Creating great places
 - (c) Productivity
 - P1 – Growing a stronger, more competitive Central Sydney
 - P2 – Developing innovative and diverse business clusters in City Fringe
 - (d) Sustainability
 - S2 – Creating better buildings and places to reduce emissions and waste and use water efficiently
 - S3 – Increasing resilience of people and infrastructure against natural and urban hazards
 - (e) Governance
 - G1 – Open, Accountable and collaborative planning

Relevant Legislation

29. Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

30. Should Council endorse the proposed principles and indicative staging, the City will proceed with collaboration with the NSW Government and other stakeholders to realise the square.

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