

# Sydney's light rail: Renowned French architect Thomas Richez to advise on design

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Light rail designer Thomas Richez stands at the intersection of George and Park streets in Sydney. *Photo: Peter Rae*

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Imagine for a minute a George Street devoid of cars, with sleek granite paving spanning the entire boulevard and trees shading pavement cafes as pedestrians wander from boutique to boutique.

Every four minutes a light rail tram would roll by, almost silently. But by and large, Sydney's major artery would be a place for people to walk and talk - an unthinkable idea now.



The tramway in Reims, with the cathedral in the background. *Photo: Richez Associes*

"The idea is, a good tramway line is like a reserve, a pleasant place, whether people use the transportation system or not," says Thomas Richez, a world-renowned French architect whose firm has been involved in retrofitting more than a dozen cities in Europe and Africa with light rail projects.

"France has been through this for the past 30 years - 25 cities have new tramways in dedicated space," Mr Richez says. "These projects have been undertaken in France, not only as transportation projects but urban projects."

While most Sydneysiders and officials are contemplating the disruption that construction of the light rail project will bring - the digging up of George Street starts in October - Bridget Smyth, design director at City of Sydney, says she is focused on making sure the project really works as a public space.



A light rail station in the city of Tours, France, with white and black motifs. *Photo: Richez Associes*

"We don't have expertise in light rail, which is why we have brought Thomas out here to advise us," she says.

"Our job is to make sure that the space we provide to the pedestrian, the tram and the car is perfectly fitted and works smoothly together. At the same time we take care to provide an identity to the places and to the line in the city," says Mr Richez.

After his first walk down George Street, Mr Richez already has some thoughts: he thinks the stations should be smooth and flush with the sidewalk. We will suddenly see a lot more of George Street, so the paving should be high-quality and interesting.



A detail of the paving for the tramway in Tours. *Photo: Richez Associes*

Mr Richez advises that there is much to be won by pulling all elements of the project together: transport design, rolling stock design and public art.

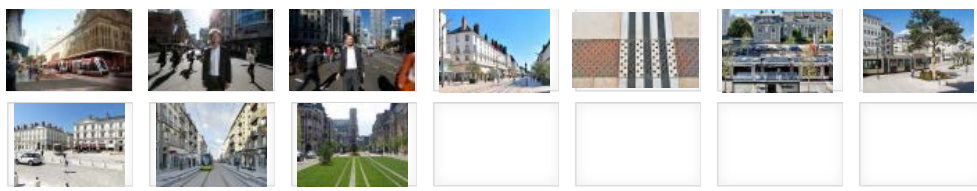
In the city of Tours, in the Loire Valley, the mayor teamed up with artist Daniel Buren to create a vision for the whole tram system and retrofit the city with one large urban work of art, he says.

"Daniel Buren installed at the station and on the trams his signature white and black strips -

#### George street light rail as a pleasant space?

Imagine for a minute a George Street devoid of cars, with sleek granite paving spanning the entire boulevard *Photo: Grimshaw Architects*

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The result is a very harmonious and interesting addition to the old city.

The 10-kilometre tramway in Reims , France, a city famous for champagne and its cathedral, was completed in 2011. It was designed to highlight views of the city centre monuments, while station furniture inspired by vineyard stakes and rolling stock inspired by the champagne flute give the line its identity.

One of Mr Richez's signature design traits is to allow grass to flow across the tracks. This could potentially be used in the Surry Hills area, to turn roadways into parks.