

Item 7.

Town Hall Public Domain Plan

File No: X018638

Summary

This report recommends that the Town Hall Public Domain Plan (the Plan) be adopted by Council and seeks endorsement on recommended project priorities to undertake stakeholder consultation, feasibility and design development.

The Town Hall public domain precinct is defined as the area between Liverpool Street to the south, Harbour Street and the Western Distributor to the west to Druitt Street, George Street to King Street in the north, and Elizabeth Street to the east.

The Plan highlights many issues including congested footpaths, the need for more public space for dwelling, too much through traffic, and the need for increased greening to respond to a hotter climate.

Addressing these issues will require space reallocation of streets from a primarily traffic and parking function to provide more space for people to walk, cycle, stay and accommodate tree canopy.

The Town Hall Public Domain Plan provides a coordinated response for improvements for streets and public spaces in the precinct. This response is based on the informing principles and directions set out in Sustainable Sydney 2030 and Public Space Public Life 2007 and 2020.

The proposals are not fully developed or resolved designs but are intended to illustrate potential design directions to particular streets and spaces within the precinct to stimulate conversation and engagement with stakeholders in particular Transport for NSW about the future direction of the area.

Stakeholder engagement and further feasibility assessment in particular with Transport NSW will be used to develop the Plan and guide the City's long term planning and capital works programming.

Park / Druitt Street and Pitt Street are identified as project priorities recommended to commence advocacy, feasibility and design development.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council adopt the Town Hall Public Domain Plan as shown at Attachment B to the subject report;
- (B) Council note that the recommended project priorities require further advocacy, consultation, feasibility assessment and design development in collaboration with Transport NSW to inform future capital works budgets to be adopted by Council; and
- (C) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to make minor amendments to the Public Domain Plan arising from stakeholder consultation and feasibility assessments.

Attachments

Attachment A. City Centre Public Domain Precincts

Attachment B. Town Hall Public Domain Plan

Background

1. The Town Hall public domain precinct is defined as the area between Liverpool Street to the south, Harbour Street and the Western Distributor to the west to Druitt Street, George Street to King Street in the north, and Elizabeth Street to the east.
2. The Town Hall Public Domain Plan is part of a broader City Centre Public Domain planning process whereby the City is divided into eight precincts. (Attachment A)
3. Each precinct's streets and public space is studied to develop a series of projects to both significantly increase the quantity and improve the quality of the city centre public domain. This is in line with Sustainable Sydney 2030 directions to create a Lively and Engaging City Centre.
4. A key objective in the development of the City Centre Public Domain Plans is to rebalance space allocation of streets to provide more room for people to walk, cycle and stay.
5. Plans completed to date are Chinatown Public Domain Plans (2010 and 2015), Harbour Village North 2012, George Street 2013 and City North 2015.
6. A City South Public Domain Plan has also been prepared (subject of a separate Council report).

Town Hall Public Domain Plan

Planning context

7. Sustainable Sydney 2030 and the key informing document Public Space Public Life 2007 included the idea of a pedestrianised George Street linked by city squares at Circular Quay, Town Hall and Central Station.
8. The Public Space Public Life Study was recently updated in 2020 and again reinforces the importance of continuing a public domain quality agenda to support the growth, competitiveness and environmental resilience of the city.
9. The Town Hall precinct will be subject to future change with increased development and opening of Sydney Metro stations in 2024.

Development of Public Domain Plan

10. Development of the Study involved collaboration between City staff and informing plans and studies.
 - (a) Sustainable Sydney 2030;
 - (b) Public Space Public Life 2007 and 2020 - Gehl;
 - (c) Town Hall Precinct Public Domain Plan Streetscapes Study (Draft) 2020 - HASSELL; and
 - (d) Town Hall Precinct Urban Design Study 2017 - Gehl.

City Centre Transformation

11. The Plan builds on the transformation of city centre undertaken over previous years. This includes:
 - (a) George Street transformation creating a new civic spine connecting Circular Quay and Central Station;
 - (b) twenty-six laneway upgrades;
 - (c) substantial investment in public transport by State government including light rail and future Sydney Metro;
 - (d) rollout of new public domain furniture and improved wayfinding signage;
 - (e) rollout of more granite paving to achieve a more consistent footpath quality;
 - (f) planting additional street trees in the city centre; and
 - (g) planning controls delivering design excellence outcomes for built environment.

