

Submission
No 75

**INQUIRY INTO GOVERNMENT'S MANAGEMENT OF THE
POWERHOUSE MUSEUM AND OTHER MUSEUMS AND
CULTURAL PROJECTS IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: Name suppressed
Date Received: 18 May 2020

Partially
Confidential

17 May, 2020

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committee:

This submission is in response to the terms of reference as noted in the document <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/inquiries/2582/TOR%20-%20Museums%20and%20cultural%20projects%20in%20New%20South%20Wales.pdf>.

The perspective from which I lodge this submission is that of an interested member of the general public who has no financial or professional “skin in the game” of this project regardless of its outcome. I do not work for this nor any other museum, nor have I ever worked for one, although I have volunteered at a museum overseas. I do not run or work for a business that will be affected by either the closure of the Ultimo site nor the building and opening of the Parramatta site. And I do not speak as a representative of any community group. My background is in software engineering and technology. I have a keen interest in industrial history and the effects of changes in technology, transportation, and manufacturing on how people live, work, and play in our state as exemplified by my informal photojournalism efforts around transformative projects such as the removal of the Sydney monorail around the CBD, the new Sydney light rail, the updated Wynyard station, and the creation of the Sydney Metro.

As a frequent visitor to the Powerhouse Museum, and sometimes researcher relying on staff expertise in and access to the collection, I value its existence and its stewardship of its collection. I am concerned that this “move”, which is really more the destruction of a museum and the creation of what most recently appears to be some sort of social centre for Parramatta area companies and residents, puts both the museum itself and its collection at risk of harm – perhaps irreparable harm. Therefore, my submission primarily concerns the Powerhouse Museum project and proper stewardship of the heritage properties involved: the Powerhouse Museum site in Ultimo, Willow Grove, St. George’s Terrace, and the Fleet Street Heritage District.

I am also concerned with the dire state of small museums around the NSW regions, having heard witnesses explain the bare bones budgets and inadequate facilities that most such museums have, but am leaving that to the experts in the regions to discuss whilst voicing my support for their plight. These small institutions, often volunteer-led, are worth supporting as they tell stories that other museums in metropolitan areas don’t tell.

Please consider that this submission reflects my personal opinions and concerns about the matters raised in the terms of reference. It is my intention to raise questions about matters that have concerned me as a member of the public, so that they may, if the Committee determines it is worthwhile, be further investigated to determine the facts.

Rather than addressing each sub-part of the terms of reference in order by clause, the comments below pertain to various matters of concern that span one or more of the terms.

[Core vision behind the move](#)

This author has followed this project since at least 2015, and possibly before that, attending every public hearing held by the Inquiry into Museums and Galleries either in person or over the web. And yet the author admits that she is no clearer on the core vision behind the move than she was at the start. If anything, it has become more inexplicable than it was when the idea was first raised.

The project apparently started with a simple vision: “We’re going to move the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta, it’s a done deal,” and everything else flowed from there as details, in an awkward attempt to support that decision. This is not typically the way one would expect a government to

select a major project. Even when this author worked for a local Council, it was necessary to identify numerous possible ways in which to spend Council's scarce resources, discuss the pros and cons of projects on a short list, and then recommend ones to pursue. One develops the project vision first, then has to successfully justify it to others, before the go/no-go decision is made on a significant budget line item.

Regarding the reasoning behind this decision and the vision behind it being transparent, it's not. Why Parramatta must get THAT museum and not a new one not existing elsewhere in NSW already, and why it can't get a satellite "kids' edutainment" focused branch of the Powerhouse Museum (with the main campus of the museum remaining in Ultimo), are two things the government has not been sufficiently transparent about. To those of us on the outside, it screams "the vision was of a real estate deal that could be done if they could just free up that land in Ultimo", but the government has never admitted to that.

The following dot-points summarise my concerns about the vision for the move.

