

Project Scope - George Street North Pedestrianisation

File No: X089792

Summary

The City of Sydney's Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision 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 included 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 north George Street.

George Street, between Hunter Street and Railway Square, 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 Hunter Street and Alfred Street.

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

Extensive community consultation was undertaken from 10 October to 16 November 2022 with a notice for the proposal was published in the Sydney Morning Herald on Monday 10 October 2022, and on Wednesday 19 October 2022. The proposal was also published on the City's website with 4,965 letters and 255 emails sent to local residents, property owners, and businesses in the area. City staff doorknocked 40 surrounding businesses and held 32 individual briefings with affected stakeholders. Business leaders and industry groups were also invited to a briefing on the proposal hosted by the Lord Mayor on 10 November 2022.

This report recommends that Council endorse the scope of works for Stage 1 permanent pedestrianisation works – Hunter to Essex Streets, and the installation of the associated traffic treatments as describe in this report. A separate report will be submitted to Council for endorsement of the permanent Stage 2 permanent pedestrianisation works – Essex to Alfred Streets in approximately 12 months, following further development of options and community consultation.

The work proposed will complete the vision for a 2.5km civic boulevard outlined in Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vison and the Gehl's Public Space and Life Study 2007 and 2020.

Recommendation

It is resolved that Council:

- (A) endorse the scope of works for the George Street North Pedestrianisation between Hunter Street and Essex Street as described in the subject report and as generally indicated in Attachment A to the subject report for progression to detailed design, documentation and construction of works;
- (B) note the financial implications as outlined in Confidential Attachment F to the subject report; and
- (C) approve the following traffic changes, subject to approval processes in accordance with the requirements of the Roads Act 1993, noting that the Local Pedestrian Cycling and Traffic Calming Committee will consider the traffic changes at meetings held on 8 December 2022:
 - (i) installation of traffic treatments to close the southbound traffic lanes of George Street, between Essex Street and Hunter Street to general traffic;
 - (ii) installation of traffic treatments to close the northbound traffic lanes of George Street, between Hunter Street and Essex Street to general traffic;
 - (iii) installation of traffic treatments to close Margaret, Jamison, Bond, Dalley and Hunter Streets at George Street to general traffic;
 - (iv) installation of traffic treatments to change the direction of Wynyard Lane from southbound to northbound;
 - (v) installation of a shared zone on Margaret Street between Wynyard Lane and Carrington Street and traffic treatments to change the direction of Margaret Street from two-way to one-way westbound between Wynyard Lane and York Street;
 - (vi) installation of traffic treatments to change the direction of Wynyard Street from two-way to one-way eastbound;
 - (vii) installation of traffic treatments to change the flow of traffic on Jamison Street from one-way westbound to two-way;
 - (viii) installation of traffic treatments to change the flow of traffic on Bond Street west of the Australia Square car park from one-way westbound to two-way;
 - (ix) installation of traffic treatments to improve the geometry of the Bridge and Grosvenor Streets intersection;
 - (x) installation of traffic treatments to improve the intersection performance at Grosvenor and Harrington Streets; (K) installation of traffic treatments to improve the intersection performance at Margaret and Carrington Streets;
 - (xi) installation of traffic treatments to improve the intersection performance at Lang, York and Jamison Streets;

- (xii) installation of traffic treatments to improve the intersection performance at George and Essex Streets;
- (xiii) removal of the “No Right Turn” 6.30am – 10.00am, 3pm – 7pm Mon-Fri” restriction on Grosvenor Street (westbound) into Harrington Street;
- (xiv) removal of the “No Left Turn” restriction on York Street (southbound) to Jamison Street;
- (xv) removal of the “No Right Turn” restriction on George Street (southbound) to Essex Street; and
- (xvi) removal of the “No Right Turn 6.30am – 9.30am, 3pm – 7pm Mon-Fri” restriction on Margaret Street (eastbound) into York Street.

