

# George Street

Places to Love Case Study:  
City of Sydney

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Pedestrianisation trial to help transform a street  
into one of the world's great boulevards

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# Acknowledgement of Country

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

We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to society.

Aboriginal peoples take a holistic view of land, water and culture and see them as one, not in isolation to each other. This Places to Love Case Study is based on the premise upheld by Aboriginal peoples that if we care for Country, it will care for us.



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Concrete block seating during the trial closure to vehicle traffic. Image courtesy: City of Sydney.



# Project at a glance

This demonstration project took place along the southern section of George Street. In 2020, City of Sydney temporarily tested the closure of the street to vehicles. It did this through installing vehicle barricades, new seating, vibrant road painting and engagement with local business and community.

Pedestrianising George Street created a place where people could physically distance during the COVID-19 pandemic and catalysed support for the evolution of the street into a green, car-free corridor for people.

In 2021, informed by the success of the trial and with further support of the Places to Love program, City of Sydney began the permanent pedestrianisation of this section of the street which was completed mid-2022.

## Places to Love

Places to Love is a collaborative program between NSW Government and councils to trial demonstration projects that improve walkable access to, and the quality of, local public spaces, particularly in streets and transport hub precincts.

In 2020-21, six councils partnered with the program, including City of Sydney for the pedestrianisation of George Street.

These demonstration projects trial quick and low cost approaches to make public spaces more vibrant and active using pop-ups and semi-permanent changes to test ideas and build the case for longer-term change.

Places to Love is a rolling program with opportunities for other councils to be involved in the future.



The completed temporary works on George Street.  
Image courtesy: City of Sydney

Places to Love Case Study | City of Sydney | George Street



## What was implemented?

The phase 1 trial included:

**4,500 m<sup>2</sup>** of pedestrian space created from temporary lane closures

**50+** temporary seats

**50+** comments from the community, welcoming improvement to access, local amenities, outdoor activation and dining

The phase 2 permanent changes included:

**9,000 m<sup>2</sup>** of new public space

**430** comments from the community      **20** new street trees

**120** seats and benches      **10** outdoor dining requests from businesses

## Key outcomes

Phase 1 of the project delivered a more people-friendly George Street with wider footpaths, and new spaces for businesses to operate, while attracting people back to the city centre.

The project provided the City of Sydney with evidence to progress its plans to permanently convert the closure into a pedestrian boulevard. Construction of the phase 2 permanent works began in 2021 and were completed in 2022. The permanent works were possible thanks to the trial's successful delivery and were further supported by the NSW Government through the Places to Love Program.



Above: Decal placed to invite people onto George Street.  
Below: A colourful painted design unified the reclaimed concrete seating and asphalt.  
Image courtesy: NSW Government.





# Project description

George Street runs 3 km long through the centre of the City of Sydney, from Sydney Harbour and the historic area of The Rocks, through to Central Station. The vision for George Street is for it to be Sydney's civic boulevard.

The north section of George Street, between Hunter and Bathurst streets, was transformed into a pedestrian boulevard as part of the CBD and South East Light Rail construction in 2019. The vision for this project was to extend the pedestrian boulevard of George Street south from Bathurst Street to Rawson Place in Haymarket.

The City of Sydney first worked with the NSW Government to temporarily close George Street between Bathurst Street and Rawson Place. The northbound and southbound traffic lanes were closed using temporary rubber kerbs and bollards with water-filled barriers at intersections.

Reallocating the traffic lanes next to the existing footpath increased the space for people to walk.

Once the lanes were closed to traffic, concrete logs and cubes were installed and provided seating. The lanes and concrete seats were then painted to provide colour, vitality, and better amenities for people walking and sitting.

After the success of the trial, NSW Government supported Council's plans to permanently pedestrianise the street.

## Aims and objectives

This project aimed to encourage community use of the newly created public space on George Street south by creating additional seating and inviting visual cues.

The primary objective of the temporary trial was to ensure people could maintain physical distancing and safely return to the city centre.

