

Attachment C

Communications and Engagement Summary Report

Engagement report - Loftus Street, Customs House Lane & Reiby Place



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Overview

Background

The City North Public Domain Plan outlines ideas for the part of central Sydney north of King Street and east of George Street, including a master plan for Martin Place.

As part of the City North Public Domain Plan, the City proposes to upgrade Loftus Street, Reiby Place and Customs House Lane – including pedestrianising Loftus Street north of Reiby Place, upgrading the Loftus Street roadway south of Reiby Place, paving Customs House Lane and footpath extension works in Reiby Place.

The project aims to improve pedestrian safety, access and amenity, reduce through traffic, and maintain servicing and deliveries for surrounding businesses.

Engagement summary

Between February and March 2022, City staff met with a number of key stakeholders to seek early feedback on the proposal, prior to the development of a concept design.

The purpose of the early engagement was to understand servicing and delivery requirements of properties affected by the project, as well as any other issues or impacts.

Stakeholders also provided information on how the area is currently used, and ideas and opportunities for the area in the future.

This report outlines the community engagement activities that took place and summarises the key findings from the consultation.

Purpose of engagement

- To seek early input from stakeholders on the proposal
 - To understand stakeholder issues, service requirements and project impacts
 - To capture feedback to help inform the development of a concept design
 - To capture all relevant contact with stakeholders
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Outcomes of engagement

Early engagement activities included a series of stakeholder meetings, included individual briefings both face-to-face and online with affected stakeholders.

Engagement activity table

Quantity	Description of activity
35	Individual stakeholders consulted
10	Key stakeholder briefings were held

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Quantity	Description of activity
1	Submission received via letter
5	Stakeholder emails received

Key findings

Stakeholder sentiment

The below table is a snapshot of stakeholder sentiment towards the proposal, and the percentage of stakeholders who expressed this sentiment.

Snapshot of stakeholder sentiment

Quantity	Proposal sentiment
86%	Support the proposal
0%	Do not support the proposal
14%	Did not specify

Overall, stakeholders were overwhelmingly supportive of the proposal. Eighty-six percent (86%) of stakeholders consulted raised their support for the project. No stakeholder raised opposition to the proposal.

Those who volunteered their support for the proposal mentioned it is consistent with their vision for alfresco dining and activating Loftus Street. Stakeholders also raised their interest in working together with the City on a masterplan for the area, including outdoor dining and other activations.

“We are enthusiastic about the prospect of increased high quality public space at Circular Quay and appreciate the opportunity to share our feedback and views.” stakeholder comment.

“We are very excited about the future plans for the City North precinct and see great merit in the public domain project here.” stakeholder comment.

Stakeholder issues

Overview of key issues

The below table is a snapshot of common issues or impacts raised from consultation with affected stakeholders, how often it was raised.

Snapshot of stakeholder issues

Quantity	Stakeholder issue
71%	Lack of parking for loading / deliveries
57%	Pedestrian safety and Customs House Lane
57%	Access for events
43%	Communication and project timelines
29%	Antisocial behaviour / homelessness
29%	Congestion in Loftus Street / Reiby Place / Pitt Street
14%	Cleansing and waste

Lack of parking for loading / deliveries

The lack of available loading zones in the area, particularly on Loftus Street was raised as a key issue for surrounding stakeholders. Stakeholders commented that the loading zones on Loftus Street are utilised all day by building contractors/tradies, and this is inhibiting deliveries to their property and impacting their business.

Customs House and Café Sydney receive high volume of deliveries each day. The restaurant kitchen can receive 45-60 deliveries between 6am and 11.30am, including large trucks that deliver water pallets and linen; the library receives deliveries multiple times a day, and the venues are used for a variety of events, including weddings, requiring large deliveries (such as AV, flowers, music/bands).

Stakeholders with designated loading docks also mentioned the need to retain loading zones on Loftus Street, but their main concern was to ensure access to their delivery docks and waste collection bays are maintained. The need to maintain access for large trucks in and out of the loading docks on Reiby Place was also raised, given the City's proposal includes extending the footpath along Reiby Place. The City will check truck movements in and out of these driveways.

Loading zones are beneficial for smaller deliveries occurring via trolley from Loftus Street and reduce congestion in loading docks and in Reiby Place. It was noted that the Loftus St/Reiby Pl/Pitt St loop can be very slow and congested with traffic, taxi drop offs in Loftus Street, and deliveries. This is a concern for stakeholders, particularly once the precinct is back to full capacity.

Stakeholders also rely on street parking for trades and technicians who service surrounding businesses.

