

# Beauty and Budget: Ensuring Metro West delivers great stations for Sydney

Committee for Sydney and Business Western Sydney  
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Committee  
for  
Sydney

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# Introduction

**Business Western Sydney and the Committee for Sydney are proud champions of the Metro West project, collaborating on research and advocacy to deliver the best possible project for the people of Sydney since 2018.**



**With the opening of the City and South-West Metro from Chatswood to Sydenham in 2024, Sydneysiders saw the transformative impact that rapid, turn-up and go services can have on the CBDs of Sydney. At the same time, the thoughtful design of stations – ‘cathedrals to public transport’ – made locals fall in love with the stations.**

Recently, the NSW Government announced a desire to reduce the cost of stations in the Metro West project, in comparison to the cost of the stations on the City and South-West Metro project.

We respect the NSW Government’s position that budgets need to be met. However, within this envelope, we believe strongly in having design ambition for Western Sydney.

In early April 2025, our two organisations coordinated a workshop to explore policy options with a multi-disciplinary group of 39 experts from across the private sector and academia in engineering, architecture, infrastructure finance, urban planning and art curation.

It is the group’s considered view that Metro West should not be a second-class project in terms of design and user experience. Through tightened initial project specifications smart creative and design choices, there is an opportunity to deliver stations that local residents and visitors fall in love with.

Metro West is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for Western Sydney and we firmly believe the project deserves stations that are well designed, beautiful and reflective of the communities they serve.



# Insight 1: Smaller can still be beautiful

Expert consultation strongly emphasised that the biggest cost drivers for Metro stations are not flashy finishes or artistic flair, but the fundamentals: the size of the station footprints and the technical specifications for steel and concrete are what really shape budgets. According to engineers, the greatest savings can be achieved by rethinking these parameters from the start, including by designing certain stations along the route to be more compact.

These fundamental issues are quite separate from station look and feel. But we also know that great design does not have to mean sandstone walls, marble floors or trying to mimic the Sistine Chapel. Iconic interiors can be achieved – with less cost – through smart, creative design choices, artworks and quality finishings.

## Consider how large individual station boxes must be

The size of the station boxes along the Metro West, in general, do not need to be as large, cavernous or cathedral-like as the Sydney Metro stations in the Sydney CBD.

