

Public Spaces Streets as Shared Spaces

ENGAGEMENT REPORT



NSW Department of Planning,
Industry and Environment

October 2020





Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past, present and future.

We recognise Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to society.

Aboriginal people take a holistic view of land, water and culture and see them as one, not in isolation to each other. Public Spaces Streets as Shared Spaces Engagement Report is based on the premise upheld by Aboriginal people that if we care for Country, it will care for us.

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Public Spaces Streets as Shared Spaces Engagement Report

Image on front cover: Paddington, Sydney.
Courtesy of Destination NSW.

Artwork (left) by Nikita Ridgeway

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*Western Sydney Parklands
Courtesy of Western Sydney Parklands*



Overview

Why public spaces matter

Great public spaces are vital to communities. They provide places for social interaction, can improve health and wellbeing, and offer communities a sense of identity and character. Great public spaces are also safe and accessible for all to use and enjoy.

Streets, paths and plazas make up an essential part of our network of public spaces. Whether people use them for travelling, walking, cycling, outdoor dining, socialising or doing business, streets are crucial infrastructure for successful and healthy urban areas.

Streets are public spaces

As public spaces, our streets have become a focal point during the COVID-19 pandemic. Communities across NSW are using streets differently, to ensure safe physical distancing and the ability to exercise.

To better understand how people have been using streets as shared spaces during COVID-19, as well as to increase awareness of the importance of public spaces, the NSW Government launched the Streets as Shared Spaces program in May 2020. The program supports delivery of the Premier's Priority to increase the proportion of homes in urban areas within 10 minutes' walk of quality green, open and public space by 10% by 2023.

The program had two key components: \$15 million of grant funding for local councils to provide new, better and more activated streets and public spaces, and an initiative to engage with communities and councils across NSW.

The grant initiative was for demonstration and pilot projects to help communities reimagine streets as shared spaces and contribute to NSW's economic recovery. The engagement initiative is part of a broader communications program to understand the value and benefits of public spaces, especially during COVID-19, and as we re-equip our cities and towns to be safe and attractive places and support recovery.

Hearing from the community

We are committed to using a citizen-led approach to delivering the Premier's Priority. This approach aims to engage the community in understanding what public spaces are available to them so they can provide feedback and help us improve them. From May to August 2020, the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment asked members of the community about their local streets, to find out what currently works well and what changes they would like to see in the future. The department also asked the community about changes in the use of public spaces during COVID-19, to understand the impacts of physical distancing regulations on how people use public spaces.

The department received more than 5,000 comments or survey responses, with many people contributing multiple comments and ideas. Key themes included:

- Communities across NSW highly value accessible and inviting local streets.
- Safety is a priority for pedestrians and bicycle riders when using their local streets.
- Trees and green space play an important role in making neighbourhoods pleasant, comfortable and resilient.
- Communities, culture and local economies thrive when they have great public space.

The responses also reveal some areas for further investigation. Although COVID-19 restrictions encouraged 59% of people to walk more and 27% people to cycle more, these new habits are fading. Of respondents, 70% visited public spaces where it was difficult to maintain physical distancing. There are also early signs that driving is becoming more popular in an effort to seek more spacious and distant public spaces where people can feel safe.

The engagement process also provided useful feedback about public spaces during COVID-19. These community insights help clarify some ideas for the future of public space in NSW.

*Right: Laneway cafe in Potts Point, Sydney
Courtesy of Destination NSW*



Engagement context

Since the creation of new ministerial portfolio for Public Spaces and the establishment of dedicated departmental team in 2019, a citizen-led approach to public space design has been one of its primary goals. The changes in how communities use public space as a result of COVID-19 have made hearing from our citizens even more important.

The department gathered insights from the community in two ways:

1

Interactive map

From 8 May to 19 June 2020, the department asked the community about how they use their local streets to find out what currently works well and what changes they would like to see in the future. We encouraged people to submit ideas for local streets on an interactive map. Comments on the map added to a bank of ideas for the department and local government.

2

'Public spaces during COVID-19' survey

The 'Public spaces during COVID-19' survey was open from 8 May to 20 August 2020. It aimed to provide the NSW Government with insight into the changing uses of public spaces during COVID-19 and the impacts of physical distancing regulations on how people interact with public spaces.

Analysis of engagement

This document summarises the findings of both these engagements. The results from the interactive map provide background into what people think is working and what needs changing in public spaces in their local area. The results from the COVID-19 survey give more context and ideas for action. Both channels can help us better plan initiatives that promote public safety, urban resilience and economic recovery in NSW.

The goals of the engagement

The goals were to:

- get feedback from the public and experts on local streets through the interactive map for ideas around planning and design of these spaces
- reinforce the definition of public space—that it includes streets, paths and plazas—and create the opportunity to reimagine these as great public spaces for people
- raise awareness of the value and benefits of public spaces, especially during COVID-19, and as we re-equip our cities and towns to be safe and attractive places and support recovery
- provide information for the public to explore, learn about and share knowledge and experience about public spaces.



Streets as Shared Spaces—at a glance

“ Public spaces are all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive. ”
—United Nations

We heard from you in two ways:

1 **Interactive map**
Tell us about the places you love

2 **Survey**
Public spaces during COVID-19

You told us about the places you love, and how you have used these places during COVID-19.

How feedback can contribute to future actions and ideas



Action

- 1** **Setting Streets as Shared Spaces goals**
- 2** **Validating and refining community feedback**
- 3** **Responding to community feedback**
- 4** **Delivering projects**



Detail


- Acknowledging and demonstrating the value of streets as public spaces
- Improving walkable access
- Providing new, better and more activated public spaces
- Making public spaces all of government's business
- Building stronger partnerships
- 'Tell us about the places you love' interactive map
- 'Public spaces during COVID-19' survey
- Greener public spaces Premier's Priority
- Collaboration with local councils
- Collaboration with Transport for NSW
- The department's strategic framework
- 24 short-term projects to activate public spaces in response to COVID-19, improving safety for the community
- 24 medium-term projects to create better streets by adapting public space to support economic, physical and mental wellbeing