An additional objective was to gauge community support for the new pedestrian space.



The temporary installation of the painted design along the asphalt.  
Image courtesy: NSW Government.



“ The COVID-19 pandemic brought into sharp focus just how important our public spaces are - we need to prioritise space for people.

Wider footpaths and more space for pedestrians are critical.

Creating this space opens new opportunities for businesses and, crucially, provides places for people to gather and get around safely.

By creating spaces along George Street that people can enjoy, we're delivering our long-held vision of a world-class city centre, while also

assisting with COVID-19 recovery.

This is all part of our long-term vision to provide a calmer, more appealing environment for workers, visitors and residents and to generate a 24-hour city economy.”



**Councillor Clover Moore**  
The Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of Sydney



Permanent closure of the vehicle lane.  
Image courtesy: City of Sydney.



## Project location

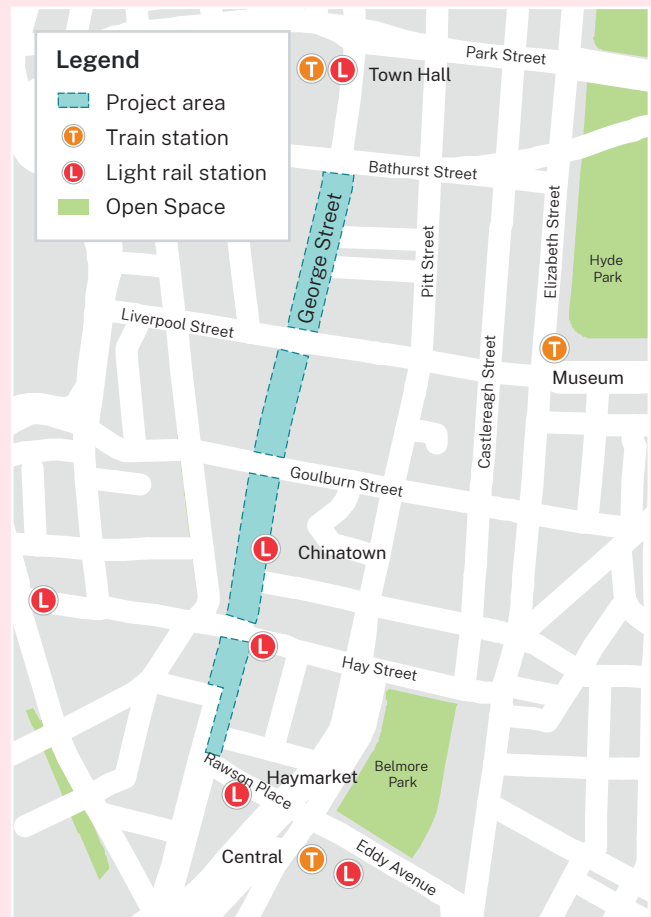
Sydney's George Street is the city centre's main north–south axis, connecting Circular Quay to Central Station, as well as bus and light rail interchanges. The recent introduction of light rail has substantially transformed parts of George Street.

The project focused on the southern section of George Street, a 780m stretch where pedestrian congestion made the footpath space unpleasant.

In 2020, the City of Sydney secured approval from Transport for NSW for the temporary closure of road lanes on the:

- East side of George Street between Bathurst Street and Rawson Place
- West side of George Street between Bathurst Street and Ultimo Road
- Hay Street between George Street and Sussex Street.

Concurrently, the City of Sydney partnered with the NSW Government on the Places to Love program to add another 4,500m<sup>2</sup> to a phase 1 temporary pedestrian space, effectively doubling the width of footpaths and creating more space for walking, socialising and physical distancing. For phase 2, the area for the permanent pedestrianisation was expanded.



## Strategic alignment

The George Street project supports the City of Sydney's long-term plan for a greener, global and connected city.

Specifically, it supports the Sustainable Sydney 2030 goals, and strategy to transform roads into

linked public squares by connecting Circular Quay, Town Hall and Central stations to the new and improved George Street.

