

HERITAGE IMPACT STATEMENT



Alterations to Signage

Circular Quay Viaduct, George Street, The Rocks

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preamble

This Heritage Impact Statement (HIS) has been prepared in conjunction with an application to alter the existing advertising signage on the Circular Quay Railway Viaduct, at George Street, The Rocks, New South Wales.

The Circular Quay Railway Viaduct is owned by, and is listed as a heritage item on the s170 Register of the Transport Asset Holding Entity. The viaduct is also listed on the State Heritage Register as part of the listing for the Circular Quay Railway Station Group. The viaduct is located within the immediate vicinity of heritage items and conservation areas listed on the s170 Register of Property NSW and on Schedule 5 of the *City of Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012 (City of Sydney LEP 2012)*.

The section of viaduct part of this proposal is located within an area managed by Property NSW (formerly managed by the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority).

1.2 Authorship

This statement has been prepared by Peter Duggan, B.Sc.(Arch), B.Arch(Hons), M.Herit.Cons., and James Phillips, B.Sc.(Arch), B.Arch, M.Herit.Cons.(Hons), of Weir Phillips Heritage and Planning.

1.3 Limitations

No historical archaeological work was carried out on the site. A detailed history was not provided for. The brief history contained in this statement was compiled from the resources identified in Section 1.6.

1.4 Methodology

This statement was prepared with reference to the NSW Heritage Office's (now Heritage NSW) *Statements of Heritage Impact* (2002 update) and with reference to the Council documents listed in Section 1.6.

1.5 Physical Evidence

An inspection of the property and the surrounding streetscape took place in November 2021. Unless otherwise indicated, the photographs contained within this report were taken at this time.

1.6 Documentary Evidence

1.6.1 General References

- Ashton, Paul and Waterson, Duncan, *Sydney Takes Shape*, Brisbane Hema Maps Pty Ltd, 2000.
- Attenbrow, Val, *Sydney's Aboriginal Past: investigating the archaeological and historical records*, NSW, University of New South Press Ltd, 2002.
- Australian Historical Railway Society, 'Sydney's Railways' in Don Fraser (ed)., *Sydney: From Settlement to City*, NSW, Engineering Heritage Committee, Sydney Division, the Institution of Engineers, Australia, 1989.

1.6.2 Planning Documents

- *City of Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012*.

- *NSW Government Department of Planning Transport Corridor Outdoor Advertising and Signage Guidelines*, November 2017.
- *State Environmental Planning Policy No. 64 (Advertising and Signage)*.

1.6.3 Historic Plans and Photographs

- *(A Bustling Circular Quay)*, c.1900. State Library of New South Wales, GPO 2 – 52156.
- *Cahill Expressway Overhead/Railway Bridge*, 1961. City of Sydney Archives, NSCA CRS 48/1513.
- Carmichael, John, *(George Street, near the Wharf)*, 1829. State Library of New South Wales, DL Q82/19.

1.7 Site Location

The site of the proposed signage is the southern side of the Circular Quay Viaduct, at the point where it crosses over George Street, The Rocks (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The location of the subject site (indicated by the red arrow). WhereIS.

2.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1 The Site

Prior to the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788, the area now part of the City of Sydney lay within **Cadi Country**, home of a coastal Dharug speaking people known as the Cadigal. Archaeological evidence suggests that patterns of life in the Sydney region changed little in the period before 1788. Bands moved within their territory at the prompting of seasons and with the availability of food. A coastal sea diet of fish and shellfish was supplemented by terrestrial food sources, such as edible tubers, figs and apple berries. A wide variety of materials were used in the production of tools and artefacts. Among the aboriginal names recorded for local landmarks were the original names for Sydney Cove, being *War-ran*, and for the western side of Sydney Cove (The Rocks), being *Talla-wo-la-dah*.¹

¹ There are a variety of spellings recorded for Sydney Cove, including *Warran*, *Weerong*, *Warrane* and *Warrang*. See Val Attenbrow, *Sydney's Aboriginal Past: investigating the archaeological and historical records*, NSW, University of New South Press Ltd, 2002, p.11.