Attachments

Attachment A. George Street North Concept Design

Attachment B. Local Access Plan

Attachment C. Photomontage

Attachment D. Engagement Report

Attachment E. Response to Submissions

Attachment F. Financial Implications (Confidential)

Background

1. In 2007, Gehl Architects made the recommendation to transform the full length of George Street into a pedestrian boulevard in their Public Spaces, Public Life study. Adopted as a project idea in Sustainable Sydney 2030 vision in 2008, the City in partnership with the NSW Government was able to realise the vision for George Street between Hunter and Bathurst Streets as part of the CBD and South East Light Rail (CSELR).
2. The CBD and South East Light Rail from Circular Quay to Randwick and Kingsford was opened to the public in stages in December 2019 and April 2020.
3. The City contributed \$220 million to the project for public domain upgrades and improvements, which included pedestrianisation of Alfred Street between Loftus and George Streets, pedestrianisation of George Street between Hunter and Bathurst Streets and other public domain improvements in Surry Hills.
4. Introduction of the CBD and South East Light Rail through Sydney's city centre has facilitated the removal vehicular traffic off Sydney's George Street spine and its city centre.
5. The pedestrianisation of George Street has attracted investment in private development adjacent to and surrounding George Street.
6. Prior to the introduction of the CBD and South East Light Rail (CSELR), George Street, between Hunter Street and Alfred Street, had four lanes of traffic.
7. 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 .
8. Traffic on George Street, between Hunter and Alfred Streets, remained open 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).
9. On 8 May 2020, the NSW Government approved a trial proposed by the City to extend George Street's car-free zone to Rawson Place in response to Covid-19. The trial was implemented on 20 July 2020.
10. During the construction of the CBD and South East Light Rail and the car-free zone trial, parking and traffic changes were implemented in surrounding streets to service and provide access to properties.
11. The George Street South project has made the car-free trial zone permanent and is nearing completion. As well as improving pedestrian capacity and amenity, journey times for trams have substantially improved as a result of the project.

12. The proposed traffic treatments to close George Street North 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 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.

Scope of Works - Proposed Traffic Treatments

13. The scope of the proposed traffic treatments for George Street North are detailed below:
 - (a) Installation of traffic treatments to close the southbound traffic lanes of George Street, between Essex Street and Hunter Street to general traffic.
 - (b) Installation of traffic treatments to close the northbound traffic lanes of George Street, between Hunter Street and Essex Street to general traffic.
 - (c) Installation of traffic treatments to close Margaret, Jamison, Bond, Dalley and Hunter Streets at George Street to general traffic.
 - (d) Installation of traffic treatments to change the direction of Wynyard Lane from southbound to northbound.
 - (e) Installation of a shared zone on Margaret Street between Wynyard Lane and Carrington Street and traffic treatments to change the direction of Margaret Street from two-way to one-way westbound between Wynyard Lane and York Street.
 - (f) Installation of traffic treatments to change the direction of Wynyard Street from two-way to one-way eastbound.
 - (g) Installation of traffic treatments to change the flow of traffic on Jamison Street from one-way westbound to two-way.
 - (h) Installation of traffic treatments to change the flow of traffic on Bond Street west of the Australia Square car park from one-way westbound to two-way.
 - (i) Installation of traffic treatments to improve the geometry of the Bridge and Grosvenor Streets intersection.
 - (j) Installation of traffic treatments to improve the intersection performance at Grosvenor and Harrington Streets.
 - (k) Installation of traffic treatments to improve the intersection performance at Margaret and Carrington Streets.
 - (l) Installation of traffic treatments to improve the intersection performance at Lang, York and Jamison Streets.
 - (m) Installation of traffic treatments to improve the intersection performance at George and Essex Streets.
 - (n) Removal of the "No Right Turn 6.30am – 10.00am, 3pm – 7pm Mon-Fri" restriction on Grosvenor Street (westbound) into Harrington Street.

