

Laneways Revitalisation Program Review

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Summary

In 2007, prominent Danish architect Jahn Gehl, a world leader in people centred urban design, completed the "Public Spaces and Public Life" report for the City of Sydney. This report included a review of the city centre with recommendations to improve pedestrian connectivity and quality of the public domain, setting the stage for the laneways revitalisation program.

A program to revitalise the city's laneways was subsequently endorsed by Council in March 2008. The program consisted of several initiatives including process mapping, small business grants and a capital works program. The program is focused on 58 laneways located within the Central Sydney planning control area.

The program focused on city centre laneways and identified nine laneways for priority upgrade works. These included: Angel Place, Ash Street, Albion Lane, Bulletin Place, Central Street, Wilmot Lane, Hosking Place/Penfold Lane, Lees Court and York Lane. Upgrade works to all lanes have been completed with the exception of York Lane which was deferred due to upgrade works at Wynyard Station and Lees Court which is being upgraded in conjunction with the MLC refurbishment currently underway.

To date, a total of twenty-five (25) lanes in the Central Sydney planning control area have been upgraded. These include Abercrombie Lane, Albion Place, Angel Place, Ash Street, Bridge Lane, Bulletin Place, Central Street, Customs House Lane, Douglass Lane, Eagar Lane, Factory Street, Gas Lane, Hosking Place, Kimber Lane, Loftus Lane, Little Hay Street, Market Row, Nithsdale Lane, Rowe Street, Skittle Lane, Sussex Lane, Tankstream Way, Temperance Lane, Thomas Lane and Wilmot Street.

This program delivers on the Sustainable Sydney 2030 vision to transform the city centre to a lively and engaging place and creates more quality space for people at the heart of our City.

In 2013, the laneways program was reviewed to better align with the delivery of the light rail project and transformation of George Street. Completion of the light rail project in July 2020, private sector developments and other public domain works have resulted in a transformation of the much of the city centre.

This report recommends a revised priority list of ten (10) laneway upgrades to align with recent changes in the city centre and maximise opportunities to activate the Central Sydney.

Recommendation

It is resolved that Council:

- (A) note that since the development of the Central Sydney Laneways Revitalisation Program in 2008, a total of 25 lanes have now been upgraded; and
- (B) endorse a revised list of priority laneways for the Central Sydney laneways that will guide the Laneways Revitalisation Program in the future.

Attachments

- Attachment A.** Laneways Program Staging Map - September 2021
- Attachment B.** Laneway Priority Projects
- Attachment C.** Photos of Selected Completed Works

Background

1. In 2007, prominent Danish architect Jahn Gehl, a world leader in people centred urban design, completed the "Public Spaces and Public Life" report for the City of Sydney. This report included a review of the city centre with recommendations to improve pedestrian connectivity and quality of the public domain, setting the stage for the laneways revitalisation program.
2. A program to revitalise the city's laneways was subsequently endorsed by Council in March 2008. The laneways revitalisation program comprised several initiatives including a Capital Works program which was endorsed in June 2009. This was supported by the "Fine Grain Review" completed by Six Degrees in November 2010, which identified key recommendations to improve the form and vitality of the city centre.
3. The program focused on city centre laneways and identified nine laneways for priority upgrade works. These included: Angle Place, Ash Street, Albion Lane, Bulletin Place, Central Street, Wilmot Lane, Hosking Place/Penfold Lane, Lees Court and York Lane
4. Upgrade works to the original priority laneways have all been completed with the exception of York Lane which was deferred due to upgrade works at Wynyard station and Lees Court which is being upgraded in conjunction with the MLC refurbishment currently underway.
5. In February 2012, Council endorsed priorities for the conversion of some city centre laneways into shared zones with upgrade works to align with the transformation of George Street into a pedestrian boulevard as part of the delivery of the CBD and South East Light Rail project.
6. To date, a total of twenty-five lanes in the Central Sydney planning control area have been upgraded, including eight of the original prioritised lanes. Six of the upgraded lanes have been completed by developers.
7. These include Abercrombie Lane, Albion Place, Angel Place, Ash Street, Bridge Lane, Bulletin Place, Central Street, Customs House Lane, Douglass Lane, Eagar Lane, Factory Street, Gas Lane, Hosking Place, Kimber Lane, Loftus Lane, Little Hay Street, Market Row, Nithsdale Lane, Rowe Street, Skittle Lane, Sussex Lane, Tankstream Way, Temperance Lane, Thomas Lane and Wilmot Street.
8. The light rail was completed in July 2020 and the adjacent public domain handed back to the City. The City is also currently extending the George Street pedestrian boulevard from Town Hall to Central Station. Furthermore, private sector developments in response to the transformation of George Street have resulted in public domain upgrades on or near George Street. It is timely therefore that the laneways program be reviewed in response these changes and the many laneways already completed since 2008.

