

Amanda Harvey
Executive Director Metro East and South
NSW Department of Planning and Environment
4 Parramatta Square
12 Darcy Street, Parramatta NSW 2150

Dear Amanda,

Central State Significant Precinct rezoning proposal | UTS Submission

We write in relation to the above and thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

The NSW Government, and TfNSW in particular, should be commended for the significant work to date in developing the vision for the Central Station precinct.

As a major landowner, key precinct partner, and anchor institution within Tech Central, UTS thanks the Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) for the opportunity to comment on the rezoning proposal.

This submission builds on the earlier submissions made by UTS, in particular relating to the Strategic Vision for the Central Precinct and Western Gateway rezoning, and UTS's contributions to, and engagement in, a number of precinct-related taskforces and committees since 2017.

UTS is a strong advocate and supporter for the renewal of the Central Station precinct, however, cautions against expediting the proposal at the expense of getting the fundamentals that will set the precinct up for success right.

Executive Summary

- UTS commends TfNSW on the considerable good work and thinking that has gone into the rezoning proposal.
- UTS supports the strategic expansion of Central Sydney south and the latent opportunities that the Central Station precinct can provide to ensure the ongoing global competitiveness of Tech Central and the Sydney CBD.
- For the City to thrive and meet future needs driven by new areas of research, technology and work practices it is critical that the planning framework created for the Central Precinct takes a different and innovative approach that doesn't lock in decisions now that would diminish and prevent its success. UTS is concerned that the current proposal and approach to Central is too short sighted and focussed on short-term physical and financial goals, which will undermine the full potential and long-term economic, social, community and environmental benefits.
- UTS has serious concerns around the future pedestrian capacity of the precinct and issues of safety for students. We note that detailed pedestrian modelling has not been included within the exhibition material and is planned to be finalised and included at a later date. Given the critical importance of this work, UTS recommends that the rezoning process is paused until such time as this work is completed and clearly understood. UTS requests an opportunity to review the modelling work once completed and may engage a specialist technical consultant to peer review this work.

Strategic Growth Direction of Central Sydney

UTS strongly supports plans for renewal of the Central Station precinct, in particular acknowledging the natural constraints to expanding the CBD and the need to focus planning and investment along the Central to Eveleigh Corridor.

What needs to not be lost on the redevelopment opportunity is the crucial role that the Central Precinct plays as part of the NSW's government anointed Tech Central precinct. This context needs to filter through and be applied across all aspects of the rezoning proposal. UTS is concerned that the current approach and plans for the precinct are taking the form and model of a development project more akin to "business as usual" and not future focussed enough to cater for the businesses and industries of the future.

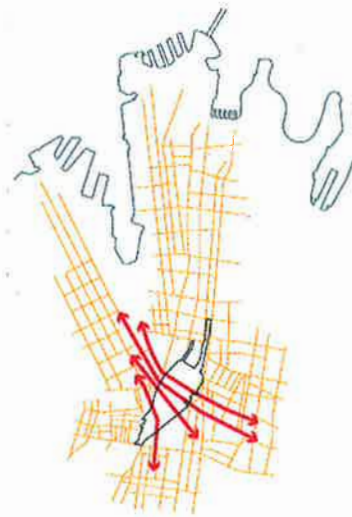
Pedestrian Connectivity and Movement

UTS supports the "five big moves" included within the Place Strategy, in particular reconnecting (east-west) and stitching the precinct into the fabric of the City.

What is apparent from the exhibition material is the limited focus and detail on the peripheral surrounding areas and the necessary upgrades and improvements that will need to occur in order to support and deliver on the big moves. The solutions and details need to be clearly articulated, along with arrangements for funding and delivery, upfront before the rezoning is finalised. Without this certainty it risks undermining the vision and success of the precinct.

There is also limited consideration of future increases in people movement associated with future development located on the western side the precinct, such as Powerhouse Museum, UTS plans for the redevelopment of its Haymarket Site 5, and other development to be facilitated and unlocked through the City of Sydney's Central Sydney Planning Strategy.

The staged delivery of crucial east-west pedestrian connections will have a significant impact, requiring students to undertake indirect and circular movements in order to access UTS. The early delivery of Central Walk in its entirety from Surry Hills to Haymarket is critical in this regard.



