



# Lane Cove Council

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Mr Charles Casuscelli RFD MP  
Committee Chair  
Inquiry into the utilisation of rail corridors  
Parliament of NSW  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mr Casuscelli,

**Re: Inquiry into the Utilisation of Rail Corridors**

I refer to your request for further information from Lane Cove Council regarding our submission on the rail corridor inquiry that you chaired.

Please find attached Council's response to your additional questions that was issued on 13 April 2012. I trust the responses that Council has provided will assist your inquiry to develop recommendations that will ensure improved utilisation of rail corridors. This is particularly with respect to proposals for improved public domain such as that developed by Lane Cove Council for St Leonards.

Council remains committed to progressing the St Leonards Bus/Rail Interchange and Plaza, and whatever assistance your inquiry can provide will be appreciated.

Should you wish to discuss our submission in any further detail, please do not hesitate to make contact with

Yours sincerely

**PETER BROWN**  
**GENERAL MANAGER**

## **Inquiry into Utilisation of Rail Corridors - Additional Questions from Committee**

**1. What do you see as being the most significant barriers to the progress of the St Leonards Plaza project?**

The most significant barriers have been a lack of understanding and appreciation for what Council is trying to achieve in providing a significant public benefit project. Although Council is constantly praised by different departments of state government for our initiative to proceed with the St Leonards Plaza concept, no one appears to be aware who needs to provide the strategic "stewardship" to assist Council to progress the idea to implementation. Council has been enamoured by the amount of support provided from within the government departments that we have consulted. However, there was clearly little understanding about the process that Council should follow and who would ultimately provide the strategic sign off for the project to proceed to implementation. Each meeting has resulted in Council being referred to a different government department to seek that strategic direction and approval. The fact that no one appears able to take responsibility to either approve or reject Council's proposal has been very frustrating to date.

**2. The Committee has heard that approval timeframes are significant barrier to development. Has this been your experience?**

Council has heard the same information from the Winten Group. Council's negotiations with the Winten Group to support the St Leonards Plaza soured because of their timeframe experiences in obtaining approvals for the Forum project (over St Leonards Train Station). Winten detailed to Council that they had previous experience in dealing with RailCorp and other government departments in the development of the 'Forum' at St Leonards. Gaining the approval for this development took the Winten Group over seven (7) years. Council has taken over six (6) months to date liaising and negotiating with different government departments, and are yet to be advised whether our proposal even has in principle government support.

**3. If there were a single specialized development agency to lead rail corridor developments, would it be useful if it had the power to compulsorily acquire land to make projects more economically viable?**

Council can recognise the advantages of having a single specialized development agency to lead rail corridor projects. It would provide certainty for applicants in knowing where to discuss their proposal, and where approval would need to be sought. It would also assist the process if this agency had the power to compulsorily acquire property. Council has yet to enter that phase of our project, but it is something that will be required to be undertaken. Council cannot enter that phase of our project until we have certainty that the project will proceed.

**4. What feedback has the Council had from the Winten Group on why they did not prepare their development application in line with the St Leonards Plaza plan?**

See 2 above. Winten Group discussed their frustrations in the 'Forum' approvals taking over seven (7) years to obtain, and they advised Council that they were not willing to wait nearly that long when they could proceed with a development proposal that already had a Part 3A Concept approval with stipulated conditions.

**5. The Committee understand that developers often require a higher than allowable floor space ration in order for a development to be viable. Mr O'Dowd said in evidence that Council has encouraged Loftex to come up with a higher density development than Loftex had originally proposed. What is Council's rationale for encouraging higher density on this site?**

Council did not so much encourage Loftex to develop a higher floor to space ratio, but supported their proposal for a higher density at the eastern end of their site, supplemented by lower density over the remainder of the site. In early discussions, Loftex was investigating the implementation of four (4) twelve storey apartment buildings on their site. This has now been replaced with a single 20 storey tower at the eastern end of the site (nearest to the rail corridor) and three 6 storey structures for the remainder of the site, to the west. Both Council and Loftex agree that this provides for better planning and urban design outcomes, and it allows Loftex to include Council's Plaza vision to provide a better sense of address along the rail corridor frontage.

**6. Was there community consultation undertaken as a part of the development of the St Leonards Plaza plan? What feedback did the Council get from the community?**

Council has not undertaken any significant community consultation to this point of the process specifically related to our current proposal. However, Council has consulted with numerous government departments, NSROC, Willoughby and North Sydney Councils, the developers of 88 Christie Street and Marshall Avenue, and several affected property owners.

There was also an extensive community consultation process undertaken in the development of the regionally adopted St Leonards Strategy. The Strategy identified the need for a bus/rail interchange and plaza on the southern side of the Pacific Highway over the rail corridor. Council's concept has enhanced and fine-tuned this idea. If Council is successful in obtaining government support for the project then there will significant community consultation process undertaken to involve as many parties as possible in finalizing the ideas to create a real 'sense of place' for the St Leonard's community.

**7. What is the status of Lane Cove Council's application for Federal Government "Liveable Cities" funding?**

Council has recently been advised that we were unsuccessful in our 'Liveable Cities' grant application even though we presented a very good case. This is very disappointing, but does not divert Council from our objective of making this project happen. The feedback received by Council from the responsible Federal Government Department, centered on five (5) criteria that were established to determine successful grants. These were outlined as follows:

**1. Policy Compliance**

*You scored very well*

*You articulated the project really well*

**2. Partnerships in Planning**

*Very, very happy with your collaboration with NSROC, Willoughby and North Sydney Councils*

**3. Strategic Alignment**

*You scored well in this one, happy with the way you were tying in with the Metro Strategy.*

*Good overall*

**4. Deliverability**

*You scored very well*

*Let down a little by having no risk assessment*

*Overall we were happy with your response*

**5. Funding**

*Most applicants provided no partner contributions – you did.*

*However, you needed lots of partners which you didn't provide*

*You need the use of a Project Officer*

*You did not provide enough structure around the funding needs.*

Council was definitely let down in the Funding criteria, as we were unable to define the funding scope and where funds would be drawn from. For Council, this was impossible to define, as we were restricted in what we could confirm as no clear approvals have been provided to date.

**8. Would the Council prefer freehold title or a long-term lease over the area covering the rail corridor? Does it make a difference to the project viability how air space rights are granted?**

Council is equally happy to secure a long term lease over such a public facility or freehold ownership as being a custodian of public assets. However Council's view is that ownership and operational issues should be considered after the strategic and public benefit consideration of the proposal are evaluated.