

Committee
for
Sydney

GRIMSHAW



Reclaiming Parramatta Road

November 2020



About the Committee

The Committee for Sydney is an independent think tank and champion for the whole of Sydney, providing thought leadership beyond the electoral cycle. We bring people together to solve the problems of today and tomorrow.

With 150 member organisations, we work on behalf of Sydney, not the interest of any industry or sector.

If you would like to find out more about joining us, please call Hannah Jamieson, Director of Engagement and Development on +61 417 729 001.

Foreword



For far too long Parramatta Road has been neglected by planners and by city makers, with improvements to it as a place thrown in the 'too hard' basket.

But, with the delivery of Westconnex, along with a new rail line in Sydney Metro West and increased capacity on the T1 Western Line, in the next 5 years there will be a once in a generation opportunity to reclaim Parramatta Road as series of dense, vibrant urban places.

Indeed, this was my original vision for the delivery of Westconnex. As Chairman of Infrastructure NSW, I was proud to champion the underground tunnel as a crucial project for Sydney for a number of reasons.

The project closes a gap in Sydney's motorway network, putting cars and trucks underground. In doing so, the negative aspects of traffic are taken off surface streets, enabling urban renewal of one of our most deteriorated corridors. At the time I firmly believed that Westconnex should crystallise positive change on the surface of this corridor. This remains true.

Sadly, the vision for this renewal has been lost in recent years. Due to fragmented governance and land ownership, the corridor lacks a champion to push bold changes. Luckily, it's not too late. With Westconnex nearing completion, it's time to do the hard work to deliver a transformed Parramatta Road.

This report presents one vision of a way forward – new public transport that catalyses land use changes and a transformation of the urban realm. I encourage decision makers across government to take the challenge of this vision. Surely the details will change, but the point is that there is now an opportunity for a transformation of the entire corridor. It would be tragic to have invested all this time and money in Westconnex, and then leave Parramatta Road as it was before the project began.

I commend the Committee for Sydney for their willingness to take on this project, and would urge the rest of Sydney to join in the effort.

Nick Greiner

Former NSW Premier & Treasurer 1988 - 1992

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Summary of Recommendations



1. Public Transport

Create a new permanent, rapid, intermediate public transport for the Parramatta Road corridor from Burwood to Central, such as light rail or a trackless tram.

2. Cycling Infrastructure

Complete a separated bike path along corridor, either on Parramatta Road, or adjacent.

3. Slow down vehicles

Reduce the traffic speed on Parramatta Road to 50km/h or further.

4. North-South movement

Rephase traffic lights along Parramatta Road to deliver greater prioritisation for north-south vehicle and pedestrian movement.

5. Plant more trees

Increase tree canopy along Parramatta road to improve amenity and lower heat.

6. Feeder streets

Close slip lanes/feeder streets to make pedestrian plazas.

7. Street Furniture

Install street furniture that provides greater pedestrian amenity and supports the rehabilitation of retail on Parramatta Road.

8. Planning controls

Review the land use outcomes proposed in PRUTS to ensure it is responding to transport and urban design changes, while protecting and promoting the renewal of important heritage streetscapes and facilitating high quality redevelopment and renewal elsewhere.

9. Governance

Create a shared governance structure to bring together all stakeholders to deliver investment in Parramatta Road.

10. An Economic Strategy

Create an economic strategy for the corridor aligned with adjacent innovation precincts and collaboration areas.

11. Valuing Place

Update business case development to value placemaking appropriately in funding decisions

Introduction



Parramatta Road, 2020

You would be hard pressed to find anyone who is happy with Parramatta Road. Clogged with traffic, it is a commuter's nightmare. Noisy, hot, and dusty, it is a place best avoided by pedestrians. An artificial barrier between North and South, it has cut communities in half. Economically, the road has been on life support for many years, with most shopfronts empty.

It has been hard to find a way to resolve this. We have, historically, relied on Parramatta Road to act as core transport corridor, making any changes to improve pedestrian amenity or North-South connectivity hard – although the narrowness of the corridor and its historical form has also meant it is a terrible transport corridor.

Now more than ever, there is an opportunity for change. After years in planning and construction, the first stage of WestConnex is open underneath Parramatta Road, and the next stage is expected for completion in 2023. This will be supported by an increase in capacity on the T1 Western Line and new Metro projects in coming years, greatly diminishing Parramatta Road's transport role for private vehicles, freight, and longer distance public transport.

These major infrastructure investments, particularly WestConnex, present a once in a generation opportunity to reimagine the road, returning it to its previous role as a place for people.

This report is informed by our Reclaiming High Streets report.

Few would consider Parramatta Road a 'high street' today, but that is what it has been for the vast majority of its history. We believe Parramatta Road represents the furthest gap between current reality and future potential of any high street in Sydney.

Revitalising Parramatta Road is not a new idea. A variety of strategies and plans have attempted to facilitate renewal along the corridor since the early 2000s. Unfortunately, many of these strategies seem to be lost or forgotten. Work completed in 2016 by UrbanGrowth NSW has seen little by way of implementation – despite a timeframe that is more than half over.

The Committee for Sydney proposes a comprehensive overhaul of Parramatta Road. Catalysed by the completion of WestConnex and underpinned by extending public transport like light rail or a trackless tram down Parramatta Road, our proposals would return the Road to a high street – a place where people congregate and spend time, while still maintaining important connectivity across Sydney's Inner West. The value of this renewal stretches far beyond simply economic measures, contributing to societal, health, community, and environmental benefits for all of Sydney.

Our vision is supported by three key principles:

Great places for people and where businesses and industry thrive; World-class connectivity and accessibility; Liveability and amenity for surrounding communities;

History



Source: State Library of NSW

Parramatta Road, late 1880s

Parramatta Road is Australia's oldest city-to-city roadway. Built in large part on previous Aboriginal tracks, the road was an early infrastructure priority for the fledgling colony. As the principle land link between Sydney and the emerging centres of Parramatta and beyond, Parramatta Road quickly became a busy thoroughfare. But it also became the focus of commercial activity, as shops and businesses clustered along its corridor to catch the passing trade or to get easy access to market for goods and services. It soon developed a dual role; one as a transport corridor linking the two largest colonial settlements and the other was as a 'place'. By 1900, it hosted a string of vibrant 'villages' dotted along its length, while also being our busiest road.

However, its success in both roles was relatively short lived. Between 1901 and 1940, Sydney's population exploded by 500% and at the same time the private automobile became ubiquitous. Parramatta Road quickly became congested as more and more vehicles crowded onto its narrow corridor. This congestion increasingly undermined its role as a high street.

Throughout the early 1900's several attempts were made to remove the congestion. In 1906, the first sections of the Road were widened to create Broadway. But this proved prohibitively expensive (even with a toll) and widening came to halt after just two miles. As traffic surged, the road (and the surrounding neighbourhood and shops) declined. In 1920, NSW Treasurer, Jack Lang, nicknamed Parramatta Road 'Gallipoli', saying *"...it was much easier to scale the heights there then negotiate the hazards of Parramatta Road"* Despite successive Governments endeavour's, by the 1940's, traffic had overwhelmed the local main street villages and the economic life of Parramatta Road declined.



Parramatta road in 1939

Source: [State Library of NSW](#)

After 1945, our civic leaders began thinking about how to restore Parramatta Road as an economic hub and functioning high street. In 1949, the Government released the **County of Cumberland Plan**, Sydney's first ever metropolitan wide planning strategy. This Plan paid particular attention to the role high streets play in the urban economy and articulated for the first time that cars and traffic should be redirected onto new, purpose-built, freeways. These Freeways would be surrounded by "parklands" which would buffer local communities from amenity ruining noise and pollution. In the case of Parramatta Road, a new freeway was planned to remove cars and restore its role as a high street.

While Government considered building the Freeway, temporary measures were introduced to relieve congestion. In the late 1950's the trams were removed to create two more lanes for cars. Traffic lights were also installed and the first 'clearways' introduced. While this improved the flow east-west, the loss of kerbside parking ruined what little amenity was left on the footpath. Without public transport and a poor pedestrian environment the commercial activity on the street declined further.

By the end of the 1960's new efforts were being considered to 'save' Parramatta Road. In 1969, the County of Cumberland Plan was abandoned with little progress having been made on a new freeway. In its stead a new **Sydney Region Outline Plan**, was adopted. Unlike earlier schemes, this Plan was backed by an infrastructure plan which committed Commonwealth and State funds to building an elevated freeway from Darling Harbour to Parramatta and a "rapid transit train" from Penrith to the City. Its explicit aim was to relieve congestion on Parramatta Road, returning it to a functioning high street.

Yet construction of an elevated freeway meant the demolition of thousands of historic homes and bulldozing dozens of neighbourhoods and a massive community back lash ensued. In 1972, an activist Whitlam Government intervened refusing to fund any urban freeways. While work had started, the freeway was abandoned leaving only the Western Distributor and the M4 being built – leaving Parramatta Road as crucial link between the two. At the same time, it was determined that the only way to build a "rapid transit train" was to put it underground. This was prohibitively expensive, so it too, was abandoned.



1973 UBD Street Directory showing the proposed route for the Sydney to Parramatta elevated freeway.

By 1980, Parramatta Road had devolved into a traffic heavy highway, avoided by pedestrians, dominated by vehicles, and renowned throughout Australia for its poor urban amenity and congestion.

Yet while six decades of plans and strategies failed to do anything to save Sydney from what was now a traffic sewer, the planning and strategising didn't stop. In 1996, the Government allocated \$150,000 to a Local Council led Taskforce to identify how the road can be improved. This Taskforce (**Parramatta Road: Beyond 2000**) outlined several measures to fix the Road including planting more street trees, slowing traffic speeds, better north-south connectivity, and bike paths. Not for the first time, the Taskforce wanted to return Parramatta Road into a series of high streets and urban villages. However, without an alternative route for cars to take, the Taskforces recommendations were never adopted.

In 2000, newly elected Lord Mayor, Clover Moore, convened her own Taskforce to 'fix' Parramatta Road as a post Olympics urban renewal project. This too recommended much the same measures as previous studies but added the novel idea of extending the Inner West Light Rail to Burwood and then from Burwood to Central, along the centre lanes of Paramatta

Road, to create a continuous loop. This would have removed two lanes of traffic but, the Taskforce claimed, would carry many more people using mass transit. The then Roads and Traffic Authority said this was unworkable without alternative route for the displaced cars and questioned whether Light Rail would ever be workable in Sydney.¹

Not to be outdone, in 2012 the **Urban Taskforce** convened some of the city's best architects and developers to develop a rescue package to fix the road. They too made recommendations for restoring the Road as a place but added three novel ideas. Bury the traffic in a new trench or 'slot' under the existing road and build some 100,000 apartments along its length. Importantly, the Urban Taskforce highlighted the need for a special "Urban Renewal Authority" noting the governance problem of having the RTA own the road, while the Council's 'owned' the public realm. Without the two working in tandem it would never be able to function as a high street.

A Road most studied:

This report was soon followed by **First Things First**, the NSW State Infrastructure Strategy. This strategy echoed the 60-year-old **County of Cumberland Plan**, recommending the construction of a new tunnel (dubbed WestConnex) to remove traffic from Parramatta Road which would be repurposed as a public transport corridor and as a high street.

With WestConnex under construction, UrbanGrowth prepared a **Parramatta Road Corridor Urban Transformation Strategy** (PRUTS) in 2016 which included a set of guidelines to transform the forlorn urban villages along its route. This was given further impetus with the commitment in 2018 to build a “rapid transit train” or **Western Metro** between Parramatta and the CBD.

Because of these major investments by the NSW Government, for the first time in a generation, there is an opportunity to restore Parramatta Road to its Victorian heyday as a bustling main street within walking distance of 300,000 people.

However, notwithstanding the imminent opening of WestConnex, and construction starting on the Western Metro, there is growing pressure to maintain Parramatta Road as a main road for vehicles. Traffic engineers are arguing that WestConnex, being a tunnel, might fail and an alternative is needed when it does.

This is in direct contradiction of every strategy, plan and promise for over eighty years, but it now seems likely. The implementation plan in the PRUTS laid out a timeline for delivery of the initial urban renewal from 2016-2023 – a time period we are now halfway through. With little monitoring or reporting, much of this plan are now seemingly forgotten. In March 2020, **Transport for NSW** changed the sequencing of traffic lights along the length of Parramatta Road to better support the flow of traffic east/west and to limit the “disruption” caused by north/south movement.

Over the next few years both WestConnex and the Western Metro will open. But without a clear plan and better governance arrangements, Parramatta road will continue its century old decline. It need not be like this.

- 1790 – Construction of an overland road to Parramatta starts.
- 1811 – Toll established to maintain and upgrade Parramatta Road.
- 1882 – New steam tram service between Sydney and Leichhardt
- 1906 – Road widening commenced, and Broadway created.
 - This was abandoned at Camperdown as too expensive to continue, even with a Toll.
- 1932 – Department of Main Roads created.
 - This new authority was created to manage the operation of important roads and highways, particularly Parramatta Road. Control was removed from Local Councils and a commitment made to tarmac its entire length.
- 1948 – County of Cumberland Plan released.
 - This Plan outlined a series of new freeways to remove traffic from local high streets, particularly Parramatta Road.
- 1960's – Improvements made improve flow of traffic along Parramatta Road.
 - Trams removed to free up road space for cars.
 - Traffic lights installed to better regulate intersections and improve movement east-west.
 - “Clear ways” installed to allow better flow of cars during peak times.
- 1968 – Sydney Region Outline Plan.
 - A new elevated freeway to be built to take traffic off Parramatta Road.
 - A new “rapid transit train” to be built linking Penrith with the CBD, via Parramatta.
- 1972 – Works starts on Western Distributor and M4 motorway.

