



# Planning for Pride

Thursday 23 February 2023



**Tom Loomes**  
Transport for NSW



**Cindy Williams**  
Arcadis



**Peter Gahan**  
Sydney Gay and  
Lesbian Mardi Gras

## About Roads Australia

[Roads Australia](#) (RA) is the peak body for roads within an integrated transport system, representing an industry that contributes \$236 billion annually to the economy and supports 1.4 million jobs. RA brings industry, government, and communities together to lead the evolution of Australia's roads, integrated transport and mobility.

RA's members include all of Australia's transport agencies, road owners, major contractors and consultants, material suppliers, service and technology providers, and other relevant industry groups. RA's policy focus extends across five activity streams: Safety; Capacity; Transport Reform; Customer Experience; and Sustainability. Diversity and Inclusion is a commitment across each stream.

## Event Summary

RA in partnership with **Arcadis** welcomed over 90 people to its first pride event to hear from the following speakers:

[Tom Loomes](#) – Executive Director – Cities Integration, [Transport for New South Wales](#)

[Cindy Williams](#) - National Sales Director – Mobility, [Arcadis](#)

[Peter \(PJ\) Gahan](#) – Director of Operations and Programming, [Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras](#)

The panel discussion was facilitated by [Michael Kilgariff](#), CEO, [Roads Australia](#).

## Key Points

- Roads and streets play an important role for communities beyond transport links, like Oxford Street in Sydney does for the LGBTQIA+ community.
- Flexibility and being open to failure are a part of innovation. Industry and clients accepting this is crucial for the creation of community centred places.

## Questions to take away

- There is work to be done to improve the diversity and inclusion of the transport infrastructure industry. How can we continue supporting the LGBTQIA+ community to make a welcoming workplace?
- When people use and engage with places there is a level of risk attached. How do we balance managing those risks with place-based opportunities?

## Place and the community

Oxford Street represents the heart of Sydney's LGBTQIA+ community. Since 1978, community members have journeyed to this significant place to celebrate, protest and commemorate in the continuous search for equality.

From 17 February to 5 March 2023, Sydney Mardi Gras and Sydney WorldPride united to deliver Sydney WorldPride 2023. This was the first time the event was staged in the southern hemisphere, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Australian Gay Pride Week, the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras and the fifth anniversary of Marriage Equality in Australia.

At the centre of this event is Oxford Street.

**Tom Loomes** expressed the street's importance and why it is a place that matters.

Substantial progress towards equality for the LGBTQIA+ community has made Oxford Street a safe place for the community to gather and celebrate but this has not always been the case.

The Mardi Gras that we celebrate today began as a protest and was born out of the rallying cry, "out of the bars and into the streets". The streets were a key part of the movement and the push for equal rights for the LGBTQIA+ community.

Back in 1978, and even before then, queerness was not as accepted by society and remained hidden behind closed doors in safer spaces such as bars and clubs.

The LGBTQIA+ community remained invisible and when members were visible, it often led to exclusion.

Stepping out visibly onto Oxford Street was a public display of queerness to promote inclusion.

Recently, the way Mardi Gras has adapted to COVID and its effect on the community re-emphasises the importance of place.

For the last 2 years, Mardi Gras has been held at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG). As an enclosed venue that usually holds sporting events the SCG provided a more controlled environment where fewer policy and traffic controllers were needed.

Considering the risks in managing such a large-scale event, it made sense to hold Mardi Gras at the SCG, but at the cost of deprioritising the importance of community place and Oxford Street.

Despite this risk assessment, **PJ Gahan** said that it would be the end of 45 years of tradition and community history should the event continue at the SCG. It would completely change the way that the community could express themselves and the number of people able to attend would be approximately ¼ of what would have been the case if held along the street.

The difference between having Mardi Gras in public on Oxford Street and in the SCG cannot be understated.



## Designing inclusive places

Oxford Street is just one of many examples of places that hold community significance beyond what their original designers considered.

The strict guidelines, procedures and standards that the transport infrastructure industry relies on, as well as a culture of risk aversion, can destroy the ability to allow the community to adopt and accept a place.

While safety standards are important, applying them identically across projects without thinking about how a community may use this space can lead to other negative outcomes.

The speakers outlined that a new approach to traditional planning and designing practices is needed.

The first and most important step is understanding and engaging with existing communities. This will bring broader considerations into play for the planners and designers allowing a holistic conception of place, including how a place could be used at varying times of the day and year.

Another change is building industry and client acceptance of testing, trialling and importantly failure during the innovation process.

For example, increasing the use of temporary interventions is a way that innovations can be tested. It provides a lower cost way to assess the impact of these interventions will have in for all the uses of streets and roads (not just as traffic routes). At the conclusion of these trials, successful interventions can be made permanent and lessons shared with other communities.

In our standard approach, **Cindy Williams** acknowledges that the fear of failure can prevent the best outcomes for place being realised.

Testing and trialling ideas and moving to the next one quickly if it doesn't work are needed to achieve inclusive outcomes.

Mardi Gras and its home on Oxford Street shows the importance of communities using streets and roads for things other than cars.

As we continue planning and designing transport for Australia, it's crucial to keep in mind the varying uses of places to ensure we continue creating community centred inclusive places.