Engagement summary


 **15,273**
page visits


 **113,320**
impressions on
social media

 **4,777**
survey responses
and map comments

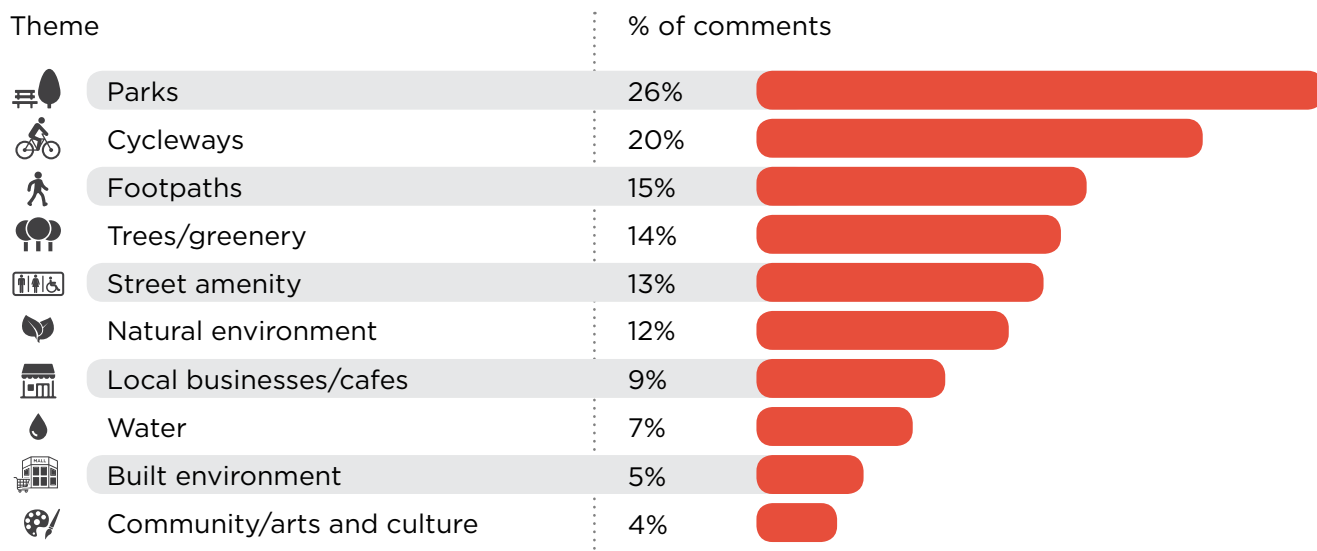
Streets as Shared Spaces grant summary

 **\$15 million**
for local councils

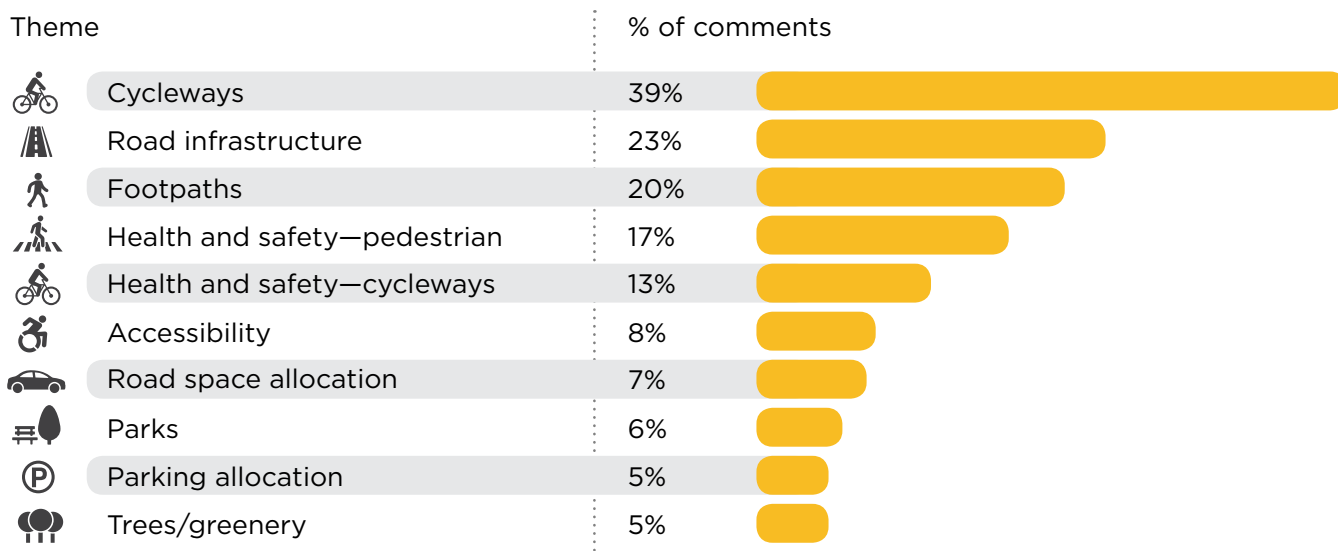
 **24**
short-term projects
to improve local
streets during
COVID-19

 **24**
medium-term
projects to pilot
and test new local
streets initiatives

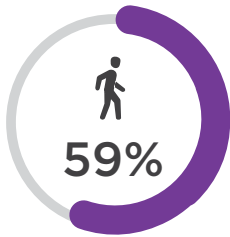
These are the top 10 features of the places respondents love:



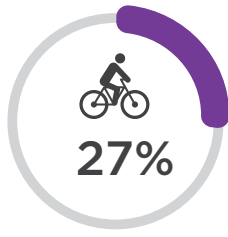
These are the top 10 things that could be improved to make public space in NSW better:



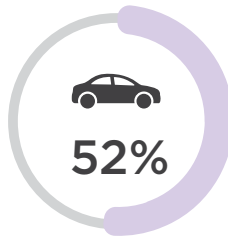
COVID changed the way respondents move around



People walked more

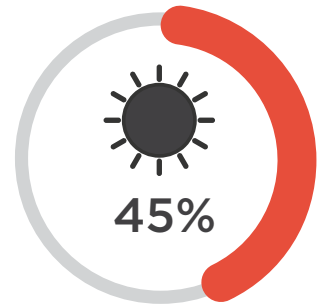


People cycled more

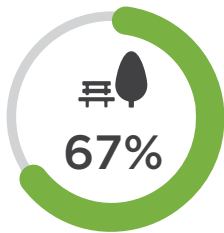


People drove less

We spent more time outside



Especially in:



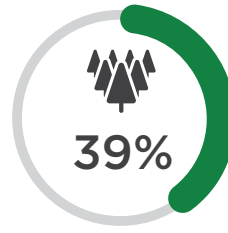
Local parks



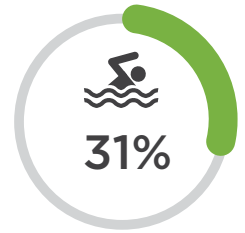
Local streets



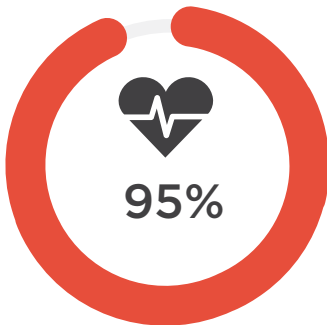
Walking tracks



Bushland and national parks



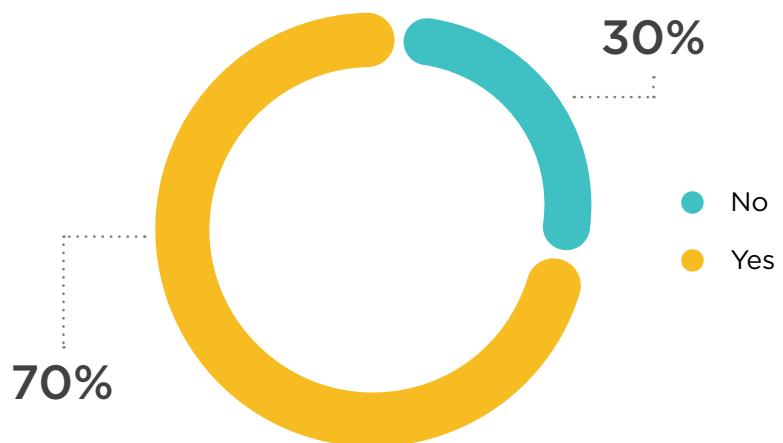
Beaches and foreshores



of us used these spaces for exercise

It wasn't without its challenges though. 70% of us visited somewhere it was difficult to maintain social distancing.

Have you visited anywhere where it was difficult to maintain social distancing?



23% of people felt less safe during the day mainly because of challenges maintaining a safe distance in busy public spaces

Background



The NSW Premier has highlighted the importance of creating more accessible, greener public spaces to improve the quality of life for NSW residents. The Premier's Priority for greener public spaces aims to increase the proportion of homes in urban areas within 10 minutes' walk of quality green, open and public space by 10% by 2023.

Public spaces are all places that are publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all free of charge. In particular, streets, paths and plazas are an essential part of our network of public spaces.

These are places that help support the health and wellbeing of people. Unique public spaces provide character and culture to neighbourhoods and a sense of identity to the people within them. Great public spaces are accessible and safe spaces that everyone can enjoy.

The department's Public Spaces team is responsible for delivering against this Premier's Priority and its implementation across NSW Government. The team has already actioned several initiatives which have also responded to needs triggered by the 2019–20 bushfires and COVID-19, for example, with the recent launch of the COVID Safe Summer Plan.

Opportunities created by COVID-19

COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of public spaces to our wellbeing. Walkable, accessible and enjoyable streets are particularly important in this time of pandemic.

The Streets as Shared Spaces program has supported the community during COVID-19 and helped to progress the Premier's Priority to increase walkable access to quality public space. On 8 May 2020, the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment launched the program, including \$15 million in grants to support council projects across NSW that provide more space for communities to safely walk, cycle and exercise.

