Planning for Growth

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Clover Moore  
Lord Mayor, Sydney

If you ask what makes Sydney an amazing city to work and live in, visit and enjoy, ‘planning’ may not be the first thing that comes to mind. But planning and development that is sensible and strategic is the basis for what makes our city world-renowned for beauty and liveability.

Central Sydney plays a key role in metropolitan Sydney, New South Wales, and the nation. In a world that is quickly changing, the Central Sydney Planning Strategy will help ensure Sydney’s continued dynamism for business and economic growth, while accompanied by social infrastructure, arts and recreation, and environmental stewardship.

With a unique setting, form, history and infrastructure, we welcome the challenge of building on our achievements and attributes while at the same time balancing economic, social and environmental needs. Space for future workers is crucial for our economy. Transport will be a major issue. Maintaining our memorable parks and green spaces is paramount. We will encourage beautiful buildings, and taking care of our residents.

The Strategy will help us plan for growth and change, facilitate a lively and engaging city centre and create a sustainable and resilient city, one that is globally competitive and serves its residents, workers and visitors well.

We will plan for jobs growth with an approach that is people-focused and place-led, and work together with business owners, landowners, residents and the New South Wales and federal governments, hand in hand, in the interests of our city.
Australia has one of the highest population growth rates of any OECD country in the context of falling global growth rates. In this there lies an intrinsic demand for higher value employment as well as a drive to carve out productive capability in an increasingly global marketplace.

Central Sydney and surrounds has become a magnet for attracting higher value businesses across their full lifecycle – in their fledgling embryonic phase, through their growth phase to their mature phase across sectors such as professional and financial services, education and tourism and hospitality. Sydney also has the prospect of becoming a significant centre for many digital-based industries, which dissolves the tyranny of distance. A consequence of this mixed-use environment is the need to ensure future workplace and business capacity at different price points in locations where the benefits of agglomeration are their most effective.

The Central Sydney Planning Strategy identifies and translates into spatial controls the setting for the heart of modern Sydney to grow in stature and importance. It builds on the success of a truly mixed use centre and the transformational investment that different sectors can bring to the city within the right framework and settings.

The Strategy builds on what has worked, strengthens what we value and identifies what can change while managing negative side effects. The Strategy retains those unique spatial controls that have influenced the vitality and amenity and will underpin the success of Sydney going forward. The Strategy adjusts where they apply, makes the case for enlarging the boundaries of Central Sydney and provides innovation in how a mixed-use centre can accommodate essential productive capacity for Sydney’s ongoing success.
Overview
The Central Sydney Planning Strategy is the result of a detailed review of the planning controls that apply to Australia’s most productive and strategically important employment centre.

The Strategy uses existing successful planning controls to ensure that Central Sydney can continue to grow in the service of its workers, residents and visitors. It ensures that Central Sydney is well positioned to contribute to metropolitan Sydney being a globally competitive and innovative city that is recognised internationally for its social and cultural life, liveability and natural environment. The Strategy presents key moves and planning control amendments with the aim of providing certainty, consistency and continuity for planning.

The Strategy is divided into five main sections that provide an overview of the Strategy; introduce the Strategy in more detail; provide context for the Strategy; describe the why, what and how of growth; and articulate the detailed provisions and actions of the Strategy.

An evolution of planning strategy

Planning strategies for Central Sydney have determined the shape and form of the city, and have evolved to become more complex and comprehensive. The Strategy builds on planning precedents to address the current climate and challenges. It is closely aligned with the City of Sydney’s Sustainable Sydney 2030 program and the NSW Government’s A Plan for Growing Sydney. Its governance will require a whole-of-government approach with meaningful collaboration and relationships between the State and metropolitan-level bodies including the newly formed Greater Sydney Commission.

Place-led and people-focused

Central Sydney is a unique place: an outdoors city with a stunningly beautiful setting and a temperate climate. Its geography has implications for how the city can grow, how people move around, how people enjoy public spaces and conduct their daily lives. It is rich with beautiful heritage buildings, special places and attractive parks. Its orientation, architecture and the shape of its street grid and precincts all add up to create an experience that sets it apart from other global cities.

These factors of place, structure and form are the considerations that create the first principles for the environmental controls that will be used for Central Sydney’s future: preserving and maintaining what is positive and unique, while reshaping attributes to meet the needs of tomorrow. Infrastructure, and in particular transportation, will play a key role. The growth of heavy and metro rail will be needed to accommodate Sydney’s worker population and residents. Management of vehicle use is required, as well as the promotion of cycling and walking, and creating transport links between Central Sydney’s open spaces. Other infrastructure issues are the need for social and cultural infrastructure, affordable rental housing and reducing energy consumption.
Planning for growth

Planning strategies have very successfully expanded residential floor space since the early 1990s. With residential growth has come a growth in supporting services and an injection in vitality that continues to benefit visitors, tourists and businesses.

Central Sydney now needs to relocate these incentives and protect and grow employment floor space to maintain its economic vitality and resilience, and to respond to the changing needs of markets.

Central Sydney has a limited capacity to grow and adapt because of its natural containment, heritage and the growth of residential development. Planning for growth therefore requires clear policies and careful management where the opportunity to grow employment floor space is protected from high residential demand and the effects of strata subdivision of prime land.

While recognising environmental controls, the Strategy has potential to unlock up to 2.9 million square metres of new floor space, and protect it for future income. Essential public infrastructure will be needed to accommodate increased workers and residents. Metropolitan Sydney’s other employment centres, particularly planned centres like Central to Eveleigh and the Bays, will need to provide for medium to long-term employment growth.

A refocus

The Central Sydney Planning Strategy recognises Central Sydney’s role in metropolitan Sydney, New South Wales and Australia, and the need to maintain and grow its status as a global city with a dynamic economy and high quality of life. It celebrates and promotes Central Sydney’s many famous, loved and valued attributes. The Strategy builds on past strategies to adapt to current needs and has a clear plan for action and implementation. It refocuses the current development environment that favours residential use of land towards accommodating employment needs while keeping a balance with social infrastructure and amenity.
About this strategy

The Central Sydney Planning Strategy is a 20-year growth strategy that revises previous planning controls and delivers on the City of Sydney’s Sustainable Sydney 2030 program for a green, global and connected city.

Planning for development in Central Sydney means planning for Sydney’s ongoing competiveness, appeal and resilience. As the economic heart of Australia’s most global city, the area plays a critical role in the continued growth and economic success of wider Sydney and the national economy.

Through 10 key moves, the strategy balances opportunities for development to meet the demands of growing numbers of workers, residents and visitors and their changing needs. It includes provisions for affordable housing, community facilities, open space and the essential services that will help these populations thrive.

It includes opportunities for additional height and density in the right locations, balanced with environmental sustainability initiatives, and sets criteria for excellence in urban design.

The strategy presents these opportunities in stages – short-term, medium-term and ongoing – and aligns these with planned developments in infrastructure and technology for an economically, environmentally and socially successful city.

The economic, social and cultural heart of the nation

Central Sydney plays a significant role in the life of the nation. It helps generate over $108 billion of economic activity annually – nearly 8 per cent of the total national economy. It has the highest concentration of top 500 companies and mainstream artistic and cultural institutions in Australia, and is its largest retail centre.

Much more than a business district, Central Sydney is home to 25,000 residents and 12,000 businesses. It accommodates close to 300,000 workers and a large proportion of the City’s 610,000 domestic and international visitors every day.

Millennia of Aboriginal history, more recent colonial settlement and decades of urban renewal and reinvention have shaped Central Sydney. The character of its streets and spaces and its connections, look and feel are shaped by the desires, needs and movements of those who live, work and visit the area.

The Strategy will build on these attributes that make Central Sydney unique and attractive using a place-led and people-focused approach to draw people, talent, investment and innovation, while providing the opportunity for the city to grow to accommodate demand for jobs and housing.
Worker and resident population growth – a comparison
Central Sydney and Metropolitan Sydney

Central Sydney

Jobs
- 2012: 286k
- 2036: 375k
- Growth: +1.24% p/a

Residents
- 2012: 25k
- 2036: 44k
- Growth: +3.04% p/a

Metro Sydney

Jobs
- 2012: 2.8 m
- 2036: 3.7 m
- Growth: +1.35% p/a

Residents
- 2012: 4.3 m
- 2036: 5.9 m
- Growth: +1.55% p/a
An evolution in planning strategy

Today’s Central Sydney – its density, shape, skyline and structure – was imagined in 1971 under the City of Sydney’s first comprehensive planning strategy. Since then, growth has been further influenced by new local, metropolitan and state planning strategies.

This strategy updates successful urban planning strategies and introduces new approaches to manage today’s environmental, social and economic challenges – the challenges of being a ‘global city’.

Competition for space fuelled by projected commercial demand, an awakening of the benefits of inner-city living, and escalating population growth: all of this means major cities of the world need to be more deliberate in planning how and where they should grow.

It is even more critical to tailor and manage growth in Central Sydney, a small and compact urban centre surrounded by the harbour and parklands.

Our vision and aims

Central Sydney is part of a green, global and connected city – a centre that is beautiful and vibrant, which supports a strong and growing economy, a sustainable environment and diverse communities. But we must continue to create and maintain Sydney’s prominent profile as a great place to live, work, study and visit.

This strategy recognises the role of Central Sydney in the economic, cultural and social identity of the nation. The strategy:

- Promotes sustainable buildings with great design and architecture
- Creates opportunities for beautiful parks and places
- Enables the protection and adaption of our heritage
- Ensures a resilient and diverse economy
- Promotes efficient and effective transportation
- Makes efficient use of land
- Supports great streets
- Delivers a city for people
- Ensures strong community and service infrastructure accompanies growth.
The challenge for a ‘global city’
Balancing economic, social and environmental outcomes

**Economic**
- Grow CBD office space
- Expand the CBDs footprint
- Support priority industries

**Social**
- Provide social infrastructure to support growing communities
- Grow the CBD as a cultural destination
- Deliver opportunities for affordable housing

**Environmental**
- Plan for a sustainable and resilient city
- Improve access, safety, amenity and capacity for walking and cycling
- Build Sydney’s resilience to natural hazards

**Plan for growth and change**
- Plan for long-term development opportunities
- Strengthen globally competitive clusters

**A lively, engaging city centre**
- A cultural and creative city
- Housing for a diverse population including affordable housing

**A leading environmental performer**
- A city for pedestrians and cyclists
- Sustainable development renewal and design

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**A Plan for Growing Sydney**

**Sustainable Sydney 2030**
Planning for growth with 10 key moves

The Strategy will facilitate projected growth in Central Sydney to 2036 and beyond with 10 key moves. These moves will be implemented in three stages: immediate and short-term (in 1 to 2 years), medium-term (2017 to 2036), and ongoing. Each stage will include review and monitoring processes.

10 key moves

1. Prioritise employment growth and increase capacity
2. Ensure development responds to context
3. Consolidate and simplify planning controls
4. Provide for employment growth in new tower clusters
5. Ensure infrastructure keeps pace with growth
6. Move towards a more sustainable city
7. Protect, enhance and expand Central Sydney’s heritage, public places and spaces
8. Move people more easily
9. Reaffirm commitment to design excellence
10. Monitor outcomes and respond
Timeline for delivery
Prioritise employment growth and increase employment capacity by implementing genuine mixed-use controls and lifting height limits along the Western Edge

New development controls will limit residential and serviced apartment floor space in large developments to a maximum of 50 per cent. This will provide for a genuine mixed-use outcome, stem the loss of employment floor space and ensure that as the city grows, new employment floor space is provided to accommodate projected jobs growth.

Providing an immediate increase in height controls on the Western Edge will capitalise on the changing form and character of the area and the additional rail infrastructure commitment by the NSW Government.

Within the podiums of towers, the city will see more retail, affordable offices, and cultural and creative uses that provide services at street level, allowing for an exchange between the life of the street and life in buildings – and contributing to the public life of the city. In the towers above, residential use will still occur with a buffer between these private habitats and the hustle and bustle of street life below. Controls for tower separation and height will drive the creation of slimmer towers that have better access to outlook, sunlight and air.

This short-term move will ensure the development of a genuine mixed-use centre and provide a solid foundation for the growth of employment floor space.

**Actions**

- Introduce a maximum 50 per cent residential and serviced apartment land use mix requirement for developments above 55 metres in height
- Increase heights along the Western Edge from 80 metres to 110 metres
0.3
Approved floor space, City of Sydney developments
2012–2015

0.4
Floor space growth for the same projects if 50/50 mix applied
2012–2015
Ensure development responds to context by providing minimum setbacks for outlook, daylight and wind

Flexible planning controls for tall buildings mean buildings will better respond to their context. Site specific considerations, such as adequate building setbacks and outlook, heritage curtilage, wind impacts, sunlight and air movement will determine where a new tower can appropriately be accommodated.

These changes will be implemented in the short term, in anticipation of new tower developments.

Actions

- Ensure tall buildings demonstrate appropriate setbacks and separation
- Increase the minimum size of tower sites to 1,000 square metres
- Strengthen and clarify Special Character Area setback controls
Consolidate and simplify planning controls by integrating disconnected precincts back into the city, unifying planning functions and streamlining administrative processes.

Expanding the geographic boundaries of Central Sydney to include the Rocks, Darling Harbour, areas around Ultimo, the University of Technology Sydney and Central Railway will maximise growth opportunities.

A single consent authority and planning framework for Central Sydney allows for the efficient and streamlined administration of planning functions. It allows the identity of Central Sydney and its precincts to be reflected as a single entity and projects this image globally. It allows Central Sydney to have a single unified strategic plan that responds to the planning and land use philosophies of the City’s Sustainable Sydney 2030 program and the NSW Government’s A Plan for Growing Sydney.

Consolidation and simplification of the planning controls will occur in the short term. Actions requiring state government partnerships will take place in the medium-term, with expanding boundaries opening up opportunities for a larger heritage floor space scheme, improved design excellence, unified data collection and a consistent approach to public domain and open space.

