

Public Exhibition - Amended Busking and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Practice Policy and Sydney Busking Code

File No: X130950

Summary

In our local area, the rules regarding busking in public places are outlined in the Busking and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Practice Policy (the Policy) and the Sydney Busking Code (the Code).

On 17 November 2025, Council resolved to undertake an urgent review of the Policy and Code. The resolution requested City staff: consult with the busking community regarding recent changes to the Policy and Code; investigate increasing the number of safe busking sites on George Street; and consult with Transdev - who operate the light rail on George Street - on the safety implications of any proposed changes.

Online and in-person consultation with buskers took place throughout December 2025 and January 2026, providing buskers with the opportunity to suggest new sites and changed arrangements. An Engagement Report, summarising the feedback received from buskers during the review, is included at Attachment A.

In addition, City staff met with Placemaking NSW regarding their management of busking in Barangaroo, The Rocks and Circular Quay, and requested a written submission from Transdev, operator of the light rail.

These engagement activities have informed proposed amendments to the Policy and Code, which are outlined in this report, including the rationale for the amendments, along with some further actions to support busking. The key changes can be summarised as follows:

- Simplification of language
- Removal of amplification as a criterion for a high impact act
- Reinstatement of 2 busking pitches in Pitt St Mall for low impact acts
- Busking is permitted on George Street except for 3 locations which have caused safety concerns or amenity impacts for residents
- Reinstatement of the 2-hour duration for busking on George Street for low impact acts
- Inclusion of safety guidance for busking around light rail so that buskers can set up their pitches safely.

This report recommends the amended draft Local Approvals Policy for Busking and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Practice, and an amended Sydney Busking Code, be placed on public exhibition for feedback from all interested persons - including buskers, businesses, residents, key stakeholders such as Transdev, the RSL and precinct associations, and the general community - for a period of 42 days.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council note the feedback received from buskers during the review, outlined in the Engagement Report, as shown at Attachment A to the subject report;
- (B) Council approve for public exhibition the draft amended Busking and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Practice Policy (the Policy), as shown at Attachment B to the subject report;
- (C) Council approve for public exhibition the amended Sydney Busking Code (the Code), as shown at Attachment C to the subject report, a guidance document to be published alongside the Policy;
- (D) Council note that any recommended changes to either the Policy or the Code will be reported to Council for consideration following the exhibition period; and
- (E) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to undertake minor editorial corrections prior to the exhibition of the draft amended Policy and Code.

Attachments

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| Attachment A. | Engagement Report - Busking Policy and Code Review - Targeted Engagement with Busking Community |
| Attachment B. | Draft Busking and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Practice Policy (amended) |
| Attachment C. | Sydney Busking Code (amended) |

Background

1. On 23 June 2025, Council approved the public exhibition of a draft Local Approvals Policy for Busking and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Practice (the Policy), alongside an updated Sydney Busking Code (the Code).
2. The Policy was placed on public exhibition for 42 days from 24 June to 5 August 2025.
3. The Policy included some amended rules related to busking in our local area, and the Sydney Busking Code included a new approach to managing busking on George Street and Pitt Street Mall.
4. A very small amount of feedback was received during the public exhibition period, and following public exhibition, the Council adopted the Policy and Code on 25 August 2025.
5. As noted in a resolution of Council on 17 November 2025 "Support for Busking in the City of Sydney", the recently adopted Policy and Code impose restrictions including:
 - (a) a reduction from 2 pitches to one pitch in Pitt Street Mall for both low and high impact acts
 - (b) the classification of any act using amplification as high impact and reducing performance time to a maximum of one hour
 - (c) limiting busking to just 6 locations along George Street, prohibiting busking in many popular and long-standing pitches
 - (d) reducing performance time for low impact acts on George Street to a maximum of one hour
6. When these changes were implemented in October 2025, several buskers took to social media to voice concerns about the impacts of the changes. Of particular concern was the reduction of busking sites on George Street. Correspondence received from buskers suggested that many were unaware of the proposed changes that were exhibited in June, July and August.
7. On 17 November 2025, Council resolved to undertake an urgent review of the Policy and Code. The resolution requested City staff: consult with the busking community regarding recent changes to the Policy and Code; investigate increasing the number of safe busking sites on George Street; and consult with Transdev - who operate the light rail on George Street - on the safety implications of any proposed changes.

Consultation

8. Targeted engagement activities with the busking community were undertaken throughout December 2025 and January 2026.
9. Invitations to participate in this consultation were emailed to 476 registered buskers, messages were sent to all buskers who had previously communicated with the City through social media channels, and flyers were distributed directly to buskers in Pitt Street Mall, Hyde Park, Circular Quay, Martin Place and George Street.

