



Interloop

A reinterpretation of the 1950s wooden escalators at Wynyard Station





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1. What is your project?

Project Background

Wynyard Station was opened on 28 February 1932 featuring a parallel bank of three (with provision for a fourth) OTIS escalators connecting York Street with the concourse. They were presented in the '*Streamline Moderne*' architectural style with wood panelling to match the art deco station interiors. The prominent curves of the newels and the repeated parallel lines of the decking conveyed a modern sense for the customer.

In 1956/7 they were wholly replaced, and the fourth escalator added, with locally made OTIS machines - again with wooden panelling and treads.

After 60 years in operation serving Sydney's commuters, the four wooden Wynyard escalators were retired in January 2017 as part of the Wynyard Station Upgrade. Remarkably they, along with two at Town Hall, were the last operating wooden escalators in Australia.

Interpretation Concept

As part of the Wynyard Station Upgrade project's Heritage Interpretation Plan, Transport for NSW (TfNSW) commissioned artist Chris Fox to develop an artwork that re-used salvaged escalator components and expressed the history, scale and heritage significance of these escalators.

Interloop is the resulting creative sculpture that plays with the idea of continuous motion and connected journeys. It successfully re-uses the escalator elements for heritage interpretation as public transport artwork, and to keep alive the history of these escalators and their role from Wynyard Station's past.

Design and installation

The three dimensional suspended sculpture, loops together two pairs of reconfigured heritage escalators measuring more than 50 metres in combined length. It uses 244 of the original timber treads and four of the original escalator OTIS comb-plates from the dismantled historic wooden escalators.

Taking six months to design and engineer, the sculpture took 12 weeks to fabricate with over a kilometre of welding, before an intensive 48-hour installation period. *Interloop* is built from high strength marine grade aluminium and suspended via new steel beams. The wooden treads from the original escalators have been fastened to the accordion-like aluminium surface.

The sculpture was unveiled on 4 December 2017 to immense public interest.

Legacy

Artist Chris Fox has created an 'otherworldly' space suspended above transport commuters. The artwork explores the idea that people are stationary on an escalator while also travelling, allowing for a moment of pause that occurs mid-motion. The sculpture references all those journeys that have passed and are now 'interlooping' back.



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With the re-purposing of the wooden treads, the sculpture evokes memories of past passengers and former modes of travel.

A panel with a QR code was also installed near the sculpture enabling people to scan the code with their phone and learn more about the history of these heritage wooden escalators.

Other heritage interpretation elements at Wynyard Station

- Escalator museum room tucked away in the basement of Railway House (adjacent to the location of the old motor room) featuring a reconstruction of the base of one of the wooden escalators and a suspended motor assembly. The museum is available for guided tours during special events held by Sydney Trains Heritage.
- A webpage on the Sydney trains heritage website accessible at the station via a QR code on the *Interloop* sign, tells the history of escalators in the railways, focussing on Wynyard and Town Hall stations*.
- A black and white 'keep left' image from 1948 was installed on the bulkheads above the new escalators, showing life-sized commuters riding the original Wynyard escalators, while reminding today's commuters to stand to one side.
- A dedicated digital screen using text and images to tell the story of the land of Transport House and Wynyard Station
- A display of the remnant ceiling from the station's 'Grill Room' to illustrate the early form of this 1930s space
- Replicas of the original 1932 steel station name signs on Platforms 5 and 6

2. How does it demonstrate excellence and best practice in heritage interpretation?

Before works started at Wynyard a research paper into the significance of the heritage escalators at Wynyard and Town Hall Stations was commissioned by Sydney Trains to inform the project teams of the importance of the escalators and their history. It was discovered that the escalators to be decommissioned and replaced in 2017, had only been installed in the 1950s when the iconic bank of four was finally complete, and were not the original 1930s escalators with a single new addition, nor were the original Wynyard escalators the ones originally used at Lavender Bay. Despite this, the escalators retained heritage significance as the world's final bank of four wooden escalators in operation.

Through the Wynyard Station Upgrade REF(Review of Environmental Factors) and project determination process there were very strong views voiced by community regarding the importance of the heritage escalators, and the much loved old-world feel that they provided commuters during their daily travels.