**Actions**

- Increase public confidence in local planning decisions by working with the NSW Government to revise state-significant cost thresholds and to transfer land back to the City of Sydney
Expand the geographic boundaries of Central Sydney
Provide for employment growth in new tower clusters

Introducing a new planning pathway for heights and densities above the established maximums limits will increase growth opportunities for employment floor space, promote the efficient use of land, and encourage innovative design. It will also unlock opportunities for the delivery of cultural, social and essential infrastructure and improved public spaces commensurate with growth.

These opportunities are focused in those areas of Central Sydney less constrained by sun access planes. As opportunities are taken up over the next 20 years, new tower clusters will form in Central Sydney to 2036 and beyond.

**Actions**
- Permit taller buildings with higher floor space ratios for income-earning uses in the right locations
- Outline first principle environmental controls to shape growth sites
- Create a streamlined planning proposal process through published guidelines
Ensure infrastructure keeps pace with growth to sustain a resilient city with a strong community, economy and high standard of living

With affordable housing provided for in the short term and additional infrastructure addressed on an ongoing basis, the Strategy will balance growth with essential social and physical infrastructure.

The greatest challenge for any global city is the supply, funding and delivery of infrastructure. Doing this well creates and sustains a resilient city with high standards of living.

The Strategy requires the development of an infrastructure plan that identifies current and planned infrastructure and any opportunities to strengthen and prioritise infrastructure provision across both the City of Sydney Council and the NSW Government. This plan will assist in optimising the community benefits of growth, assigning responsibilities to different levels of government to ensure they are best placed to respond to emerging challenges and demands. It will aid in forging private and public agency partnerships to ensure the delivery of infrastructure is provided in an efficient, integrated and timely way across a variety of infrastructure classes including open space, waste, fibre optics, water and water recycling, education, health, and public transport.

**Actions**
- Ensure all development contributes to the provision of new affordable housing
- Develop a comprehensive infrastructure plan
- Develop a clear infrastructure contributions policy for growth sites
Move towards a more sustainable city with planning controls that require best practice energy and water standards and for growth sites to drive zero-net energy outcomes

In support of the City’s aim to become Australia’s first zero-net energy city, the Strategy includes actions to implement planning controls for minimum energy and water standards for all new developments. It also includes actions to investigate provisions that reward the retention, refurbishment and upgrade of older office buildings to a higher water, energy and waste efficiency performance. This will take place over the short to medium term.

**Actions**
- Require large residential projects to comply with higher BASIX targets
- Require office development to achieve at least a 5 star NABERS rating
- Require growth sites to drive zero-net energy precinct outcomes
- Investigate provisions that reward the retention, refurbishment and upgrade of older office buildings

Energy efficiency is cost-effective and will make the most significant contribution – almost half – of the City’s emissions target.

Existing policies such as building codes and energy standards can save one million tonnes of carbon emissions each year by 2030.

New policies and programs can save almost two million tonnes of carbon emissions each year, which would mean annual emissions are 42 per cent less than 2006 buildings emissions.
Central Park
Protect, enhance and expand Central Sydney’s heritage and public places

Balancing growth with the need to protect and enhance public parks, spaces and views will ensure Sydney remains a beautiful and vibrant city. These public assets are critical to attract visitors, high-value jobs, tourists and residents. It is essential to ensure they receive adequate sunlight, remain safe and are well utilised.

As development occurs, the City will work with landowners to enhance and expand our network of public places and spaces. New roads, pedestrian links, revitalised laneways, events, green spaces, paved meeting places, outdoor dining opportunities and public art will be provided as the city grows.

Actions

• Strengthen sun protection to important public spaces
• Add and strengthen sun protection for Prince Alfred Park, Harmony Park and the future Town Hall Square
• Protect significant public view corridors at Martin Place, Central Railway clock tower and Observatory Hill
• Remove ineffective Chifley Square sun protection
Move people more easily by prioritising streets for walking and cycling and expanding the pedestrian and open space network

Prioritising streets for people to walk and cycle, and encouraging public transport, will reduce congestion and redefine our streets as places to enjoy, linger, interact and do business. These actions will help maintain our economic competitiveness, reduce greenhouse gases, and improve the health of the community. And it will make Central Sydney a pleasant place to work, live and visit.

The Strategy will deliver actions in the NSW Government’s Sydney City Centre Access Strategy, linking them, as the city grows, with opportunities introduced by the Strategy. The Strategy picks up where other strategies like the City’s Walking Strategy and Action Plan leave off. It directly links land use, the challenges of moving people in a growing urban centre and opportunities created through state, local and private partnerships to resolve complex issues such as freight management, footpath capacity and how to move a growing working population.

Actions
• Confirm and complement NSW Government and City commitments under the Sydney City Centre Access Strategy
• Partner with industry through growth sites to deliver more open space and east–west connections
• Partner with industry through growth sites to deliver precinct solutions to waste, car parking, loading and site servicing
George Street pedestrianisation and light rail
Reaffirm commitment to design excellence by continuing to work in partnership with community and industry to deliver collaborative, iterative and tailored solutions

High quality building design assures Sydney’s status as one of the most beautiful cities in the world. The Strategy promotes and encourages building design of excellent quality at every scale and level of detail, so people find buildings inspiring, satisfying and comfortable. The quality of a building – including its performance, proportions, finishes and placement in the skyline – all combine to make a building remarkable.

**Actions**
- Continue to provide resources and expertise to support design excellence processes
- Ensure growth sites demonstrate design excellence with particular attention to the skyline and the principles of ecologically sustainable development
- Extend design excellence to Central Sydney’s expanded precincts
- Extend design excellence to state projects including future metro stations
Monitor outcomes and respond to issues that arise to ensure the Strategy’s ongoing success

Monitoring the success and impact of these 10 key moves will help identify issues early and take action to address them.

A monitoring program will be developed in the medium term that focuses on the net growth of employment floor space.

Ongoing monitoring will also allow regular reviews of the strategy in line with critical land use and employment surveys, including the City’s Floor Space and Employment Survey (FES) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ Census of Population and Housing (Census). Results of the City’s monitoring program, informed by the FES and Census, will inform reviews of this strategy and related controls and guidelines.

**Actions**

- Develop a monitoring program with the NSW Government to track the net growth of employment floor space, overseen by the Central Sydney Planning Committee.

- Regularly review and adjust planning controls as required to deliver the planning and land use directions of the City’s Sustainable Sydney 2030 and the State’s A Plan for Growing Sydney.

Barangaroo will deliver over 300,000 square metres of employment floor space, or close to 6 years’ supply of office floor space in the space of 12 months. This flood of supply, rather than attracting new office tenants from overseas, will house existing Central Sydney tenants that have moved from older office buildings. This has left older office buildings, towards the end of their economic life, vacant. Whereas in the past, these buildings would have been upgraded and placed back on the rental market, in the current economic climate they are being sold and redeveloped for residential strata.

The predicted upwards trend for residential investment in Central Sydney is likely to continue, with a decreasing proportion of employment floor space and employment land available in Central Sydney – unless appropriate planning controls and intervention are implemented.
Why we need to plan for jobs growth

A growing economy

Central Sydney is the focal point for much of Australia’s economic activity and the premier centre of its society and culture. It is critical that we plan for the places and spaces for needed Central Sydney to continue to flourish.

Our greatest challenge is ensuring longer-term economic and employment growth. The economy needs space to grow. New workers need space. New business services need offices and meeting places. Retail businesses need shopfronts. The infrastructure required to support growth also demands a share of Central Sydney. Public spaces, theatres and community facilities all need spaces.

Central Sydney produces a $68 billion gross output, compared to Melbourne’s city centre at $39 billion and Parramatta at $8 billion. To maintain our standard of living, the State and nation depend on the growth of total gross output in all centres.

Step change in transport capacity

The largest commitment to new public transport infrastructure since the 1980s is set to boost public transport capacity in 2024, which will likely lead to an increase in demand for employment floor space. Central Sydney must be positioned to accommodate this growth.

Based on industry mix and relative occupational wage levels, it is estimated that the economic activity (GDP) generated in the City in 2013/14 was approximately $108 billion, representing 8 per cent of the total national economy in Australia, 30 per cent of the Sydney metropolitan economy and almost 25 per cent of the entire GDP for New South Wales.

Overall, the City’s working population represents just under 4 per cent of the total workforce in Australia.

The City is the workplace for 21 per cent of the entire finance sector, 15 per cent of the total information, media and technology industry, and 11 per cent of creative and performing arts activity across Australia. Catering for employment floor space and employment growth in Central Sydney is critical for the economic resilience of Australia.
Major planning strategy and public transport interventions
Worker population growth

Source: SGS Economics and Planning and City of Sydney, 2015
Planning for our future

Space is a finite resource. In Central Sydney, the potential for growth is limited or constrained by the natural environment, the City’s parks and harbour, existing development, the capacity of infrastructure, heritage considerations, international airport safety obligations and the spatial limitations of streets, lanes and blocks.

The best cities are mixed-use cities. With the introduction of policies to encourage more residential development, the last 20 years has seen a substantial increase in the number of people living in the centre. This has resulted in a vibrant, lively and productive centre, one that is increasingly attractive for residents, business and visitors alike.

However, this strong demand for residential development has resulted in the displacement of existing employment space and future opportunities for new employment space. This situation represents a direct risk to the Australian economy and must be rebalanced to retain metropolitan Sydney’s international competitiveness.

Effective Job Density

Effective Job Density (EJD) is a measurement of agglomeration that takes into account the relative size, connection and spatial organisation of a city.

Agglomeration

Agglomeration describes the benefits which flow to firms from locating in areas with a higher density of economic activity and connectivity. Increasing the level of agglomeration can boost labour productivity and GDP.
Strata Growth and Total Available Land in Central Sydney over time (top & bottom)
How we will plan for jobs growth

Changing demands and a changing population

Over the last four years, 52 per cent of new floor space developed in Central Sydney was residential. Without intervention to stabilise employment losses and increase the amount of employment floor space, jobs growth will be constrained. Based on a business-as-usual scenario to 2036, between 45 and 64 per cent of the projected jobs growth of up to 85,000 jobs will not be able to find the space to be located in Central Sydney.

For metropolitan Sydney to retain its global city status, and Central Sydney its primacy as Australia’s commercial core, space must be secured for jobs growth.
Employment Centres in Metropolitan Sydney with more than 9,000 jobs

- Central Sydney: 286,000
- North Sydney: 45,500
- Macquarie Park: 47,500
- Parramatta: 43,700
- Blacktown: 9,900
- Bankstown: 9,600
- Liverpool: 15,100
- Mascot: 33,600
- Hurstville: 9,300
- Chatswood: 17,700
- Randwick: 15,100
- Burwood: 10,200
- Penrith: 17,100
Place-led and people-focused

Central Sydney is in the middle of a renaissance with extraordinary levels of private and public investment in development and infrastructure. The Strategy will build on the opportunities offered by these projects and encourage employment investment beyond the traditional confines north of Park Street. This will complement the pedestrianisation of George Street and its three main squares – a square for celebration at Circular Quay, a civic square opposite Town Hall and a village square at Central Station.

The Strategy also supports the revitalisation of the Midtown and Southern precincts. Catalytic projects by both the NSW Government and private sector will be instrumental to improving the profile and market perception of these less traditional employment areas. Proposed metro stations and their integration into the city; the redevelopment of the space above the train lines at Central Sydney Railway Station; and private site redevelopments, must all contribute to the growth of this area as a future extension of the CBD.

By fostering growth sites through a guideline-led process, and by supporting growth sites with upgrades to footpaths and open space, the City can work with landowners to collectively secure the necessary boosts in profile and image that will result in commensurate rises in the overall commercial viability of these areas.

The Central to Eveleigh Precinct will become Central Sydney’s newest precinct, youthful and lively, and serving existing education, visitor accommodation and creative uses. It will also serve those emerging and perhaps yet-unknown business models and workplaces that are seeking a playful and creative point of difference to the traditional office core.
George Street public domain spine connecting 3 city squares
Closing the capacity gap

The Strategy’s 10 key moves will significantly increase the quantum of employment floor space. In total, the proposed immediate changes to the Sydney LEP 2012 under key move 2, together with the floor space unlocked by identified "growth opportunities" in key move 4, increases the amount of additional floor space to over 2.9 million square metres.

This unlocked development capacity will accommodate employment growth under modest projection scenarios.
1. 1,300,000 square metres
   Short to medium-term
   Today to 2030

2. +500,000 square metres
   Medium to long-term
   2024 to 2036 + beyond
A multi-centre city

The Central to Eveleigh and Bays Precinct urban renewal projects are an opportunity to secure the growth potential of Central Sydney. The physical proximity of these projects makes them the natural long-term extensions of Central Sydney, and the future home of metropolitan Sydney’s high-value workers and knowledge-intensive industries.

While this strategy includes planning controls that protect and encourage the provision of employment floor space, it remains critical that these planned centres, and other centres within metropolitan Sydney, also set aside an appropriate amount of land for employment floor space growth. Planning for a high jobs growth scenario for 2036 and beyond, rather than according to current trends, is critical to preserve the global status of metropolitan Sydney.

The Strategy details planning priorities for Central to Cleveland Street and the Bays Precinct, including additional public transport linkages, affordable housing, diverse employment floor space, enhanced local connections and improved local infrastructure.

It extends the question of how we plan for the growth of Central Sydney from what can the City of Sydney do alone, to what can the City, state and communities do in partnership to ensure these precincts develop as a successful extension to Central Sydney, where success is measured through financial, social and environmental sustainability.
3. +1,100,000 square metres
Medium to long-term
2024 to 2036 + beyond

4. +significant employment floor space
Long-term
2036 + beyond
Implementing the Strategy

Urban growth and development in Central Sydney requires specific solutions and controls. The Central Sydney Planning Strategy provides a planning framework with clear objectives for this complex area.

The Strategy aims to balance public and private interests and so requires support from landowners, business owners, residents and all levels of government.

A truly comprehensive and holistic vision for Central Sydney also requires focusing on the wider Sydney region with a greater understanding of the fundamental elements of a global city of choice and what will be the future needs of business, workers, visitors and residents who choose Sydney to work and live in, and enjoy all that the city offers.