Left: George Street before project. Image courtesy: City of Sydney  
Right: George Street in use after project. Image courtesy: NSW Government.





# Design and delivery of the temporary trial

Phase 1 of the project for the temporary trial included concrete logs and cubes that were recycled and relocated from the construction of the Sydney Light Rail to provide public seating south of Bathurst Street.

In addition to the road closure and public seating, the closed roadway was painted to encourage pedestrian use. Initially, temporary road decals were installed to invite pedestrians to walk on the closed lanes.

The City of Sydney maintained the southbound lane closure and extended it to Rawson Place. Council also closed the northbound traffic lanes of George Street from Bathurst Street to Ultimo Road under Section 115 of the *Roads Act 1993*.

On 8 May 2020, the NSW Government issued a media release announcing an extension of George Street's car-free zone in the city in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

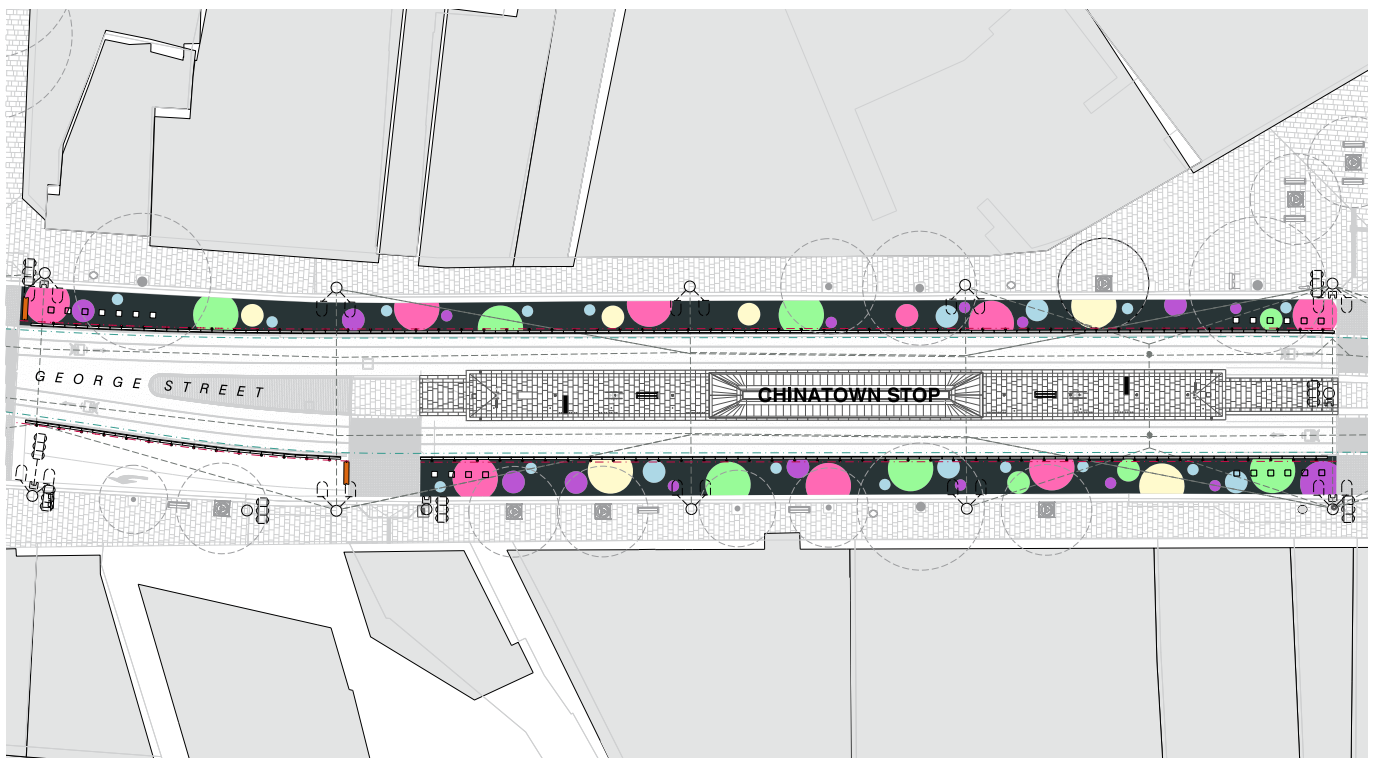
On 3 July 2020, Transport for NSW approved a traffic management plan for the temporary road closures.