10. Buskers were invited to complete an online survey, provide one-to-one feedback with Council staff, or attend a drop-in session at Town Hall House on 8 December 2025.
11. A total of 134 pieces of feedback were received from buskers, including:
 - (a) 101 comments received by 15 people who attended the drop-in session at Town Hall House
 - (b) one face-to-face meeting
 - (c) 31 survey responses
 - (d) one written submission
12. Buskers were asked what they think is working well about busking in Sydney, what is not working well, where they like to busk, and where they think the most suitable locations for busking are, particularly in George Street and Pitt Street Mall. Further feedback around safety, the experience of busking and the Policy in general was also sought.
13. Feedback on the safety implications of busking adjacent to light rail tracks on George Street was requested from Transdev who provided a written submission (making a total of 135 pieces of feedback received during the consultation period).

Insights

14. The busking community indicated a strong desire to be included in making changes to the busking policy and code. They requested clearer communications to ensure buskers properly understood policy review processes and how they may be impacted by any proposed changes.
15. The previous busking policy and code (in place prior to August 2025) was working well and many buskers considered it to strike the right balance between enabling self-managed busking and minimising impacts on public spaces and neighbouring businesses or residents. Many buskers suggested the previous policy and code be reinstated.
16. Buskers feel that busking on George Street was working well without defined pitches, allowing for flexibility and for buskers to respond to the conditions on the day, such as rain, protestors, preachers, and rough sleepers. Buskers appreciated how the previous policy allowed them to use their discretion to determine the best location to busk at any given time.
17. Buskers noted that safety on George Street alongside the light rail is important. Guidance was sought on how buskers can set up their act safely in these areas.
18. Pitt Street Mall continues to be a very popular and important location for busking. Here, buskers do see the need for specifically determined busking pitches and a one-hour time limit to maximise shared access to these pitches. However, buskers feel that a return to 2 pitches for musical acts is needed.
19. Buskers who use Pitt Street Mall noted a need to better manage disruptions to busking, such as protestors, preachers, dance groups performing without permits, retail activations and Christmas carols.

20. Some buskers requested more advocacy and support, including a dedicated busking liaison officer at the City and facilitation of busking in festivals and events produced or funded by the City (such as Vivid Sydney or Sydney New Years Eve).

Proposed amendments to the Policy.

21. Informed by the consultation, the following amendments are recommended and marked up in the draft Policy shown at Attachment B.
- (a) Removal of the use of amplification as a criterion for a High Impact permit.
 - (b) Inclusion of PASS accreditation (Peer Assessment for Street Safety) from Street Performance Australia as criteria for receiving a High Impact permit without attending an act assessment.
 - (c) Removal of clauses 14.2 and 14.3 that prohibit busking on George Street or within 5m of traffic intersections, pedestrian crossings and light rail tracks.
 - (d) For clarity, an addition to clause 14.7 noting that a busking site must not be established where the act or their audience is likely to hinder access to a pedestrian crossing or to public transport (including light rail).
 - (e) For clarity, a change to clause 15.3 to note that busking is only permitted within event sites (such as Vivid Sydney or Sydney New Years Eve) in accordance with conditions provided by the City or the event owner, and that those conditions may be different from the standard conditions for a busking permit, and they supersede standard conditions.

Proposed amendments to the Sydney Busking Code

22. Informed by the consultation, the following amendments have been made to the Sydney Busking Code shown at Attachment C.
- (a) Simplified language throughout.
 - (b) Removal of the use of amplification as a criterion for a High Impact permit.
 - (c) Amended conditions for Pitt Street Mall:
 - (i) There are 3 pitches in Pitt Street Mall.
 - (ii) A Central pitch (outside MidCity entry), for Extended Duration acts only.
 - (iii) North (near King Street) and South (near Market Street) pitches, for Low Impact acts only. Buskers may perform at these pitches for one hour only.
 - (iv) All pitches are allocated on a first-in basis.

- (v) Buskers may perform at only one pitch once per day and not the same pitch on consecutive days.

Reason: the reason for these amendments is to return 2 pitches to Pitt Street Mall for musical acts, while balancing concerns expressed by neighbouring businesses about repeatedly hearing the same acts every day.

- (d) Amended conditions for Martin Place:

- (i) No busking is permitted in Martin Place between Pitt Street and Castlereagh Street.

Reason: previously there was only one pitch available along the whole of Martin Place in a location not favoured by buskers. The amended conditions will increase busking opportunities, while avoiding conflicts with busy outdoor dining, event and retail activation locations in the section of Martin Place between Pitt and Castlereagh Streets.

- (e) Amended conditions in George Street:

- (i) Busking is permitted on George Street in accordance with the criteria for establishing a busking pitch in the Policy and the conditions of a busker's permit (that is, standard Low Impact and High Impact conditions apply).