Actions

- Develop clear guidelines to enable growth through site-by-site planning changes in the short term
- Work with the NSW Government to provide certainty and security that growth sites will be protected for income earning uses, therefore supporting the viability of Central Sydney as Australia’s premier location for employment
- Work with the NSW Government to fully implement the growth strategy directly within the Local Environmental Plan by overcoming regulatory constraints in the medium-term
1
Introduction
1.1
Purpose, scope and vision

This introduction to the Central Sydney Planning Strategy (the Strategy) describes the Strategy’s purpose, scope and guiding documents. This is followed by a vision for Central Sydney as a global city that is green, global and connected. A description is given of the nine aims that underlie the Strategy and the development controls and actions that are a key part of the Strategy’s implementation.
Purpose

The Central Sydney Planning Strategy aims to ensure strong planning for Central Sydney. It outlines how Central Sydney will grow in the future and includes development controls to promote the type of growth and environment for Central Sydney to remain part of one of the world’s truly unique and memorable global cities, recognising its role as the State and nation’s economic, cultural and social engine. The Strategy builds upon Central Sydney’s strong beginnings in urban planning and proposes nine aims for the protection and growth of a green, global and connected Central Sydney, today, tomorrow and beyond.

Scope

Central Sydney is the commercial centre and core of the Sydney Metropolitan Area. For the purposes of the Strategy, Central Sydney refers to the land that has been designated as B8 Metropolitan Centre Zone under the Sydney Local Environmental Plan (LEP) 2012 and its four precincts: the City Core, the Western Edge, Midtown and Southern (refer to 1_1).

Central Sydney is the only piece of land attributed this level of zoning in the state of New South Wales. The NSW Government prescribed three mandatory objectives for the zone:

- To recognise and provide for the pre-eminent role of business, office, retail, entertainment and tourist premises in Australia’s participation in the global economy
- To provide opportunities for an intensity of land uses commensurate with Sydney’s global status
- To permit a diversity of compatible land uses characteristic of Sydney’s global status and that serve the workforce, visitors and wider community.

How Central Sydney is referred to has changed over time, from a ‘Business and Commercial Centre (County)’ in the 1950s, a ‘County Centre’ in the 1970s, and a ‘City Centre’ in the 1990s to today’s ‘Metropolitan Centre’. Central Sydney is also referred to as the ‘CBD’ and the ‘City Core’.

Importantly, the Strategy recognises Central Sydney’s importance to metropolitan Sydney, New South Wales and Australia. It includes principles and actions that go beyond the confines of the B8 Metropolitan Centre to consider how Central Sydney should grow into the future as part of a larger, connected, multicentre metropolitan Sydney.

The Strategy represents an evolution of planning strategy for Central Sydney. Central Sydney has grown in line with best practice planning and sound objectives for over 40 years. Today’s Central Sydney – its density, shape, skyline and structure – was imagined in 1971 under the City of Sydney’s first planning strategy, which set out numerous controls and concepts that are still in place today. Its growth was then subsequently influenced by new and updated local, metropolitan and state planning strategies. Now, the Strategy recognises that urban planning strategies need to be refined and reworked in response to changing environmental, social and economic conditions, so that urban centres can continue to perform their important roles to their people and nation.

The Central Sydney Planning Strategy is the result of the Central Sydney Planning Review (the Review) that was initiated in early 2012 by the City of Sydney and reviewed the urban planning framework and controls that apply to Central Sydney and its surrounding areas. The Review, along with a range of other cross-organisational initiatives, was aimed at achieving the Sustainable Sydney 2030 vision of a green, global and connected City of Sydney.

The Strategy represents the key findings and recommendations of the Review. It analyses and presents a strategy for how Central Sydney has, will and should grow. The Strategy looks at its people and places, and the challenges of balancing land use and of moving people in, out and around the City of Sydney and metropolitan Sydney.

The Strategy aims to provide certainty, consistency and continuity for planning. It recognises that its successful implementation will require effective and efficient administration and that the plan, as a whole, carries a broad range of support from stakeholders, as it will involve working with landowners, business owners, residents and all levels of government. The Strategy envisages a planning framework that is simple and clear in regards to its objectives while acknowledging that to resolve something as complex as urban growth and development in Australia’s only global city will sometimes require specific, tailored, technical solutions and controls. Finally, the Strategy expects that a reasonable balance will be achieved between public and private interests in the implementation of the Strategy.

Depending on its context, the Strategy uses ‘City of Sydney’ to refer either to the City of Sydney Local Government Area or the City of Sydney organisation.
Existing Central Sydney Precincts:
Shown indicatively
Vision and Aims

Sustainable Sydney 2030 provides a vision for the City of Sydney as green, global and connected for 2030 and beyond. The Strategy seeks to build on this to create specific principles for the development of Central Sydney. The following principles were developed as part of the Central Sydney Planning Review and act as the basis for the Central Sydney Planning Strategy. Encompassing the same values as Sustainable Sydney 2030 – green, global and connected – the Strategy adopts nine principles to carry us to 2030 and beyond:

Green

• Promoting sustainable buildings with great design and architecture
• Creating opportunities for beautiful parks and places
• Enabling the protection and adaption of our heritage

Global

• Ensuring a resilient and diverse economy
• Promoting efficient and effective transportation
• Making efficient use of land

Connected

• Supporting great streets
• Resulting in a city for people
• Ensuring strong community and service infrastructure is provided as growth occurs.
Sustainable buildings with great design and architecture

The Strategy will facilitate the development of buildings with great design and architecture that are functional and sustainable over their long-term life span. The Strategy’s planning controls will minimise negative impacts on surrounding public spaces and neighbouring buildings, and protect the city from overshadowing and wind effects in the streets.

Great architecture contributes to the health and productivity of a city’s workers and residents, and to the enjoyment of visitors. A great building creates a healthy and inspiring space for living and working with a sense of space, light and thermal comfort within the building. Great architecture and buildings make a city enjoyable to be in. They are an essential feature of Sydney’s global image: a city with a diversity of great contemporary and heritage buildings set within a spectacular landscape. This Strategy encourages buildings that are healthy, inspiring and productive places for people. All buildings should be comfortable, safe and high quality, offering positive and memorable experiences for those who use them.

The buildings should be appropriate to their function as workplaces, cultural, retail, community or mixed-use spaces.

The Strategy promotes and encourages design excellence at every scale and level of detail, so that users of these created spaces find them inspiring, satisfying and comfortable – from appreciating a building’s performance and proportions to touching its finishes and viewing its placement in the skyline.

The Strategy will facilitate sustainable buildings that will contribute positively to the city. These buildings minimise their overall negative impact on the environment and dependence on non-sustainable energy, and have obvious current and future benefits.

The Strategy will support tall buildings that contribute to Sydney’s iconic skyline that includes the Opera House nestled in our famous harbour, and the many skyscrapers of the City Core – a beautiful skyline that reinforces Sydney’s global image.
Opportunities for beautiful parks and places

The Strategy will preserve the comfort and enjoyment of parks and other public places as important spaces for the benefit of all.

Great parks and other public spaces contribute to how people experience, visualise and remember a city – this is especially true of Sydney, an outdoor city blessed with one of the world’s most enviable settings and climates.

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Hyde Park, the Domain: these are examples of Sydney’s unforgettable public spaces that provide space for recreation, rest, reflection, commemoration, celebration, and civic and social gatherings, and allow contrast and relief from the city’s office blocks and towers.

A key approach for promoting the enjoyment of parks and other public spaces is to protect their access to direct sunlight, particularly during the middle of the day when it is most critical for public enjoyment and plant growth. This is best achieved through attention to building heights and the skyline.

The Strategy will also ensure buildings contribute to beautiful public spaces, not only their aesthetic qualities but also how they address their surroundings and frame a space.

Finally, the Strategy recognises the importance of beautiful public spaces to Sydney’s image: their creation and protection, and keeping them maintained and updated – these actions all support major events, underlie tourism and strengthen Sydney’s identity and brand.
Protection and adaption of our heritage

The Strategy will continue to protect Sydney’s heritage and seek innovative conservation methods. It will act to conserve, respect and celebrate the city’s unique history through its buildings, places, objects and landscapes. It will do so by preserving heritage buildings, and by recognising and respecting special areas where groups of important buildings frame significant public space, and contribute to precincts of a shared character.

Sydney’s heritage contributes to our distinctive identity, but change is constant. Historical buildings, precincts, structures and details are the physical expression of our history: they add to the image and memory of Sydney for visitors and residents. Sydney has some of the nation’s most historically significant buildings. It’s important to protect them so our collective heritage can be appreciated and understood by visitors to our city.

This Strategy will provide an improved experience of Sydney’s heritage. By preserving and adapting our heritage, the layers of Sydney are built upon and enhanced to make a city that is authentic, human and soulful. Heritage buildings add quality and history to the streetscape, contributing layers of community and social significance. They are important for their intrinsic value as well as for their cultural significance.

They express different periods of time and progress and allow Sydney’s major stages of development to be traced through the history and shape of its precincts. Importantly, they contribute diversity – different forms, functions and aesthetics – and provide breathing space between office towers and skyscrapers, and a contrast between the old and the new. The buildings express the city’s personality and contribute to a perception of authenticity by retaining traces of past use and activity, while allowing for reuse and adaptation. At the same time, the appropriate adaptation of heritage buildings is encouraged for contemporary, economically productive and sustainable use. While the Strategy cannot define how growth can be achieved by incorporating heritage buildings into development schemes, it encourages the creative and innovative achievement of growth through heritage amalgamations, appropriate adaptations and, most importantly, through conversation – as any proposal that involves one of Sydney’s unique heritage buildings will require unique consideration and collaboration outside of the planning framework.
A resilient and diverse economy

The Strategy will facilitate and encourage metropolitan Sydney’s productivity, recognising Central Sydney’s role as an economic engine and premier employment hub that benefits New South Wales and the nation. By positioning itself for sustainable and purposeful population and employment growth, Central Sydney can promote itself as a city open to new opportunities. Central Sydney’s economy is competitive, high yielding, high value and innovative.

Central Sydney is the home of Australian and international companies, renowned cultural and tourist destinations, and vibrant shopping and entertainment quarters. It attracts industry through its significant competitive advantages: strong infrastructure, a magnificent location, a high quality of life and a skilled workforce. As a global city, it attracts talented workers and provides opportunities for innovation. It is important to maintain this role and position as a desirable environment for global firms, faced with competition from elsewhere in the country and the Asian region.

As Central Sydney grows, this Strategy will guide and encourage investment, matching it to Sydney’s needs. It will clearly define a pathway for investors and developers to contribute to the city. With limited physical space for Sydney to grow into, land use must be carefully managed with attention to urban density.

This Strategy is medium-term with an eye beyond 2036. Whether the current economic cycle favours residential or commercial investment, the best use of space in the city is one that supports economic growth and facilitates an increase in productivity. While residential investment contributes to attracting industry and individuals to Sydney as a liveable and people-friendly city, this Strategy prioritises space to be occupied by a variety of commercial, retail and hospitality businesses.

The Strategy envisions industries located in close proximity in the city, creating anchors for clusters of firms and organisations to complement and compete with each other. Regular engagement between them improves learning and innovation, draws customers and improves efficiency, including through ease of transport, movement and communication. The Strategy will protect and provide opportunities for these known industry-based precincts, such as finance, media, law and design, and those yet-unknown today, those emerging and those growing.

The strategy also recognises that different centres of economic activity and investment in metropolitan Sydney will be a part of a complex interaction with the city, nation and world. It actively reinforces links with these other locations so that each is encouraged to play to its strengths and most advantageous roles.
Efficient and effective transportation

The Strategy promotes and prioritises modes of transport with the most efficient use of space – walking, cycling, light rail and metro. It champions improved public transport and the effective use of the city’s space for these modes of transport as outlined in the NSW Government’s Sydney City Centre Access Strategy.

Sydney’s streets are the Central Sydney’s public domain; they are its arteries, the way we move through and get around the city. As Sydney grows, the demand on our streets also grows. The Strategy promotes the most productive use of streets, balancing the different ways they are utilised.

A smart transport strategy contributes to the vitality of Sydney’s streets by encouraging walking and cycling and effective public transportation. It helps residents, workers and visitors move around easily. It guides policy, services and amenities to best do this, recognising that while some streets carry more traffic than others and some are prioritised for public transport, all streets are important public spaces.

The Strategy supports the NSW Government’s Sydney City Centre Access Strategy by addressing walking and cycling as the most efficient modes for short inner-city trips. This is because a higher proportion of workers in Central Sydney rely on surface transport rather than the rail network. Also, Sydney’s inner neighbourhoods are rapidly growing; their residents will access Central Sydney most easily by walking and cycling. The Strategy supports Sydney in being a more accessible, attractive and safer city to explore on foot, by making walking quicker, more convenient, inviting and easy.

Public transport is fundamental to Sydney’s role as a modern city, moving around increasing amounts of people, talent and knowledge in the service industries including finance and education, especially by rail and bus. The Strategy is reliant on the improved efficiency of the public transport network, particularly by planning better connections between modes of transport.

To benefit communities, urban consolidation and increased commercial development must be accompanied by high-quality transport infrastructure. The Strategy supports the progressive expansion of Sydney’s emerging light rail network, superseding buses on very busy corridors, including Oxford Street, Broadway and parts of Elizabeth Street. The Strategy protects these corridors from incompatible development, such as major driveways.

Workers will continue to use private vehicles in Central Sydney but the proportion of work trips in private cars will decline as jobs and housing grow. The Strategy will stabilise the total parking supply in Central Sydney.

The Strategy will balance access to streets, footpaths and private land. It will maximise opportunities to consolidate sites for the delivery of services and goods. Where possible, sites will be encouraged to share basement connections with their neighbours and provide improved facilities for handling deliveries and goods through precinct-based freight hubs where last-mile deliveries are completed on bike. Basement and other underground connections may also help congestion and protect the amenity of streetscapes and major public transport interchanges.
Efficient use of land

Maximising the efficiency of floor space within the height available in Central Sydney is the Strategy’s key move for the efficient and productive use of land. Land is Central Sydney’s most important asset. Sydney must make the most of it. We must ensure it is developed in a way that contributes to a productive city, a city that best utilises our space and land and is smart about the way we grow and encourage land use.

