

## 10.11.Supporting Local Businesses during Council Infrastructure Works

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| <b>ATTACHMENTS</b> | Nil  |
| <b>CSP LINK</b>    | 2. Our Built Infrastructure<br>2.2 Vibrant public domains and villages |

### **PURPOSE:**

This purpose of this report is to respond to a Council resolution of 12 November 2023 in relation to supporting local businesses during infrastructure works.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

- Council is continually investing in infrastructure to improve the amenity of the North Sydney Local Government Area, which has long-term benefits. However, it is acknowledged that Council work on public infrastructure can be disruptive.
- Impacts on businesses and the community are always considered in the development of Council's capital works program, however issues such as available resources, access to materials, grant conditions, inclement weather, traffic, contractual agreements, and utility shut-downs often dictate when these works can be undertaken.
- Council is increasing its use of technology to communicate more effectively with stakeholders. Council is also including requirements for contractors to include communication resources when tendering for capital works.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- 1. THAT** Council note the contents of this report.
- 2. THAT** Council note that a separate report will be provided to Council in relation to regarding the policy relating to outdoor dining fees during construction following the public exhibition of Council's draft Outdoor Dining Policy.

## Background

At its meeting of 12 November 2023, Council resolved:

- 1. THAT Council acknowledges that infrastructure works - while ultimately improving conditions for small, and large, businesses - usually cause temporary disruption.*
- 2. THAT Council prepare a report as to how infrastructure work programs can be improved to minimise disruption and loss of income to local businesses.*
- 3. THAT the report examine the timing of work, improving communication with property and business stakeholders, providing adequate notice of due works, improving hoardings, and any other relevant measures that can ameliorate disruption to business operations.*

This report responds to parts 2 and 3 of the resolution.

It should be noted that there is a separate but related Council resolution to create a policy relating to outdoor dining fees during public domain upgrade works. This will be the subject of a separate report to Council following the public exhibition of Council's draft Outdoor Dining Policy.

## Report

Council is continually investing in infrastructure to improve the amenity of the North Sydney Local Government Area (LGA) for residents and the broader community, which includes visitors and local businesses. In the 2023/24 financial year Council invested \$10.6m in capital works related to public domain upgrades, which represents approximately 23% of Council's total capital works budget.

Council is constantly receiving requests for public domain upgrades which are generally welcomed by operators of small businesses as they recognise that the investment by Council increases financial viability through improved access and improved amenity that generates appeal and increased foot-traffic. These infrastructure improvements also assist in attracting and retaining business in the LGA.

Despite these longer-term benefits, it is acknowledged that public domain improvements are disruptive and an inconvenience to the local community and businesses in the short term, which is, to some extent, unavoidable.

Council's Projects and Assets team is constantly looking to improve how it delivers infrastructure upgrades, including reducing impacts on local businesses.

## Programming

Programming of Council's capital works program, which includes infrastructure upgrades in the public domain, is typically completed in the last quarter of the prior financial year in conjunction with the finalisation of the Operational Plan and Budget. The development of the program considers available resources, peak periods, events, and community feedback.

Whilst the mitigation of impacts to the community and local businesses are always considered, other factors dictate and impact programming of projects e.g., resourcing, contractor availability, access to materials, grant conditions, inclement weather, traffic, contractual agreements, utility shut-downs, time restrictions, and reliance on other agencies' works. On occasions these factors are unknown at the initial planning stage or do not materialise until closer to the proposed commencement dates, requiring projects to be rescheduled at short notice.

Where public domain works are proposed in public areas which will affect businesses that utilise outdoor dining facilities, Council looks to schedule the construction works outside of summer peak trading periods, to enable businesses to take full advantage of outdoor dining within public spaces during their busiest and most profitable periods.

### Timing

In the lead-up to commencing construction, consideration is given to a combination of day and night works to minimise disruptions during regular trading hours, noting that night works have additional costs, and consideration needs to be given to impacts on adjacent residents. Council will also look to stage works to allow enable businesses to continue to trade, plan bookings, and receive deliveries during construction.

### Notification and Engagement

In addition to forum and committee meetings, Council uses direct mail-out and email notification. Visits to businesses and residents may also occur, depending on the nature of the project. Proposed works information is also provided on Council's website.

Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that Council's current works notification processes can be improved, and Council's projects team have recently commenced using additional notification processes including social media posts, group text messaging, and other technologies. Inclusion of QR codes on notification signs is also now being incorporated into larger projects to provide project information. A monthly e-newsletter, providing high-level updates on upcoming and completed projects is also being trialled.

Council's project team will look to initially engage with potentially impacted businesses in relation to public domain works proposed within an upcoming financial year following the approval of Council's budget in late June. The project team will then engage at tender with indicative timeframes and then with a detailed program following the engagement of a contractor at tender.

To ensure contractors improve in line with Council's expectations, tender criteria now include a requirement for contractors to identify and nominate a community liaison officer as part of their tender proposal. This role facilitates discussion between community groups, local business, and residents relating to constructions works and staging.

## Temporary Fencing

Temporary fencing systems usually used in Council's public domain are sometimes moved on a daily basis. This fencing, which is standard for this type of work in CBDs and town centres, is lightweight and can be adjusted more easily than semi-permanent solid construction hoardings. However, there may be situations where such hoardings can be considered.

The utilisation of noise blankets has recently been introduced. This assists in dampening some of the higher frequency sounds due to cutting or hammering activities

Unfortunately, the nature of public domain work is disruptive, however it is acknowledged that Council has an obligation to mitigate the impacts of these works on the community and local businesses as much as possible, and Council's projects teams will continue to look at improvements in this area.

### **Consultation requirements**

Community engagement is not required as part of this report.

### **Financial/Resource Implications**

There are no financial implications with the Council accepting the recommendations outlined within this report.