- (ii) There are 3 locations on George Street where busking is not permitted. These locations are:

- a. the intersection of George Street and Hay Street, within 50m of all corners of the intersection

Reason: this busy light rail intersection has limited space for pedestrians and high levels of background noise which can urge buskers to perform at very high volumes. Busking here impacts pedestrians' capacity to see, hear and navigate around trams. Busking is better suited to nearby Dixon Street Mall, Thomas Street and the intersection of Barlow and George Streets.

- b. either side of George Street between Goulburn Street and Liverpool Street

Reason: busking here impacts residential apartments above World Square. The City has received a number of complaints about busking in this location over a sustained period of time. There is ample opportunity for busking on adjacent blocks.

- c. the southwestern corner of the intersection of George Street and Bathurst Street (outside KFC)

Reason: feedback received from Transdev notes records of near misses with trams in this location related to busking activity. Busking in this location impedes pedestrian flow and encourages people into the path of trams. Musical busking acts make it harder to hear tram warning sounds. A number of complaints about busking have been received from residents overlooking this intersection. Buskers are encouraged to use the popular busking areas outside St Andrews, Town Hall, Woolworths or QVB instead.

- (f) Inclusion of safety guidance for busking around light rail.

Further actions to support busking

- 23. The City is developing an online resource for busking. Specifically designed for use on mobile devices, the resource will provide an interactive digital version of the Sydney Busking Code, further information about obtaining and renewing permits, real-time updates regarding impacts to busking locations, and an easy way for buskers to contact the City and provide feedback about busking. This online resource will be trialled post-exhibition, and will incorporate any updates to the Policy and the Busking Code adopted by Council post-exhibition.
- 24. The City is working with Placemaking NSW who manage busking at Barangaroo, The Rocks and Circular Quay, to better align busking programs and to provide a single source of information relating to busking across the 2 jurisdictions.
- 25. The City employs a busking coordinator and will continue to provide support for buskers on new arrangements.
- 26. The City will continue to facilitate opportunities for buskers to participate in festivals and events in Sydney.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

- 27. Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision renews the communities' vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2050. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the city, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This policy is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 3 - Public places for all - busking makes a notable contribution to a vibrant city centre, and bustling retail centres. Busking helps contribute to the human experience of visiting the city centre to shop, socialise and be entertained. By enabling Cultural Practice across our local area, we increase our communities' connections to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and heritage in our public places.
 - (b) Direction 8 - A thriving cultural life - busking is an important part of the music ecosystem, providing professional development and economic opportunities for musicians.

Organisational Impact

28. The Policy review has recommended no changes to how the management of busking is currently resourced.
29. The proposed actions to further support busking can be implemented within current resources.

Risks

30. The Policy review has recommended increasing the number of locations for busking in George Street, Pitt Street Mall and Martin Place. These risks are assessed in balance with the considerable benefits that busking activities generate for the city. The Policy and the Sydney Busking Code are designed to manage those risks.
31. Guidance for busking safely around the light rail has been included in the Sydney Busking Code to help manage the risk of additional busking activity adjacent light rail operations.
32. This approach is within the City's risk appetite which states:
 - (a) We are committed to conducting our activities in full compliance with applicable laws, regulations and relevant industry standards.
 - (b) We have a cautious to open appetite for our strategic, community development, urban planning and creative functions and services.
 - (c) We acknowledge that achieving a risk-free environment is not feasible, especially in the public domain. We therefore aim to minimise health, safety and wellbeing risks within our organisation and in the public domain as far as reasonably practicable and in keeping with our legal obligations.

Social / Cultural / Community

33. A comprehensive review of the City's approach to busking was recommended in an action in the City's Live Music and Performance Action Plan, 2014. This action initiated the comprehensive review undertaken in 2017 and 2018 which put in place a self-managed system for busking, governed by former iterations of the Policy. The Policy has opened up most public locations in our local area to busking and dramatically increased busking opportunities in Sydney for 8 years.
34. This Policy review and consultation with the busking community was an urgent response to community feedback and advocacy received on behalf of buskers. The City has undertaken this consultation to ensure that those who are affected by the Policy are aware of proposed changes and have been given fair opportunity to provide feedback and inform policy outcomes.

Financial Implications

35. The Policy review recommends no changes to the currently budgeted resources for managing busking.
36. Public exhibition of the draft policy and associated community consultation is accounted for within the existing operational budget.

Relevant Legislation

- 37. Local Government Act 1993.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

- 38. If approved, the Policy will be placed on public exhibition for 42 days in accordance with the requirements in the Act. Feedback will be reviewed and any recommended amendments will be reported to Council for adoption prior to June 2026.

Public Consultation

- 39. This Policy review is informed by targeted consultation with the busking community and a written submission provided by Transdev, the light rail operator.
- 40. If approved, the draft policy will be placed on public exhibition for 42 days.
- 41. Consultation will include surveys, written submissions and an online forum with City staff. People who made submissions to the previous policy review in June 2025 will be notified and provided with an opportunity to provide further feedback. An information session will be organised for buskers.

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