These projects will help test ideas and create an evidence base to support the planning and delivery of future public spaces. They are also supporting the economic, physical and mental wellbeing of people during COVID-19.

Projects underway

The funding made available through the Streets as Shared Spaces program has allowed councils to pilot new and innovative ideas for streets as safe, shared public spaces. Grants were made available for:

- short-term projects—up to \$100,000 to help adapt public places to cope with COVID-19
- medium-term projects—\$100,000 to \$1 million to pilot and test semi-permanent public space initiatives.

In August 2020, 48 temporary demonstration and pilot projects across 27 regional councils and 14 councils in Greater Sydney received funding, with some councils securing multiple grants. Local councils will manage and deliver these projects to test new public space initiatives with the community and local businesses.

Evaluating these projects is a key part of the program. Some of the collected data and insights will help build the case for longer-term programs to improve public space.



The goals of the Streets as Shared Spaces program

The goals of the program are to:

- acknowledge that streets are an important part of our network of public spaces
- improve walkable access to public space
- provide new, better and more activated public places with councils and other government agencies
- increase the value the community places on public space
- increase engagement and participation from other agencies in championing public space and streets as public spaces—making public space everyone’s business
- seek stronger partnership and collaboration to deliver these improvements
- attract Streets as Shared Spaces grant applications from councils
- build capacity of councils and NSW Government agencies in Streets as Shared Spaces
- promote councils that are doing great work improving public space in their local government areas.

*The People’s Loop, Parramatta
Courtesy of Parramatta Park and Western
Sydney Parklands Trust*

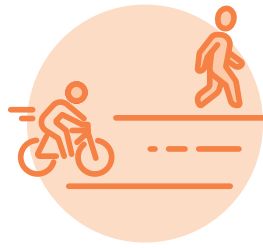


Key insights

We gathered community feedback in five key insight areas, which we summarise here and further discuss later.

KEY
INSIGHT

#1



Respondents love and value your local streets

Of the community comments, we received 65% were about footpaths, cycleways and shareways. The comments show that accessible, well-maintained and appropriately connected active transport infrastructure promotes wellbeing and contributes to sustainable and resilient communities.

Respondents from regional and Sydney communities equally valued footpaths, cycleways and shareways. However, there are challenges in making cycling equally as appealing to women as it is to men. Women who responded to the survey said they were 35% less likely to cycle more during COVID-19.

KEY
INSIGHT

#2



Safety in public spaces is a priority

Around 25% of comments were about safety in public space. The feedback suggests local communities have a good understanding of what their neighbourhoods need to be safe. This includes lower vehicle speed limits and other steps to make public space more inclusive and enjoyable.

COVID-19 has focused attention on the importance of safety in public space for the community. People commented that safety means protection from traffic, as well as protection from infection risk.

KEY
INSIGHT
#3



Urban areas need trees and parks

Trees, parks and green spaces add significantly to the amenity of urban areas. According to the community feedback, large, established trees feature in many people's favourite places. Respondents also mentioned the importance of local parks in supporting a healthier lifestyle.

KEY
INSIGHT
#4



Local economies, culture and community go hand in hand

Public spaces are nothing without culture and community. In Sydney, many of the most loved and vibrant neighbourhoods are defined by the diverse businesses that form parts of those communities. Survey respondents said that public space and local business have a mutually beneficial relationship.

Respondents shared stories about culture, community and place. Clearly, the identity and feel of NSW's most loved places are tied to their unique cultures and communities.

KEY
INSIGHT
#5



COVID-19 has created demand for public space

COVID-19 restrictions put the spotlight on public space. Of survey respondents, 45% spent more time outside, mostly to exercise or get fresh air, and 90% used streets or parks in their local area. During COVID-19 restrictions, there was a clear change in people's behaviour, creating unprecedented demand for public space. The pandemic has potentially unlocked a greater appreciation of public space.

This greater appreciation and demand may present an opportunity, though not without its challenges. For example, of survey respondents, 70% visited public places where it was difficult to physically distance. And although 59% of respondents walked more and 27% cycled more, these rates were declining towards the end of the survey period. In August 2020, respondents were beginning to drive more than cycle.

According to the survey, respondents' use of more open spaces, where they can physically distance, such as beaches and national parks, increased throughout the survey period. Local streets remained the most popular spaces, but there was not the same growth as in other spaces.

What we did

From May to August 2020, we asked the people of NSW to tell us about their public spaces. We did this by communicating and engaging with them through consultation and surveys.

Communication

We used several communication channels to tell the community about the Streets as Shared Spaces program, the interactive map and the 'Public spaces during COVID-19' survey. These channels included a website, webinars, social media and traditional media.

Website

We created the Streets as Shared Spaces webpage on 8 May 2020 which let the community and stakeholders know about the program.

The website includes information about the department's approach to public spaces and how this supports the Premier's Priority for great public spaces in NSW. It provides an overview of the Streets as Shared Spaces program and local government grants. It also features a list and interactive map of successful projects as well as a document library of design guidelines, resources for grant applicants and good public space design case studies.

There's also a section for users to have their say, with links directing them to one of the two engagement channels: the 'Tell us about the streets you love' interactive map or the 'Public spaces during COVID-19' survey.

During the engagement period, relevant pages on the website received 15,273 unique views. On average, each visitor spent 6:25 minutes on the page during their visit.

Webinars

The department held three webinars in May and June 2020 to raise awareness and provide more information about the Streets as Shared Spaces program. The webinars encouraged place-based thinking (collaborative, long-term approaches to building thriving communities) across local and state government agencies as well as business and industry.

More than 3,200 people from a range of organisations, including urban and regional local councils, state government agencies, planning and design firms, management consultancies, property developers and non-government organisations, registered for the sessions and received the link to the video recording.

The webinars highlighted the collaboration between the department and Transport for NSW as well as the opportunities from the Streets as Shared Spaces program to collaborate for great public space outcomes.

The webinar topics were:

1. **Making public spaces everyone's business: An introduction to the Streets as Shared Spaces Program.** Presented by Dr Caroline Butler-Bowdon (Department of Planning, Industry and Environment), Peter Carruthers (Transport for NSW) and David Petrie (Liverpool City Council)—541 attendees.
2. **Stories from the frontline—a tactical approach to reimagining streets as shared spaces.** Presented by Dr Caroline Butler-Bowdon, Julie Sundqvist (Transport for NSW) and Fleur Mellor (Waverley Council)—320 attendees.
3. **The role of business in championing streets as shared spaces.** Presented by Dr Caroline Butler-Bowdon, Katherine O'Regan (Sydney Business Chamber, Cities Leadership Institute), Tania Loveridge (Heart of Auckland City) and John Dinan (Transport for NSW)—187 attendees.

Recordings of each webinar are available on the Streets as Shared Spaces webpage on www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces/streets/grants-for-councils

Social media

From 8 May to 24 August 2020, 30 posts were published on the department's Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter channels to promote Streets as Shared Spaces. The posts promoted the interactive map, grant initiative, webinars and the 'Public spaces during COVID-19' survey.

The posts received a combined total reach of 113,420, with 1,489 reactions and 195 shares. Overall, LinkedIn reached the most people—an average of approximately 6,500 people per post.

Table 1: Social media engagement

Channel	Number of posts	People reached	Reactions	Shares
Facebook	8	22,488	123	26
LinkedIn	10	65,237	1,182	92
Twitter	12	25,595	184	77



Facebook post

Media releases and announcements

Streets as Shared Spaces grant funding and engagement was announced on 8 May 2020 and secured coverage in metro, local and regional media.

The front page of *The Sydney Morning Herald* quoted Rob Stokes, Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, on 8 May 2020: 'Our future precincts, parks and public spaces need to be designed to enable better social distancing, with wider footpaths, segregated cycleways and more linear parks, to meet the increased demand for these precious public spaces.'

On 18 August 2020, we announced funding for 48 public space projects across NSW, with local media outlets reporting on the grant funding and their local council's participation in the program.



Front page article in *The Sydney Morning Herald*

Engagement



Two communication channels gathered input on citizens' views on streets as public spaces. Although the map and survey both sought input from the community about public space, the two channels provided distinctly different results.

