

Rokeby Road South Streetscape Masterplan

Summary of Community Workshop 2 - Monday 5 February 2018

Held at City of Subiaco Administration Building

Twelve community members attended the second Community Workshop, of who six had participated in the first workshop. James Hambly, Coordinator Transport and Feet at the City of Subiaco, summarised the objectives and process of the project, after which Place Laboratory presented the draft design that was developed as result of Workshop 1.

The presentation was broken up into 5 sections: introduction, character, private interfaces, material palette and streetscape design. After each section the group discussed if the presented was a satisfying translation of what was discussed in Workshop 1 and if they had additional considerations or feedback.

Introduction

The first section was a summary of the objectives of the project (traffic safety, pedestrian priority, Subiaco character, limit disruption to businesses and cost effectiveness) and the outcomes of Workshop 1, to refresh the memory and bring the community members that hadn't attended Workshop 1 up to speed. The group agreed this was indeed what was discussed. One note was made that 'more nightlife' was not necessarily needed for Rokeby Road South.

Character

The analysis of the character of the residential streets surrounding Rokeby Road South was presented. The analysis of the streetscape was captured in 1 characteristic image analysing spatial aspects that make you experience the Subiaco character while walking its streets. The terminology of the character of Rokeby Road south was described as classic, stylish, simple, elegant and timeless.

The group agreed with the analysis of the character and preserved it as a good base for the development of the Masterplan design. Attendees mentioned that Scheme Amendment 35 is challenging this character; however this is outside the scope of this project.

Private Interfaces

The approach to improve the private-public interfaces was presented, making a difference between 'active' frontages – shops and cafes with liveliness spilling out on the sidewalk – and 'gardens' – offices and dwellings without active engagement with the street, but the potential to present themselves proudly with a stylish garden. The improvement is outside the scope of this project, but important to consider regarding the street character. Suggested was to advise the City to develop guidelines and possibly grants to facilitate owners and tenants to improve their street interface.

The attendees largely agreed with the proposal and supported the development of guidelines and a proactive approach to encourage owners and tenants to contribute to the streetscape. They agreed it should be guidelines, not something for the City to enforce. The guidelines should be developed with the owners and tenants, to reflect their ambitions and concerns and enhance support of a precinct style. The guide should consider shop signs. Reference was made to the Grounds of Alexandria in Sydney as a good example. The guide should also express that the gardens need to suit the architecture of the existing buildings. 'You shouldn't slap a traditional picket fence on a concrete office building.'

Material Palette

The proposed material palette for the streetscape was presented. For the footpath pavement the proposal is to continue the red bricks, but with a subtle, stylish pattern, edged with granite kerbs. The road will generally be in grey and red asphalt, with for the intersections dark grey cobble stones, combined with white or light grey stone for zebras – no paint. The existing street furniture is mapped and proposed is to develop a ‘family of furniture’ around the existing lantern street lights and heritage bollard (example outside Regal Theatre), in a dark grey colour to be stylish and in the background.

Overall the attendees supported the palette and agreed it says ‘this place is special’, although several elements were commented on and were discussed in more detail. Some didn’t like the red brick, partly due to practical reasons (uneven and stained in alfresco areas), while others suggested it might be a heritage requirement. (This has been checked since and there is no document, heritage or otherwise, that details materials to be used in this streetscape.) The roughness and lifespan of the cobble stones were discussed. A finish rough enough to be noticed in the car, but smooth enough to cycle, was perceived to be suitable. Using red cobbles was suggested, though most agreed that dark grey cobble stones suited the simple, elegant streetscape most. The thought of zebra crossings was questioned – it might look too modern – but this discussion was deferred to the next section after more details were presented on the streetscape design. A more elaborate pattern of cobble stones received some assent and one person suggested to use the Subiaco logo for this. The approach to the ‘family of furniture’ was supported, with the note to keep the aspiration high when selecting materials. There was a suggestion to add a stylish tree grate, for instance as used on St. George’s Terrace.

