

23 October 2020



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Dear Ms Kalnins,

Proposed pedestrianisation of George and Devonshire Street

Sydney Business Chamber is dedicated to creating, advocating, and promoting Sydney as a City of Opportunity – a global city to invest, work, live and visit. A division of Business NSW, formerly NSW Business Chamber, Sydney Business Chamber represents over 145 leading corporations and through our work we drive the economic growth, prosperity, and sustainability of our great City.

The Chamber values the opportunity to comment on the proposed pedestrianisation of George Street and Devonshire Street. George Street is the most important commercial street in Australia. It provides a range of economic, cultural, social, and transport functions and each of these functions need to be carefully balanced. George Street is also a place, a place that deserves specific and special treatment and consideration.

The Chamber supports Sydney City Council's aim to re purpose George Street as a pedestrianised boulevard. As Sydney CBD has developed it has outgrown the transport and movement arrangements and patterns established in the 1960's and 70's and has transitioned to become almost solely reliant on public and active transport modes for mobility and access to and throughout the district.

The introduction of the CBD/South East Light rail is the latest iteration of this transition process. The incorporation of a new public mode of transport has been instrumental and a valuable driver for the repurposing and redesign of the public realm away from serving private vehicle use towards pedestrian and cycling mobility. The move to prioritising active transport, however, needs to be carefully balanced with the critical economic and logistics functions thoroughfares like George Street provide. We appreciate the efforts Council has been making to work to get this balance right.

As Council moves to the detailed design stage of the draft Pedestrian Plan, we recommend Council consider the following issues before it is fully implemented.

1. Access for service and maintenance vehicles

In reviewing the draft Access Plan, we are concerned that access for service and maintenance vehicles will be largely limited to times when the Light Rail is not operating (1.00 am-5.30am). While in most cases this is manageable from a business perspective, there will be times when access is required outside of these hours and it unclear how this will be appropriately managed. We therefore recommend that a detailed and clear process of securing safe access be established in partnership with Council, Transport for NSW and the operators of the Light Rail prior to the current road closures are made permanent.

This access arrangement should be determined in consultation with affected businesses and landowners in advance of any changes to access. Further, any access service should be provided free of charge and not included in Council's schedule of fees and charges. Council should also consider permitting limited access during periods of low pedestrian activity and when the Light Rail operations are limited, such as between 5.30am and 7.00am. This mirrors the valuable arrangements that operate elsewhere in the Sydney CBD, notably in the Pitt Street Mall.

2. Business consultation

In relation to the specific access arrangements for this city block, we recommend that Council conduct a further consultation program with affected property owners and businesses when the detailed designs are being finalised. While Council has trialled these arrangements for several months, this trial was during the early stages of the Covid pandemic lock down, when many of the businesses were closed. It is possible that the indicative 'freight and service' areas may need to be reconsidered when normal business operations are considered, and this potential should be tested. We also note that the city block between Liverpool and Goulburn Streets currently has no dedicated freight and service areas which may need further consultation with business to ensure suitable access.

3. Adjoining streets and lanes

While we support the aim of this proposal to remove all loading zones along George and Devonshire Streets, it is critically important that these are replaced along adjoining streets and lanes. These should be clearly identified and communicated to business and stakeholders well in advance of any permanent closure of George Street to service vehicles.

4. Staged implementation

The proposed pedestrianisation of George and Devonshire Street is a significant intervention and will have a substantial impact on the urban fabric of the CBD. To ensure the new arrangements are workable for businesses and tenants and unintended consequences are avoided we recommend that Council adopt a two staged implementation process.

The Chamber recommends that Council consider an implementation plan that installs the permanent street furniture and street trees in twelve months. This would allow the use of the widened footpaths as a 'shared zone' for commercial and service vehicles during periods of low demand while limiting any impact on the Light Rail service. Should this process work as planned then more permanent measures can be implemented, including street furniture, trees, planter boxes and footway dining licences.

5. Emergency services

It is currently unclear how emergency services and vehicles are to be managed under the Proposal. As Council is no doubt aware it is critically important that emergency vehicles do not obstruct the Light Rail operations for routine inspections and callouts. Greater clarity and communication of emergency service access is recommended.

6. Neighbouring streets

Improving the amenity and vibrancy of George Street should not come at the expense of neighbouring street scapes and congestion on these neighbouring streets. The displacement of so many vehicles has the potential to cause undue and unintended consequences. The Chamber recommends that the impact on neighbouring streets be monitored closely.

7. Railway Square and Broadway

The pedestrianisation of George Street opens the opportunity to fix some of the many amenity and traffic issues around the Railway Square and Broadway area. The section of Broadway from Wattle St to George Street currently contains eight lanes for traffic and consideration should be given to rebalancing the amount of land dedicated to vehicles and instead cater for active transport through measures including wider footpaths and dedicated bike lanes. This would support local businesses through increased foot traffic and improved access and enhanced quality of the public domain.

Similarly, many of the traffic lanes through Railway Square should be repurposed for active transport. The growth of the Ultimo/Camperdown Education Precinct in recent years has seen a dramatic increase in

pedestrian movements through these areas and this will only further increase with the development of the new Tech Central precinct. The Chamber recommends that the principle approach of prioritising pedestrians should extend to these areas of Railway Square and Broadway to improve amenity and business opportunities.

As the leading voice for business in Sydney, Sydney Business Chamber supports the proposed pedestrianisation of George and Devonshire Street. The recommendation outlined seeks to ensure that the design and delivery of this significant change to the urban fabric of the City supports the City's economic growth.

Should you require further information please do not hesitate to contact me and I look forward to continuing to work with you on the detailed designs and implementation of this valuable proposal.

Yours sincerely



Katherine O'Regan
Executive Director
Sydney Business Chamber