

Federation Square Temporary FOH Container

HERITAGE OPTIONS ANALYSIS

2-20 Swanston Street, Melbourne VIC 3000

June 2026

Prepared for

MAP CO

Prepared by

LOVELL CHEN





ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Federation Square is located on the lands of the Wurundjeri people, who have been custodians of the land for thousands of years. This report was also prepared on Wurundjeri Country.

Federation Square stands on the Yarra Bank where the peoples of the Kulin nation and their visitors have traditionally met and gathered, a connection to Country that is maintained to this day. We acknowledge their stories, connection to land, water and culture which is embedded in Country. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and acknowledge the stories, traditions and cultures of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Quality Assurance Register

The following register documents the development and issue of this report prepared by Lovell Chen Pty Ltd in accordance with our certified quality management system.



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1.0 Introduction

This document has been prepared for Melbourne Arts Precinct Corporation (MAP Co) in respect to Federation Square, a place included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) and subject to controls under the *Heritage Act 2017*.

This Heritage Options Analysis provides supplemental information in respect to a heritage permit application (P422560) made by MAP Co for the temporary installation of a Front of House (FOH) facilities container at Federation Square. The container would be installed annually to support the presentation of performance events held in the Federation Square Plaza on a seasonal basis (September to March), and the permit application seeks approval for this seasonal installation of the container to occur for a five-year period (refer to **Section 2.0**).

A Request for Further Information (RFI) issued by Heritage Victoria in April 2026 seeks additional information in respect to the functional requirements for the container and an options analysis of prospective alternatives. This document has been prepared on the basis of additional functional information provided by MAP Co (Appendix A), and addresses the options analysis requested in the RFI.

1.1 Request for further information for P42256

The 24 April 2026 RFI requested the following information:

- A full options analysis undertaken by an experienced heritage consultant; and
- A detailed explanation of the minimum requirements for the structure, i.e. access/security, nos. of persons, amount of equipment, distance from stage, visibility of stage. This information should also explain why the proposed structure is necessary to facilitate and improve the reasonable or economic use of the heritage place which will assist with addressing the economic use of the heritage place, which the application currently lacks.

The options analysis was requested to include:

- Consideration of all potential locations for the equipment, including next to the stage, above and to the north of the proposed location, between the stairs to the River Terrace and the Yarra Building and internally within one of the buildings.
- Analysis of the impact of each location on the cultural heritage values of the Plaza and Federation Square. The Statement of Design Principles and Conservation Management Plan (CMP) specifies that the Plaza, the cobble pavement, the Nearnamnew artwork, the Yellow Gum tree clusters and the inherent visual relationship of the Plaza to the surrounding facade planes, are all of intrinsic value. There is concern that the proposed location is too exposed, intrudes upon the Nearnamnew artwork and is sited upon the planter beds. A detailed and proper analysis should interrogate and assess each possible location against the Design Principles and CMP to understand the impact of each location on the cultural values of the place.
- A view analysis within and external to the site should be developed to test and inform the appropriate massing and location for new built form. It should demonstrate the impact of each location on important views into and out of the Plaza and features within those views that may be impacted. The views analysis should also consider the visual setting of a new structure within the Plaza and whether the structure will be visually dominant from any view points.

A summary of the minimum requirements of the FOH container is provided at **Section 2.1**, with a more detailed description of the requirements provided in a document prepared by MAP Co (Appendix A).

The requested options analysis is provided at **Section 4.0**.

A review of the findings of that analysis and the implications for the heritage impact assessment as well as other relevant determination considerations is provided at **Section 5.0**.

2.0 What is proposed?

The proposal has been detailed in previous application documentation submitted by MAP Co, including a Heritage Impact Statement authored by MAP Co personnel.

The Front of House container is proposed to be installed on annual basis within a planter bed (Planter Bed 2, **Figure 1** and **Figure 2**) on the north side of the Plaza facing the Stage. The container would be placed in the same location, and have the same form and attached infrastructure as the Container that was installed on the site from September 2025 to March 2026 under a previously approved permit exemption (P41420) (**Figure 4**, refer also **Section 2.2**).

The container is a lockable unit with a matte dark charcoal grey finish relieved by an oversized 'Fed Sq.' logomark, and would be positioned atop Planter Bed 2 over the existing artificial turf that covers the east section of the bed. Structurally, the Container would be supported on a 9.5 x 4 metre platform riser extending over the garden bed's sandstone clad perimeter walls and a section of the adjoining sandstone cobbled plaza surfaces. To accommodate the riser structure and access ramp, a short section of glazed balustrade and handrail behind the planter bed (**Figure 3**) would be temporarily removed, stored and then reinstated at the end of each seasonal installation.

The location of the FOH container at Planter Bed 2 places it next to a light and services pole (Delay Pole), which hosts multiple lights, PA system speakers, security cameras and antennas. The location also directly adjoins the Plaza's Communications Room, a key location that is required to be accessible by event technicians during performances.

Discreet services connections enable the FOH Container to be tied into the Plaza's main communication room (immediately adjacent to the planter bed) and to power services. The riser legs would stand on bog mats protecting the Plaza surfaces, and do not require penetrations or alterations to the Plaza's sandstone finishes. The works proposed in the permit application would be entirely reversible at the end of each season.



Figure 1 Plan of Plaza planter bed locations, with proposed FOH Container location indicated (red arrow)
Source: *Federation Square Conservation Management Plan* (Lovell Chen, 2020), p. 148



Figure 2 Proposed temporary FOH Container location at Planter Bed 2, to be situated on the green artificial turf behind the gum trees and lighting mast



Figure 3 Section of balustrade and handrail to be temporarily dismantled, indicated in red



Figure 4 Temporary FOH Container as installed from September 2025 to March 2026
Source: Courtesy MAP Co

2.1 FOH container requirements and functional constraints

MAP Co have supplied details in respect to the FOH Container's minimum technical requirements and the fundamental technical constraints associated with providing professional front of house functions for Federation Square's Plaza Stage (refer **Appendix A**).

Locating the FOH functions is fundamentally constrained by the Sound Pressure Level (SPL) mixing zone located between the main stage PA system and the delay poles which are each located roughly 25 metres from the centre of the stage (**Figure 5**). A FOH audio engineer must be positioned within this zone to accurately hear and balance the PA output in real time. A position outside of this zone is acoustically unrepresentative of the audience experience and is not a viable operational configuration that would support the presentation of professionally engineered events at Federation Square. A secondary but equally critical constraint are the direct sightlines to the stage: the FOH engineer must maintain unobstructed vision of the performers and stage at all times for both operational and safety reasons.

Functional limitations that shape the geometry and location of this mixing zone including decibel limits on public performances at Federation Square as an outdoor venue in Melbourne's central city, as well as the size of the PA system that can be practically accommodated on the main stage. A further consideration is the existing location of the delay speakers on the two high mast light poles which are strategically placed at planter beds to either side of the main stage audience area. The Federation Square Conservation Management Plan (refer **Section 3.3**) identifies a preference that these two mast locations are maintained at their current locations and that the introduction of further high mast poles within the Plaza is limited or avoided entirely.¹

Other relevant functional requirements that apply to the size and detail of the temporary structure have been outlined by MAP Co, including the minimum occupancy requirements and physical space required for the production equipment supporting the current events program at the Plaza, as well as security provisions and access control.

The alternative locations identified in Heritage Victoria's 25 April RFI have been reviewed against these technical and functional requirements and constraints in **Section 4.0**.