Interactive map

The interactive map was available from 8 May to 19 June 2020.

We invited the community to post about their favourite streets and places or identify places that needed improvement. Users could post comments in one of four categories.

Users posted 2,962 comments on the interactive map. Due to the open-ended nature of this platform and the fact that we opened the survey to the whole of NSW, the comments covered a wide range of topics.

The map received 13,244 views from 5,706 unique users. Of the users, 644 commented on the map.

'Public spaces during COVID-19' survey

The survey was based on a Danish study from urban-design organisation Gehl, 'Public Space & Public Life during COVID-19' and adapted for

Interactive map categories

Places I love

471
responses

Case studies

2
responses

Great streets
in my area

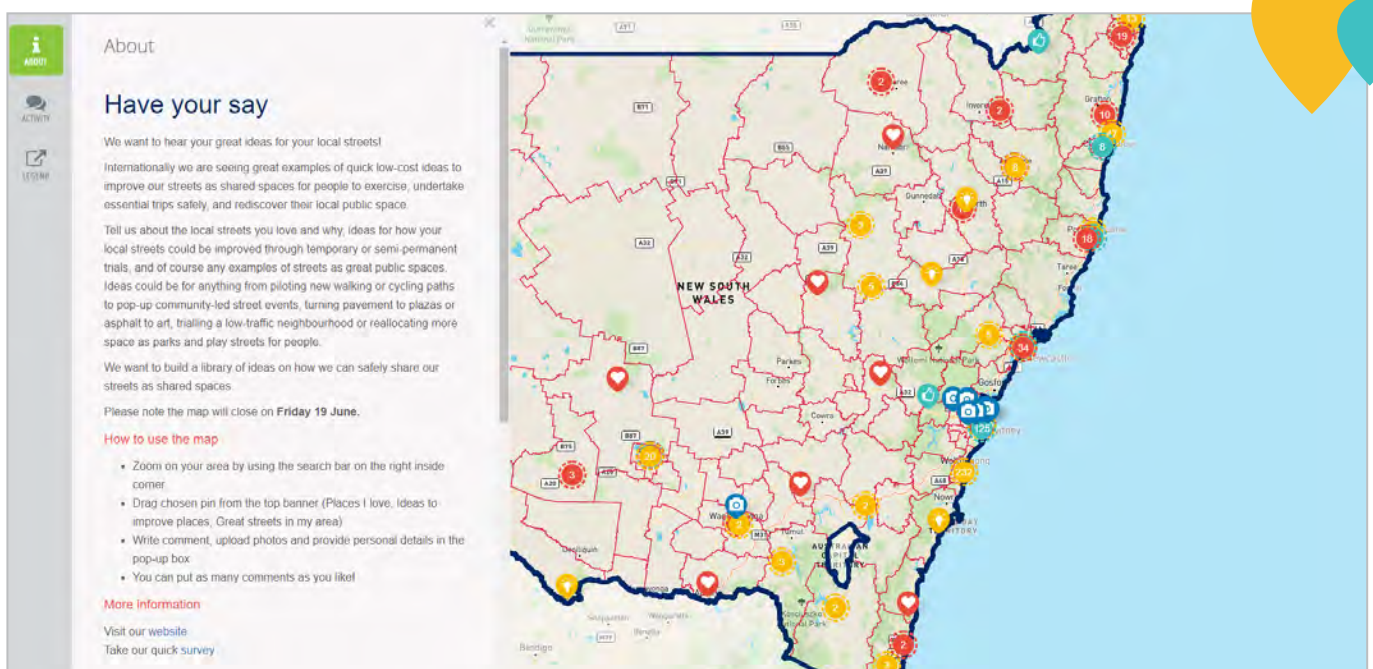
163
responses

Ideas to
improve places

2,326
responses

NSW with permission. The survey was on the Streets as Shared Spaces webpage from 8 May to 20 August 2020. The survey had 2,134 responses. Of these, 1,815 were fully completed, with only fully completed surveys included in this report.

The survey included 30 questions about people's behaviour towards, attitudes about and perspectives on public space during COVID-19. The questions were mostly multiple choice, with some free text for 'other' answers or further explanation of a multiple-choice selection.



A screenshot of the interactive map, with instructions for users

The questions covered the following COVID-19-related topics:

- public spaces being used
- main reasons for using public space
- public spaces that were useful
- frequency and length of visits to public space
- changes to frequency and mode of transportation
- feelings of safety
- places it was challenging to physically distance
- connections, community and relationships
- government services
- benefits to public space
- opportunities to improve public space.

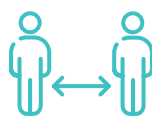
The survey also asked for demographic information, including postcode, age, gender, whether the respondent was an essential worker, whether the respondent was a car owner and parental status. This summary of findings does not look at demographic trends in detail. The Public Spaces team will use this demographic information when considering future, more detailed studies.

Due to the length of time the survey was open and changes in COVID-19 restrictions, it is likely that people's attitudes changed over the survey period. Although this has not been explored in detail, this report covers a number of time-related trends.

Next step

Explore and detail the experiences of public space for different demographic and socio-economic groups in NSW.

Key COVID-19 restrictions and public space milestones



13 March 2020

The first physical distancing recommendations are put in place, restricting gatherings to fewer than 500 people.



30 March 2020

People are only permitted to leave their residence for essential activities and no more than 2 persons to gather in a public space.



10 April–31 May 2020

Centennial Park closes to all motor-vehicle traffic.



8 May 2020

The department announces the Streets as Shared Spaces grant funding and engagement program.



15 May 2020

Some outdoor facilities can reopen, such as pools and playgrounds. Outdoor gatherings of up to 10 people permitted.



29 May 2020

Temporary cycleways were introduced to protect health, safety and welfare of the public by reducing demand on public transport.



29 May 2020

Travel within NSW is allowed. Museums and art galleries resume operations. Outdoor gatherings of up to 20 people permitted.

18
August
2020

48
Streets as Shared
Spaces projects
receive grant
funding.



What we heard

The following pages delve deeper into the five key insight areas.

KEY INSIGHT

#1



Respondents love and value your local streets

The findings from the 'Public spaces during COVID-19' survey demonstrate the love, appreciation and value that communities across NSW have for public space. In particular, respondents were very engaged about the amenity and quality of their own neighbourhoods and streets. Responses indicate an obvious connection to place; these are the spaces that people spend every day walking or cycling.

It is easy for pedestrians and bicycle riders to notice the opportunities for public spaces during COVID-19. Among changes in behaviour, more people were using their neighbourhood streets and parks. This has increased demand for higher quality public space.

On our interactive map, footpaths, cycleways and shareways were the focus of 65% of comments. These comments indicate that quality walking and cycling infrastructure is a priority for improving their experience of public space.



It's a delight to walk down Belgrave St with its wide footpaths, sun and beautiful street trees. It almost looks a bit European with its town square and nice low-rise units. I love to chill out in the new outdoor space that was recently installed.

Belgrave Street, Kogarah

'The finest Federation Street in Australia—the beautiful Appian Way. Lovely tree-lined serpentine street, central village green and glorious federation bungalows.'

Appian Way, Burwood

'Glebe Point Road is a fantastic place with people, shops, buskers, books, street life.'

Glebe Point Road, Glebe

'Great public art starting to happen here'

Ulong Street, Griffith

'This is my favourite laneway of Marrickville. It is constantly changing with talented street artists using the western factory walls as their canvas. It also provides a good shortcut to the Marrickville Metro shops. Well used at all times of the day.'

Lilian Fowler Place, Marrickville

“

Cyclists are meant to cross from Virginia St, across the median strip and onto the shared walk/cycleway via a tiny and barely visible ramp/drop in. Cars often park in such a way that blocks it. Better visibility of the ramp on both median strip and eastern side of the road to make cars aware, and signage to also increase awareness and slow cars down.

”

Squires Way, Wollongong.