Streetscape Design

The streetscape design needs to combine the Subiaco character with the objectives to reduce speed and address the black spots, and a construction that causes little inconvenience to the businesses and can be done for a limited budget. To bring these objectives together, and combine them with the Workshop 1 outcomes, the proposal is to start with upgrading the intersections with Hamersley Road and Heytesbury Road. The idea is to remove the median islands, so that both the carriageway and the corner radii can be narrowed, resulting in wider footpaths and a shorter crossing distance for pedestrians. The intersection will be paved with cobble stones, to create a rumble and slow down cars. Paved zebras further contribute to slowing down speeds, while prioritising pedestrians at the same time. The second stage concentrates on the blocks between the intersections. Additional trees are proposed in the footpath to fill up gaps in the tree lines. The carriageway is visually narrowed with line marking and wider parking zones in resurfaced red asphalt. The painted median is removed. In the long-term the brick pavement of the footpaths is proposed to be extended to a new kerb at the location of the line marking. Parking will then be on the bricks, while this zone can also be used for alfresco and other initiatives – flexible in use and permanent in treatment. Mid-block rumble strips or crossing can be added to give pedestrians more priority and support the speed reduction. The intersection with Thomas Street is narrowed to provide more pedestrian space and create a larger planted island with an art piece marking the entry of Rokeby Road.

An important concern that was raised by several people in the group, was the potential redistribution of traffic: lowering the speed on Rokeby Road might lead to more traffic and higher speeds in the surrounding residential streets. It would be strange if the central street would have a lower signposted speed (40km/h) than the residential streets! This point was extensively discussed. Several ways to prevent the redistribution of traffic to the residential streets were discussed, including signposting them as 40km/hr. Other attendees said that lowering the speed on Rokeby Road should have priority and then might be rolled out over the residential streets.

There was also a considerable discussion about the merits of narrowing the road and removing the median. One person suggested a median with trees, however this would be costly, disruptive to construct and reduce the long-term possibility to widen the footpaths. Someone mentioned that narrowing the road would cause driver frustration when they wouldn't be able to bypass a parking car. A number of others said they thought it was a good idea to stop what is sometimes a dangerous manoeuvre (driving around a parking car). One of them mentioned he was sceptical when a similar change was made on William Street in Northbridge but said once installed it worked well. People get used to it and wait. Another attendee asked if dedicated bicycle lanes had been considered. They have, but the available road width is not enough for official cycle lanes that meet Australian Standards, especially when taking the space for buses and parking into consideration. However, using red asphalt zones that are wider than needed for parking, combined with removing the median, provides more space for cyclists and for cars to bypass cyclists with enough distance. Concerns were raised over shortening the parking bays to achieve more bays. Longer bays might be preferable to get in quicker and easier.

There was strong support in the group for giving pedestrians priority at the intersections, with most understanding that the zebra crossings were an important way to achieve it. One person thought the look of the zebras would not fit the Subiaco character. Several attendees mentioned that the streetscape design should be a holistic approach, taking all user and technical requirements into account, and they recognised that in what was presented, taking the improvements discussed during the workshop into account. However, many agreed the presented reference photo was not looking good enough for Subiaco. An attendee thought that zebras would not be safe and cause more pedestrian accidents. Research recently published by the Journal of the Australasian College of Road Safety proves zebras can cut road deaths and serious injuries on urban roads by up to 63% (Vol 28 no 2, May 2017).

Another attendee asked if a raised crossing, similar to those in Hay Street could be used. It was explained that the City had moved away from these on Rokeby Road, as they wrongly give pedestrians the impression they have right of way. To reduce the risk of accidents, additional signage was needed – 'Pedestrians have to give way to through traffic' – which undermines the objective of pedestrian priority. Widening the footpaths was also discussed. All but one was in favour, given the lack of space available around alfrescos with pedestrians, prams, dogs and cyclists. A couple of people mentioned they did not see the need for bollards at the intersection corner. They might give the impression that the corners are not safe for pedestrians. While others suggested hedges in the corners to create distance and make it feel safer for pedestrians. It was explained that the bollards keep the corners permeable, while providing a sense of protection for those who need it. They can also assist drivers in getting used to the tighter corners. Discussed was whether permanent planting or planter boxes could be added and if this should be maintained by the City or the businesses. The general consensus was that low-level planting would improve the intersections. Several attendees expressed that they would prefer more trees at the intersections and sooner along the streets. One person asked if roundabouts had been considered. Yes they have, but were rejected by the Council and resulted in this project.

The group supported the approach for the Thomas Street intersection, with an art statement. At various moments people mentioned that there should also be some artwork or interesting features scattered along Rokeby Road to grab people's attention. Although outside the scope of the project, a paragraph on public art will be added to the Masterplan.

After 2.5 hours intensive and productive discussion the second Community Workshop was closed with thanks to all attendees for their constructive contribution.