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MEDIA RELEASE

An evaluation of the safe city strategy in central Sydney

Sydney has become a safer city over the last few years according to those who live and work in it, the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research has found.

The Bureau reached this conclusion after evaluating the City of Sydney Council's Safe City Strategy. The strategy was implemented in Sydney's central business district by the Council about two years ago in response to public concern about the safety of the city. The Strategy included:

- an upgrade of city streets and footpaths;
- improved lighting;
- Street Safety Cameras in crime 'hotspots';
- a trial of four Emergency Video Phones which provide video communication with the nearest police station at the push of a button;
- a community safety education program;
- an Accord with licensed premises aimed at reducing alcohol-related violence and misbehaviour; and
- a Safe Taxi Ranks initiative.

A survey of over 1,800 city users conducted by the Bureau early last year revealed a high level of satisfaction with all of these initiatives, despite an overall moderate awareness of the Strategy.

Awareness of the initiatives ranged from a high of 77 per cent for the Street Safety Cameras to a low of 24 per cent for the community education program and 33 per cent for the Safe Taxi Ranks initiative. The lower levels of awareness of the latter two initiatives was expected because the implementation of these initiatives had not been completed at the time of the survey.

All initiatives were rated by over 60 per cent of respondents as likely to improve safety. Those which received the highest level of endorsement in terms of improved safety were improved lighting (93%) and the Safe Taxi Ranks initiative (89%).

Asked to rate the safety of the city at the time of the interview (after most initiatives had been implemented), compared with 12 months earlier, most respondents said the city was the 'same'. However, while 30 per cent of respondents thought the city was 'safer now', only 13 per cent thought it was 'worse now'.

The Bureau also asked respondents how safe they felt in six different parts of the city (George Street/Town Hall, Hyde Park, Central/Belmore Park, Haymarket/Chinatown, Circular Quay/The Rocks and the Retail Centre).

Most respondents rated these areas as being about as safe at the time of interview as they were 12 months previously. However, a larger proportion rated each of these areas as 'safer now' than 'worse now'.

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Overall, at least 79 per cent of respondents said they were either not concerned or only a little concerned about physical attacks/threats or stolen/damaged property in any of the nominated parts of the city during the day.

About half the respondents, however, said that they were either quite concerned or very concerned about physical attacks/threats or stolen/damaged property at night in Hyde Park and Central/Belmore Park.

As part of its evaluation, the Bureau compared trends in recorded crime in the Strategy area, postcode 2000, with those in the surrounding Sydney Local Government Area, both before and after the Strategy was implemented. The offences examined were serious assault, common assault, sexual offences, robbery with a weapon, robbery without a weapon, steal from person and malicious damage to property. The results of this part of the evaluation were more inconclusive.

For only two of these offences was there any indication that the Strategy may have had a positive impact on crime, namely serious assault and robbery without a weapon.

There were substantial increases in these offences from 1998 to 1999 in the precincts immediately surrounding the Strategy area, suggesting that similar increases would be expected in postcode 2000 if the Strategy had no effect on crime. Instead, however, these offences remained stable in postcode 2000, consistent with the Strategy preventing an increase in crime.

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