- Degree to which current and proposed locations complement the museum

No compelling connection between the collection and a new Parramatta location exists. However, the museum has been based in the Ultimo/Sydney City area since the inception of MAAS. Numerous collection artefacts have been donated by those whose families have a long history in Ultimo or inner Sydney. Many others pertain to other historic artistic and industrial endeavours in Sydney city. It makes more sense for the collection to remain in its context in Ultimo. There's nothing about Parramatta, or really any other location in NSW, that screams, "Better fit for the Powerhouse Museum than inner Sydney is!".

- Ease of access of a unique NSW museum to ALL in NSW and interstate/international visitors

Its current Ultimo location within easy walking or taxi distance from the core tourist and business precinct of greater Sydney, and direct train or light rail ride from the airport or Central Station makes it easily and efficiently accessible to out-of-area visitors (northern, southern, eastern AND western Sydney suburbs residents, regional residents, and interstate and international visitors). This is important because the items displayed in the museum ARE significant to out-of-area visitors, not just Western Sydney schoolchildren. It was THE Sydney museum this author wanted to see when she – a tech industry engineer - was an international tourist.

The above two dot-points call into the question the "vision" involved in moving the facility to Parramatta.

- And then, every time the museum is discussed, those doing the talking describe a different institution/facility, illustrating that the publicly-communicated "vision" and actual vision discussed in the party room that got everyone on-side with it, could well be different. (These comments are my recollections from news reports, Inquiry hearings and consultation comments.)
 - First it's going to have a planetarium.
 - Then it isn't, because it's not the most cost-effective use of funds or space.

- But later it's going to have 360 degree projection ability in one of the halls, which sounds a great deal like someone really didn't want to give up on that planetarium idea, but is attempting to obscure it.
- First it's going to be as large as the Ultimo facility.
 - Then it's going to hold more objects from the collection than the Ultimo facility does (but the size of the facility is not mentioned, and multiple members of the public believe it will substitute less flashy, easy to move, small items at the expense of larger showpiece objects.)
 - And still later, it's going to have flexible function areas that can be used for many different purposes, including corporate events and exhibits.
- First it's going to be Sydney's answer to Questacon, an edutainment facility for kids.
 - Then it's going to display many items from the collection.
 - And later, it's going to be a place for corporate events filled with corporate sponsored exhibits.
- First it's going to be a standalone facility with nothing other than the museum on-site, and perhaps small supporting industry such as an in-house café and a museum shop.
 - Then there might be another unit block near it. Or over it.
 - Then, no, never! Not a unit block on top of the museum building. We won't stand for that!
 - Still later, there's going to be a floor of apartments above the exhibit area, which will be used by visiting "researchers" and regional students. These units will be "managed" by the museum, but I do not recall anyone ever stating whether they would be state-owned or privately-owned. Apparently the answer to, "When is a unit block not a unit block?" is "When it's single storey and we explain that only people somehow related to the museum can stay in it." The Committee might want to look into this further.

From one set of public comments to the next, the vision appears to be changing markedly. I think. Or have just the words used to describe it changed, in an attempt to make it more palatable to a public they've realised isn't having any of it?

Regardless, it certainly seems odd to this author that the government has gone all-in and committed that much funding to an idea for which there was no coherent vision – at least not one that could be publicly disclosed – at the start, and for which there does not seem to be a clear, consistent vision even after 5 years of thinking about it. And even after untold dollars spent on consultants to conduct group discussions called "consultations" after which a report barely acknowledging most sentiments expressed by participants is presented to the government, among surely numerous activities for which they engaged consultants.

Effectiveness and Adequacy of Planning

This author's submission to the original Museums and Galleries Inquiry points out many shortcomings in planning, such as a lack of realisation on the part of government that it's faster for people in many parts of NSW, including the southwestern suburbs of Sydney, to get to Ultimo than it is to get to Parramatta. And the importance of keeping the Powerhouse Museum in proximity to other major tourism/cultural draws, which encourages name recognition and fosters word of mouth among travellers who might be exchanging tips on what else they can go see if they have a few

hours before dinner. And concerns about the feasibility and difficulty of moving the very large objects.

