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Parramatta Powerhouse opening delayed

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Construction of the Parramatta Powerhouse is unlikely to finish before 2024, three years after the Ultimo building closes its doors, according to documents obtained by parliamentary order.

The documents also disclose that the design team has been searching for ways to install Locomotive No 1 and other oversized steam engines and aircraft from its collection in the new museum.

[The Powerhouse Museum's Locomotive No. 1. *CREDIT: DALLAS KILPONEN*]

The Berejiklian government was forced to release thousands of documents this week around planning for the new Parramatta Powerhouse, the Ultimo creative precinct, and the fate of the museum's very large objects.

Upper House crossbenchers, including the Greens and the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party, united with Labor to enforce a call of papers ahead of new hearings into the \$1.17 billion relocation project.

The project's timetable reveals the government is working towards ministerial approval for the new site by December, with a builder to be procured early next year and construction to wrap up sometime in 2024. The original timeline predicted a start on construction in 2019 and a grand opening in late 2023. The Powerhouse at Ultimo shuts its doors finally next July.

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A feasibility study commissioned in March confirmed at least 15 of the museum's largest objects would not fit in the new building's goods lift. This includes most of its steam engine collection, including NSW's first train, railway carriages, its tram, helicopter, and the train indicator board that stood at Central Station directing passengers for 76 years.

Engineering consultants Arup Australia investigated two options to lift the heavy objects, each carrying risks. The first involves designing a door into the lattice facade for passage of the objects from a landing in Phillip St. This required the purchase of an overhead crane costing \$400,000 and hire of a mobile crane at a cost of \$35,000.

"While the strategy is feasible, we'd like to advise against this due to the design complexity, capital, and maintenance costs associated [with] the custom-made doors and telescopic crane," the report said.

Option two involves punching an internal void between two presentation spaces and is favoured because of the minimal impacts to traffic, public access and the museum's operations.

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Labor's treasury spokesperson Walt Secord said the struggle to relocate the 26-tonne locomotive showed how farcical the business of moving the Powerhouse's collection had become.

"Documents show that it will cost almost a half-million dollars to simply lift the locomotive into the new Powerhouse. That is just crazy and shows that no due diligence was taken when they promised to relocate the locomotive.

"This would be laughable if we were not paying for this exercise during these tough economic times."

Meanwhile, delays to the Parramatta Powerhouse's opening mean that Sydney will be without the physical museum presence for two or three years.

If construction ends in 2024, a fitout is then required, before doors open to the public. That involves testing and embedding air conditioning, power, lifts and escalators, as well as any outstanding landscaping work. This phase might take up to 12 months, meaning it will be 2025 before the museum opens to the public.

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A spokesperson for Infrastructure NSW would only say that "a timeframe for construction will be confirmed when planning approval is received and a building contractor is appointed".

One planning timetable shows the government factoring in delays this year around the cooperation of Parramatta City Council, a possible interim heritage order on the two historic sites scheduled for demolition at Parramatta, and community opposition around any fast-tracked demolition process.

In March, Paris-based architects Moreau Kusunoki said concept designs for the Powerhouse, due in July and necessary before construction proceeds, were unlikely to be completed until late September.



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