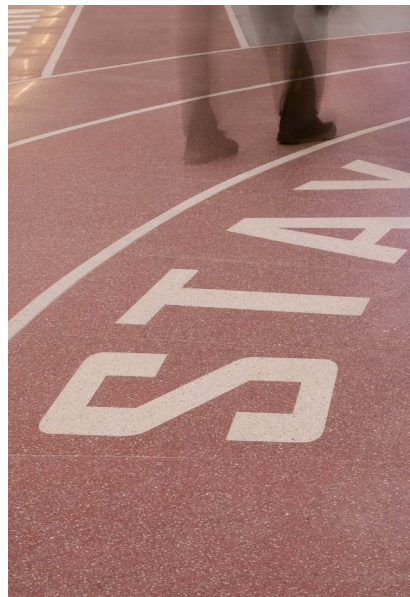
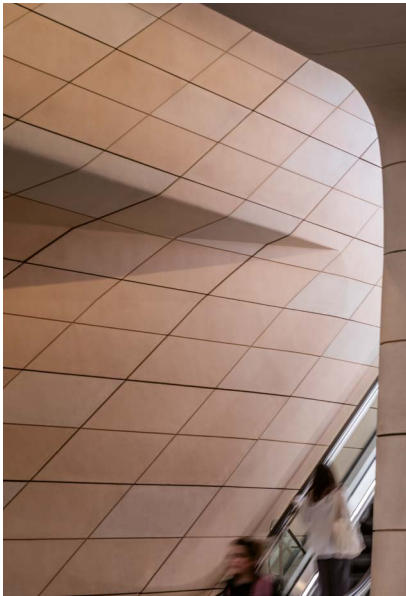


Sydney on the Move

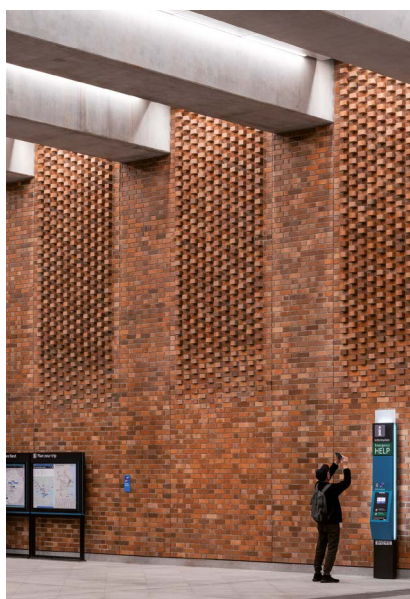
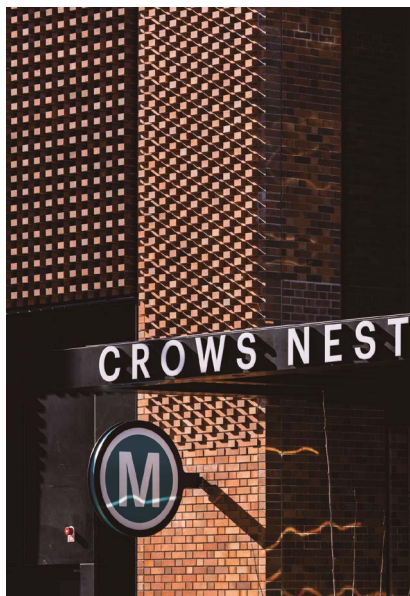
Text by Emma-Kate Wilson



Sydney's rail infrastructure has received a once-in-a-generation upgrade, with an entirely new metro line and a series of stations designed to improve the commuter experience and, ultimately, the Sydneysider's quality of life.



ENTRANCE TO
CITY RAILWAY



Previous page
The Sydney Metro upgrade has added practical elements as well as character. Central Station's redesign brings in light and air via cathedral-like ceilings while preserving heritage elements
Images by Trevor Mein

This page
Crows Nest is one of a handful of new stations, and was designed by Woods Bagot around the idea of extending the village
Images by Trevor Mein and Kyle Ford

Facing page
Central Station's overhaul by Woods Bagot with John McAslan + Partners focused on safety, warmth, tactility and natural light
Image by Brett Boardman

For some, Sydney's Central Station was a place to avoid. A confusing maze of gloomy passages and dark corners, it could feel uninviting or unsafe to travel through. But a recent transformation, completed in 2024, has rendered it almost unrecognisable. The station now has a cathedral-like vastness, with soaring ceilings bathed in light. 'It's on par with the scale of other Central Stations around the world,' says John Prentice, principal at Woods Bagot, which was tasked with the overhaul of Central Station with John McAslan + Partners. Despite the subterranean environs, Prentice says the firm sought to create a 'positive underground experience', adding that their research gave them 'a real understanding of those nuances about human interaction, the sense of consideration, sense of safety, warmth, tactility and natural light.'