Recommended Priorities

9. The first group of priorities are based on identified opportunities and needs associated with completed George Street transformation, the George Street south pedestrianisation works currently underway or development renewal of city precincts.
 - (a) Barlow Street;
 - (b) St Laurence Lane;
 - (c) Curtin Place;
 - (d) Hamilton Street;
 - (e) Little Hunter Street;
 - (f) Underwood Street; and
 - (g) Dalley Street.
10. The 'Barlow Street Forest' located off George Street, between George Street and Parker Lane, is a temporary artwork by the artists collective "Dirt Witches" that was implemented in January 2021 as part of a temporary laneways art and AI Fresco Sydney program to encourage and support a return to the CBD after the Covid-19 pandemic lock down of 2020.
11. The 'Barlow Street Forest' is a landscape installation that replicates a Banksia Forest in the heart of the city. The installation has received overwhelming support from the public with over a dozen requests to retain the 'forest' as a permanent installation.
12. Barlow Street forms a natural extension to the laneways program. With the extension of the George Street pedestrianisation south to Central Station there is an opportunity to support a permanent landscape installation in the western section of Barlow Street. Consultation with Transport for New South Wales will be undertaken to maintain emergency access in developing a permanent design for Barlow Street.
13. Upgrade works to St Laurence Lane would provide opportunities for local business and encourage pedestrian activity, given the new light rail stop in Rawson Place at the end of the laneway.
14. Curtin Place is located directly off George Street and the western section of the lane has recently been upgraded and converted to a shared zone as part of the public domain works associated with the adjacent development at 280 George Street. Together with Hamilton Street and Little Hunter Street, these lanes form a network of lanes and pedestrian connections between George and Pitt Street.
15. Underwood and Dalley Streets located in the vicinity of the Quay West Quarter will build upon and support public domain improvements in the precinct. The City has entered into planning agreements under which it has received contributions for improvements of these laneways and adjacent public domain.

16. The second group of priorities are based on identified opportunities around the redevelopment of Wynyard Railway Station and the new Metro Railway Station at Central:
 - (a) Randle Lane;
 - (b) York Lane; and
 - (c) Wynyard Lane.
17. Randle Lane is adjacent to the new Metro pedestrian portal on the eastern side of Central Station. It will have high pedestrian volumes in the vicinity.
18. York and Wynyard Lanes are adjacent to the upgraded development at Wynyard Station. There is an opportunity to further revitalise and activate these laneways once the redevelopment works are complete.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030

19. 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 program is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 4 - A City for Walking and Cycling - The Central Sydney laneways provide a network of cross city connections for pedestrians within the CBD.
 - (b) Direction 5 - A Lively and Engaging City Centre - The laneways program provides better quality spaces, improves the fine grain character of the city and creates opportunities for small retail spaces.
 - (c) Direction 7 - A Cultural and Creative City - The laneways provide opportunities for public art and opportunities for creative and cultural events within the hidden and forgotten spaces of the CBD.

Organisational Impact

20. Delivery of the projects will require a multi-disciplinary team of project managers, designers, and contract managers to prepare work packages for approval and construction.

Risks

21. Many of the laneway works are time dependent on other projects or developments. Staff will continually review the program to coordinate timing.

Social / Cultural / Community

22. International case studies and examples have shown that improved pedestrian amenity is likely to bring substantial economic and public domain benefit to the city.
23. The creation of a pedestrian network within the city will encourage walking and reduce congestion.

24. Associated public domain improvements will improve amenity, safety and liveability within the city and provide increased opportunities for outdoor events and activities.

Environmental

25. An improved network of lanes will increase pedestrian connectivity within the city and encourage visitors to walk, cycle or use public transport. This will assist Council to achieve its target for reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

Economic

26. International studies have shown that there have been significant benefits in terms of increases in new tenancies, retail rents and turnovers in cities where similar projects have been undertaken.
27. Increases in pedestrian activity will improve the potential for viable footway cafes and passing trade. The provision of a connected network of lanes that encourage pedestrians will provide opportunities for small scale low rent tenancies and associated start-up businesses.

Financial Implications

28. The current Laneways Revitalisation Program has a budget allocation of \$15.47 million in future years. It is proposed that the listed laneway priorities be delivered within the allocated program budget.

Relevant Legislation

29. Works will be completed in accordance with existing regulations and in accordance relevant Australian Standards and Council policies.
30. Applications for shared zones/ slow zones/ timed closures will be in accordance with the Roads Act 1993.
31. Tenders for construction works will be conducted in accordance with Local Government Act 1993 and Local Government (General) Regulation 2005 and the City's Contracts Policy.

Public Consultation

32. Regulatory advertisements and notifications as required under section 116 of the Roads Act 1993 will be undertaken for the approval of shared zones/ slow zones and timed closures.
33. Stakeholder consultation will be undertaken with all affected stakeholders during concept design and prior to detailed design and documentation of any proposed works.
34. Standard City of Sydney protocols regarding construction will be followed. Project information will be provided and updated on a regular basis on the City website.

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