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Reconnect east-west and stitch into the fabric of the city

Western Gateway

While UTS is generally supportive of the first stage of the Central Precinct, there is concern around it being delivered in an ad-hoc way and without the necessary investment in improved supporting infrastructure – e.g. upgraded Lee Street Tunnel, new/upgraded pedestrian connections such as Central Walk West. The general rhetoric within each of the three projects is to defer any meaningful and positive impactful upgrades and impacts to later undefined stages.

Future Focus of Workspace

It is crucial that the traditional lens of CBD commercial office development is not applied to the Central Station Precinct, and that the spaces being created aren't out of reach for tech and innovation businesses and industries of the future. Ultimate flexibility will be key to ensuring the workplaces of future tech users are able to be accommodated and provisioned for.

A review of the proposed number of buildings, separation, height, floor plate size, floor to floor heights etc is recommended. It is critical that the right foundations for future tech and innovation workplaces are controlled from start. There needs to be a clear move away from just trying to maximise density, which will have the potential to undermine the exact types of tenants in the future that you will want to attract.

Affordable Workspace

UTS recommends there are clear mechanisms embedded into the future planning framework to support start-ups and industries of the future. A proportion of the overall commercial office floor space should be subsidised and offered at below typical CBD market rates.

Affordable Housing

The commitment for the Central Precinct to require a minimum of 15% of residential floor space to be provided as affordable housing is supported.

UTS however opposes the approach of only securing monetary contributions and for these monies to be used to provide affordable housing in other parts of Sydney. Given the context of the precinct and exceptional locational advantages, it is considered essential that on-site provision of affordable housing is provided.

UTS also supports the consideration of a further 15% of residential floor space to be used for diverse housing such as key worker, seniors, and co-living.

Land Use

The primacy of employment uses embedded within the rezoning documentation is supported, including the proposed mechanism of imposing a cap on residential development. UTS would suggest though that the cap should exclude diverse forms of housing – in particular student accommodation.

Holistic Consideration of Impacts

In reviewing the technical supporting documentation there is a common theme around trying to compare and isolate impacts associated with the rezoning and that of the existing and future Central Station precinct. In our view there needs to be a holistic consideration and assessment of the project and its setting, and the approach of justifying impacts as "negligible" when compared to the existing/future situation should be avoided.

Approach to Open Space and Public Domain

While supportive of the overall aspirations to increasing public open space, expanding the green grid, increasing canopy cover, reducing heat island affect, etc it is considered that the amount of open space is not proportional to the proposed new population and workers nor the volume of future visitors and commuters to the precinct.

As UTS and the broader community has found through its experiences with COVID-19, the value and appreciation of open space and open learning has exploded, with people wanting to spend more time and do more activities outdoors. Without direct investment and provision, the current approach is likely to see significant demand and additional use of the existing open spaces surrounding the precinct. These surrounding areas will therefore also need to be considered to ensure they are suitable and equipped to handle future expected demand.

Goods Line Extension

UTS has been a long-time advocate for the extension of the Goods Line, acknowledging that its current termination is unsatisfactory and leaves much to be desired in terms of legibility of the connection and the overall pedestrian experience.

UTS very much welcomed and strongly supports the commitment made to extend the Goods Line to Mortuary Station. This connection would complete a continuous public domain link from Darling Harbour, would provide a critical connection from Ultimo through to Redfern and Surry Hills, and would vastly improve the pedestrian experience of arriving at Central Station from the existing Goods Line.

Clear details around the funding, delivery and timing for the extension of the Goods Line is requested to be included as part of any finalisation of the rezoning.

Infrastructure & Contributions

Concern is raised around the lack of detail and certainty on the scope, timing and responsibility for the delivery of the necessary infrastructure to support the precinct, both within and surrounding the precinct. There is clear acknowledgement within the rezoning documentation that the surrounding pedestrian crossings and footpaths will need to be improved and upgraded in order to mitigate safety and capacity issues.

UTS would support the creation and implementation of a local infrastructure contributions regime, enabling the collection of contributions by the City of Sydney that are able to then be deployed around the precinct.

Conclusion

UTS thanks DPE for the opportunity to comment on the rezoning proposal for the Central Precinct. UTS congratulates DPE and Transport for NSW on the considerable work undertaken to date and welcomes continued engagement to ensure the collective aspiration and vision for the precinct is realised.

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Director, Property

University of Technology Sydney