Rather than repeat these known issues, this section discusses new issues.

First, the location. Why, when planning, was the Fleet Street Heritage Precinct not rated more highly as a potential location for Parramatta's next great cultural facility, be that Questacon North, Carriageworks The Sequel, or something else preferred by the people of Parramatta? It already contains numerous heritage structures and offers a historic context that an old car park site cannot.

As the design competition proceeded and the public got to see the compromise design with the cavernous, empty ground floor necessitated by the risk of flooding, and apparently some sort of underground reservoir to hold overflow water, it has only become more obvious that this location is one into which a museum is being shoehorned, not because it's the best site for a museum, but because that's where the government wants to put it. It is abhorrent that government is allocating significant funds to flood-proofing and welcomed numerous design limitations like valuable artefacts unable to be housed on the ground floor due to flood potential, as if there's something SPECIAL about this old car park site that makes it the most suitable site in Parramatta for a museum. There's a vastly better location that would be fit for purpose: the Fleet Street Heritage Precinct, as stated above.

Second, the current and proposed museum structures. The location of a multidisciplinary museum displaying the history of applied arts **and** sciences, focusing on practical applications and industry, in an old power station, is very appropriate. The Powerhouse Museum is a rare museum housed in a historic structure related to its subject matter, and it's a mistake to squander this meaningful synergy. Conversely, the new building could house any civic functionality, even a library. There is nothing inherent in the new design proclaiming, "This is the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, the Powerhouse Museum."

It is incorrect to disparage the Ultimo facility as old and no longer fit for purpose. Numerous science and technology oriented museums and educational facilities are located in buildings that are many decades old and which have been brought up to modern standards and augmented with more modern wings in much the same way as the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo has been. It seems especially ludicrous to disparage the Ultimo Powerhouse Museum on these grounds whilst accepting museum designs for an old car park site that can't locate exhibits on the ground floor and can't have basement storage because of the risk of flooding.

Parramatta deserves better than a subset of the original Powerhouse Museum shoehorned onto a site that is apparently not worth building anything else on, and which requires removal of two heritage structures on property neighbouring the car park.

The government tells Parramatta it's getting a museum, whilst initially describing kids' edutainment centre facilities, not a museum. More recently, they've described it as a community multi-function centre with shopping, dining, and units. A recent consultation's description didn't even mention exhibit space, just flexible "presentation" space. THIS is the cultural facility they're spending big dollars to build for Parramatta? It's NOT a museum and it's disingenuous to represent it as a reasonable replacement for the Powerhouse Museum OR better outcome for Parramatta than creation of a cultural precinct with a new Museum of NSW or other such institution in the Fleet Street Heritage Precinct.

Moving on from physical planning issues, another planning issue into which the Committee may wish to delve is that of the collection. The Museum has been consistently tight-lipped about which items from the collection would be exhibited in Parramatta, and which would not. It's almost like they're taking the opposite approach to that taken by the Ultimo designers, who designed the building around the objects they wanted to showcase. In fact, at least one very large object is an integral part of the structure. The Parramatta Powerhouse (Museum) leadership seem to be deciding which objects to showcase depending on what they've got room for in the building that their design competition gets them... and perhaps, on a rotating basis, what their sponsors wish to pay them to show.

This author is just a member of the general public, but it is concerning that the primary considerations around final design/design team selection involved flexibility of spaces, rather than ability to accommodate the exhibits that were considered core to the Museum's identity. Because again: at the core of any museum, and what attracts visitors from far and wide to it, is its collection.

