

Powerhouse Museum should move to Western Sydney where the majority of the population lives

David Borger, The Daily Telegraph

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THE debate about the Powerhouse Museum is more than just about the location of a building. It is about fairness for the two million residents of Western Sydney, who have paid millions of their hardworking dollars for us to have such cultural assets.

This debate is about our major cultural institutions such as the Powerhouse, the NSW Art Gallery, the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Sydney Opera House and our large-scale production theatres, all being located out of the reach of the growing majority of Sydneysiders. We must not accept this to be the norm.

Western Sydney residents want art galleries, museums and theatre as much as we want to cheer on the Western Sydney Wanderers and Parramatta Eels at Parramatta Stadium. We are people who love cultural pursuits of all kinds.



The Powerhouse Museum building at Ultimo in Sydney.

The truth is we have been waiting for decades to get major cultural institutions in the heart of Sydney's western suburbs.

Why does a region where nearly one-third of NSW's population lives, only receive just 1 per cent of Commonwealth arts program funding and 5.5 per cent of the State Government's art budget?

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Sydney Business Chamber director David Borger. Picture: Joel Carrett

Why have we accepted this as the standard and why are we not debating the need to end this arts disparity?

Our research has shown that people have a limit to how far they are willing to travel to access cultural institutions — it is about 30 minutes.

That means that the five top tier institutions that are all clustered around the Sydney CBD are simply too far away to be used by the people who pay for them.

The new Powerhouse Museum in Parramatta would provide Western Sydney residents within reasonable travel distance to a world-class cultural institution for the first time.

I am tired of hearing the critics say Western Sydney should have a museum with its own collection.

That is an argument for another two decades of more delays — it takes years to build such a collection from scratch.

The Powerhouse collection includes more than 500,000 objects collected in a 135-year period. Why shouldn't this collection be located where the majority of our city's population actually reside, in Western Sydney itself?

The Powerhouse Museum has a universal collection on behalf of the people of NSW; it is not a local studies library or a plaything for the inner city community.

If you examine the Powerhouse collection, you will see objects from around Australia and the world.

What do Egyptian revival settees, telescopes from London, Burkinis or bits of the international space station have to do with Pyrmont and Ultimo?

Let us be fair about this. The Powerhouse collection includes more than 500,000 objects collected in a 135-year period.

Why shouldn't this collection be located where the majority of our city's population actually reside, in Western Sydney itself?

It is time for our political and cultural leaders to support this new Powerhouse Museum in Western Sydney as the first step in addressing this imbalance.

The museum will be a catalyst for the growth of the knowledge economy of Western Sydney by supporting research and learning in science, technology, engineering, arts

and mathematics and will be the inspiration and stimulation for upcoming inventors and designers.

Let's work together to get on with giving Western Sydney the cultural institution it so rightly deserves and end the dispute once and for all.

David Borger is Western Sydney director of the Sydney Business Chamber.