

**Submission**

**No 36**

## **INQUIRY INTO THE UTILISATION OF RAIL CORRIDORS**

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# INQUIRY INTO THE UTILISATION OF RAIL CORRIDORS

SUBMISSION BY

LANE COVE COUNCIL



Mr Charles Casuscelli MP  
Chair of the Legislative Assembly Committee on  
Transport & Infrastructure  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

**ST LEONARDS PLAZA**

**&**

**BUS/RAIL INTERCHANGE**

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# INQUIRY INTO UTILISATION OF RAIL CORRIDORS

## **1. Executive Summary**

Lane Cove Council welcomes the Legislative Assembly Committee on Transport and Infrastructure conducting this Inquiry into the Utilisation of Rail Corridors.

For the past 9 months, Lane Cove Council has been developing an exciting proposal to provide for a significant public domain space over the rail corridor at St Leonards, to be known as the St Leonards Plaza. This proposal espouses the objectives of the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry, building on them to provide for a great community outcome that will benefit all inhabitants and workers of St Leonards for years to come.

Council welcomes the opportunity to discuss this proposal in detail with the Committee and thanks the State Government for the opportunity that this Inquiry provides in highlighting the need for better utilisation of the air space above, and land adjacent to, the rail corridors throughout the Greater Metropolitan Area of Sydney.

## **2. Introduction**

In early 2011, Lane Cove Council became aware of two significant proposed developments on either side of the rail corridor, south of the Pacific Highway, St Leonards.

One of the proposals was for an 18 storey commercial tower to be located on the site known as 88 Christie Street. The other proposal involved the creation of a high density residential precinct that would replace the existing 13 low density residential dwellings on the northern side of Marshall Avenue. The Marshall Ave proposal is currently the subject of a Planning Proposal (LEP Amendment) to allow for a 20 storey residential tower, at the eastern end of the site, and adjacent to the rail corridor.

These two major development proposals (each valued in excess of \$100 million) opened up an opportunity for Council to create a significant public open space that could span between the sites and utilise the unused airspace over the rail corridor and adjacent public road ways.

Council has written to, consulted and engaged in deliberations, with both of the major development proponents through the latter part of 2011. However, the proponent for 88 Christie Street, Winten Property Group, has indicated a less desirous way forward in proceeding to lodge a development application (DA 224/11) just prior to Christmas 2011 that simply mirrored their proposal that had received a Part 3A concept approval. This proposal does not meet any of Council's DCP requirements, and does not align with the planning objectives for St Leonards detailed in Council's LEP, nor the St Leonards Strategy that was developed as a joint policy setting document by the Department of Planning and the tripartite of Lane Cove, North Sydney and Willoughby Councils.

Council is concerned that this application now falls within the jurisdiction of the J.R.P.P. The preliminary briefing of this decision making authority is scheduled for the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2012, and that approval may jeopardize the positive public domain outcomes of our St Leonards Plaza proposal.

### **3. Urban Design Development Opportunities**

Planning outcomes for the St Leonards Precinct governed by “The St Leonards Strategy” and the Metropolitan Strategy identification of this centre as “Specialised”. This identification results from the location of the Royal North Shore Hospital, St Leonards Station and other significant projects of commercial employment and residential development potential.

At present, the commercial front on the southern side of the Pacific Highway remains an area that is in decline and of decrepit urban fabric. This area has stagnated commercial and retail strip development with very poor cross access (both east/west and north/south). The poor connectivity extends to the bus users and community amenity connecting to the Station and the hospital precinct and supporting services.

Lane Cove Council has developed a proposed new bus/rail interchange and Plaza design for St Leonards that embraces and subscribes to the Goals and Objectives of the NSW State Government in the Metropolitan Plan for Sydney 2036 and May 2011 adoption of the National “*Our Cities, Our Future*” Program.

The outlined objectives of the National Urban Policy : Productivity, Sustainability, Liveability and Governance are all encompassed within this St Leonards Transport Interchange Project that has been developed by Lane Cove Council.

Through this proposed urban renewal project, Lane Cove Council intends to provide

- new retail facilities;
- new residential capacity;
- an effective public transport interchange and;
- a new public space with a superior sustainable urban design.