During the first Zoom Internet-based public consultation recently, the collection and even the museum itself were notably missing in action. This author used the meeting's question time to ask about the government's terminology that emphasised activities to attract locals again and again, and encourage industry to hold events and functions at "the Powerhouse" where's THE COLLECTION in all of this? The author also noted that their slides are stamped with and they are talking about "The New Powerhouse at Parramatta", which seemed to be omitting a very important word that is the entire entity we're fighting about: A MUSEUM whose collection includes the history of the area that has held the MAAS for so long but also NSW, Australia, and beyond, that we don't want to be destroyed. To their team's credit, the terms exhibit, collection, and museum were more commonly used in the second Zoom consultation meeting. However, it is impossible for this author to determine whether that is a change in direction, or just a change in terminology in an attempt to placate the unhappy public.

Also during the Zoom meeting, a community participant voiced misgivings about the name because the new building isn't even a Powerhouse. Ms. Havilah's response was TO SAY THAT THEY'RE OPEN TO OTHER NAMES, and that if they have some ideas, please send them in.

So, this is apparently where they are in planning:

- They're destroying a purpose-built museum called the Powerhouse Museum, which features an eclectic set of exhibits in Ultimo.
- They're creating a new cultural facility in Parramatta, name To Be Determined, which features flexible function space, a kitchen or two, a floor of units, a floor of offices, a big empty ground floor area, a floor with 360 degree projection, and oh, yeah, we'll have space for a frequently changing program of exhibits, of course.

After 5 years, this is as close as they can get to convincing interested members of the public that they are moving the Powerhouse Museum, rather than destroying the Powerhouse Museum and using the money from selling it off to build some new cultural facility they prefer in a location with cheaper land. How can they still maintain with a straight face that they're "moving the museum to Parramatta"?

In the Zoom meeting, this author also pointed out that their plan of having rotating exhibits every 6-18 months is going to require quite an ongoing financial commitment, as curators, exhibit design and interpretation, and even transportation of artefacts don't come cheap. And that those who criticise the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo for being tired need to understand that the reason for this is

efficiency dividends that reduced the museum's ability to refresh its exhibits regularly: exactly the thing they're now magically saying they WILL be able to do, even though they haven't been able to do that at the Powerhouse Museum to any great extent recently. And in light of that, this author asked how they thought that the Parramatta Powerhouse would be able to keep up such an ambitious program of changing exhibits given the budgetary limitations that would almost certainly exist after the first year or two. The answer seems to be that they plan to rely on corporate sponsorships. Which is fine, perhaps, for parts of a museum, but.... for most/all of it?

Is this new museum going to look like the built environment equivalent of a footy guernsey, plastered with corporate logos?

Project management by Powerhouse Museum leadership

Part of the reason for the shifting vision may be the comings and goings of board members and Museum leadership with differing personal and business priorities.

As a member of the general public, this author was surprised when Ms. Merrillees, whose background was in art gallery management rather than in more general museum management, was brought in as Director. Her personal interest in the decorative arts, particularly fashion, led to a focus on beefing up the museum's fashion collection and its fashion-oriented conservation work and exhibits... and the ill-fated fashion ball.

After Ms. Merrillees came Ms. Havilah, a self proclaimed "failure at high school, disengaged and uninterested" with "no hope of gaining a place at university" (<https://www.afr.com/life-and-luxury/arts-and-culture/lisa-havilah-s-ambitious-plans-for-sydney-s-powerhouse-museum-20191128-p53f4t>), who appears to be excited about an events space for corporate activities that has interesting curios along the walls, changing exhibits sponsored by industry partners she's skilled at networking with, and a showpiece item here and there. To Ms. Havilah's credit, she did go on to earn a degree in creative arts and a Masters in Arts Administration, with a year of law studies in between. But like Ms. Merrillees, her background appears to primarily involve the decorative arts.

Much of the Powerhouse Museum collection's core strengths are around its unusual transportation, industrial design, and technology objects, including the functioning steam gallery. Objects which don't have much of a place in the new Parramatta facility. And also, interestingly, objects which neither Ms. Merrillees or Ms. Havilah have publicly shown much interest in. These objects, which trace significant engineering accomplishments across multiple centuries, deserve better than for most of them to be relegated to a suburban warehouse, with only one or two of the best on permanent display at the new museum. Whose idea was it to sideline them? Is that coming from the Premier, or from the Directors?