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Stakeholders were interested in understanding how loading in the precinct would work following the public domain works proposed.

Comments included:

“No one is monitoring trades and they are parking all day in this location.” stakeholder comment.

“We would like to understand further the options that will remain for street parking and loading as we feel the area that public domain replaces does function quite heavily to allow street loading, pick and parking so how will this be provided once removed.” stakeholder comment.

Pedestrian safety and Customs House Lane

Another key concern for stakeholders is pedestrian safety in Customs House Lane resulting from the increase in vehicle traffic using the laneway, especially at night.

Traffic changes in Loftus Street have caused confusion around vehicle access in/out of Loftus Street and Customs House Lane. Vehicles also travel at high speed through Customs House Lane, which is a danger to pedestrians.

Stakeholders raised concern for Customs House and Café Sydney patrons exiting via Customs House Lane at night into traffic, and for people needing to use the intercom and access the delivery dock roller door on Customs House Lane.

“We strongly agree with the paving of the Lane to discourage regular vehicle traffic as we have observed pedestrians crossing or traversing the Lane are often unaware of or don’t expect approaching vehicles. It will improve the walkability of the laneways and encourage through pedestrian traffic to Customs House from the south, Young Street and Loftus Street.” stakeholder comment

“Cars, particularly at night are speeding down the lane... Historically there was minimal traffic in this area – there were bollards, which of course meant that no one was using the lane to traverse between Loftus and Young Streets.” stakeholder comment

Additional lighting and temporary art installations were suggested to help improve visibility and safety at night and would also help activate the precinct.

Access for events

Stakeholders also commented on the many major events and festivals in and around Circular Quay that require access onto Alfred Street, Gateway Plaza and Customs House Square, including VIVID and New Year’s Eve. The proposal should not impede access for these events.

The need to coordinate construction with major events such as VIVID 2023 was also raised.

Communication and project timelines

Stakeholders requested clear timelines and project updates, to help them plan activities and mitigate disruption. Should the proposal go ahead, construction should minimise disruption and not block access to any property/business. Minimising disruption is of particular importance considering the amount of disruption from ongoing construction in the area over the last several years.

Antisocial behaviour / homelessness

Some stakeholders noted an increase in the number of homeless at night and an increase in anti-social behaviour on Alfred Street outside Customs House Lane.

Additional lighting and temporary art installations were suggested to help improve safety at night and would also help activate the precinct.

It was noted the City's proposal aims to improve pedestrian safety, access and amenity, and provide opportunities to activate the area in the evenings.

Congestion in Loftus Street / Reiby Place / Pitt Street

Traffic congestion caused by vehicles stopping at Reiby Place/Loftus Street, including taxis and uber drop offs was raised as another issue. A lot of pedestrians use the crossing at Reiby Place/Loftus Street, and stakeholders raised safety concerns for pedestrians at this crossing.

Feedback included making it clear who has right of way and a clear delineation between the road and footpath/shared zone.

Suggestions included preventing vehicles stopping near the crossing and providing a drop-off/lay-by area nearby. Providing a drop off zone is discussed further in the "Drop off zone to improve accessibility" section of this report.

Investigating widening the Reiby Place footpath on the southern side was also suggested.

Pitt Street is one-way and closed at Alfred Street, therefore traffic from numerous developments and construction works in Pitt Street are directed down Reiby Place. Stakeholders commented that this causes congestion in Loftus Street and Reiby Place, and requested the City consider how Pitt Street is used as part of the proposal.

Cleansing and waste

The Customs House forecourt is steam cleaned every night. There are a number of access points onto Alfred Street (including Young St, Pitt St, George St North and Loftus St).

Comments included considering an appropriate sealant for pavers to prevent food stains, and noting a grease trap exists in the Customs House bin room, and a commercial waste room in Customs House loading dock.

City waste collection occurs three times a day, currently via Loftus Street. New electric buggies are planned to collect pedestrian waste bins, which are 2 metres wide, and can hold 2 tonnes rubbish.

However, there needs to be an area to park a larger waste vehicle in the precinct, noting a rubbish container cannot be carried more than 10 metres as per WHS requirements. Suggested locations included Young Street at Customs House, or Loftus Street.

Stakeholder ideas

Overview of key ideas

The below table is a snapshot of common ideas and suggestions raised from consultation with affected stakeholders, how often it was raised.