This benefits metropolitan Sydney, reinforcing its powerful economy, attracting investment and maintaining its global reputation, at the same time as promoting and protecting the Central Sydney’s amenity. It is about a city that is adaptable and flexible, and resilient to changing economic climates. The best use of space will contribute to the most productive Sydney.

The Strategy goes beyond simple floor space ratio (FSR) calculations to consider function, form and interaction: what is expected for land use, the contribution to the public domain, and how buildings relate to each other. The Strategy will also encourage design excellence that references simple rules related to scale and built form. It will respect existing controls and permissions while prioritising the minimum requirements for comfortable and quality environments for users, the envisaged character of the precinct, and the needs of the city as a whole.

As Sydney is compact and growing, proactive efforts are needed to ensure efficiency and productivity. In acknowledging the limited space available, the Strategy will seek effective, creative and appropriate solutions. Floor space that is not committed to residential use increases our ability to stay adaptable. Where opportunities exist, the Strategy will maximise the benefits of available land by promoting amalgamation. In Central Sydney’s limited space, larger towers are the most efficient and productive. Where sites redevelop together rather than on their own, they can achieve larger and higher developments that use land more effectively.

Finally, the Strategy supports sites to be self-sufficient. Redevelopment of sites will ensure adequate light, air and outlook, and will not prevent neighbouring sites from future redevelopment. Appropriate heights and setbacks of buildings from their boundaries achieve appropriate amenity in terms of light, shadow and outlook; the larger the site, the easier it is to accommodate those setbacks. The principles that encourage amalgamation and self-sufficiency go hand in hand.
Great streets

The Strategy elevates the importance of Sydney’s streets as public spaces. It builds upon the principle that buildings must relate to the street, allowing for an exchange between street life and the life in buildings, contributing to the city’s public life. It envisions a diversity of activity at street level by requiring buildings to have active frontages, where the front facades of buildings open towards the street, allowing active engagement between those in the street and those in the lower floors of buildings, and where the ground floor activities of buildings contribute to an interesting and dynamic street life.

Great streets are enjoyable, comfortable and safe for all people. They define what it’s like to live and work in and visit Sydney. Sydney’s streets and laneways form a network of public spaces that are functional, interesting, diverse, quiet, busy, big, small, impressive and intimate. Each street has a unique combination of elements – including architecture, light, air, scale, views and function – that makes it special.

They are also the infrastructure for people to easily get around, particularly by walking and cycling, and support an active and diverse retail economy. Just as important, great streets are those that draw people out of buildings, to engage in creative conversation, ideas and activities. It’s important to the City’s future to recognise the benefits of public spaces and prevent their erosion. Our streets are the location of day-to-day and recreational activities, increasingly so in a compact city centre that is growing in density and population. The amenity of our streets is therefore of more and more importance, particularly the protection of direct sunlight access. Street-level amenity plays a crucial role in establishing Sydney’s character as a memorable and iconic global city with streets that are defined, lively, vibrant and comfortable.

The Strategy prioritises the comfort and enjoyment of Sydney streets. It envisions space between buildings for light to come through to the street and the minimisation of the uncomfortable effects of wind created by tall buildings. It encourages that an element of protection is integrated into the design of streets, so they are safe from the weather and people feel safe using them, including by being part of a healthy amount of activity on the streets, day and night. It includes the management of air quality.

As Central Sydney grows and increases in density, competition will intensify for the limited amount of space on Sydney’s streets: the solution will be to find the most effective ways for people to get around in a safe and comfortable way. Walking and cycling save space and are the most time-efficient modes of transport; this Strategy will actively support them.
A city for people

The Strategy promotes Sydney as a city for people through actions that facilitate the values of liveability, inclusivity, tolerance and diversity. Sydney belongs to everyone: people of all ages and life stages; locals and visitors; workers, businesses and residents. Sydney’s success and reputation is associated not only with economic outcomes but also with these non-economic values.

The Strategy elevates the quality of how people experience the city, whether at work or play, whether living in or visiting Sydney. Their increased enjoyment of the city leads to more benefits: attracting people to the city, supporting them to work and live, and encouraging their positive contributions to the city.

To achieve this quality and enjoyment, it is essential that people can easily get to the city, and then easily get around by public transport and by walking and cycling – the best way to get between the many services located in the city – along routes that are pleasant and comfortable.

Recognising that the city is of benefit to everyone, the Strategy seeks to facilitate spaces for public life. The city is a stage. Beautiful and memorable settings host musical events, art exhibitions, protests, celebrations and parades. They are activities that represent the diversity of how we as Sydneysiders participate in a city we love.
Strong community and service infrastructure accompanying growth

The Strategy will align urban growth with the delivery of appropriate infrastructure. A city exists first and foremost for its people. This means that as it grows, community and service infrastructure must grow with it to create an environment that is safe, pleasant and attractive. It should encourage social life with well-functioning community services such as schools and health and medical services. Significant investment is required to facilitate this infrastructure, and all levels of government must work together to achieve it.

When urban growth occurs without improving community and service infrastructure, the negative consequences are obvious. A lack of essential infrastructure means cities become unsustainable and unliveable, suffering social polarisation, urban decay and economic stagnation. It means failing transport, pressure on health and education services, unaffordable housing, damaging pollution and less access to public buildings and spaces.

Community and service infrastructure must continue to grow. It must serve both current and future communities. Opportunities for the city’s growth must consider what infrastructure is needed to support it. Developers will be required to work with the City in an accountable and efficient manner to deliver community infrastructure, including libraries, child care and cultural facilities, and service infrastructure such as light rail, footpaths and affordable rental housing.

Development and good community and service infrastructure go hand in hand towards a healthy, vibrant and sustainable city. This Strategy will facilitate developers to support the growth of infrastructure through transparent and straightforward planning controls and administrative processes.
Strategy development controls and actions

As Central Sydney grows, and opportunities for growth become limited, responsibility increases for the City of Sydney to plan for and promote the efficient, orderly and economic development of land through development controls. Development controls protect the public domain and public interest. They provide for sufficient development potential to meet reasonable demand. The Strategy comprises both a strategic plan for the development of Central Sydney and a system of development controls. The development controls are based on the controls contained in the Sydney Local Environment Plan (LEP) 2012 and the Sydney Development Control Plan (DCP) 2012.

A clear understanding and consistent application of Strategy’s development controls will provide certainty to stakeholders, and result in achieving the future vision of Central Sydney as the engine for a dynamic green, global and connected City of Sydney that continues to grow and serve its people.

Some areas of urban planning are beyond the influence of development controls and will require further action as part of the Central Sydney Planning Strategy. Together with short-term, medium-term and ongoing actions and key moves, the Strategy identifies where the City can influence and work with Central Sydney’s various communities and state and federal governments to ensure that Central Sydney can play its role in metropolitan Sydney maintaining its global status.
Central Sydney: one centre in a multicentre metropolitan Sydney
2
Context
Central Sydney planning: a history

Central Sydney’s urban planning, its strategies and controls, can be traced back through the abandonment of building height limits in the 1950s; the introduction of comprehensive strategic plans in 1971 and 1988; and the emergence of design excellence controls in the late 1990s. However, they have changed little in the past two decades. The local planning controls that came into effect in 1996 have not until now been subject to a major review.

This section discusses the broad phases that have influenced Central Sydney’s planning controls – and how the controls in turn have influenced Central Sydney’s form within a dynamic political and economic context. Understanding the history of Central Sydney planning strategies provides important context for the current Central Sydney Planning Strategy, its precedents and the evolution of key concepts found in the Strategy.
The Height of Buildings Advisory Committee (HoBAC) was created by the State Government in the late 1950s with the responsibility for making decisions on proposals for buildings above 80 feet in height (24.38 metres); the heights of tall buildings were determined on a site-by-site basis, and assessed individually by HoBAC. HoBAC considered the floor space ratio (FSR) available on the site, and local considerations, including the overshadowing of public space, wind, heritage buildings, scale and other amenity concerns. HoBAC had significant discretion and there was little consistency in their decisions and floor space ratios could vary significantly from site to site. HoBAC continued to make decisions about tall buildings in Central Sydney until the mid-1980s.

As is the case today, authorisation from the Civil Aviation Authority was also required for the approval of very tall buildings. The AMP building at Circular Quay, completed in 1962, was the first genuine tower building to be assessed by HoBAC, achieving an FSR of 18.7:1 and a height of 383 feet (116.7 metres). This height was not exceeded until Australia Square on George Street was completed in 1966 with a height of 170 metres.

1908–1956: Restrictions on building heights

In 1908, a height restriction was first placed on buildings in Central Sydney through a City of Sydney resolution to limit buildings to 150 feet (45.72 metres). In 1912, the Height of Buildings Act was passed which allowed the City to approve development up to 100 feet (30.48 metres) but gave the State Government the power to approve up to 150 feet. Buildings taller than 150 feet required advice from the Superintendent of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

This set the template for a complex relationship in Central Sydney between state and local government, where decision-making responsibilities were shared. This relationship exists to this day via the City of Sydney, the Central Sydney Planning Committee (CSPC) and the State Government, who each have responsibilities for development decisions in Central Sydney.

1957–1971: Construction boom and the removal of building height restrictions

Building heights remained uniformly between 10–15 storeys throughout Central Sydney until a 1957 amendment to the Height of Buildings Act that removed height restrictions. Once lifted, high-rise buildings started to transform Central Sydney’s skyline, coinciding with the beginning of Australia’s most frenzied construction boom, lasting through the 1960s and into the early 1970s, with Central Sydney as its epicentre.

Development activity was concentrated in the vicinity of Circular Quay with a number of buildings achieving floor space ratios of around 15:1. The most intense development in Central Sydney took place in the “golden square mile”, which extended from Circular Quay to Martin Place, and from Macquarie Street to George Street.

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1971: City of Sydney Strategic Plan

The City’s first truly comprehensive planning strategy was the 1971 City of Sydney Strategic Plan, which sought to overcome the ad hoc planning of the previous decade, setting out guiding principles to coherently integrate objectives, policies and priorities for planning in Central Sydney.

In the late 1960s, an increasing number of government agencies and “special purpose” authorities had authority for development in the City of Sydney. The City of Sydney, HoBAC, the State Minister for Planning and the Land Tribunal all had responsibility for decisions. The Electricity Commission, Board of Fire Commissioners, Maritime Services Board, Department of Main Roads, Railways Department and Department of Road Transport each had control over parts of Central Sydney but none were accountable to the City of Sydney. The Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority (established in 1968) had significant land control responsibilities within the City of Sydney area.

But until the early 1970s, there was no overarching plan for the governance, shaping and forming of Central Sydney – neither a framework nor guidance for how multiple agencies could coordinate their responsibilities. So, the 1971 plan heralded an ideological shift in the way the City of Sydney and the State Government planned for the growth of Central Sydney: towards collaborative and shared decision-making, and away from the fragmented approach – including the discretionary development decisions made by HoBAC – that dominated the previous decade.

The 1971 plan considered the economic, social and physical environment of Central Sydney, proposing 16 key policies. It divided the then larger Central Sydney into 33 precincts, each with some unity in terms of their intended form and function. It proposed precinct-based development controls, floor space incentives, and incentives to retain heritage buildings. It also included an ambitious plan to connect pedestrians, public transport and car parking. It became the blueprint for Central Sydney’s future growth and development:

“...a landmark plan in Australian planning in terms of its analytical depth, comprehensiveness, detail and policy sophistication. It was politically astute in its clear statement of objectives, supporting policies and implementation devices, though it was never approved by the State.”

(Punter, 2004)

The plan was adopted by the City of Sydney Council in August 1971 and reviewed every three years until 1983. The initial 1971 plan was largely concerned with the form and function of Central Sydney, whereas later iterations became increasingly focused on the Central Sydney’s economic role as an emerging global city in the 1980s.

However, the 1971 plan faced challenges. It was compromised by the prevailing development control process. This was unpredictable and susceptible to political lobbying from developers seeking approval from agencies most likely to give them the most beneficial outcome.

Another challenge was that its release coincided with the State Government’s gazettal of the revised City of Sydney Planning Scheme Ordinance, which was initially exhibited several years earlier. The 1971 Ordinance comprised a limited range of planning controls devised in the early 1960s and the controls were effectively obsolete by 1971. However, unlike the 1971 plan, the Planning Scheme Ordinance had legal status, and continued to influence development decisions, undermining many of the goals of the 1971 plan throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s.
Despite this, the 1971 plan had positive results. For its time, it included detailed and progressive planning initiatives and concepts. These were influential in shaping Central Sydney in the decades that followed, and many of the City’s existing planning controls have evolved from the vision of the 1971 plan. For example, when the 1996 Local Environment Plan (LEP) and Development Control Plan (DCP) came into effect, the new planning controls were influenced by the overall form of the city and skyline as envisaged by the 1971 plan.

1971: Development Control and Floor Space Ratio Code

Floor space ratio controls appeared shortly following the publication of the 1971 plan, and the Development Control and Floor Space Ratio Code (the Code) was adopted by the City of Sydney. Base level floor space ratios for a wide range of Central Sydney precincts were set out in the Code, along with maximum floor space ratios – which could only be achieved after applying bonus provisions. Maximums could not be exceeded in any circumstance.

The Code was largely the City of Sydney’s policy response to the considerable number of building approvals arising from the 1960s investment boom. A laissez-faire approach to development decisions in the previous decade resulted in 162 building schemes with FSRs of over 10:1 being approved between 1967 and 1969. This increased the potential supply of office floor space by five times. While many of these schemes would never be built, the development of a number of large Central Sydney sites stagnated for many years as a result of over-generous planning consents. So the Code gave the City of Sydney a degree of control over the supply of floor space and to achieve some amenities in the absence of prescribed building form controls.