The project team saw an opportunity to maintain the feeling of connection and old-world heritage by re-using the escalators in an art-installation through a condition of approval in the Section 60 heritage application to re-use a substantial part of the escalator fabric.

*<https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/projects/community-engagement/sydney-trains-community/culture-and-heritage/escalation-sensation>



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The audience for the artwork was intended to be commuters who use Wynyard Station and any person for whom a trip to Sydney city was never complete without a ride on the York Street escalators; this reinterpretation was an opportunity to create an art destination within a commuting hub to complement the already popular Wynscreen. Due to the visibility of the Wynyard Precinct, an art strategy consultant was engaged to develop a brief for the reinterpretation artwork; the brief was developed by Cultural Capital and they went to a panel of four artists to produce concepts for review.

The concepts were reviewed on criteria including clarity of connection to the heritage escalators, urban design and presence in the Wynyard Precinct, effective use of materials and space, impact on station operations and maintainability. The artwork needed to have presence and provide the emotional connection with the heritage escalators without impacting commuter flow and other station functions. As a result of this review the concept presented by Chris Fox was selected and his company, Studio Chris Fox Pty Ltd was engaged by the principal contractor for the Wynyard Station Upgrade, Novo Rail.

The development of the concept of Interloop was included within the Heritage Interpretation Strategy for Wynyard Station Upgrade and the subsequent Heritage Interpretation Plan, both of which were submitted and endorsed by the Office of Environment and Heritage. The Sydney Trains Heritage team assisted by sharing resources and research relevant to the station, and were consulted as the strategy and plans were developed and implemented.

3. Identify the resources needed for your projects (e.g. staff, materials, money). Demonstrate how you used these resources effectively.

The development of Interloop involved collaboration across multiple government agencies and private sectors. Transport for NSW led the project with critical support from Sydney Trains. Due to the complexity of the project the private sector provided critical expertise in the fields of heritage advisors, artists, architects, structural & services engineers, manufacturing, construction and installation.

The *Interloop* measures more than 50 metres in combined length, incorporating 244 of the original timber treads and four of the original escalator OTIS comb-plates from the dismantled historic wooden escalators.

Taking six months to design and engineer, the sculpture took 12 weeks to fabricate with over a kilometre of welding. *Interloop* is built from high strength marine grade aluminium and suspended via new steel beams.

One of the more interesting design challenges faced was that the entire sculpture needed to be installed over a single weekend to minimise disruption to station customers. This meant that the entire structure was re-designed to enable a lifting and install methodology that met this deadline. Chris Fox with the support of Bollinger Grohmann Engineers and NASS developed the new structure of the artwork and robust installation methodology to meet the opening deadline.



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The *Interloop* reinterpretation of the 1950s escalators was commissioned as part of the \$160 million recent major upgrade to Wynyard Station. All the combined heritage interpretation elements at Wynyard Station were delivered for \$1.5 million.

4. How has your project met clear and measurable outcomes for your client/organisation and stakeholders?

Interloop has satisfied the condition of approval in the Section 60 heritage application to re-use a substantial part of the escalator fabric with the inclusion of 244 of the original timber treads and four of the original escalator OTIS comb-plates.

Interloop was recently the winner of the prestigious National Trust (NSW) 2018 “Education & Interpretation” category and the “Judges Choice” category that recognises exemplary work in the field of heritage interpretation.

Interloop was also the biggest social media story of the year for Transport for NSW.

For Transport for NSW, it was the year’s top performing post on Instagram with 788 likes and 61 comments within the first week (average 250 likes and 3-5 comments) and Facebook performed even better with a total reach of 176,914 on Transport for NSW owned assets.

The reach of the project has exceeded the planned audience with positive news articles and social media postings picking the artwork up on a global level.

Interloop continues to reach the commuter audience with one of the true joys for the project team is being able to walk into the station six months later and still see people starting up at *Interloop* and taking photos.

On the 25 July 2018 the project was advised that *Interloop* had been listed by the National Trust of Australia (NSW) on the Trust Register.

The Register lists those buildings, sites, areas, and items which, in the Trust's opinion, fall within the following definition:

"Those places which are components of the natural or the cultural environment of Australia, that have aesthetic, historical, architectural, archaeological, scientific, or social significance or other special value for future generations, as well as for the present community."