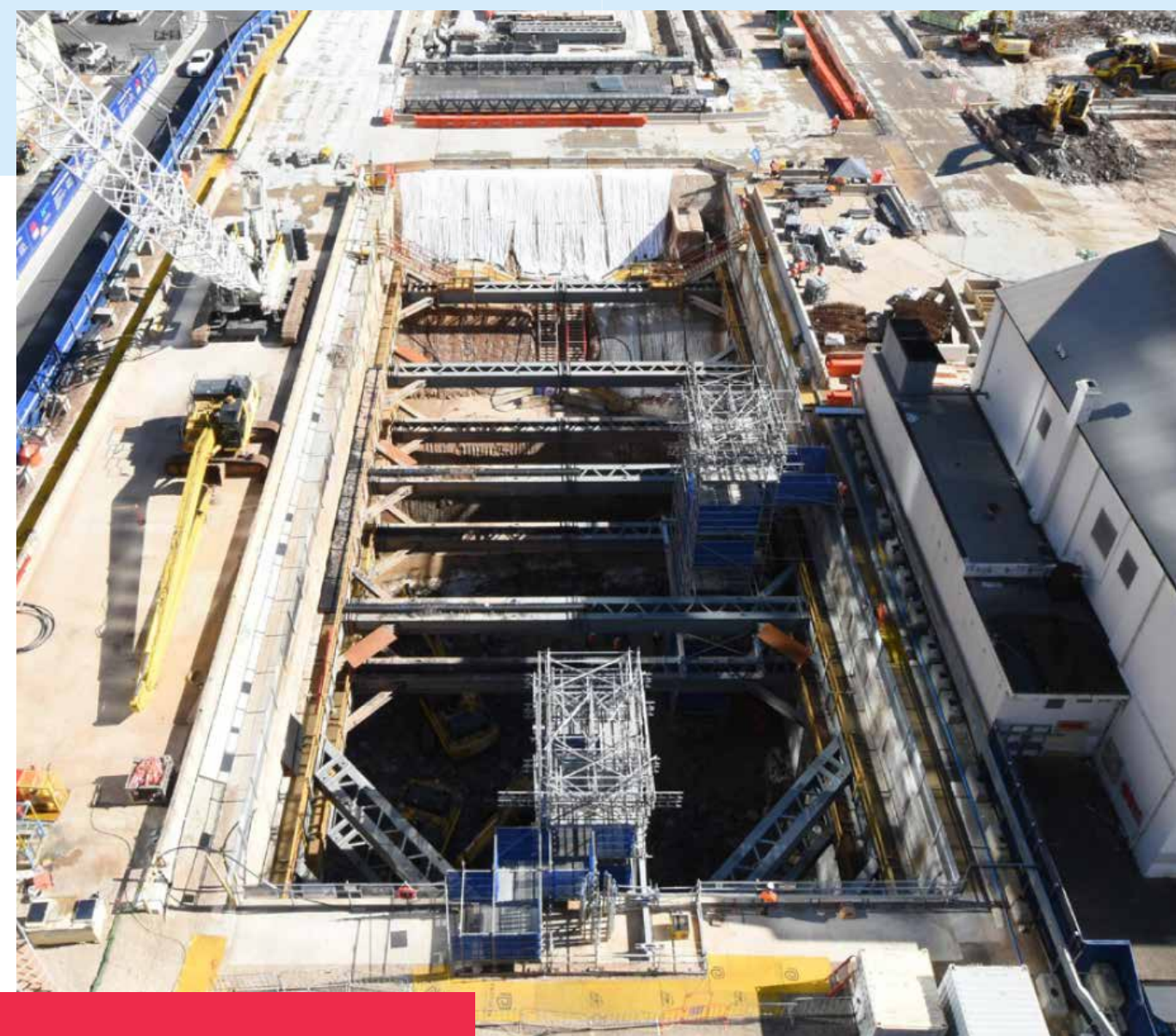
Larger station footprints and architectural ambition may be appropriate in particular cases. A distinction should be made between CBD stations along the Metro West route, such as Parramatta and Pyrmont, that will attract enormous commuter numbers (or strategically significant Sydney Olympic Park in the case of major events), compared with other stations.

Yet even stations with smaller footprints can still be well-engineered and creatively designed.

## Implement appropriate technical standards, not necessarily the highest

Industry often defaults to the highest possible technical standards on major infrastructure projects, rather than only those that are necessary. This can lead to inefficient use of budgets and outcomes that don't always serve the community's best interests.

To achieve cost savings, projects should follow the requirements set by international or national standards. Additional measures should only be mandated when these standards fail to address specific local needs.



Station box excavation at Parramatta Metro Station site.  
(Source: Sydney Metro)





**Tunnel nozzle excavation at Sydney Olympic Park Metro Station site.**

(Source: Sydney Metro)

### Reduce material costs by changing technical design

Technical specifications are often the final element of a 'Request for Proposals' to be confirmed, yet they have a major influence on overall project costs. These specifications cover aspects such as concrete thickness, steel reinforcement, station lifespan, footpath materials and tree maturity. Specifications can add to costs – for example, extending the expected lifespan of a station from 100 to 120 years would require thicker concrete and reinforced materials, significantly increasing the budget.

To prevent cost blowouts later in the project, the government should allocate enough time during the procurement phase for an independent review of technical specifications. This review should benchmark the project against comparable transport systems and recommend ways to reduce overly prescriptive requirements, helping ensure better value for money.

### Reduce initial fit-out while building capacity for future expansion

A major opportunity to save costs is by scaling back initial fit-out, while designing the stations to allow for future upgrades or retrofits. This approach would spread costs over time as passenger numbers grow. It also enables stations to adapt to increasing population density in the area (see Insight 5). For example, fewer lifts or escalators could be installed initially – while still ensuring accessibility – with more added later as demand rises. Underground links could be preserved in order to facilitate future adjoining development