Relocating and placing the concrete cubes seating within the closed lanes was undertaken as exempt development under the *State Environmental Planning Policy (Transport and Infrastructure) 2021* (the SEPP). A Review of Environmental Factors for painting the road carriageways identified this project element as 'development permitted without consent' under the SEPP and granted approval under Part 5 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.



Visualisation of project concept. Image courtesy: City of Sydney.

Below concept plan detail of George Street before the project commenced. Plan courtesy: City of Sydney.



# Community and stakeholder engagement

Council aimed to minimise the impact of change on the community and achieve the following outcomes through stakeholder engagement for the phase 1 trial:

- Property owners, businesses and residents along the route understand how the changes will affect them, and impacts will be minimised.
- The community, including visitors, workers, resident and key stakeholders, is aware and involved in building a new vision for the George Street south area through activations of the temporarily pedestrianised sections.

The following activities took place ahead of the temporary closure to inform and engage:

- Key stakeholder briefings
- Individual briefings with those directly affected
- Door-knocking for businesses on George Street
- 14,000 notifications sent
- Project webpage, online information form and staff contact details
- Media release and FAQs
- Monitoring of community sentiments to inform future plans for the space
- A total of 228 surveys were collected.

Feedback was largely neutral or positive and welcomed the opportunity to improve pedestrian access, the local amenity, outdoor activation and dining. Key issues for businesses included property access, loading, parking and servicing.

The City of Sydney's plans to permanently pedestrianise the area were subject to further community consultation. The permanent proposal received a total of 431 comments. The majority of respondents (71%) were supportive of permanent pedestrianisation.



Temporary bench seats provided a place for people to sit and stay. Image courtesy: NSW Government



Installation of the painted design on the asphalt. Image courtesy: NSW Government.



# Evaluation of the temporary trial

Council used the Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life (Evaluation Tool). The Evaluation Tool was used throughout the phase 1 temporary trial of the project to document trends in pedestrian activity before and after project implementation.

Surveys were undertaken at four locations along George Street, both during the day and evening throughout 2020 and upon completion of the project in 2022.

During the trial, most people were observed sitting or standing outside the cinema where the majority of temporary concrete block seats were installed. The afternoon/early evening was when the street was usually its busiest. However, the street was mainly used as a thoroughfare, with the vast majority of people walking on footpaths.

Additional surveys were undertaken upon completion of the new pedestrian boulevard in March 2022. There was a significant increase in the number of people observed sitting on the seats and new outdoor dining areas or standing and conversing with others. In particular, these numbers doubled at the cinema and World Square locations which had the majority of new public seating and outdoor dining areas.

Count	Who and what can you see?
10	Children aged 0-12
16	Teenagers aged 13-19
5	Adults aged 20-64
3	Seniors aged 65+

The site was assessed by staff from the City of Sydney and the NSW Government before, during and after the project. Images courtesy: NSW Government.



# Timeline

2020

## Phase 1: Temporary trial

**3 July**

Approval and handover of the George Street public domain from Transport for NSW to the City of Sydney

**13 July**

Temporary closure of traffic lanes

**6 August**

Relocation of concrete cubes to provide seating

**25 August**

Installation of temporary road decals

**12 October**

Approval to paint road

**2 November**

Painting of asphalt vehicle lanes and temporary seating

2021

## Phase 2: Permanent works

**Beginning March**

Staged replacement of temporary trial to permanent upgrade

2022

**June**

Opening of George Street permanent pedestrianisation

# Cost breakdown

The City of Sydney utilised a lighter, quicker, cheaper approach with \$130,000 of funding for the phase 1 temporary trial and an additional \$1 million towards permanent pedestrianisation.

