

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 5 

A LIVELY, ENGAGING CITY CENTRE

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CITY CONTEXT

The City Centre has a unique natural setting



Few cities in the world enjoy a natural setting as spectacular as Sydney's. The series of peninsulas and coves and inlets provide a unique setting for a major city. Views to the water and the landscape beyond are a major selling point for the City Centre. The topography too is interesting with the City Centre positioned on two hills so that it offers constant surprises.

Source: Gehl Architects (2007) *Public Spaces / Public Life Sydney*, for City of Sydney, p.11

The City Centre has special significance for Indigenous Australians

When Arthur Phillip landed the First Fleet and chose Sydney Cove as the location for the new city he acknowledged attributes that had long been appreciated by the Indigenous Australians. Fresh water in the Tank Stream, a sheltered cove between Bennelong and Dawes Point and the views across the water made Circular Quay a popular spot for the Gadigal people of the Eora nation.



Sydney Harbour

The City Centre contains a positive legacy of open spaces, a street network, heritage and landmarks

Governor Macquarie and other administrators that followed in the 19th century did their best to formalise what was from early days a chaotic network of tracks and lanes. The street pattern was partly formalised into two irregular grids, and large open space areas were provided to the east (Hyde Park and the Domain). This legacy again provides the City with a special feel —streets with kinks, streets with vistas, streets up hills often terminating at the water or at the parklands.

Though many wonderful buildings have been lost, the heritage buildings make a critical contribution to the mix and feel of the City Centre. In addition to the historic buildings of the 19th century, and the commercial towers of the 20th century, which define the City's skyline, are the magnificent icons of the Opera House and the Harbour Bridge. These give Sydney and Australia an immediately recognisable image to the world.



Heritage buildings at Circular Quay



The Sydney Opera House

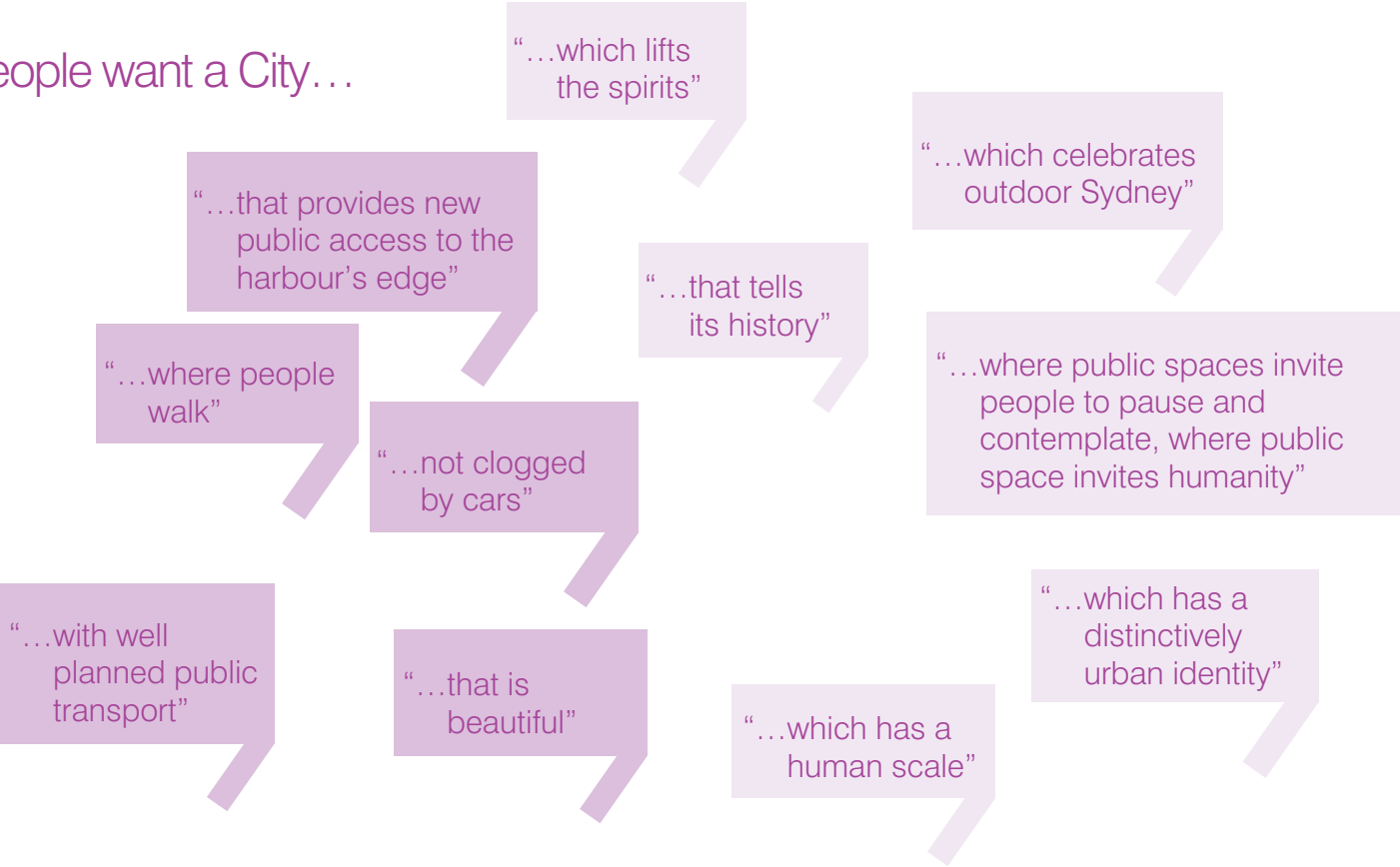
The City Centre has iconic status.

The City Centre is the focus for the wider Sydney metropolitan region and NSW in general. It contains capital city functions but is also the premier destination for retailing, entertainment and cultural activities. The City Centre is also a key destination for interstate and international visitors and its skyline and icons are recognised all over the world.

WHAT THE COMMUNITY SAID

The consultation undertaken for Sustainable Sydney 2030 revealed how attached the people of the City are to the City Centre. They acknowledge that it is the focus for business, cultural and recreational activity. They want to see its status preserved.

People want a City...

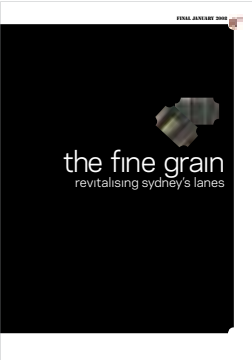


WHY ACTION IS NEEDED

Challenges facing the City

- 1 Protecting the City Centre's role as Australia's iconic location
- 2 Opening and re-connecting the City Centre to the water
- 3 Reclaiming the City Centre from traffic
- 4 Creating more and better spaces for people to enjoy the City
- 5 Preserving and extending the City's 'fine grain'—the small scale and diverse spaces providing for small retail and service tenancies, set in vibrant and attractive streets
- 6 Increasing life on the street
- 7 Creating a more diverse and mature night time culture

The City of Sydney has identified the need to ensure that central Sydney remains an attractive, lively, people-friendly and engaging place by commissioning two major reports—one on Sydney's Public Spaces, Public Life by Gehl Architects and one on Revitalising Sydney's Laneways by Six Degrees Architects.