Previous attempts to renew Parramatta Road

- 1996 – Parramatta Road: Beyond 2000
 - Recommended traffic calming, wider footpaths, installing bike paths and more street trees.
- 2000 – Clover Moore releases findings from her Parramatta Road Taskforce
 - Recommended traffic calming, wider footpaths, installing bike paths and more street trees.
 - Recommending extending the Light rail along Parramatta Road.
- 2011 – NRMA advocates for Parramatta Road re-imagining
 - Research argues for a road tunnel linking the M4 and the City West Link.
 - This would enable Parramatta Road to be revitalised with light rail, slower traffic and a bike path.
- 2012 – First things first
 - The first NSW State Infrastructure Strategy.
 - Chaired by the Hon. Nick Greiner AC.
 - Called for the construction of WestConnex.
 - Identified this would benefit public transport on Parramatta Road.
- 2015 – Sydney CBD to Parramatta Strategic Transport Plan
 - Transport for NSW report recognizing the need for greater active and public transport options in the corridor.
- 2015 – Parramatta Road Urban Amenity Improvement Plan
 - UrbanGrowth NSW report identifying the need to improve precincts.
- 2016 – Infrastructure Priority List
 - Public Transport along Parramatta Road is added to Infrastructure Australia's IPL.
- 2016 – Parramatta Road and Norton Street Urban Design Study
 - Leichardt Council report proposing urban renewal of Parramatta Road through streetscaping and pedestrian prioritisation
- 2016 – Westconnex EIS
 - With the approval of Westconnex M4 East, a requirement for 2 lanes of public transport down the Western half of Parramatta Road was introduced.
- 2016 – Parramatta Road Public Transport Opportunities Study
 - Inner West Council report.
 - Proposed trackless trams – or equivalent – along Parramatta Road.
- 2016 – Parramatta Road Urban Transformation Strategy
 - UrbanGrowth NSW report setting out the future of the Road.
 - Detailed urban design and transport changes to improve the Road

Challenges

Congested East-West Transport

Parramatta Road is one of the ten most congested roads in Australia.ⁱ The corridor is renowned by motorists as slow and congested, with vehicles rarely travelling the full length.ⁱⁱ

Poor traffic light sequencing, inefficient and sporadically located right turn lanes bank up traffic into free-flowing lanes. Recent efforts to ease congestion have centred around removing car parking, shortening bus lanes and reconfiguring road space for vehicles, but ultimately the road does not have the capacity to deliver free-flowing movement for private vehicles at the level of current demand.

Cycling along Parramatta Road is a dicey proposal – meaning few people commute along the road by bike. The lack of separated bike paths means bikes sharing lane space with cars and buses. As a result, where cycling does occur, it is often on the footpath – which poses a risk to pedestrians. Ironically, the poor walking experience means there are few, if any people walking on Parramatta Road.

The 2016 PRUTS recommended increasing active transport as a mode share in the corridor – this will not occur without infrastructure, primarily separated cycling lanes.

There is also no permanent rapid public transport service in the corridor. At present, shared bus lanes run between Petersham–Leichhardt and Broadway–Railway Square. Sections of these narrow bus lanes are regularly blocked by turning traffic and parked cars, heavily reducing their efficiency.

The average bus speed in the corridor is 14kmh (well below best practice of 25–30kmh) with the 10km journey into the Sydney CBD from North Burwood taking on average over 40 minutes.ⁱⁱⁱ

Cyclists avoid Parramatta Road – and when required, ride on the footpath.



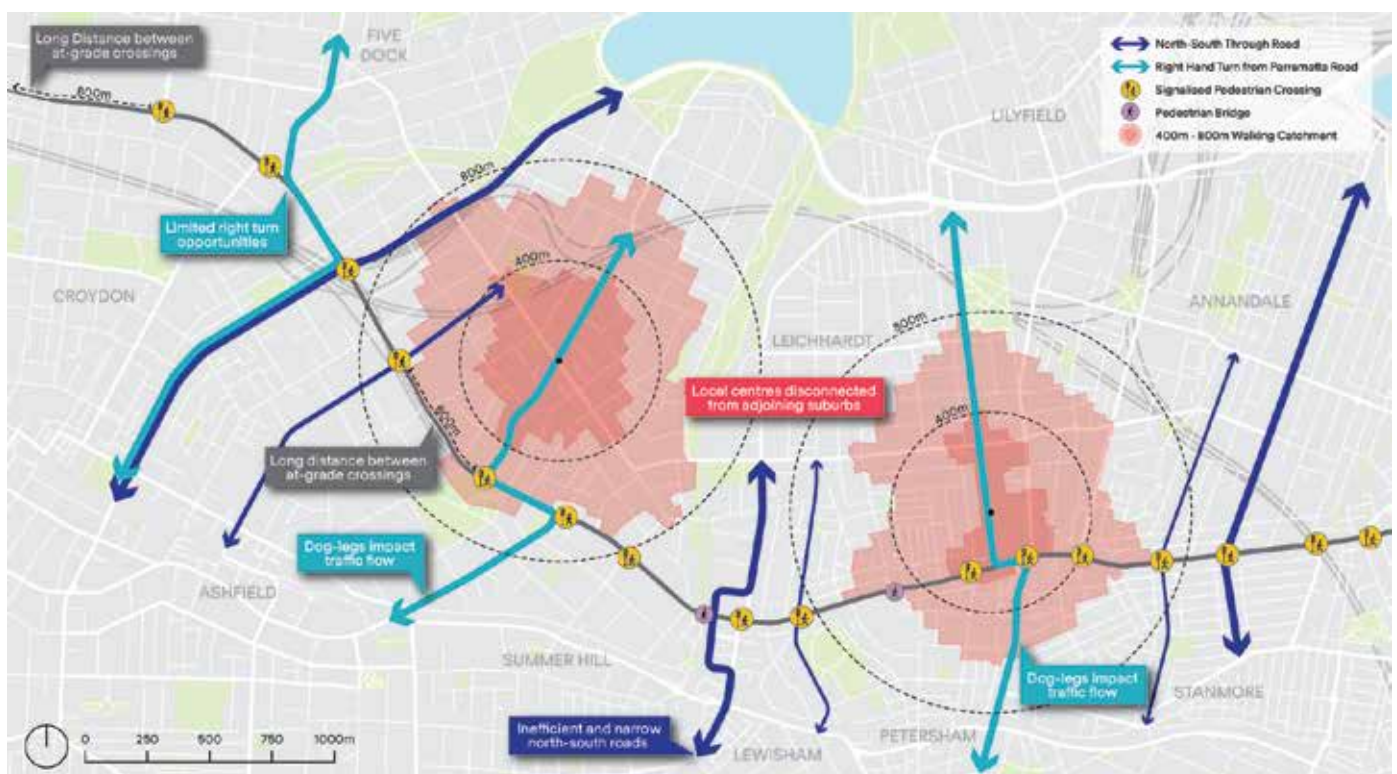
Barriers to North-South Transport

Pedestrian barriers, a lack of median strips, and sparsely located signalised pedestrian crossings mean long detours for pedestrians or cyclists hoping to cross the corridor. Meanwhile, signalling priority for East-West movement means vehicles can wait multiple lights cycles to cross Parramatta Road.

The long waits between lights have meant many communities cut in half by Parramatta Road.

Pedestrians waiting for extended periods of time for signals to change are waiting alongside a hostile road with fast moving, noisy traffic.

Parramatta Road reduces the walkability of communities, with pedestrians required to make significant detours to cross it



Degraded Public Realm

In some areas building setbacks from kerb to façade are exceptionally narrow. Footpaths of up to three metres exist but the nature of a busy roadside means the street is an unpleasant place to be.

There is also a lack of adequate landscaping, particularly in the eastern sections. Pedestrians will not spend time in a place without shelter from rain or sun.

In part, building awnings provide some degree of shelter from the weather however along Paramatta Road they are often sporadic, inconsistent, and non-contiguous. In some parts, the footpaths are exposed with little shelter, openings between buildings contribute to undesirable wind effects, and at times sunlight can be either sparse or blinding), all impacting the comfort of the pedestrian experience.

Along most of its length, Parramatta Road is bereft of natural landscape, particularly in the eastern sections, where footpaths are narrow, and buildings have constrained setbacks. There are instances - at Ashfield for example - where buildings are set back from the roadside and grass verges line footpaths, but even here the grass verges are relatively free of vegetation and trees.

Hard surface footpaths run the length of Parramatta road and are typically maintained in good condition. However hard surfaces contribute to the urban heat island effect, storing heat and reflecting sunlight, and when coupled with the lack of greenery contribute to increases in ambient temperatures. In addition, hard surfaces repel water and impact runoffs which can be particularly problematic during heavy deluges with overflowing sewers and localised flooding. Acoustically, road traffic produces excessive levels of noise, which is compounded by the hard-paving surfaces which reflects sound, as well as atmospheric pollutants from the vehicles themselves.

Inconsistent and non-contiguous awnings provide poor shelter from the elements



Parramatta Road presents a hot, noisy and dusty pedestrian experience.



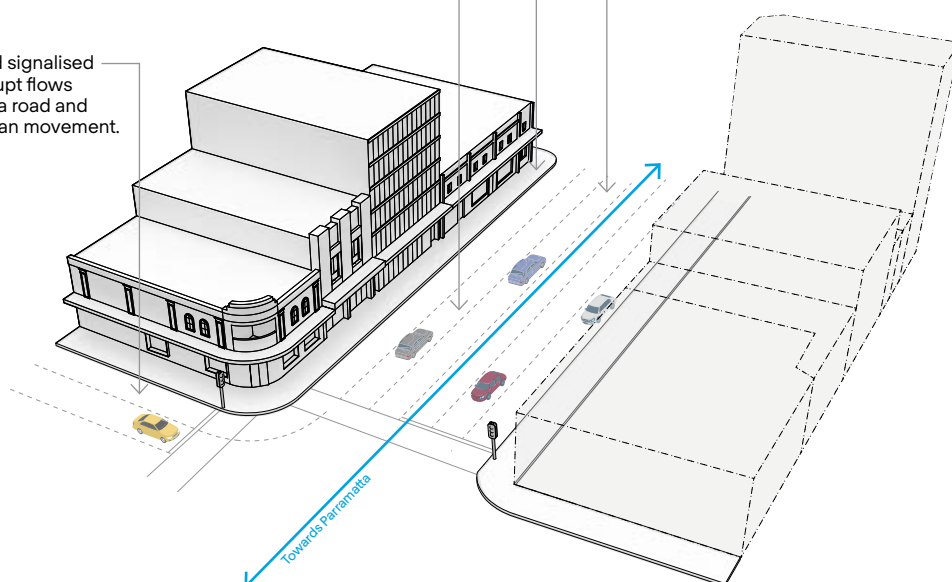
A typical section of Parramatta Road has numerous public realm issues

Constrained footpaths restrict pedestrian movement and activity along roadside. Hard landscape causes heat island effect and lack of landscape impacts flooding / water run off. Footpath width approx 3m.

Public realm is compromised by constrained building setbacks and inactive frontage.

6 lanes of traffic (typical) including centre median kerb and fencing with prioritised bus lanes (outer lane) ensure an unfriendly pedestrian environment. Crossings are limited and biased to the traffic flow east-west.

Feeder road and signalised crossings interrupt flows along Parramatta road and restrict pedestrian movement.



Economic Decline

Most shops along Parramatta Road are empty



Older buildings, built when the road was a flourishing high street, once held lively local stores, milk bars and cafés. These have fallen into disrepair and dilapidation, with the street becoming unviable for businesses and unremarkable as a place of interest.

Shop front retail is now almost extinct along the road, making way for specialist services and commercial premises which aren't reliant on footfalls and passing trade benefit from low rent, however, with the circumstance of this year's pandemic, these businesses too have suffered immensely, with one exception; cycle stores.

The real estate value of both commercial and residential property along the road is below average when compared to the average property values of the suburbs which they bound: Annandale and Camperdown. An estimate suggests two in every three shops were closed/vacant, even before COVID-19.

In many areas along Parramatta Road, re-development has been slow and inconsistent, not necessarily reflective of underlying planning controls. Particularly in the western part of the corridor, older residential properties can be found sandwiched between car dealerships and mixed use apartment buildings, creating an incongruous collection of typologies.

These inconsistent land uses, a poor streetscape experience and intensity of traffic are all contribute towards an environment that is not an enjoyable or economically viable place.

However, in many sections of the road, the existing building stock is made up of grand heritage buildings that are simply in need of refurbishment. Clearly defined planning controls that promote good quality design and amenities will in turn allow strong market interest and incentivisation which will ultimately generate higher value outcomes. But with the road and adjoining streetscape designed primarily to achieve a movement purpose only, there is no impetus for large scale renewal to take place or for existing building stock to be renewed. This is unlikely to change in the absence of a dramatic restructure of how the space on the road is allocated.

Lack of coherent delivery to a strategy

In many respects, as we have seen historically, the lack of a cohesive governance group or structure has meant that many of the good intentions for the redevelopment of Parramatta Road have failed to materialise.