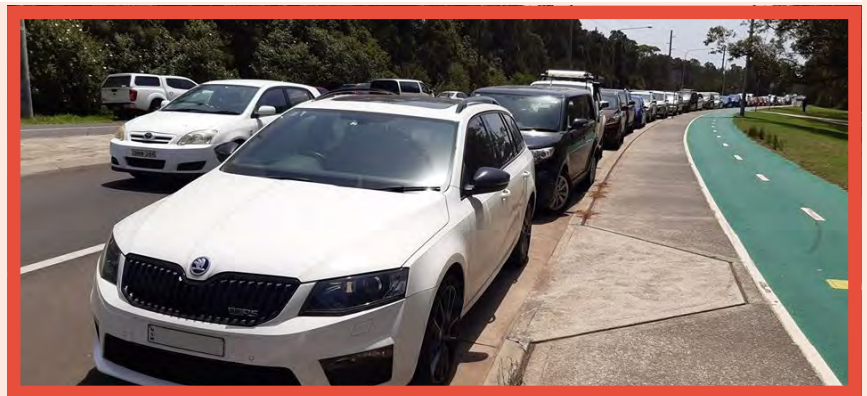
Pedestrian infrastructure

Respondents valued wide footpaths, streets with high levels of amenity and safe interactions with other road users.

Respondents particularly identified with places that celebrated local culture and character and that had a unique identity. Of the positive comments, 13% of responses were about street amenity and focused on character, heritage, community and culture. Many comments drew attention to the unique characteristics of these places.

Of respondents, 8% said that accessing their favourite public spaces presented a challenge, particularly for bicycle riders, pedestrians and the less mobile. Challenges people noted in the feedback included:

- Access for schools is important. Suggestions included more crossings to link schools with nearby parks and with other popular public spaces.
- Major roads and train lines are challenging for neighbourhoods, as they can make it difficult for people to access good public space that is only a few streets away.
- Access is a challenge for everyone, including people with disabilities, young children, bicycle riders, pedestrians and commuters.
- Access could be improved by prioritising pedestrians and bicycle riders over vehicles. Of all comments, 2.5% asked for adjustments in priority at crossings and intersections.



Cycling and bicycle paths

Comments relating to bicycle use were the most common theme in the survey. Of all comments, 39% mentioned cycling or bicycle paths. Respondents love protected cycleways, especially newer routes that have been recently installed that provide significant and memorable improvements in commuting and recreational riding experiences.

For bicycle riders, many comments focused on small improvements that could enhance commuting and recreational trips:

- As with pedestrians, connections and accessibility are important for bicycle riders. Many comments mentioned connections and additions that could link cycleways.
- Safe passages to popular destinations such as shops, train stations and business centres were popular requests.
- Maintenance of infrastructure was a priority for bicycle riders. Comments frequently mentioned faded paint on roads, illegible signage, potholes, gutter lips and locked gates.
- Car parking and cycleways are often in conflict with one another and diminish bicycle riders' experience of public space. Of comments about cycleways, 5% were about the 'door zone' (the area many bicycle riders ride in that is shared with opening doors of parked cars). Bicycle riders also acknowledged that some marked cycleways were occupied by parked cars, which rendered them unusable.
- Bicycle trips are not just about the journey. Bicycle riders in some areas struggle to find bicycle parking that is secure and accessible.

Public space is common ground

Comments about footpaths, cycleways, accessibility, safety and amenity were consistent across the state, regardless of location. Although more people are cycling and walking for transport in inner-city Sydney, regional areas also value footpaths and cycleways. Of comments in areas outside Greater Sydney, 60% were about pedestrians and bicycle riders compared with 65% within Greater Sydney.

Next step

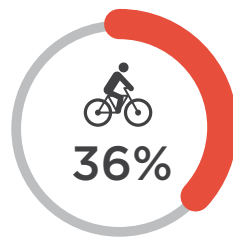
Collaborate and advocate across agencies to understand opportunities for improved connectivity. Explore opportunities such as:

- for walking, access and connection improvements between neighbourhood hubs (schools, parks, shops) and pedestrian prioritisation in these areas
- for cycling, secure parking, safety, maintenance of roads and cycleways, connectivity improvements and effective wayfinding.

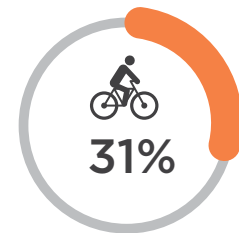
Connectivity comparison by region

Percentage of comments inside Greater Sydney

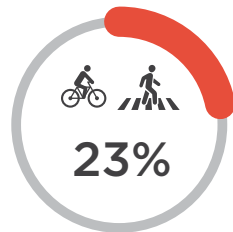
Percentage of comments outside Greater Sydney



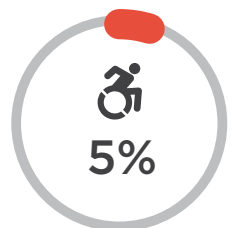
Cycleways



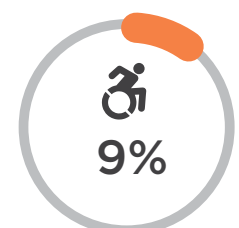
Footpaths



Road safety
(bicycles/
pedestrians
combined)



Accessibility



KEY
INSIGHT
#2



Safety in public space is a priority

A quarter of comments on the interactive map concerned people wanting to feel safer in public space. These comments were predominantly about pedestrian and bicycle safety. Common themes included wider footpaths with safer crossings and more protected bicycle routes.

During COVID-19, the definition of and demand for safer public space have changed. Survey respondents said that better pedestrian facilities are necessary both to feel safer on streets around other road users and to help maintain appropriate social distancing. Similarly, the survey revealed a substantial increase in demand for public space from people exercising outdoors.

Speed limits and traffic calming

About a quarter of the survey comments about safety mentioned speed limits. Concerns related to interactions between faster cars and slower other road users, particularly in high-pedestrian-activity areas such as busy shopping districts. Bicycle riders shared this view and identified many places where speed differences with drivers caused unsafe situations.



The positioning of the advertising sign on this corner is dangerous for pedestrians crossing Victoria Street from north to south. If a pedestrian waits at the kerb, they are obscured from the view of motorists approaching the crossing from Victoria Street.

Potts Point

‘I have a different perspective on safety. Before, I was worried about predators, etc. But during COVID, I worry about the number of people in a space and the ability to distance. We only used spaces where we could achieve distancing.’

Rydalmere

‘This is a very narrow street. Reduce speed limit to 10 km/h and make bi-directional for cyclists. Install a fish-eye lens at the street bend on the Reynolds Street end. Many young families live here. Kids play on the road and the grown-ups have regular social gatherings here too. Consider closing off to car traffic one day a week on a trial basis.’

Rozelle



“

I love my neighbourhood; we just need to have footpaths in all the streets for the safety of the kids cycling and mums with prams.

Camden Park

”

About 80 comments (3% of all comments) requested 30 km/h and 40 km/h speed limits.

Other responses were less prescriptive about a speed limit and expressed desire for other changes that would lower speeds and improve feelings of safety. The comments highlighted that people concerned about safety have a detailed understanding of the context and challenges of their neighbourhoods.

Safety clearly has a significant impact on the experience and enjoyment of public space. Ideas for fixing these issues were in the context of each particular place. Popular ideas included specific traffic-calming measures (such as speed bumps, narrower streets and planter boxes), raised pedestrian crossings, closure of streets/conversion to cul-de-sacs, changing to one-way

traffic flow and improved sightlines.

Comments from regional areas focused on challenges around mixed-use traffic on higher speed roads and highways. This is more prevalent in regional areas, where narrow shoulders are a challenge for bicycle riders and pedestrians. This may deter some people from walking or cycling more.

Local streets in residential areas serve multiple purposes for the community. Cars do not exclusively use these streets. In some places with unsuitable or non-existent footpaths, these streets are also walkways for pedestrians. Children and adults also use streets for recreation or social gatherings. In these situations where streets are truly shared spaces, certain changes could create more shared or safer zones for other road users.

