

'Permanently destructive': new tower will make North Sydney's problems worse

By Jeremy Dawkins

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Four days before Christmas, the NSW government announced [a contract with Lendlease](#) for the new Victoria Cross metro station in North Sydney and a "[landmark building above it](#)".

This appears to mean that Lendlease will pay a [relatively modest \\$200 million](#) for a large site compulsorily acquired by Sydney Metro. On this they will build by far the largest building in North Sydney – also the most wind swept, with the largest shadows – while incorporating an entrance and services for the station beneath Miller Street.



The development slated for Victoria Cross station in North Sydney.

It certainly means that North Sydney will be "[transformed](#)". All of its current defects – congestion, lack of civic space and functions, cold windy streets – will be made worse.

Any long-term strategy to make North Sydney a real city centre, a centre of public life for the region, will be stopped dead.

This addition to North Sydney's woes bypasses approved plans and normal planning processes for commercial buildings. It appears the state government has been prepared to commit to contracts prematurely and prior to the elections.

The Committee for North Sydney, 20 eminent North Sydney leaders in architecture, urban design, transportation, city planning and urban development, have written to the Premier to ensure that she clearly understands just how permanently destructive this decision would be.

The compelling evidence for this has recently been reinforced by [two studies](#) released by the North Sydney Council.

Undertaken by leading consultancies, the studies address the poverty of civic space and functions in the city centre, and search for ways to create good spaces and a civic heart.

Bizarrely the briefs for both studies precluded any consideration of the new Metro station site as a potential space for civil society activities, but both prove beyond doubt that a single initiative could transform the North Sydney city centre with a wide, level, sheltered, sunny public space on the Miller Street axis.

The two reports tacitly but emphatically confirm the findings of others: that no matter how and where the planners and designers look for inspiration and ideas, there is only a single site where a wide, level, sheltered, sunny civic space is even possible: at the corner of Miller and Berry Streets.

The government may regard it as fortuitous that its agency Sydney Metro now owns this site, all 4800 square metres of it. The government knows, and the community is well aware, that half of the site, Tower Square – until recently North Sydney's best people place – was resumed for a song.

The Committee for North Sydney has characterised the present city centre as an "office park with through traffic" and painted an alternative future. Instead of launching this future through opportunities presented by the metro, the NSW government has chosen the cash.

They call this "value capture". It is value extraction: resuming the site, and selling it as soon as possible (for less than it is ultimately worth with a functioning metro station) while imposing negative impacts of the whole city centre.

Sydney Metro may have its cash-oriented marching orders, but the Premier needs to know that the metro can be a force for *value creation* and a better Sydney. The alternative legacies of this critical decision in North Sydney could not be more stark, or more immediate.

Jeremy Dawkins is the convenor of the [Committee for North Sydney](#) and vice-president of the International Society of City and Regional Planners.