

➤ Key insights

# Parramatta Road Summit

July 2024





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## Summary

A boulevard of broken dreams, a pumping artery, a varicose vein, the Nile River, an economy of the future. There was no shortage of nicknames - and visions - for Parramatta Road at this crucial deep dive event.

And while countless visions have been proposed for Parramatta Road, our brilliant speakers came together with a unified and determined focus: if not now, when? With the opening of WestConnex, increased nearby rail capacity, and a chronic housing crisis to solve, now is the time to take accountability to transform Parramatta Road by:

### Integrating public transport infrastructure

Let's go hard on rapid bus or light rail, as well as active transport and better pedestrian spaces, to bring more people to the area (and get them to love spending time there)! This will also attract more investment and economic activity while supporting existing businesses and services.

### Looking back to look forward

This means acknowledging its history and Indigenous roots as a vital corridor connecting people from the mountains to the sea. We must push for coordinated governance and a comprehensive strategy to align land use planning and transport initiatives that help Parramatta Road fulfil its original historical purpose.

### Building density done well

Density done well in Parramatta Road will provide the housing we need, with green spaces, retail and essential services that are vital to thriving, well-connected communities within cultural and economic hubs.



## You would be hard pressed to find anyone who enjoys spending time on Parramatta Road.

Noisy, hot and polluted, it is a place best avoided. Whether fast moving cars and buses or traffic jams, Parramatta Road is an unwelcome place for people. Footpaths are desolate and shopfronts are empty or rundown. Once one of Sydney's greatest high streets, it is now Sydney's least favourite road.

With the opening of WestConnex and increased nearby rail capacity, we can reimagine Parramatta Road's role as a transport corridor and place. Many visions, including our 2020 report Reclaiming Parramatta Road, call for catalytic transport and urban renewal in the corridor.

Parramatta Road already has the bones of a great high street: continuous retail, critical mass of local customers, awnings, Victorian buildings, and a north-south aspect. So, how can we transform transport on Parramatta Road to reclaim it as Sydney's favourite high street? How could this be used to unlock the potential for 'density done well' along the corridor? What would this mean for connecting Sydney's innovation districts?

**This summit brings together leaders from state government, local governments, industry and key institutions to share visions for the future of Parramatta Road and how to get there.**



Commuters using the tram on Parramatta Road, Leichhardt, 1947. Source: Sydney Morning Herald archives



## Welcome to Country

### Aunty Joan Bell

Metropolitan Aboriginal Land Council

Aunty Joan Bell welcomed guests to Gadigal Country and set the tone for the day's conversation, highlighting the importance of listening and respect.

Conversations and collaborations about how we plan for land use and revitalisation on Parramatta Road should prioritise listening with respect – including listening to Indigenous knowledges and ways of caring for country – and taking care of our environment and being mindful of the natural resources we use.

## Introduction and welcome

### Eamon Waterford

CEO, Committee for Sydney

### Harri Bancroft

Policy Manager Mobility,  
Committee for Sydney

There have been many visions for transforming Parramatta Road into a vibrant high street connecting thriving communities and economies.

This has been a key priority at the Committee for Sydney. Our 2020 report, [Reclaiming Parramatta Road](#), outlines several recommendations to revitalise the corridor. This includes improving transport and land use planning controls, adopting a shared governance structure, and linking these solutions with an economic strategy for the corridor.

However, what we missed in the report was housing. Fast forward to today, and we can't ignore the potential for Parramatta Road to help us solve the housing crisis.

Now is the time to fix Parramatta Road. With WestConnex open, increased capacity on the western train line, and a housing crisis to address, the urgency is clear, and we risk losing momentum if we don't act.

## A vision from the NSW Government

### The Hon. John Graham MLC

Speaking as the Minister for Roads

Minister Graham took us for a historical walk on the "boulevard of broken dreams," citing plans from 1951, 2004 and 2012 to transform Parramatta Road.

Instead of providing a new vision, Minister Graham outlined four key principles that should underscore the chosen strategy for Parramatta Road.

1. It must play a part in solving Sydney's housing crisis, especially by leveraging nearby Transport Oriented Development precincts such as Ashfield, Burwood and Homebush.
2. With their ability to work across agencies, local councils and the private sector, the state government must take a more active role on Parramatta Road and provide more resources to local councils in the area.
3. The strategy must integrate new transport infrastructure and technology.
4. Solutions for Parramatta Road should consider the government's vibrancy agenda, making space and planning for the local entertainment and food culture that already exists.





## Three mayors on the future of Parramatta Road

Clover Moore, Lord Mayor of the City of Sydney, Darcy Byrne, Mayor of the Inner West, and John Faker, Mayor of Burwood, shared their insights on Parramatta Road and how its transformation could impact their respective areas.

As well as enthusiastically supporting light rail on Parramatta Road, they collectively emphasised the importance of community engagement, committing to a plan, developing density done well, and providing local councils with the resources and autonomy they need to improve the corridor.

### From skeptics to supporters: a vision from the City of Sydney

Clover Moore highlighted the need for decisive action on Parramatta Road, citing the successful transformation of George Street - which moved forward despite copping its fair share of criticism. With federal and state government support and community collaboration, Parramatta Road can also be turned into an iconic urban hub that cements Sydney as a global city.