A definition of 'fine grain'

Small scale and diverse spaces at street level, in lanes and basements and on the first floor of buildings, providing for small retail and service tenancies, set in vibrant and attractive streets. These small scale places with their mixed ownership and leasing patterns enable more organic changes to occur throughout the City and support businesses being able to 'have a go'.

Both identify the challenges and looming threats confronting the City Centre. Drawing from this material and other analysis, issues to be addressed include the following:

1. Protecting the City Centre's role as Australia's iconic location.

The City Centre—in particular the view of the water, Opera House, Harbour Bridge and skyline—has represented Australia as an iconic image. Sydney's icons have been enduring but need to be supplemented by fresh images and substance, as competition between cities intensifies—particularly around the Pacific Rim. China and other Asian countries are rapidly expanding their sophistication and attractions. There has been no great public investment in iconic Central City architecture or development in the last 20 years. New icons, new images and new depth to the City Centre are required.

2. Opening and re-connecting the City Centre to the water.

Despite its unrivalled setting, central Sydney offers generally poor access and connections to the water. The Western Distributor freeway system, the Cahill Expressway at Circular Quay, the legacy of wharves, many now converted to private dwellings and, in some cases, the topography of the shoreline, have restricted pedestrian movement from much of the waterfront. A great number of other cities in the world have made a point of enhancing waterfront access in renewal projects (as redundant industrial areas, wharves or docklands have become available). Direct competitors to Sydney such as Singapore, Hong Kong and in more recent times Melbourne and Brisbane have created lively, waterfront precincts—often with less attractive waterways to work with.

3. Reclaiming the City Centre from traffic.

The City Centre still offers traffic through-routes for vehicles with destinations elsewhere. Bus traffic is heavy and noisy. Service vehicles have relatively unregulated access to shops and businesses.

City Centre streets are largely undifferentiated, all playing a role as vehicular traffic corridors, service roads and parking locations. They have been allowed to fill with vehicular traffic so that conditions for other transport modes are poor. Pedestrian and cycling conditions are difficult.

The traffic and lack of distinction between the streets creates, as Gehl Architects note, 'a sense of indifference towards the individual streets, [they] are being perceived as insignificant—it is what they connect that is important.' Successful cities have calmed their City Centres, allowing the pedestrian and the cyclist to reclaim a place on the streets.

4. Creating more and better spaces for people to enjoy the City.

Sydney has some fine spaces—East Circular Quay, Martin Place and a number of smaller squares. Gehl Architects note, however, that 'the spaces are scattered, covering most of the City Centre, and the links in between are weak. There are few dedicated routes for promenading and no dedicated walking links between the various public spaces. Thus the small squares and pocket parks are not frequently visited'.² The danger is that the spaces become residualised and unattractive. This is a waste of a great public resource.

5. Preserving and extending the City's 'fine grain'—the small scale and diverse spaces providing for small retail and service tenancies, set in vibrant and attractive streets.

Both Gehl Architects and Six Degrees highlight the lack of attention to the City's street level experience and the City Centre's 'fine grain'. In particular, they note that there has not been a sufficiently discerning approach to building heights with the result that most parts of the City Centre are dominated by buildings higher than 10 storeys, with the streets often dark and in shadow or subject to wind tunnel affects. Six Degrees make the comparison with the Melbourne City Centre where taller buildings were allowed to reinforce the topography at the eastern and western ends but along the key shopping, transit and pedestrian spine of Swanston Street buildings were low-rise with the fine grain preserved. This varied approach has created a more distinct character in the different precincts of activity.

Six Degrees note, 'Over the last 30 or 40 years as the Sydney City Centre has developed from a medium-rise to a high-rise City, many of the activities at street level have disappeared. Part and whole blocks have been consolidated to create high-rise building sites with little success in retaining the small scale retail on the street and lane frontages.'³

Heights have been moderated only where there is a preponderance of heritage buildings—along Macquarie Street and in areas to the west of the Town Hall. Where the fine grain in Sydney exists, and particularly where it still enjoys solar access, it should be protected. Elsewhere it should, where possible, be restored. In particular precincts, notably in the commercial core where it is already compromised by tall buildings, it is not expected that solar access to streets should necessarily be restored. Large floorplate and tall buildings in these areas will be acceptable, so long as ground floor activation is prioritised.



6. Increasing life on the street.

Street level activities in the City Centre have tended to diminish as new developments create internal malls, internalise activities such as food courts and incidental retailing, or instead create large forecourt or foyer areas. Footpaths just become conduits for rapid movement between destinations or places to wait for the bus.

In Melbourne, simple but strict design principles for new development, and investment in quality paving, public art, street furniture and the public domain, combined with active al fresco café and dining licensing and policies, have re-activated life on the street.

7. Creating a more diverse and mature night time culture.

Although the City Centre contains a valued collection of cultural and theatre assets its other night life has tended to become homogeneous, and focused on large, drinking venues. As a result, night time in the City Centre is dominated by a narrow spectrum of leisure offerings. The City Centre's role at the heart of the Sydney Region's creativity, music, entertainment and night life is being diminished.



More than one million people gather to watch City of Sydney's New Year's Eve fireworks display

TOWARDS A LIVELY, ENGAGING CITY CENTRE

The City Centre should belong to everyone —young, old, locals, visitors, tourists, workers, business, residents. It should be a place where people want to congregate because they feel good, have their senses stimulated and their creativity encouraged. The City Centre should provide these opportunities, it should be a stage for the full range of human activity.

Sustainable Sydney 2030 has the following objectives

5.1	Strengthen the City's public domain identity and create more places for meeting, rest and leisure
5.2	Provide an activity focus for the City Centre worker and visitor communities
5.3	Manage and strengthen existing fine grain precincts in the City Centre
5.4	Increase the supply of small scale spaces for retail and small businesses on streets and lanes
5.5	Assist appropriate small businesses to locate and thrive in the City Centre
5.6	Support the development of diverse, new bars and restaurants in the City Centre

In their report on public life in the City Centre, Gehl Architects provide a range of insightful recommendations covering pedestrian, cycle and vehicular access and connections, public transport, identity and design and public spaces. The Gehl Report recommendations have been adapted and incorporated by City of Sydney to address the first of the above objectives, and generally elsewhere in Sustainable Sydney 2030. The Six Degrees report, commissioned by the City of Sydney to look at revitalising Sydney's laneways, is more directly confined and relevant to the agenda addressed in this Strategic Direction and the objectives—and associated actions—from this report are included in a slightly adapted form in the last four objectives listed above.