It might be interesting for the Committee to explore how much these leaders know about the Powerhouse Museum's collection outside their particular areas of interest, including how much they know about to whom items are significant, and why. And why those objects were chosen for inclusion in the permanent display galleries of the Powerhouse Museum.

This author would have thought that a more scientific or museum/collections management oriented academic background would be a pre-requisite for being the leader of a major transformation and move of a museum that is at its core a museum of innovation and the fusion of arts and sciences -- specifically, not just "arts", and "events" particularly within the context of the greater mission of the museum.

It appears to this author that some of the leadership failures during this hoped-for-transition period are a case study in how solutions are limited by the knowledge base of the one charged with coming up with the solution; this may one day be mentioned in someone's dissertation on museum transformation. [One is left to conclude that these leaders need better media handlers. From my perspective, the description of Ms. Havilah quoted above significantly detracts from her professional credibility as a leader of a museum of applied arts and sciences, and perhaps was best left unmentioned.]

Regarding the board, it's interesting that appointments seem to have been made along ideological lines, seeking members who are enthusiastic supporters of the move to Parramatta, as opposed to members who are resolute advocates for MAAS, the institution, wherever it may be located. One noteworthy appearance and disappearance was that of Darren Steinberg, associated with Dexus, as written about in the Sydney Morning Herald, <https://www.smh.com.au/cbd/power-play-on-museum-s-board-20191211-p53j3h.html>.

Reading news articles about the project and attending consultations, this author's perception is that they plan to turn the main location of MAAS in Parramatta into a function centre containing some exhibits of local history/pop culture including local sport with a couple showpieces from the collection that WE know as the MAAS, and a bunch of ground floor restaurants/bars/whatever for locals to hang out at.

There appear to be secret deals or the prospect of secret deals (Has the Ultimo site been sold yet? Does Dexus figure into any of these real estate deals?). People who this author sees as "stretch" candidates for a major museum leadership position appear to be blinded by the opportunity to get the chance of a lifetime that can "make" their professional futures – if they succeed – to the point that they're willing to take on a financially and politically challenging project that the community loudly opposes, and do the government's bidding (apparently without question) to the extent that their experience permits. And all this museum stuff is boring, so let's put some video wall projection in, and we need restaurants, lots of good restaurants so people have somewhere to go at night. Potential for pests due to the restaurants? Potential for flood damage due to locating the building on a flood-prone river bank? Hey, anything to turn a profit. We don't really place much value on individual items in the collection anyway, so we're sure things will be fine. They'll be fine. If we lose some of it, we can always get more. We have warehouses, whole warehouses, full of objects! Big objects! Small objects! Lots of objects! And oh, we even have Parramatta Eels guernseys. How good are those Eels?

This author can make no more damning statement about management of this project than this: **If Donald Trump were to decide to relocate the National Air and Space Museum in America, he'd probably run that project similarly to the way this project has been run for the past several years.** And yes, another commonality is that most people would assume there's some real estate deal with profits for the people at the top or their mates, at the heart of it.

[Public reporting, business cases, and related matters](#)

The information released to the public so far has not demonstrated that the government can deliver the project with a BCR greater than 1, nor has it demonstrated that publicly released documentation is necessarily accurate and complete so that the project can be evaluated on its merits and the people can understand why the government is moving forward with it.

The one time that this author attended an event about which a publicly released report was written, was the public consultation held in Ultimo about the new museum; a similar consultation was held in

Parramatta, and the report summarised both. From the perspective of attendees of both of these consultations, the public reporting did not accurately reflect the sentiments of the majority of comments made by participants during the consultation. This does not lead to high levels of confidence by the community in the completeness and accuracy of other reports and public documents issued by the project. Every other document may be 100% spot on, but those of us who attended the consultations only know that the document that summarised the meetings we attended wasn't.

Add to this the challenge of obtaining the business case documents.