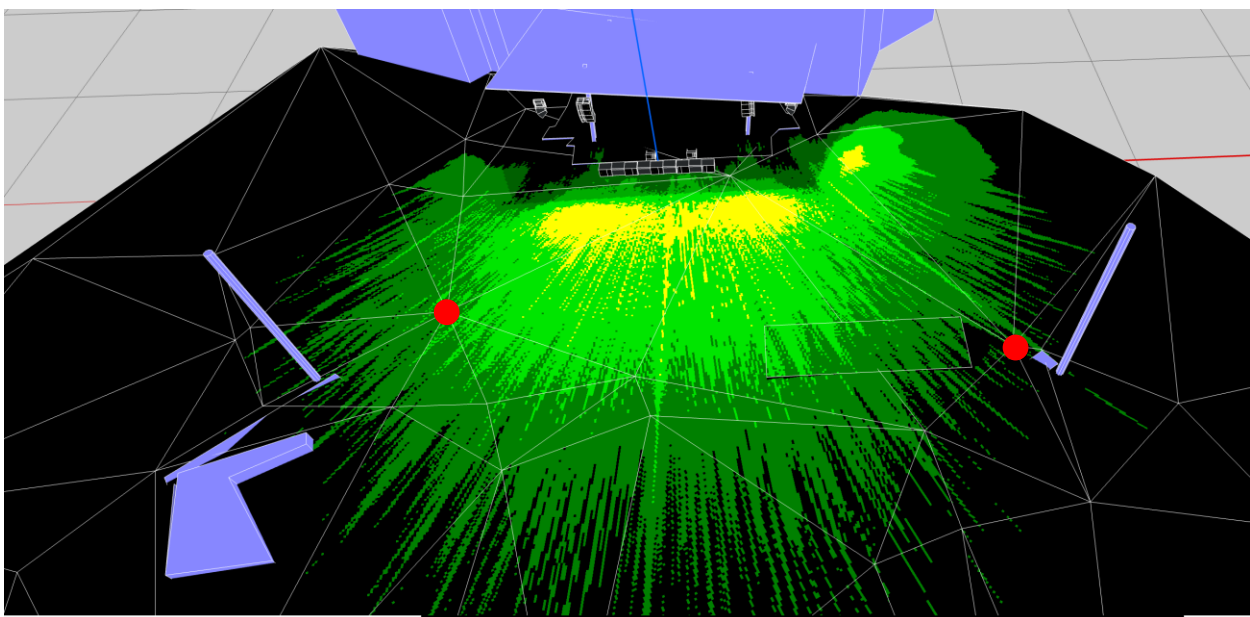


Figure 5 Digital modelling of the optimal functional sound pressure levels in relation to the mixing zone of the Federation Square main stage, the location of the delay poles is indicated by the red circles
Source: Courtesy MAP Co

2.2 Temporary FOH Container in place in 2025-2026

The FOH container previously installed at Planter 2 (**Figure 6**) supported a variety of live music and film events throughout Federation Square's 2025-26 spring-summer programming (**Figure 7, Figure 8**).



Figure 6 2025-2026 FOH Container installed at Plant Bed 2, looking south-west towards Plaza Stage

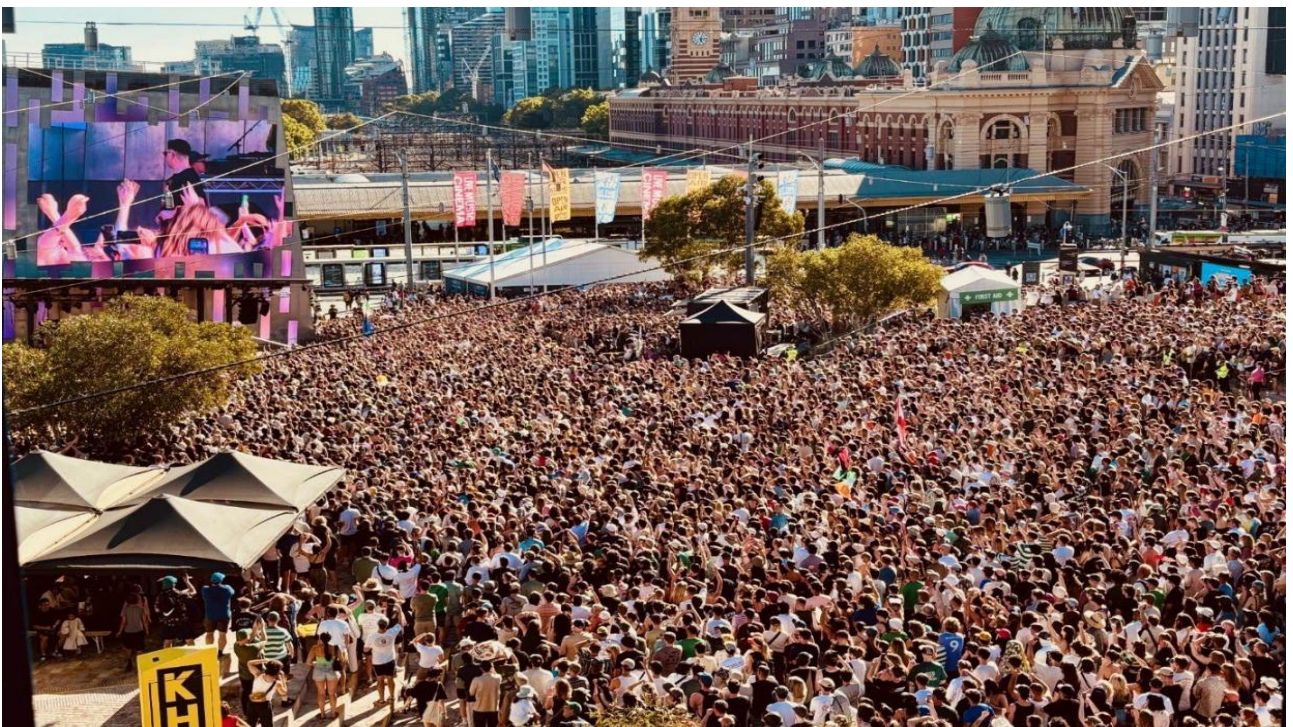


Figure 7 Concert event with 2025-2026 FOH Container and temporary marquee on the container riser (centre)
Source: Courtesy MAP Co



Figure 8 Silent cinema event with live scores at Federation Square, 2025, with FOH container behind
Source: Courtesy Map Co (photograph by Maira Troncoso)

3.0 Heritage management at Federation Square

3.1 Civic and Cultural Charter

The *Federation Square Civic and Cultural Charter* is a short statement of purpose drafted by the Victorian Government and Melbourne City Council in 1996-97 to guide the management and operation of all components of Federation Square. An addendum was adopted in May 2013. The Charter sets out Federation Square's objectives as follows:

- to provide a stimulating, educational, comfortable and entertaining destination venue to Victorians, and to interstate and international visitors
- to represent Melbourne as a leading city for the arts and for innovation and creativity in all forms of cultural expression
- to communicate the City's leadership in contemporary ideas and expression
- to provide a focal point for arts and cultural festivals and activities and important civic commemorations
- to reflect Melbourne's cultural diversity in its overall operations and programming
- to attract local, national and international visitors to Federation Square.

To achieve those objectives, the Charter identifies a group of critical outcomes to be derived from Federation Square's development and operations, realising (selected as pertaining particularly to public events and performances):

- a continuous and high calibre mix of cultural programming and civic activity that is recognised as contemporary and stimulating
- a high level of use by local, national and international organisations, events and activities
- an identifiable synergy between the cultural program and other leisure, personal and commercial services
- high levels of use of all spaces for activity consistent with and complementary to the stated objectives
- high levels of new and return visitation
- a positive local profile for Federation Square as a focal point for the City's civic and festival program
- a positive national and international profile for Federation Square and its program
- an accessible secure and attractive public experience.