The project, however, encompasses more than just Central Station. A whole network of new stations has arrived, a mix of updates on grand scales at Central Station and Sydenham, and new builds at Crows Nest, Victoria Cross, Barangaroo, Martin Place, Gadigal and Waterloo, all offering a distinct sense of arrival for commuters. Designed to be instantly recognisable, each station was created with a unique set of materials, colours, finishes and, most notably, public art. Unexpected and surprising, a sense of delight now underpins the entire Sydney Metro.

Beyond the art, the locally inspired materials and the rigorous structural engineering, it's the light that makes these facilities special. Rejecting the notion that underground train terminals are dark and dingy, these are light and bright, helping to increase usability and ensure overall comfort, with the aim of making getting around the city a joy. 'We want to prioritise the experience of the person using the station, and that was one of the mantras at the beginning of the project,' says Muir Livingstone of Foster + Partners, which completed preliminary designs for five of the stations and worked on Barangaroo and Gadigal stations from start to finish, with Architectus and Cox Architecture respectively. The users are at the heart of its design, continuing even into the stations' toilets. 'They call it the super standard — and it is. It's bigger and better. And Metro's taken the toilets to the next level, better than you'd get in any fancy nightclub,' says Architectus senior associate Liam Fitzgerald, who worked with Sydney Metro on the initial planning of several stations and took Barangaroo to completion.



Everyone gets to experience the spaces thanks to the generous provision of escalators and lifts — no more time wasted for those with prams, wheelchairs or mobility issues. And the materials enhance the experience: light, bright, clean and sleek, these are spaces made to age and grow into themselves. Whether it's brickwork made to feel like home, the familiar sandstone that's so common in Sydney, or metals that add warmth and will patina with time, materiality is the star. It's architecture you want to touch, and it's for everyone.

It's through this premise that Sydney Metro uses architecture to engage with the community. Woods Bagot's Crows Nest station was designed around the idea of extending the village, taking cues from the Federation-style porch complete with patterned ceramic tile artworks. 'Everyone who walks through that space says "This is our station",' says Prentice. 'I remember there was a lot of opposition about the metro coming, but it's been a real success story.'

Victoria Cross station, meanwhile, is an extension of North Sydney's public domain. The project connects 'fragmented streets and lanes with a new through-site link in the form of a laneway, open to the sky,' says Cox Architecture associate director Chris Collignon. The station's white palette is punctuated by Michael Hill and Indigo Hanlee's video installation *Sundial*, which tracks the sun and moon for a novel experience, changing every hour throughout the day.

The stations have become embedded in their locations and, as part of this connection to place, noteworthy efforts have been made to recognise First Nations communities and culture. Significant Aboriginal names like Gadigal and Barangaroo were chosen for two of the stations, while at Waterloo Station, Nicole Monks's *Footprints on Gadigal Nura* is a series of three large wall-mounted sculptures that celebrates the Gadigal people, the traditional owners of the land.

At every station, public artworks are used as place markers, while being fundamentally integrated with the architecture. 'A key approach for the station artworks was to locate them at entrances, to engage and welcome people right from the start of their journey,' says Kati Westlake, Sydney Metro's associate director of design. Callum Morton's *The Underneath*, for example, is a pair of monumental, brightly coloured tiled works that mark the two entrances to Gadigal Station, while at Central Station, Bronwyn Bancroft's bold brick installation *Time Travellers* takes over the facade of four ventilation towers.

Commuting on these rapid, driverless trains between Sydney's new stations, it feels like the iconic harbour city is finally in the future. The materials cocoon, while the architecture, engineering and even the toilets keep travellers safe and comfortable. At each turn, there's a sense of joy and delight and of noble goals realised. Sydney Metro isn't just about conveyance, it's about connection.

The project made efforts to recognise the history of Australia's First Nations people. At Waterloo, Nicole Monks's *Footprints on Gadigal Nura* recognises the area's traditional owners
Image by Peter Bennetts