Issues

12. Although much has been achieved, issues confronting the city centre including the Town Hall precinct are:
 - (a) growth - increasing pedestrian numbers are putting pressure on narrow footpaths;
 - (b) need for additional public space for people to gather and socialise;
 - (c) the Metro station precinct will increase concentration of people using public domain to interchange between modes and access stations;
 - (d) traffic including buses still dominate and dictate the management of most streets in the city centre; too many streets are serving the same purpose primarily for vehicular traffic and parking;
 - (e) disconnected cycleways in the city centre inhibit the uptake of cycling from all sectors of the community; and
 - (f) climate action requires a rethink on public space provision to accommodate additional tree canopy and greening.

Covid-19

13. Covid-19 has reinforced the necessity of public space to support healthy, equitable and financially viable city centres. The pressure for redistributing street space for high capacity transport, walking, cycling and public transport is further increased through the demand for more space to enable safe social distancing.

Response of the Plan to Issues

14. To increase the amount of available public space, a key objective in the development of the Town Hall Public Domain Study is to rebalance space allocation of streets to provide more room for people to walk, cycle and stay, as well as accommodate additional tree canopy.
15. The Plan uses the directions in Public Space Public Life 2020 to provide a framework for public domain improvements. They are:

A green and cool city

16. The Plan is aligned with the City's leadership in environmental sustainability and climate action with recommendations to maximise tree canopy and greening linkage improvements between city, parklands and harbour.

A protected heart

17. The transformation of the city centre requires a systemic and structural transport and traffic rethink to create opportunities for road space reallocation to provide more space for people to walk, cycle and stay, as well as for green infrastructure. Key to achieving this in the Town Hall Precinct is a review of Park Street and Pitt Street, as well as progress on public spaces including Sydney Square and delivery of Town Hall Square.

A city for all

18. This direction is focussed on ensuring the public domain public spaces are welcoming for all with an emphasis promoting social inclusion.

City identity

19. This direction is focussed on ensuring a high quality, connected and legible public domain. For the Town Hall precinct this includes:
 - (a) spines and squares - reiteration of the Public Space Public Life Study 2007 idea of the George Street spine linked by squares at Circular Quay, Town Hall and Central Station. Town Hall Square provides critical space for people to gather for both everyday life and larger events;
 - (b) clear street hierarchy - capitalise and expand on George Street pedestrianisation and create a distinct street hierarchy with transformation of additional east-west and north-south streets to more pedestrian orientated and green streets. Park Street and Pitt Street have been identified in the Study as having merit for further feasibility assessment and design development; and
 - (c) celebrate place and enhance special character areas - continuation of public domain planning that is sensitive to place including recognition of First Nations People through design, use of special materials and public art.

Project proposals and opportunities

20. Projects underway or in advanced design development include:
 - (a) George Street South pedestrianisation project - currently under construction.
 - (b) Castlereagh Street north cycleway (from Liverpool Street to King Street) and streetscape improvements - a joint City and state government project with design development and consultation underway.
 - (c) King Street cycleway (from Pitt Street to Phillip Street) - a joint City and state government project with design development underway and consultation about to begin.
21. The study includes various public domain opportunities for the streets and public spaces to facilitate consultation with the community and stakeholders. High level images and sketches have been used to illustrate design concepts for each street and space to communicate possible design directions for improvements.
22. These proposals are not fully worked designs but are rather intended to inform and to be the basis for advocacy, technical and feasibility assessment and collaboration with state agencies to achieve successful outcomes.
23. Identified project opportunities and proposals include:
 - (a) Town Hall Square;
 - (b) Sydney Square upgrade;
 - (c) Park / Druitt Street upgrade - a new green boulevard;
 - (d) Pitt Street - a green thoroughfare for activation and dwelling connecting Central to the Harbour;
 - (e) Castlereagh Street short term cycleway and long term upgrade;
 - (f) Bathurst Street upgrade;
 - (g) Market Street upgrade;
 - (h) Elizabeth Street upgrade;
 - (i) King Street upgrade and extension of cycleway from Clarence Street to Pitt Street; and
 - (j) project overlays - rollout of granite paving, street furniture, and wayfinding signage to lift public domain quality in accordance with the City's public domain palette.