The charter subsequently sets out requirements to be implemented by Federation Square's management company (now MAP Co), including (selected as pertaining particularly to the use of the Plaza as a venue for events and performances):

- develop and oversee a year-round program of activities embracing visual, performing, multimedia, event, literary, festival, botanical, multicultural and other themes
- promote the use of Federation Square venues, and procure events and activities with appropriate local, national and international organisations and individuals
- work with public bodies to ensure appropriate access and security is provided at Federation Square
- maintain up-to-date and leading edge operating technology for all aspects of the site's activity, uses and presentation.

Delivery of the Charter's objectives, outcomes and requirements continues to inform operation of Federation Square by MAP Co as its current public manager, including the current application for approval of a temporary FOH container.

Finally, the Charter sets specific operational principles in respect to how the Plaza is operated, managed and programmed by MAP Co:

‘Use of the Civic Square will be subject to the following:

- A standard hiring agreement will be formulated and implemented by the management company.
- Sections of the Square may be hired at market rates to organisations for commercial purposes, where these are consistent with the Civic and Cultural Charter.
- The Civic Square is to be made available at nil hire cost for appropriate public events organised by non-commercial arts and festival organisations and relevant public sector agencies. Such groups can be required to pay direct event staging costs, including set-up and dismantling, after-event cleaning, security, insurance, power and the management company’s handling expenses. Subject to reasonable notice being given, such groups are to be given priority in the use of the Square over commercial hiring.
- The management company will enforce rules and codes of public behaviour, and ensure an adequate level of supervision in the Square’s use by the public.’²

These principles would continue to apply to how the Plaza and Stage are booked, programmed and managed by MAP Co. for the duration of the proposed temporary FOH Container.

3.2 Heritage significance

Federation Square is included in the VHR as a place of historical, architectural, aesthetic, cultural and technical significance to the State of Victoria. Heritage Victoria has published a statement of significance for Federation Square; key reasons for significance that are relevant to the assessment of the current proposal and alternative options are as follows:

- Federation Square is of historical significance as Victoria’s preeminent memorial to the Federation of Australia (1901). The principle of federation is embedded in the design and planning rationale for Federation Square... [and] referenced in the Nearing artwork by Paul Carter which forms part of the Plaza... [Criterion A]
- Federation Square is also of historical significance as a tangible expression of Melbourne’s long and deeply held aspiration for a large public square for ceremonial, civic, and recreational purposes in the city. [Criterion A]
- Federation Square is a notable example of a public square. While it is a mixed-use precinct, the primary function of the place (and a defining aspect of its identity is as a public square... [Criterion D]
- Federation Square is of significance to Victoria for its aesthetic and architectural qualities. The precinct is a visually distinctive arrangement of non-orthogonal forms that uses a design grammar of lines and fractal geometries to achieve a complex aesthetic of coherence and difference... [Criterion E]
- Federation Square is socially significant and is valued by communities and cultural groups for a range of cultural and experiential reasons. It is Victoria’s preeminent civic space for formal and informal public gatherings and is regularly used in times of celebration, grief and protest. Federation Square is used and appreciated by communities of locality (the Victorian and/or Melbourne community); affected communities (including visitors to Melbourne); communities of identity (communities for whom the use of Federation Square is part of an annual cycle of events that enables these communities to reaffirm their identity in a prominent public setting); communities of interest (including communities that aim to affirm Federation Square’s civic purpose); and communities of practice (including communities who engage with the site’s cultural institutions and sports enthusiasts). [Criterion G].³

3.3 Management policy guidance from CMP and SDP

Following the place’s heritage registration, a Statement of Design Principles (SDP) (Lovell Chen, May 2020) and a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) (Lovell Chen, June 2020) were prepared for Federation Square. These documents provide further detail about the place and its values, along with guidance for their management and conservation.⁴ The Design Principles provides a short format review of the theoretical positions and experimentation explored by Lab Architects, and a distillation of key principles that are embodied in Federation Square’s architectural design; the CMP identifies these Design Principles as an important reference in the place’s ongoing management.

The Plaza, including sandstone paving, ‘Nearamnew’ artwork and six integrated planter beds planted with Red Flowering Yellow Gums (*Eucalyptus leucoxylon megalocarpa* ‘Rosea’) are identified in the CMP (**Figure 9**) as elements intrinsic to the heritage significance of the place.⁵ Buildings, areas, elements and attributes that are intrinsic to the cultural heritage significance of Federation Square should be retained and conserved according to the principles of the *Burra Charter*, and consistent with the policies included in the CMP. In respect to the proposed Temporary FOH Container, the SDP and CMP provide relevant guidance and policies (summarised at **Table 1**) which have been considered in current document’s heritage options analysis.

Table 1 Relevant conservation policies, Federation Square SDP/CMP

Area/element	Conservation and management policies
Plaza	<p>Relevant to this report, the SDP recognises that the ‘plaza (public open space) extends deep into the site, creating connections with the main building complex and optimising active edges (for retail and cultural tenants).’⁶</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freedom of movement and permeability across Federation Square are key considerations for the location of any temporary structure within the Plaza. <p>CMP Policy 20 states the Plaza should remain a permeable and accessible space with strong and legible pedestrian connections.</p> <p>Policy 37 states the Plaza should be maintained as an exposed and hard-surfaced public square.</p> <p>Policy 42 states that the ‘existing dimensioned sandstone for pavements and wall dressings should be maintained and conserved’.⁷</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Plaza is the place’s signature public space and embodies, physically and symbolically, principles that are central to an understanding of Federation Square. Physical changes within the Plaza must be carefully considered and calibrated to maintain the features, qualities and characteristics that support significance.
Nearamnew artwork	<p>Policy 39 states that the <i>Nearamnew</i> artwork should be maintained and conserved.⁸</p> <p>The accompanying guidance describes the form and conceptual intent of the artwork, a coloured sandstone ‘whorl’ (or ‘global thumbprint’), accompanied by nine ‘visions’ (concrete poems) inscribed in sandstone tiles.⁹</p>
Tenancy patios	<p>Policy 46 states that the tenancy patios at the periphery of the Plaza should be maintained and conserved.¹⁰</p> <p>The accompanying guidance observes that the tenancy patios ‘enable the animation of the plaza.’¹¹</p>
Planter beds	<p>Policy 45 states that the Plaza planters should be maintained such that they continue to support the stands of Yellow Gum trees and contribute to the presentation of the Plaza.¹²</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The accompanying guidance describes the planters as functional infrastructure responsive to the limitations of the supporting deck structure. The artificial turf sections were originally

Area/element **Conservation and management policies**

installed as natural turf, but this failed quickly as a result of the constrained growing conditions and heavy public use.¹³

Sound and lighting masts

Policy 49 identifies a preference that the existing high mast sound and lighting locations (i.e. the delay poles) are maintained and the introduction of additional masts is avoided.

- The accompanying guidance notes that the siting of the existing sound and lighting masts minimises intrusion into the Plaza’s open form and composition.¹⁴

Communal use and programming

Policy 64 encourages the managers of Federation Square to continue to ensure that Federation Square is accessible to all communities, groups and individuals, including through the application of the Civic and Cultural Charter.¹⁵

Policy 68 states that the combination of civic, cultural and commercial activities at Federation Square is part of its identity and should be maintained.¹⁶

Managing event impacts

Policy 69 states that the managers of Federation Square should continue to ensure that impacts on physical fabric relating to the management of events are minimised and avoided.¹⁷