All stakeholders across State and Local Government recognise the importance of Parramatta Road and the opportunities it provides. Unfortunately, the lack of clear governance means most of the comprehensive change needed has failed to eventuate. For too long, the road has sat across numerous actors with conflicting objectives, with Roads & Maritime Services (RMS) prioritising vehicle movement at the expense of other outcomes.

All parties are committed to delivering the Parramatta Road Corridor Urban Transformation Strategy (PRUTS), however without better governance to coordinate these actors, the individual elements outlined in PRUTS will not deliver on the overarching vision.

Placemaking is undervalued

Often, projects seeking government investment are evaluated using Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA). CBA's are a tried and tested method, and applying them brings rigour to ensure that decisions are made on the basis of what will benefit society most - and therefore that our tax dollars are put to good use.

In NSW, public funded projects rely on the CBA outcomes to determine, in part, whether funding approval will be granted to allow for project progression. The metrics applied in a CBA have great influence on how and where public funds are spent. However, within a CBA there is a observed deficit in the way in which place-making value is measured and quantified. This can skew the viability of projects that have a stronger focus on amenity and experience outcomes:

The benefits of successful placemaking are an increasingly recognised part of effective strategic transport planning. However, these benefits are not formally recognised in business cases or in any cost-benefit analysis (CBA) for new infrastructure projects, resulting in unfavourable or undervalued appraisals of these projects...

The value of placemaking benefits are unnoticed in favour of more established, accepted, easily accessible measures aligned with movement such as time-saving and/or safety benefits. Consequently, important aesthetic, social, cultural, environmental and heritage impacts are not appropriately considered.

Source: Transport for NSW, Problem Statement AP 18-01

Because investment decision-making frameworks are more well-developed for transport benefits, transport outcomes have tended to dominate project outcomes over place and experience outcomes. This naturally skews decisions towards investments favouring projects that get people from A to B as quickly as possible.

Changing the way in which the valuation of improved places is measured, to better reflect the true benefits and costs of change, would ultimately lead to the renewal of Parramatta Road having a far greater chance of staking up.

Solutions



Transport

Recommendation 1: Public Transport

Create a new permanent, rapid, intermediate public transport for the Parramatta Road corridor from Burwood to Central, such as light rail or a trackless tram.

The construction of Westconnex, along with other major transport infrastructure in this corridor presents an opportunity to deliver a new public transport line from the City to Burwood, running down the middle of Parramatta Road. This would help catalyse the other urban design and

environmental interventions suggested, and provide a rapid and comfortable connection to, from, and between parts of the Inner West and the CBD that are not currently served by any rapid transit solution.

The completion of the City and South East Light Rail has transformed George Street into one of Australia's most vibrant pedestrian centric places. Property values along George Street have soared and commercial properties with a George Street address are revered and highly demanded. This benefit has been felt both in the pedestrianised zones and the areas of George St still open to cars.



It is acknowledged that there will be engineering challenges in the implementation of light rail along Parramatta Road, particularly in determining where stops are positioned, and this will require more detailed analysis. It may be that a trackless tram is more appropriate given the width of the road. Maintaining left and right turns, pedestrian intersections and crossovers will also need careful resolution. However, these challenges are not insurmountable and can be resolved given the significant benefits that could be achieved.

A new transport link that connects seamlessly into the existing transport network also justifies many of the land use changes envisioned in PRUTS. It would facilitate development, not only for general residential property, but for hotels, student accommodation, commercial buildings and offices, educational and health institutions, and retail. There is nevertheless the opportunity to re-interrogate the outcomes envisioned under PRUTS alongside the introduction of new rapid transport – better connectivity may catalyse even greater potential for densification along the corridor.

A proposed City and Inner West transport network with the inclusion of Burwood-City light-rail/trackless tram and Sydney Metro West



Collectively, the outcome of an improved and well-connected public realm would stimulate a greater value in residential development along the road corridor, but more than that, it will stimulate new communities that grow around the new connection and see Parramatta Road as a renewed place of exception.

Recommendation 2: Cycling Infrastructure

Complete a separated bike path along corridor, either on Parramatta Road, or adjacent.

Some sections of Parramatta Road have, on adjacent streets, quality cycling infrastructure. But the corridor lacks a good, joined-up cycleway. Adding in cycle lanes along some sections of Parramatta Road, combined with existing and new alternative routes along the corridor will open up a new mode for commuting into the Sydney CBD and fill in a crucial active transport link in Sydney's strategic cycle network.

Recommendation 3: Slow down vehicles

Reduce the traffic speed on Parramatta Road to 50km/h or further.

Speeds of 60km/h, particularly without parking along each side of a road, result in a hostile experience for pedestrians. Most streets that have speeds of 60km/h find it difficult to maintain retail tenancies and see substantially reduced lingering time from pedestrians. The experience of being on the footpath can feel hostile, and the lack of protection from road traffic can be uncomfortable, particularly in sections where traffic is free flowing or at maximum allowable speed.

Slowing down Parramatta Road to 50km/h – or further – will improve pedestrian experience on the street, while not having substantial impact on the travel time of vehicles on the road, that currently travel at an average speed of under 20km/h.

Recommendation 4: North-South movement.

Re-phase traffic lights along Parramatta Road to deliver greater prioritisation for north-south vehicle and pedestrian movement.

Traffic lights on Parramatta Road provide long periods for vehicles travelling East-West, and little time for vehicles on North-South streets and pedestrians attempting to cross the road. This has been exacerbated with the opening of Westconnex 1A, where cars exiting the tunnel at Ashfield have been given greater priority travelling Eastwards to avoid traffic backing up to the tunnel entrance.

This should change. There is no fundamental reason to prioritise East-West movement, aside from habit. Re-phasing of traffic lights will re-shape the communities along Parramatta Road, opening them up to greater pedestrian access and encouraging the expansion of movements between the North and South sides of the road.

Addressing the traffic arguments

While adding public transport down the middle of Parramatta Road will deliver improved public transport capacity and speed along the corridor, it will come at the expense of lanes available to private vehicles. Proposals that have suggested this or similar interventions have traditionally been met with opposition due to the expected impacts this would have on congestion for private vehicles in this corridor.

This fear is unfounded. All over the world, where lanes are removed – or indeed entire sections of highway, congestion has not increased. There is a concept in transport modelling of ‘induced demand’ – essentially, if you build it, they will come. But this concept works both ways. Reduce capacity will result in increased traffic – for a short period. But then the increased travel time will cause some to vary their travelling – perhaps they catch the train instead, or change the time they decide to travel.

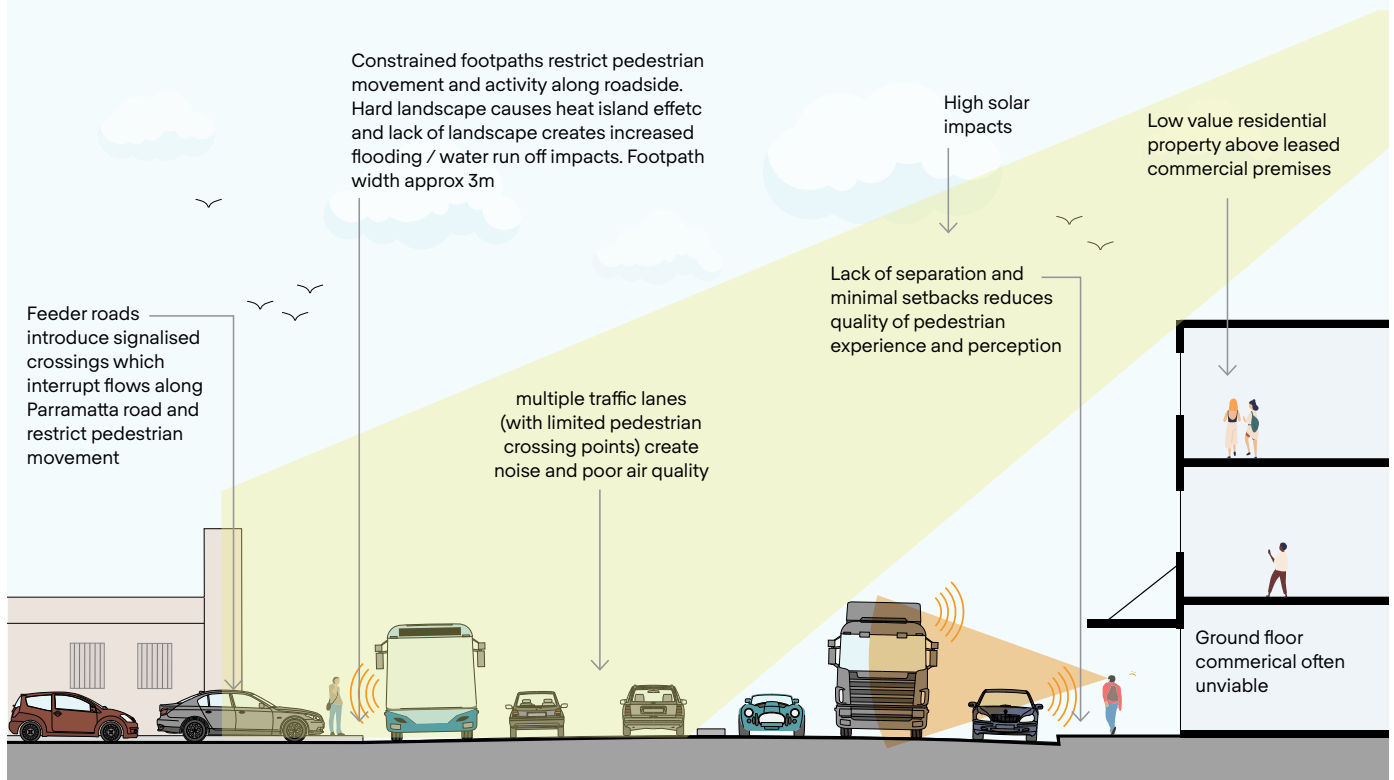
Traffic engineers will say they need the surface capacity in addition to new underground capacity in Westconnex for private vehicle demand. But this implies a static ‘demand’, rather than the reality of demand: it is shaped in equilibrium with supply.

It is also worth noting:

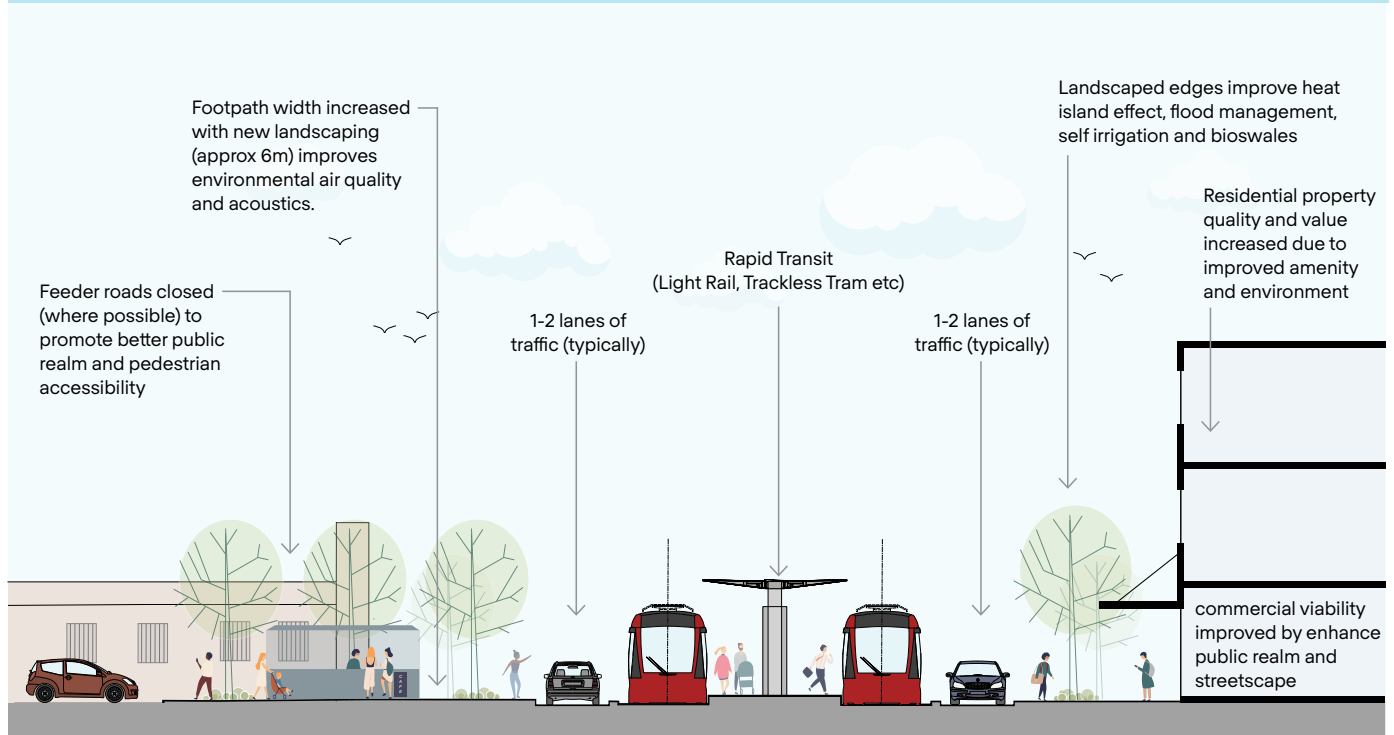
- **There are alternative routes**
The completion of WestConnex (combined with the existing M4, Western Distributor and the proposed Western Harbour Tunnel) presents a substantially improved option for people travelling distances in the corridor.
- **There are alternative modes**
The creation of surface public transport, in addition to Metro West and increased capacity on the T1 Western Line (catalysed by the removal of the Bankstown line from the City Circle as part of the City and South West Metro) means greater capacity to travel by public transport along this corridor, while also delivering more certainty in travel times vs. private vehicles.
- **Travel happens in all directions – not just East-West**
A focus exclusively on travel times for East-West journeys ignores the number of North-South journeys that currently are delayed by the difficulty of navigating Parramatta Road. Reducing speeds East-West will allow for more travel in alternative directions.

