



NSW Guide to Walkable Public Space

Ideas for open spaces, streets and public facilities



April 2022



Contents

What is a walkable public space?	6
What makes public spaces walkable?	7
Why is it important for public spaces to be walkable?	11
What are the benefits of walkable public spaces?	12
Ideas and opportunities	17

Published by the NSW Government

dpie.nsw.gov.au

Title: NSW Guide to Walkable Public Space - Ideas for open spaces, streets and public facilities

© State of New South Wales through Department of Planning and Environment 2022. You may copy, distribute, display, download and otherwise freely deal with this publication for any purpose, provided that you attribute the Department of Planning and Environment as the owner. However, you must obtain permission if you wish to charge others for access to the publication (other than at cost); include the publication in advertising or a product for sale; modify the publication; or republish the publication on a website. You may freely link to the publication on a departmental website.

Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (April 2022) and may not be accurate, current or complete. The State of New South Wales (including the NSW Department of Planning and Environment), the author and the publisher take no responsibility, and will accept no liability, for the accuracy, currency, reliability or correctness of any information included in the document (including material provided by third parties). Readers should make their own inquiries and rely on their own advice when making decisions related to material contained in this publication.

Acknowledgement of Country

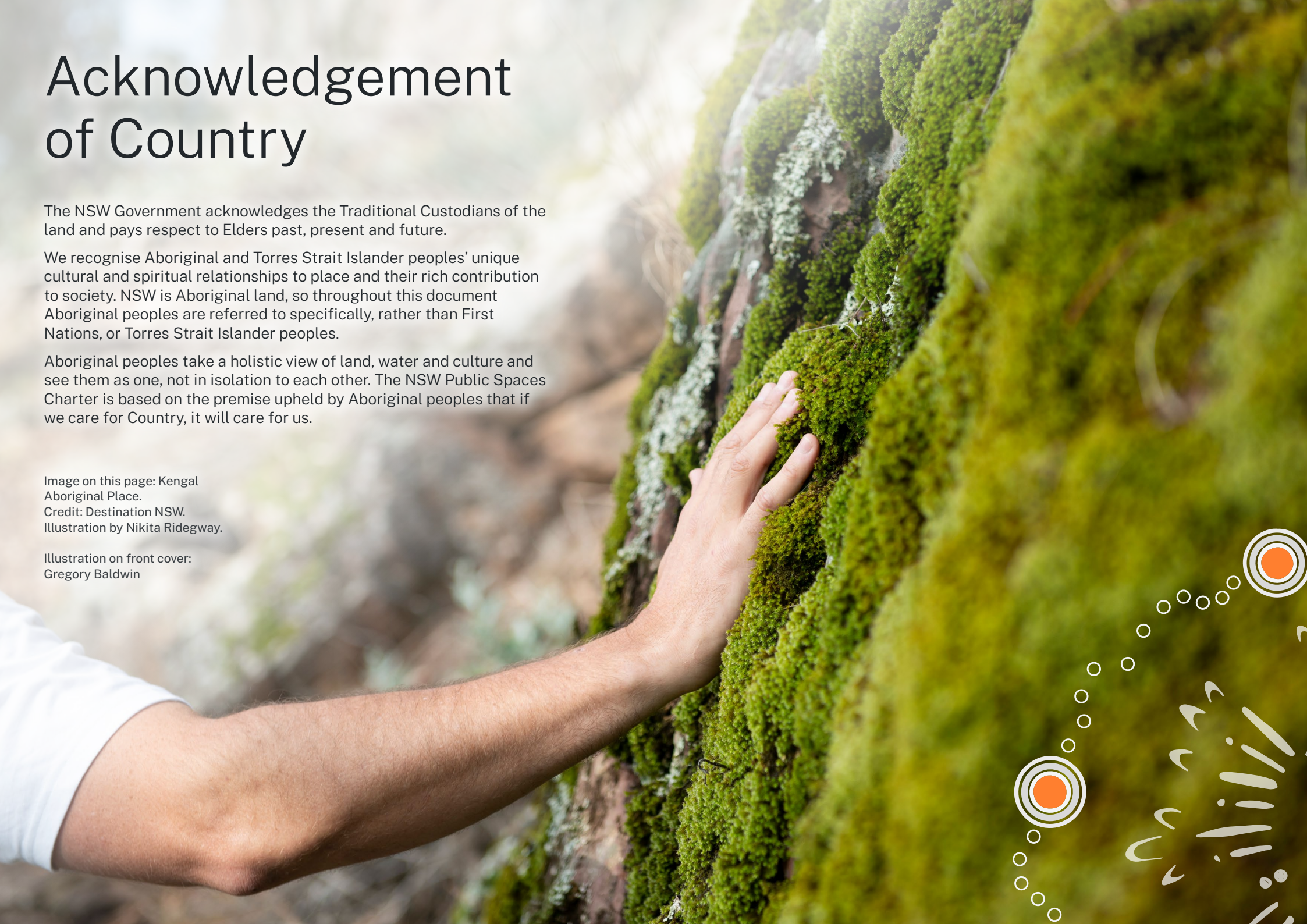
The NSW Government acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past, present and future.

We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to society. NSW is Aboriginal land, so throughout this document Aboriginal peoples are referred to specifically, rather than First Nations, or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Aboriginal peoples take a holistic view of land, water and culture and see them as one, not in isolation to each other. The NSW Public Spaces Charter is based on the premise upheld by Aboriginal peoples that if we care for Country, it will care for us.

Image on this page: Kengal
Aboriginal Place.
Credit: Destination NSW.
Illustration by Nikita Ridegway.

Illustration on front cover:
Gregory Baldwin



Minister's message

The experience of pandemic-induced lockdowns and other restrictions on movement have made us realise the importance of simple freedoms, like walking along a street, on a trail, or in a park. We have become more conscious of our outdoors - fresh air, natural light and safe places to meet and enjoy community. I'm determined to channel this new found delight in our shared spaces into transformative action.

