

INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC TOILETS

Organisation: City of Sydney

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Response to Inquiry into Public Toilets

Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service

Contents

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Introduction | 3 |
| 2. Background | 4 |
| 3. Response to Terms of Reference | 7 |
| 4. Recommendations | 9 |

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of Submission

This is the City of Sydney's (the City) submission to the NSW parliament's Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service Inquiry into public toilets (the Inquiry) .

It identifies recommendations or considerations for the Inquiry, based on the City's strategies, policies and action plans (see Section 2 of this document for more information).

1.2. Terms of Reference

That Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service inquire into and report on public toilets, and in particular:

- a) the provision, design, accessibility and inclusivity of public toilets across New South Wales, including toilets provided in public places and toilets provided for the use of members of the public in private premises accessed by the public;
- b) state, national and international best practice for the provision and maintenance of public toilets;
- c) the regulation of, and funding for, public toilets in New South Wales and whether new standards, guidelines, funding models, legislation or other forms of regulation are warranted;
- d) the employment arrangements and conditions of cleaners who clean public toilets in both public and private premises; and
- e) any other related matters.

This submission responds to these Terms of Reference (see Section 3 of this document for more information).

2. Background

2.1. Public Toilets in the City of Sydney Local Government Area

The City is committed to creating a liveable and sustainable city that provides a high quality of life for its residents, visitors and businesses.

Public toilets are essential facilities for all residents, workers and visitors to participate in community life. Convenient and accessible toilets enhance people's freedom to travel within the city. These facilities improve quality of life, mobility, and dignity for all people and particularly for people with disability or health problems, older people and people with young children.

The City's vision is for a:

“highly regarded, safe and accessible network of public toilets to meet the current and future needs of a world-class city.”

Planning for and provision of public toilets in the City of Sydney Local Government Area is guided by the City's:

1. Public Toilet Strategy
<https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/strategies-action-plans/public-toilet-strategy>
2. Inclusive and Accessible Public Domain Policy and Guidelines
<https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/policies/inclusive-and-accessible-public-domain-policy>
3. Inclusion (Disability) Action Plan
<https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/strategies-action-plans/inclusion-disability-action-plan>

The key objectives of these strategies are outlined below.

2.2. Public Toilet Strategy

The City's Public Toilet Strategy (the Strategy) was adopted by Council in 2014 and includes:

1. An overview of the network of public toilets across the LGA, including information on usage of facilities and community expectations (informed by survey of public toilet users and consultation with the community);
2. Guidelines for the design and management of public toilets, including guidance on temporary facilities for special events; and
3. Recommendations and actions for the planning, provision and management of public toilets by the City, State Government agencies, private sector.

The key objectives of the Strategy are:

Objective 1: Public Toilet Availability

Public toilet facilities will be well distributed, appropriately located and open at times that meet the needs of residents, workers and visitors.

The City aims to ensure that public toilets (provided by the City, Government Agencies and the private sector) are available within 400 metres of any point within central Sydney and at all village centres and major neighbourhood parks with play or sports facilities.

Objective 2: Inclusive access

Public toilets will be accessible to everyone, and well connected to pedestrian areas and public transport.

Objective 3: Safety

The location and orientation of public toilet facilities will meet best-practice principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).

Objective 4: Easy to find

The City's public toilet network will be well publicized and promoted through a wide variety of media to ensure toilets and information about the toilet network is accessible to the community.

Objective 5: Servicing and cleanliness

Maintenance and servicing standards will ensure that the City's public toilet network meets community expectations at all times.

Objective 6: Build quality and sustainability

The City's public toilets will be well-designed and built using robust, high quality, vandal-resistant materials and fixtures that reflect the character of their setting. They will incorporate best practice principles of Environmentally Sustainable Design and management.

2.3. Inclusive and Accessible Public Domain Policy + Guidelines

The City is committed to Sydney being an inclusive and accessible city for all, now and in the future.

The City seeks to meet its legislative obligations under the Disability Inclusion Act 2014 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and to create a truly inclusive City.

The City's Inclusive and Accessible Public Domain Policy (the Policy) and Inclusive and Accessible Public Domain Guidelines (the Guidelines) provide a consistent approach to accessibility and inclusion in the design of new outdoor places, spaces and infrastructure, and the management of outdoor spaces and infrastructure that the public enter or use and identify applicable standards and best practice approached and how and when they are to be applied by the City.

The Guidelines reference the Strategy and include Performance Standards for the design of new facilities and guidance on inclusive and accessible design. Key points noted in the Guidelines:

4. New public toilets will be designed to be accessible and inclusive of people of all ages, abilities and gender identities to make their journeys in the public domain with confidence, dignity, safety and independence;
5. They will be connected to a continuous accessible path of travel;
6. The City will maintain dignified access for all users by providing a range of both unisex and gender specific facilities across the network of public toilets. Where the City provides solely unisex facilities, the City will ensure that the design and configuration take privacy and dignified access into account; and
7. The City will provide a range of both left hand and right-hand transfer arrangements for accessible facilities across the network of public toilets.