How Parramatta Road looks today, and how it could be changed by transport and public realm improvements

Current



Future



Current landscaping on Parramatta Road is a poor replacement for decent tree canopy



Public Space

Recommendation 5: Plant more trees.

Increase tree canopy coverage along Parramatta road to improve amenity and lower heat.

Parramatta Road suffers from a lack of shelter, strong winds, and blinding sun (at different points), excessive heat and excessive noise. Trees and other vegetation can help improve the footpath experience and elevate the quality of the streetscape.

Trees and tree canopies provide shelter from the sun and assist in cooling the microclimate. Low level vegetation, grass verges and gardens absorb solar energy converting it to oxygen. Landscaped floor surfaces absorb rainwater (and self-irrigate) mitigating localised flooding. Water that irrigates landscape can be filtered through bioswales before it enters the street sewers, reducing it of waterborne pollutants.

Trees and plants also improve the visual quality of the environment, bringing colour and texture to the streetscape. High quality vegetation can be allowed to flourish and community gardens can stimulate additional social benefits, and despite the need to be maintained, their value in improving the road side is significant

Recommendation 6: Feeder streets

Where possible, close slip lanes to make pedestrian plazas.

Slip lanes can interrupt the flow vehicular traffic along a main road. They can also create uncertain and unsafe environments for cyclists and pedestrians. Where possible, feeder roads, particularly those that occur at signalised intersections, should be reconsidered with the outlook to become shared zones or closed to vehicles. This will require careful assessment; recognising that closing feeder roads may have wider impacts on the road network. The ability to improve footpaths and maintain steady flows of traffic and public transport along Parramatta Road provides a high value outcome.

Recommendation 7: Street Furniture

Install street furniture that provides greater pedestrian amenity and supports the rehabilitation of retail on Parramatta Road.

Incumbent on the renewal of Parramatta Road is the provision of equitable access along the length, and at pedestrian crossings. Providing good surfaces and kerb edges that meet Disability Discrimination Act standards is essential, but better street furniture such as seating, bins, smart poles and street lighting would also help to improve the environment.

Land Use

While many parts of Parramatta Road are in need of revival, PRUTS provides a robust land use planning framework, so we don't need to start from scratch in terms of planning control changes.

However, the strategy is now several years old and doesn't consider changes like Sydney Metro West. The strategy assumed that Parramatta Road would remain primarily a car-centric corridor, with no light rail or trackless tram. Given the substantial change this would deliver to the corridor, were the NSW Government to determine to deliver these changes, the land use strategy would need to be updated, delivering uplift in areas needing investment.

This should not be done at the expense of local character zones or without consideration of existing high quality building stock, with new development in other areas. To ensure the best quality design outcomes, new development would be set back from heritage items and design excellence provisions should be included which may allow for height or density bonuses.

Recommendation 8: Planning controls

If new public transport is introduced along Parramatta Road, review the land use outcomes proposed in PRUTS to ensure it is responding to transport and urban design changes, while protecting and promoting the renewal of important heritage streetscapes and facilitating high quality redevelopment.

Governance

The renewal of Parramatta Road is contingent on a collaborative approach to leadership and governance from all levels of government to integrate transport, land use and urban realm changes.

A new governance structure is required to bring together State Government (including Transport for NSW and the Department of Planning, Industry & Environment), Local Government along Parramatta Road, and major precinct stakeholders such as Sydney Local Health District and the Camperdown Ultimo Collaboration Area. These groups should be tasked with coordinating key objectives:

- The funding of infrastructure
- The delivery of infrastructure
- Undertaking strategic land-use planning
- Implementing any resulting land-use changes.

This structure should be aligned to efforts to achieve a shared vision and economic strategy for Parramatta Road that delivers connective infrastructure aligned with growth and improvements to the public realm.

Recommendation 9: Governance.

Create a shared governance structure to bring together all stakeholders to deliver investment in Parramatta Road.

An Economic Strategy

Parramatta Road links many key innovation precincts and economic clusters, from Tech Central through the Camperdown-Ultimo Collaboration precinct with the proposed bio-medical cluster at St Johns Rd, through to Parramatta and the Westmead Precinct.

Developing a strategy that aligns changes along the corridor to supporting the economic success of these clusters will support spill-over effects from these precincts, with renewal and investment along the corridor for allied jobs and services. A coherent strategy, developed by NSW Treasury with input from corridor stakeholders, will support the future of the road.

Recommendation 10: An Economic Strategy

Create an economic strategy for the corridor aligned with adjacent innovation precincts and collaboration areas.

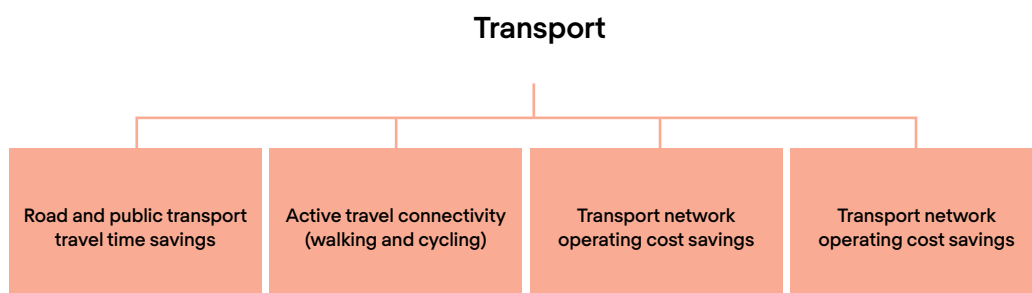
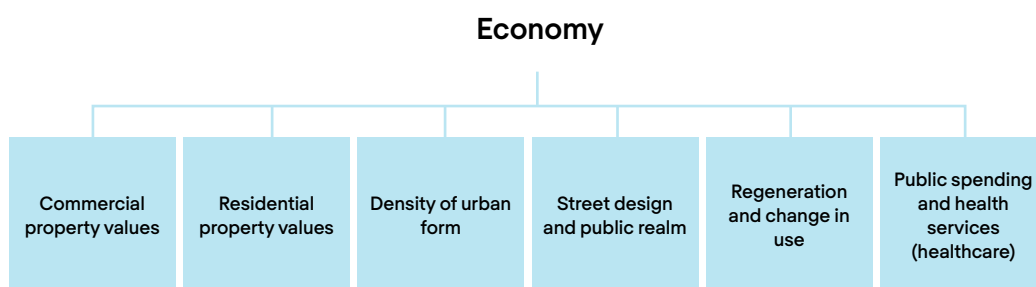
A better way to value place

Recommendation 11: Valuing Place

Update business case analysis to measure the value of placemaking appropriately in funding decisions.

There is a large and growing body of evidence on the importance of placemaking. Throughout the development of this paper, every stakeholder has agreed that Parramatta Road fails as a place. The challenge lies with incorporating this evidence into established investment assessment frameworks such as Cost Benefit Analyses.

An extensive literature review¹ for this paper identified a range of potential placemaking impacts across the themes of community, economy, and transport. The economic and social benefits of better places are substantial but are not currently measured when considering the future of the Road. Without valuing the benefits of better places, changing the urban form will never stack up to the potential travel time costs. Balancing road traffic to and from centres with other place functions will ensure attractive places for people and strong local economies to develop and thrive.



¹ Over 50 academic papers were reviewed to develop the place benefit framework presented in this report.

Precinct Plans

A long-exposure photograph of a city street at dusk. The sky is a mix of orange, pink, and purple. Light trails from cars and streetlights create streaks across the road. A large building is on the left, and a street sign for Jones St is on the right.

Reimagining Place

The increased capacity of vehicular movement along Parramatta Road has progressively eroded the streetscape as a place for people, impacting the viability of many businesses and the quality of the residential amenities and public benefits along the roadside.

Our vision for Parramatta Road is to be a world class city boulevard; creating exceptional public realm with generous tree lined streets footpaths and with lively and vibrant cafés, shops, restaurants and amenities.

This study promotes a significant reduction in traffic and an enhanced high-quality pedestrian environment reinforced with superior public transport which seamlessly connects the inner west to the city and eastern suburbs beyond.

Improved placemaking and public transport solutions would create a number of place-based benefits along six 'precincts' on Parramatta Road. Each of these benefits represent a different opportunity to quantify the value of improved placemaking along Parramatta Road. While a full CBA that incorporates the measurement of place benefits was beyond the scope of this paper, a high-level benchmarking assessment was used by PwC to explore the value of benefits that could come from a reimagined Parramatta Road for each precinct.

The assessment included the following steps:

1. Identify the current and future economic and place profile of each section of Parramatta Road.
2. Quantify a subset of place benefit(s) within each category based on a literature review and government guidelines for CBA:

Community	Economy	Transport
Community impacts capture the impacts of the interventions on health, environment and safety through:	Economy impacts which capture the effects of increased activation through:	Transport impacts which capture the travel time impacts of interventions on travellers through:
Increased in walkability and the associated health benefits	Improvements in public realm and changes in urban form	A new light rail/trackless tram connection between the CBD and Burwood North resulting in 15 minute saving
Reduced emissions associated with mode shift to public transport	This would, in turn, lead to increased activation and desirability of the precinct which can capture through changes in property values	Traffic calming measures on the road network including reduced speeds from 60km/h to 50km/h
Improved road and pedestrian safety resulting in less collisions		The introduction of dedicated cycle lanes

3. Apply this high-level place assessment^{iv} to understand the impact of change to each precinct. The position of each 'slider' provides an indicative benefit for each section of Parramatta Road and helps to highlight the trade-offs between benefit types as well as the overall impact.

When taking these wider benefits and costs into account, it becomes clear that through interventions that deliver better places, active transport and public transport accessibility we see Community, Economic and even Transport benefits at every precinct along the corridor outweighing the costs.

Broadway

Broadway has undergone significant renewal over the past 10 years with the major redevelopment of the UTS campus and the near completion of Central Park. This renewal has increased pedestrian activity along Broadway and been accompanied by traffic calming along some parts of the road and nearby streets. However, Broadway still has too many lanes, there are no safe cycling options, and footpaths and signals for walking remain poor.

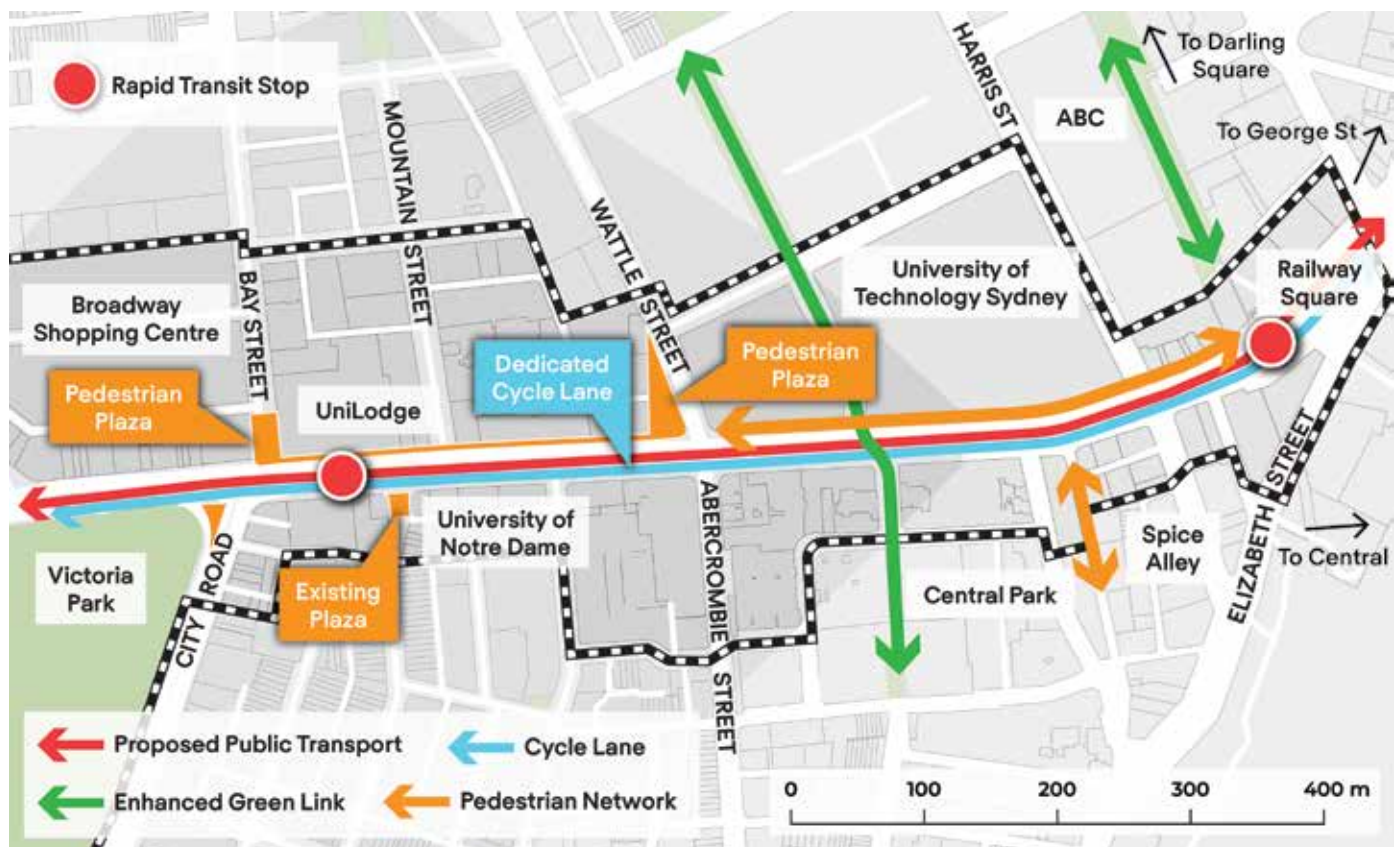
The basic moves:

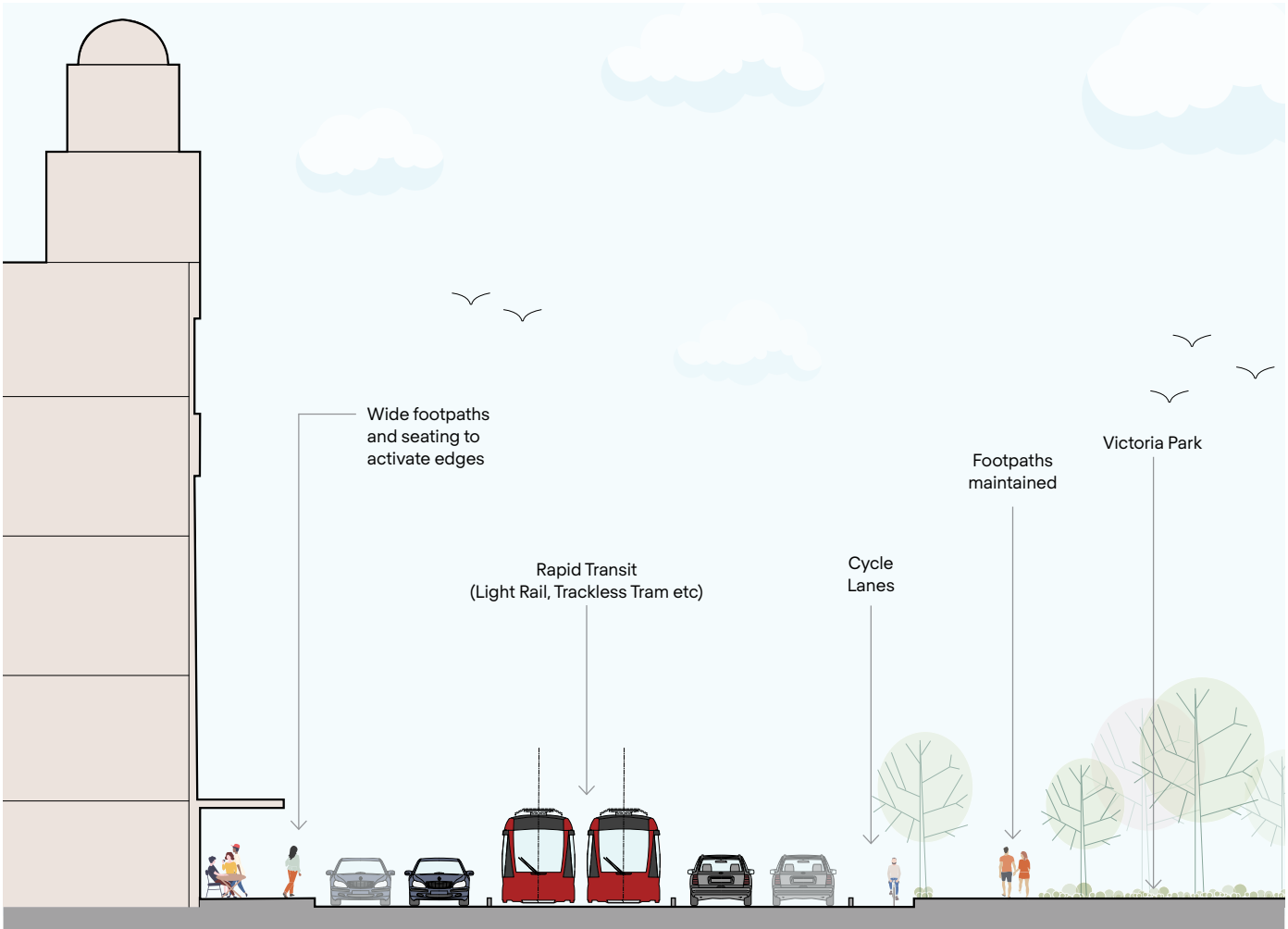
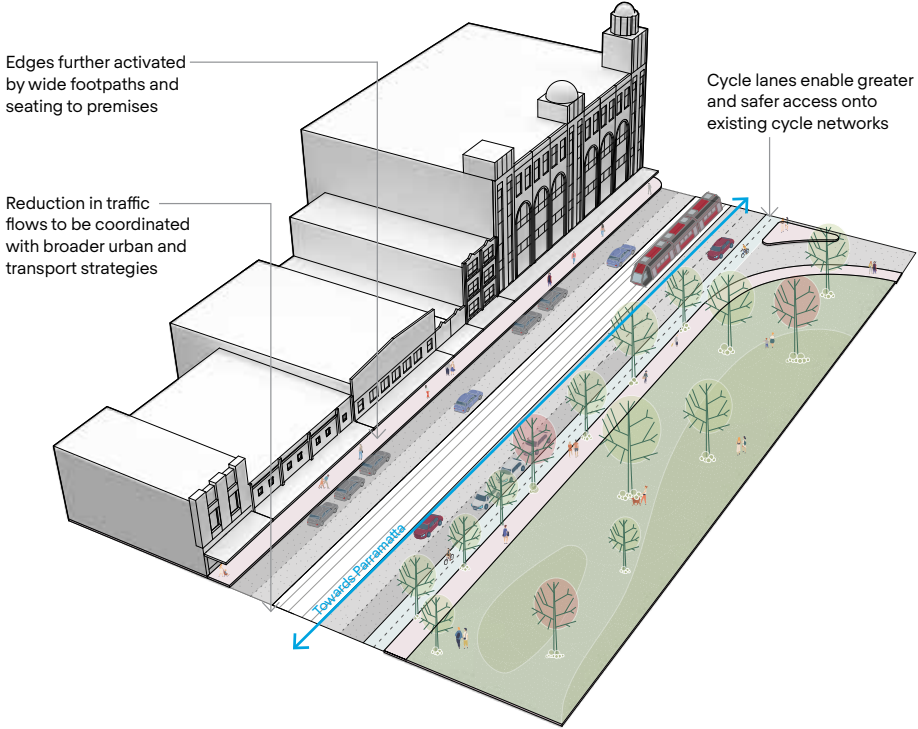
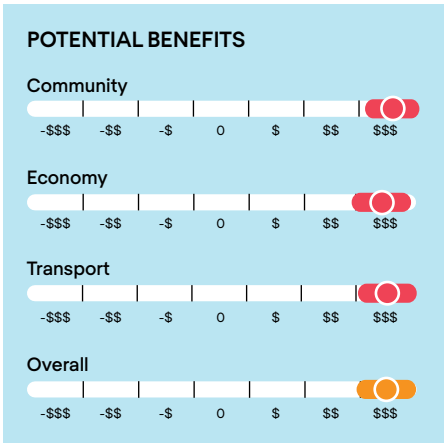
- Create a separated cycle lane along Broadway.
- Pedestrianise feeder lanes to provide greater pedestrian amenity.
- Improve north-south links.
- Integrate with Tech Central, with reduced lanes for vehicles.

Broadway currently has the largest allocation of road space along Parramatta Road, generally with eight lanes of traffic and in parts nine. With traffic calming comes the opportunity to redistribute this road space and represent Broadway as a gateway to the city.

Current pedestrian footfalls exceeds footpath capacity at peak times. The creation of plazas in high footfall areas will improve road safety for pedestrians. Sites such as Bay Street near Broadway Shopping Centre and the feeder lane from Broadway onto Wattle Street are potential opportunities for pedestrianisation.

This stretch of the corridor also provides an opportunity to improve cycle accessibility from Sydney University, down Broadway towards Central. At present cyclists must weave through a complicated network of backstreets parallel to Broadway. Provision of a cycleway will improve cycle accessibility through the corridor and encourage cycling as a viable and safe mode of transport





Camperdown

The Camperdown precinct is one of the most promising regeneration opportunities along Parramatta Road. It is able to leverage its proximity to the CBD, Sydney University and Royal Prince Alfred Hospital to foster supporting industries with diverse uses and buildings of different sizes.

Placing transport stops strategically will enable access to the existing education and medical precincts while supporting the current redevelopment of RPA. With improved public transport links to Central, the precinct will also play a role for spill-over economic activity from Tech Central. Meanwhile, creating improved North-South links will connect the corridor to the Bays Precinct in the North and Newtown to the South.

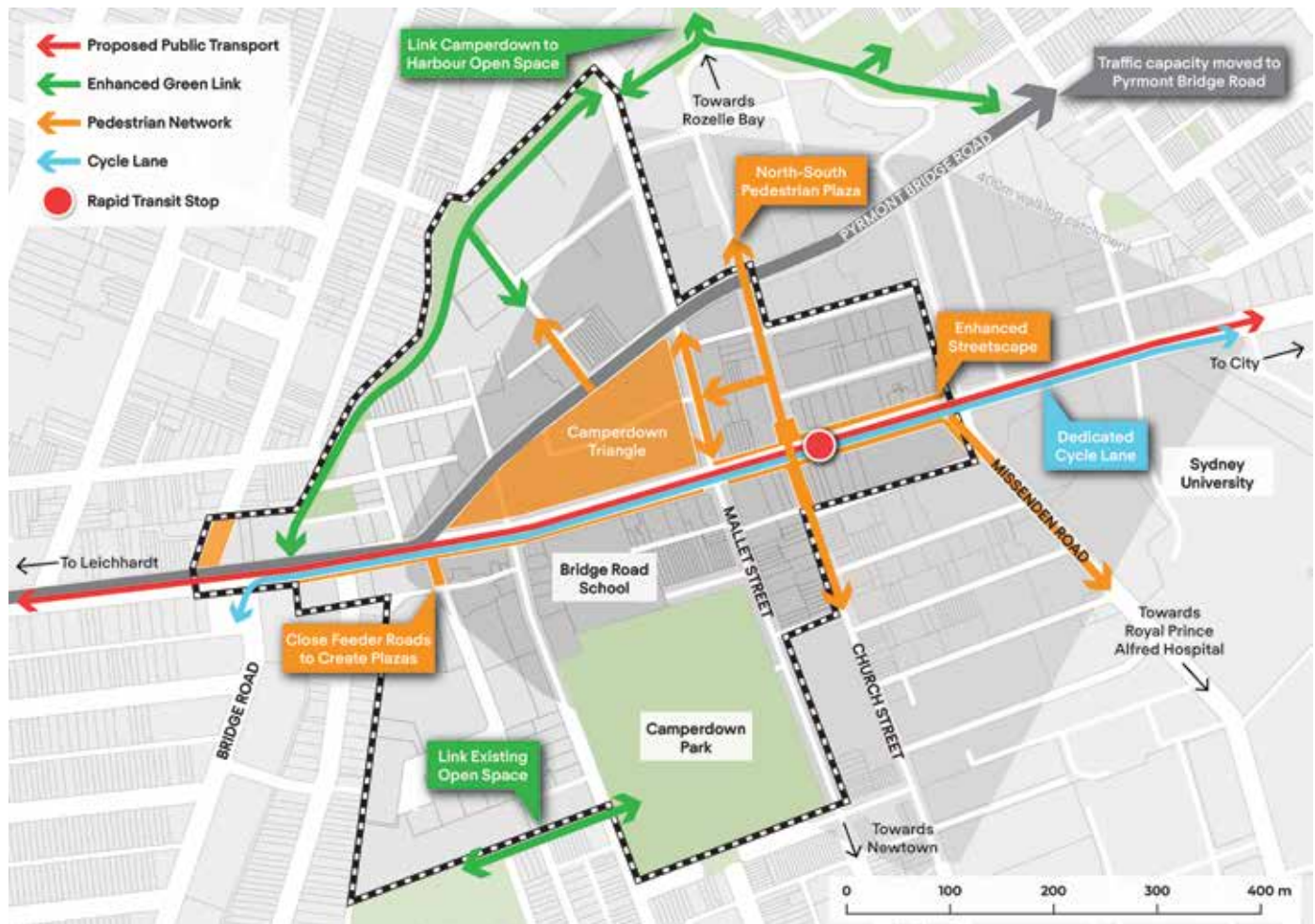
The basic moves:

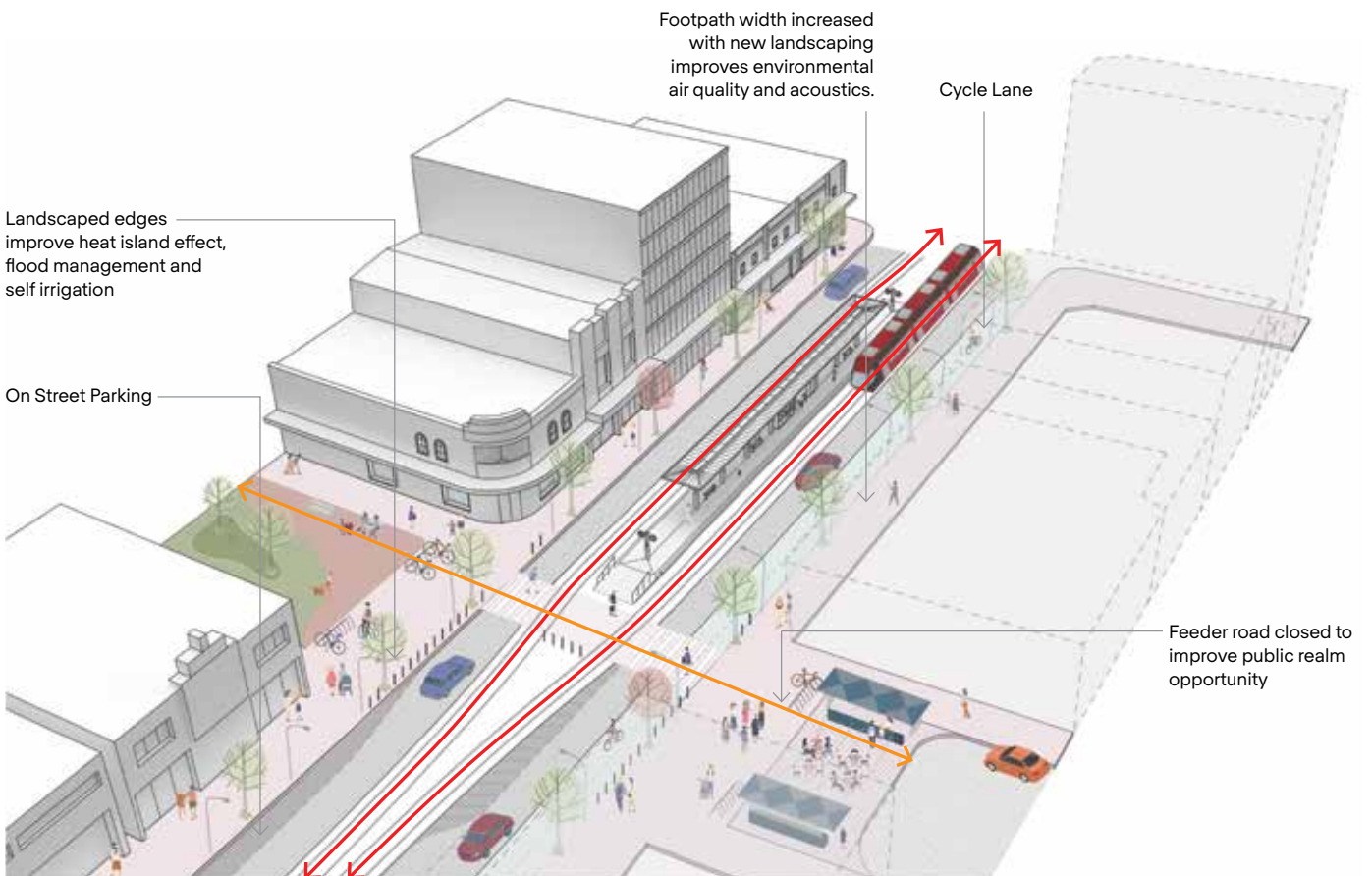
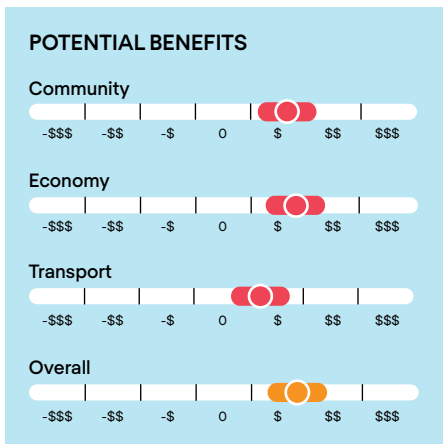
- Pedestrianise Layton Street to create a North-South plaza.
- Create a separated cycle lane along Parramatta Road.

- Close feeder streets to create better places for people.
- Catalyse the renewal of the Camperdown Triangle.
- Regenerate Johnstone Creek to link Camperdown to Sydney Harbour.

There is a strong opportunity to leverage the current WestConnex construction site to catalyse the 'Camperdown Triangle'; the triangular shaped wedge formed by the intersection of Pyrmont Bridge Road, Mallett Street and Parramatta Road, as a Biomedical research hub. Combined with transformed streets and links to the anchor institutions to the East, this 'in-between' space can become a major new centre.

The proximity of significant local open space assets as well as the existing historic industrial character further strengthen the opportunity for urban renewal.





Annandale to Leichhardt

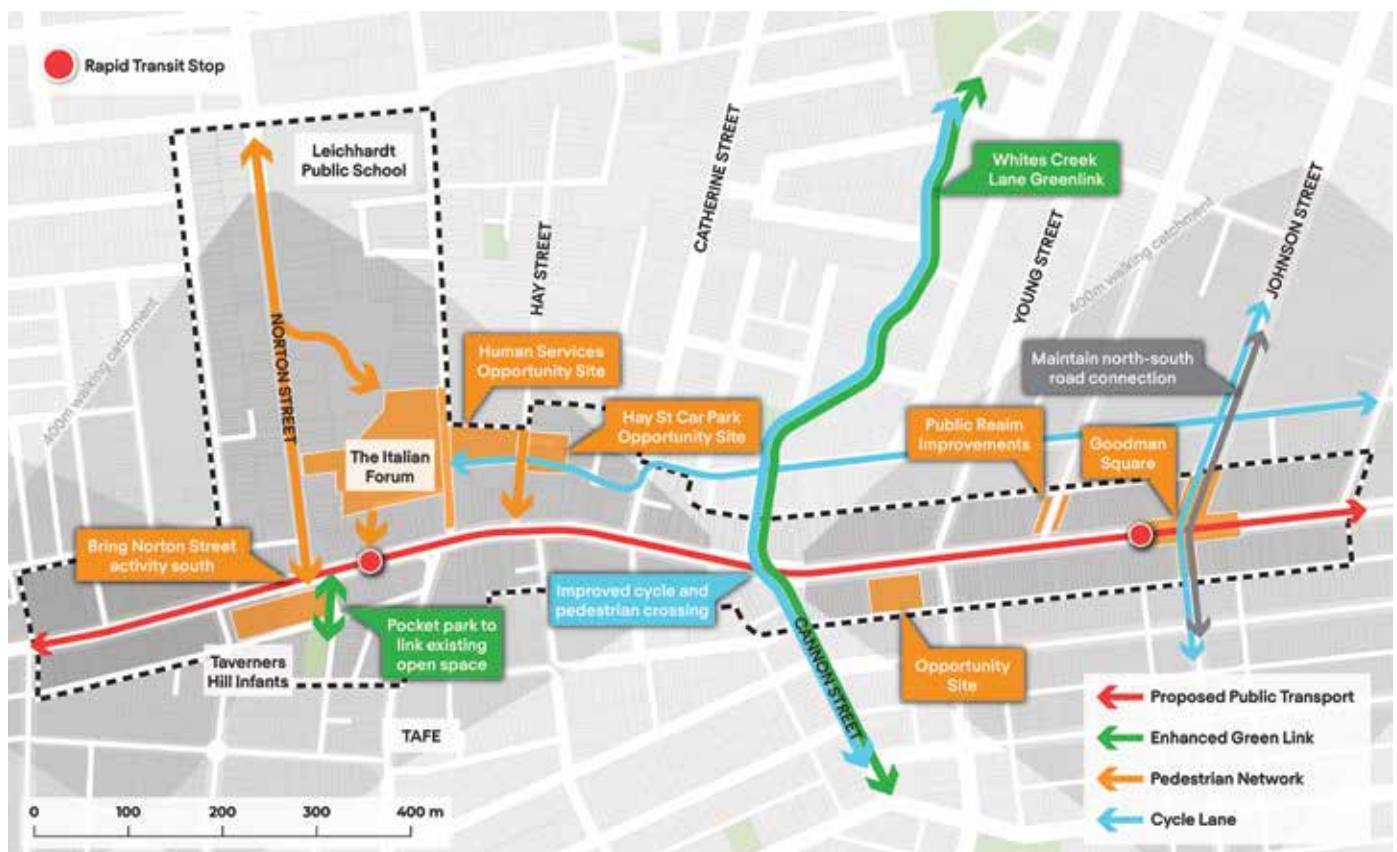
Johnston Street, Annandale to beyond Norton Street in Leichhardt is the heartland corridor of the once vibrant Parramatta Road. Norton Street's cosmopolitan hub is a key attractor and could be used to spur rejuvenation and renewal if this activity were encouraged to spill over into Parramatta Road.

The basic moves:

- Increasing North-South connectivity for Norton Street through open space links to Quinn Playground, south of Parramatta Road.
- Promoting increased economic activity, density and vibrancy through opportunities sites in Leichhardt and Stanmore
- Creating a new North-South active transport along Cannon/Macquarie Street
- Reallocation of road space around the rapid transit stop at in Annandale to create Goodman Square; A new shared pedestrian area with wider footpaths, increased tree canopy and improved pedestrian and cycle crossings centred around the historic Goodman building.

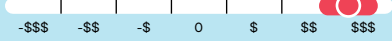
Increased tree planting, improved footpath design and more frequent pedestrian connections across Parramatta Road, all linked to new rapid transport connections, will lift the profile of the currently underutilised retail offering. With its proximity to the Sydney CBD, this area will become more attractive to new businesses, young professionals and young families.

The area's dilapidated but character filled shopfronts and finer grain streets provide the building blocks to reinvigorate Parramatta Road into a vibrant place for people. Norton Street, a thriving hub, can be better linked to Parramatta Road and public transport access through improved North-South signalling, traffic calming and better open space links South of the road.

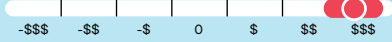


POTENTIAL BENEFITS

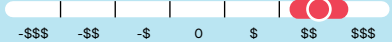
Community



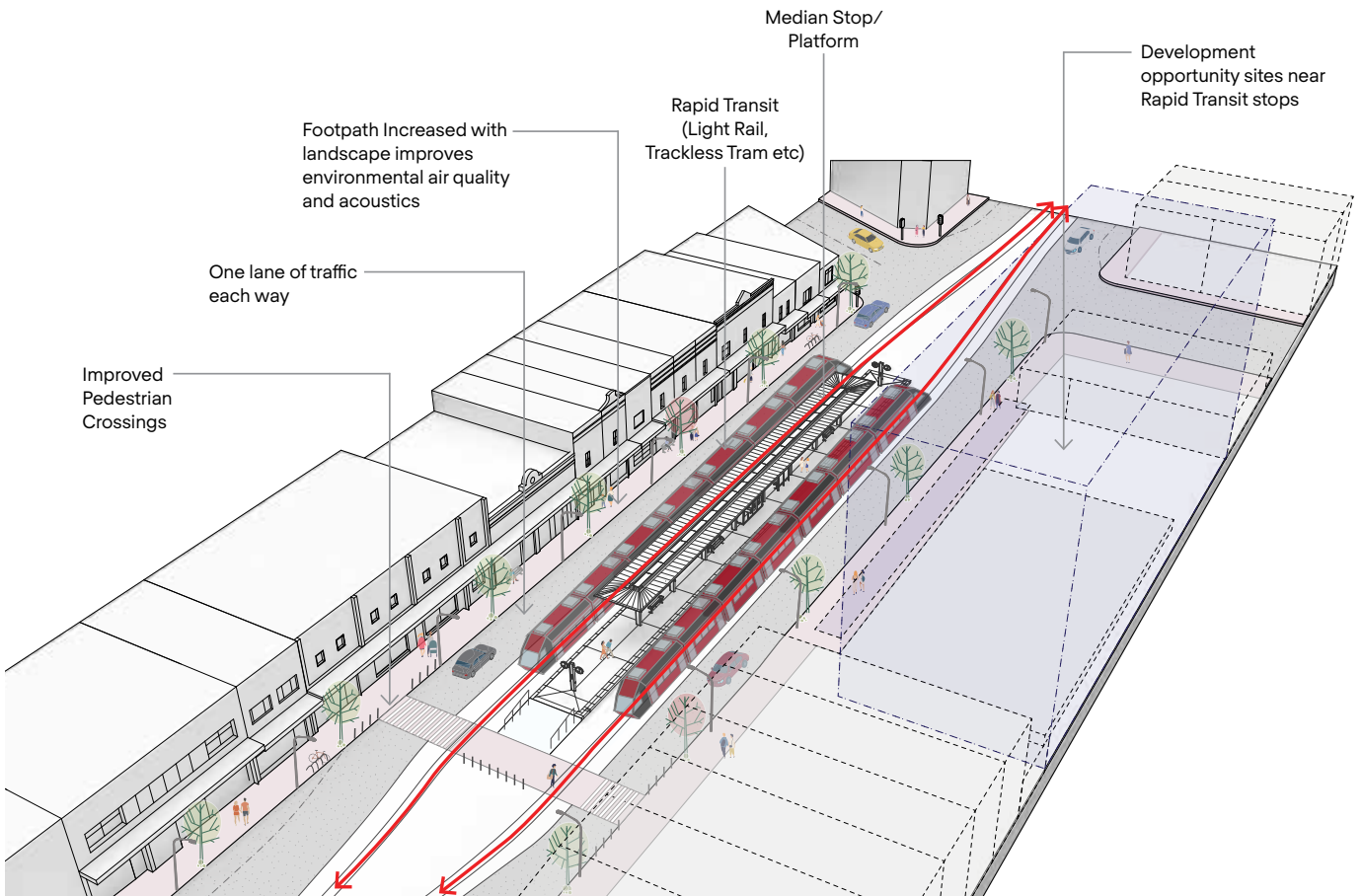
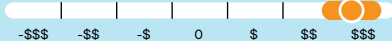
Economy



Transport



Overall



Fort Street to Ashfield Park

A new rapid transit route and stop outside Fort Street High School offers the opportunity to renew the streetscape and larger underutilised lots adjacent, while Taverners Hill becomes an interchange with a revitalised high street and Ashfield Park becomes a renewal opportunity.