Experiencing public space by walking can improve mental and physical wellbeing, foster public life, support local economies, and allow us to connect with other people and our environment. The NSW Guide to Walkable Public Spaces provides ideas and exposes opportunities to create more walkable local neighbourhoods through improvements in our open spaces, streets and public facilities.

The Guide helps bring the ten principles of the NSW Public Spaces Charter to life by inspiring creation of better quality and connected public space.

By creating a connected network of paths and open spaces rather than a labyrinth of routes that don't really lead anywhere, we're likely to see even more people walking, running, riding and enjoying the public spaces on the doorsteps. That will enable all of us to live longer, healthier and more fulfilling lives.



The Honourable Rob Stokes
Minister for Infrastructure, Minister for Cities, and Minister for Active Transport

Introduction

Walking is a free and accessible mode of travel to and between places, allowing us to explore and enjoy their character and beauty.

Walkable public spaces provide opportunities to connect with our public open spaces, nature, galleries and museums, provide links between our neighbourhoods and town centres and the wider city. They connect people with each other and help us lead healthy lifestyles, physically and mentally.

This guide outlines the characteristics of walkable public spaces, with ideas and opportunities to help create public spaces that you can easily walk to and from, within, and through, while enhancing the experience along your journey.

The guide will assist communities, industry, local and state government to take action in creating walkable public spaces that improve liveability and the quality of life of our communities.

When we use the terms walkable, walkability and walking, we mean any way to travel without a car or bike, inclusive of all abilities, such as using a wheelchair, or other type of mobility aid.

We are always Walking Country wherever our public spaces are located. Walking Country connects to a way of knowing the deeper histories of our public spaces, and is core to many Aboriginal peoples' identities and sense of belonging.

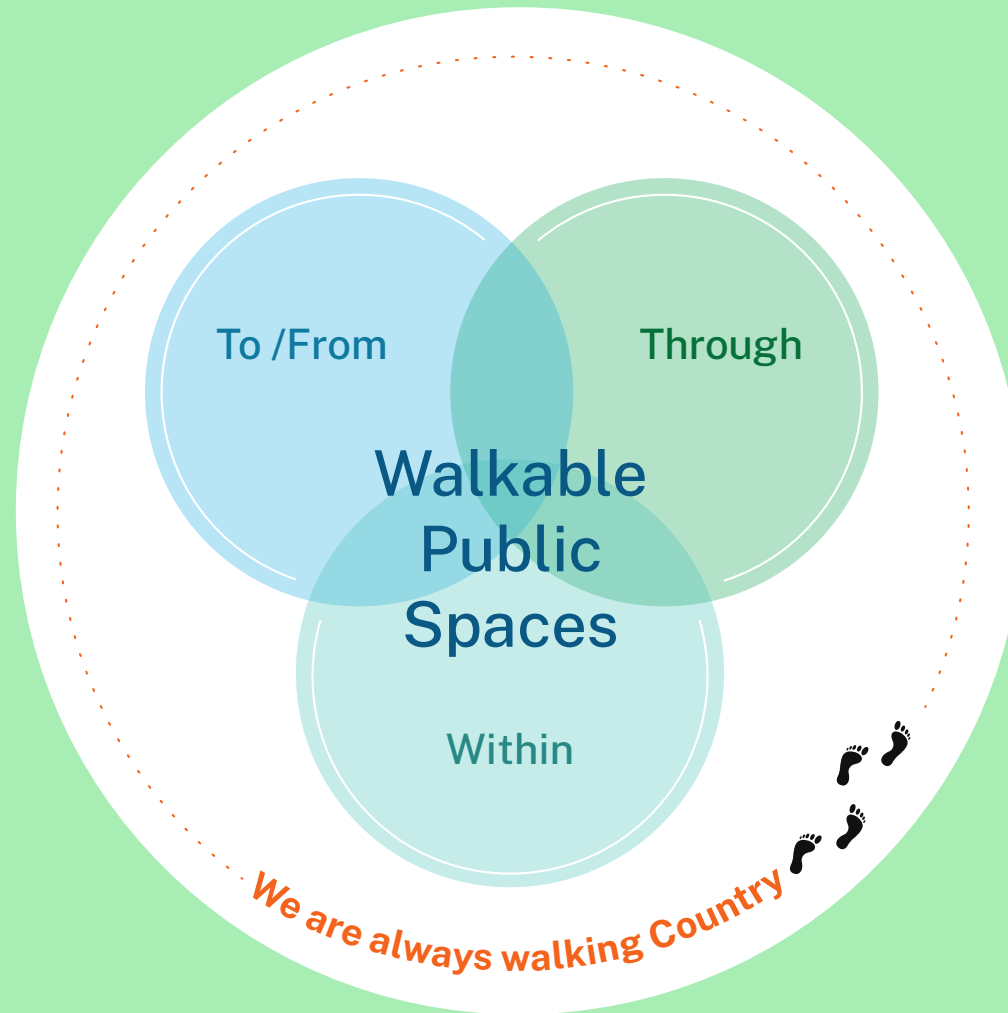
Kiama Coastal walk.
Credit: Destination NSW.



What is a walkable public space?

Public spaces are all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free. They include our streets, public facilities and public open spaces. Walkable public spaces connect where we live, work, learn and play, while providing places of interest, and enhancing our wellbeing along the way.

Experiencing a public space by walking can bring enjoyment, improve mental and physical health and wellbeing, foster public life, support local economies, and allow us to connect with other people and our environment.



This includes walkable connections:

To and from a public space as part of our regular and daily routines.

For example, the experience of walking via connected public spaces, such as streets or footpaths, enabling us to get to a library or park.

Through a public space.

For example, along our local, high or main streets connecting our homes to places where we can access jobs, services and recreation.

Within a public space.

For example, pathways, loops or spaces where we can walk or dwell. These can be enhanced with clear and intuitive wayfinding and sightlines including within our public facilities like libraries and community centres.

This diagram is derived from the [NSW Movement and Place framework](#)¹ - the approach illustrated here applies to all modes of transport and in this circumstance relates to walking.

What makes public spaces walkable?