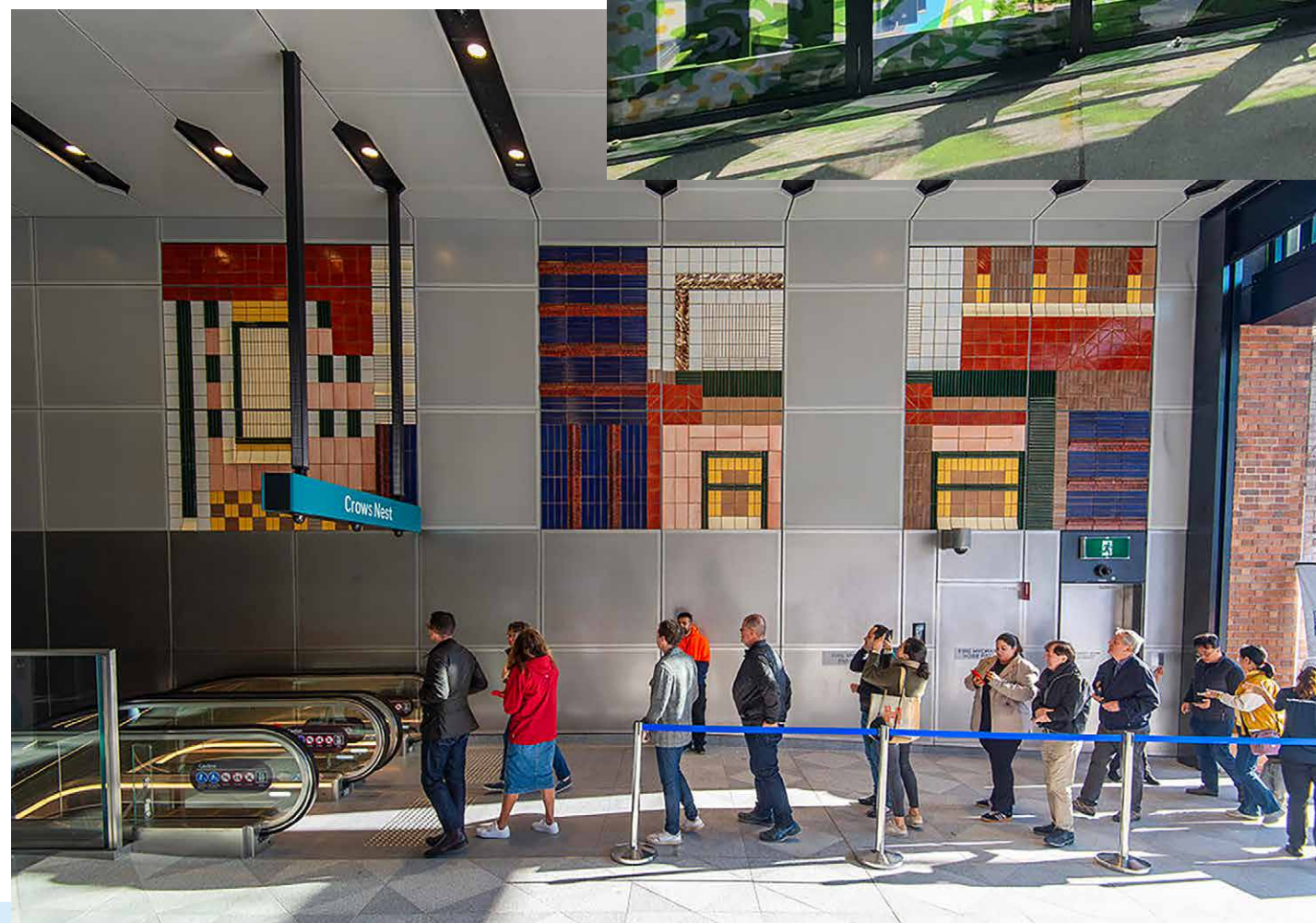
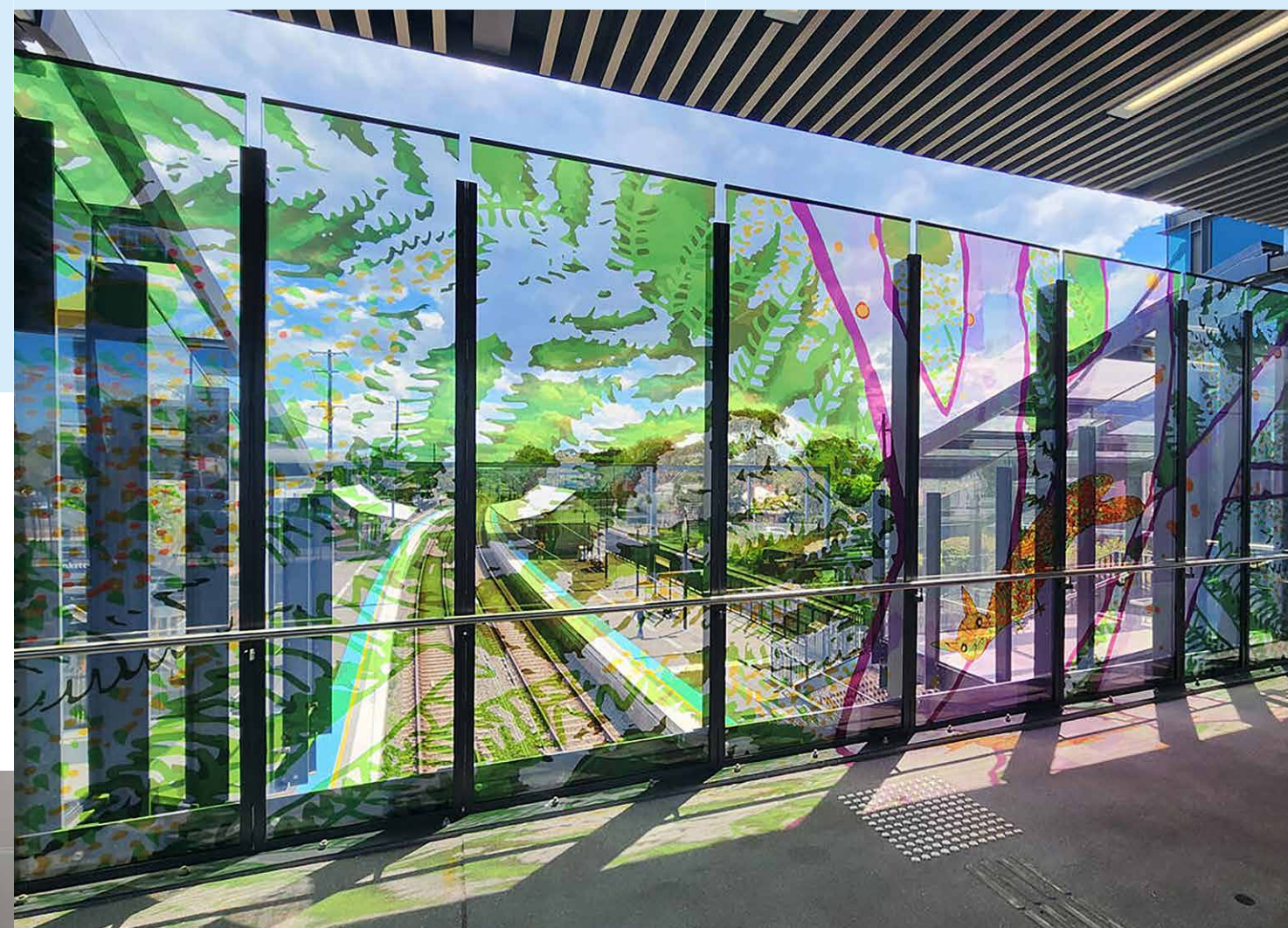
## Insight 2: Public art improves community engagement