WHAT THE CITY OF SYDNEY IS ALREADY DOING

The City of Sydney is investing significantly in public spaces to encourage people to enjoy the City Centre

Festivals and Events

The City Centre plays host to a number of significant festivals and events that contribute to the vibrancy and cultural and economic vitality of the City. The City of Sydney plays an important role in facilitating, coordinating, managing and funding an annual program of high quality events including: Sydney's New Year's Eve, Chinese New Year Festival; Sydney Festival, Sydney Writer's Festival, Sydney Film Festival, Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, Art & About and the City's Christmas celebrations. In 2007 the City of Sydney produced the inaugural Live Green, a highly successful new event to promote practical environmental action and sustainable living which attracted an estimated 10,000 attendees.

Live Lanes

In 2007, following the Fine Grain Report from Six Degrees Architects, the City started a program to revitalise the laneways across the City Centre, with small bars, public art and quirky retail experiences.

Quality Urban Environment

The City of Sydney supports attractive high quality public domain and facilities in the City Centre. These facilities are designed to meet community needs with well maintained, clean, accessible and safe environments. The City of Sydney has a public works program of streetscape upgrades, tree plantings as well as upgrades to parks and open spaces to enhance public spaces.

In April 2007, the City of Sydney established a Design Advisory Panel to review major development proposals.

The Panel, drawn from Sydney's leading urban design, architectural and planning experts, helps to maintain high standards of design. It will guide development to improve the public domain and will ensure public and private projects achieve the City of Sydney's environmental commitments.

Introduced in 2007, the *Public Domain Landscaping Program* saw more than 3,000 square metres of new shrub planting introducing vibrant colour, texture and adding new life into public spaces. This helped enhance the thousands of square metres of new paving and kerbing throughout the City, which increases amenity for pedestrians through the City Centre.

The Living Colour program provides planter boxes, creating floral art pieces throughout the City Centre. New tree plantings and the protection of City trees through the extension of the Register of Significant Trees also contribute to a quality urban environment in the City Centre.

City Art

In 2006-07 the City of Sydney's began work on new *Public Art Policy*, *Public Art Strategy* and *Public Art Guidelines*. In 2007 a Public Art Advisory Group was appointed. The Group is providing expert independent advice in the selection of public artists, the commissioning of new public art projects, the management of existing works, and in the assessment of public art proposals in private developments. The City of Sydney is working with the Group to develop a creative framework for City Art



Darling Harbour is the site for many major sport and community fun events

Objectives & Actions

OBJECTIVE 5.1 Strengthen the City's public domain identity and create more places for meeting, rest and leisure

CITY NOW



Lack of distinctive streets.

Because the City Centre's streets have been allowed to converge in their function, with most providing car, bus, taxi and service vehicle access, they are generally no longer distinguished. Pitt Street Mall, which is pedestrianised, is different and it does provide a focus for retail life in the central part of the City. Elsewhere, however, the streets have become anonymous, with little to distinguish them. Gehl Architects note 'the streets now work as part of a big traffic machinery, where their main purpose is to deal with as much traffic as possible'.⁴

Lack of open space network.

Gehl Architects note that though there is a fair amount of open space in the City Centre (74,000sqm), the network of spaces is scattered and weakly connected. Again, the spaces are relatively undistinguished.

Dominated by noisy and polluting traffic.

The streets in the City Centre are often dominated by road traffic that can be noisy and polluting. This impacts on the amenity of the City Centre as a place for pedestrian movement, resting and enjoying other activities.

CITY IN 2030



A strong City identity—a central north-south spine linking major public squares.

A central spine linking three significant squares at Circular Quay, Town Hall and Central will be developed to create a stronger City identity. This will be a pedestrian and transit oriented spine to distinguish it from streets with other functions.

An inviting streetscape—a strong hierarchy of significant public spaces.

A more legible and coherent network of City Centre squares, plazas and open spaces will be created. These spaces will have a variety of characters and settings, and host a range of events and activities.

The City Centre is a designed public realm that is inclusive and encourages social interaction and harmony—children, young people, older people, people with disabilities, people who are homeless.

ACTION 5.1.1 Plan for a north-south central spine in the City Centre connecting three new squares at Circular Quay, Town Hall and Central, with priority for public transport, cycling and pedestrians.

The Gehl Architects report recommends the creation of a central spine linking three significant squares. The spine would combine public transport, pedestrian movement and cycling with vehicular traffic removed, and link new squares at Circular Quay, Town Hall and Central Station. The intention would be to better link public spaces along the spine, heighten the retail experience and encourage people to walk or 'promenade'. Candidates for the 'spine' include George, Castlereagh and Pitt Streets.

Further analysis and investigation is required to work toward this idea, in particular with the State Government. The future role of the monorail should be re-considered as part of these investigations.

FIGURE 5.2
'THE BEATING HEART'
One main street, three main squares and a network of pedestrian friendly streets

Source: Gehl Architects (2007) *Public Spaces / Public Life Sydney*, for City of Sydney, p.102



ACTION 5.1.2 Develop a public space improvement strategy to enhance streets and squares in the City Centre.

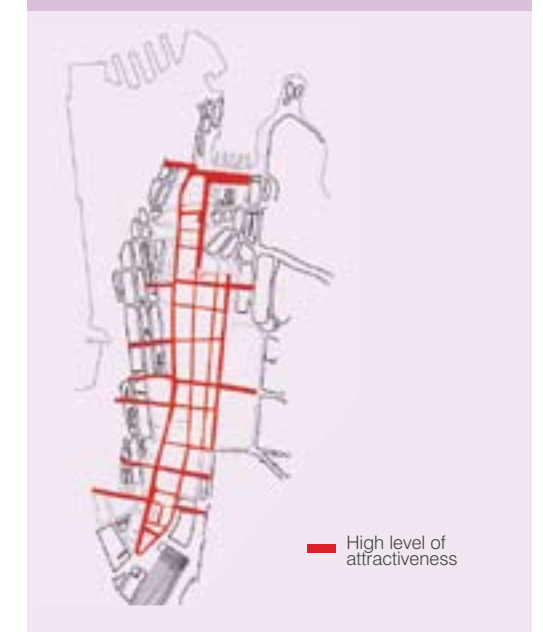
The City of Sydney has already undertaken significant public domain improvements in the City Centre. The Gehl Architects report has identified additional areas of attention, in particular the need for a public space improvement strategy which would better characterise types of streets and squares and ensure they offer a variety of settings and activities.

Priorities in these spaces could include:

- improved environments for children;
- iconic public artworks using durable materials such as mosaics, paving, bronze, lighting, commissioned from local and international artists; and
- accessible public information (historical information, contemporary stories and sustainability data—such as the City's greenhouse gas emissions and energy usage) using advanced technologies.

FIGURE 5.3
AREAS WHERE A HIGH QUALITY PUBLIC REALM SHOULD BE

Source: Gehl Architects (2007) *Public Spaces / Public Life Sydney*, for City of Sydney, p.102



CASE STUDY Paris and Barcelona Bars and Cafés

Many of the older European cities, such as Barcelona and Paris, have a very strong small bar culture. High density living in apartments in the core of the old cities creates a need for a range of public and private spaces outside of people's homes.