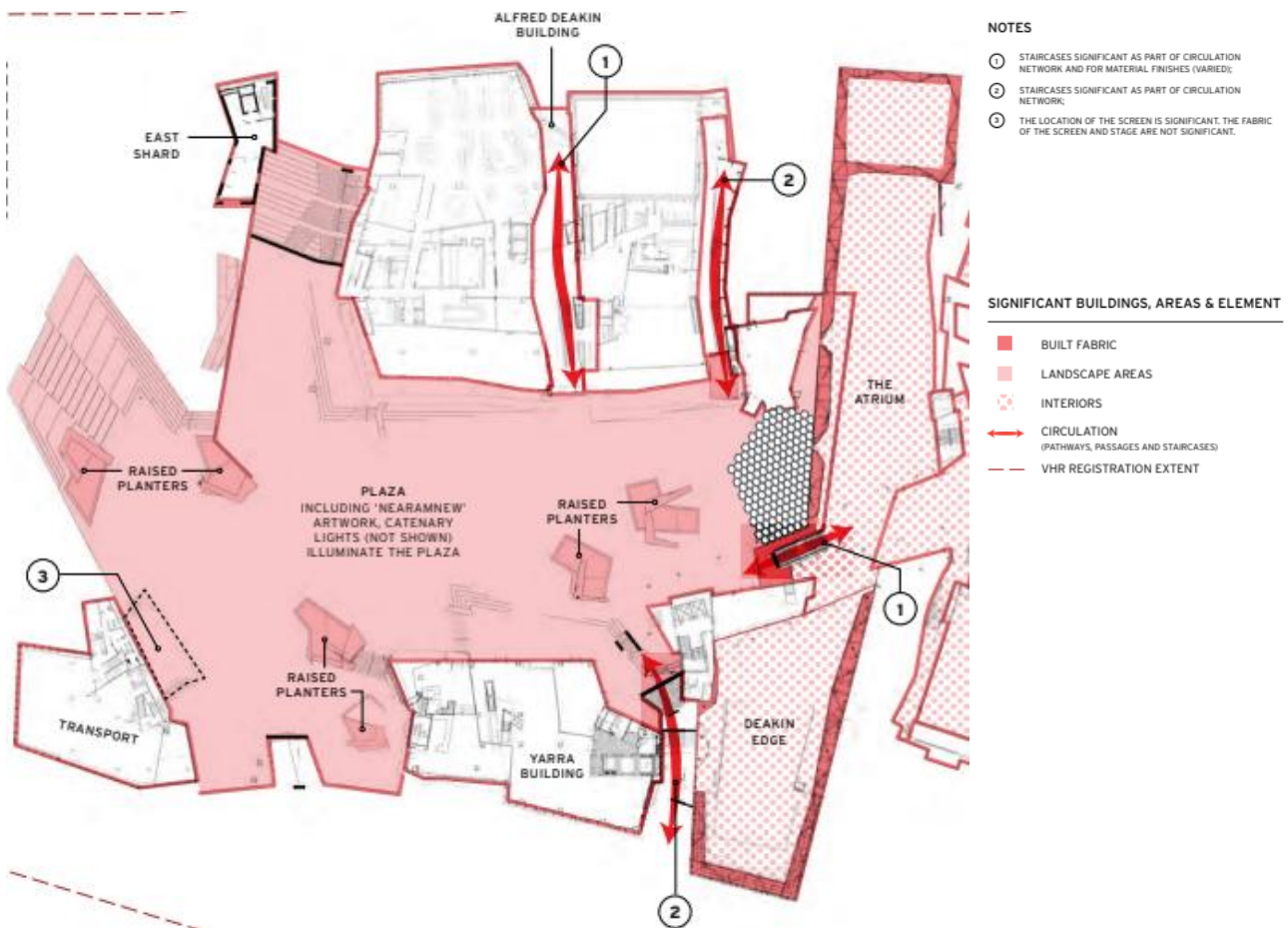


Figure 9 Detail, CMP Levels of Significance plan and legend identifying the Plaza, planters and artwork as elements of intrinsic significance
 Source: *Federation Square Conservation Management Plan* (Lovell Chen, 2020, p. 62)

4.0 Options analysis

4.1 Alternatives identified by Heritage Victoria

The following provides an analysis of the technical constraints, feasibility and heritage impacts associated with each alternative location identified in the RFI.

ALTERNATIVE 1: ADJACENT TO STAGE



Comment on technical constraints

- This location sits outside the functional SPL mixing zone and does not provide the acoustic representation of the audience area necessary for FOH engineering.
- Sightlines from this position are also compromised by stage infrastructure.

This location is not operationally viable.

Comment on heritage impacts/considerations

This location is not feasible given the associated technical constraints.

Additional heritage considerations:

The proposed form and 6-month duration of the Temporary FOH Container (or a similar securable enclosure) would have the potential to pose overt impacts to:

- the public perception of a critical public entry into the Plaza
- the architectural presentation and mediated experience of the Plaza Main Screen during the period of installation.

**ALTERNATIVE 2: ABOVE AND TO THE NORTH OF THE PROPOSED LOCATION
(UPPER TERRACE BESIDE CHOCOLATE BUDDHA TENANCY)**



Technical constraints

- This location falls outside the functional SPL mixing zone and is positioned behind the PA system’s delay poles. Engineering from behind delay poles is not a viable FOH position as the engineer would be hearing a delayed signal inconsistent with the main PA output.
- Sightlines to the stage are partly obstructed by trees in Planter Bed 2.
- Installation in this location would also impact public circulation and access to the adjoining Commercial Tenancy.

This location is not operationally viable.

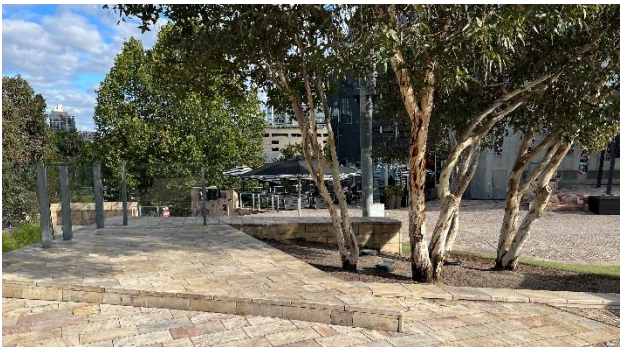
Heritage impacts/considerations

This location is not feasible given the technical constraints.

Additional heritage considerations:

- A structure placed at this elevated position would be more likely to pose a visual impact to the relationship between the Plaza and Alfred Deakin Building.

ALTERNATIVE 3: LOCATION BETWEEN THE RIVER TERRACE STAIRS AND BIRRARUNG (YARRA) BUILDING



Technical constraints

- Placement of the FOH Container to the front of the Planter Bed 3 would impact public circulation, especially during Plaza events.
- Placements to the rear of Planter Bed 3 are outside the functional SPL mixing zone and behind the delay poles of the PA system, presenting the same acoustic constraints as described for the alternatives above.
- Sightlines to the stage from behind Planter Bed 3 are obstructed by trees.
- Neither of these two locations are feasible from an events logistics and emergency perspective: if technical issues arise during an event, technical staff would need to traverse through the crowd to reach the communication rooms north-west of the Plaza.

This location is not operationally viable.

Heritage impacts/considerations

This location is not feasible given the technical constraints.

ALTERNATIVE 4: INTERNALLY WITHIN ONE OF THE BUILDINGS



Technical constraints

- An internal location in the Birrarung (Yarra) Building, Alfred Deakin Building or East Shard would be located entirely outside the functional SPL mixing zone.
- A location inside one of the perimeter buildings, even at an elevated position, would eliminate the engineer's ability to effectively see the stage, monitor crowd response, or coordinate with stage management — effectively severing the FOH position from the live event.
- The closest perimeter buildings facing the Plaza Stage are generally occupied by institutional and commercial tenants. These areas are not available for recurring temporary use by the Venue Manager (MAP Co) or booked events.

These locations are not operationally viable.

Heritage impacts/considerations

These locations are not feasible given the technical constraints. Additional heritage considerations:

- To improve sightlines and acoustic connections to the stage from the perimeter buildings would inevitably require changes to the glazed openings and pinwheel façade panels visible from the Plaza. In the context of the place's architectural significance and the CMP policies, this is not an action that would be easily considered or adopted.
- The commercial retail tenancies that ring the Plaza are recognised as an essential element of the place's public activation and use. Policy 46 of the CMP states that the tenancy patios at the periphery of the Plaza should be maintained and conserved as they 'enable the animation of the plaza.'