From the Easter long weekend to the end of May 2020, Centennial Park closed to motor-vehicle traffic to assist with social distancing during the peak of COVID-19 restrictions. This example provides insight into the community’s reaction to reallocating road space. About 6% of Sydney Eastern City District residents who completed the survey answered positively about their experience at Centennial Park in response to the question: ‘How have the public places you visit changed for the better during COVID-19 restrictions?’

Personal safety

As noted, our survey covered safety. During COVID-19 restrictions, 60% of respondents said their feeling of safety did not change. From this group of respondents, most indicated they were not significantly concerned about safety in public spaces because their local neighbourhoods felt safe.

Heightened infection risk was the largest concern of those people who felt less safe, especially in crowded spaces such as supermarkets and busy walking tracks.

During the day, 25% of women felt more unsafe during COVID-19 restrictions compared with 19% of men. At night, this percentage dropped to 19% of women and 12% of men. We also had non-binary respondents to the survey, but we did not collect enough data to determine their feeling of safety.

Next steps

Study the Streets as Shared Spaces grant projects to understand public space interventions and the impact of these on people’s feeling of safety.

Promote the new evaluation tool for public space and public life to empower people, industry and government agencies to assess their public spaces and understand pedestrian safety challenges in streets and public spaces. The tool guides users through a series of questions to identify how people use public spaces and evaluate the positive attributes and areas for improvement. We can use the evidence we gather to inform future planning, design and investment.

Work with councils and other government agencies to rapidly address simple safety challenges identified through this process.

The data demonstrates that a feeling of safety is a complex emotion that people judge based on their environment and tolerance for risk. Although more respondents seemed concerned about the COVID-19 pandemic than didn’t, some indicated they were not fearful of COVID-19. Compared with most, these respondents would have a very different experience in public space.

Other responses focused on risks unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as trip hazards or cycling accidents.

On the interactive map, personal safety did not rank highly. (The map did not specifically investigate or mention this topic.) Less than 1% of comments related to poor feelings of personal safety and crime. Lack of street lighting was the main reason people cited for feeling unsafe.



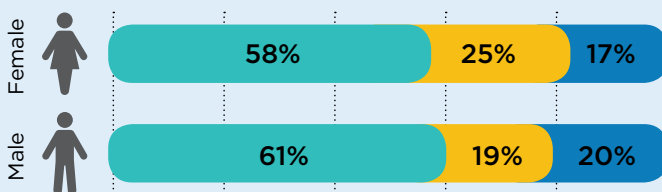
Big, wide, open spaces like White Bay have been great. Other parks very crowded with people, dogs, etc. so they didn’t feel so good. We need more park space.

Balmain



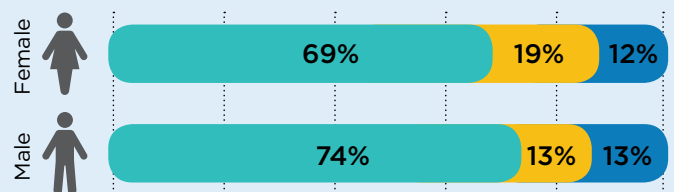
Changes in feelings of safety

Has your feeling of safety in public space changed during the COVID-19 restrictions in the daytime?



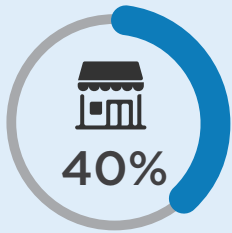
- About the same
- Less safe
- More safe

Has your feeling of safety in public space changed during the COVID-19 restrictions at night?

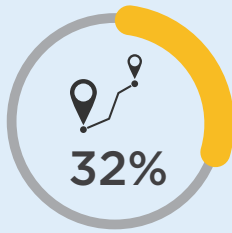


- About the same
- Less safe
- More safe

Where did you find it difficult to practise physical distancing?



Local main or high street for services



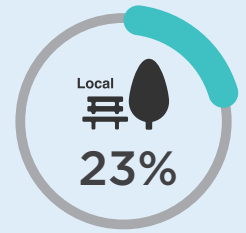
Walking track



Plazas or paved public spaces



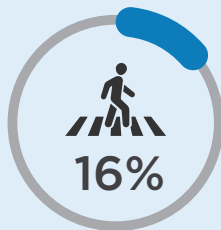
Other



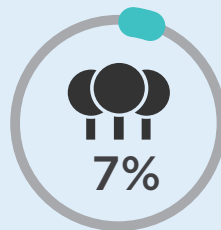
Parks in your local area



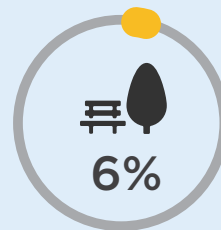
Beaches and foreshores



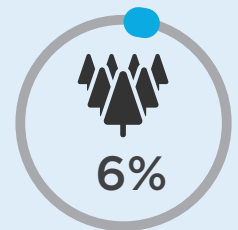
Local street in your neighbourhood



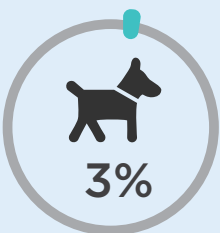
Major parkland



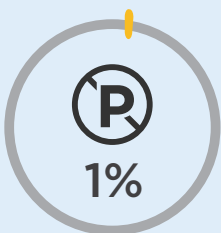
Parks outside your local area



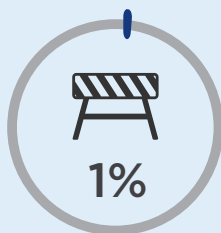
Bushland or national parks



Off-leash dog areas



Temporarily closed car parks



Temporarily closed streets

KEY
INSIGHT
#3



Urban areas need trees and parks

Trees and green space make a big impression on the people of NSW when they're out and about in their neighbourhoods. Of the positive comments we received on the interactive map, parks were the most popular theme, making up 25% of all comments. Trees closely followed, with 14% of all positive comments mentioning them.

In the comments about parks, greenery and exercise opportunities came up most often. People love to walk, run and cycle in larger parks. Smaller parks offer opportunities for people to relax and enjoy nature away from the urban hustle.

Large established trees were favourites of the community. People frequently mentioned some of Sydney's most iconic and striking large trees, such as jacarandas and figs.

Many responses also complimented other characteristics that often accompany streets and suburbs with established green space. These traits include reduced traffic volumes, wide footpaths, median strips and peaceful amenity. For example, Bourke Street in Surry Hills received 20 comments relating to its amenity, several of which mentioned the large trees lining the street.



This wetland park is amazing.
Love the nature in it.



Cubbitch Barta Reserve, Camden Park

'Bourke St in Surry Hills is so beautiful with its trees, low traffic and cycleway. The whole streetscape is so pleasant and inviting.'

'Bourke St is great, with the separated cycleway, leafy trees, reduced number of cars and many interesting cafes.'

'Bourke Street with its trees and cycleway should be the model for most streets in Sydney.'



A challenge ahead for new suburbs

In your comments, you told us about the benefits of the urban canopy, mostly in older and more established suburbs of Sydney. The Eastern City District received 60% of comments praising trees. Weighted for volume of response by district, this was nearly twice as many comments as any other Sydney district or regional area.

Communities clearly value improving the urban tree canopy; planning for new and growing suburbs should consider this.

Next steps

Explore opportunities for future funding for public space improvements, which could leverage current grants available for tree planting to improve street amenity.

Build on the success of cross-agency partnerships through the Premier's Priority of Greening our City to support increased tree planting in streets and public spaces.



The planted median strip with canopy trees and the strip across Fifth Avenue limiting car traffic make Eighth Avenue a stand-out street for walking and cycling.

Eighth Avenue, Campsie

KEY
INSIGHT

#4



Local economies, culture and community go hand in hand

Public space and the economy

On the interactive map, comments about local business in public space made up 4% of responses. Half of these comments mentioned instances where local businesses had positive influences on public space and called out the role that business plays in activating public space and creating vibrant neighbourhoods.

Comments focused mostly on the cafe and restaurant culture for which many Sydney suburbs are famous. Users said that outdoor dining and busy streets improve amenity, add vibrancy and create a sense of community for many of these places. These characteristics are mutually beneficial: improvements in public space can improve commercial opportunities, and improved business presence can enhance the amenity of public space.

