



THE TURNING CIRCLE PROJECT

RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS IN MELBOURNE CBD

Turning Circle Project is a plan to revitalise Melbourne by engaging the dynamic power of its local creative industries and the adaptive re-use of vacant CBD space. It is designed to immediately support the social, cultural and economic vitality of Melbourne by fostering creative enterprise and cultural production through the creation of a new central creative precinct.



Images from 180 The Strand London, The Victorian Eco Innovation Lab activator for Friesland, Netherlands and Assemble UK

The idea responds to the sudden emptying of Melbourne's CBD and the likely long-term effects of Covid-19 on demand for commercial, retail and office space. Its aim is to develop prosperity, local economies and with the involvement of a new generation of artists/designers in the life of Melbourne CBD.

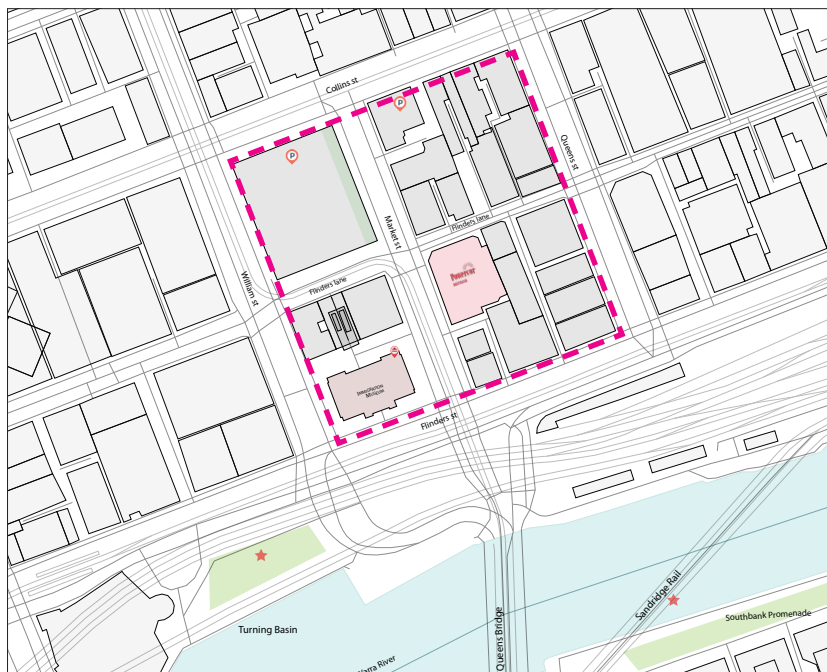
We all love Melbourne's dynamic cultural identity and would be devastated by the loss of its reputation as a cultural capital, its liveability and its role as a creative powerhouse.

CREATING A CENTRAL CREATIVE PRECINCT

Melbourne’s CBD has a history of renewal, most recently in the 1970s and 1980s when many artists and designers moved into vacant offices and other low-cost buildings. This in turn attracted complementary cultural enterprises and created a buzz of economic activity and a unique city community.

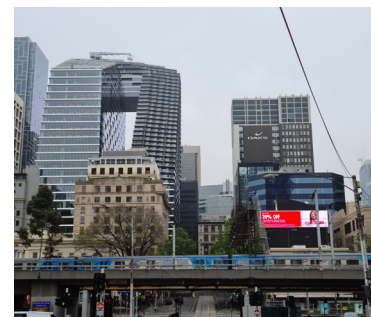
We believe the current Covid-19 crisis requires a major rethink of how we use our City. Our plan is to work with key stakeholders and engage Melbourne’s creative industries to strengthen the CBD through developing a central creative precinct.

The area selected for the Turning Circle Project is bounded by Collins, William, Flinders and Queen Streets. It is a significant location, close to the foundation site of Melbourne and the new Market Street Park and public amphitheatre at the new Collins Arch development. Its valuable mix of features also includes diverse building stock, the Immigration Museum (former Customs House) together with creative and hospitality businesses make it the perfect home for a new creative precinct.



Precinct map

Turning Circle Precinct



The Turning Circle research project and case study is a long-term plan, devised in association with RMIT University, to revitalise Melbourne and support its creative industries.

Phase 1 will culminate in a series of summer outdoor events in the new Market Street Park and Collins Arch amphitheatre to coincide with the “reopening” of the City. Subsequent phases will continue in 2021 identifying vacant spaces and brokering introductions between landlords and artists/creative businesses. Throughout the project, a public/private partnership will be developed that includes government, business and philanthropy that encourages new local economies and communities in the precinct.



THE TURNING CIRCLE PROJECT VISION

The Turning Circle Collective vision to support local creative production in Melbourne can be summarised as follows:

- **Create a centre of creative production model in CBD.**

Cultural activity is a key part of Melbourne's identity and brand. Using creative production as the driver, develop new local economies and civic engagement by repurposing vacant space in CBD with the new generation of artists and designers.

- **Develop a model that is adaptable and repeatable.**

Research, implement, test and document the development of organizational, financial and governance models for CBD based creative production hubs - and use Turning Circle case study as an open access resource to build collective understanding about how to grow the creative sector economy, related infrastructure and local manufacturing.