These initiatives capture the National Urban Policy objectives of:

- raising productivity (through new commercial facilities and more efficient connecting transport to them);
- sustainability (through enhancement of transport accessibility and hence increased usage of public transport); and
- liveability (by providing a new public space in an area of acute open space shortages).

- The project, which aligns a public transport interface with major commercial and residential development within a major health and hospital precinct, provides unique design opportunities that need to be explored to maximise the strategic value and regional community benefits.
- Council has commenced the project by proactively employing a full time, highly experienced and qualified Urban Designer along with an Urban Design Planner to commence the planning and design details of the project.

Included with this submission are A4 Perspectives that support and embellish the Design Concept Planning Principles pursued over the last six months by Council's Urban Design section.

### **Project Description and Genesis**

The St Leonards Bus/Rail Interchange Project has emerged from the St Leonards Strategy, jointly commissioned by Lane Cove Council, Willoughby City Council & North Sydney Council and the NSW Department of Planning in 2006. The approach adopted by Council in developing this project is reinforced by the NSW State Government in the Metropolitan Plan for Sydney 2036.

St Leonards is identified as a “**Specialised Centre**” within the Metropolitan Strategy under the “Inner North Sub region” in the following terms:

#### ***Specialised centres***

*Macquarie Park and St Leonards will continue to grow as specialized centres, within the Global Economic corridor.*

*In Macquarie Park, the plan supports a vibrant and diverse mix of office spaces and education uses, including the growth of Macquarie University and emerging employment related to Macquarie University Hospital. These uses will be within walking distance of train stations. Improved public transport links, particularly the Parramatta to Epping rail link, will be integral.*

*In St Leonards, the plan supports more intensive office activity. Other future directions include the redevelopment of existing buildings to provide employment, clustering of medical services associated with Royal North Shore Hospital, and an emerging technology cluster at Gore Hill Technology Park*

The Metropolitan Plan for Sydney 2036 is the umbrella Design and Planning document for “*City of Cities – a Plan for Sydney’s future*” promulgated by the State Government.

The St Leonards Strategy sits comfortably within the ambit of the State Governments Planning Initiatives for the Sydney “Inner North Sub region.”

#### **4. Sustainable Urban Renewal**

The fundamental aspiration for the St Leonards Plaza & Bus/Rail Interchange over the existing rail corridor on the southern side of the Pacific Highway is to efficiently and safely provide an interconnect for the community to the northern side, including that between buses and the railway station at St Leonards. It will also provide an interconnection between the commercial precinct to the east of the rail corridor and a newly created high density residential precinct to the west.

The concept outlined in the attached perspectives is to provide a substantial open space/meeting place that will include the closure to traffic of both Canberra Avenue and Lithgow Street on either side of the existing Railway line. The Plaza will extend to the prolongation of Marshall Avenue some 75 metres from the Highway alignment and some 60 metres across the Railway line and street closures. A separate escalator/travelator will connect directly to each railway platform. Lane Cove Council is presently in receipt of a Development Application from the Winten Group for an 18 storey development through Lithgow Street to Christie Street at a value of some \$100M. Council has stressed the need, particularly over the past six months, for the commercial project to directly interconnect with the bus/rail interchange Plaza.

A residential development is also proposed on the western side of the railway line. This will also consist of an 18 storey tower adjacent to the railway line, and three 6 storey forms along Marshall Avenue. This proposal has been lodged by Loftex P/L. A submission has recently been received from this residential development company to amend the Lane Cove LEP & DCP Controls for this site to facilitate the 18 storey tower. Again, the applicants have been encouraged and are enthusiastic to integrate the address to take advantage of the public domain opportunities from the proposed bus/rail interchange Plaza.

Both of these major \$100M development applications are in the Planning Stages and imminent in terms of development. The success of these projects is contingent upon their construction and integration with the physical construction of the bus rail interchange Plaza as a concurrent construction project.

#### **5. Income Generation**

Lane Cove Council has initiated seed funding for the implementation of this project by engaging the Urban Design Team to assist with the implementation of this project. It is also seeking funding through the Federal Government's "Liveable Cities" program.