This guide identifies ten characteristics that are generally shared by walkable public spaces. These characteristics align to the ten principles of quality public space outlined in the [NSW Public Spaces Charter²](#) (Charter). Each characteristic is strengthened by key enablers on the ground, and these may vary depending on what is appropriate for that public space.



Principle #1



Open and welcoming

They connect people to each other

Walkable public spaces provide the physical environment where we go about our public lives. They help create a sense of belonging, foster social cohesion and allow for a range of experiences that connect us to others.

Key enablers include:

- Linking homes via local streets to places where people gather like high streets, libraries and parks
- Activating public spaces with events or activities that are free and accessible for pedestrians to enjoy
- Incorporating places to sit or dwell that allow people to connect with their community
- Providing space for people to walk on their own or with others
- Being safe and secure, including at night (see Principle #8)
- Allowing enough space for people to walk without crowding
- Being obviously public, removing barriers, and providing easily accessible pathways
- Incorporating views to the sky and clear visual access through the public space

Principle #2



Community focused

They prioritise people over cars

Walkable streets with safe and well-designed layouts are designed for people over vehicles. They encourage walking by allowing sufficient place for people as well as other movement functions, sufficient places to dwell/rest for free, along with clear and legible wayfinding.

Key enablers include:

- Wide footpaths with easy crossing points for people using a wheelchair or mobility device
- Streets are generously proportioned for people
- Incorporating effective and attractive safety barriers where needed between traffic and people
- Slower driving speeds and reducing traffic volumes
- Traffic calming measures including raised crossways, higher thresholds
- Reducing road space allocation for vehicles and increasing separated bicycle lanes
- Encouraging businesses to use road space differently, such as parklets for outdoor dining
- Clear and legible wayfinding to help guide and direct people

Principle #3



Culture and creativity

They are vibrant and activated

Walkable public spaces attract people to come and experience a place. They provide activities, provoke curiosity and increase the energy of the space. They are programmed to create thriving places, with things to see and do that respond to local character and community interests.

Key enablers include:

- Activating main streets, retail and hospitality areas, including through outdoor dining
- Activating 'in-between' or 'forgotten' spaces and walkable connections, e.g. laneways
- Incorporating play elements and other activities for children and adults
- Bringing creativity and art into the public realm, celebrating and responding to local character with opportunities for discovery and learning
- Engaging and activating through sound, light and tactile opportunities



Principle #4



Local character and identity

They showcase unique local character

Walkable public spaces reflect the natural beauty and cultural significance of a place, and highlight key sights or landmarks. They bring moments of delight by connecting varied points of interest, whether along a journey or at a destination.

Key enablers include:

- Identifying and linking key elements of local character in a neighbourhood
- Highlighting the unique identity and points of interest in the public space
- Designing well-thought out loop paths, walks and trails that incorporate local landmarks
- Using digital technology (e.g. interactive maps) to enhance or unlock local character and tell local stories
- Maintaining or progressing local character and improving the walking experience on streets, e.g. through continuous awnings where appropriate and the character of shop fronts and building facades
- Providing a variety of public facilities that are inclusive, flexible and adaptable and contribute to local character and sense of place

Principle #5



Green and resilient

They are comfortable, green and shady

Walkable public spaces provide an environment that enhances our walking experience. This can include available amenities as well as the presence of trees, shade and greenery or links to water in the landscape that help to cool us down.

Key enablers include:

- Tree canopy and landscaping that provide shelter and respite through increased shade and greenery
- Access to amenities that allow people to dwell longer such as toilets and water bubblers
- Helping create a green and blue grid, e.g. linking to existing green networks, opening up missing links for walks along foreshores, or linking to water and water retention in the landscape
- Reducing wind tunnels and providing protection from the elements e.g. awnings and bus shelters for shelter from the rain or heat
- Integrating urban greening, such as green roofs or green facades, to support urban ecology and biodiversity, reduce stormwater run-off, reduce urban heat and increase amenity

Principle #6



Healthy and active

They enable a healthy lifestyle

Walkable public spaces incorporate walking, running and cycling paths and tracks that encourage recreation and physical activity. Walking also supports our wellbeing, and allows us to relax and connect with nature. More people actively using in public space also improves perceptions of safety.

Key enablers include:

- Providing active travel networks such as designated walking and bicycle paths
- Designing walking loop paths and trails of varying distances and difficulty
- Providing public space networks to and from homes or places of work that can be used for breaks and exercise
- Providing neighbourhoods with connected, wide, well-maintained footpaths on both sides of the street
- Providing places to stop and rest, like a place to stretch, fix the bike chain, or drink some water
- Providing a diversity, distribution and hierarchy of both active recreational public spaces (such as parks, indoor and outdoor sporting facilities) and passive recreational public spaces (such as civic spaces, parks and reserves, green corridors and linear parks) that promote outdoor activity and street life

Principle #7



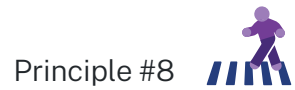
Local business and economies

They connect people to places

Walkable public spaces provide easy access from homes and places of work to activities, shops and services. They provide walkable connections at the neighbourhood, precinct and city scale.

Key enablers include:

- Building homes within ten minutes' walk of a range of quality public spaces
- Creating permeable street pattern grids with high intersection densities
- Designing neighbourhoods with connected, wide, well-maintained footpaths
- Creating public space networks by linking streets, public facilities and public open spaces
- Using Smart City solutions to help navigate and find public space, and provide feedback to improve planning and management of public spaces
- Integrating plazas, squares and other public spaces within the street network to connect and activate places for vibrant day and night uses



Principle #8
Safe and secure

They feel safe day and night

Walkable public spaces feel safe day and night. Feeling unsafe, or experiencing unwanted or dangerous behaviour, is a lived experience for many people and can negatively impact wellbeing and use of public space both day and night.