The Cadigal felt the full impact of the European invasion of 1788. Imported diseases, to which they had no immunity, decimated the people; conflict followed from the meeting of two fundamentally different cultures. Traditional lifestyle was further disrupted by the loss of lands and exposure to new technologies. Within forty years the pre-colonial way of life had all but disappeared from the Sydney region.

Governor Phillip was concerned with the laying out of an organised township from the very beginning of settlement. His plans for the township, and those of his successors, were frequently circumvented by the influence and power of landowners. The exact line of the 'Main Street' of the township, later **George Street**, as shown by late eighteenth and early nineteenth century plans varies. It has been suggested that the line of the street evolved, as opposed to being planned, out of a pathway taken by people carrying water to the early convict huts from the Tank Street.²

Before 1810, George Street was known as 'Sergeant Major Row', 'Spring Row' or 'High Street.' Governor Macquarie changed the name of the street in 1810, in honour of King George III. Macquarie renamed a number of Sydney streets at this time for other members of the Royal family, including York, Cumberland, Sussex, Clarence and Kent Streets.

The settlement that grew on the western side of Circular Quay was known as The Rocks from an early date, a reflection of the topography on which it was built. The area surrounding the northern end of George Street has continuously evolved over time. Not surprising, maritime related industries dominated the northern end of the street throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The shape of Sydney Cove underwent dramatic alteration following the implementation of the Semi-Circular Quay works in the late 1830s, then among the largest foreshore reclamation projects in the world. It was around this time that the name Circular Quay came into use. The Quay took on a more formalised appearance with the construction of a number of substantial buildings over ensuing years (Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 2: John Carmichael, (*George Street, near the Wharf*), 1829.
State Library of New South Wales, DL Q82/19.

² Refer to information and maps in Paul Ashton and Duncan Waterson, *Sydney Takes Shape*, Brisbane Hema Maps Pty Ltd, 2000.



Figure 3: (A Bustling Circular Quay), c.1900.
State Library of New South Wales, GPO 2 – 52156.

The **Circular Quay Railway Viaduct** was constructed as part of a second major government works programme in Sydney Cove begun over one hundred years after the above reclamation works.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, John Whitton, Chief Engineer of New South Wales Railways from 1856 to 1890, advocated the construction of a railway terminus at Circular Quay without success. A number of proposals to extend the railway system from Central Station into the city centre were put forward after 1900. In 1909, a report prepared by a City Royal Commission raised the idea of a city loop line, incorporating a station at Circular Quay. In 1911, J.J.C. Bradfield put forward plans for a high level bridge across Sydney Harbour, which incorporated the construction of a city loop line. Three years later, Bradfield was appointed Chief Engineer, Metropolitan Railway Construction, and embarked on an overseas tour to familiarise himself with the latest developments in railway design and construction. Part of his report relating his findings to the Government in February 1915 recommended that the proposed city line be in the form of a double track loop (electrified), which would diverge at Redfern from the approaches to the then new Sydney Terminus, pass adjacent to and at the same level to this station, then go underground to Town Hall and Wynyard Square, be above ground at Circular Quay, then return underground via St. James and Liverpool Street to Central.³ Bradfield also recommended that a number of branch lines be constructed from the city and it was Bradfield who nominated the site on which Circular Quay Station was later built.

The legislation enabling Bradfield's ambitious scheme was passed in 1915; work on the city railway extension began in 1918. The first section of the line, from St. James Station to Central Station, opened in December 1926. The section from Central via Town Hall and Wynyard was opened along with Sydney Harbour Bridge in February 1932. The construction of the Harbour Bridge and the Great Depression, followed by World War II, diverted funds away from the completion of the city loop line. In 1936, the Circular Quay Planning Committee had recommended a design for a substantial sandstone station for the Quay. While nothing came of this proposal, three important parameters

³ Australian Historical Railway Society, 'Sydney's Railways' in Don Fraser (ed.), *Sydney: From Settlement to City*, NSW, Engineering Heritage Committee, Sydney Division, the Institution of Engineers, Australia, 1989, p.87.

were established that would influence the design of the existing station in the early Post World War II period: the provision of a colonnade along the edge of the water; the use of natural materials for external surfaces and an unimpeded view at ground level between the water and the streetscape.

