

Item 7.

Traffic Treatment - Pedestrian Boulevard - George Street South, Sydney

File No: X027274

Summary

The City of Sydney's Sustainable Sydney 2030 strategic plan identifies George Street as the central spine of the city centre. The vision for George Street is a pedestrianised boulevard designed to provide a focus for public life in the city centre with light rail connecting three city squares – Circular Quay, Town Hall and Central Station.

The City's Community Recovery Plan in response to the Covid-19 pandemic includes actions to continue the acceleration of the capital works program to upgrade city streets, parks and playgrounds; work with the NSW Government on city management initiatives such as mobility and transport, temporary footpath widening, cycleways, change signal timing, lower speed limits, travel demand planning and reprioritisation of roads; and invest in the pedestrianisation and activation of south George Street.

George Street, between Hunter and Bathurst Streets, has had traffic treatments installed to close the road to general traffic and convert it into a pedestrian boulevard following the introduction of the CBD and South East Light Rail (CSELR).

To continue the pedestrian boulevard, it is proposed to install traffic treatments to close the road to general traffic and widen the footpath of George Street between Bathurst Street and Railway Square.

The proposed extension of the pedestrian boulevard of George Street includes footpath widening, traffic changes and the permanent road closure of nearby streets.

This report recommends that Council approve the installation of traffic treatments associated with the proposed extension of the pedestrian boulevard of George Street.

Recommendation

It is resolved that Council, subject to the concurrence of the Central Sydney Traffic and Transport Committee, approve the following in Sydney and Haymarket:

- (A) installation of traffic treatments to close the southbound traffic lanes of George Street, between Bathurst Street and Rawson Place to general traffic;
- (B) installation of traffic treatments to close the northbound traffic lanes of George Street, between Ultimo Road and Bathurst Street to general traffic;
- (C) formalise the installation of traffic treatments to close Wilmot, Central and Barlow Streets at George Street to general traffic;
- (D) installation of traffic treatments to close Campbell Street, at George Street to general traffic, and make Campbell Street two-way between George and Pitt Streets;
- (E) installation of traffic treatments to close Hay Street, between George and Sussex Streets to general traffic;
- (F) installation of traffic treatments to close Thomas Street, at Hay Street to general traffic, and making Thomas Street two-way between Hay Street and Ultimo Road;
- (G) restricting Ultimo Road to one-way westbound from George to Quay Streets; and
- (H) removal of the “No Right Turn” restriction in Valentine Street at George Street.

Attachments

- Attachment A.** Concept Design and Local Access Plan
- Attachment B.** Item 36 of the Local Pedestrian, Cycling and Traffic Calming Committee (LPCTCC) 19 November 2020
- Attachment C.** Community Engagement Summary and Analysis Report dated 30 October 2020

Background

1. Prior to the introduction of the CBD and South East Light Rail, George Street, between Bathurst Street and Railway Square, had six lanes of traffic with intermittent parking on both sides of the street.
2. From mid-2016 to mid-2019, temporary road closures and traffic detours were implemented in George Street for the construction of the CBD and South East Light Rail.
3. The southbound lanes of George Street, between Bathurst and Campbell Streets, remained closed to traffic as services for the CBD and South East Light Rail commenced in December 2019 (L2 Randwick Line) and April 2020 (L3 Kingsford Line).
4. On 8 May 2020, the NSW Government announced a trial to extend George Street's car-free zone to Rawson Place in response to Covid-19. The trial was implemented on 20 July 2020.
5. During the construction of the CBD and South East Light Rail and the car-free zone trial, parking and traffic changes have been implemented in surrounding streets to service and provide access to properties.
6. The proposal to install treatments to close these roads to traffic and widen the footpath of George Street to extend the pedestrian boulevard, will improve pedestrian access and provide opportunities for outdoor dining and the installation of trees and street furniture.
7. The proposed traffic treatments to close George Street to general traffic will reduce the number of conflicts between drivers and trams at intersections along George Street. To improve pedestrian safety in the proposed pedestrian boulevard, the speed limit of trams will need to be reduced from 40km/h to 20km/h. Despite the reduction of the speed limit, journey times for trams are expected to improve due to the reduced number of conflicts with drivers and opportunities to optimise the phasing of traffic signals.
8. Cleansing, construction, freight and servicing vehicles are encouraged to utilise off-street and on-street parking to service businesses, properties and future developments. For special deliveries, vehicular access to George Street via the tram tracks and stopping in the proposed pedestrian boulevard will be permitted subject to approval from the City, Transport for NSW and the Light Rail operator.
9. Emergency vehicles will be permitted to access George Street via the tram tracks and stop in the proposed pedestrian boulevard under flashing lights.
10. The proposed traffic treatments to close Thomas Street at Hay Street will prevent drivers from using Thomas Street as a shortcut from Sussex Street to Harris Street and eliminate conflicts between drivers and trams on the L1 Dulwich Hill Line. This would improve the amenity of the area and journey times for pedestrians and trams.
11. The proposed changed traffic arrangements will require drivers to travel on alternative routes and lead to changed restrictions in some streets as noted in this report.
12. On 7 October 2020, a Traffic Management Plan for the traffic treatments and traffic changes was approved by Transport for NSW.