When the residential buildings of a city area are an average of six storeys, densities are around 300 dwellings per hectare (gross). At street level many of these residential buildings have a café that serves breakfast and lunch, which turn into a small bar and restaurant in the evening.

Guide books, such as the Key Guide to Barcelona, barely differentiate between Cafés

and Bars, other than to discuss the time of day during which places function as one or the other, or both.

The guidebooks do outline, in a different section the Pubs and Nightclubs, which are generally suited to larger crowds, have entertainment and are open into the early hours of the morning.

Real estate in desirable parts of these European cities can be relatively expensive, thus giving rise to innovative uses of small spaces and bar/café operating in hidden away lanes and basements, relying on social connections, reputation and word of mouth to keep patrons coming down the lanes and in the door.

Source: *The Fine Grain: Revitalising Sydney's Lanes*, Six Degrees (2008)

CASE STUDY People Oriented City: Copenhagen

Over the past 40 years, the City of Copenhagen has turned a car orientated city into a people orientated city. This change did not happen over night, rather it was achieved on a step by step basis. This process has involved stopping the through traffic, reducing the number of car parking spaces in the centre and increasing the amount of space set aside for pedestrian activities from 15,000 m², when the first pedestrian scheme was introduced in 1962, to the present day 100,000 m² of car free streets and squares. These streets and squares now form a coherent network of high quality walking links and public squares for recreation, all of individual quality and character.



The network of car-free streets and squares in Copenhagen comprises 100,000 m² (2005).

Source: Gehl Architects Public Spaces, Public Life Sydney (2007)

Provide focal points in the City Centre for workers, residents and visitors to meet and gather



Customs House forecourt, Circular Quay

CITY NOW



Lack of a focus for the City's worker, student and visitor communities.

The City Centre contains a rich array of cultural venues, cafes and restaurants. Some parks and squares play a role as recreation areas and meeting places. These are the focus for the non-business activities of the City's workers, students and visitors. However, the City Centre does not contain a recognisable civic or community heart, where the City's diverse communities are welcome. Public buildings and facilities have retreated from their central role in the life of the City. There are few activity centres or points of focus with the scale or significant role offered by the great squares and places of European cities, like Las Ramblas in Barcelona or Plaza Mayor in Madrid.

CITY IN 2030



The three new squares on the north-south spine are service and activity hubs for the City Centre's communities.

With the creation of a major north-south spine linking the City Centre's great squares and public buildings, the opportunity exists to focus new public, community and business investment along the spine and in and around the three new squares. The squares should host new community facilities, visitor information services, markets and regular events and be the focus for the activities of the City Centre's worker, student and visitor communities.

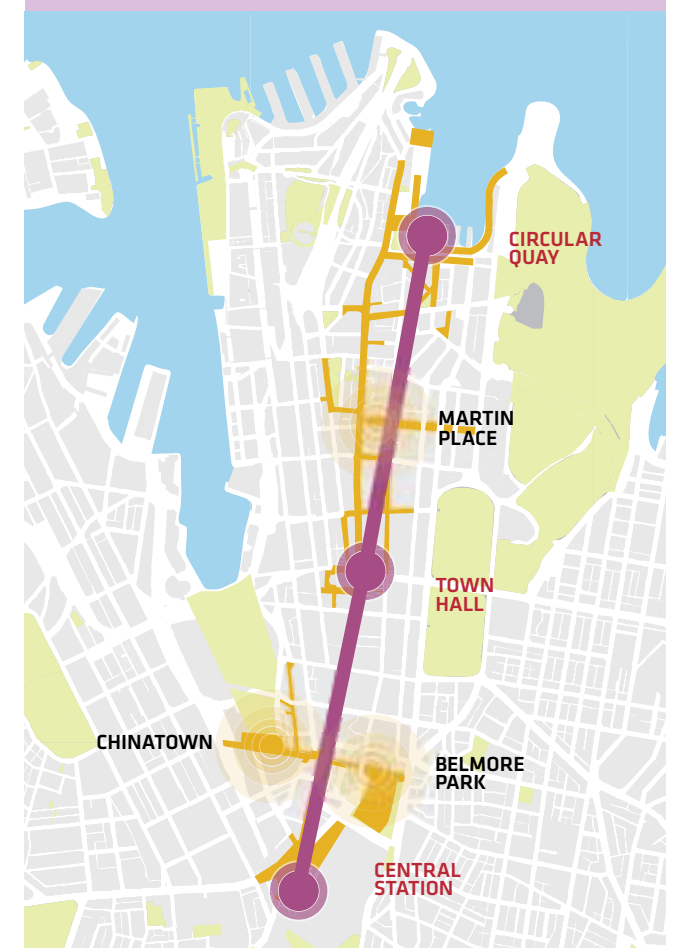
ACTION
5.2.1

Prepare a City Centre Community Facilities and Programs Strategy and review the City Plan to deliver the three squares as a focus for City Centre community life with services such as childcare, libraries and information services.

Community facilities and programs in the City Centre could be audited. This would be accompanied by a needs analysis to identify what sort of facilities or programs workers, students and visitors in the City Centre expect or anticipate. These needs might vary in different parts of the City Centre and the analysis should be informed by precinct development work and characterisations.

A long-term strategy for the development of new programs and events, and investment in new facilities and services in each of the three squares at Central, Town Hall and Circular Quay, could be developed. The squares should play a role as activity and service hubs with for example visitor information, library and knowledge centre services including internet access, child care, fresh food markets and one stop governance shops. They should also be the focus for events and programs for City Centre community development.

FIGURE 5.4
CITY CENTRE CENTRAL SPINE
AND THREE MAJOR SQUARES



Gardens in the City

Manage and strengthen precincts in the City Centre

CITY NOW
✕

Insufficient variation in height and built form controls leading to overshadowed streets and insufficient protection for fine grain areas.

The built form of Sydney City Centre has largely been controlled through the preservation of sunlight on major parks and gardens and public spaces. The two axis concept has also been important to high buildings on the ridges and low in the valley as you look from Circular Quay, and the ridge controls then govern the scale of the building, based on site area and a maximum floorspace ratio of 12.5:1. This has not provided sufficient variation in feel in the different parts of the City Centre with the consequence that many streets are overshadowed. The streets need also to be considered as public space in considering solar access issues.

Underdeveloped cultural and leisure precincts.

Entertainment and cultural institutions in and around the City Centre tend to be spread across the whole area. Some of the original venues in the theatre district remain such as the Capitol and State Theatres, but new venues have been developed at the other end of the City Centre, including the Sydney Theatre at Walsh Bay and the Opera House at Circular Quay. The facilities are not well connected and tend to be isolated, with few options for late dining or a continued conversation 'after the show' in the vicinity of the venues.