Key enablers include:

- Applying Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles, e.g. spaces that are well-lit day and night and encourage natural surveillance through openness and visibility
- Asking women and local community groups what would make a place feel safer
- Ensuring physical safety from vehicular traffic or other hazards, e.g. through design or with barriers
- Programming that increases the number and diversity of people in a space to an appropriate capacity
- Public facilities that provide a safe and welcoming environment for diverse community groups
- Supporting the local night-time economy and providing more varied, well-integrated uses that are activated, appropriately lit and acoustically suitable



Principle #9
Designed for place

They are inclusive for everyone

Walkable public spaces are designed for all abilities and ages, and for cultural and gender diversity. They are flexible and respond to the environment to meet the needs of its community. They are accessible and allow for participation in a range of activities with places to play, sit and dwell and move.

Key enablers include:

- Auditing streets and public spaces for accessibility
- Implementing universal design principles
- Allowing for easy navigation by all abilities, with reduced physical barriers
- Planning, designing and managing multi functional public spaces with a focus on diverse needs so they can be enjoyed by all
- Providing public amenities in safe and visible locations and making them accessible for people of all abilities, and parent-friendly for all family structures



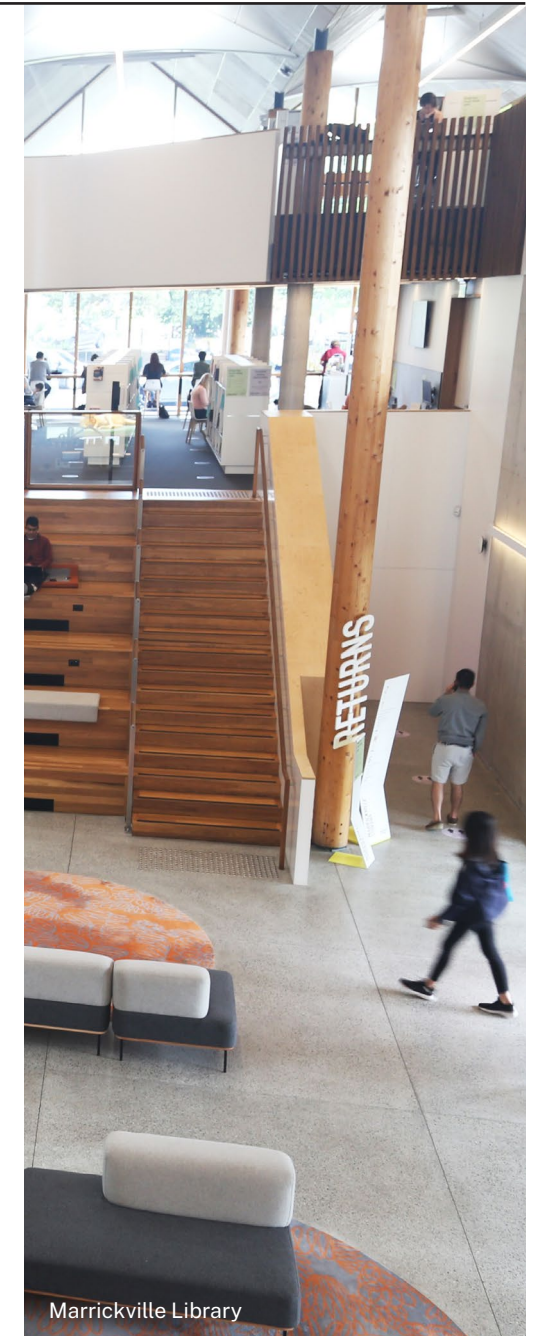
Principle #10
Well managed

They are attractive and well maintained

Walkable public spaces provide amenity within their built or natural environment and surrounds. They are well maintained and managed, with quality treatments and features.

Key enablers include:

- Planting street trees and providing greenery, flowers and landscaping
- Regular maintenance, cleaning and management
- Incorporating permeable surfaces
- Providing seating and other furniture for outdoor and indoor public facilities
- Allowing for adaptability of space for a range of temporary uses or changes while maintaining walkable access, e.g. during events
- Integrating place infrastructure and services into the public space while maintaining clear walking access e.g. electrical boxes under seats or poles located off the pathway
- Using high-quality materials, and considering scale and tactility and how the materials contribute to peoples engagement with the place



Marrickville Library

10 characteristics of walkable public spaces

Illustration by Gregory Baldwin.



Prioritise people over cars

Vibrant and activated

Comfortable, green and shady

Inclusive for everyone

Connect people to each other

Enable a healthy lifestyle

Feel safe day and night

Connect people to places

Showcase unique local character

Attractive and well maintained

Why is it important for public spaces to be walkable?



Walkability and quality of life go hand in hand. When cities are ranked according to quality of life through studies such as the Global Liveability Index, cities with good quality infrastructure for walking are high on the list because they are healthy, liveable, have better air quality, and enable people to access their daily needs by walking.

According to the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy's 2020 study on the world's most walkable cities, London, Paris, Bogotá and Hong Kong rank highest, in terms of proximity to car-free spaces, schools and healthcare, and smaller average city block size.

The 15 Minute Neighbourhood concept aims to foster local areas where people can walk along their local streets from home to their daily needs, like going to school, a grocery store, post office, bank, medical centre, public transport stops, and public spaces like open spaces and public facilities.

Encouraging walking by creating more walkable public spaces allows for numerous social, health and wellbeing, economic, environmental and cultural benefits. Walkable public spaces help us connect with each other and maintain healthy lifestyles, physically and mentally. They provide opportunities for place-based experiences and activation, foster a sense of attachment, and enhance liveability. They also follow cultural and historic routes, enabling a connection to Country and our communities' stories.



Homebush West

COVID has influenced the way people move around NSW

The global pandemic has highlighted the importance of walkable public spaces. Our research, conducted over two years of gathering community insights in our [Public Spaces during COVID-19 survey](#)³ show us that more people are walking and cycling in their local areas more than ever before. Local walking tracks, local streets, main streets, as well as dog off-leash areas have all been highly used during the pandemic, with this trend continuing even as restrictions have eased. The survey also highlighted the importance of streets designed for people, as well as the value of walking for connecting socially, which helps strengthen our wellbeing and resilience.