Illustrating the demand and love for bustling public places, 55 comments requested improvements to support local business activation of public space. Most of these comments indicated that allocating more space to footpaths, roads and parks for local businesses would improve the overall amenity of these spaces.



Katoomba Street! Such an amazing strip, fantastic restaurants, bars, cafes, and gift shops. Still lots and lots of potential for improving Katoomba Street. It's a vibrant spot but could be so much more the beating heart of Blue Mountains culture!

Katoomba Street, Katoomba

'The cafe is very popular and the people waiting for orders take up a large amount of space with social distancing in place. It would be good if one of the parking spaces could be used to provide additional space to free up the footpath.'

Liverpool Street, Darlinghurst

'Closing Lackey St temporarily to vehicles between Hardie Ave and Smith St would allow much more space for eating in at the cafes and restaurants, and plenty of space for pedestrians.'

Lackey Street, Summer Hill

Cycleways present an opportunity to grow tourism in regional areas. Survey comments pointed out that cycling is popular with tourists and that new connections would increase opportunities for business. In regional areas, common suggestions included cycleways between vineyards and near beaches, lakes and rivers.

Next steps

Evaluate the Streets as Shared Spaces grant program to measure the economic benefits of embellishing the public domain.

Engage with local businesses to measure revenue and patronage changes following public space improvements near their business.

Consider a targeted approach to future grant funding to support local business and high streets as well as their interactions with public space.

Community, arts and culture

Users of the interactive map highlighted art, culture and community as popular themes, clearly linking public space and community. When we looked at the comments, only comments that specifically mentioned community, art and culture were captured under the 'Culture and community' theme. Of the comments, 4% specifically mentioned the value that the community places on art and culture and the role these play in improving and activating public space.

Respondents often associated the identity of a place they loved with the culture and community of that place.

Responses also indicate that connection with local community is a big part of the pleasure people derive from public space in regional NSW. Here, community and amenity often go hand in hand, with community initiatives enhancing people's experience in public space.

The idea of connection between place and culture is not new for Australia; Aboriginal people have celebrated connection to Country for tens of thousands of years. Three survey respondents identified an opportunity to better celebrate place and culture. This involves providing better signage and access to the many Aboriginal sites around NSW to recognise the long cultural connection of these places.

“

A mural on the railway underpass would make the entrance to Minnamurra/Kiama Downs a feature and could integrate local Aboriginal history.

Minnamurra

”

Next steps

Explore opportunities for future grant funding to target criteria that celebrate and foster connection with country.

Investigate aligning with council Aboriginal heritage management strategies.



An open-air gallery that celebrates public art. The space has a diverse body of work from a variety of street artists and muralists.

Eggins Street, Lismore

‘Nimbin Main Street—colourful, vibrant and full of arts and culture. With amazing historic buildings, the street has a lot of incredible history.’

Cullen Street, Nimbin

‘Tillman Park is a lovely spot always filled with local kids and dogs. The oval at the back is a great resource and used for the local 2044 festival each year.’

Tillman Park, Sydenham

‘Wilsons River Experience Walk—a shared pathway that runs along the Wilsons River. Interpretive sites, public art installations, native landscaping and parkland facilities all link to create a unique setting for you to explore the historic, cultural, artistic and recreational fabric of life along the banks of the Wilsons River.’

Molesworth Street, Lismore

‘The Bondi Pavilion is one of Sydney’s greatest community and cultural assets. Whilst it hasn’t been properly maintained, the building has incredible features such as a full theatre, music recording studios, art and pottery studios, a great gallery space and the best balcony view in Bondi.’

Bondi Beach, Bondi

KEY
INSIGHT
#5



COVID-19 has created demand for public space

Urban resilience

During the COVID-19 lockdown, 95% of people used public space either to be outside in the sun and fresh air and see nature or to exercise. The people that did go outside during COVID-19 restrictions mainly used their local spaces—most commonly, local streets in their neighbourhood (78%) and parks in their local area (73%).

COVID-19 has underscored that having access to high-quality public space supports creating and sustaining healthy, happy and resilient communities.

Changes in behaviour

COVID-19 and government guidelines necessitated changes in community behaviour. These changes placed unprecedented demand on our local spaces. Survey respondents indicated that they changed their behaviour and were using public space more often. For example, 59% of respondents walked more often, and 25% cycled more often. By comparison, 52% of respondents drove their car less during the lockdown. Comments about people’s experience and observations of streets in their neighbourhood back up these figures.

Which public spaces have you most used during the COVID-19 restrictions?



I have explored more local streets, as I’ve had more time to walk. This has allowed me to find the better/nicer streets with more trees and better footpaths to maximise my enjoyment of my walks.

Comment from Mascot



Travel restrictions and feelings of safety in open space

Travel restrictions impacted people’s ability to go places to exercise and enjoy the outdoors while maintaining appropriate physical distancing. Some Sydneysiders were unable to travel to less crowded spaces, such as bushland. Given the availability of these places nearby, residents of the Western City District were nearly twice as likely (47%) to visit bushland or national parks as residents of the Eastern City District (25%). Only 10% of survey respondents who visited national parks and bushland reported that it was difficult to physically distance there.

The gap in access to these kinds of large public spaces led to a significant difference between the experience of residents in the Western City District and those in the rest of Sydney.

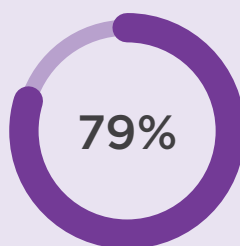
For example, the survey asked the question: ‘Have you visited anywhere it was difficult to practise physical distancing due to the number of people?’ In the Western City District, 59% of residents found it difficult to physically distance in any location compared with 79% of those in the Eastern City District. Although our survey is not a detailed study of behaviour and perception, the greater availability in the west of large open spaces, especially bushland and larger private homes, has likely contributed to the ease of maintaining safe distances in public spaces.



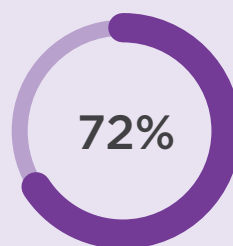
The best in this area, if you want to walk alone.
**Mount Annan Botanical Gardens,
 Campbelltown**



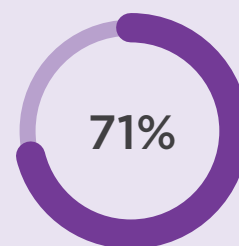
Difficulty in physical distancing by region



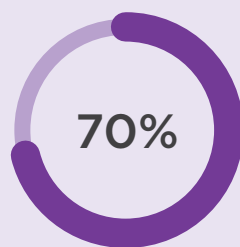
Eastern City District



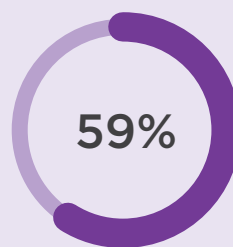
South District



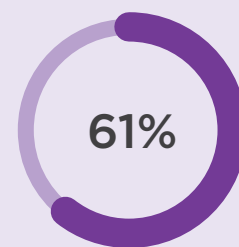
Central City District



North District



Western City District



All regional areas

● Yes ● No

A window of opportunity

Our COVID-19 survey was open from 8 May to 20 August. The feedback provides us with the opportunity to understand changes in people's behaviour and attitudes over time. It reveals that the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on behaviours has presented a window of opportunity to encourage new ways of experiencing public space.

Restrictions on where people could travel have brought the quality of and access to public space to the forefront of their minds.

Although the survey is not a detailed study of behaviour over time, the data does reveal some trends. These trends highlight that people's perception of public space has changed as restrictions have eased and concerns have shifted.

For example, although cycling was initially popular, with twice as many people reporting they were riding their bicycles more in May and June, this trend had reversed by the end of August. By then, more people were driving their cars than cycling. This is likely because, with restrictions relaxing, people could travel farther than their immediate neighbourhood for recreation or work.