Cutting expenditure on public art will not materially reduce the costs of the Metro West stations. Despite being seen as a luxury, investment in public art is usually a very small percentage of the overall budget (for example, \$10 million out of a \$10 billion project). However, public art can add prestige, build anticipation before the station opens and greatly enhance community enjoyment.

### Incorporate public art to enhance station perception and civic pride

Our workshop provided strong feedback that public art significantly enhances station perception, strengthens community identity and supports long-term patronage – all at relatively low cost.

The experience of Sydney Metro is that incorporating high-quality materials and public art have not resulted in graffiti or vandalism. Trusting the community with quality infrastructure appears to have been met positively and led to greater respect for the space. This deters vandalism, encourages civic pride and lowers maintenance costs. On the contrary, a perception or reality of a 'no frills' Metro West design might be more susceptible to damage and neglect.



Public art can be delivered at different budgets. Hurlstone Park (above) and Crows Nest Station (left).  
(Source: Sydney Metro)





A large artwork featuring Indigenous Australian dancer Roscoe, greets rail users at Waterloo Metro Station.

(Source: Sydney Metro)

### Co-commission artworks to share costs and foster social connections

Co-commissioning art allows sharing of costs and creates broader civic and cultural benefits. Local artists and arts organisations can enjoy greater participation and ownership of artistic process from conception to delivery. This is especially important for Western Sydney's emerging creative identity. One idea could be to invest in a Metro West Public Art Fund to deliver a rolling (and perpetual) program of public art in each train station – essentially an 'art line' across the city. A public competition could be run, perhaps involving students, to create murals or artworks reflecting the rich artistic creativity of communities across the Inner West and Western Sydney. These could showcase local multicultural communities, Indigenous histories or major events, such as the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

### Ensure east and west are treated with the same design respect

Noting the continued shortfall in arts and cultural funding in Western Sydney compared with the rest of the city, Business Western Sydney and the Committee of Sydney have always been strongly of the view that Western Sydney deserves the same level of artistic and design quality as the east. To ensure fairness and avoid disparities, the NSW Government should empower departments to maintain consistent design standards across all regions. This would align with the long-term vision for Western Sydney's economic, social and cultural development.



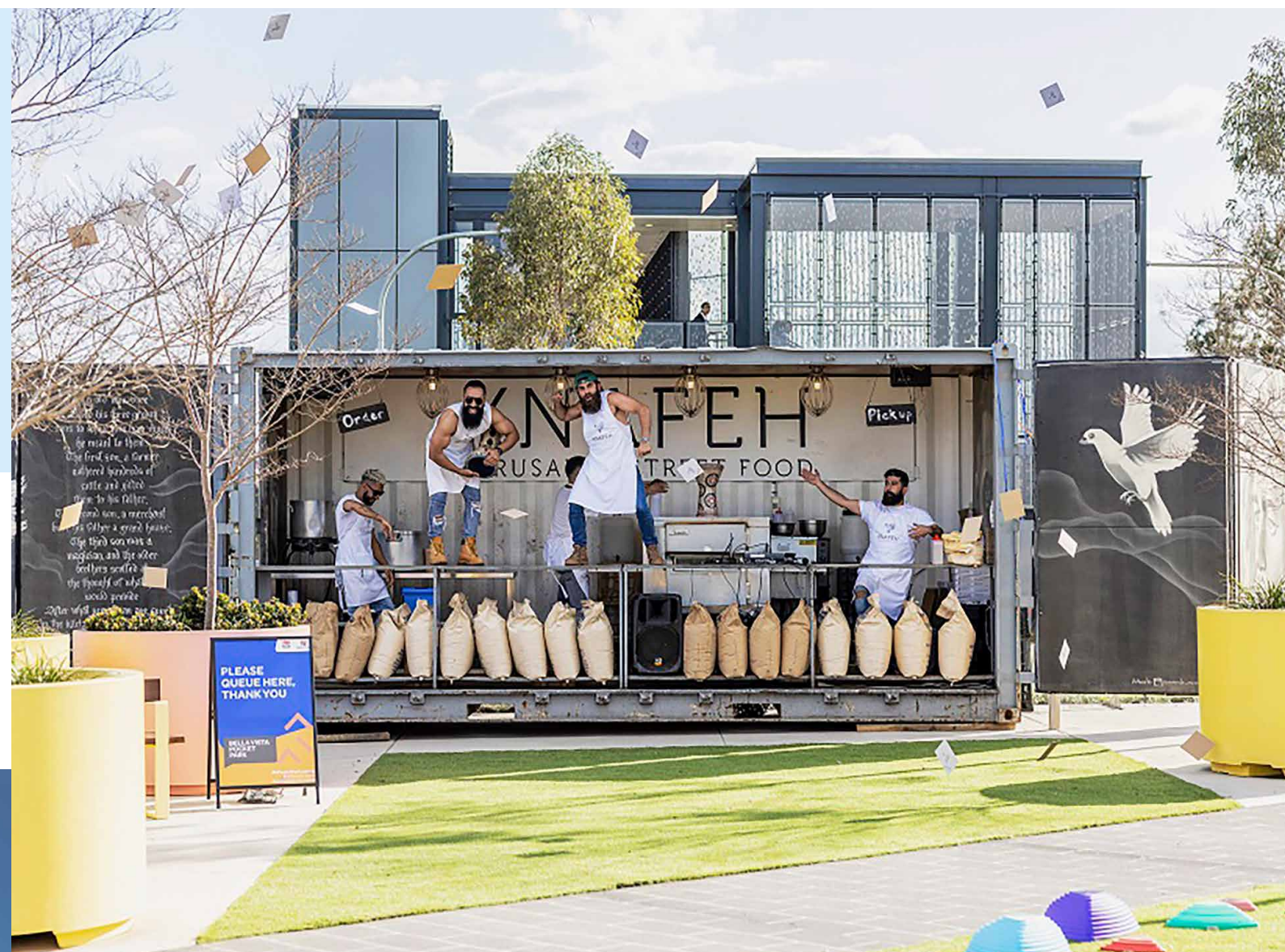
## Insight 3: Social and cultural benefits matter