Of the close to 2,000 people surveyed by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment in 2021:



45% spent more time in public spaces than before COVID-19



76% used parks in their local area



The top 3 most appreciated public spaces:

- parks in local areas **68%**
- walking tracks **48%**
- beaches and foreshores **47%**



71% used public space to connect with people outside their households



49% cycled more during COVID-19



57% visited a local high street at least once a week



31% of people used online services provided by indoor public spaces



26% of people felt less safe in public spaces during the day during COVID-19

See [COVID Safe Public Space Guide](#)⁴ for pointers and links to resources to help us stay safe in our parks, beaches and foreshores, destination precincts and streets. Also see the [Case Studies](#)⁵ for examples of the different ways that councils and state government public space managers are working to support the community.



Case study: Trialling activations to encourage walkability



Fairfield City Council's 'Healthy Active Fairfield' project trialled changes in Fairfield and Cabramatta's town centres. With \$100,000 from the Streets as Shared Spaces program, Council transformed these sites with temporary pop-up parklets, turf, synthetic grass and seating, children's yoga classes, live DJing, public art and decorative lighting from November to December 2020. The projects provided new and unexpected opportunities for residents to stop, relax, rest, socialise and linger longer.

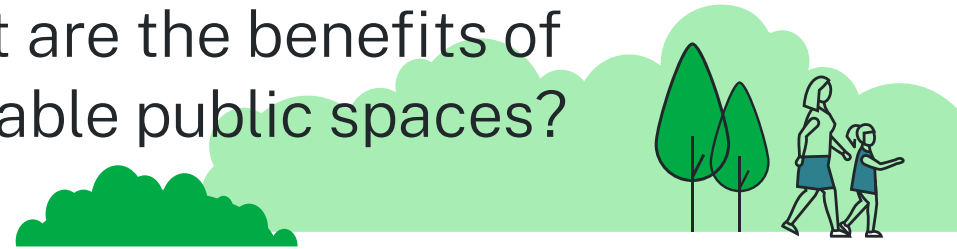
The Cabramatta project saw roughly double the usual number of pedestrians during the pop-up, and an increase in people visiting the space on foot at night, illustrating the importance of vibrant and activated spaces that are attractive and well maintained for encouraging walkability. Together, the projects also saw the creation of 180sqm of additional public space and 228sqm of road space reallocated for pedestrian use.

The projects gave Council the opportunity to test a place-based initiative that they now consider has longer-term viability and is well-supported by the local business community.



Cabramatta Town Centre.
Credit: Ken Leanfore.

What are the benefits of walkable public spaces?



Social benefits

The Department's *Greater Sydney Recreation Report* found that people use recreation for physical and mental health benefits and to also connect with other members of their community. Walkable public spaces enhance a sense of community and belonging. They encourage and facilitate social connections through opportunities to meet, interact, and engage with our neighbourhoods and local centres.

They allow for a range of experiences that connect us to our family, friends and neighbours, as well as diverse communities and other cultures. Walking allows us to participate in daily life through access to social infrastructure, services, shops, transport and employment.



Health benefits

Multiple health benefits may arise from providing supportive environments for both active and passive recreation. Research by AusPlay shows that walking is our most popular physical activity in NSW. Physical activity is essential to maintaining physical and mental health, improving wellbeing and quality of life. In 2020 the Greater Sydney Commission stated in the Performance Indicator: Walkable Places 'a daily 20 minute walk reduces the risk of early death by about 22% and increases mental health by about 33%'. Public Health England research has also found walking supports the prevention of non-communicable diseases, including diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Environmental benefits

We know that walking has a positive impact on the environment, as it results in reduced vehicle use, and therefore reduced carbon emissions. However, built environments that don't protect walkers from climate impacts such as too much sun and wind can make walking unpleasant. Improving the walkability of public spaces through increased urban tree canopy coverage and greenery is a key strategy to address urban heat and to improve the quality of public spaces. Increasing open space for walking trails creates a greener environment to support walking.

Source: Public Health England, 2019



Sydney Park, St Peters.
Credit: Destination NSW.



Case study: The Great West Walk



The department has partnered with Parramatta, Blacktown and Penrith local councils as well as Landcare NSW and Greening Australia to plant more than 26,000 trees along the Great West Walk, under the Greening the Great West Walk initiative. The Great West Walk is a 65 kilometre walking trail from Parramatta to the base of the Blue Mountains, the longest continuous walking trail of its kind in Western Sydney.

The walk was identified as having large portions of low tree canopy cover (less than 20%) resulting in sections of the trail being more than 8-11 degrees warmer than other parts of Sydney. Under the initiative, the department has funded the planting of trees of varying species and sizes at six locations across the three local government areas. Greening the walk will provide a cooler, more comfortable and walkable trail for communities to enjoy.



Parramatta Park.
Credit: Destination NSW

Economic benefits

Walkable public spaces can increase economic activity and support local economies by increasing visitation, spend and footfall. Activated, vibrant public spaces attract people and can stimulate a stronger night-time economy. They also help to generate local tourism, including in the nature-based outdoor activities sector, which Outdoors NSW estimates employs around 77,000 direct and indirect jobs.

The Heart Foundation's *Good For Business* report from 2011 notes improvement in the quality of the urban environment results from a rise in the volume of walkers and a fall in the dominance of cars, with the improved quality helping to increase visitation levels and frequencies, longer dwell times, and higher levels of expenditure per head for surrounding local business. In other words, 'a good physical environment is a good economic environment'.

The economic benefits of increasing physical activity levels through walking are substantial -15 minutes of brisk walking 5 days per week could reduce disease burden in Australia by 13% (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Canberra, 2017). Additionally, converting some car trips to walking could help reduce the cost of congestion in Sydney, the Central Coast, Newcastle and Wollongong which is predicted to nearly double between 2016 and 2031 (Infrastructure Australia, Australian Infrastructure Audit, 2019). This would also support NSW's goal of net zero emissions by 2050 under the NSW Climate Change Policy Framework.