And the statement by project leadership during one of the recent Zoom consultations that although the competing designs had not yet been released to the public, the plan was to do so. (We're waiting...).

[Impact on the heritage status of the site at Ultimo and heritage items at Willow Grove and the Fleet Street precinct at Parramatta](#)

This author is deeply concerned about loss of another Sulman award winning structure from the Darling Harbour area. Whilst it appears government's current intention is to re-use part of the Ultimo power station, the entire Powerhouse Museum facility should be kept; to retain only part and gut the insides detracts from its heritage significance.

Additionally, it is significant that a former tram power station now showcases Sydney's industrial history, including that of transportation. The power station's interior provides an appropriate backdrop for many objects exhibited there. Properly maintained, the Ultimo facility is likely to outlast any concrete, glass, and steel structure built today.

The late 1800s Willow Grove and St. George's Terrace are championed by many in Parramatta as having particular heritage significance to that area. I will leave the details of those sites to that community, as they have far more knowledge about them than do I.

However, it is revealing that the government's messaging to the community differed from their messaging to potential designers:

- To the community: The preference is to retain both structures if at all possible.
- To potential designers: It is acceptable to demolish either or both if required.

.. and that government ultimately accepted a design requiring removal of those structures. Government knew their plans didn't match the community sentiments of Parramatta residents any better than they matched the community sentiments of Ultimo residents.

Government's Fleet Street Heritage Precinct plans show disregard for the multi-layered historical significance of that site. That precinct is NSW's own version of Colonial Williamsburg. The degree to which NSW appears to be actively squandering the obvious cultural potential of the FSHP's multiple layers of history is troubling. Shouldn't government strive to be much better stewards of significant heritage precincts?

This project represents significant heritage losses to both Ultimo and Parramatta for minimal gain, and likely no net gain once all losses are taken into account.

[Risks in the move](#)

Some key risks include:

- The risk of diminishing its worth to NSW as a significant museum & its international reputation

A museum's strength is in its collection and the interpretation and presentation of it to the public and researchers. It provides an identity that endures across generations of museum leadership, visitors, and even traveller word-of-mouth.

De-emphasising permanent displays in favour of frequently changing exhibits dilutes its identity as a museum vs. an event space. Carriageworks is well known locally, but this author cannot identify, "What specific objects do you visit it to see?" let alone, "What specific objects do you tell others they should go see at Carriageworks, when they're next in Sydney?". I can answer that question for the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo. It is perhaps the lack of good answers to these questions, resulting in the reliance on repeat visits by locals, that made Carriageworks so vulnerable to economic conditions.

Fewer out-of-area Sydney visitors will travel to Parramatta for a locally-oriented cultural facility, resulting in reduced non-local word of mouth and further reduced interest by non-locals. A significant downturn in attendance could even threaten the viability of the museum itself.

- Risking integrity and conservation of the collection and reduced access to the collection

Less exhibit space and little storage means items must be shuttled to/from off-site when changing exhibits or performing conservation activities on displays. Packing, unpacking, and transport add risks.

High humidity from flooding will be an issue. What about UV damage from excessive daylight? What about coexistence of rare artefacts, corporate functions and food service (including independently operated ground floor shops)? Additionally, as a renter who has sometimes lived in a building with an "activated" ground floor containing restaurants, contents insurance is more expensive when living above food service, due to higher risk.

- Spending money on a project which is at least two sub-projects (destruction of Ultimo Powerhouse Museum, creation of facility at Parramatta) with little to no benefit, especially when compared with other potential projects that could be done with those funds

Government says it's essential to create badly-needed construction jobs. However, construction of hospitals, schools, and public housing, and renovation of the existing Powerhouse Museum and buildings at the Fleet Street Heritage Precinct, would also create jobs without merely creating a lesser version of an existing institution.

[Museums in Sydney and NSW in general](#)

This comment relates to the general development and maintenance of museums in NSW, and to the overall vision for museums in NSW.