13. Approval has been sought from the Central Sydney Traffic and Transport Committee out of session. Council's approval of the traffic treatments is subject to concurrence from the Central Sydney Traffic and Transport Committee.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030

14. 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 plan is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 3 - Integrated Transport for a Connected City - The proposal invests in walking infrastructure that encourages more people to walk when travelling within the city; enhances the amenity of the city centre; and provides accessible infrastructure.
 - (b) Direction 4 - A City for Walking and Cycling - The proposal extends the network of accessible, safe and connected walking paths that is integrated with green spaces; facilitates the movement of people walking; and encourages and increases the number of people walking.
 - (c) Direction 5 - A Lively and Engaging City Centre - The proposal creates safe and attractive public spaces for people to meet, rest and walk during the day and night; provides a city centre with diverse uses and experiences; supports innovative, creative, retail, hospitality, tourism and small business activity; and creates places for cultural activity, creative expression and participation.

Risks

15. Drivers will need to travel on alternative routes to access and egress properties. For special deliveries, vehicular access to George Street via the tram tracks and stopping in the proposed pedestrian boulevard will be permitted subject to approval from the City, Transport for NSW and Light Rail Operator.

Social / Cultural / Community

16. The repurposed traffic lanes will become additional public spaces which may be used for cultural activities such as outdoor dining, busking or festivals.

Environmental

17. The closure of vehicular lanes to traffic creates the opportunity for additional street tree planting which will positively contribute to the City's tree canopy cover targets.

Economic

18. Several businesses have expressed interest in creating outdoor dining areas in the redundant traffic lanes. This is positive step towards post-pandemic economic recovery.

19. The extra space created through traffic treatments and traffic changes will provide opportunities for businesses to re-engage with the public and boost their turnover to aid economic recovery. Pre-Covid-19, 1.3 million pedestrians used the City's streets every day and this project will stimulate local businesses along the street and increase economic activity, which is much needed in Sydney's CBD with current Covid-19 impacts.

Financial Implications

20. There are sufficient funds in the 2020/21 capital works budget and future year forward estimates for the George Street South Pedestrianisation project.
21. Ongoing maintenance costs for the proposed pedestrian boulevard are not expected to exceed existing costs to maintain the current trafficable road.

Relevant Legislation

22. Transport for NSW is responsible for the control of traffic on all NSW roads and has delegated to Council certain functions to regulate traffic on local roads.
23. Transport for NSW delegation gives Council authority to approve traffic changes under Part 8, Division 2 of the Roads Act 1993.
24. This delegation can only be exercised by the elected Council and is subject to a number of conditions and limitations, including the advice of Council's Local Pedestrian, Cycling and Traffic Calming Committee.
25. The traffic treatments are proposed pursuant to Section 116 of the Roads Act 1993.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

26. A construction contract was approved by Council on 26 October 2020. A delay to the formal road closure process could affect the construction program. Construction is due to commence in February 2021.

Public Consultation

27. In accordance with Section 116 of the Roads Act 1993, a notice for the proposal was published in the Sydney Morning Herald on Wednesday 23 September 2020. The proposal was also published on the City's website with 14,471 letters and 184 emails sent to local residents and businesses in the area. Local businesses and residents were also invited to join the project team for a walk on George Street on 23 September and 13 October, to hear an update on the plans and next steps. Consultation for the proposal closed on 21 October 2020.

28. An external consultant reviewed all comments received on the proposal's Concept Design, Local Access Plan and Review of Environmental Factors. To complete the analysis, the consultant read each comment received and organised them into themes and topics based on the points made. Some comments contained multiple points, relevant to multiple topics, resulting in many comments being allocated to multiple topics. Please refer to Attachment C for the Community Engagement Summary and Analysis Report.
29. The proposal received a total of 431 comments with 247 comments supporting the proposal, 103 comments opposing the proposal, 61 neutral comments and 20 mixed comments - feedback that was a mix of supportive, unsupportive and neutral. All comments have been forwarded to Transport for NSW pursuant to Section 117 of the Roads Act 1993.
30. The comments supporting the proposal welcomed the opportunity to improve pedestrian access, the local amenity and outdoor activation and dining.
31. The neutral comments suggested improving access for cyclists and provide footpath widening on the southern side of Ultimo Road between George and Thomas Streets. The City is reviewing the cycling network in and around the project area to address the wider connection needs.
32. The mixed comments provided suggestions to improve the design, cycle access and general access and parking.
33. The main issues raised by people who were not supportive included parking, access to properties, limited access for cyclists and impacts to the community during construction.
34. A parking plan for the proposal will be developed as part of the detailed design should approval be granted. The City will consult affected residents and businesses on the parking plan during the detail design phase before it is considered by the Local Pedestrian, Cycling and Traffic Calming Committee.
35. Concerns were raised about access to and from properties in George Street, between Rawson Place and Pitt Street, and Thomas Street. Drivers will be required to travel on alternative routes to access properties. The City will work with stakeholders and Transport for NSW to investigate options to allow drivers in vehicles under six metres to turn left from George Street into Pitt Street at certain times of the week.
36. According to the Road Rules 2014, it is illegal for cyclists to ride in the tramway and on the footpath. The City will work with Transport for NSW to develop options to improve local access for cyclists.
37. Should approval be granted to construct the proposal, the City will work with the local community to minimise impacts during construction. The City and Contractor's Community Liaison Officer along with the project teams will ensure the community is regularly updated and their issues are addressed.
38. The proposal has been amended to provide footpath widening on both sides of Ultimo Road between George and Thomas Streets.

39. The proposal was endorsed by the Local Pedestrian, Cycling and Traffic Calming Committee at their meeting on 19 November 2020 and has been provided to the members of the Central Sydney Traffic and Transport Committee for out of session endorsement.

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