"NSW is officially Australia's most popular bushwalking destination. More than 5.5 million visitors trek on the State's bushwalking trails.

Over a third of all travellers in Australia who undertake a bushwalk choose NSW for this activity and 16% of holiday trips in NSW involve bushwalking."

Destination NSW 2015



Mount Arthur Reserve
Credit: Destination NSW



Spice Alley, Chippendale
Credit: Destination NSW

The role and benefits of main streets

Streets in particular play a vital economic role as places of public life, where many activities occur in one place. Main streets, including high streets in urban centres, are important economic drivers and offer places to gather and access services. More than just a place for the movement of cars, these are principal streets providing vitality to neighbourhoods, supporting the local, and sometimes wider area, with jobs and services such as shopping, dining, entertainment and health to meet the daily needs of the local community.

The most common reasons cited for visiting local main streets, in our [Public Spaces during COVID-19 survey](#)³, were shopping or accessing services (87%) and visiting cafés and restaurants (61%).

The most common reasons for visiting local main or high streets were to:



Shop or access services



Visit cafés and restaurants

Case study: Maitland City Council, The Levee and Riverlink Building



The Levee and Riverlink Building project in Maitland has reconnected the city's main street with the Hunter River. Previously, the city had its back turned to the river, with little interaction or activity taking place along the riverbank. The urban design strategy for the area saw the river repositioned as the economic heart of town. An existing pedestrian pathway was refurbished, and follows the riverbank for the length of the town centre before connecting people back into city streets. This has encouraged shops and cafes to turn and face northwards, taking advantage of the prospect to the river.

The street and riverfront precinct has been rebranded as “The Levee”, with the new centrepiece of the city being the Riverlink Building – a spectacular, sculptural “gateway” connecting the main street to its unique river setting, framing views of the river and drawing people to the waterfront. The new streetscape and revitalised main street improve connectivity, walkability and cycling opportunities through refurbished footpath connections and by limiting vehicular access.



The Levee. Credit: Brett Boardman



Case study: Car-rang gel (North Head)

Cultural benefits

Walking is an important way to experience public space, enhancing our sense of place and place attachment. Walkable public spaces act as a canvas for public life by enabling diverse experiences day and night, throughout different seasons, and for all ages and abilities. Events and programming designed for people to walk to and through encourages activation and activity.

Walkable public spaces also highlight their unique heritage and local character and allow us to connect with Country and understand the storytelling of a place. Public art, installations and signage can unlock meaningful experiences on the ground, and can be enhanced by digital technology.

See the [NSW Guide to Activation](#)⁶ for more guidance.



Great Cobar Heritage Centre, Cobar
Credit: Destination NSW

Walking Country connects to a way of knowing the deeper histories of our public spaces. Country is an interrelated complex network, a holistic worldview that incorporates both the tangible that can be seen, touched or felt, but also the intangible expressions of spirit, language, customs or identity. Country encompasses the lands, waters and skies, and enables wellbeing and belonging. Country is not only the areas outside the urban environment; Country holds all spaces and whether the environment is natural or built, walking Country is an integral part of care of Country activities. Through walking, Country can be known, seen, experienced and loved – and in return Country provides nurturing for all who share Country.

Walking Country is an important way to foster connection and belonging for all people. Spending time on Country with family and kin, or if possible, Aboriginal Knowledge Holders of place, enables the narratives embedded in Country to come to life through story. Experiencing Country with those who know Country best enables a connection to place and broader cultural landscapes, revealing

the hidden or intangible aspects of the landscape. If this cannot happen in person, why not seek out audio-visual or written materials by Aboriginal Knowledge Holders to guide you into a place.

Several Aboriginal Knowledge Holders have shared stories about Car-rang gel (North Head) in Sydney and there are numerous walks on and around Car-rang gel that can be enjoyed through a filter of story and culture. Car-rang gel also holds

some of the rare patches of Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub left in the Sydney area. Seek out the hanging swamps. Notice how they give shelter and water to the smallest creatures who share this special Country that firmly holds back the seas while also feeling so remote from the city centre.

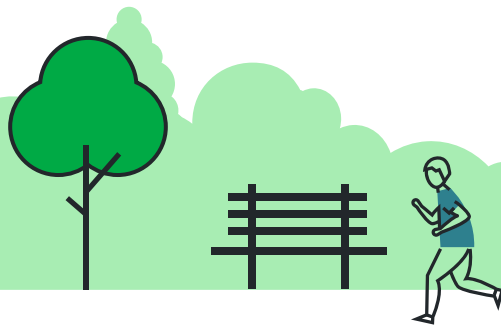
Dr Danièle Hromek

Dr Hromek is a Budawang woman of the Yuin nation.



Fairfax walk, Sydney Harbour National Park.
Credit: Natasha Webb.

Ideas and opportunities



Planning for walkable neighbourhoods and centres

Planning and delivering a network of walkable public spaces, supported by well-connected walkable neighbourhoods, local centres, high streets and social infrastructure like public facilities provides the biggest opportunity for positive change. People walk more where they are able to interact and engage with both the journey and the destination, particularly when they can access places from their home. This is supported by permeable street patterns, with high intersection density considered from the early stages of land use planning.

The *Greater Sydney Region Plan* emphasises that “great places are walkable – they are designed, built and managed to encourage people of all ages and abilities to walk or cycle for leisure, transport or exercise. Fine grain urban form and land use mix at the heart of neighbourhoods enhances walkability and the vitality of cities and centres.”

The NSW Movement and Place framework

[Movement and Place](#)⁷ is a cross-government framework that has been developed to create successful streets and roads across NSW by balancing movement of people and goods with amenity and quality of places.

Movement and Place considers the whole street including footpaths. It takes into account the needs of all users of this space including pedestrians, cyclists, deliveries, private vehicles and public transport, as well as people spending time in those places, whether moving around the place or enjoying street life including outdoor dining, waiting for a bus or people watching.

To support the framework, a series of tools and guidance documents are currently being prepared across NSW Government agencies.