Work on Circular Quay Station commenced in the immediate Post World War II period. The design of the station drew on the pre war recommendations of the Planning Committee and the legacy of the earlier Interwar period Functionalist architecture. This project was the last major project undertaken by the NSW Department of Railways in which the Department performed almost every aspect of the work. It was also the last major structure to use riveted construction. The viaduct thus provides an interesting and significant contrast to the Cahill Expressway which lies above it. Circular Station was opened on 20 January, 1956 by J.J. Cahill, then Premier of New South Wales. The expressway was constructed, commencing in 1959, by the Department of Main Roads and the City of Sydney, using welded steel.

The construction of the Harbour Bridge, Railway Viaduct and Cahill Expressway had a dramatic impact on Circular Quay and, in particular, The Rocks. Large areas of the latter were demolished to make way for the approaches to the Harbour Bridge and, to a lesser extent, for the Expressway. The construction of the viaduct, station and expressway created a major horizontal element across the face of Circular Quay that blocked or redefined vistas from the harbour to the foreshore buildings. As demonstrated by Figure 4, the viaduct and expressway visually separate George Street North (within The Rocks) from the remainder of the city.



Figure 4: Cahill Expressway Overhead/Railway Bridge, 1961.
City of Sydney Archives, NSCA CRS 48/1513.

3.0 SITE ASSESSMENT

The purpose of this section is to establish the character of the area immediately surrounding the proposed signage site and to identify any significant visual relationships.

3.1 George Street North and Alfred Street

George Street is a major city thoroughfare that runs through the city from its junction with Hickson Road at Dawes Point in the north to its junction with Broadway in the south. The street generally runs in a north-south direction; numerous deviations along its length create contained vistas along the street. The street is generally lined with conjoined and closely spaced buildings along its length.

The proposed signage site on the Circular Quay Viaduct is located near the intersection of George Street with Alfred Street. The character of George Street to the north and south of the viaduct differs. On the southern side, lie the high-rise commercial buildings and international hotels of the Central Business District (CBD). The majority of these buildings were constructed within the last 30 years. The footpaths to either side are wide and paved and the street lined with young street trees; flagpoles and traffic management devices/road signs are prominent streetscape elements.

On the northern side of the viaduct lies The Rocks. This section of George Street lies within the George Street North Conservation Area. The western side of the street is comprised of mid and late nineteenth century buildings and hotels, many of which are listed as individual heritage items on Property NSW's *s170 Register*. On the eastern side, immediately beyond the viaduct, is First Fleet Park and the former Maritime Services Buildings, now the Museum of Contemporary Art, a fine example of interwar period architecture.

The area beneath the viaduct itself is paved. There are views from beneath the structure to Circular Quay and the Harbour.

Alfred Street runs along Circular Quay. The viaduct and Circular Quay Station dominate the northern side of the street. The buildings lining the southern side of the street are mixed as to height and architectural style. At the western end of the street, close to its intersection with George Street, the pavement is wide and there are street trees. Of particular note is the Stephen Walker designed Tank Stream Fountain in Herald Square.

3.2 The Circular Quay Viaduct

The Circular Quay Viaduct comprises a 12 span structure of riveted plate web girders and concrete slabs and rubber pads supporting the tracks to deaden the noise. It supports the railway tracks of the City Circle railway. Above lies the Cahill Expressway. The whole is supported by massive, round stone pylons. The section of viaduct the location of the proposed works is shown by Figure 5.



Figure 5: The Circular Quay Viaduct as it crosses George Street, looking north showing the existing signage.

JCDecaux.

3.3 Contribution to the Surrounding Area and Streetscape

The viaduct is a significant element in the George Street North and Alfred Street streetscape. The viaduct (and Circular Quay Station) defines the northern side of Alfred Street and frames view corridors to and from Circular Quay into and out of the city. The viaduct cuts the vista of George Street North in two, creating a distinct entry/exit into The Rocks.