Bonus provisions provided an incentive for public facilities to offset the high density of development that the floor space ratios generated with public amenities. This included facilities such as plazas, through-site links and retail frontages and potentially could increase the available base 6:1 floor space ratio to a maximum of 12.5:1. A floor space ratio of 12:1 was established in the City Core, with 10:1 in the Midtown and Southern precincts. These bonuses were also available for desirable uses within precincts, such as hotel or residential development. And Bonus No. 6 was a measure designed to encourage the protection of heritage buildings by permitting the sale or transfer of development potential.

A key limitation of the Code was that it did not consider building form or environmental impact issues, only the fulfilment of the bonus. Development proposals were able to exploit the bonus provisions to achieve the maximum permissible floor space ratio. Even though the maximum was intended to be the exception, it became the norm and led to very large buildings in a number of precincts.

Looking back, the Code had a strong influence on development but with mixed success. This was because it wasn’t backed up by development controls that addressed the amenity issues that have since become a normal part of detailed development control plans. The bonus provisions resulted in a number of redundant building elements that contributed little value as civic assets. Poorly designed buildings with excessive bulk, wind impacts, intrusive car parking ramps, poor access and underutilised plazas were a direct result of a lack of prescribed amenity and design controls:

“Foremost among these were the T&G Building with its bare plazas, missing pedestrian links and shadows cast across...”
Hyde Park in the afternoon, and the Lanray Centre (Hilton) with its demolition of the Royal Arcade, inaccessible and oppressive shopping plaza and car parking ramps that blighted Pitt Street.

There were partial design successes like Harry Seidler’s MLC Centre, where architectural ingenuity created an excellent urban space, but where the 68-storey tower interrupted the street pavement and overshadowed Hyde Park.” (Punter, 2004)

Despite attempts to assign precinct-based floor space ratios, the floor space code did little to reign in the surplus of development consents. The bonus system did, however, provide an incentive to renegotiate some approvals from previous years.

1972–1987: Limited implementation of the 1971 plan

Making progress on the objectives of the 1971 plan was a challenge, despite much work and analysis by the City of Sydney into, for example, reductions of FSRs in the Midtown retail area and fringes of the central spine, and the mapping of maximum building heights. Jurisdictional issues created barriers. A range of committees, agencies and tribunals continued to be responsible for decision-making and lacked coordination.

In 1972, a Professional Planning Unit was set up by the City of Sydney and commenced work on 27 action plans to achieve the goals and objectives of the 1971 plan. The unit worked with 14 consultant groups, and took 3 years to complete the action plans. The action plans covered all physical areas of Central Sydney and included detailed pedestrianisation schemes, and district plans and policies for residential and redevelopment areas. The action plans foreshadowed a “character area” approach to the development of planning controls.

A Transfer of Development Rights mechanism was also prepared to compensate owners of heritage buildings for the loss of development rights, removing incentives for demolition. However, this “Heritage Floor Space” (HFS) scheme had little early impact because bonuses for public amenities were easily accessible to developers. The “Green Bans” of the early 1970s had a much greater impact upon heritage conservation in Central Sydney. The Builders Labourers Federation (BLF) refused to demolish any buildings that the National Trust recommended for preservation, or any of the heritage-classified buildings in Central Sydney. The lasting legacy of the BLF:

“… changed public opinion on the inevitability of insensitive change and [prompted] State legislation on environmental protection, heritage and environmental planning in 1979.” (Burgmann and Burgmann, 1996).

Thus, in the absence of implementing the 1971 plan, the modern New South Wales planning system was established in the form of statutory LEPs and DCPs that arose out of the new 1979 environmental planning act. It wasn’t until the mid-1990s that the City of Sydney could implement this system by way of its own new planning controls.
1988: Central Sydney Strategy 1988

Following the dismissal of the City of Sydney Council by the State Government in 1986, the Central Sydney Strategy was released in 1988, replacing the 1971–1983 strategic plan series. The 1988 strategy provided a revised framework for detailed planning and decision-making for Central Sydney, drawing elements from previous strategies. The 1988 strategy was jointly prepared by the City of Sydney and the NSW Department of Planning, and progressed many of the innovative ideas and principles of the 1971 plan.

The 1988 strategy outlined future directions for the growth and functions of Central Sydney and its surrounding areas, set upper limits for height and floor space, revised development control standards, and identified areas of Central Sydney which have an individual character that required protection.

The 1988 strategy had three themes – “central place”, “special place” and “place for people”. In addition to the traditional Central Business District, it redefined the “City Centre” to include the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Area, Darling Harbour, Ultimo, Pyrmont and Central Railway.

At the time of the 1988 strategy’s release, a complex patchwork of “planning instruments” applied in the City of Sydney Council area, many applying to single sites. There was also growing concern about the effect of development on Central Sydney’s environment, including the loss of important streetscapes and buildings, the overshadowing of parks and places, the loss of views, and wind effects. Increasing pressure for higher and larger buildings and to exceed floor space ratio controls coincided with community concerns about Central Sydney’s environment.

A number of principles and initiatives in the 1988 strategy were antecedents to the controls in the Sydney Local Environmental Plan 1996. The 1988 strategy was growth oriented and aimed to accommodate a growing workforce. It proposed to replace the complex bonus system of the 1971 Development and Floor Space Code with a basic FSR of 10:1 and a bonus of 2.5:1 for the purchase of unrealised floor space from heritage sites.

Significantly, it proposed a comprehensive set of 22 urban design and heritage principles that eventually translated into detailed urban design controls in the Central Sydney DCP 1996. These principles have since had a significant impact on city form, and continue to underpin the City’s LEP and DCP controls.

The 1988 strategy was a further ideological shift in the way that Central Sydney is planned – and represented a key division from previous practices. This ideological shift had two dimensions. Firstly, the 1988 strategy was oriented much more towards urban design and environmental outcomes. Although the 1971 plan strongly signalled the adoption of urban design controls, it did not include a comprehensive urban design plan to guide development. Secondly, the 1988 strategy heralded a transformation in planning governance to a partnership model with shared values about the importance of economic planning.


The initial outcome of the 1988 Central Sydney Strategy was the public exhibition of a draft LEP and draft DCP in 1991. These set out the planning controls for Central Sydney with an unprecedented level of detail and sophistication.
Although the draft LEP included few development standards, it did include floor space ratio controls. Six precinct-based FSRs were prescribed: FSRs ranged from 2:1 in Millers Point to 6:1 in Railway Square with no bonuses available in these areas; in other parts of Central Sydney, a base floor space ratio of 10:1 applied, with an additional 2.5:1 available for heritage conservation or the provision of significant public benefits.

The 1991 draft controls were controversial and never adopted. In response to submissions, the Central Sydney Planning Committee appointed an independent panel (the Panel) to recommend appropriate planning controls. The Panel recommended that a development control system be adopted which contained mandatory urban design controls in an LEP (e.g. height, bulk and floor space ratio) and non-mandatory urban design controls in a DCP (e.g. parapet heights, setbacks, building alignments, colours and materials, and measures to protect pedestrian amenity).

The Panel also identified that an improved system for the conservation of heritage buildings was needed, and recommended that special areas be identified for detailed development controls and that floor space bonus provisions be abandoned except for heritage conservation (recommending a base FSR 7:1 and maximum of 14:1). It also made recommendations on podium dimensions, maximum height and maximum floor plate size.

On consideration of the Panel’s recommendations, an interim City Centre Local Environmental Plan was created in 1993 to implement the principles of the 1988 strategy. This plan was effectively a stop-gap measure while the 1991 draft controls were reviewed and redrafted. The draft 1991 controls were then replaced by a new draft Central Sydney LEP and DCP, exhibited in 1995, which responded to the recommendations made by the Panel.

The major determinants of urban form enshrined in the City of Sydney’s current LEP were included in the 1995 LEP (e.g. floor space ratios, building height, sun access planes and car parking standards). Also, a detailed zoning map was introduced that effectively “downzoned” parts of the city where conservation or city edge issues were considered important. Maximum building heights were mapped, as well as a schedule of sun access planes to ensure direct sunlight on key public spaces. There were also special controls preventing additional overshadowing and to protect street and skyline amenity and microclimate.

The 1995 controls were not fully adopted because they were seen by the Central Sydney Planning Committee as too prescriptive; it was not until May 1996 that they adopted a revised LEP. The 1996 LEP was broadly similar to the exhibited LEP but emphasised Central Sydney’s role in a global city. The height map was also changed to allow a maximum building height of 235 metres within two areas – around George and Liverpool Streets (around the current World Square site), and between Bridge and Hunter Streets. Bonuses were available for hotel and residential development, allowing them to exceed the maximum FSR of 12.5:1. A key aim of this policy was to increase the feasibility for hotel and residential projects while the commercial office market was experiencing a downturn.

The 1996 LEP contained several time-limited FSR incentives specifically tailored to encourage the development of hotels and serviced apartments in the lead up to the 2000 Olympics and to address vacant sites. Largely as a result of the 1991 recession, Central Sydney was populated by 22 vacant development sites where buildings had been demolished or sites excavated and redevelopment had not been completed.
A bonus above the maximum FSR was permitted for hotel and serviced apartments which commenced construction prior to 1 January 1998 but the bonus was only achievable if the buildings were approved for occupation before July 2000. The bonuses allowed hotels a maximum FSR of 14:1 and 15.5:1 for serviced apartments (without the need to purchase heritage floor space). By 1999, the 22 vacant sites were reduced to five.

In response to developers giving preference to the eastern side of Central Sydney, where views of the Harbour and parks could be achieved, the 1996 plan provided an additional bonus of 1:1 FSR for development approved prior to January 2002 along the western corridor of the CBD (i.e. generally considered land between York Street and Darling Harbour).

In the mid- to late 1990s, Sydney’s high-rise residential development principally occurred in Central Sydney. This development was largely enabled by the Living City policy which envisioned a 24-hour city with a strong residential presence. The Living City vision was crystallised by planning controls within the 1996 LEP that permitted higher FSRs for residential, hotel and serviced apartment development compared to commercial development.

2000 and beyond: design excellence

During the 1990s, developers expressed an increasing desire to deliver high-quality tower buildings designed by renowned architects. This was largely driven by economic imperatives – iconic buildings provided opportunities to maximise floor space and attract commitments in advance from high-status tenants.

From the mid-1990s, approvals were given to a number of architecturally innovative commercial tower projects that have transformed Central Sydney’s skyline. Examples include the ABN AMRO (Aurora Place) tower designed by Renzo Piano and Deutsche Bank Place designed by Norman Foster and Partners.

By the late 1990s, design excellence was an established policy position of the City of Sydney. Development applicants had to demonstrate how design excellence would be achieved, and buildings were subject to open or limited architectural competitions, or designed by renowned architects.

Design excellence was initially formalised by the City of Sydney’s planning controls in 2000. The controls require that a building envelope is approved for buildings above 55 metres in height or on sites exceeding 1500 square metres, and then required to undergo a design excellence process. This can be done through a competitive architectural design process or through the consideration of design alternatives.

Since 2000, there have been over 150 design competitions held in the City of Sydney, making high-quality building design a key defining feature of all new buildings in Central Sydney.
2.1
City of Sydney, by M. S. Hill
3 September 1888

2.2
The Central Spine, 1960
1971 Central Sydney Strategy

2.3
The Central Spine, 1970
1971 Central Sydney Strategy

2.4
Sydney today
Source: Sydney Aerial Photography, 2015, Sydney Images
2.2 Policy and governance

This sub-section describes the Strategy’s guiding documents and governance. It outlines how the Strategy is overseen, what coordination and collaboration is needed to do this, and what roles and responsibilities are assigned to each stakeholder.
Guiding documents
While the Central Sydney Planning Strategy represents an evolution of the 1971 Strategic Plan, it has its foundation in two other key plans: the City of Sydney’s ‘Sustainable Sydney 2030’ and the NSW government’s A Plan for Growing Sydney.

Sustainable Sydney 2030
Sustainable Sydney 2030 is a community strategic program for the City of Sydney’s sustainable development to 2030. Created in 2007 with the help of tens of thousands of Sydneysiders, it established a vision for the City of Sydney as green, global and connected. Sustainable Sydney 2030 represents a set of goals that transforms the way we live, work and play, and is the cornerstone of all of the City of Sydney’s work. It is based on how residents, visitors, workers and businesses described the kind of city they wanted: a city that cares about the environment, has a strong economy, supports the arts and that connects its people to each other and to the rest of the world. The Strategy is inspired by and is consistent with the goals of Sustainable Sydney 2030. The Strategy envisions a plan for Central Sydney that reaches not only to 2030, but beyond.

A Plan for Growing Sydney
The NSW Government envisions metropolitan Sydney as a strong global city and a great place to live. To achieve this, A Plan for Growing Sydney (the Plan) sets four goals, intending that metropolitan Sydney will be:
• A competitive economy with world-class services and transport
• A city of housing choice with homes that meet our needs and lifestyles
• A great place to live with communities that are strong, healthy and well connected
• A sustainable and resilient city that protects the natural environment and has a balanced approach to the use of land and resources.

The Plan establishes a series of directions for facilitating a competitive economy, housing choices and great places to live in metropolitan Sydney, as well as a healthy environment. The Strategy is consistent with these goals and directions.

Planning for the growth of a global Sydney
What makes metropolitan Sydney a “global city” is linked to a broad range of factors, not only population size, growth rate or the height of buildings – but include also our economy, human capital, liveability, cultural offerings, accessibility and environment. Metropolitan Sydney is one of the world’s highest ranked global cities.

Central Sydney’s growth should not be at the expense of its global status. The challenge for Central Sydney is to ensure it can accommodate reasonable growth to support its role in a multicentre metropolitan Sydney. The challenge for metropolitan Sydney is to enhance transport and technological connections between its centres to encourage growth and the fast and effective flow of capital, trade, ideas and people.

Both Sustainable Sydney 2030 and A Plan For Growing Sydney include strategic objectives for maintaining and growing a global metropolitan Sydney. The Strategy aligns to these objectives, as outlined below in Sustainable Sydney 2030’s and the Plan’s opening directions.