Under-recognised underground life and activity for low rent spaces.

There is an extensive network of underground spaces in Sydney. Some are residual spaces while some are high value retail locations, particularly those near the train stations. A key challenge is to bring the pedestrian experience back to the surface. Nevertheless, these underground spaces will remain and more will be provided as new rail stations are developed. Currently the underground network is incoherent, not well branded and not effectively utilised as part of City Centre revitalisation.

CITY IN 2030
➔

Fine grain protected in key precincts, for example, in the Retail Core west of George Street, south of Erskine Street to Chinatown and City South.

Solar access and the sub-division pattern in precincts—such as the Retail Core west of George Street, south of Erskine Street to Chinatown, and City South—are preserved to make the street level experience interesting and pleasant and to allow for small businesses and residents to occupy this area.

Cultural and hospitality precincts develop in the vicinity of cultural venues.

Opportunities for additional and 'fringe' culture and entertainment, dining after dark and new bars are facilitated in particular locations in the City Centre, building on existing cultural venues.

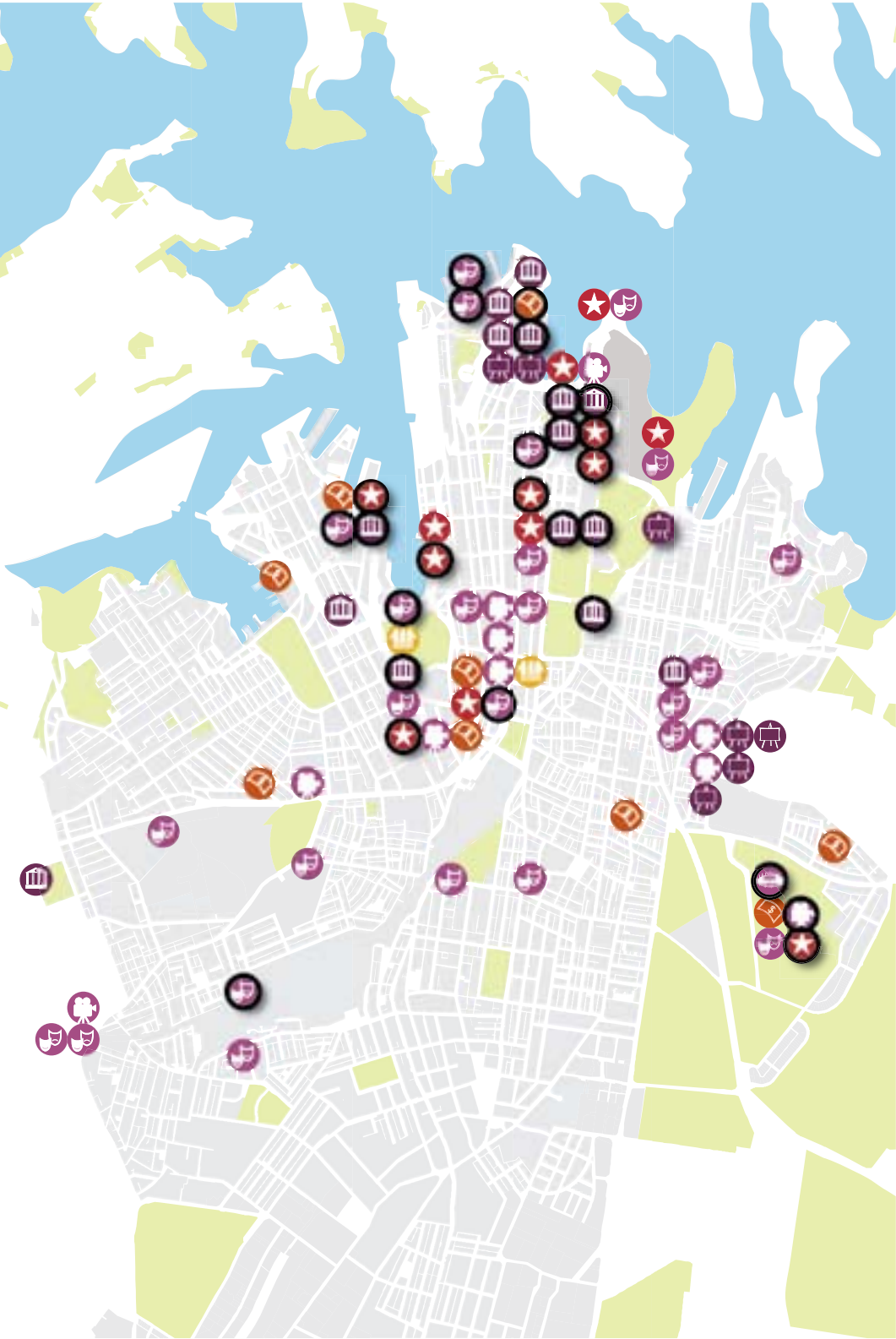
Sydney's laneways and underground spaces are part of the attraction of the City Centre and complement street life.

The underground spaces are better utilised for shops, night club spaces, art and cultural activities (though as a complement to and not at the expense of its street level life). They are a loved part of Sydney's mystery and underbelly.

FIGURE 7.1
REGIONALLY SIGNIFICANT MUSEUMS, GALLERIES, ATTRACTIONS, MARKETS, CONVENTIONS, THEATRES, CINEMAS.

Source: City of Sydney, SGS Economics and Planning

- Museum
- Conference centre
- Theatre
- Market
- Gallery
- Attraction
- Cinema
- Since 1980



ACTION 5.3.1 Ensure the City Plan preserves mixed uses and ‘fine grain’ development, in particular west of George Street, south of Erskine Street to Chinatown and in the City South.

Key directions for the precincts in the City Centre have been outlined in STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1: GLOBALLY COMPETITIVE AND INNOVATIVE CITY. More detailed structure planning work is required to ensure building scale is appropriate to each precinct of the City, and that good quality public domain and street edge conditions are achieved.

The western corridor has been identified as a possible location for a significant amount of commercial growth in the next office construction cycle and this is one of the best fine grain areas of the City Centre. Some areas of this corridor are unlikely to be redeveloped due to heritage controls, but the quality of these and other sites need to be retained—particularly in the areas west of George Street, south of Erskine Street to Chinatown. The topography and street pattern has made it difficult to consolidate blocks for larger development, and it currently provides a lot of low to mid priced office and retail space in the City Centre. The building stock is relatively good quality, usually around eight to 15 storeys tall, retail outlets are mainly built to the street edge on the ground level and relatively easily adapted for modern use.

There are also a large number of partial and full basement retail spaces due to the steep slopes in the area. The variety and mix of uses here are important to the feel of the City Centre, and this area should be protected from large-scale consolidation in the long-term.

Residential development should be encouraged in the upper stories of these buildings to create a lively mixed-use feel. New York’s Greenwich Village and Tribeca and London’s Soho areas, as well as Melbourne’s lanes and ‘minor’ streets (Flinders Lane, Little Collins Streets etc) are examples to emulate.