The viaduct is a dominant street element in George Street North. Views towards the southern side of the viaduct as it is approached along George Street are restricted by the bend in the street near Essex Street. Above Essex Street, visibility of the viaduct is limited; the area of proposed advertising signage is screened by vegetation and street elements. Figures 6 to 8 demonstrate the visibility of the existing signage on the viaduct at increasing distances along George Street.



Figures 6 to 8: Views toward the existing signage from along George Street from an increasing distance.
JCDecaux.

Views towards the southern side of the viaduct and the area of proposed advertising signage as it is approached along Alfred Street from the east are partially screened by vegetation. Closer to the intersection, this area becomes highly visible (Figures 9 to 11).



Figures 9 to 11: Views toward the existing signage from various locations along Alfred Street.
JCDecaux.

3.4 Summary Statement of Significance

The Circular Quay Viaduct, Sydney has historic significance as an integral part of the City Circle Railway, constructed during the 1920s and 1930s. The system was designed by and thus has a close association with the work of engineer J.J.C. Bradfield, who integrated the City Circle into the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Sydney train system.

The Circular Quay Viaduct, Sydney has aesthetic significance as a major component of Circular Quay. The viaduct and the Cahill Expressway above it control and frame vistas into and out of Circular Quay.

The Circular Quay Viaduct has technical significance as containing the third largest plate web girders of their type in the NSW State Railway System.⁴

3.5 Summary of Heritage Citations and Listings

3.5.1 The Circular Quay Viaduct

The viaduct is listed as part of the listing for Circular Quay Railway Station group on the *State Heritage Register* (Listing No. 01112).

The viaduct is listed as a heritage item on the State Railway Authority's *s170 Register*.

3.5.2 Adjacent Heritage Items

The boundary between the area controlled by Property NSW and the City of Sydney, insofar as it effects this proposal, lies at Grosvenor Street.

Within the Property NSW Area

Heritage Items within the immediate vicinity of the viaduct listed on the Property NSW *s170 Register* and or the *State Heritage Register* include:

- First Fleet Park, George Street.
- The George Street North Commercial Heritage Precinct (north of the Cahill Expressway to Dickson Road).
- The Russell Hotel and Shop, 143A George Street.
- Shops and Residences, 149-151 George Street.

Within the City of Sydney

Heritage Items within the immediate vicinity of the viaduct listed by the *City of Sydney LEP 2012* include:

- Cast Iron Railings, Circular Quay.
- Circular Quay Railway Station including interior, 2 Alfred Street.
- Paragon Hotel facades and interior (27-29 Alfred Street), 1 Macquarie Place.
- Former Ship Inn façade, (10-18 Pitt Street), 1 Macquarie Place.
- Tank Street Fountain, Herald Square.
- Circular Quay Special Character Area (Area 6) as defined by the *City of Sydney DCP 2012*.

⁴ This last statement, relating to technical significance, is the only significance attributed to the viaduct by the State Heritage Register Inventory Listing Sheet.

4.0 HERITAGE IMPACT STATEMENT

4.1 The Proposal

It is proposed to convert one of the existing illuminated advertising signs on the Circular Quay Viaduct over George Street to a digital LED screen.

There are two existing illuminated advertising signs. The right hand sign, measuring 8.2m x 2.2m (18.01 sq. metres), is used for commercial advertising purposes and the sign on the left, measuring 5m x 2.2m (11 sq. metres), is currently used by Property NSW as a gateway sign and is to be permanently removed as part of the proposal to consolidate the signage. It is proposed to convert the commercial advertising sign into a LED digital sign.

4.2 Effect of Work

The following statement is written with an understanding of the guidelines provided by the:

- *State Environmental Planning Policy No. 64 (Advertising and Signage).*
- *NSW Government Department of Planning Transport Corridor Outdoor Advertising and Signage Guidelines, November 2017.*
- *Section 3.16 (Signage and Advertising) City of Sydney DCP 2012.*
- *Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority The Rocks Signage Policy 2013.*

Clause 24 of *SEPP 64* permits advertising on bridges provided that it meets the requirements outlined by the *Department of Planning Guidelines* (November 2017). The primary purpose of these guidelines, aside from ensuring public safety, is to ensure that the architectural qualities of the bridge or overpass are not compromised. Signage must also be compatible with the visual character and amenity of an area.