- **Build a project partnership team**

Build a collaborative public/private partnership team of government, landlords, education institutions, relevant precinct stakeholders and creative industry sector to cooperatively build, support and manage a creative production precinct.

- **Create dynamic civic spaces and activate CBD**

Build a dynamic civic outcome, emphasising outdoor and accessible activities and events that will promote, support and grow a long-term creative community in the CBD as a vital site of production, creative entrepreneurship and community engagement.

- **Leverage existing local opportunities**

Work with existing precinct groups, landlords and cultural programs and events to provide leverage to engage new creative industry opportunities that specifically draw value from and further support existing local creative industry and CBD activation.

Stakeholder engagement (September 2020)

- City of Melbourne (councillors, cultural infrastructure, city design studio, smart city office, precinct committees)
- RMIT University
- Museum Victoria / Immigration Museum
- Collins Arch (Cbus, ISPT, W Hotel, owners corporation)
- Schoolhouse Studios
- Testing Grounds/ Siteworks
- MPavilion/ Naomi Milgrom Foundation
- Victorian State Government

THE TURNING CIRCLE PROJECT: Why now, and why here...?

The Turning Circle Project is based on our belief in the importance of creative industries and cultural production to the vitality of Melbourne as a city and its role as a cultural and economic powerhouse.

From our research, there are multiple factors that are likely to reduce demand for commercial, retail and office space in the CBD:

- economic impact of Covid-19, especially during the 2nd Melbourne lockdown, will put pressure on corporate bottom lines and companies will be looking to reduce spending potentially reducing demand for CBD office space;
- economic impact of Covid-19 will see a dramatic increase in retail vacancies;
- economic impact of Covid-19 will see a dramatic decline in tourism, CBD business activity and visitation;
- the impact on supply line businesses and complementary industries, especially hospitality that were co-located in the CBD;
- employees' preferences for more flexible working arrangements, including working from home;
- employees' preferences to cut their commute, either to save time or a reticence to use public transport;
- realisation by employers that remote working might not impact long term productivity
- expected drift to better quality (premium) office space and emptying of lower quality commercial stock;
- impact on viability and appeal of high-end residential in the CBD if there is reduced visitor numbers and reduced cultural and hospitality activity;
- reduction in international student numbers on CBD activity;
- moves by large firms/government to set up hub and spoke models of office use, with reduced centrally located (hub) office space mostly assigned for meetings and day to day work achieved offsite in suburban (spoke) locations;
- Covid-19 health and safety protocols and social distancing;

The research undertaken in the project will test some of these ideas and assumptions in the case study area (Turning Circle) as it has the benefit of a number of key elements:

- high quality public space
- diversity in the built form and scale
- existing cultural activity

The Turning Circle area is a mixed-use area occupied by residential, hospitality, retail and office space, (play up the idea of more mixed than just office..)ranging from the new Collins Arch development to some of the oldest bluestone buildings remaining in Melbourne. And it includes the Immigration Museum, shared work spaces, hotels, carparks, publishing houses, cultural organisations, architects, indigenous design business and a mix of hospitality businesses. All of the properties and businesses within the Turning Circle area will be affected by the impact of Covid-19. In real estate parlance, much of the office accommodation in the precinct would be considered "B-grade", and most likely to be vacant if the projected oversupply plays out in the way that is expected.

The Turning Circle Project aims to respond to these challenges with a long-term vision that develops new local economies, reinforces Melbourne's reputation as a cultural capital and improves community engagement for the lasting benefit of Melbourne CBD. This vision is based on developing an inclusive and engaged governance model, built on a partnership of public and private stakeholders.



THE TURNING CIRCLE PROJECT LEADERSHIP

The decision to establish the Turning Circle Collective is in response to the enormous challenges facing Melbourne due to the impact of Covid-19. The impetus to act now is drawn from the group's shared experiences of Melbourne during four decades of economic and cultural expansion and downturns.

The Turning Circle project will be led by **Wendy Lasica** (urban planner and creative producer), **Michael Trudgeon** (architect, designer and educator), **Millie Cattlin** (designer, creative precinct creator) and **Robert Buckingham** (creative director and design entrepreneur) – who have each played a significant role in the social, cultural and economic life of Melbourne.

The combined skills and experience of the Turning Circle Collective includes design, arts production, event and festival programming, strategic planning, education and entrepreneurship. It combines innovative, intelligent and resourceful 'thinking and doing' with extensive local, national and international contacts and high-level insight and experience.

Michael Trudgeon and Robert Buckingham were part of the reinvigoration of Melbourne in the 1980s, and have continued to play key roles in the design sector. Wendy Lasica has produced and toured live performance in Melbourne and internationally and is a trained urban planner. Millie Cattlin lectures at RMIT University and has established two innovative creative spaces (Testing Grounds in Southbank and Siteworks in Brunswick).

The Collective's involvement in Melbourne's cultural and creative industries sector gives it considerable insight and extensive contacts that will help support the next generation of artists, designers and creative producers – and help Melbourne manage the forthcoming economic, social and cultural challenges.

Contact email: info@crowd.com.au

Website: crowd.com.au/tcc