Sydney’s ‘Underground’ World

The Six Degrees report includes a discussion of Sydney’s ‘Hidden Spaces and Seedy Places Beyond the Lanes’. It provides a starting list of underground places and spaces.

- Tank Stream Tunnels.
- Devonshire Street Pedestrian Tunnel, Central Station.
- Darling Dive train tunnel, connecting Central to Ultimo.
- St James Station unused platforms, rumoured to have been prepared for Macarthur’s Bunker if the Second World War came to Sydney.
- Mark Foy’s tunnels, Castlereagh Street to Museum Station.
- Old Tram Tunnel under the southern approach on the eastern side of the Harbour Bridge, connecting to Wynyard Station, now used in part as a car park.

ACTION 5.3.2 Undertake cultural mapping to identify opportunities for cultural, entertainment and hospitality precincts around existing venues, and facilitate by appropriate development controls, street level lighting, signage and paving.

The more active and important existing cultural venues may be the seeds around which a hospitality precinct may be based. A review of facilities and surrounding land uses should be undertaken (the City’s Land Use and Floorspace Survey will be a foundation resource). Opportunities for smaller venues offering ‘fringe’ events, late night dining and new bars should be considered. A long-term strategy may also emerge to inform future locations of cultural venues to create stronger precincts around particular aspects of the arts.

This action will require working with the relevant venue managers and other authorities, and using appropriate development controls, street level lighting, signage and paving. Interventions should not be heavy handed: top down attempts to ‘create’ cultural precincts do not typically succeed, so a facilitative role is required.

ACTION 5.3.3 Investigate use of underground spaces for cultural venues, public art and exhibition spaces, entertainment and hospitality. (see panel below)

An audit of Sydney’s underground spaces should be prepared, with a view to the preparation of a strategy for their better use and promotion.

The underground pedestrian system could provide an interesting counterpoint to the rest of the Sydney City Centre in the future. If significant improvements are made to the streets to attract pedestrians up to the surface—as envisaged by Sustainable Sydney 2030—the underground

- Argyle Cut.
- Underground toilets at Taylor Square, Hyde Park, Wynyard.
- Macquarie Place.
- Harbour Bridge approach vaults (North Sydney and The Rocks).
- Domain Travelator pedestrian tunnel.
- Wynyard/Hunter Connection labyrinth.
- Town Hall Station—QVB lower level—Sydney Central/Myer food court basement.
- Mixed bars and restaurants across the City, including below the State Theatre, Marble Bar (Hilton Hotel), Le Chifley Wine Bar/Restaurant, Wine Banc, Bar Europa, Dug Out Bar (Burdekin Hotel, Oxford Street), Mr Goodbar on Oxford Street, The Basement at Macquarie Place, Tokyo Joes, The Astor, La Sala.



Angel Place Recital Hall

City of Sydney

could become a more diverse, low-cost part of the City Centre—providing the necessary fertile space for new and more experimental businesses to start-up (subject to the intentions and perspectives of owners). This could be assisted by a consistent signage system that conceptually linked all these spaces, which does not occur in Sydney. This could be similar to the subway signage in Paris, Bilbao or New York, as the Sydney underground pedestrian system is based on the train stations.

ACTION 5.3.4 Promote laneway precincts such as Angel Place.

One of the principal challenges for a precinct management team is to find the right level of intervention in assisting the growth of precincts within the City Centre. There is a fine line between boosting organic growth and intervening too much to the point where the dynamics of natural growth and change are lost.

The City of Melbourne funded part-time precinct managers in the mid 1990’s. These people were from outside Council and had some connection to the precinct, either living or working there. They acted as the link between the Council and the businesses, residents and users of the precinct. Their connections into Council allowed them to put the right people in touch for particular projects such as footpath widening for more café tables, or to target the right operators for new businesses in the precinct.

Angel Place Opportunities

Angel Place and the adjacent Ash Street are two lanes that have good potential to develop further as an evening arts related precinct, based around the Angel Place Recital Hall and existing restaurants and hotels.

There are a number of existing retail spaces that front onto Angel Place, while some on Ash Street are currently used as temporary office space. These lanes are tucked away, yet right in the heart of the City and they provide mid-block links between George Street, Pitt Street and Martin Place. The large Ivy hospitality development is activating Angel Place further with some tenancies fronting the lane.

There is an opportunity for the City of Sydney to build a stronger precinct based around activities in the Angel Place Recital Hall. Actions may include subdividing the office tenancies fronting Ash Street to create a number of smaller tenancies to be run as bars, cafés or specialty retail. Other buildings backing on to the lanes should be encouraged to convert blank façades and loading docks into new active retail spaces on the lane.

This precinct is also adjacent to the Hunter Connection underground arcade, connecting under George Street to Wynyard Station. The creation of a physical link between Angel Place and the Hunter Connection should be investigated.

Increase the supply of small scale spaces for retail and small businesses on streets and lanes

CITY NOW **Diminishing supply of independent and specialist retailing.**

✕ The rise of the suburban shopping mall has led to a reduction in the number of people coming to the City Centre to shop. The suburban malls have a smaller catchment area, so they generally focus on providing a standard range of goods rather than a large variety of niche products for different markets. The Westfield investment in the City Centre will be a substantial boost to retailing in the retail core of the City Centre. The large catchment will enable Westfield to attract a strong array of tenants. However, additional and independent niche retail outlets are necessary to provide unique offerings unavailable elsewhere in the metropolitan area.

CITY IN 2030 **Australia's premier retail destination with a great variety of offerings.**

➤ As Australia's gateway to the world, the City Centre should be the premier destination for retailing—from mainstream to quirky to niche and specialist offerings. A variety of spaces at a range of rents should be available for both start-up, boutique and established retailers.

In a recent survey of Sydney Region residents, 78 per cent of those surveyed supported making laneways and other spaces in the City Centre more lively by allowing small bars and encouraging small shops.



Niche market retail outlet

ACTION 5.4.1 **Prepare a retail strategy focused on expanding small scale capacity across the City Centre and reinforcing high-end shopping in the retail core.**

A successful retail strategy is fundamental to aspirations for a lively City Centre area. The City Centre will be significantly strengthened with a long-term focus as a specialist retail location that offers a different experience and range compared with the suburban malls. In the past many jewellers, medical specialists, bookshops, bespoke tailors, milliners and other highly specialised retailers and services were located in the City Centre, allowing them to draw on the catchment of the entire metropolitan area. The aim should be to restore this status for the City Centre.

The strategy can be the focus for a number of the actions including, for example, ensuring an adequate supply of small retail tenancies, and the development of retail precincts. It could also form part of the agenda of the Precinct Management teams, some of which could provide retail advisory services.