4.2 Continued use of temporary marquees

The provision of provisional front of house services to the Plaza was not effectively addressed in the design of Federation Square as delivered in c. 2002-2003. From its opening, performance events utilising the Plaza Stage were supported with technical FOH equipment placed under temporary canvas marquees varying in size from 3 x 3 metres to 6 x 3 metres or larger depending on the scale and scope of the event. However, there are significant operational issues with operating events on the Plaza Stage in this way. These include:

- Requirement for security staffing when equipment is installed overnight
- Weather exposure to staff and equipment
- Additional costs to hirers
- Constraints (time available, technical limitations) on planning and setup of complex temporary equipment
- Additional time and complexity of connection and removal of equipment on a daily basis for multi-day events
- Additional load-in and load-out requirements, obstruction and impact to public spaces.

The current proposal builds upon other improvements to Federation Square's event facilities and infrastructure, and recent success in programming a higher order of regular performances and cultural events. In this context, continuing use of temporary marquees as the sole accommodation for modern front of house equipment and technicians is no longer considered viable or appropriate to public and professional expectations of the place as a cultural venue.

5.0 Review of options analysis and impact assessment considerations

In consideration of the above options analysis, as well as the additional functional information provided by MAP Co, a review has been made of the potential heritage impacts and related considerations as apply to the Executive Director's determination of the application for the proposed FOH Container under section 101 of the *Heritage Act 2017*, including:

- The extent to which the application, if approved, would affect the cultural heritage significance of the registered place or registered object [s. 101(2)(a)]
- The extent to which the application, if refused, would affect the reasonable or economic use of the registered place or registered object [s. 101(2)(b)]
- If the applicant is a public authority, the extent to which the application, if refused, would unreasonably detrimentally affect the ability of the public authority to perform a statutory duty specified in the application [s. 101(2)(d)].

5.1 Potential for heritage impact

Physical impacts

Physical impacts from the proposed temporary installation of the FOH Container on a seasonal basis over the next several years would be limited and entirely reversible.

The placement of the temporary FOH Container and the use of a supporting riser platform and bog mats ensure that there would be no physical impact to the following fabric of heritage significance:

- Sandstone-clad walling around Planter Bed 2
- Red Flowering Yellow Gum trees (*Eucalyptus leucoxylon megalocarpa 'Rosea'*) in Planter Bed 2
- Sandstone cobble pavement to the surrounding Plaza surface
- Patterning and composition of the *Nearamnew* artwork embedded in the cobbles.

Temporary removal of a section of glass balustrade and handrail to the rear of Planter Bed 2 is required to enable to the installation of the FOH Container and supporting riser. The balustrade and handrail would be reinstated at the end of each seasonal installation of the Container, as occurred without issue at the end of the 2025-2026 installation that was approved under the previous permit exemption.

In respect to the management of significant fabric at the place, the proposal is consistent with the CMP policies reviewed in **Section 3.3**, including Policy 37 (Plaza), Policy 39 (*Nearamnew* artwork), Policy 42 (Sandstone fabric), Policy 45 (Yellow Gum trees) and Policy 69 (Managing event impacts).

Comparative review of alternatives

Notwithstanding their technical non-viability, several of the reviewed alternatives posed the potential for greater physical impact within the place. This is because obstructed viewing angles to the stage would likely have required alterations to be made to existing features and elements of heritage significance, including pruning or temporary removal of Yellow Gum trees (Alternatives 2, 3 or 4) or alterations to the Pinwheel Façade panels and recessed glazing on the Plaza's perimeter buildings (Alternative 4).

Visual impacts

Temporary visual impact to architectural composition (effect on appreciation and understanding)

The proposed temporary FOH Container does not pose an unacceptable impact to the public and architectural presentation and visual appreciation of Federation Square or of the Plaza as its central composition. The Container is proposed to be sited unobtrusively at a location where an existing level change between the lower and upper Plaza and the position of a group of Yellow Gum trees would reduce its (seasonal) visual prominence and effect on critical views to the upper Plaza and the adjoining Alfred Deakin Building, Atrium, Crossbar and Birrarung (Yarra) Building.

In particular, the physical 'break fault' or 'breakfront' element created by the elevation of the northern terrace west of the Alfred Deakin Building and above the Time Out tenancy and Planter Bed 2 enables the FOH Container to be placed in a position where it does not obstruct key open views across the Plaza and of the visual contact between the buildings' Pinwheel Façade planes and the Plaza surface. It is also placed in an oblique position relative to Swanston Street, where the Yellow Gums in Planter Bed 2 already obstruct views up the Plaza towards the Atrium. As the visitor moves up the steps towards the south-east, the views are revealed from behind the Gum trees; the same experience would occur during periods where the FOH Container is in place on the rear section of the planter.

The proposed location for the FOH Container (and the site at which it was previously installed in 2025-2026) minimises the container's potential to be a visual obstruction within the Plaza during the periods when it would be on site, and enables it to be clearly understood as it is: a mannered and functional installation placed in the most recessive location available to support the summertime events program at the place, a peak period of activity within the Plaza when many other temporary furnishings and structures are employed to stage events programming and support visitor experience and comfort.

Comparative review of alternatives

In comparison to the proposed temporary FOH Container location, many of the surveyed alternatives would place a temporary FOH Container or similar enclosure in locations where there would be a greater potential to pose seasonal visual impacts on the architectural presentation and visitor experience of the place.

Acknowledging previous upgrades to the Main Stage, the presence of a freestanding enclosure adjoining the stage and media screens on the rear of the Transport Building (Alternative 1) would present a new intrusion on the relationship between the screens, the Shard-like massing of the building's rear elevation, and the Plaza within the key point of arrival and event viewing. Placement of the Container closer to the Alfred Deakin Building (Alternative 2) or near to the Birrarung (Yarra) Building (Alternative 3) would similarly pose a greater potential to detract from the architectural presentation, appreciation and public engagement with those buildings during the period in which it was installed. In respect to Alternative 4, while concealment of the FOH facility in an existing building might present as desirable to avoid a change to the Plaza, this is not technically viable and would be likely to require potentially impactful physical changes to the subject building or Plaza features in order to achieve the sightlines required.

Temporary visual impact to appreciation of the *Nearamnew* artwork

The proposed temporary FOH Container requires the installation of a riser platform that extends over a small area of the Plaza abutting Planter Bed 2. The cobbled Plaza surface in this area is patterned as part of the *Nearamnew* artwork. Under the proposal, some cobbles in this area would be concealed under bog mats for the duration of each temporary installation season.

The area in question sits at an interface between the light and dark bands of the 'whorl' that defines the centre and abstract composition of the *Nearamnew* artwork (**Figure 10**). As part of the visitor experience of Federation Square, the 'whorl' component of the *Nearamnew* artwork is experienced as a visual gradient, a banding and variation of tones in the pavement cobbles similar to natural geological structures, and a perceived sense of movement in the stone surfacing of the Plaza which contributes to the unconventional forms and sense of spectacle within the place.

On foot within the place, the full scope and form of the whorl is difficult to perceive as a singular visual composition, only manifesting in elevated and aerial views of the site.

Temporary structures, even those that remain in place for a period of months, are unlikely to have a measurable impact on the perception and experience of the whorl component of the artwork and its relationship to the other aspects of the architectural and aesthetic presentation of the Plaza. In the regular operation of the place, sections of the Plaza are frequently concealed under event vendor marquees, temporary furnishings and seating or play mats, and other temporary infrastructure supporting programmed events as well as general visitor use and occupancy within the Plaza. This is particularly the case in the summer months when shade structures and temporary seating are required to alleviate the hot and exposed condition of the Plaza. The visual impact of these furnishings and activities to visitor perception and access to the *Nearamnew* artwork is itinerant and generally negligible, as the artwork is composed to be perceived from any angle and on any part of the Plaza, consistent with the federated themes at the heart of its visual and narrative concept.