Project development and delivery

24. To achieve the Plan's project outcomes partnership and collaboration with State agencies will be imperative - in particular, measures to change traffic and access arrangements. The efficient functioning of the city, including servicing and loading, will also be a prime consideration in developing the project proposals.

25. Stakeholder engagement and further feasibility assessment will be used to guide the City's long term planning and capital works programming.

Project priorities for feasibility and design development

26. The recommended project priorities to commence stakeholder engagement, feasibility assessment and development resolution are as follows:
 - (a) Park / Druitt Street upgrade - supporting the transport interchange precinct around Town Hall Station and the new Pitt Street metro station with a new east-west green boulevard.
 - (b) Pitt Street upgrade - connecting the interchange precinct with the creation of additional space for activation and vibrancy, supporting businesses and people using and enjoying space by providing a north-south green street with space for stopping, dwelling, dining.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030

27. 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 report is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 1 - A Globally Competitive and Innovative City - the Plan promotes a public domain quality agenda that supports the 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 Plan supports the City's environmental actions, in particular increasing space available for tree canopy.
 - (c) Direction 3 - Integrated Transport for a Connected City - the Plan supports efficient public transport modes such as Sydney Metro through provision of wider footpaths, wayfinding and public domain legibility.
 - (d) Direction 4 - A City for Walking and Cycling - the Plan promotes a rethink of street space allocation to promote better conditions for walking and cycling.
 - (e) Direction 5 - A Lively and Engaging City Centre - the Plan advocates for a welcoming public domain that encourages people to stay and enjoy as well as measures that support a diverse 24-hour city economy.
 - (f) Direction 7 - A Cultural and Creative City - the Plan promotes the importance of a diverse cultural offer and public art for city identity and encourages people to come to the city for leisure beyond work and business activities.
 - (g) Direction 9 - Sustainable Development, Renewal and Design - the Plan advocates for built development and public domain to be exemplars of sustainability.

- (h) Direction 10 - Implementation through Effective Governance and Partnerships - it will be imperative for State government and private sector collaboration to implement the Plan's recommendations as most require a rethink of road space allocation and traffic management managed by State agencies.

Risks

28. All recommendations and actions in the Plan will require a project scoping and feasibility assessment process that will identify risks and mitigation measures prior to any implementation stage proceeding. Many of the recommendations require Transport for NSW support, approval and ongoing collaboration for a successful outcome.

Social / Cultural / Community

29. The Plan includes as a strategic direction "A City for All" which recognises the importance of the public domain to bring people together, with ideas of co-creation of public space outcomes, and need for ongoing public life data collection to ensure an evidence-based approach to public domain planning.

Environmental

30. The Plan is aligned with the City's environmental actions, in particular the need for more space to increase tree canopy and greening.

Economic

31. The Plan's focus on delivering public domain quality and liveability is a key contributor to the competitiveness of cities to do business and attract investment.

Financial Implications

32. The City's long term financial plan has budget allocations for capital works for Castlereagh Street cycleway and associated streetscape improvements.
33. The King Street cycleway between Pitt and Phillip Streets, is fully funded by the Federal and NSW Governments.
34. The recommended project priorities require further advocacy, consultation, feasibility assessment and design development in collaboration with Transport NSW to inform future capital works budgets to be adopted by Council.

Relevant Legislation

35. Project delivery will be in accordance to relevant planning and approval legislation and regulations including Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 and Roads Act 1993.

Options

36. Council may choose to identify other project priorities for investigation as part of the development and adoption of the Long Term Financial Plan.

Public Consultation

37. The Plan has drawn on extensive community engagement process for the preparation of Sustainable Sydney 2050. The main themes identified by this process - a city that is green with quality public space, is easy to walk and cycle in, and responds to climate change - have informed the development of the project proposals and opportunities.
38. An intercept survey undertaken in September 2018 is aligned with Sustainable Sydney 2050 consultation in people wanting a greener city that is more pedestrian friendly.
39. Consultation on the Plan has been undertaken with the Design Advisory Panel.
40. It is recommended that the Plan be placed on the City's website and the informing principles and public domain proposals and opportunities be a basis for advocacy and consultation to key stakeholders in particular Transport for NSW , as well as to undertake further feasibility assessment and design development.
41. Individual projects will be subject to separate consultation and stakeholder engagement process in the future which will be reported to Council with recommended project scope for Council approval.

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