

Significant access improvements for Sydney Opera House

The New South Wales Premier Hon. Morris Iemma announced the release of \$38 million of funding for a significant construction program to improve accessibility at Sydney Opera House.

The Foyers Access project will include several Jørn Utzon-designed elements to improve access for elderly visitors or visitors with disabilities:

1. Construction of a public lift from the Lower Concourse level to the Playhouse, Drama Theatre, Studio and Box Office Foyers.
2. Escalators will also be incorporated into the stairs from the Box Office level to the Southern Foyers of the Concert Hall and Opera Theatre.



“This is an important step forward and will make a visit to Sydney Opera House so much easier and more enjoyable for everyone, particularly people with disabilities and older people,” Premier Iemma said today.

“Sydney Opera House is visited by more than four million people each year and with approximately 20% of the population with mobility difficulties, that is a sizeable percentage whose Opera House experience will be improved by this construction project”, said Mr Iemma.

Sydney Opera House Chief Executive, Dr Norman Gillespie said patrons who have mobility difficulties, currently have to be escorted via goods lifts to the Concert Hall and Opera Theatre.

“When Sydney Opera House was built, people were less aware about access issues. There are over 60 steps up to the Concert Hall and Opera Theatre and each night an increasing number are assisted by staff to their seats through backstage areas,” said Dr Gillespie at today’s press conference.



“From my point of view, and our point of view as architects, we want to give spectators and visitors to the Opera House a beautiful extra experience and we are so happy to have this opportunity to create such a lively, marvellous atmosphere” said Jørn Utzon from his home in Denmark.

The Utzon design includes the total refurbishment of The Studio, Playhouse and Drama Theatre foyers, with the consolidation of box office, cloakroom and bar facilities.

The Bennelong stairs from the vehicle concourse to the Box Office Foyer will be demolished to allow construction of the public lift and to give covered, level access to the Western Foyers.

The designs for the project were included in the 2004 Colonnade/Foyers development application, but were at that stage unfunded. Modifications to the development application to reflect changes to the design will be lodged with Planning NSW in the next week. The Colonnade was opened by Queen Elizabeth II in March.

Construction on the Foyers Access project is scheduled to commence in December this year.