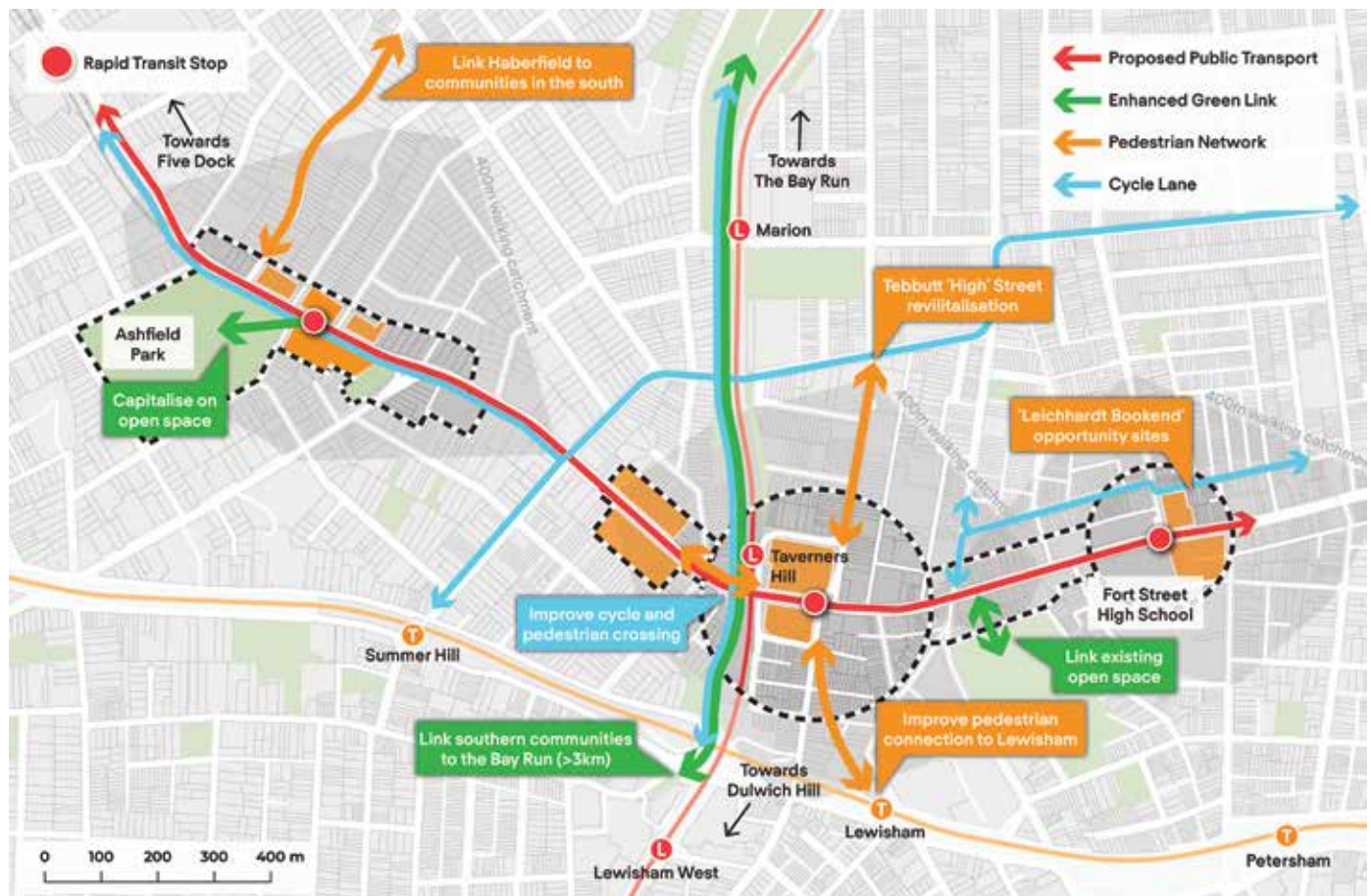
The basic moves:

- Provide an interchange between the new rapid transit line and the existing Light Rail network at Taverners Hill.
- Improve North-South pedestrian and cycle connectivity at Taverners Hill to better link communities in the north and south.
- A new rapid transit stop to catalyse the renewal of Tebbutt Street into a vibrant local high street.
- Pedestrian network and public realm improvements around rapid transit stops.

Fort Street High School is the oldest academically selective school in NSW, with students travelling from outside the local area to attend the school. Improved public transport provision would improve these students' access to education.

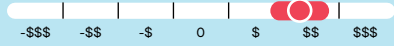
Currently surrounding the High School are large underutilised lots operating as retail showrooms and a self-storage warehouse. Supporting education and community uses or increased provision of residential housing could further activate the area and help bookend the Norton Street precinct.

The Taverners Hills area is currently traffic heavy, with little opportunity for pedestrians to continue north or south. Parramatta Road currently severs the greenway connection from the Bay Run south towards Lewisham and Dulwich Hill. Improved pedestrian connectivity and urban realm upgrades would connect the communities south of Parramatta Road to the Bay Run and the harbour beyond.



POTENTIAL BENEFITS

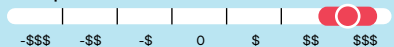
Community



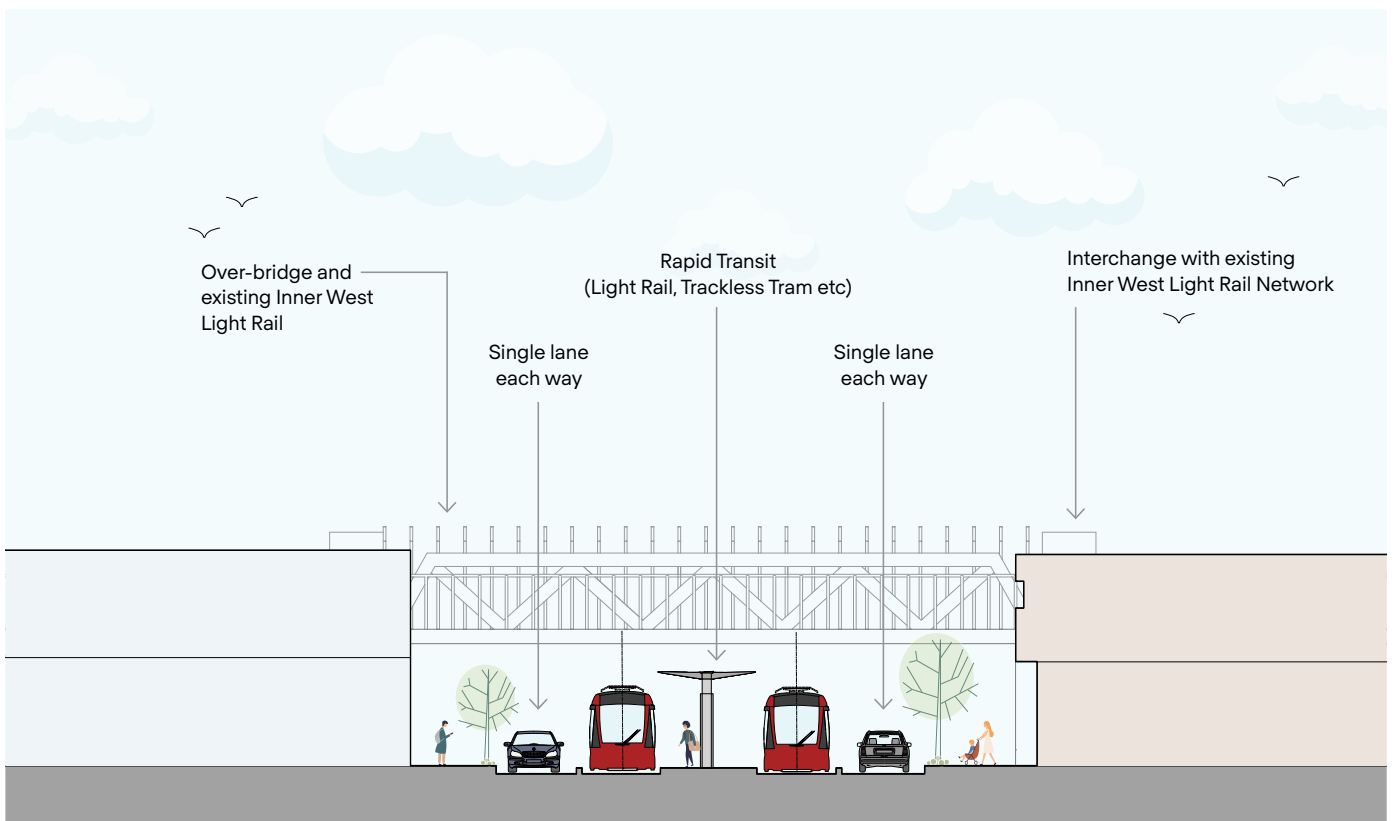
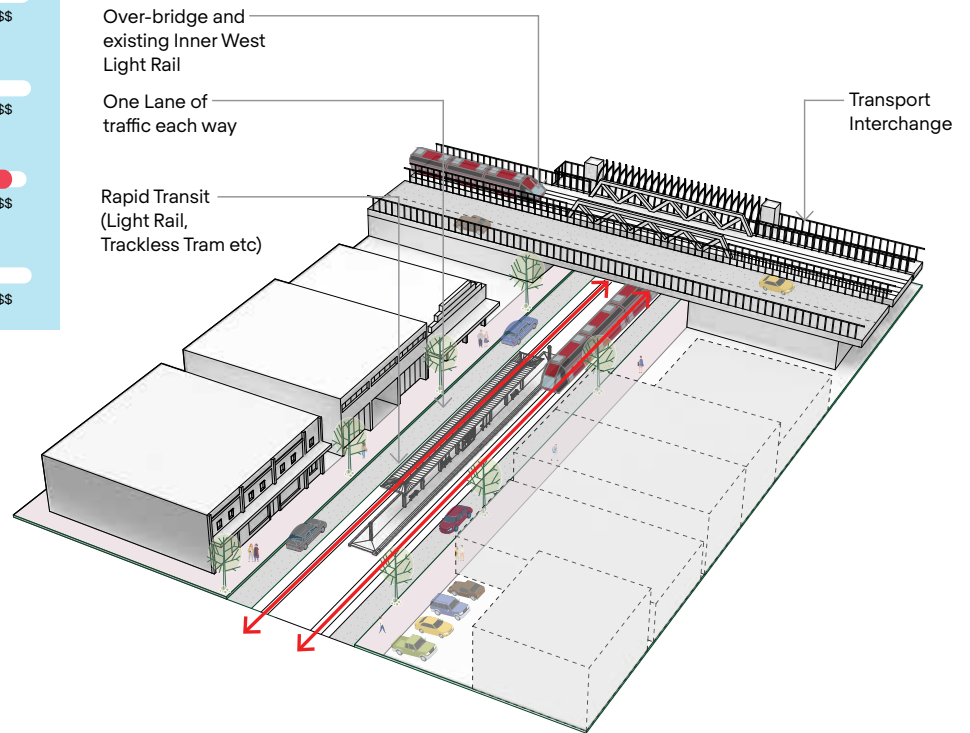
Economy



Transport



Overall



Iron Cove Creek to Spencer St

Urban renewal around transport stops, while delivering improved green links to Sydney Harbour and an improved cycling network, can transform this area currently dominated by car yards.