Insights from people who provided feedback indicate that there is potentially a decline in the early momentum of people walking and cycling more during COVID-19 restrictions as people travel farther to access less crowded public space. We saw this in the comments about the change in



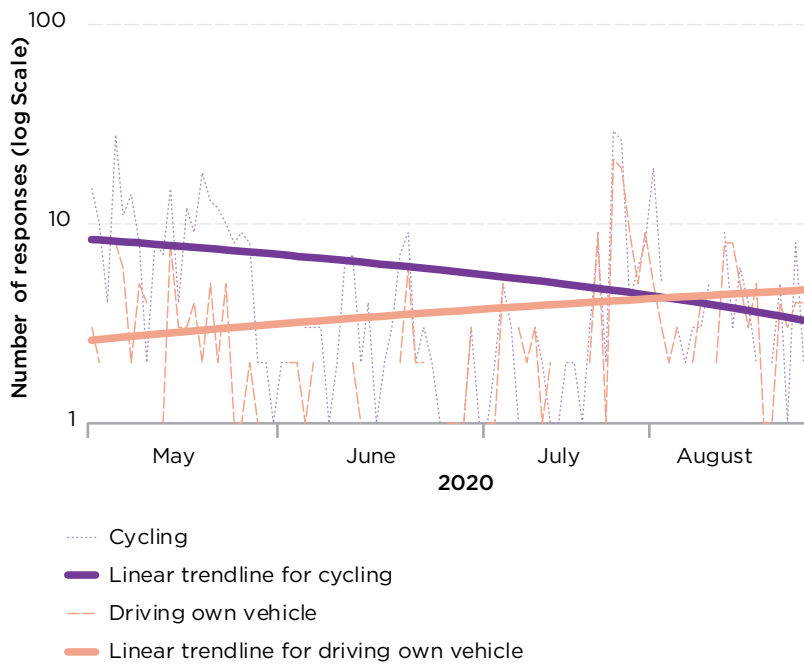
Buckra St has become an extension to local front yards during COVID-19, with children making street games with chalk. This is a great example of how people are using local streets as public spaces with more time at home.

Buckra Street, Turramurra

places people reported having difficulty staying physically distant. In early June, people felt that local streets and walking tracks were the most crowded. But as restrictions eased and people began to travel more, they felt more comfortable in these places, and fewer respondents reported physical distancing problems. At the same time, people noted that plazas and paved public spaces had become

more crowded. This trend has not been explored in depth in the survey, but the change corresponds to a growth in driving. The popularity of beaches and national parks grew at similar rates throughout the study period, providing more evidence that the public was seeking higher quality or more isolated spaces as travel restrictions eased.

How has the way you travel changed during COVID-19?



“

Footpaths need to be wider! It wasn't so bad at the start of restrictions, as it is relatively safe to walk on the road shoulder, but now that there are more cars on the roads, it's really difficult to walk on the paths and maintain distance.

”

**Comment from
St Leonards**

*Below: Streetscape in Newcastle
Courtesy of Destination NSW*



What we are doing for public space

The results of the Streets as Shared Spaces engagement demonstrate the importance of creating great public spaces, including streets where everyone feels safe and welcome. They reinforce that these places are essential to the physical and mental health of the people of NSW. Spending more time in local public spaces also has clear benefits for improving community connection and local economies.

Achieving the Premier's Priority of greener public spaces means increasing the proportion of homes in urban areas within 10 minutes' walk of quality green, open and public space. The NSW Government is working towards this target by creating new, better and more activated public spaces.

New parks and new pedestrian-friendly streets

Through the Streets as Shared Spaces program, Sydney and regional NSW councils are delivering 24 pilot projects. The government has granted councils from \$100,000 to \$1 million each. Councils will deliver these pilot projects by November 2021.

Many of the projects are in response to the feedback we received during this engagement around traffic calming, pedestrian and cyclist safety, street closures and pedestrianisation, street shading and tree planting, art and culture, and community connections.

Further, the NSW Government's \$50-million Parks for People program will increase public open space, with the program delivering eight new or improved parks around Greater Sydney. Construction will start in early 2021.

Greener and more inclusive spaces

As many of our survey respondents told us, trees play an important role in creating great public spaces for NSW communities. The Premier's Priority of greening our city is increasing green cover and planting 1 million trees across Greater Sydney by 2022. The department is achieving this by partnering with the private sector, non-government organisations and local government to plant trees and deliver public domain green cover projects, as well as by directly encouraging planting at home. Over time, this work will

increase Greater Sydney's green cover, not only improving people's experience of their public and private spaces, but also providing vital shade, creating connectivity and corridors, improving people's health and wellbeing and protecting our unique plants, animals and waterways.

Further, the \$250 million NSW Public Spaces Legacy Program aims to deliver quality long-term, safe, public and open space and to provide economic and job stimulus in response to COVID-19. The department will provide as much as \$5.5 million in funding to support councils' planning, design, construction or land-acquisition costs for new and existing public and open spaces.

The funding is available to the 68 councils using the NSW Government's ePlanning system as at 1 July 2020. The councils must adopt a Planning System Acceleration Program and show that they can achieve improvements in assessment activity from 1 September 2020 to 30 June 2021.

Another initiative, Everyone Can Play, is a five-year grant program and design guideline for providing new or upgraded inclusive play spaces across NSW. The program aims to make the experience of public space more enjoyable for everyone. Almost \$8 million in funding has already been allocated across the 2018 and 2019 grant rounds, funding 71 inclusive playspaces in total so far. The 2020-21 grant round is currently open, with up to \$7million available to councils across NSW to apply for funding for new or upgraded inclusive playspaces. Of the \$7 million, \$4 million is open to all NSW councils and \$3 million is being prioritised for LGAs who were officially declared to be impacted by bushfires in 2019-2020 to assist with community recovery and regeneration.

Safer and more vibrant communities

Along with its 24 pilot projects, the Streets as Shared Spaces program is funding 24 quick-response demonstration projects of up to \$100,000 through council grant funding. These projects will improve the safety, amenity and enjoyment of public spaces, particularly those that have seen increased use during COVID-19. The activations seek to address concerns raised during our survey by widening footpaths,



repurposing parking spaces, and improving pedestrian and cyclist safety.

Most of the projects focus on town centres, main streets and pedestrian malls to stimulate local economies. They adopt temporary cultural activations to improve the vibrancy of these places and allow for some outdoor dining and street trading.

Transport for NSW, in partnership with councils, introduced more than 20 kilometres of pop-up

cycleways across Sydney to provide more travel options. More pop-up cycleways will be rolled out in outer metropolitan and regional areas, including Newcastle, Wollongong and Goulburn, in coming months. Transport for NSW has also lowered speed limits in 12 busy locations across Sydney to provide a safer environment for pedestrians and bicycle riders.

*Above: Great Penrith River Walk, Penrith
Courtesy of Destination NSW*

What's next?

Building on the feedback we have received, future opportunities include:

- exploring and detailing the experiences of public space for different demographic and socio-economic groups in NSW
- collaborating and advocating across agencies to understand opportunities for improved connectivity and explore such opportunities as:
 - for walking, access and connection improvements between neighbourhood hubs (schools, parks, shops) and pedestrian prioritisation in these areas
 - for cycling, secure parking, safety, maintenance of roads and cycleways, connectivity improvements and effective wayfinding
- studying the Streets as Shared Spaces grant projects to understand different public space interventions and the level of impact different designs have on people's feelings of safety
- promoting the new public space and public life evaluation tool to empower people, industry and government agencies to assess their public spaces and understand pedestrian safety challenges in streets and public spaces
- working with councils and other government agencies to rapidly address simple safety challenges identified through this process
- exploring future funding for public space improvements, which could include grants for tree planting to improve street amenity
- exploring cross-agency partnerships to support increased tree planting in streets and public spaces
- evaluating the Streets as Shared Spaces local government grant program to measure the economic benefits of public domain embellishments
- considering a targeted approach to future grant funding to support local business and high streets as well as their interactions with public space.

*Right: Sampson Street, Orange
Courtesy of Destination NSW*







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