Description of activities	Cost
<b>Activation</b>	\$100,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Road decals</li> <li>Planning advice (Review of Environmental Factors)</li> <li>Carriageway painting</li> <li>Road opening fee</li> <li>Barrier hire (July to December 2020)</li> </ul>	
<b>Communications</b>	\$30,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Temporary closure notification (print and distribution)</li> <li>Translation service for notification</li> <li>Photography</li> <li>Online promotion (Sydney Your Say website, Sydney City News and Sydney Your Say eDM)</li> <li>Paint install notification (print and distribution)</li> </ul>	
<b>Phase 1: Approximate total</b>	\$130,000
<b>Phase 2: Permanent works</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional Places to Love funding was provided to support the permanent pedestrianisation of this section of George Street</li> </ul>	
<b>Phase 2: Approximate total</b>	\$1,000,000



# Outcomes and lessons learnt

The temporary trial demonstrated the need for additional permanent pedestrian space on George Street, with pedestrian numbers generally up since the street was closed to vehicles.

More people were observed sitting or standing in the areas where additional concrete seats were installed, such as outside the cinema and outside World Square.

Initial observations found that pedestrians were not using the additional roadspace. Changing the appearance of the road surface and adding

seating were cost-effective visual cues to invite people into the space and let them know it was now safe to walk and dwell.

The trial closure also demonstrated community acceptance and support for a permanent pedestrianised George Street. Given the extra space, there is an opportunity for outdoor dining and additional street trees and furniture in the future. The City of Sydney continues to receive local business interest, which is another positive outcome.

The concrete block seating outside the cinemas during the trial closure to vehicle traffic. Image courtesy: City of Sydney.



“

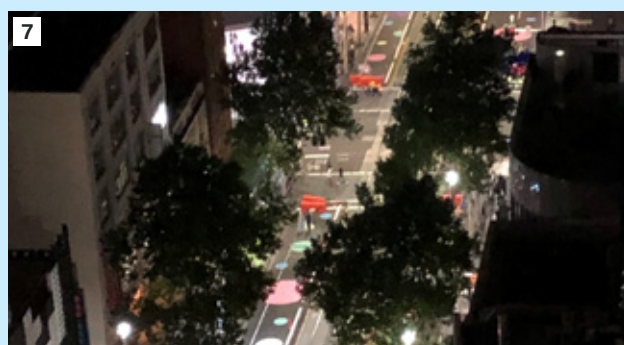
Just a quick email to say I fully support the proposed pedestrianisation of the entire length of George St

Local resident

”



# Photo diary



1. **Before** – The traffic lane between the light rail corridor and footpath before closure in early 2020
2. **Before** – Temporary closure of the vehicle lane
3. **Before** – Installation of kerbs and bollards on the area of road closed to traffic
4. **Before** – A template on the surface of the road for painted circles.

5. **Before** – Installation of concrete logs and cubes for seating
6. **After** – Decal placed to invite people into the street
7. **After** – Aerial view of the completed temporary project
8. **After** – Permanent closure of the vehicle lane.

Images 1, 2, 3, 7 and 8 courtesy: City of Sydney. Images 4, 5 and 6 courtesy: NSW Government.



“

I think the plan to extend the pedestrian zone for George Street is brilliant and should be made permanent. I think the more the CBD is made car free and available to pedestrians and cyclists the better.

”

Local resident



The completed permanent works on George Street.  
Image courtesy: City of Sydney.



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## NSW Government

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Image on front cover:  
George Street, Sydney, Places to Love.  
Image courtesy: NSW Government.

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## Resources



For more information, please visit [City of Sydney](#)



Visit our website to learn more about the [Great Places Toolkit](#) or email [revitalisation@transport.nsw.gov.au](mailto:revitalisation@transport.nsw.gov.au)