Sustainable Sydney 2030
• Strategic Direction 1 – A globally competitive and innovative city
• Objective 1.1 – Plan for growth and change in the City Centre
• Action 1.1.1 – Ensure the City Plan provides capacity for employment growth in the City
• Action 1.1.3 – Plan for long-term increased development opportunities

A Plan for Growing Sydney
• Direction 1.1 – Grow a more internationally competitive Sydney CBD
• Action 1.1.1 – Create new and innovative opportunities to grow Sydney CBD office space by identifying redevelopment opportunities and increasing building heights in the right locations.
• Action 1.1.2 – Create new opportunities to grow Sydney CBD office space by expanding the CBD’s footprint, particularly along the Central to Eveleigh corridor.

Employment growth is key, and the Strategy plans for and provides capacity for it, noting that Central Sydney’s ability to accommodate employment growth, and therefore compete for capital, business, visitors, knowledge workers, and academics and their students, is intrinsically linked with the ability for metropolitan Sydney to maintain its global status.
What makes Sydney “global”?

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Coordination and collaboration

Governance structures make a difference in how cities respond to challenges, and how they implement effective city planning. Many major cities overseas have regional governance structures or “city governments” that cover an entire metropolitan region. These can be either unitary governments where the metropolitan council looks after all local government services (for example, Shanghai and Toronto) or a two-tier structure, as in London, where local services are provided by local councils, but a metropolitan body looks after broader issues.

The governance structure of Central Sydney has generally reflected a multi-tier structure. During the history of Central Sydney, a number of its functions and areas of responsibility have been transferred in whole or part to various boards, commissions, trusts and departments established by the State. The more important of these areas are social housing, major roads, water, sewerage, drainage, electricity, many aspects of health and welfare, and urban planning and development approval for “State-significant” sites and development types.

The effect of this gradual erosion of responsibility is that the City of Sydney finds it increasingly more challenging to deliver consistent, streamlined and certain outcomes, especially in the areas of urban renewal precincts, transport and development control. In these areas, there are perceived conflicts of competing strategic priorities and outcomes, and considerable duplication of responsibility and activity.

To address this, the Strategy aligns with state-level frameworks so that the City of Sydney can have a meaningful and productive working relationship with the State, particularly with the Greater Sydney Commission. The Greater Sydney Commission is a dedicated new body with the responsibility for coordinating the various State agencies to ensure that growth is aligned with infrastructure and delivered in the right places at the right time.

At the same time, the two committees that govern the Strategy, the Central Sydney Planning Committee and the Central Sydney Traffic and Transport Committee, represent collaboration between two tiers of government; each committee’s membership represents both the City of Sydney and NSW State. Through these two committees, the City of Sydney can be confident that a whole-of-government approach will contribute to strong, collaborative and effective city planning.

Roles and responsibilities

Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the city in urban planning is necessary and useful. The City of Sydney’s roles and responsibilities are defined by the New South Wales (NSW) Local Government Act 1993. The basic functions of local councils are:

- **Service functions** – such as providing and maintaining community, health and recreation facilities and municipal, transport and housing services
- **Regulatory functions** – such as development approvals, orders and building certificates
- **Ancillary functions** – such as resumption of land and the power of entry and inspection
- **Revenue functions** – including rates, charges, fees, borrowings and investments
- **Administrative functions** – such as employment of staff, urban planning and reporting
- **Enforcement functions** – such as prosecution of offences, and recovery of rates and charges.

While the City of Sydney’s core service and regulatory roles are defined principally by this legislation, it plays a wider role as an advocate and a partner in planning and funding. The City of Sydney also addresses broader issues identified of strategic importance and which impact on our communities.

Planning and development in the heart of metropolitan Sydney, which contains the Metropolitan Centre, is of fundamental importance not just to the City of Sydney but to the whole State and beyond. Therefore, a workable and democratic mechanism for integrated City–State environmental planning and development control is essential. The City of Sydney Act 1998 represents this mechanism and contains roles and responsibilities specific to Central Sydney. It acknowledges the unique development environment of Central Sydney, as compared to other centres across metropolitan Sydney, and at the same time the imperative that purely local planning and development control remains at council level.
Current projects shaping Central Sydney

- State projects
- City projects
- Proposed Metro Line
- Proposed Light Rail

- Connections to new headland park and Barangaroo
- Wynyard pedestrian connection
- Western Edge revitalisation
- Darling Harbour revitalisation
- Ultimo and UTS revitalisation
- Central Park development
- Foreshore Walk
- Walsh Bay Arts Precinct
- Sydney Opera House
- Overseas Passenger Terminal
- Art Gallery of NSW development
- Eora Journey
- Bus route reconfiguration
- George Street Light Rail Project
- Light and Heavy Rail Interchange
- Central Station revitalisation

2.6
2.3
People

The City of Sydney is one of the largest, fastest growing and most dynamic local government areas in Australia. Central Sydney is its heart, currently host to nearly 300,000 workers, over 27,000 residents and 480,000 day visitors including a significant share of metropolitan Sydney’s over 10 million annual visitors. The Central Sydney Planning Strategy recognises the importance of people to the city, and its principles and development controls aim to put people first in urban planning.
Workers

Central Sydney is home to Australia’s workers of highest value. This means that, at $104 per hour per worker, Central Sydney has a higher worker productivity than any other Australian centre of employment. This productivity is reflected in the large contribution of Central Sydney and its jobs to the national and state economies: employment in the City of Sydney contributes to over 7 per cent of Australia’s GDP and 25 per cent of NSW’s GDP.

This means that jobs matter – and contribute to the maintenance and growth, as well as the global competitiveness, of metropolitan Sydney. Continuing to attract workers to Central Sydney has benefits that flow onto the nation and state. With a total workforce population of 300,000 people, Central Sydney houses 20 per cent of metropolitan Sydney’s workforce. And at over 80,000 jobs per square kilometre, Central Sydney represents one of the highest density CBDs in the world.

This large pool of highly skilled workers and access to an extensive customer base are reasons businesses choose to be located in Central Sydney. So it is essential that the City of Sydney provides business of all types with easily accessible opportunities to grow. This growth must be balanced with sustaining the factors why people choose to work in Central Sydney: for its livability, vibrancy, natural beauty and its strong cultural and community identity.

Since the early 1990s, Central Sydney has experienced steady employment growth. For many, the 2000 Summer Olympic Games represented metropolitan Sydney’s first steps onto the world stage, when it first established itself as a truly global city. Even with the economic downturn in 2007/2008 when employment growth dipped, the strength and diversity of Central Sydney’s employment sector, with ties to mining profits, strong Asian investment and burgeoning creative clusters, meant that the numbers of employees and businesses has continued to grow in Central Sydney.

The predominant industry sectors in Central Sydney are Finance and Financial Services and Professional and Business Services. These two sectors combined employ over 50 per cent of the workforce, representing the greatest concentration of knowledge-intensive industries in Australia (refer to 2_8).

The composition of workers within Central Sydney varies significantly north and south of Bathurst Street. North of Bathurst Street, unsurprisingly, Finance and Financial Services and Professional and Business Services make up 60 per cent of the total workforce population. South of Bathurst Street, these two sectors account for only around 30 per cent (refer to 2_10).

North of Bathurst Street represents a traditional global CBD in regards to the predominance of office space and a workforce that operates 9 to 5, 5 days a week. The areas south of Bathurst Street are much more diverse. The workforce is more evenly proportioned between retail services, technology services, food and drink premises, and government use – and they use the city and its services in more diverse ways and outside of traditional office hours.

Between 1991 and 2012, Central Sydney’s traditional core employment population grew by close to 50 per cent. Employment losses in recent years in Central Sydney are attributed primarily to conversions of employment land and floor space to residential strata developments.

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1 The workforce population of 300,000 represents the worker population for greater Central Sydney as measured in 2012 and estimated for 2015. The estimated growth of these combined areas is shown against the growth of Central Sydney’s traditional core in Figure 04_01. The traditional core area growth is provided as a historical reference as data for this area is the most accurate across a larger time period.
Residents

Central Sydney is not only a place where people work and visit: people live here. Going about their daily tasks, residents contribute to Central Sydney’s vitality as well as the image of Central Sydney as lived in, cared for and looked after.

Central Sydney provides very high amenity for residents. The proximity to the largest concentration of high-wage employment opportunities makes it one of the most attractive places to live in Australia.

Central Sydney has high quality streets, parks and squares and generous continuous public waterfront access. The active transport modes of walking and cycling are more comfortable and safer than many places that lack a growing network of pedestrian connections and separated cycleways. Heavy rail directly connects Central Sydney to other centres within metropolitan Sydney and the surrounding regions. The domestic and international airports are close, making it easier to travel for work and pleasure.

Entertainment that is not available elsewhere in the state is accessible and frequent in Central Sydney. Living in Central Sydney allows one to be within walking distance of opera, symphony and chamber music, musicals, popular music, dance clubs, small bars and a diversity of amazing restaurants. International and local fashion houses, specialist goods suppliers and department stores are also concentrated here.

Much of this amenity is provided for residents throughout metropolitan Sydney and indeed the state; its consequence is that it engenders a high demand for residential accommodation in Central Sydney.

Between 1996 and 2012, the residential population of Central Sydney more than quadrupled from around 6,500 to 25,000 residents, a demonstration of the success of the City of Sydney’s Living City Policy (refer to 2_11).

In 2012, the two most populous age groups were of “tertiary education and independence age” and the “young workforce”, reflecting a large student population and a highly mobile and educated young workforce (refer to 2_12).

In 2012, approximately 25,000 Central Sydney residents lived in 12,000 dwellings, 85 per cent of which were multi-storey apartments. Occupancy rates were variable depending on location. Between 2007 and 2012, occupancy rates for dwellings north of Bathurst Street fell from 1.75 residents per dwelling to 1.56. Yet south of Bathurst Street, occupancy rates rose dramatically from 2.04 to 2.54 reflecting a predominance of share accommodation.

Central Sydney is multicultural with growing numbers of residents from China, Indonesia and Thailand. Over 75 per cent of the area’s residents were born overseas, more than 50 per cent of whom arrived in Australia since 2006. This is the largest concentration of migrants in the City of Sydney, much higher than the City’s average of 49 per cent. This community includes international students studying at the University of Sydney, the University of Technology and other educational institutions (refer to 2_13).

Central Sydney is one the least disadvantaged areas of the City, with the lowest number of low-income households, social housing and single-parent households of Sydney’s four city areas. While 23 per cent of Central Sydney households earn more than $2,500 per week and are considered high income, the average weekly household earnings are lower than other city areas, where closer to 30 per cent of households are high income. This lower average is partly because just 16 per cent of households are high income in the areas south of Bathurst Street, and only 11 per cent in the suburb of Haymarket, the lowest percentage of households in the City of Sydney.

Pockets of disadvantage are concentrated in Millers Point, Dawes Point and the Rocks where social housing has historically been located. However, these communities are undergoing significant change with the NSW Government selling off social housing.

As metropolitan Sydney’s social and cultural engine, the City of Sydney is committed to ensuring Central Sydney is welcoming to all and culturally inclusive. The City of Sydney does this by celebrating metropolitan Sydney’s diverse community and cultural groups through social, community and cultural facilities; and by providing a diverse choice of housing and workplace.

Central Sydney is of vital importance to community groups across metropolitan Sydney; in turn, communities are valued for contributing to the modern identity and image of Central Sydney as vibrant, multicultural and inclusive. It is therefore important that the economic growth of Central Sydney is balanced with the growth of those facilities and programs that bring value to the residents of Central Sydney, and make metropolitan Sydney a city of choice to move to, live in, work in, visit and enjoy.
Visitors

Tourism is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. It contributes significant economic growth and diversification across a wide range of employment opportunities. Tourism generates more than $30 billion of the state economy every year, and contributes approximately $36 million a day across metropolitan Sydney.

Metropolitan Sydney is Australia’s leading destination for tourists and is the gateway to NSW; it attracted 10.5 million visitors in 2012; 4.3 million of those stayed within the City of Sydney. Those visitors made a significant local economic impact, spending more than $5 billion in 2012 with around $1 billion spent on shopping and $2.8 billion in hospitality.

Because visitors spend their money on a variety of activities – such as accommodation, transport, shopping, restaurants and attractions – a wide range of businesses benefit from across the metropolitan area. The tourism industry supports 10,000 businesses, makes up 11 per cent of Sydney’s workforce and provides a total of 47,000 jobs: 26,700 people directly and 20,300 people indirectly employed.

Close to half of all visitors from overseas and two-thirds of international business travellers come to metropolitan Sydney as their first Australian destination, confirming metropolitan Sydney’s status as Australia’s only global city. In 2011/12, over 2.5 million business visitors from abroad and around the country stayed in metropolitan Sydney.

At the end of 2012, metropolitan Sydney’s accommodation providers recorded close to 80 million visitor nights (refer to 2_14). Sydney is home to 60 per cent of metropolitan Sydney’s hotel rooms and around 27,500 people stayed within Sydney on any given night in 2012. The majority of hotels are located in Central Sydney, but with a growing number to the south in the precincts surrounding Central Railway Station and Broadway, where a large number of backpacker hostels attract visitors.

Cruise ship arrivals continue to be the fastest growing area of the tourism sector. The 2012/13 season was the busiest on record with 265 cruise ships docking in Sydney Harbour. The combined economic contribution to the NSW economy of the cruise ship industry was $350 million in 2010/11; this is forecast to grow to $1.1 billion in 2019/20.

In 2012, about 60 per cent of Sydney visitors who stayed in paid accommodation were leisure travellers, almost 30 per cent were corporate travellers, and about 4 per cent visited for meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (MICE). Although corporate travellers are fewer, they occupy a similar number of rooms as leisure travellers, who tend to have more people per room.

Over the last 10 years, the proportion of corporate and MICE visitors staying in upscale hotels has increased, but there has been a decline of these visitors in standard hotels. Standard hotels have had growth in leisure and education visitors, who are also choosing to stay outside of Central Sydney.