- (o) Removal of the “No Left Turn” restriction on York Street (southbound) to Jamison Street.
- (p) Removal of the “No Right Turn” restriction on George Street (southbound) to Essex Street.
- (q) Removal of the “No Right Turn 6.30am – 9.30am, 3pm – 7pm Mon-Fri” restriction on Margaret Street (eastbound) into York Street.

Scope of Works - Permanent Pedestrianisation Works

14. The scope of permanent pedestrianisation works include:
 - (a) Removal of existing temporary water-filled traffic barriers, kerbs and bollards currently used as part of temporary street closures.
 - (b) Demolition and removal of existing kerbs, gutters, asphalt and base course in roadway.
 - (c) Construction of new concrete slabs and sub-bases to accommodate footpath extensions across former roadways and new granite paving.
 - (d) Installation of new granite paving (new paving will be trafficable).
 - (e) Installation of stormwater drainage under existing kerbs.
 - (f) Installation of new flush trench grates in line with existing gutters.
 - (g) Modification of existing pit lids to suit new public domain levels.
 - (h) Associated traffic signalisation works.
 - (i) Installation of additional City of Sydney street furniture.
 - (j) Tree planting.
15. The scope of permanent pedestrianisation works does not require the following:
 - (a) Light rail shutdown.
 - (b) Contamination and site remediation.
 - (c) Replacement of existing footpath slabs and pavers.
 - (d) Smartpole replacement or relocation and low voltage electricity network upgrades and relocations.
16. 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.
17. Emergency vehicles will be permitted to access George Street via the tram tracks and stop in the proposed pedestrian boulevard under flashing lights.

18. The proposed traffic treatments to close Margaret, Bond, Jamison, Dalley and Hunter Streets will require drivers to use alternative routes as noted in this report. This would improve the amenity of the road closures and journey times for pedestrians and trams.

Local Pedestrian, Cycling and Traffic Calming Committee

19. The Transport for NSW (RMS) delegation to councils limits the types of prescribed traffic control devices and facilities that a council can authorise and imposes certain conditions on councils. One of these conditions requires councils to refer all traffic-related matters to its traffic committee prior to exercising its delegated functions.
20. The Local Pedestrian, Cycling and Traffic Calming Committee (LPCTCC) considers the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and motorists in the City of Sydney.
21. The Local Pedestrian, Cycling and Traffic Calming Committee has no decision-making powers. It is primarily a technical review body which is required to advise Council and City staff on traffic-related matters. Council and City staff are therefore not bound or required to implement a proposal supported by the Local Pedestrian, Cycling and Traffic Calming Committee. Any proposal supported by the Local Pedestrian, Cycling and Traffic Calming Committee must be approved by either the elected Council or authorised City staff (depending on the nature of the proposal) if it is to be implemented. This can only be done when the advice of the Committee is unanimous. Where the advice of the Committee is not unanimous, Council must separately notify and obtain the endorsement of Transport for NSW and NSW Police.
22. The proposed traffic treatments for George Street North have been submitted for endorsement by the Local Pedestrian, Cycling and Traffic Calming Committee on 8 December 2022.

Central Sydney Traffic and Transport Committee

23. The primary function of the Central Sydney Traffic and Transport Committee is to coordinate transport policy and major transport related works between the City of Sydney and the NSW Government.
24. The Central Sydney Traffic and Transport Committee reviews and approves certain projects within the Sydney CBD having a significant impact on public roads, road related areas, traffic or transport in the whole or any part of the Sydney CBD.
25. The proposed traffic treatments for George Street North have been submitted for out of session approval by the Central Sydney Traffic and Transport Committee.
26. A Review of Environmental Factors was completed in October 2022 for the project.
27. The road closures indicated in Attachment A between Hunter Street and Bridge Street will be implemented on a temporary basis on 9 January 2023. A treatment to the road surface in the form of the Pride (Progress) Flag is being investigated as part of the temporary closure in January 2023.
28. The permanent construction works will be done in two phases, Hunter to Essex Street, followed by Essex to Alfred Street. Approval is only being sought at this stage to implement the first phase between Hunter Street and Essex Street on a permanent basis.