Key guidance from Transport for NSW

The *Future Transport Strategy 2056* is an overarching strategy, supported by a suite of plans to achieve a 40 year vision for our transport system. One of the six core outcomes in the Strategy is Successful Places: liveability, amenity



“A great neighbourhood centre should provide access for people of all abilities”

and economic success of communities and places are enhanced by transport.

The *Road User Space Allocation Policy and Procedure* sets out how Transport for NSW (TfNSW) will deliver safe and equitable allocation of space on roads for place, function and movement requirements, during network planning, precinct and corridor planning, or designing roads and streets. Considerations for walking as a mode include locating crossings on desire lines and at all segments of an intersection; prioritising pedestrians through automated phasing of traffic signals; reducing street clutter; and identifying zones where car access should be restricted and determine whether restrictions apply at certain times of day or only to certain types of vehicles.

The [TfNSW Walking Space Guide](#)⁸ provides a set of standards and tools to assist those responsible for Walking Spaces on streets, to ensure that sufficient space is provided to achieve comfortable environments which encourage people to walk.

Healthy Streets[®]

The Healthy Streets Approach developed in the United Kingdom is a human-centred framework for embedding public health in transport, public realm and planning. The 10 Healthy Streets Indicators focus on the human experience ‘needed on all streets, everywhere, for everyone’. This approach offers another method to plan for and improve streets to create great public space, and can be used in combination with Movement and Place.

Case study:**Liverpool City Council,
City Centre Public Domain Master Plan**

The *Liverpool City Centre Public Domain Master Plan* is Liverpool City Council's 10-year vision and improvement plan for public spaces within the Liverpool City Centre, as it continues to develop into Sydney's third CBD, and gateway city to the new Western Sydney International Airport and Aerotropolis. Improving and increasing walkability was a key focus throughout the development of the Master Plan.

Research was undertaken including mapping and analysis of the factors influencing how people currently access and move through the city, to identify opportunities and constraints, and community and stakeholder engagement to

understand what improvements people wanted to see, to encourage walking within the city.

Benchmarking was also undertaken to identify local and international best practice examples, with respect to creating walkable public spaces. In response, the Master Plan proposes 90 projects that will improve the city's walkability, including healthier and safer streets that better connect people to places, vibrant and activated laneways, a more accessible riverfront, and unique public open spaces that respond to local character and celebrate the city's heritage.



Artist's impression of what Liverpool City Centre could look like. Credit: Liverpool City Council.

Evaluating the walkability of a public space

Understanding how walkable a public space is, whether existing or planned, can easily be assessed by measuring how many of the characteristics and enablers are present, and how effectively the space is performing for people walking. It's useful to measure before an intervention to develop your concept, and then after your intervention is installed to see how it is performing. Below are simple ways to evaluate walkability.

Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life

The Department's Evaluation Tool for Public Spaces and Public Life provides a useful way to evaluate the characteristics of a walkable public space. This adaptable tool assesses quality under the themes of: Am I able to get there? Am I able to play and participate? Am I able to stay? Am I able to connect?

These themes are described in the [NSW Great Public Spaces Guide](#)⁹.

You can use the tool, [available online](#)¹⁰, to observe onsite how people are using a space, and identify ideas and opportunities for where the place is doing well and how it could improve.

Understanding user experience

Auditing a public space experience with different user groups is another way to better understand their different needs. This includes gathering information and feedback on how they journey to and through a public space, their destination, arrival experience, and how they engage with focus points within the public space.

Examples include:

1. Accessibility User Testing of the physical design elements by customers with vision impairment and wheelchair users to help ensure the comfort and safety of both user groups in a given pedestrian zone.
2. Holding Night Walks with groups of women and other groups who may feel vulnerable in public space to understand perceptions of safety is another useful way to identify issues of concern or areas for improvement. A Womens Night Walk undertaken by Penrith City Council in partnership with the Department through the [Places to Love program](#)¹¹ informed many positive outcomes for their project in Kingswood: "70% of participants in the Night Walk wanted Kingswood to become a more colourful and attractive place" to help it feel more active and safer.
3. Technology can also be used to measure progress in public spaces, for example by using QR codes and interactive signage to invite visitors to provide feedback on their experiences in a public space.



Case study: Assessing walking vs waiting time

Walking is typically most enjoyable when it is uninterrupted. For a public space to be walkable, for the comfort of pedestrians it is important that people can cross streets regularly, easily and safely; however, streets often prioritise vehicular traffic and movement. This can be especially problematic for children, older persons and those with disabilities who may not feel confident to walk along vehicular-dominated streets.

Global urban experts Gehl have developed a simple technique to assess walking and waiting times to evaluate the experience of a walk in terms of the level of interruption experienced by pedestrians. This technique is described in the publication *How to Study Public Life* (Jan Gehl, Birgitte Svarre). This involves two people selecting a street, street segment, or path to walk together, with one person measuring total trip time and one person measuring total wait or stoppage time. Walkers can then compare these times to identify the level of interruption experienced along a street.

Gehl's research indicates that time spent waiting of 15% or less compared with the total trip time indicates a relatively uninterrupted experience.

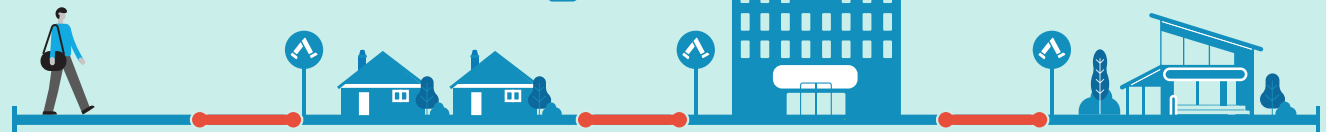
You can also use the [Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life](#)¹² to tally a snapshot of people using your space either 'moving' or 'staying'.