In respect to the proposed location of the FOH Container, this would be placed at a point where the 'whorl' pattern is already interrupted by the elevated form of Planter Bed 2 and the 'break fault/breakfront' edge of the upper terrace behind it. The visitor experience of the 'whorl' is already interrupted by the planter and backing wall at this location, and the temporary concealment of a small section of cobbles at this location would not dramatically alter the scope and effect of the existing interruption and thus change how the artwork is perceived within the place.

Within the 'whorl' there are a series of discrete points where the visitor comes into contact with one or another of *Nearamnew's* textual storytelling elements ('Visions' or concrete poems), inscribed stone panel elements set within the pavement. Only one of the scattered concrete poems is positioned close enough to Planter Bed 2 to be visible from this location, however it is located approximately 10 metres south-east of the Container, in the opposite direction from the area proposed to be covered by the temporary riser.

Comparative review of alternatives

Although technically non-viable, Alternatives 1 to 3 would have all involved the erection of a temporary FOH enclosure over parts of the 'whorl.' In comparison to these suggested alternatives, which would generally locate the entire enclosure and riser on an area of cobbled paving rather than on an existing intervening structure, the proposed location of the temporary riser on the site of Planter Bed 2 would be less disruptive of visual access to the artwork.

Use of the place

The temporary FOH Container is proposed to be utilised to support a key aspect of Federation Square's continuous cultural programming, by enabling use of the venue for professionally staged public performances. This use is promoted within the Civic and Cultural Charter (refer **Section 3.1**), which encourages the public manager to maintain and update the operating technology that supports 'all aspects of the site's activity, uses and presentation.'

The proposed FOH Container location has been selected specifically to minimise the impact of the temporary installation on other uses of the Plaza which are recognised in both the Charter and the place's VHR registration. The location minimises the potential obstruction to public circulation and access across the Plaza, as well as to passive viewing of content and video presentations on the Main Screen and access, viewing and participation in the cultural events, exhibits, programming and performances that are a regular part of the Plaza's programming and visitation throughout the calendar year. The location also minimises potential impacts on visitor and customer access to the commercial and cultural tenancies which have storefronts, patios and entry points on the Plaza.

The proposal poses negligible temporary impacts on use of the place during the periods in which the Container would be installed on the site, and supports key cultural uses of Federation Square and the objectives encouraging a high local, national and international profile and recognition of the place which were embedded in its founding charter. Notwithstanding the non-viability of the assessed alternatives, the proposed location is understood to be the least impactful on other public, cultural and commercial uses of the place.

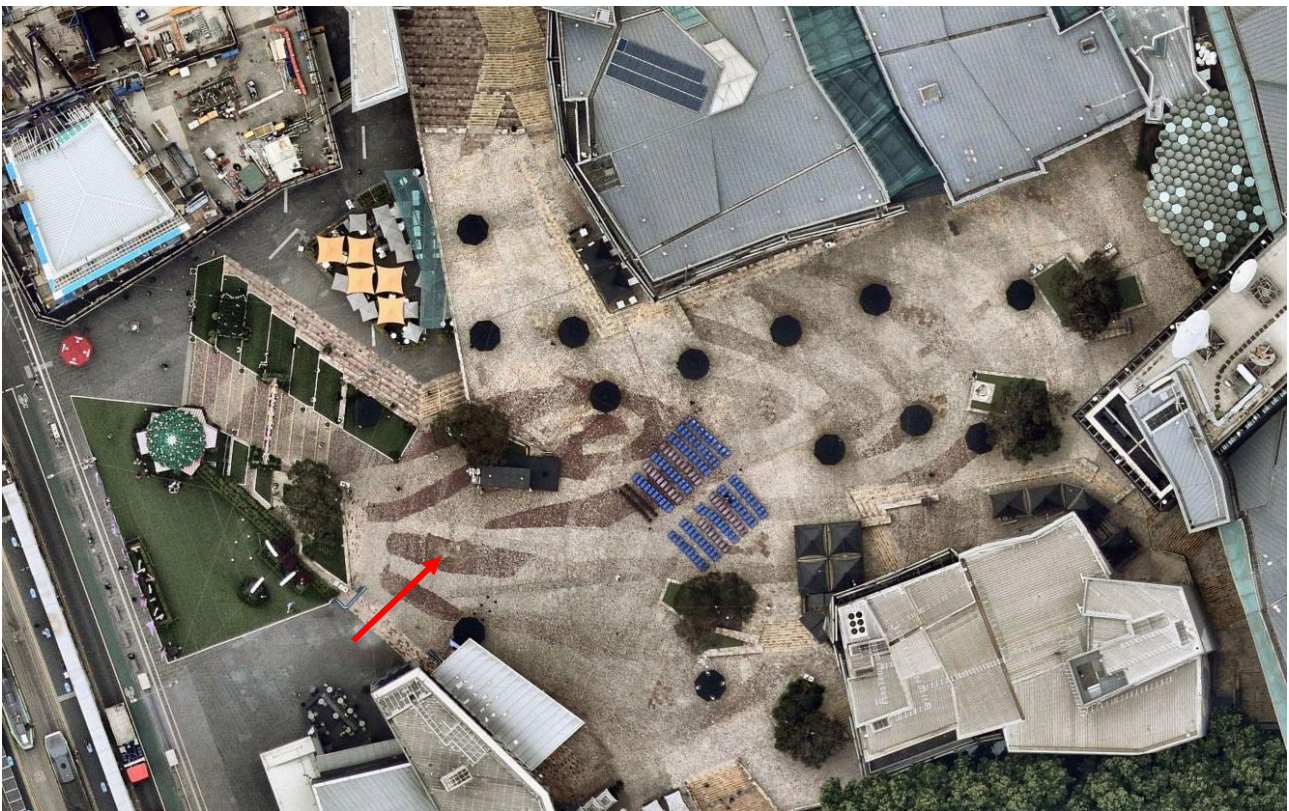


Figure 10 Aerial views of the Plaza showing (top) the *Nearamnew* 'whorl' unobstructed, and (bottom) the 2025 Temporary FOH Container and riser platform in place on Planter Bed 2 (and a variety of other furnishings); the location of the nearest 'Vision' panel is indicated in the bottom image (red arrow)
Source: Nearmap (capture dates: 7 September 2020 and 10 December 2025)

5.2 Effect of a refusal on reasonable use

The RFI requested additional analysis from MAP Co in respect to ‘why the proposed structure is necessary to facilitate and improve the reasonable or economic use of the heritage place.’ The comments below are restricted to considerations of reasonable use given that the proposal relates to works that are required to support the current and future use of Federation Square as a performance and events venue focused on the delivery of not-for-public and community cultural programming, rather than the introduction of a new revenue raising activity or function.

The Federation Square Plaza is a fundamental element in the functional design and use of the place as a cultural and performance venue, functions that are enshrined in the Civic and Cultural Charter. The Plaza has been used for and hosted live performances and events since its opening in 2002, including concerts, film screenings, dance and theatre performances, community cultural festivals and civic gatherings and demonstrations. These uses of the place contribute to its social significance. The CMP observes that:

A distinctive feature of Federation Square as a place of public engagement is its use of digital media, to provide information and to screen live events to a mass audience [...] The provision of cultural activities/events at Federation Square is a defining aspect of Federation Square’s identity, notably in the site’s programming and through community festivals.¹⁸

Some of the permanent supporting infrastructure for these events and performances has been regularly upgraded across the place’s 25 year operating history, reflecting both the incomplete or compromised nature of the original project as delivered in 2002-2003 and the rapid pace of technological advances, performance standards and evolving public relationship with central Melbourne and the Birrarung (Yarra River) as a venue and backdrop for a variety of cultural experiences and spectacles. Temporary marquees and infrastructure have also been a regular fixture of major events at the place from the outset, including as shelters for the event FOH operators and equipment, but they impose their own challenges and compromises for the staging of events (and for public uses of the place during set-up and tear-down).