29. Further consultation and design development will occur for the section of George Street between Essex and Alfred Streets. This is being staged due to construction activities around the Alfred Street precinct.
30. Transport for NSW have been actively involved in the development of this concept and have provided in-principle approval of the project. Concurrence of Transport for NSW will be confirmed through the Local Pedestrian, Cycling and Traffic Calming Committee on 8 December 2022.
31. A Traffic Management Plan for the project is currently being assessed by Transport for NSW.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

32. Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision renews the communities' vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2050. 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 - Public places for all - The proposal creates new, accessible public spaces within the city; and enhances the amenity of the city centre.
 - (b) Direction 5 - A city for walking, cycling and public transport - The proposal invests in walking infrastructure that encourages more people to walk and dwell when travelling within the city; enhances the amenity of the city centre; improves public transport operational performance and provides accessible infrastructure.

Risks

33. Drivers will need to travel on alternative routes to access and egress properties. For special deliveries and construction, 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

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

Environmental

35. 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

36. The additional public 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.

Financial Implications

37. The Long Term Financial Plan includes capital project funding for the pedestrianisation of George Street North, as set out in Confidential Attachment F. The assumed funding is 50:50 share between the City and the NSW Government of the total project budget.
38. To date, the Minister for Infrastructure, Cities, and Active Transport has committed \$3 million in funding of "in-kind work" by Transport for NSW for the project.
39. Whilst there are sufficient funds in the 2022/23 capital works budget for project costs incurred this financial year, the total project funding shortfall will need to be considered by Council as part of the development of the next iteration of the City's Long Term Financial Plan.
40. Ongoing maintenance costs for the proposed pedestrian boulevard are not expected to exceed existing costs to maintain the current trafficable road.
41. Financial implications are outlined in Confidential Attachment F.

Relevant Legislation

42. 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.
43. Transport for NSW delegation gives Council authority to approve traffic changes under Part 8, Division 2 of the Roads Act 1993.
44. 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.
45. The traffic treatments are proposed pursuant to Section 116 of the Roads Act 1993.
46. Local Government Act 1993 - Section 10A provides that a council may close to the public so much of its meeting as comprises the discussion of information that would, if disclosed, confer a commercial advantage on a person with whom the council is conducting (or proposes to conduct) business.
47. Attachment F to the subject report contains confidential information which, if disclosed would confer a commercial advantage on a person with whom the Council is conducting (or proposes to conduct) business.
48. Discussion of the matter in an open meeting would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest because it would compromise Council's ability to negotiate fairly and commercially to achieve the best outcome for its ratepayers.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

49. The temporary road closures between Hunter Street and Bridge Street are due to be implemented on 9 January 2023.

50. Permanent construction works between Hunter Street and Essex Street are scheduled to commence in November 2023.

Options

51. An option is not to implement the proposed scope of works and allow the current traffic arrangements at George St north to continue. This is not recommended as it does not deliver on the endorsed Community Strategic Plan directions.

Public Consultation

52. In accordance with Section 116 of the Roads Act 1993, a notice for the proposal was published in the Sydney Morning Herald on Monday 10 October 2022, and on Wednesday 19 October 2022. The proposal was also published on the City's website with 4,965 letters and 255 emails sent to local residents, property owners, and businesses in the area.
53. City staff doorknocked 40 surrounding businesses and held 32 individual briefings with affected stakeholders.
54. Business leaders and industry groups were also invited to a briefing on the proposal hosted by the Lord Mayor on 10 November 2022.
55. A detailed engagement report is included at Attachment D.
56. Responses to the key themes raised in the George Street north pedestrianisation community engagement campaign is included at Attachment E. Feedback was sought from face-to-face consultations with key stakeholders, a Lord Mayor's peak body Stakeholder Forum, door-knocking local businesses, and an online community survey,

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