This statement deals with heritage impact only. Safety implications and public benefit are not discussed.

The NSW Heritage Office guideline publication *Statements of Heritage Impact* requires three specific statements to assist in determining the impact of proposed works on the heritage significance of a site or area. These statements are as follows.

The following aspects of the proposal respect or enhance the heritage significance of the item for the following reasons:

Section 2.5.5 of the *Department of Planning Guidelines* deals specifically with signage on bridges.

The proposed LED digital screen is compatible with the scale of the viaduct. The area of the existing signage is not altered. The area of coverage of the existing signage is minor compared to the length of the viaduct.

The existing signage to be converted into a LED digital screen lies within the structural boundaries of the bridge. It is restricted to the southern face of the viaduct only (see below).

The signage is not welded or bolted to the existing bridge girder. The signs are clamped to the existing bridge; no drilling, bolting or welding is required. The significant fabric is thus protected and the work will be fully reversible at a later date.

The proposed conversion of the existing signage provides for a more interesting element within the public domain. Through the use of digital technology the advertisements on the proposed LED screen will change on a 10 second basis. These

images are static and not animated. This high turnover of advertising will provide visual interest without detracting from the character of the streetscape.

Although Section 3.16.19.2 of the *City of Sydney DCP 2012* excludes internally illuminated signs within the Circular Quay signage precinct it is considered that the proposed LED digital screen advertising sign will not introduce any new adverse impacts on the significance of the railway viaduct in comparison to the existing externally illuminated signage. The LED digital screen will produce similar luminosity levels as the existing light box illuminated sign. The changeover of advertising on the LED screen on a 10 second basis will not introduce any new impacts on the heritage significance of the viaduct.

The following aspects of the proposal could detrimentally impact on heritage significance. The reasons are explained as well as the measures taken to minimise impacts:

The proposed digital LED screen advertising sign will continue to conceal part of the welded steel plating of the viaduct. This will have an acceptable impact in that the overall area of the viaduct covered is small; other continuous sections of steel plating will remain clearly visible from the public domain, in particularly along Alfred Street. As noted above, the area of plating covered by the proposal is the same as that covered by the existing advertising sign.

The proposed signage is located within the immediate vicinity of heritage items and areas within The Rocks. The proposal will have a minimal impact on the heritage items within The Rocks, given that it is located on the southern side of the viaduct. The proposed signage will not further obscure the already restricted view corridors towards these items, created by the massing and scale of the viaduct and expressway. The LED digital screen will not reduce the already limited enjoyment of these items to be obtained from south of the viaduct.

The proposed conversion of the existing signage to a LED digital screen will have a minimal impact on the heritage items and special character areas within the City of Sydney. Signage is already a significant element within the George Street streetscape. Existing streetscape elements and trees will assist in the integration of the proposed LED screen into the streetscape.

The following sympathetic solutions have been considered and discounted for the following reasons:

The proposal complies with the guidelines and examples for bridge signage provided by *NSW Government Department of Planning Transport Corridor Outdoor Advertising and Signage Guidelines*, November 2017. Although it does not meet the guidelines for advertising and signage in the *City of Sydney DCP 2012* which does not allow for internally illuminated signage on heritage items it is considered that the conversion of the existing illuminated signage into a LED digital screen will not introduce any new detrimental impacts on the item or heritage items in the vicinity for the reasons as stated above. The proposed LED digital screen advertising signage is a use of new technology that allows the change over of advertisements without having to physically replace them and therefore cause less obstruction to the public domain.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

This heritage impact statement has considered the impact of altering the existing signage to the southern face of the Circular Quay Viaduct at the point where it passes over George Street. The proposed LED digital screen advertising sign, although not fully compliant with the relevant guidelines, will have a minimal impact on the heritage significance of the viaduct and on heritage items and areas within the immediate vicinity.