NOTE: The City does not install the MLAK (Master Locksmith Association Key) system on accessible toilets. This is to ensure these facilities are available for use by all member of the community (including many visitors from overseas) during opening hours.

2.4. Inclusion (Disability) Action Plan 2021-2025

The City's Inclusion (Disability) Action Plan (the Plan) is the fifth Plan and was developed in consultation with people with disability, people with mental health conditions, carers, disability service providers and advocacy groups. The plan is part of our ongoing commitment to make our city truly inclusive. It includes strategies to ensure our services, programs and events are inclusive for everyone, including people with less visible disabilities.

This action plan focuses on 4 key directions to build a more inclusive and accessible city for everyone:

Direction 1: develop positive community attitudes and behaviours towards people with disability.

Direction 2: create more liveable communities for people with disability.

Direction 3: achieve a higher rate of meaningful employment participation by people with disability.

Direction 4: provide more equitable access to mainstream services for people with disability.

An inclusive and accessible public domain is the foundation of a liveable community. The City is responsible for the design, maintenance and management of public spaces within the City of Sydney local area and strives to ensure that these spaces are accessible and allow everyone equal opportunity to participate.

The City has delivered on actions which contribute to a more liveable community for people with disability, including the development of:

- Inclusive and accessible public domain policy and guidelines
- An online access map which provides information about key access features, such as accessible public toilets

The City continues to advocate to other government agencies and landowners to provide additional adult change facilities in the City of Sydney area..

3. Response to Terms of Reference

3.1. The provision, design, accessibility and inclusivity of public toilets across New South Wales, including toilets provided in public places and toilets provided for the use of members of the public in private premises accessed by the public

The City provides 50+ public toilets in the local government area. These include standalone public toilets in parks and the public domain, and toilets within community facilities.

The City's Public Toilet Strategy includes 'best practice' guidelines for the provision, design, management and maintenance of public toilets within the LGA.

The City's Public Toilet Strategy, Inclusion (Disability) Action Plan, and Inclusive and Accessible Public Domain Policy and Guidelines provide guidance to ensure public toilets are designed to be accessible and inclusive of people of all ages, abilities and gender identities.

The City is committed to maintain our current network of public toilets and supporting NSW Government agencies and the private sector to enhance the network of public toilets for the benefit of all community members.

3.2. State, national and international best practice for the provision and maintenance of public toilets

Refer above.

3.3. The regulation of, and funding for, public toilets in New South Wales and whether new standards, guidelines, funding models, legislation or other forms of regulation are warranted

Regulation

The design and construction of public toilets are required to comply with the National Construction Code (the NCC).

The NCC currently requires the provision of male and female facilities and the use of the term 'unisex' for accessible facilities.

In May 2024 the NCC opened consultation on suggested changes to enable the provision of all-gender sanitary facilities alongside male, female and accessible facilities.

The proposed changes included:

1. A voluntary Deemed-to-Satisfy pathway in Section F, F4 Sanitary and Other Facilities
2. Replacing and consistently using 'gender' instead of 'sex' and 'accessible' instead of 'unisex' throughout the NCC.

The proposed changes are not incorporated into the NCC 2025 Public Comment Draft (PCD) and the NCC has notified that they are running a separate consultation as the topic needs both technical and policy considerations.

The City strongly supports the proposed NCC changes and notes that the modernising and standardising the language and incorporating all-gender bathrooms into the NCC supports a more inclusive and equitable society and encourages the changes to be adopted as a priority.

Funding

The City provides funding through its Long-Term Financial Plan for the delivery of new public toilets and the maintenance or renewal of existing toilets in line with the objectives of Public Toilet Strategy 2014.

3.4. The employment arrangements and conditions of cleaners who clean public toilets in both public and private premises

The City's public toilets are serviced between two and seven times per day depending on location and frequency of use. In addition to their cleaning duties and restocking of consumables, service staff are responsible for reporting maintenance problems for repair.

The City's service providers operate a 24-hour call centre through which service faults and feedback can be reported.

The City regularly audits maintenance and servicing standards to ensure the public toilet network meets community expectations at all times.

The City has adopted a policy to identify, manage and minimise the risk of modern slavery in our operations and supply chains, including the cleaning of public toilets.

4. Recommendations

The City recommends that NSW Government:

1. Advocates for changes to the National Construction Code (related to the provision of 'All Gender' facilities) to be expedited;
2. Improves the availability and accessibility of public toilet facilities at rail stations and expands opening hours of public toilets under their control;
3. Explores opportunities for the provision of and access to public toilets on land / within buildings owned by all NSW Government agencies; and
4. Promotes the location of current public toilets through a variety of media, including signage and maps.