The NSW Government should recognise the intergenerational impact of the Metro West project and account for intangible social benefits in its financial decision-making.

### Apply a more holistic understanding of value

Current financial models (for example, discount rates, ROI) fail to account for intangible social benefits such as cultural development or social cohesion. This makes projects such as Metro West appear less economically viable, leading to undervalued opportunities.

Our workshop discussed how the NSW Government could do more to factor the intergenerational nature of major Metro projects in its decision-making and favour partners who share long-term interests in supporting community activation and placemaking.



Bella Vista Pocket Park is connected to Bella Vista metro station and provides a flexible, multi-use community space.

(Source: Landcom)

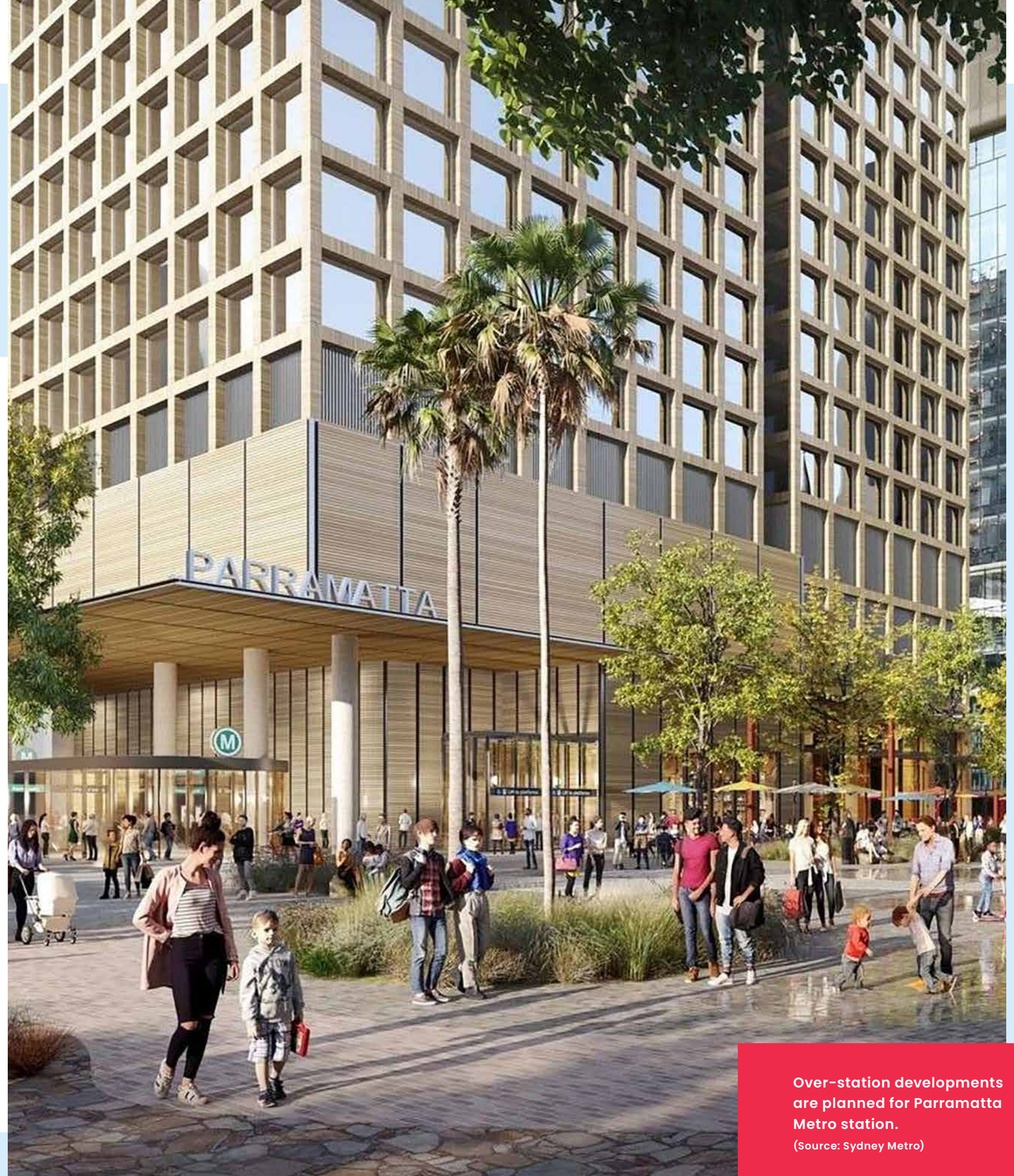


## Insight 4: An activation opportunity Sydney cannot miss

**The Metro West stations offer potential for greater retail, commercial and cultural activation, generating new income streams that offset project costs. The station in the heart of Parramatta CBD, in particular, is an opportunity to create a broader entertainment and nightlife precinct showcasing the city.**

Business Western Sydney and the Committee for Sydney believe the Metro West stations are a once-in-a-generation opportunity for commercial activation, attraction and place-making. The massive pedestrian flow in and around stations creates new options to generate income through great retail, offsetting project costs.

In global cities, from Seoul to Tokyo, London and Rome, and even Melbourne's Southern Cross, major stations are packed with boutiques, bookstores, newsagents, cafes, sandwich shops and other convenience offerings. This commercial potential has arguably not been realised as fully as it should have with many of the Sydney Metro stations, and particularly the refurbishment of Central Station.