The frequency and consistent professional quality of the events programming introduced since MAP Co became responsible for Federation Square’s public management has made more pressing the need to upgrade the FOH accommodations and resolve the constraints imposed by the use of temporary marquees for this function. As encouraged within the Civic and Cultural Charter, adoption of sensitively considered upgrades to support this essential and reasonable use of the place is not only unavoidable but also desirable provided that other valued aspects of the place are maintained.

Refusal of the proposal would impede the provision of suitable infrastructure supporting consistent use of the Federation Square Plaza as a venue for professionally staged cultural events and performances that appeal to a diverse cross-section of the Victorian community.

5.3 Effect of a refusal on the public authority’s statutory duties

Although not directly addressed in the RFI, it is appropriate in the context of the options analysis that has been presented to review and touch on the responsibilities of MAP Co and the rationale and process it has undertaken in developing the temporary FOH Container for use during the 2025-2026 summer events season, and in making the current application for approval of its ongoing seasonal installation at Federation Square over the next several years.

MAP Co was established as a ‘State body’ and a State Business Corporation by the Victorian Government in 2022 under the *State Owned Enterprises Act 1992*.¹⁹

Two of the three purposes for which MAP Co was established are directly relevant to the proposal. These are to:

- (a) provide leadership and strategic direction for the transformation of the MAP Designated Area, and the precinct around the MAP Designated Area, into a world class civic, cultural, arts and creative precinct;

(b) own, control, manage, operate, promote and develop Federation Square and other MAP Co. Managed Sites.

Hosting world class cultural events and performances at Federation Square requires suitable technical infrastructure aligned with contemporary event standards. Maintaining MAP Co's functions and role as specified above is an important aspect of MAP Co's duties under the *State Owned Enterprises Act*.

In its programming of the Federation Square Plaza as a public performance venue, and in its development of the FOH Container and the current application to continue use of this infrastructure, MAP Co has sought to advance the purposes identified above, as well as the objectives and responsibilities assigned by the Victorian government and the City of Melbourne to Federation Square's public manager under the Civic and Cultural Charter.

The Options Analysis presented above clarifies that the temporary location MAP Co has selected for the FOH Container is an appropriate response by a public body to satisfying contemporary technical requirements applicable to the staging of cultural performances and events at the place. The location represents what is effectively the only technically and operationally viable location to place the FOH Container within the Plaza Stage's SPL Mixing Zone without impeding on other aspects of event staging or crowd experience.

Moreover, in considering the container's potential impact to the physical fabric, visual experience and use of the place, the proposed location presents as preferable to suggested alternatives. The proposed FOH Container location is an effective response by the public body to balancing improved delivery of contemporary FOH infrastructure against the potential for the temporary structure to impact the heritage values, significance and use of the place.

Should the permit application be refused despite the measured and temporary nature of the proposal, it can be observed that this would have a negative effect on MAP Co's capacity to sustain the presentation of high quality public cultural programming at the place, and thus impede its statutory functions as the state body tasked with managing and advancing the profile and objectives of Federation Square and the Melbourne Arts Precinct.

5.4 Comment on proposed permit duration and permit conditions

The above analysis of alternatives and review of the potential heritage impacts and other considerations arising from the proposed Temporary FOH Container demonstrates that the proposed seasonal use of this container will not harm the heritage significance of Federation Square and has a strong rationale and justification established in the governing documents, heritage significance and existing management policies established for the place.

In respect to the potential duration of this recurring seasonal installation and of a heritage permit (if granted) which would approve it for a set period of years, it would be reasonable to balance a cautious approach to duration against the desirability of not imposing a requirement to apply on an annual basis for a temporary work whose potential for heritage impact is anticipated to be nearly if not entirely unchanged year-to-year. With those considerations in mind, and regarding the proposed five year duration of the permit as a reasonable time period for the use of the temporary container, permit conditions could be established to ensure that each season's installation and the execution of make-good activities following removal are tracked and reported. This would enable the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria to maintain oversight of this recurring seasonal works program and to review any unanticipated issues or impacts prior to approval of the next season's installation. The following structure is suggested for these conditions:

- A requirement to submit each season's dates for installation and removal of the Temporary FOH Container, in advance of commencement of the yearly works
- A twice-annual requirement to submit dilapidation photographs of the condition of the Plaza surface, Planter Bed #2 walls, Yellow Gum trees, and glass balustrade and handrail, before installation and after reinstatement
- A requirement to inspect and report any damage and required make-good repairs to reinstate the condition of the above elements after removal of the Temporary FOH Container at the end of each season.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Lovell Chen, *Federation Square Conservation Management Plan Volume 1*, prepared for Federation Square Pty Ltd, July 2020, p. 151.
- 2 Federation Square: Civic and Cultural Charter. Victorian Government and the City of Melbourne, undated
- 3 Heritage Council Victoria, 'Federation Square – H2390', Victorian Heritage Database, <https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/201519/download-report>.
- 4 Lovell Chen, *Federation Square Statement of Design Principles*, prepared for Federation Square Pty Ltd, May 2020; Lovell Chen, *Federation Square Conservation Management Plan Volume 1*, prepared for Federation Square Pty Ltd, July 2020.
- 5 Lovell Chen, *Federation Square Conservation Management Plan Volume 1*, prepared for Federation Square Pty Ltd, July 2020, p. 58.
- 6 Lovell Chen, *Federation Square Statement of Design Principles*, prepared for Federation Square Pty Ltd, May 2020, p. 34.
- 7 Lovell Chen, *Federation Square Conservation Management Plan Volume 1*, prepared for Federation Square Pty Ltd, July 2020, p. 146.
- 8 Lovell Chen, *Federation Square Conservation Management Plan Volume 1*, prepared for Federation Square Pty Ltd, July 2020, p. 141.
- 9 Lovell Chen, *Federation Square Conservation Management Plan Volume 1*, prepared for Federation Square Pty Ltd, July 2020, p. 23.
- 10 Lovell Chen, *Federation Square Conservation Management Plan Volume 1*, prepared for Federation Square Pty Ltd, July 2020, p. 149.
- 11 Lovell Chen, *Federation Square Conservation Management Plan Volume 1*, prepared for Federation Square Pty Ltd, July 2020, p. 149.
- 12 Lovell Chen, *Federation Square Conservation Management Plan Volume 1*, prepared for Federation Square Pty Ltd, July 2020, p. 148.
- 13 Lovell Chen, *Federation Square Conservation Management Plan Volume 1*, prepared for Federation Square Pty Ltd, July 2020, p. 148.
- 14 Lovell Chen, *Federation Square Conservation Management Plan Volume 1*, prepared for Federation Square Pty Ltd, July 2020, p. 151.
- 15 Lovell Chen, *Federation Square Conservation Management Plan Volume 1*, prepared for Federation Square Pty Ltd, July 2020, p. 186.
- 16 Lovell Chen, *Federation Square Conservation Management Plan Volume 1*, prepared for Federation Square Pty Ltd, July 2020, p. 189.
- 17 Lovell Chen, *Federation Square Conservation Management Plan Volume 1*, prepared for Federation Square Pty Ltd, July 2020, p. 189.
- 18 Lovell Chen, *Federation Square Statement of Design Principles*, prepared for Federation Square Pty Ltd, May 2020, p. 30.
- 19 Victorian Government Gazette, State Owned Enterprises Act 1992, G7 17 February 2022, p. 831.