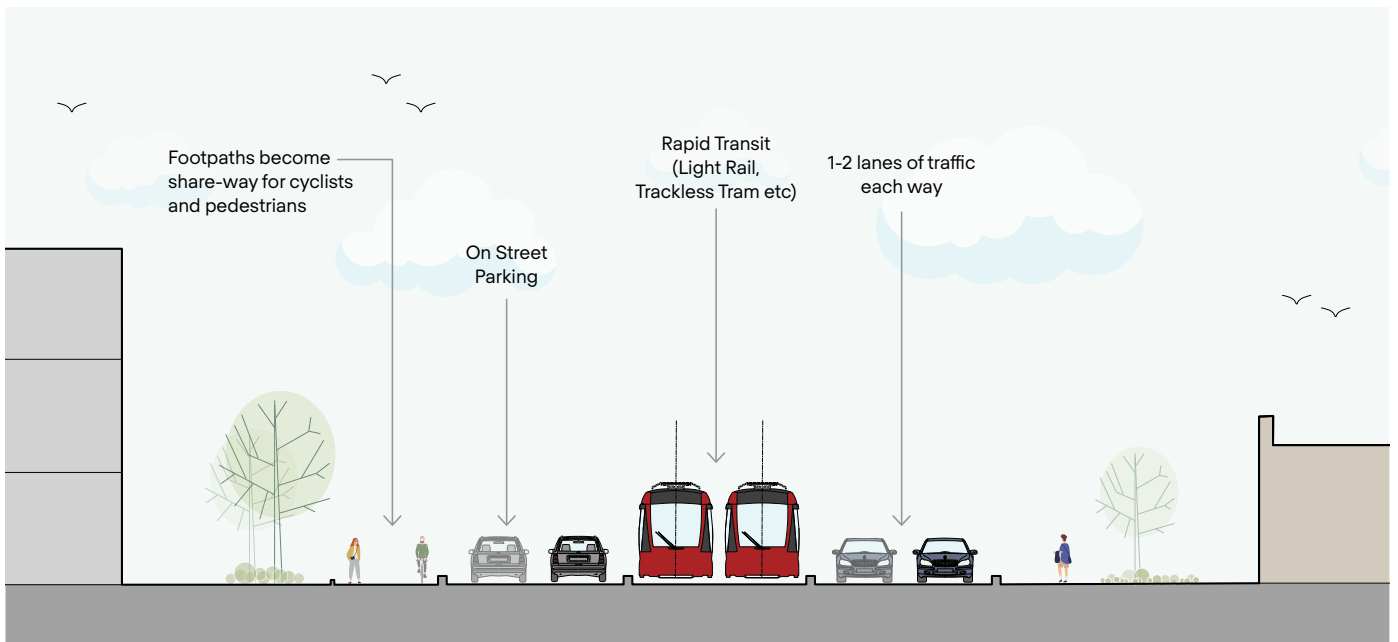
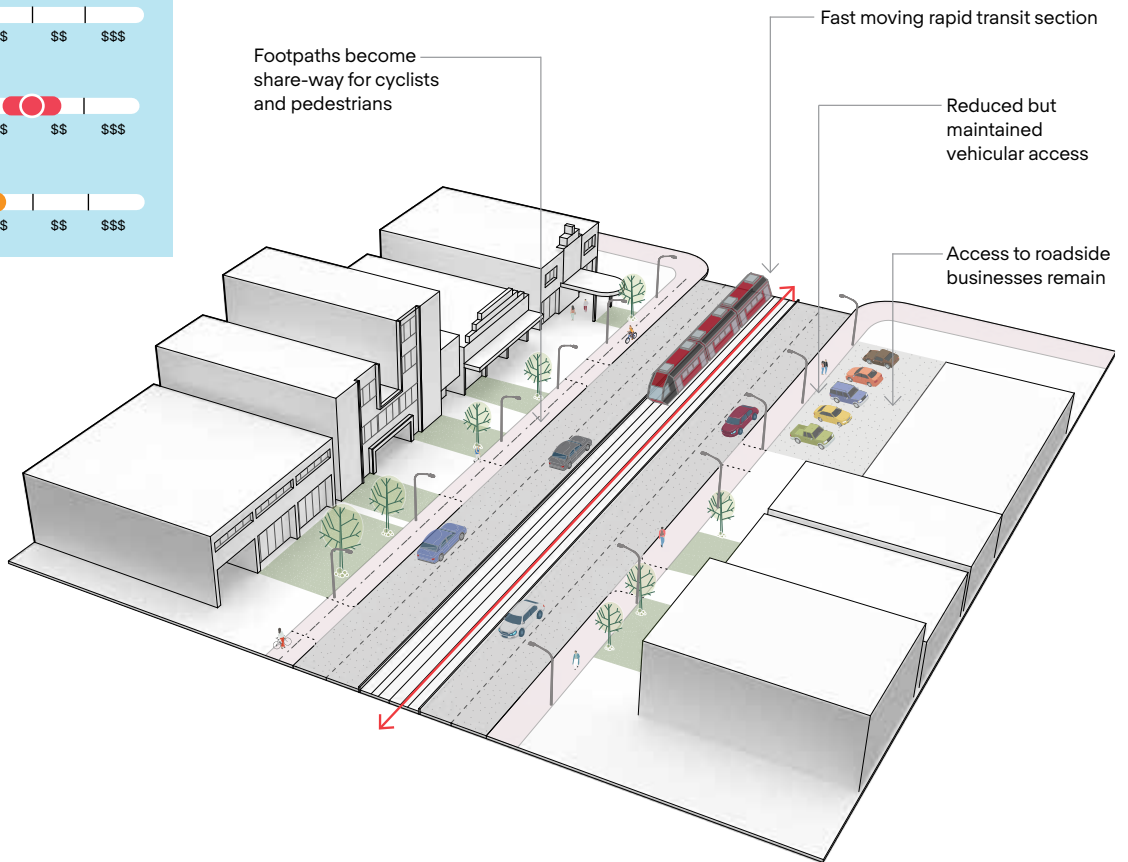
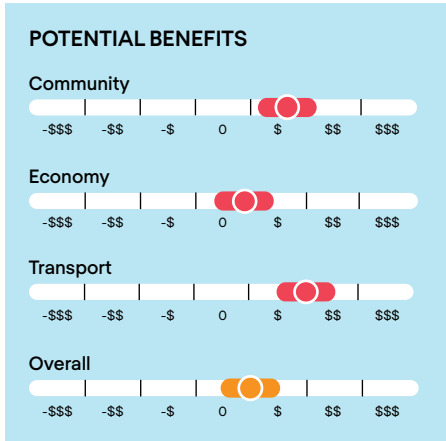
The basic moves:

- Catalyse the renewal of the Spencer Street Precinct in line with the PRUTS vision.
- Improved cycle and green links at Iron Cove Creek to link communities and open spaces in the north and south.
- Improve the quality and safety of the pedestrian network to and from Parramatta Road.

From north-west of Parramatta road at Iron Cove Creek (the meeting point of Inner West and Canada Bay councils), are a network of interconnected green spaces that link to the harbour and the bay run. This can be extended across Parramatta Road and south towards Centenary Park and Burwood. Meanwhile, Spencer Street is identified in PRUTS as part of the Kings Bay precinct, a new residential urban village with a dense network of streets and an identity built on its proximity to Sydney Harbour.

Spencer Street will form the basis of a new and compact local centre – an east-west axis for local shops and services, and a new address for medium and high-density residential development. The precinct has been identified with significant housing and jobs growth potential and will be well served by public transport with the new Burwood North Metro station within close proximity.





Burwood North Precinct

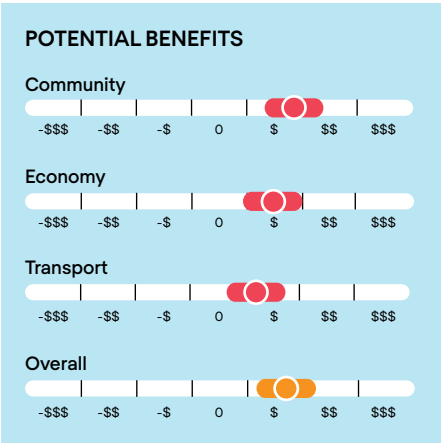
The North Burwood Metro station, as part of Sydney Metro West, is a significant catalyst for renewal on Parramatta Road. Major housing and jobs growth have been identified for the area and development is beginning to respond to this growth.

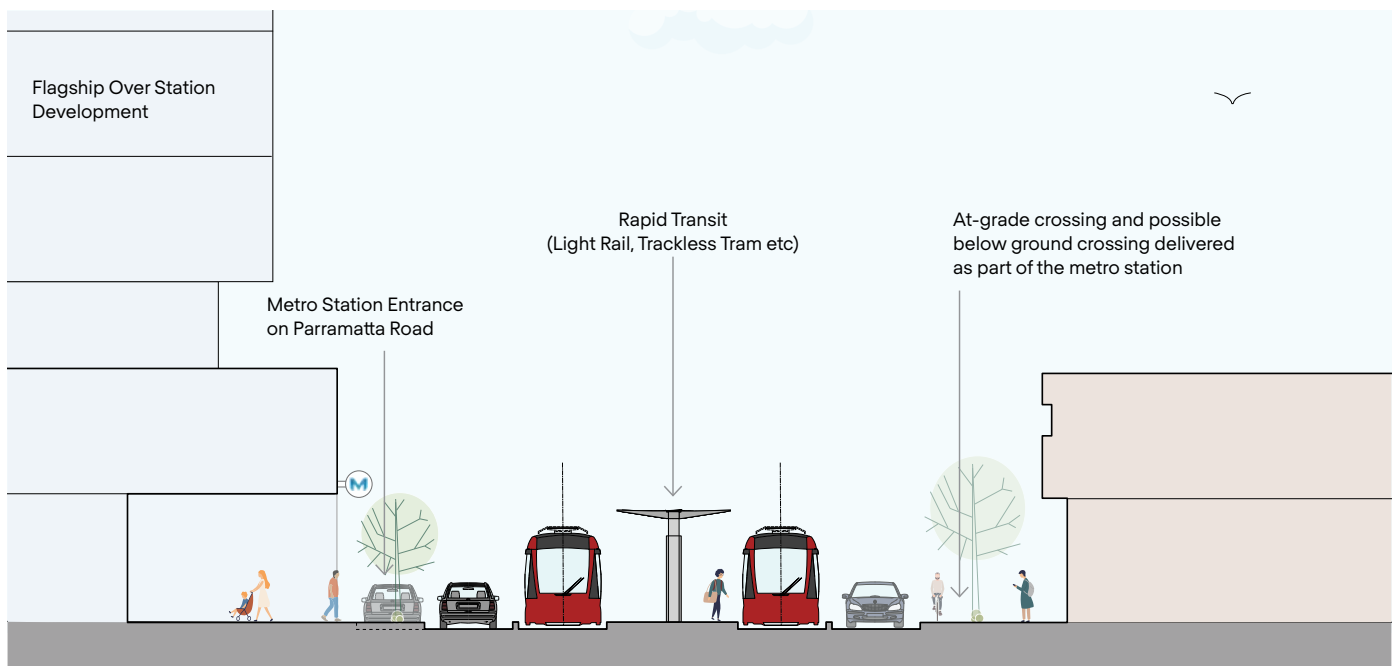
The basic moves:

- Interchange between rapid transit stop and Metro station, connecting south to Heavy Rail.
- Street and footpath transformation catalysed by a new Metro station.
- Close feeder streets to create pedestrian plazas.
- New North-South cycle lane.
- Enhanced tree canopy.

As with other Metro precincts, uplifts in development capacity will encourage investment and help invigorate renewal for the area. Public realm improvements along Parramatta road will afford confidence to the community and lift local pride in the area. These initiatives could include better planting and enhanced footpath design, which in turn would encourage pedestrian traffic.

Urban design principles to be adopted in the station precinct should aim to activate building frontages on Parramatta Road and utilise station entrances as new public spaces to extend the public realm.





Action Plan

Who needs to do what to achieve these recommendations?

Transport for NSW

1. Undertake a strategic business case for permanent, rapid, intermediate public transport down Parramatta Road.
2. Reduce the traffic speed limit on Parramatta Road to 50km/h.
3. Test the rephasing of traffic lights along Parramatta Road to deliver greater prioritisation for north-south vehicle and pedestrian movement.
4. Support local government to deliver a separate bike path along the Parramatta Road corridor.
5. Close slip lanes/feeder streets to allow for the creation of pedestrian plazas.

Local Government

1. Complete a separated bike lane along corridor, either on Parramatta Road, or adjacent.
2. Increase tree canopy cover along Parramatta road to improve amenity and lower heat.
3. Develop pedestrian plazas where slip lanes and feeder streets can be closed.
4. Install street furniture that provides greater pedestrian amenity and supports the rehabilitation of retail on Parramatta Road.

Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

1. In conjunction with the delivery of intermediate public transport, undertake a review of the land uses proposed in PRUTS.
2. Provide funding to local councils to deliver street trees, street furniture and to design and construct pedestrian plazas.
3. Working with NSW Treasury and TfNSW, lead the development of a place-based benefits framework that can be incorporated into Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) to inform future investment.

NSW Treasury

1. Working with key precinct managers and institutions, develop an economic strategy for the corridor.

Endnotes

- i Infrastructure Australia's 2019 Audit of Urban Transport Crowding and Congestion
- ii TfNSW Sydney CBD to Parramatta Strategic Transport Plan 2015 'Trips in the corridor'
- iii SMH, Parramatta Road tram plans developed - then scrapped, July 20, 2017,
- iv Note that detailed transport modelling was not undertaken for this assessment. Any transport network interventions would need to be explored through detailed modelling and testing

Innovation Fund Partners

We would like to thank our Innovation Fund Partners for their support of this report and for their broader sponsorship of the Committee for Sydney's research.

Our Innovation Fund Partners are future focused, and outcome driven. They are leaders of change. Their combined investment underpins our annual research and policy program and together with our members, enables us to grow our impact and output – striving to create a better Sydney that offers unparalleled opportunity and quality of life for everyone.

We are proud to welcome our inaugural Innovation Fund Partners, Dexus, ICC Sydney and Western Sydney University.

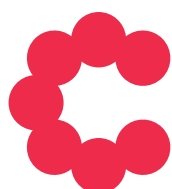
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