### North to south, once and for all: a vision from Inner West Council

Darcy Byrne explored the challenges and opportunities in improving north-south connectivity across inner-west Sydney, particularly with the upcoming metro. He stressed the urgency of planning now to facilitate movement across the corridor. Byrne also addressed the tension between heritage preservation and new housing development, acknowledging it as a significant challenge that needs careful management.

### The people want public spaces: a vision from Burwood Council

Drawing on examples of density in Burwood (where 45% of residents live in apartments), John Faker advocated for more density done well around Parramatta Road. This includes better planning for light rail integration, and providing more resources and autonomy for local councils to lead these transformations alongside their communities.







Penny Graham (ALTRAC Light Rail), David Berger (Business Western Sydney) and Kirsten Andrews (The University of Sydney) also shared their insights and visions for Parramatta Road, from new opportunities for transport and business innovation to the corridor's capacity for more student housing.





## Panel: reimagining great places to live

### Philip Coxall

Chairman and Director of Design,  
McGregor Coxall

### Sharon Veale

CEO, GML Heritage

### Kat Jurkiewicz

Principal, Grimshaw

### Andy Hoyne

Founder and Principal, Hoyne

### Estelle Grech

Policy Manager Planning,  
Committee for Sydney

## Parramatta Road runs through the heart of Sydney, but where is its soul?

**Philip Coxall** asked: are we mature enough a city to build an urban icon that stretches through the heart of Sydney and connects our two largest centres? Parramatta Road is the ultimate litmus test. From a placemaking perspective, **Andy Hoyne** spoke about developing experiences and curating the right businesses. Parramatta Road is made up of multiple unique nodes that offer different experiences, and these need to be celebrated. **Sharon Veale** described the corridor as a chronological slice through Sydney's history. This brings immeasurable value to the experience of the high street and its place character. **Kat Jurkiewicz** spoke about how transport business cases can obsess over capacity and travel times, when the power of light rail is so much more: we need to account for the social and economic value light rail brings to place.



## Panel: transformative transport

### Elle Davidson

Aboriginal Planning Lecturer, The  
University of Sydney

### Sebastian Smyth

City Access and Transport Executive  
Manager, City of Sydney

### Duncan Edghill

CEO, ALTRAC Light Rail

### Ben Hendriks

Founder and Executive Chair, Mecone

### Harri Bancroft

Policy Manager Mobility,  
Committee for Sydney

## Making Parramatta Road a great place to live starts with prioritising people before travel times.

Parramatta Road has long been an east-west connector, linking saltwater to the mountains. **Elle Davidson** spoke about the opportunity to tell this story and connect people to this rich history – from audio at future light rail stops, artwork, design, interpretation, planting. **Sebastian Smyth** raised the challenge of changing the DNA of road traffic planners, but also: investing in walking, cycling and public transport always pays off. **Duncan Edghill** reflected on how housing and light rail go together hand in hand, and light rail can unlock so many of the benefits that can help address the housing crisis. **Ben Hendriks** highlighted the importance of keeping development feasibility in mind – yes, transport is linked to housing, but densities must be at a level the market can respond to.





## A cultural vision

### Tyla Dombroski

Director and Chief Operating Officer  
at Crowbar / Board Member,  
Sound NSW

Parramatta Road, already home to some of the city's favourite pubs and music venues, has huge potential to be a bustling entertainment precinct.

Since opening in 2018, Crowbar has seen a huge growth in attendees, directly benefitting nearby restaurants and bars on Parramatta Road and Norton Street. But when no shows are scheduled, local businesses struggle. Culture makers in the area deserve more: a special entertainment precinct like Enmore Road, light rail to bring more foot traffic, and improvements to public space are urgently needed to help local culture thrive.



## Panel: catalysing innovation

### Julie Cairney

Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research -  
Enterprise and Engagement, The  
University of Sydney

### Glen Wightwick

Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice  
President (Innovation and Enterprise),  
University of Technology, Sydney

### Sally-Ann Williams

CEO, Cicada Innovations

### Jeremy Gill

Head of Policy, Committee for Sydney

Parramatta Road can help us stitch world-leading universities together, connecting them with jobs of the future and places where people want to live.

Sally Ann Williams expressed the importance of connecting where people are living, learning and working, creating opportunities for businesses spinning out of incubators and accelerators to put down roots and grow. Julie Cairney spoke about how the incredible research that happens on campus needs places to commercialise outside – but near the university – ensuring that Sydneysiders continue to drive new innovations. Glenn Wightwick explored how a future light rail will allow for greater movement throughout Tech Central, as well as connecting this corridor to the whole of Sydney via Central Station.



## We know we need to act now.

The next step for the Committee is to bring together the many organisations, institutions and businesses who care about Parramatta Road and make the case to the NSW Government on the next steps for transport that catalyses transformation in the area.

You'll hear more from the Committee on this over coming weeks and months.

In the meantime, [subscribe](#) to our fortnightly Sydneysider newsletter, follow us on [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#), or reach out to us at [committee@sydney.org.au](mailto:committee@sydney.org.au) to share your vision for Parramatta Road.







## Keep in touch

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