ACTION 5.4.2 **Investigate planning controls requiring new and redeveloped buildings to be built to the street edge with active, externally focused frontages for small retailing.**

Consistent with proposals for explicitly defining desired street edge conditions with Public Domain Interface Guidelines (see STRATEGIC DIRECTION 9: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, RENEWAL AND DESIGN), the opportunities to better activate street level frontages and create retail floorspace should be explored. An option would be to require all new and redeveloped buildings in the City Centre be built to the street boundary edge, with 50 per cent of all street and lane frontages available as small retail tenancies of less than 6m in width. The remaining 50 per cent of the ground floor perimeter could be used for foyers, loading bays, car park entrances, fire exits etc. Any public areas set back from site boundaries would need to be well designed, active spaces. These ideas should be investigated in reviews of development controls.

ACTION 5.4.3 **Develop ways to encourage existing building owners to build to street edges. Fill in empty colonnades and activate blank building edges with retail activity on streets and laneways.**

The 'Opportunity Sites' provisions in the current local environmental plan (LEP) provide an incentive to 'fill in' street frontages. Additional mechanisms could be explored.

A strong set of criteria will be required to ensure that any new space allowed at ground level creates significant improvements to the public domain and/or activates the street edges. This should include a maximum floor area and width of frontage for new retail spaces to ensure that new elements are part of the 'fine grain' of City streets.

ACTION 5.4.4 **Investigate conversion to 'grand retail' or 'grand hotels' for landmark City building.**

The Queen Victoria Building recalls the time of the grand emporium consisting of a number of small but important shops. The Strand Arcade has repositioned itself as a collection of designer stores, relying on the ambience and central location, which seems to have worked, with the upper two levels being almost all high-end design shops including jewellery and clothing. These two historic buildings provide an atmosphere for retail that is rare in Sydney, and strengthen the City Centre compared to other locations.

The City Centre needs to build on these strong foundations, and look at ways to increase these types of retail experiences. It may be possible to bring similar buildings back to life or create new precincts that have similar characteristics of scale, detail and overall style. The lanes and smaller spaces are well placed for this, particularly in the Western Corridor where the fine grain architecture of the early 20th century is still largely intact.

Key City Centre buildings such as the former Mark Foy's Department Store have been converted to other uses, while other significant buildings such as Key College House and the Griffith's Tea buildings on Wentworth Street are empty. The Mark Foy's building was converted from a department store to its current use as a court complex. In the medium-term this use may be better suited to another facility, providing an opportunity to reinstate some specialist retail space, in the style of the Queen Victoria Building and The Strand Arcade. The Mark Foy's building is still connected to Museum Station via a tunnel beneath Liverpool Street, which could provide a good flow of pedestrian traffic through the building if the right uses and fit-out were provided.

This or other buildings could be part of a more diverse retail offer in the City Centre. They could provide specialised retail environments, similar to Queen Victoria Building and the The Strand Arcade. Obviously, significant work is required to identify potential buildings and, if appropriate, work with property owners on viability analysis and re-development plans. An initial investigation and scoping exercise, considering examples from elsewhere and barriers and constraints, is suggested.

Assist appropriate small businesses to locate and thrive in the City Centre

CITY NOW ✕

Diminishing opportunities for start-up or young entrepreneurs to establish in the City Centre.

Increasing rents and land values which favour the development of higher end commercial, retail or residential uses have tended to 'squeeze out' spaces for smaller and start-up retailers or businesses. Without a deeper cross section of business types the City Centre has tended to develop mono-functional precincts (as highlighted in the Gehl Architects report on *Public Life Public Spaces*). While Sustainable Sydney 2030 recognises the importance of the character and activities in the City Centre precincts as building blocks for the development of economic specialities and clusters, these should be built on a range of businesses and activities, not just in a few 'higher end' areas.

CITY IN 2030 ➔

Precinct identities and economic specialisations are developed and underpinned by a wide cross section of businesses—including start-ups and niche operators.

The health of the City Centre is measured by the diversity of the businesses it contains. In recognition of this, start-up and specialist businesses and young entrepreneurs are supported and encouraged to locate in the City Centre. New businesses underpin desirable directions and the character of the precincts.



City of Sydney

Night markets in the City Centre

ACTION 5.5.1

Develop 'City Centre Business Diversity' criteria to attract and encourage businesses in the City Centre.

A thriving City Centre relies on a rich mix of commercial, retail and hospitality activity. The City of Sydney floorspace survey will assist in identifying key industry clusters in and around the City Centre and its precincts. Criteria should be developed regarding desirable activities to attract to strengthen existing clusters of activity or fill gaps in the current profile of businesses in the City Centre. These criteria could inform a Small Business Development Fund (see below).

The criteria should seek to build on the aspirations set out in STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1: GLOBALLY COMPETITIVE AND INNOVATIVE CITY, including boosting innovation in the economy and developing effective partnerships. Specific criteria may also be identified for each precinct within the City Centre to assist in creating stronger identities within each area.

ACTION 5.5.2

Investigate the merits of a Small Business Development Fund to provide grants to businesses that meet the 'City Centre Business Diversity' criteria.

Financial support to assist the right businesses establish themselves is a key aspect of bringing innovative ideas and new activities to the City Centre, which is generally considered to be an expensive location for business. A Small Business Development Fund could be established for this purpose. It would require a management team and an assessment board, made up of local business people, leading figures in the City community including possibly Councillors and Councils officers. Grants would be targeted at businesses that will assist in strengthening existing City Centre precincts, or developing new clusters/precincts as identified by the City of Sydney.

The City of Melbourne has successfully run a similar grants program and it has supported economic and business development. The aim has been to encourage and support new, creative and different business activities and projects that will contribute to a thriving and competitive business environment in the Melbourne Central City area.

ACTION 5.5.3

Investigate creating City of Sydney assisted or funded business incubators.

Start-up and small business space can be provided through a number of mechanisms. These can include business incubators which provide a low cost space and some support services to assist new businesses in their early and often difficult stages. Space can be used on a temporary basis, such as use of vacant shops or offices, or a more permanent space where businesses could pass through.

The City of Sydney could support both temporary and permanent incubators. An incubator program could be linked to a register of vacant tenancies, which could be filled with short-term uses, coordinated by the City of Sydney. This could help activate lanes, vacant shop fronts and offices, basements and first floors with small, flexible groups of people including small start-up businesses, groups of students, artists etc. A current commercial example of this is the short-term tenancies of discount shops that open up for six weeks.

A registry of interested people and small businesses could be formed who want short-term space in the City. The growing use of wireless broadband, laptop computers, mobile phones and post office boxes mean potential tenants are very flexible, requiring only a power supply to set up a studio space or small business space.

This program could also be used to strengthen connections between Global Sydney and residents and educational institutions of Western Sydney through targeted support for Western Sydney-based research groups and start-up companies.

Support the development of diverse, new bars and restaurants in the City Centre

CITY NOW

An unsophisticated late night bar and hospitality culture.