Walking vs Wait Times

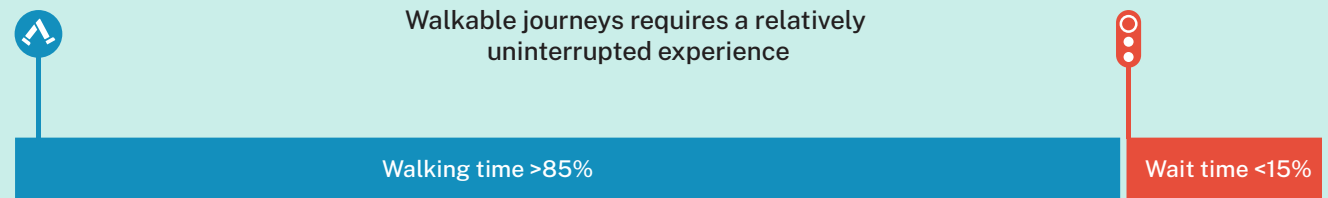
Start Together

Finish Together

First person measures total trip time



Second person measures total wait times





Trialling and testing improvements through temporary interventions

Transforming public spaces to be more walkable can be incremental. Temporary or tactical projects allow people to test and experience changes in a place, through ‘lighter, quicker, cheaper’ approaches. For example, the department’s Streets as Shared Spaces and Places to Love programs have enabled councils to adopt this approach in streets across NSW. These programs have empowered councils to test place-based changes, bringing communities together and giving them an opportunity to see their public spaces in a new light. These temporary interventions have piloted highly successful walkable public spaces that are helping build the case for more permanent change.

Case study: City of Sydney, George Street Temporary pedestrianisation trial leading to permanent change

As part of the Places to Love program, the department partnered with pilot councils to trial increasing walkable access to public spaces. The City of Sydney demonstration project took place along the southern section of George St, south of Bathurst St and north of Rawson Place.

In 2020, City of Sydney Council temporarily tested the closure of the street to vehicles. It did this through installing vehicle barricades, new seating, a vibrant road painting installation and engagement with local business and community. This created a place for

people that allowed physical distancing and catalysed support for the evolution into a permanent change to the street, creating a green, car-free corridor for people. The pedestrianisation also supported local businesses and aided the CBD in recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021 Council began the works to permanently pedestrianise this section of the street.

See the [Places to Love George Street Case Study](#)¹³ for details on this project.

The completed temporary works on George Street. Credit for image on right: City of Sydney



Case study: Ballina Shire Council, A slow path – not a fast short cut



As part of the Streets as Shared Spaces program, Ballina Shire Council is trialling traffic calming and streetscape enhancements to improve amenity and safety for pedestrians and cyclists in and around Park Lane, Lennox Head. During consultation, the community identified pedestrian safety as an important objective, as Park Lane is a popular shortcut for vehicles wanting to avoid main street traffic.

Council is testing raised speed thresholds (e.g. humps) and crossing points, kerb buildouts, reduced traffic speeds (30km/h), public art and decorative pavement treatments, a parklet, bicycle parking and maintenance equipment and solar lighting. Partway into the trial, council has already observed an average speed reduction of 10km/h along Park Lane. This trial has informed Council’s design of the Lennox Village Vision to introduce permanent streetscape improvements.



Planters were installed and the road was painted in vibrant colours

Enhancing walking experiences through digital technology

The use of digital technology is a great way to enhance the experience of a walkable public space on the ground, as well as to encourage people to get out and explore the many walkable public spaces around them.

This can be achieved by installing interactive signage on the ground, developing online or downloadable audio guides, and/or creating and promoting walkable public spaces through online mapping platforms that can direct the community to where public space is located, or to help unlock and explore the meaning and history of a given route or location through curated content. See the [NSW Smart Public Spaces Guide](#)¹⁴ for details on how technology can be used.

Public Spaces Near Me, launching in 2022, is a free, digital public space map for NSW where the community can find great public spaces within walking distance from them, and plan their own walking routes. Tools like this showcase the diversity and quality of public spaces in NSW.

Conclusion

Creating and connecting walkable public spaces through the key enablers and ideas in this guide will help support communities to get out and use and enjoy their fantastic public spaces while experiencing the many benefits of walking as part of their daily lives.

Lost Lanes, Places to Love¹¹ project in Wagga Wagga City Council



End notes

¹NSW Movement and Place framework:
<https://www.movementandplace.nsw.gov.au/>

²NSW Public Spaces Charter:
<https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces/festival-of-place/public-spaces-charter>

³Public Spaces during COVID-19 survey (3.7mb):
https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/405512/Public-Spaces-during-COVID-19-Adapting-to-the-new-normal.pdf

⁴COVID Safe Public Space Guide (14mb):
https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/488767/COVID-Safe-Public-Space-Guide.pdf

⁵COVID Safe Public Space Case Studies (4mb):
https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/486612/COVID-Safe-Public-Space-Case-Studies.pdf

⁶NSW Guide to Activation:
<https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces/festival-of-place/great-public-spaces-toolkit/guides/nsw-guide-to-activation>

⁷NSW Government Movement and Place website:
<https://www.movementandplace.nsw.gov.au>

⁸TfNSW Walking Space Guide:
<https://roads-waterways.transport.nsw.gov.au/business-industry/partners-suppliers/document-types/guides-manuals/walking-space-guide.html>

⁹NSW Great Public Spaces Guide (3.3mb):
https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/347567/Great-Public-Spaces-Guide.pdf

¹⁰Evaluation Tool for Public Spaces and Public Life:
<https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces/festival-of-place/great-public-spaces-toolkit/tools>

¹¹Places to Love Program:
<https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces/festival-of-place/places-to-love>

¹²Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life (0.9mb):
https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/357505/final-evaluation-tool-digital-english-march-2021.pdf

¹³Places to Love George Street Case Study (8.9mb):
https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/486611/Places-to-Love-case-study-City-of-Sydney-George-Street.pdf

¹⁴NSW Smart Public Spaces Guide (4.5mb):
https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/487056/NSW-Smart-Public-Spaces-Guide.pdf

NSW Government

<https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces/festival-of-place/great-public-spaces-toolkit>

For more information please contact the Cities Revitalisation and Place team at PublicSpace@planning.nsw.gov.au

