

19 December 2022

SUBMISSION: CITY NORTH | PUBLIC DOMAIN PLAN

About Business Sydney

Business Sydney is the voice for business in Sydney. We represent more than 100 leading business, community and government organisations and are vocal advocates in advancing the economic, social, environmental and cultural life of Sydney, and Sydneysiders.

To create better opportunities to work, live, visit and invest our city, we believe good planning is key. In this light, we're keen to contribute a business perspective on City of Sydney's ideas for the City North area.

City North

As a precinct, City North is core to how Sydney looks and feels.

Bordered to its north by world-famous Sydney Harbour and the transport and tourist hub of Circular Quay, it's home to a vibrant mix of international hotels, heritage buildings and large corporate headquarters. The area also accommodates myriad smaller businesses, including cafes, bars and restaurants, which make an important contribution to the economy.

Pedestrian safety – particular around the two new Metro stations – is vitally important. So too is bigger-picture planning to ensure a consistent approach to building on the area's strengths. But a cohesive plan for traffic must also be part of the picture. Clear routes for vehicles are essential for public safety and to ensure the precinct can accommodate the full range of commercial activities that will shape its character as a thriving hub into the future.

Our view

The City of Sydney's draft City North Public Domain plan gets a lot of things right. Among other things, it:

- promotes safe access for commuters and other visitors by improving pedestrian access around the proposed Hunter Street Metro station
- creates a focal point for the area, expanding the public square in front of Customs House
- increases summer shading, and updates the look and feel of Martin Place
- contributes to the emerging character of City North by planting more trees and introducing a more consistent approach to signage, paving and street furniture.

However, there are also a number of points of concern:

- The important west–east vehicular link between the emerging western CBD of Barangaroo and Macquarie Street, the Royal Botanic Gardens and The Domain may be at risk under the plan.
- People with disabilities, older people and those with prams – who cannot easily access or use public transport and/or navigate the steep streets characteristic of the area – may not be adequately supported by the City’s vision.
- Allowances for vehicular circulation may not be adequate. Taxis, rideshares, ambulances, fire trucks, police vehicles, and courier and other delivery vehicles all need fast and direct access to large hotels, corporate headquarters and smaller businesses like restaurants, cafes and bars to ensure the area remains safe and is viable for a range of commercial activities.
- Street closures and the introduction of one-way streets could inadvertently shift existing traffic bottlenecks to other areas.
- Some recently completed landscaping works do not make the best use of the limited space available in the CBD (see Figure 1). We are keen to ensure that these sorts of mistakes are not repeated in City North.



Figure 1: Seating between the bike path and footpath along Castlereagh Street is unlikely to be used and takes away valuable space from vehicles and/or pedestrians.

Specific points by street

George Street

Removing through-traffic from the southern end of George Street (Railway Square to Hunter Street) to open up the street for light rail and encourage more foot traffic has been a success and is generally supported by our members.

However, careful consideration is needed to ensure that further pedestrianisation of George Street (Hunter Street to Circular Quay) doesn't block west–east traffic flows through City North. Doing so may inadvertently shift existing bottlenecks from this area to other parts of the city.

In this regard, the plan needs more detail about the Bridge Street and Grosvenor Street crossings over George Street. We strongly support maintaining them as important cross-city links between the western CBD, City North and Macquarie Street.

Gresham and Bent streets

We broadly support the widening of footpaths and beautification works on Gresham and Bent streets and support the additional pedestrian crossing on Gresham Street at Loftus Street – as long as vehicular access is wide enough for larger delivery, service and emergency vehicles to navigate these streets safely.

Hunter Street

Closure of Hunter to through-traffic between Pitt and George streets

We support this aspect of the proposal as it is necessary to ensure the safety of the greater number of pedestrians around the new Metro station.

Widening of Hunter Street footpaths between Pitt and Castlereagh streets, reducing the existing two-way street to a one-way street for vehicular traffic

- We have significant concerns that the introduction of a one-way street may make it difficult for vehicles to navigate City North. Vehicles affected include:
 - taxis and rideshares – which are essential to ensure that people of all abilities can access the area, and which support the operation of the Overseas Passenger Terminal
 - couriers, delivery trucks and other vehicles – which service businesses of all sizes to keep the area alive and thrumming
 - emergency vehicles – including the ambulances, police cars and fire trucks that protect the wellbeing of the public.

Closure of O'Connell Street (at the intersection with Hunter Street)

We broadly support this proposal as it increases the amount of shaded green space available to those who live, work or visit the City North precinct.

Widening of footpaths in sections of Hunter Street between Castlereagh and Elizabeth streets

- We broadly support the plan's aim to improve safety around the Metro City & Southwest station entry by widening footpaths.
- We have significant concerns about reducing this section to one-way westerly traffic.

Pitt Street Mall

We note the proposed extension of Pitt Street pedestrian mall between King Street and Martin Place is in early planning stages only but look forward to contributing to further discussion on this part of the proposal.

Martin Place

We support the beautification works, including the planting of an avenue of deciduous trees to create shading, and the introduction of benches and flexible, moveable seating.

In summary

We applaud City of Sydney for its work to safely accommodate the surge in pedestrians expected when the two new Metro stations open in the area.

However, to support the commerce and tourism that make the area – and the larger CBD – the vibrant and exciting place it is to work, live and visit, we believe the City North Public Domain Plan for the precinct must more carefully consider:

- how delivery and other business service vehicles, taxis, rideshares and emergency vehicles will practically navigate the street closures and additional one-way sections of Hunter Street proposed by the plan
- cross-city vehicular circulation, in particular the role City North's streets play in connecting the emerging western CBD (Barangaroo) with heritage-rich Macquarie Street and Sydney's leafy lungs (the Royal Botanic Gardens and The Domain).

Warm regards



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