

Parramatta Road – “A new identity for a byword for urban blight” – or are we dreaming?

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Parramatta Road has been a byword for urban blight for generations. And yet it is an important and historic transport corridor between Parramatta and Sydney, there since colonisation and probably before. It is still the most direct link between the two urban nodes of Sydney, Sydney city and Parramatta, and increasingly significant given the growth of Parramatta and western Sydney generally.

In part as an outcome of the development of Westconnex and the M4 which is designed to bypass the old Parramatta Road with an East West tunnel, the NSW government has provided significant funding to “improve the amenity” of the original Parramatta Road.

One might see this as a once in a generation opportunity to address the ugliness of the Parramatta Road corridor, and one might assume that, with the massive investment in the alternative, parallel freeway routes, that the traffic environment of Parramatta Road might become more friendly and locally focussed. Visions come to mind of tree-lined boulevards, regional cycleways, pocket parks, public art ...

But, of course anything this expensive, this contested, this controversial, this important – to all sorts of people – won’t be simple. Dreams, and even modest aspirations, will need to be re-calibrated, fights fought, and concessions made. The challenge for the designers is not so much in the conceptualisation of great ideas, but more in keeping focussed on the identification of the important worthwhile changes and championing them through the often-turgid approvals processes.

In this presentation we share the journey that we have taken over ten months on this project and reflect on the bewildering complexity of the city and the bureaucracies within it. It’s a story of hope, disappointment, cunning strategies, heroic interventions, and vast amounts of money.