Lane Cove Council is seeking to commence this project by mid 2012 with the planning, design and implementation to integrate as closely as possible with the two major \$100M developments discussed in section 2, which bookend and flank the rail corridor. The proposal, whilst a Lane Cove Council initiative, necessitates the collaboration of the two adjoining Councils, Willoughby City and North Sydney, NSROC, and the NSW Government with direct contact with the Department of Planning & Infrastructure and the Integrated Transport Authority (Transport for NSW).

With financial assistance through the Liveable Cities Program in design and planning resourcing, Lane Cove envisages that the interchange would provide superior public access and amenity to the area. It is intended that the design and development stage explore innovative options and partnerships suited to a transport /health hub including:

- occasional day care facilities for health clients (in partnership with Department of Health and Council)
- special access from public transport exits to assist health clients (in collaboration with multiple Transport agencies);
- long day child care facilities
- consideration of temporary accommodation options for health clients (provided through a Voluntary Planning Agreement with developers); and
- consideration of an active open space to provide a community focus.

Lane Cove Council will work with the two major developers in utilising Voluntary Planning Agreements (VPA's) to fund the majority of works, with shortfalls caught through the Section 94 Plan for St Leonards and any grant funding that may become available.

Council has already undertaken a financial feasibility study for the structural works required and provision of landscaping and other public domain features that would be incorporated into the proposed Plaza.

## **6. Community Connectivity**

The project sits on the boundaries of 3 Local Government Areas (LGA's): Lane Cove, Willoughby and North Sydney. The cross boarder issues and benefits of this proposal have been recognised by the Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (NSROC) who is involved in advocating for the project and will be involved in engagement with other levels of government to ensure effective progress and coordination.

The proposed design, planning and implementation of the St Leonards project is contingent upon the support and collaboration of the Department of Planning and Infrastructure in the NSW State Government. The concept is also crucially integrated with the objectives of the newly formed Department of Integrated Transport – Transport for NSW. This new authority has a number of arms, one of which specialises in interchange development. Accordingly, the NSW State Government is a critical collaborative partner in the success of this project.

The proposal has a raft of benefits which enhance a multitude of planning functions including transport, land use, utilities, employment, offices, residential, recreation and facilities associated with Royal North Shore Hospital. The latter medical facility is at the centre of community health for the whole of Sydney's North Shore Community.

Another aspect is the enhancement of the transport interchange, which sits between North Sydney Station and the major Regional Centre of Chatswood. This interchange will complete a necessary link in the system of Bus/Rail connection for the Northern



Sydney region. Land use rejuvenation and relocation is designed to focus onto the Interchange Plaza. The activation of the concourse above the Bus/Rail connections is then achieved in a sustainable fashion. The proposed \$100 million development to the east of the railway line provides an 18 storey commercial component with an array of employment opportunities. The development to the west of the rail corridor is of a similar value and height as a residential proposal with a retail floor opening onto the Plaza podium. The whole of the public domain Plaza is intended to incorporate numerous recreational facilities for the entire St Leonards community which have been identified and adopted within the prescription the Lane Cove Local Environment Plan and Development Control Plan in 2010.

The critical relationship of the current expansion of the adjacent Royal North Shore Hospital facilities is inherently linked and geared to the success and implementation of this development of the Bus/Rail Interchange. Immediately adjacent to the Hospital is the North Sydney Technical and Further Education College. A high-tech development that includes the new headquarters for the ASX and Foxtel is currently being constructed as an adjunct to these higher education facilities further north on the Pacific Highway.

The St Leonards precinct is thus clearly established and expanding as a centre of Medicine, Education and Technology for Sydney's Lower North Shore. The Bus/Rail Interchange facility proposed will clearly be a benefit to these functions and also the commercial precincts of the abutting Councils of Willoughby and North Sydney. The project aligns with the Federal Government Policies and Initiatives as outlined under the foregoing headings. The proposal is also distinctly directed to the achievement of the aims and objectives of the NSW Metropolitan Plan for Sydney 2036.

In this respect, St Leonards has been specifically identified as a **“Specialised Centre”** to instigate and propagate employment and residential expansion opportunities. The proposed Bus/Rail Interchange will facilitate the interconnectivity of the outlined community facilities.

## **7. Current Planning and Policy**

The proposal aligns with the prescribed Local Government Planning and Development Control Plan gazetted as the designations for St Leonards Statutory Planning.