**Over-station developments are planned for Parramatta Metro station.**  
(Source: Sydney Metro)



**In planning the Metro West stations, a distinction should be made that highlights stations with major surrounding development and significant above-ground activation potential. Parramatta, in particular, is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to achieve something special and different.**

The NSW Government should strongly consider a mixed-use day-night entertainment district here with bars, restaurants, multicultural sweet shops, galleries and immersive artworks spilling out into the streets. Akin to Western Sydney's own Piccadilly Circus or Times Square, this would support a vibrant economy in the rapidly growing Parramatta CBD.

If the government is serious about Parramatta as the economic and cultural heart of Western Sydney, then it deserves a Metro West station and precinct to match. However, commercial activation at every station matters.

One idea would be to imagine the Metro West line as a 'food-trail'. Each station, from Westmead to Burwood North to Five Dock, could host pop-up spaces for local food retailers and restaurants to entice visitors into their community, serving as a gateway to the surrounding suburb.

Olympic Park and Pyrmont might also be stations suited to bespoke above-ground design concepts.





# Insight 5: An iconic Metro West matters

**Metro West is a city-shaping project that symbolises the future of Sydney: bold, visionary and global.**

Initially, it is designed to serve a growing number of high-density communities between Sydney and Westmead, driven by transport-oriented developments.

Over coming decades, the line is likely to mature into Sydney's premier east-west transport spine. It is easy to imagine a day when it links to Western Sydney International Airport, key centres like Liverpool and Fairfield, and even future inter-city high-speed rail.