Snapshot of stakeholder ideas

Quantity	Stakeholder suggestion
86%	Making Loftus Street two-way (Reiby Place – Bridge Street)
43%	Outdoor dining opportunities
29%	Activating Loftus Street south
29%	Infrastructure to accommodate activations
14%	Drop off zone to improve accessibility

Making Loftus Street two-way (Reiby Place – Bridge Street)

A large majority of stakeholders were in favour of making Loftus Street two-way between Reiby Place and Bridge Street to improve safety and reduce congestion in the area.

Pedestrian safety in Customs House Lane is a key stakeholder concern, due to the high volume of traffic currently using the laneway.

Converting Loftus Street to two-way vehicle traffic would enable Customs House Lane to be closed to vehicles and would improve pedestrian safety in the laneway.

Traffic congestion in Loftus Street / Reiby Place / Pitt Street was also highlighted as a key issue. Enabling two-way traffic in Loftus Street between Reiby Place and Bridge Street would reduce the number of vehicles using Reiby Place and help ease congestion in the narrow street.

Outdoor dining opportunities

A number of stakeholders expressed interest in the potential for outdoor dining on Loftus Street following the proposal to pedestrianise the area.

One stakeholder expressed displeasure with the length of time to get outdoor dining approval.

Feedback included:

“As the city has experienced over the last two years, there is high demand in Sydney CBD for outdoor dining and the benefits that it has beyond the commercial benefit to the cafes and restaurants.”

“Outdoor dining, done well, makes a public space vibrant and attractive, slows down pedestrian movement, draws both workers and leisure visitors to enjoy the public domain and creates a neighbourhood feel.” stakeholder comment

Providing the right infrastructure for activations was also raised, and this is discussed further in the 'Infrastructure to accommodate activations' section of this report.

Activating Loftus Street south

A number of stakeholders expressed their interest in activating Loftus Street and look forward to the further pedestrianisation proposed in the street. The City's grant opportunities were raised as a good way for stakeholders to collaborate with the City on activations.

Comments included:

"We understand the aspirations of City of Sydney to create a great public domain at Circular Quay and for that reason we are planning to collaborate on regular events to connect Loftus Street to the Customs House Forecourt and Quay Quarter Lanes...."

"Other Australian and overseas capitals such as Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and New York all have extremely popular temporary or semi-permanent growers or farmers markets in the city centre. These are very well attended by workers, locals, residents and become a sought-after attraction and driver of visitation for international visitors keenly interested in experiencing outdoor food culture.." stakeholder comment

Infrastructure to accommodate activations

Incorporating the necessary infrastructure at the outset to accommodate activations and events (such as farmer's markets and alfresco dining) was raised by stakeholders interested in activating the precinct.

Requests included numerous access points for 3 phase power, water access and drainage considerations, embedded footings for shade structures, and sound/speakers and lighting.

This infrastructure was seen to ensure a high standard of execution and public experience.

The need to provide shade for active uses to be successful was discussed during stakeholder conversations, ideas included trees or umbrellas, however these should not restrict access to loading docks.

Comments included:

"We believe that the best outdoor dining precincts offer a mix of both public seating and seating for diners, shade for all on hot days and inclement weather and green planting to soften the space and reduce the heat island effect."

"Provisioning for lighting and power access at the outset, ensures these spaces are well executed and minimalist. Points of history or local stories can be embedded into the street furniture and infrastructure. King Street in Albion Brisbane, is an excellent contemporary example of how this can work well." stakeholder comment

Drop off zone to improve accessibility

Another stakeholder suggestion included a drop off zone at the entrance to Reiby Place to improve accessibility, particularly for the mobility impaired and families with prams, and reduce congestion.

This would provide convenience, safety and ensure that flow through traffic along Reiby Place does not become congested.

Comments included:

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“We anticipate this could be a popular “drop off” zone for accessing Quay Quarter Lanes, Gateway, Customs House and Circular Quay more generally, particularly during busy city events and by rideshare and taxi drivers looking to avoid the buses in Young and Phillip Streets.”

“Additionally, it would mitigate against the use of Loftus Lane as an “unofficial” loading zone. We would like to understand further the options that will remain for street parking and loading as we feel the area that public domain replaces does function quite heavily to allow street loading, pick and parking so how will this be provided once removed.”
stakeholder comment.

Next steps

Upcoming community engagement

Feedback received during early engagement conversations with key stakeholders has been compiled and discussed in this engagement report.

This feedback will help inform the City's proposal and the development of a concept design.

Further consultation with key stakeholders, including the emergency services (NSW Police, Fire & Rescue and NSW Ambulance) to discuss access requirements, is also planned.

The City will formally consult key stakeholders and the wider community on the concept design, local access plan and Review of Environmental Factors later this year.