The project also aligns with the Federal Government Policies and Initiatives as outlined under the foregoing headings. The proposal is distinctly directed to the achievement of the aims and objectives of the NSW Planning Department's Metropolitan Plan for Sydney 2036.

St Leonards has been specifically identified as a **“Specialised Centre”** to instigate and propagate employment and residential expansion opportunities. The proposed Bus/Rail interchange will facilitate the interconnectivity of community facilities. The proposal aligns with the prescribed Local Environment Plan and Development Control Plan designations for St Leonards.

The timeframe for the engagement of consultants and specialists to undertake the planning and design for the proposal should commence in the first half of 2012, subject to the concurrence of the NSW State Government. Construction of the structure is anticipated to occur in the following 12 to 18 months. The impending nature of the proposed developments on either side of the rail corridor at St Leonards bodes well for the certainty that the Plaza work could be commenced within this

timeframe with the majority of funding coming from Voluntary Planning Agreements and Section 94 funds.

The project is proceeding through its initial preparatory planning and design stages. Negotiations have been conducted by Council with the major stakeholders. The need for the project to proceed through this phase post haste has been stressed by each of the major stakeholders. The critical success of the project centres around the need for the proposed Plaza to be implemented concurrently with the two major adjoining development projects.

The necessary resolutions of Lane Cove Council have been made together with the preliminary sanctions from the Minister for Transport, the Local Member and the Northern Sydney Region of Councils (NSROC).

The project is ready for commencement as Lane Cove Council seized the initiative to have the necessary zoning parameters in place through the gazettal of their LEP & DCP in 2010. The consent of the Transport for NSW, albeit supported by the Minister, is required. The consent of the NSW Department of Planning & Infrastructure is also required notwithstanding that the proposal sits squarely within the goals and objectives of the NSW Government's Metropolitan Strategy.

**The Project Leader is Wayne Rylands – Executive Manager, Open Space & Urban Services, Lane Cove Council**

This is a Council led project that will liaise with the newly formed Transport for NSW, unit known as the Transport Interchanges. This unit will look at integrated public transport nodes provided by State agencies.

In addition there is a tripartite strategy (St Leonards Strategy) between Lane Cove, Willoughby City and North Sydney Councils. This strategy acknowledges the cross border integration and planning controls.

It is proposed that a Steering Committee will be established with State agencies; Dept of Planning & Infrastructure, Transport for NSW & NSW Health, NSROC & Willoughby City and North Sydney Councils.

As already discussed Council is currently liaising with the two major property developers that sit either side of the rail corridor, south of the Pacific Highway. It is envisaged that Winten Property Group and Loftex P/L will be consulted and included in the planning and design process for the proposed bus rail interchange/Plaza proposal.

Lane Cove Council will be able to cover any cost over-runs with Section 94 funds.

As stated above, Council has employed an Urban Design team which has commenced the design and planning phase of this proposal. Council has also gained both State (Anthony Roberts MP) and regional (NSROC) backing to further this proposal.

## **Environmental Considerations**

Lane Cove Council supports the approach by Willoughby Council in regards to the considerations with respect to flora and fauna.

### **Wildlife Habitat (Connectivity)**

Determine the value of both land to be developed and adjoining areas, and impact of development on these values and assessment of how land to be developed may contribute to the large contiguous linkage.

Issues to be considered should include:

- Identifying existing habitat of the area to be developed
- Identifying existing habitat of adjoining
- Identifying potential habitat linkage between these areas
- How removal of existing vegetation or changes in vegetation management will impact existing habitat
- Specific impacts of additional infrastructure including physical barriers (fences, walls and buildings), lighting, sound and altered surfaces
- Most effective and appropriate habitat remediation works to be carried out post development

Lane Cove Council is also suggesting the inclusion of additional terms of reference for the inquiry into Utilisation of Rail Corridors acknowledging the significant environmental function of the existing Rail Corridor within the urban and rural network.

## **8. Community Compatibility**

The Lane Cove Council – St Leonards Bus/Rail Plaza has been predicated upon developing cohesion to the functions and forms of the various sectors of St Leonards. A primary consideration is the integration of the public transport system into the two \$100 m rail corridor flanking developments to the east and the west.