**Patronage is only going to increase**

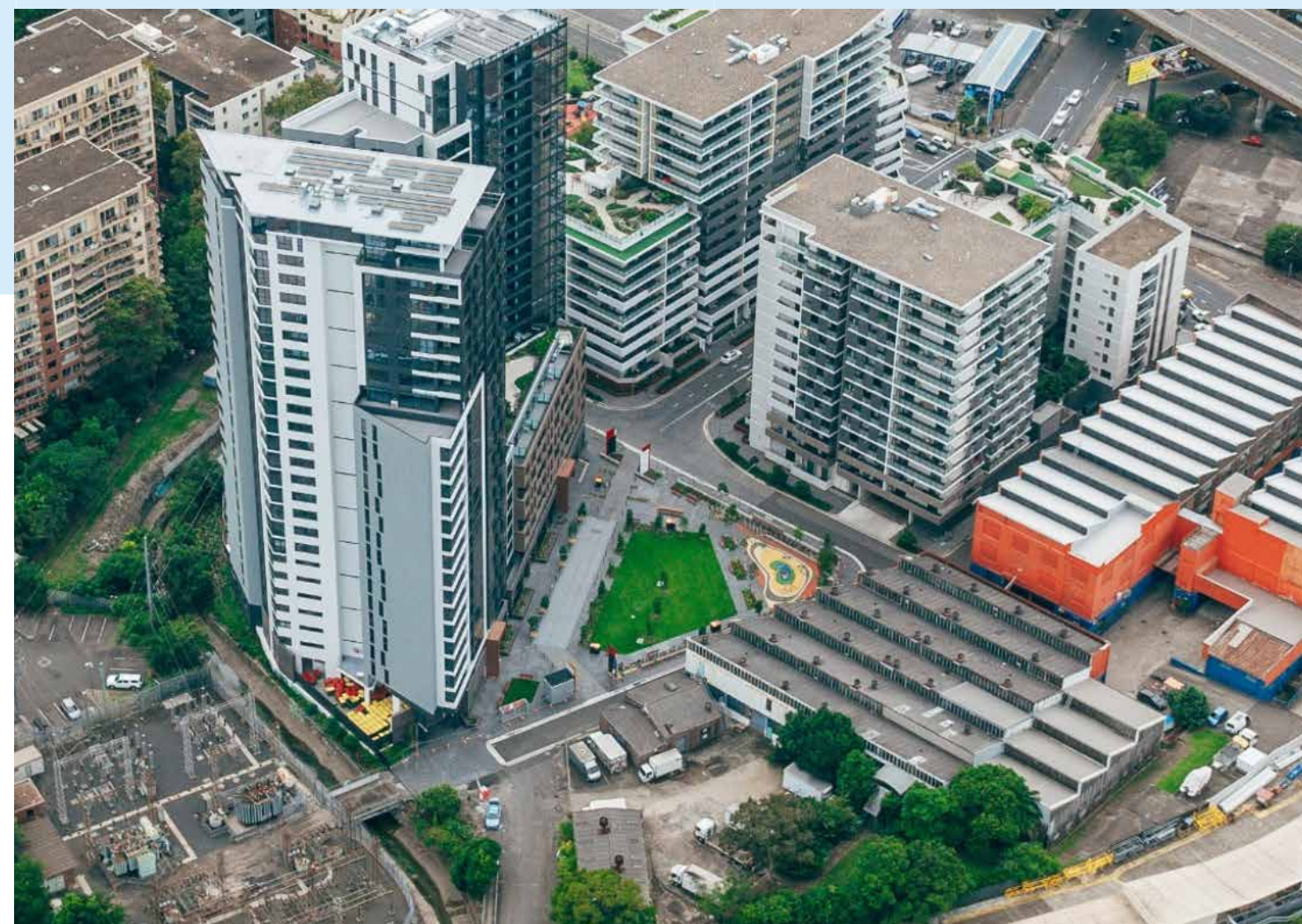
Many precincts initially identified under the Parramatta Road Corridor Urban Transformation Strategy now have updated planning assumptions in response to Metro West. For example, the Burwood North and Homebush Transport Oriented Developments (TODs) have revised their initial floor space ratio and yield controls, reflecting the unique opportunity this project presents to address the housing crisis. These changes have significantly increased projected patronage.

At Homebush, for instance, the 2016 uplift projected 11,250 additional residents (5,250 dwellings) by 2050. The current TOD now indicates capacity for 42,000 more residents or 18,300 dwellings around the station. Other TODs along Metro West include Sydney Olympic Park, Westmead, the Bays Precinct, and Burwood North.

**Design an experience that will encourage modal shifts**

A core assumption of TODs is that concentrating high density around Metro West stations will drive a broader shift to public transport. Therefore, to avoid future traffic congestion in these areas, planning for future station expansion is essential, even if some footprints are initially kept small.

In short, this is a project integral to what Sydney will become. Through a combination of graduated station sizes, in-built capacity for future expansion and smart, cost-effective design choices, there is an opportunity to create a Metro West that is beautiful, enduring and a tribute to the city and its people.



**Masterplan for the Homebush TOD precinct is in the north of Homebush Railway Station.**

(Source: Strathfield Council)





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