APPENDIX A

MAP CO RESPONSE ON FOH CONTAINER FUNCTIONAL REQUIREMENTS AND CONSTRAINTS



RE: PERMIT APPLICATION P42256 — FURTHER INFORMATION RESPONSE

PREPARED BY: Mitchell Stace on 13/05/2026

1. Location Assessment — Technical Constraints

The fundamental technical constraint governing all location options is the functional Sound Pressure Level (SPL) mixing zone of the main stage PA system. A FOH audio engineer must be positioned within this zone to accurately hear and balance the PA output in real time. Engineering from outside this zone renders the position acoustically unrepresentative of the audience experience and is not a viable operational configuration. Supporting technical documentation from the PA system specifying this zone is attached.

It should also be noted that the functional SPL mixing zone is determined by the specifications of the current PA system, which has been deliberately selected in part to comply with MAP Co's Noise Management Plan and the EPA-designated noise limits applicable to the site. Increasing the size of the viable engineering zone would require the installation of a larger PA system. This is not feasible for two reasons. First, the stage canopy does not have the structural weight loading capacity to hang a larger PA system. Second, a larger PA system would by nature produce greater dB output across the site, which would place MAP Co in breach of both its Noise Management Plan and the legally prescribed EPA noise limits. The current PA system therefore represents the appropriate and compliant configuration for the venue, and the functional SPL mixing zone it produces is a fixed and non-negotiable operational parameter.

A further acoustic requirement is that the FOH position must be situated centrally between the PA speakers. This central positioning ensures that the sound engineer hears a balanced representation of what the audience experiences across the full coverage area. A position offset to one side of the PA system means the engineer hears the mix asymmetrically, resulting in a final mix that fails to translate evenly across the crowd. Parts of the audience will consequently receive a materially inferior audio experience.

A secondary but equally critical constraint is direct sightlines to the stage. The FOH engineer must always maintain unobstructed visual contact with performers and stage management for both operational and safety reasons. This includes the ability to observe performer positions and activity, monitor crowd response, and coordinate with stage management via both direct line of sight and radio communication. If this view is obstructed — by buildings, level changes, or crowd density — it impacts both the quality of the show and overall event safety.

A third operational constraint relates to the distance of the FOH position from the stage. The position must be close enough to maintain real-time coordination with stage management and performers, yet far enough back to accurately reflect the audience's acoustic experience. A position that is too far from the stage causes timing and coordination to deteriorate and reduces the FOH engineer's ability to respond effectively to live performance conditions.

Additionally, the FOH location must not obstruct emergency egress routes or primary pedestrian flows through the venue. Safe, level access for crew and equipment must be available. The ground conditions must provide a stable, level surface capable of supporting the

structure and its equipment load, with adequate provision for power supply and cable management infrastructure.

A further non-negotiable infrastructure constraint is access to fibre connectivity. Both video and audio operations at FOH require high-capacity data connectivity that is only available at the proposed location via the existing fibre infrastructure at that point in the Square. None of the alternative locations suggested by Heritage Victoria have access to this fibre connection. Relocating the FOH position to any of those locations would therefore render the video and audio systems inoperable, as no equivalent connectivity is available elsewhere on site.

Assessment of Suggested Alternative Locations

The four locations suggested by Heritage Victoria have been assessed against these constraints as follows:

Next to the stage

This location sits outside the functional SPL mixing zone and does not provide the acoustic representation of the audience area necessary for FOH engineering. A position this close to the stage also fails to reflect the audience's listening experience and creates unacceptable sound exposure risks for the engineer. Sightlines from this position are also compromised by stage infrastructure. This location is not operationally viable.

Above and to the north of the proposed location

This location falls outside the functional SPL mixing zone and is positioned behind the delay towers of the PA system. Engineering from behind delay towers is not a viable FOH position as the engineer would be hearing a delayed signal inconsistent with the main PA output. This offset and elevated position also introduces audio distortion and disconnects the engineer from both the stage environment and the crowd. Sightlines to the stage from this position are additionally obstructed. This location is not operationally viable.

Between the stairs to the River Terrace and the Yarra Building

This location is outside the functional SPL mixing zone and is likewise positioned behind the delay towers of the PA system, presenting the same acoustic constraint described above. It also falls within a high-traffic pedestrian zone, creating congestion and access issues that are incompatible with safe FOH operations. Sightlines to the stage from this location are also obstructed. This location is not operationally viable.

Internally within one of the buildings

An internal location is entirely outside the functional SPL mixing zone and removes all acoustic and visual connection to the live performance environment. Being inside a building eliminates the engineer's ability to see the stage, monitor crowd response, or coordinate with stage management — effectively severing the FOH position from the live event entirely. Furthermore, the buildings at Federation Square are occupied as active commercial tenancies, making them unavailable for this use. This location is not operationally viable under any circumstances.

2. Other Assessed Locations Within the Square

In addition to the four locations proposed by Heritage Victoria, other areas within the main plaza — including open and cobblestone zones — have also been assessed. These locations present the following issues:

- Greater visual and heritage impact than the proposed location due to their prominence within the open plaza
- Interference with key pedestrian movement routes and emergency access corridors
- Requirement for additional infrastructure including crowd barriers and extensive cable management
- Less effective positioning for both sightlines and PA speaker alignment

3. Minimum Operational Requirements and Justification for the Structure

The following sets out the minimum functional requirements for the FOH structure:

Internal size

The structure must house a FOH mixing console, associated audio processing equipment, communications systems, and cable management infrastructure. The minimum internal footprint required to house this equipment safely and ensure operators can work effectively is 25m². This temporary proposal only provides 18m² which poses some operational constraints, however as it is a temporary installation, we have introduced stop-gap measures to compensate. There is an additional requirement of a minimum 3.5 x 3.5 m platform necessary to support a temporary marquee structure, essential for sound mixing operations.

Personnel

A minimum of 8 personnel must be able to be accommodated within or immediately adjacent to the structure during events, including the FOH audio engineer and a monitoring engineer/technician.

Distance from stage

The structure must be positioned within the PA system's functional SPL mixing zone, as defined in Attachment A.

Sightlines

Unobstructed direct sightlines to the performance area are required at all times for operational and safety reasons.

Access and security

The structure requires secure, lockable access to protect equipment between events and controlled access during events to prevent interference with live operations.

Ground conditions and infrastructure

The structure requires a stable, level surface capable of supporting the equipment load. Adequate provision for power supply, cabling, and weather protection must be available to ensure safe and reliable operational conditions.

Data connectivity (fibre)

Both video and audio operations at FOH require high-capacity data connectivity via fibre. This infrastructure is available at the proposed location and is a prerequisite for the operational functionality of these systems. It is not available at any of the alternative locations assessed.

The provision of a dedicated FOH position is essential to the reasonable and safe use of Federation Square as a live performance and civic events venue. Without a properly positioned FOH engineering facility, MAP Co cannot fulfil its obligations to event producers, performers, and the public with respect to audio quality, safety communications, and event delivery standards. The shipping container configuration is the minimum built form necessary to house this function in a weatherproof, secure, and operationally effective manner.

4. Why the Proposed Location Works Best

Within the area that satisfies the technical constraints outlined above, the planter bed location is the only identified position that meets all operational requirements simultaneously.

Specifically, it:

- Maintains clear, central sightlines to the stage
- Sits in the correct position between the PA speakers, within the functional SPL mixing zone (with the addition of stage deck)
- Avoids disrupting primary pedestrian movement routes
- Contains the operational footprint, reducing trip hazards and clutter in the public domain
- Provides a stable setup area for equipment
- Supports clear communication between the FOH team and stage management
- Has less visual and heritage impact than alternative open plaza positions
- Is the only location with access to the fibre infrastructure required for video and audio data connectivity

Note that the permit is now only extended for two years, however we would want the availability to trigger an extension if necessary.

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