As well as supporting the tourism sector, visitors coming for business, exhibitions, conferences and meetings are important to expanding Sydney’s global business networks and opportunities.

Whether Central Sydney remains a popular destination for international visitors is dependent on its ability to respond flexibly to their needs and interests with events, public spaces, and a diversity of accommodation and visitor services that can respond to different levels of demand.

Day visitors and students

On any given day, Central Sydney attracts 480,000 day visitors, who come to shop, be entertained, to learn, to visit friends and to conduct both personal and corporate business. Day visitors combined with international and domestic visitors are responsible for an estimated 20 to 25 per cent of Sydney’s retail turnover.

A key category of day visitors are students. Central Sydney is home to Sydney University, the University of Technology and numerous smaller colleges, attracting thousands of students into the city each day. With 35,000 students studying within the City of Sydney each year, their economic contribution and their employment in service industries are crucial elements of Central Sydney’s culture and community.
2.14
Annual visitors to major Australian cities
Known and projected 2005–2036 by capital city tourism region
Source: State tourism forecasts, 2014, Austrade and City of Sydney

2.15
Visitors to Sydney
Place of origin

2.16
Visitors to Sydney
Reasons for visit
Central Sydney is a unique place with a stunningly beautiful physical setting and a warm climate, contributing to people spending much time outdoors. Its unique shape has implications for how people move around the space, and enjoy public spaces and views. Its orientation and topography can create both sunny streets and parks, as well as uncomfortable conditions, including that caused by too much wind. Central Sydney is surrounded by and rich with green spaces and parks. Central Sydney’s ecology is dominated by planted native and exotic trees; landscaping of street-lined streets and parks are an important part of Central Sydney’s sense of place.
Physical setting

Sydney’s first water supply was called the Tank Stream, and Central Sydney is built in the valley around it, the Tank Stream valley. The Tank Stream now runs underneath Central Sydney, but its fresh water was one of the main reasons why Europeans set up camp in Sydney Cove in 1788. The stream drained swampy areas that existed around what is now Hyde Park, and flowed north into Sydney Cove or Warrane (also spelt as Warr-ran, Warrang and Wee-rong), its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander name as recorded in a number of First Fleet journals.

If you travel west from Macquarie Street down any of Central Sydney’s streets, you can still see how the streets dip down to where the Tank Stream flowed, before rising up again towards George Street. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander name of the stream is not known, but it was of significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a source of drinking water and for the resources that grew along its banks.

Warrane and Sydney Harbour were integral to the everyday lives of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The women line-fished from their nowies (canoes) while the men speared fish from the shoreline.

Today, Central Sydney’s natural landscapes, including its parks, shores and gardens, create the magnificent setting for a world-class city. Central Sydney is a peninsula bound by the harbour to the north, the Royal Botanic Gardens and Hyde Park to the east, railway yards to the south and Darling Harbour to the west. Its form, like an outstretched hand, reaches into the quiet waters of Sydney Harbour to create a variety of small bay areas and inlets along its 9 kilometres of shoreline. The different topography of land create views and variety. The land rises steadily to the south from Circular Quay with knolls at Observatory Hill and the Macquarie Street government precinct, and rises more dramatically from Darling Harbour, following the contours of the valleys and waterways known by the local Aboriginal peoples and the First Settlers.
Climate

Central Sydney is an outdoor city located on the southern shores of Sydney Harbour; its climate and lifestyle are major points of difference to other national and global urban centres.

It is a sunny city. Located in the South Temperate Zone on the 34th parallel south circle of latitude, Central Sydney enjoys great access to sunlight in its streets, parks and other public places. For three to four months over summer, the streets and spaces around Central Sydney are filled with sunlight. The sun can be very hot, leading people to seek shade. In the remaining months of the year, the streets and spaces of Central Sydney are more shaded through parts of the day due to the lower sun angle.

Despite this shading, many aspects of buildings and streets – such as their materials, heights, spacing, orientation and ground cover – contribute to the “urban heat island effect”. This means that Central Sydney heats up during the day and retains this heat well into the night. A well-planned city can actively reduce the urban heat island effect and prevent excessive heat from being a stress on a city’s community, plants, and its road, water and energy infrastructure.

During most of the year, people seek out direct sunlight in public open spaces. The landscape naturally creates varying degrees of light and dark spaces related to topography. Some of the lower-lying areas of Central Sydney’s topography, or southern slopes, are naturally darker; this has been exacerbated by the development of taller buildings on narrow streets. Combined with the orientation of Central Sydney’s streets and prevailing winds, this can, in some streets and spaces, create environments that are uncomfortable, dark, and cold.

Central Sydney is warm and windy, and generally with little rain. The average daily mean temperature ranges from a high of 25.9°C in January to a low of 8.1°C in July. The mean annual rainfall is 1213 millimetres. Rain falls only on an average of 8.3 days a month, and often comes in short deluges on summer afternoons.

Climatic changes are predicted for Central Sydney within the next four decades, including periods of extended extreme heat (multiple days when the temperature exceeds 35 degrees) and more intense rainfall events.
Wind

Prevailing winds strongly influence the mood of Central Sydney at any given moment. Summer winds consist of sea breezes from the northeast that tend to bring welcome relief on hot summer days. Southerlies, while refreshing, can be strong and associated with frontal storm systems which can last for several days. Winter winds tend to be the strongest of the year and are associated with winds from the west. Winds from the west are driven by inland conditions and can be warm or cold depending on the time of year.

With one side of Central Sydney exposed to the strong westerly winds and the other side to the strong northeast and south-easterly winds, Central Sydney is only protected against the strong southerlies with its street grid and rising land form dispersing potentially uncomfortable conditions.

Central Sydney’s wind environment is a major determinant of amenity for pedestrians and people wanting to linger in public places. It can be very uncomfortable or even dangerous to be in very windy places and must be taken into account in terms of Central Sydney’s architecture and design.
**2.23**
Wind rose – Sydney airport
Corrected to open country terrain
1995–2014, all months
6am – 10pm
10m height
Calm –0.6%

**2.24**
Wind rose – Sydney airport
Corrected to open country terrain
annual, all hours
1995–2014
Calm 1%
Green spaces and parks

Central Sydney is bound by green spaces that are nationally significant, and make an important contribution to the experience, image and memories of Central Sydney. Enhanced by our attractive climate and physical setting, they are a key attraction for both visitors and residents, acting as meeting places and landmarks, and the backdrops for film, photos and postcards.

Central Sydney’s green spaces encompass the shore and parks. Sydney Harbour, synonymous with metropolitan Sydney and Australia, surrounds Central Sydney with a coastline fringed with many opportunities for beautiful views and public access to a foreshore promenade. For many people, the Harbour and its foreshore are the way they orient themselves in Central Sydney.

Open green space, including the Royal Botanic Gardens, Hyde Park and the Domain, make up close to 40 per cent of Central Sydney’s land. With a park within at least 500 metres walking distance no matter where you are, Central Sydney is an area that highly benefits from landscaped open space. In fact, only a small proportion of properties are not within 400 metres walking distance of a large grassed area. These vast parklands offer a diversity of recreational possibilities for Central Sydney’s community and with their quiet, gentle sensory stimulation, space for events, and low noise and pollution levels, beautifully oppose the characteristics of a dense and busy urban centre.
Ecology

Central Sydney’s ecology has changed much over the previous centuries. In 1788, Central Sydney and its surrounds were covered in a vast, uninterrupted mosaic of vegetation which included estuarine and freshwater wetlands; open woodlands on steep sandstone scarps; heaths and Banksia scrubs on old sand dunes; and forests on the richer shale-derived soils of the higher ridges and plateaus.

Since European settlement, the natural vegetation cover has been reduced to a few scattered individual trees and shrubs, descendants of this once vast and complex natural system. These descendants are largely confined to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Mrs Macquaries Point, the steep slopes of Garden Island and parts of Glebe.

As natural vegetation was cleared, a new landscape began to take shape. Avenues and parklands of planted native and exotic trees progressively replaced natural landscapes. The new cultivated landscape of Sydney’s public parkland, dominated by Moreton Bay Figs and Port Jackson Figs, was established in the mid- to late nineteenth century – a landscape that was to transform the visual and aesthetic character of Central Sydney.

Today, landscaping in Central Sydney is an important way to contribute to the urban ecology, and has a range of environmental, social and economic benefits. Not only does Central Sydney’s landscaped character contribute greatly to its image, but a thriving urban forest of parks and street trees provides cleaner air, manages noise, filters stormwater and is a cost-effective means of managing Central Sydney’s temperature in periods of extreme heat. Trees, shrubs and other plants create important habitat for birds, insects and reptiles – and they make for beautiful city streets also. In an environment characterised by tall buildings, awnings and busy streets, landscaping and street trees have psychological benefits in reducing stress and providing spaces for relaxation and contact with nature. People typically linger, shop and dine longer in tree-lined streets, hence increasing the attractiveness of business and tourism areas, enhancing property values and playing a role in the economic sustainability of the city. And importantly, they provide a sense of place.

The Strategy maximises opportunities within the public domain to improve urban ecology by other measures as well: prioritising streets for people, protecting and widening footpaths and increasing opportunities for street tree planting. The Strategy promotes green walls and green roofs within development sites. The City of Sydney is working to create an urban forest with greater tree canopy and more diversity to provide the proven benefits to cities of plants and trees. For Central Sydney, this means increasing the average total canopy cover to more than 15 per cent by 2030.
2.5
Structure and form

The structure and form of Central Sydney are as much a part of what makes Central Sydney unique as its more obvious attributes such as its setting, climate and parks. The architecture of buildings, its orientation, the shape of its street grid and precincts, how people interact and respond to what is around them: all of these add up to create an experience of Central Sydney as a special place. Central Sydney hosts beautiful heritage buildings and open spaces that enrich the precincts that surround them. It has an intimate scale and compact nature that appeals to both visitors and workers. Views are an important commodity for people in Sydney, with a challenge to balance their maintenance with a constantly developing and changing centre. All of these factors will need to be taken into account in terms of planning for Central Sydney’s future: preserving and maintaining what is positive and unique, while reshaping attributes to meet the needs of tomorrow’s Central Sydney.
Central Sydney is undergoing an extended process of transformation. It was once a city comprised of a multitude of moderately scaled brick warehouses and offices, and beautiful sandstone buildings. It is now changing to a city of very large and very tall steel, concrete and glass towers.

The height of Modernism in the 1960s marked this evolution from a mid-scale city to one of high-rises. Modernist architecture, with its iconic towers striving for purity of form, where functionalism, universalism, and economic and constructional efficiency ruled, started to influence the character, feel and environment of the city at street level.

While heritage listings and planning controls for areas with distinct character have preserved some of the fine buildings from Central Sydney’s earlier phases of development, much has been lost. And the trend of Modernist redevelopment set up an ongoing conflict between architecture and urbanism – the idea of a city for people and its humanistic focus on their experience.

More specifically, the result of Modernist influences on Central Sydney has been:

- Tall towers that sit in open but difficult-to-use and often overshadowed and windy plazas
- Very large foyers or ground-level and underground empty spaces that are unpleasant and unwelcoming to use, and uninteresting for passersby
- Internal food courts and shopping malls with few retail shopfronts that face the street
- Oversized ground-level building services, and loading and parking facilities that have resulted in large areas of blank walls and cavernous portals for vehicle entry that face the street
- Architectural character, materials and a general shape and size that have no relationship to the surroundings, including repetitious, boring facades with poor quality.

The City of Sydney has developed policies to work with the community, land owners and businesses to moderate the tension between public and private interests. An important tool has been the City’s policy for design excellence, achieved through competitive design processes. This policy has delivered a substantial improvement in the quality of architectural design in Central Sydney. However, it requires continual innovation and the City of Sydney needs to continue to shape the culture of architecture and urban planning to focus on public interest and the needs of people.

Further, the design of buildings must support the City of Sydney’s strategic direction to attract the most valuable and productive jobs. To do this, Central Sydney’s commercial architecture must deliver high-quality workplaces that are desirable environments for workers and boost their work satisfaction and productivity.

All of Central Sydney’s architecture must contribute to the host of amenities that attract people to work in and visit the city: shops; retail services; places to eat, drink and socialise; and accessible cultural and entertainment facilities. It is particularly important that these are inviting and available to everyone. This means mostly being located at street level with some services or venues immediately above and below. Central Sydney also has an iconic role in the imagination of Sydney’s citizens. The city’s tall buildings need to be both memorable and of very high quality to reinforce the pride that Sydneysiders have in their city. Architecture should contribute to public space and, through design skill, protect and contribute to a comfortable, pleasant, delightful and safe public domain. It must address any challenges related to buildings, such as overshadowing, reduced daylight in the streets, glare, noise, footpath crowding at entries, vehicle access that disrupts pedestrians, wind effects on public places and trapping of pollution in street canyons.

The City of Sydney supports the provision of housing with high amenity such as outlook, visual privacy, access to sunlight, natural ventilation and space. This will include a mix of types and costs of housing to support a diverse population. The architecture of apartment buildings must be carefully handled to ensure that all areas of the city remain attractive for commercial developments; they should not be easily distinguished from their commercial neighbours.

Finally, the City has taken a strong role in promoting the maintenance of existing, and creation of new, extraordinary public architecture. Opportunities to create great spaces and buildings will be pursued through the renewal of major institutions and new and reimagined infrastructure projects.
2_27
Tall buildings in Central Sydney

2_28
NAB House, George Street – tower forecourt

2_29
AMP Circular Quay – food court escalators

2_30
Ground-level building services
Orientation

Long and narrow, Central Sydney measures about 1.3 kilometres east to west and about 3.5 kilometres from Walsh Bay to Central Railway Station. Its dimensions make it easy to get around without a vehicle, with the majority of people preferring to walk or cycle: east to west for shorter trips and north to south through its traditional but evolving four precincts – the City Core, Midtown, Western Edge and Southern. Along Central Sydney’s Western Edge, its steep land form can be challenging: pedestrians usually opt for a longer but flatter route rather than one that is short but steep.

