

However, despite these measures of success, there are lessons to be learned from Darling Harbour. Even now, despite its proximity, the project remains relatively isolated from the rest of the city. The Western Distributor, which encircles and cuts through the site, is a major contributor to this isolation. The project's separation is reinforced both by the project's underlying conception as a bounded campus development, and by its administrative isolation from the city. Because of the fact that the Authority was granted exemption from development controls, it did not communicate well with other agencies in the city. This, rather inevitably, meant that no attempt was made to integrate the development into the fabric of the city – for example, to extend existing roads into the development site or to establish unified and consistent development controls. The result of this inward-looking development is that many of Darling Harbour's larger facilities, including the exhibition and convention buildings, hotels and the Star City Casino complex, form a formidable wall around the site, turning their backs to the rest of the city.

The project's zoning has also played a part in the separation of the project from the city. The project's original leisure theme included retail and entertainment activities of many kinds, but no residential or commercial space. The reliance of retail to facilitate public space in the city has proven suspect in many cities around the world. The incorporation of singular large box retail was from the start problematic in many ways. The lack of resident population meant that Darling Harbour's retail component was forced to rely solely on visitors. This not only means that the project dies at night, but also that the retailers in the Harbourside complex have struggled. With the increasing redevelopment of Pyrmont, some of this will be alleviated. In many respects, Darling Harbour's "big box" program is a suburban development transplanted into the city. Although such transurban migration has occurred in other locations as well, the lesson to be learnt from this project is that such programs need to be integrated into the fabric of the host city. Connections to the host city are critical to the success of such projects. At Darling Harbour these connections are now under review.

A different paradigm for Darling Harbour may have proven more successful. Speaking purely speculatively, one wonders whether Darling Harbour might not have been better served with public and cultural facilities with associated retail development. The same amount of retail could have been incorporated into the project but would have been scattered across the 134-acre site, alleviating some of the noticeable "dead zones" in the development.

The popularity of inner city living in Sydney has led to the resurgence of many inner city neighborhoods in close proximity to the city center. Pyrmont and Ultimo, adjacent to Darling Harbour, are two of the peripheral neighborhoods, along with Miller's Point and Chinatown, where most of the city's nearly 25,000 resident population lives. The last remaining opportunity for any large-scale redevelopment adjacent to the central business district is the container wharf in an area known as the Western Wharves (Wharves 6–8), located on the eastern shore of Darling Harbour.

The larger part of Sydney's working port facility has already moved south to Botany Bay. It is therefore likely that, at some time in the future,