The City of Sydney is turning their old Haymarket Library into (if this author read it correctly) a museum of the history of the Chinese in Australia. So in addition to Sydney Modern, and the renovations of the Australian Museum, we now add a Chinese culture focused museum... all in the Sydney CBD, at the same time as the government is insisting that Western Sydney needs culture, so the Powerhouse Museum has got to go West.

It does not make sense that all these museums are being created/expanded/renovated in the city, including one targeted to a specific cultural background, and the Powerhouse Museum is being forced out.

For that matter, even the establishment of a museum focused on the history of the Chinese in Australia makes this author wonder if any coherent strategy exists for museums in NSW. Over the past several years, one alternative to moving the Powerhouse Museum that has been mentioned by some has been a museum of migration, hosted in the Fleet Street Heritage Precinct. At least some other states have a museum of migration, but NSW does not. It was once an initiative of MAAS years ago, and later spent some time at the Maritime Museum if the author recalls correctly, but no longer exists. If this museum existed, there would be less need for separate museums focused on individual migrant cultures. Instead, each common migrant culture, and the Indigenous cultures we've sadly displaced and marginalised as a result of colonisation, could have its own section or sections in the museum, with the emphasis on bringing people from different cultural backgrounds together and unifying them ("I am, you are, we are Australian," as the song goes) as a very worthwhile social side effect of the museum.

Yes, Kum-bay-a, and all that. But recent months have demonstrated that the world works best when most of us coordinate and work together toward a common goal.

With the population having grown considerably since the 1980s when the Powerhouse Museum opened in its then new home in Ultimo, the Sydney region – and the NSW regions – need more cultural facilities, not just redistributed cultural facilities. It's almost like the NSW government believes residents and museums work the same way they seem to think residents and trees work: in order to accommodate more of the former, you have to have less of the latter, or at least you have to move the latter from an politically inconvenient place you want to use to hold more residents, to a politically convenient place that might result in the trees or museums being less accessible to the greater community. And sure, the replanted trees or museums will be less impressive for the next 40 or 50 years, but if you're lucky, eventually they'll grow to become the equal of what they were intended to replace. If you're lucky.

[General comments on governance](#)

This author perceives that the current government has a consistent recent history of experiencing challenges in the area of large project governance.

Recent issues include:

- WestConnex, over budget by billions of dollars. So far.
- CBD and Southeast Light Rail, over budget by \$1.3B and counting (pending the results of a lawsuit from businesses and residents damaged by poor construction planning, management, and execution).
- Sydney Metro, over budget by \$3-4B depending on who you ask.
- Sydney Football Stadium, old stadium demolished before builder discovered they couldn't build the replacement for the cost that the state wanted to pay, resulting in a work stoppage whilst a new builder was sought.

NSW cannot afford this happening again, especially with the budget pressures created by the pandemic. And the arts & culture sector can't afford NSW getting halfway into the project, having shuttered and started ripping down the Ultimo facility, only to realise, "These costs aren't justifiable. We're going to have to cut back on what we deliver," resulting in Parramatta getting a shell of a function space with a few objects in it, but a full list of ways in which the expansive halls can be hired for corporate events, community activities, and so on, for the right price.

This author perceives that the best way to proceed is to cease work on this unnecessary white elephant vanity project immediately, and not spend another dollar on it. Instead, reserve some of those funds to help shore up the NSW budget, and use the rest to improve existing cultural facilities in Western Sydney and in the regions, and to enhance the existing Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo. Oh, and government should give Parramatta their pool without further delay. Spend a few dozen million and BUILD THEIR POOL. If it costs a few million more than you think you should pay for a replacement, please look at the list of billion dollar cost over-runs above, resist the urge to whinge, understand that it looks like a rounding error when compared to the government's usual scale of project cost over-runs, and BUILD THEIR POOL.

As in business, demonstrate that you can get the smaller things right, and your employer (that's the residents of NSW to you, elected officials) will trust you with more responsibility.

Respectfully submitted.