Resolution of Council

26 October 2026

Item 13.13

Public Toilets on George Street

Moved by Councillor Weldon, seconded by Councillor Ellsmore -

It is resolved that:

(A) Council note:

(i) George Street is the spine of our city centre. Since the light rail opened in December 2019 and the street was progressively pedestrianised between Bridge Street and Rawson Place, it has become the city's main pedestrian boulevard, carrying residents, workers, students, tourists and people doing it tough, day and night

(ii) along the roughly 3 kilometres of George Street between Circular Quay and Central Station, the City does not operate a single street-based, 24-hour public toilet. The City's only facilities on George Street are a 24-hour toilet beneath the Harbour Bridge approach at the far northern end of the street in The Rocks, and the standard toilets inside Town Hall House, which are only available while that building is open

(iii) the City's nearest 24-hour automatic public toilets to George Street are on York Street (at Wynyard Park and at Lang Park), at Castlereagh and Park Streets, and at Belmore Park on Hay Street. A further automatic public toilet is planned at Quay Street at George Street, Haymarket, but is not yet open

(iv) between Circular Quay and Central Station, the public is otherwise reliant on toilets inside railway stations, shopping centres and hospitality venues. These are controlled by others, closed at night, are often conditional on being a customer, and are frequently not welcoming to people who are visibly homeless

(v) the City's Public Toilet Strategy, adopted by Council on 8 April 2014:

(a) sets a service standard that a public toilet should be available within 400 metres, or a 5 to 10 minute walk, of any point within central Sydney

(b) records that since 2011 all of the City's street-based automatic public toilets have operated 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and abolished the fees to use them so that they are free

(c) identifies homelessness as one of the social conditions that increase demand for public toilets, alongside late-night activity in the CBD and entertainment precincts

(d) recommended new facilities along the George Street light rail corridor, and inclusive access toilets available to the public at Town Hall House on Kent Street

(e) is now more than 12 years old. It was written before the light rail was built, before the pedestrianisation of George Street, before the 24-hour economy reforms, and before the Sydney Metro city stations opened in 2024

(vi) in its April 2025 submission to the NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into Public Toilets, the City advised that it manages more than 50 public toilets across the local government area. The Inquiry tabled its report on 16 October 2025 with 22 recommendations, finding that public toilets are "an essential component of urban infrastructure, playing a crucial role in fostering community participation and ensuring public health and hygiene"

(vii) on 17 March 2025, Council resolved to request a report on expanding 24/7 public toilets near Special Entertainment Precincts, with a focus on Oxford Street, King Street Newtown, Darling Harbour and late-night transport hubs. George Street and the Town Hall precinct were not specifically addressed in that resolution

(B) Council further note:

(i) the City's February 2026 street count found 296 people sleeping rough in our local area, with a further 348 people in crisis and temporary accommodation. While this is a reduction from 346 people in February 2025, the number of people sleeping rough across New South Wales rose 5 per cent in the same period to 2,308, and anyone who walks George Street at night knows that people are sleeping in doorways, under awnings and along the light rail corridor

(ii) people sleeping rough in the city centre have nowhere to go to the toilet, wash their hands or attend to basic hygiene with dignity. This is not a matter of comfort. It is a matter of health, dignity and basic human rights

(iii) the same gap affects women, young people and others who find themselves on the street at night because they are escaping violence or an unsafe situation, and who cannot walk into a licensed venue or wait for a shopping centre to open

(iv) recently, a person was observed urinating on the stairs that connect Sydney Town Hall to the Queen Victoria Building, in daylight, within metres of this Chamber. This is not a question of behaviour. It is what happens when a city provides no alternative

(v) the absence of toilets also carries a cost to the City in cleansing footpaths, laneways and building entrances, affects the amenity of businesses and residents along George Street, and undermines the welcome we extend to the millions of visitors who come to our city each year

(vi) a free, clean and accessible public toilet is one of the most basic things a city can offer. The City has a responsibility to provide an amenity that every visitor, worker and resident of this city can use, and that is equally available to the people who have nowhere else to go

(C) Council further note:

(i) the City follows the NSW Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places, which provides that people experiencing homelessness have the same rights as any member of the public to be in public places, and that they should be treated respectfully, with dignity and without discrimination

(ii) the City's social sustainability policy, A City for All 2018-2028, is founded on the principle that "Sydney is a safe and accessible city for people of all ages and abilities", and the City's Homelessness Action Plan commits the City to supporting people sleeping rough in our area

(D) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to:

(i) investigate and report to Council on options for new free, inclusive, 24-hour public toilets along George Street between Circular Quay and Central Station, so that the 400-metre service standard in the Public Toilet Strategy is met along the full length of the street

(ii) as part of that investigation, give priority to the Town Hall precinct, including Sydney Town Hall, Town Hall House, Town Hall Square and the stairs and walkways connecting Town Hall to the Queen Victoria Building, and to the delivery timeframe for the planned automatic public toilet at Quay Street at George Street

(iii) engage with Transport for NSW, Sydney Metro and the owners and managers of major buildings along George Street, including the Queen Victoria Building, on extending public access to existing toilets and on co-locating facilities with light rail and metro stops

(iv) engage with the City's Homelessness and Safe City Units, homelessness and domestic violence services and people with lived experience of rough sleeping on the location, design and operation of new facilities, including provision for handwashing, drinking water, lighting, safety and sanitary disposal, so that facilities are safe and genuinely usable by people sleeping rough and people escaping unsafe situations

(v) identify interim measures, including temporary or pop-up facilities, that could be delivered on George Street ahead of permanent facilities

(vi) consider, as part of this work, whether the 2014 Public Toilet Strategy should be reviewed and updated to reflect the changed city centre, the recommendations of the NSW Inquiry into Public Toilets and the needs of people experiencing homelessness

(vii) report back to Council on the findings, indicative costs and a proposed timeline.

Carried unanimously.

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