Central Sydney is oriented northwards towards the harbour and views of the water. Its streets generally run north–south and east–west. Sunlight penetrates the north–south streets more readily than the east–west streets. The northern ends of street blocks, with the best access to sunlight, provide the best locations for pedestrian areas and public spaces like squares, plazas and pocket parks.

The desire for views to the north favours the northern foreshore precincts and the ridges behind them, but in an increasingly dense and compact urban centre, the ability to protect private views comes secondary to the protection and enhancement of public views and the protection of outlook as a focus of the planning framework.
Streets

Central Sydney’s streets are quite different than others around the world. Global cities like San Francisco, Vancouver, New York and Chicago have typical street grids with clear and legible geometry that promote regular and efficient development and transport. Central Sydney’s grid was instead influenced by the natural form of the land, Gadigal trading routes, and decisions made by the first British colony. The grid subtly reinforces the natural forms of hills and valleys. The major ridge lines have been used for long straight thoroughfares such as Macquarie Street and York Street. The spine of Central Sydney, George Street, runs its entire length tracing indigenous trading routes and marking the mouth of Tank Stream.

Between these ridges and across valleys, a fairly ordered but irregular street grid has been established. In places, the grid breaks down altogether, as in the northern end of Central Sydney and in parts of the Haymarket, Surry Hills and Chippendale. It is the narrow and curiously warped streets that gives Central Sydney its unique character and creates the “sense of place” so different from that of more rigidly planned cities, and yet creates its own set of challenges.

A comparison of Central Sydney and the Melbourne CBD illustrates the differences between Sydney and other cities. While Melbourne shares a similar historical background as Central Sydney and a similar history of urban planning, the original layout of each city’s grid and has affected the urban development process and traffic differently.

Central Sydney characteristics include:
• Generally narrow street widths of 20 metres
• Narrow east–west blocks, creating more streets running north–south
• Narrow streets lined by high buildings, creating shadows and high wind velocities at street level
• Few laneways as a result of previous development: block amalgamations for office towers destroyed many of Central Sydney’s laneways servicing the high buildings. Service is mainly done in the streets, demanding more space for service vehicles and for parking.
• Its containment in a peninsula with everything from rail and roads to buildings and the movement of people seemingly terminating at Circular Quay.

Melbourne CBD characteristics include:
• Generally generous street widths of 30 to 40 metres
• Large east–west blocks creating fewer streets running north–south
• Height controls that have been applied in the City Centre, especially at Swanston Street
• Laneways running through the large blocks servicing tall buildings.
• An orderly pattern of streets and laneways which contributes to a predictable flow of traffic and people.
2_32
Sydney
Street grid

2_33
Sydney
Typical street – 20m width

2_34
Melbourne
Street grid

2_35
Melbourne
Typical street – 30m width
Heritage

European heritage is physically represented in Central Sydney with the presence of each period from the beginning of European settlement throughout the centre; only a few blocks do not contain buildings or structures from an earlier period. That so much historical fabric has been retained is the result of the City of Sydney’s now strong, but tumultuous history of heritage conservation.

The 1971 Central Sydney Strategic Plan was the first plan to recognise the importance of maintaining Central Sydney’s character and sense of place in the face of very strong pressures for high-density redevelopment. Through the 1960s, there was little to prevent owners from demolishing historic buildings at will. The ambitious heritage policies of the 1971 Strategic Plan were a huge step forward for Central Sydney.

Where the policies of the 1971 Strategic Plan were a progressive administrative tool in promoting heritage conservation the “Green Bans” of the early 1970 had a greater and direct impact on heritage conservation in Central Sydney. Building unions allied themselves with middle-class environment and residents’ groups and the National Trust, refusing to work on projects they considered to damage the environment or destroy heritage. The Builders Labourers Federation refused to demolish any building which the National Trust recommended for preservation and any of the 1700 “classified” buildings in Central Sydney at the time.

The Green Bans changed public opinion on the “inevitability” of the unthinking destruction of heritage, character and lower-rent accommodation that came in the form of smaller heritage, character and sense of place. With the presence of each period from the beginning of European settlement throughout the centre; only a few blocks do not contain buildings or structures from an earlier period. That so much historical fabric has been retained is the result of the City of Sydney’s now strong, but tumultuous history of heritage conservation.

In contemporary Sydney, buildings from different eras reveal a diversity of styles and themes which contribute to a sense of place. Within Central Sydney, precincts have differing functional, architectural and symbolic roles. Their predominantly sandstone masonry facades express a tactile character that captures the daylight and projects a warm look and feel that is uniquely identifiable to Central Sydney.

Heritage buildings are part of Central Sydney’s diversity, though the diversity – between new and old – needs to be managed and balanced for the good of the city. The challenge is to create places and spaces with a rich mixture of old and new buildings but with an overall sense of order. The concept of precincts offers an effective basis for developing objectives for urban design and controls that can adapt as precincts evolve and boundaries change. Diversity of precincts is essential to maintain a culturally rich and interesting urban centre. Diversity is also a strong element of Central Sydney’s image where new buildings contrast with old; architectural styles vary from Victorian to postmodern; parapet heights step up and down; towers project irregularly into the sky; and arcades and lanes offer different passageways than major streets.
**Intimate scale**

The intimate scale and compact nature of Central Sydney provides for a memorable experience for the pedestrian, one with very human scale. Within slightly warped city blocks, a large number of relatively small lots of land have been redeveloped. The predominance of smaller sites is reflected in the scale of buildings, which is still fairly small, much moreso than is usual in comparable cities of North America and Europe.

Small-scale and diverse spaces at street level, in lanes and basements and on the upper floors of buildings, provide for small retail and service tenancies, set in vibrant and attractive streets. The spaces are adaptable, comparatively affordable and support start-up and fledging businesses. With different owners and leasing patterns than larger developments, organic changes can occur throughout Central Sydney that respond to shifts in fashion and desire – translating to a city that is resilient to economic shifts and able to adapt to the changing social needs of Central Sydney’s broad communities.

At the same time, to realise the full development potential of the city, developments are increasingly proposed for multi-site amalgamations. By grouping smaller sites together, landowners are able to realise greater development potential, accessing higher heights and larger buildings. The City of Sydney is also seeing more and more heritage items being amalgamated and included within the site area of development proposals. These amalgamations and the appropriate consolidation of heritage items into new development proposals represent a positive and efficient use of land. By allowing sites to pool together, Central Sydney is maximising what land it does have to achieve a greater supply of floor space.

The challenge therefore is one of balance, for the planning framework to encourage amalgamations while maintaining Central Sydney’s intimate scale and character. For example, the laneway resumptions of the late 1960s to 1980s, where developments were built over public and private laneways to create some of the city’s largest towers, are no longer seen as best practice for the planning and management of public spaces.
Open spaces

With Central Sydney increasingly being chosen as a place to work, live and visit, open space is becoming the greatest challenge in such a physically constrained setting: its provision, delivery and protection, and ensuring it is sunlit, meaningful and connected.

Central Sydney’s open spaces includes big and small green, open spaces (encompassing the green spaces and parks described in sub-section 2.4), as well as public squares and the network of streets, footpaths, malls, laneways and public thoroughfares that connect them. They are all parts of Central Sydney where people congregate and move, and provide opportunities for recreation, rest, contemplation, reflection, public events and social gatherings. These open spaces provide a contrast to and relief from the density and urban materials of Central Sydney’s office blocks and towers. They service workers, visitors and residents alike and provide places for Central Sydney’s inhabitants to mix and mingle.

Central Sydney’s more formal open spaces such as Martin Place, Pitt Street Mall, Sydney Square and Circular Quay are places for people. They make up the spine of Central Sydney’s open space network and provide spaces for gathering, demonstrations, people watching, shopping and eating.

Increasingly, it is Central Sydney’s growing network of smaller spaces that provide Central Sydney’s precincts with local identity and character. A large proportion of properties are farther than 200 metres from public open space (that is not a street or lane). It is important to provide these spaces for workers to sit, visitors to people-watch and residents to meet. Some minor public spaces are dispersed around the centre that are homogenous and lack substance, meaning and purpose. It is these forgotten spaces, laneways and courtyards that require redefinition and connection to promote Central Sydney’s character from the inside out.

The City seeks to capture the opportunities created by new development to increase the provision of open space, improve the quality of existing open space and improve the connections between open spaces. New open spaces have largely been created on an ad hoc basis, when individual sites come up for redevelopment, and their distribution around Central Sydney is largely confined to the City Core and the upper part of the Midtown precinct. These smaller spaces have benefits including stimulating retail activity and increasing the profile of local businesses. They increase the diversity of public space offered to Central Sydney’s workers, residents and visitors, and can rejuvenate daily life and investment in a precinct.
Views

Central Sydney contains private and public lands. The majority of public lands consist of streets, squares and parks, without being substantially built upon. Some public lands are occupied by public buildings.

The majority of private land is occupied by buildings that almost fill their sites, though some includes open spaces including gardens, courtyards and setback areas.

The combination of built and unbuilt land allows for views from private and public buildings across private and public open spaces. Due to the varying heights of buildings and their setbacks, views are also available across and around buildings.

As old buildings are replaced with new ones, views are subject to change. Given the constantly changing built environment of Central Sydney, regulating for maintenance of private views is overly restrictive and complex. Maintaining existing private views inhibits change and would render Central Sydney uncharacteristically static.

Central Sydney has a privileged position on a peninsula in a harbour surrounded by water and parklands, containing a large number of highly significant structures and buildings of a height that vastly exceeds its surroundings. This means that the large majority of available views are considered “iconic”. This sets Central Sydney apart from other places; standard principles around views and the sharing of them are not applicable.

Development in a suburban context is flexible. Building adjustments to form are relatively simple through more skilful design. However, the scope is often not available within the confines of planning requirements to adjust the shape of a building in Central Sydney or move its location on the site. For example, tall commercial buildings consist of large regular floorplates and their complex structural requirements and high-quality repeatable exterior cladding reinforces this regularity. For these buildings, better design to provide a better view is rarely possible.

The streets, parks and squares of Central Sydney provide multiple and various public views to pedestrians, providing orientation and relief from the enclosure provided by the buildings of the surrounding city. A few of these views have higher significance due to their association with significant public places and buildings. Some significant views have been purposely composed; for example, the clock tower of Central Station was placed where several streets align.

Other views connect significant places: for example, the Town Hall tower viewed from Hyde Park; and the Lands Department tower viewed from Sydney Cove. Others are important historically: for example, the view from the signal station on Observatory Hill to the South Head Lighthouse.

Others are possibly well remembered in the collective unconscious because of their association with special places over a long period of time: for example the view of the sky at the end of Martin Place viewed from Macquarie Street, that includes the silhouette of the GPO tower, or the view down Bent Street from the steps of the Mitchell Library. These public views from public places are worthy of conservation.

View west along Martin Place, 1913
Source: State Library NSW
2.41
View corridor to Central Station clock tower

2.42
View corridor west along Martin Place
The greatest challenge for any global city is the supply, funding and delivery of essential physical and social infrastructure. Doing this well creates and sustains a resilient city with high standards of living and contributes to its sustainable growth.

This sub-section describes key infrastructure issues in Central Sydney. How people move around metropolitan Sydney largely determines its success from an economic, environmental and social perspective. As such the sub-section has a substantial focus on transportation infrastructure, including current growth and changes and the need for better linkages between Central Sydney’s open spaces.

It also discusses social infrastructure, including the need for affordable housing. Community facilities are crucial for residents as well as workers. Finally, the needs for energy infrastructure are described.

The sub-section does not address all of Central Sydney’s infrastructure needs and it is intended that the Strategy will require the development of an infrastructure plan that goes beyond the infrastructure needs identified below, to address issues including waste, telecommunications, fibre optics, gas, sewerage, stormwater and water, education, health and State public transport.
Transportation

An integrated, safe and efficient transport network is critical to support growth in Central Sydney.

Central Sydney’s current transport and access network is under considerable strain. Metropolitan Sydney’s bus and rail networks are now heavily utilised, with little spare capacity on most rail lines, and severe congestion on the bus network. Central Sydney’s streets have also reached capacity. Dominated by motor traffic, they rarely function as useable and inviting public spaces; they do little to enrich the human experience of Central Sydney at street level.

Planned public transport projects, including the Sydney metro and the expanded light rail network, will help ease Central Sydney and metropolitan Sydney’s congestion challenges. But these are only part of the solution. There is still much to be done.

Demand

Central Sydney draws workers from across metropolitan Sydney, but the workforce is dominated by those from the inner and middle ring areas, particularly the Eastern and Northern Suburbs. Over the previous decade to 2011, the Inner West and Inner South West have contributed an increasing proportion of Central Sydney workers, reflecting population growth and demographic changes (refer to 2_43).

As metropolitan Sydney has grown, so too has the importance of public transport. Unlike travel in private vehicles, public transportation can move large crowds, taking up little space. Over the last 10 years, the number of people driving to Central Sydney in the morning peak hour reached a plateau of around 25,000 trips, while public transport use has increased from 105,000 to 145,000 trips.

Central Sydney generates intense demand for transportation. More than 180,000 people arrive each morning peak hour. The majority of trips, especially longer trips, are by train. Buses meet about 20 per cent of the morning’s peak travel demand, and provide additional access to inner and middle ring suburbs that are not as well serviced by trains. Private vehicles account for only 14 per cent of the morning peak travel demand, though they account for most of the traffic on Central Sydney streets. The radial structure of metropolitan Sydney’s transport network directs large volumes of passengers and vehicles through Central Sydney on route to other destinations. Approximately 67,000 journeys pass through Central Sydney, the majority of which are travelling to and from work in North Sydney, Chatswood and the Macquarie Park area. These through trips can place particular pressure on inbound rail services on the Western Line, which must cope with overlapping demand for Central Sydney and North Sydney destinations, leading to heavy loading between Central Station and Town Hall Station.
Origin of weekday (all day) trips to Central Sydney – 2011
Sydney City Centre Access Strategy 2013, NSW Government