A range of factors, including the rise of poker machines to underpin hotel revenues and restrictive liquor licensing laws, have led to a narrower range of late night dining, bar and hospitality options in the City Centre. Venues tend to be large and targeted narrowly. This has been very frustrating for cinema, theatre or restaurant patrons looking for more intimate or alternative late night opportunities to share a drink and continue a conversation.

Small bars are one of the few uses that can benefit from relatively hidden locations. They are usually patronised by particular social groups and advertised largely by word of mouth. They are able to open for long hours, including quiet times, as their staffing costs and fixed overheads such as rent are low. They create activity and bring a sense of depth of life back into the City Centre during evenings, late at night and on weekends.

Although many of Sydney's original lanes have been lost to major developments, there still exists a number of opportunities for new tenancies in the 'one out and one back' position. That is, one layer away from the main activities and one back from the main streets: down lanes, down staircases to basements, out the back, or up at first floor level.

CITY IN 2030

A thriving and quirky array of 'out of the way' choices for late night dining, drinking and continued conversations.



Lanes and 'out of the way' City streets are home to small bars and restaurants run by creative and independent operators. They complement the major cultural venues and larger hotels and add depth and sophistication to the City Centre's hospitality scene.



Liquor law reforms will invigorate night life in the City Centre and Villages

ACTION
5.6.1

Establish a liquor licensing working group to monitor and assist in the implementation of new liquor licensing laws and promote further reforms needed.

A vibrant bar and entertainment night life scene is essential for a globally competitive City. Liquor licensing laws in NSW have restricted the development of an independent and small bar scene that would add to the City Centre's night life and hospitality offerings. Reforms were made by the State Government at the end of 2007 and it will be easier and much cheaper for new market entrants.

A liquor licensing work group should be established to monitor and assist with the implementation of new liquor licensing laws announced by State Government. It would be convened by the City of Sydney, with Council staff and external advisors providing advice on issues including legal, hospitality, general business, cultural tourism and planning.

➔ THREE CITY SQUARES

Linked City squares for public life

LOCATION

George Street Spine

VISION

A new north-south 'central spine' with priority for public transport, cyclists and pedestrians is proposed. This would transform George Street as the City's premier street, linking City squares at Circular Quay, Town Hall and Central Station. The City Squares will be activity, service and civic hubs for the City Centre communities of residents, workers and visitors. The linked City Squares will be active public spaces for large public gatherings and celebrations with improved transport connections and interchange.

BENEFITS

- A strong City Centre identity.
- Greater priority for public transport, walking and cycling with active street frontages and a heightened retail experience encouraging people to 'promenade' along a 2.5km main street.
- Reduced noise and improved environment along the City's main street.
- Places for people in the City Centre with 'rest and retreat' spaces and active public spaces for meeting, resting and celebrations and improved environments for children and older people.
- City Squares as focal points for events and programs for City Centre community development.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Partnership between City of Sydney, State Government,

AIMS

- A central spine linking three significant squares in the City Centre—a new link to new major City meeting places.
- A combined public transport, walking and cycling street, with vehicular traffic removed to ensure the streets themselves are 'liveable' public domain and not just carriageways for cars.
- Public space improvements to better characterise types of streets and squares so they offer a variety of settings and activities, from major gathering areas for public celebrations to intimate retreats.

IDEAS

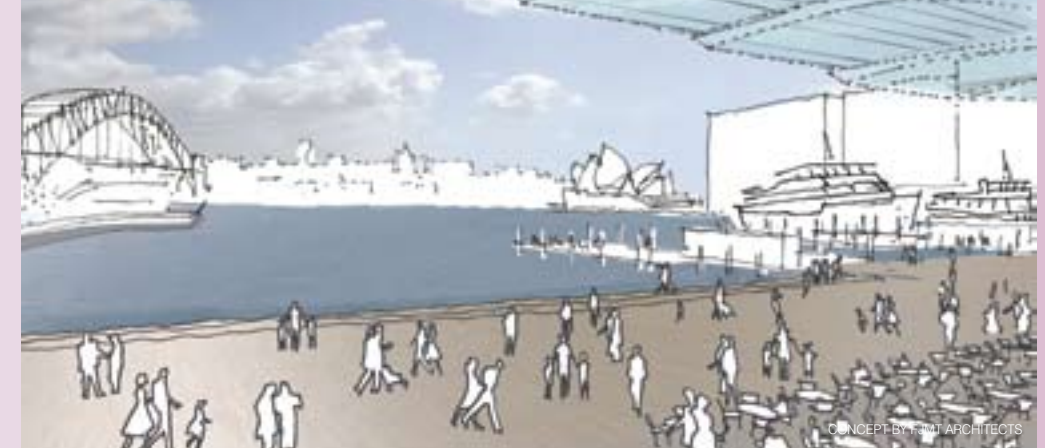
- Options for the City Centre 'spine' include George, Castlereagh or Pitt Streets. The central spine continues south to Botany through Redfern and Green Square, connecting the wider City to the Centre.
- Three City Squares—Circular Quay, Town Hall Square, Central Station—with historical and visual links to the central spine.
- Focus for new public, community and business investment along the spine and in and around the three new squares. The squares should host new community facilities, visitor information services, markets and regular events and be the focus for the activities of the City Centre's worker, student and visitor communities.

- A sense of place defined by surrounding cultural monuments and iconic public artworks commissioned from local and international artists.

- Accessible public information (which may include historical information, contemporary stories and sustainability data, i.e. City's greenhouse gas emissions, energy usage) using advanced technologies.

- Improve one-way traffic part of Gibbons and Regent Streets that divides Redfern, and limits community cohesion and adds to impoverished road network in Chippendale adjacent to Central.

CIRCULAR QUAY



- Open the front gateway to the City Centre.
- Upgrade Circular Quay as a major public square.

- Improve access and views to the Harbour.
- Celebrate Circular Quay as a natural gathering place in a Harbour City.
- Remove the Cahill Expressway in the long-term.

CENTRAL STATION PRECINCT



- Southern arrival to the City Centre.
- Upgraded public domain with clear pedestrian priority providing connections to surrounding activities in Haymarket, Ultimo, Surry Hills and City South.
- Improved pedestrian plaza with above ground to link Devonshire Street.
- Simplify traffic movements.

- Strengthen Belmore Park as an active City park by creating a building edge along Hay Street linked to Haymarket Activity Hub.
- Investigate the potential to develop airspace above Central Railway.
- Investigate the potential for exhibition, entertainment and convention facilities that would benefit from co-location.

TOWN HALL SQUARE



- A new City meeting place.
- Connect Town Hall, St Andrews Cathedral, QVB and Pitt Street Mall to public space with building facades addressing each other.
- Connect Clarence and Kent Streets to Sydney Square and Town Hall Station.
- Create a gateway from Sydney Square to entertainment precinct in the south.
- Open Town Hall Station concourse to improve address, accessibility and natural lighting.
- Focus of a new 'green link' between Hyde Park and Darling Harbour.