The interconnecting Plaza, straddling the railway line, provides a community facility of public open space which facilitates adhesion to the eclectic array of development scenarios which are imminent within this immediate locality.

The proposal has been further, in Urban Design terms, to extend into the precincts of projected development to the east and the west of the rail corridor. The implementation of the bus/rail plaza will establish the platform to ensure the community compatibility of the range of functions which will activate this admirable community facility and asset.

## **9. Best Practice Urban Design**

The Lane Cove Council Urban Design team have extensive experience in the cross sectional disciplines of Urban Planning Architecture and Urban Design. A direct connection with the St Leonards project was experienced by one of the members in the Design development of the Bondi Junction Bus Rail Interchange and Plaza connection in the mid 1990's.

The appointment by the current NSW Government of the new "Transport for NSW" Department is considered to be a reflection of the intent to appoint different arms to foster and facilitate such interchange functions for improved design outcomes to the Department of Planning.

Lane Cove Council has recently submitted its suggestion as an appropriate definition of Urban Design to the NSW Department of Planning:-

*"The Urban Design discipline is devoted largely to the design of the public realm or "The Space between buildings". The inextricable nexus also embraces and engages the neighbouring built form architecture of structures. Urban Design overarches Planning, Engineering, Architecture and Landscape Architecture and its primarily aimed at producing ebullient spaces of a public domain which defines the character of an area and its environs."*

The same ethos and philosophy has been embraced by Council in the crystallisation of the Urban Design details of the St Leonards Plaza depicted in the Council prepared attached perspective sketches.

Accordingly Council deems that the scheme for the bus rail interchange at St Leonards employs Best Practice Urban Design Principles.

## **10. Summary**

The project has also been recognised as regionally significant: both for its scale and its positive impact on adjacent councils. While the site itself lies within the Lane Cove Council area, it borders on two other Council areas: Willoughby and North Sydney. These Councils have historically collaborated through the development of the "St Leonards Strategy" – 2006. Under the new proposal Councils will work together under the auspices of the Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (NSROC).

NSROC consists of seven, northern Sydney councils and supports this project as a regional priority in recognition of the broad benefits for the major hospital in the North Shore to have effective public transport connections, quality public amenity and a prosperous economic base.

The proposed St Leonards Plaza & Bus/Rail Interchange has been designed to meet the objectives of the Australian Urban Design Protocol recently released by the Federal Government:

Australian Urban Design Protocol 2011 – "Creating Places for People"

An Urban Design protocol for Australian cities was adopted by the Australian Government in November 2011. The approach taken by Lane Cove Council with respect to the St Leonards Bus/Rail Interchange Plaza embraces the principles and

criteria outlined by the Protocol. The Federal Minister for Infrastructure and Transport advised on release of the Protocol in November 2011.

*“We need better cities for the people who live in them, for the people who work in them for the people who depend on them”* the document then espouses the following ethos:

“High quality urban design becomes even more important as we increase the density of our cities and cater for growing and changing population. It requires excellent planning, design and management, and a collaborative, multi-disciplinary approach.”

“Creating Places for People” does not take a one size fits all approach. Instead, it provides broad principles that take into account the unique characteristics of a location and encourages excellence in the design and custodianship of urban places.”

Lane Cove Council has shown the initiative to adopt these principles and criteria in the preparation of its draft concept Urban Design Plans which has been supported resoundingly and unequivocally by the outlined Government Authorities and Agencies.

Lane Cove Council has also been to the fore in the preparation and gazettal of the LEP and DCP in 2010. Thus, the planning framework is also in place to facilitate the implementation of this worthwhile and exhilarating community based Urban Design project.

## **11. Conclusion**

Council considers that the proposed St Leonards Plaza & Bus/Rail Interchange, bridging the railway corridor, fulfils the majority of the objectives outlined in the terms of reference of this Inquiry.

Accordingly, the project is considered to admirably warrant the Government’s full support with the ambit of this inquiry.

Indeed, Council submits that the concept is of such eminence that it could be upheld by the Government as an exemplary archetype and benchmark for the utilisation of airspace over rail corridors throughout NSW.

Yours faithfully

**Peter Brown**  
**General Manager**  
**Lane Cove Council**

