



The Portland Loo - one of the best public toilet designs for streets, parks and public spaces

Why Public Toilets are important and how to design them with CPTED



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Different kinds of Public Toilets

Public toilets come in many different flavours:

- Toilets in executive environments
- Toilets in high-class conference centres
- Toilets in shared spaces of luxury hotels
- Airport toilets
- Restaurant toilets
- Toilets in shopping centres and malls
- Toilets in cafes

- Public toilets on the street
- Toilets out in the countryside, bush, mountains...

Public Toilet Design Factors

Designing public shared toilets in each of these contexts differs on what kinds of user behaviours can be assumed; which behaviours are supported; and which behaviours are to be discouraged.

From a CPTED point of view, a key design aim is to discourage crime. From a maintenance point of view designs intend to discourage behaviours that require maintenance or cleaning. Business considerations include providing an excellent user experience that encourages users to positive business behaviours such as buying things, encouraging others to patronize the area. A civic or local government point of view includes ensuring citizens have access to places to relieve themselves of bodily wastes in a manner that is safe and hygienic.

From the perspective of users, they expect a public toilet design that will support the activities they wish to undertake, using the facilities and privacy that the particular design of public toilet offers in that location and context.

Culture and nationality also play a part. In many parts of Europe, France for example, there is a long history of unisex public toilets. In contrast, in other cultures, the idea of unisex public toilets would be considered somewhat immoral.

In many ways, the location and context also dictate the limits of what users might expect and also indicates what kind of public toilet design they will find.

For example, if the location and context is a high-class hotel in Dohar, Qatar, the public toilets might be expected to be luxurious, single sex, with attendants to support and manage a wide range of appropriate civilized behaviours.

In contrast, if the location and context is a rough down-town aged transport hub, user expectations would be more likely limited to providing the ability to manage bodily wastes in a clean and safe environment.

In short, each successful instance of public toilet design must take into account the location and its context and purposes and needs of stakeholders.

This also must take into account that there may be tensions and contradiction between the needs and expectations of stakeholders. For example, whilst illegal drug users may hope the toilet will provide support for drug-taking behaviours, law enforcement officers will want the design of the public toilet to discourage drug taking as much as possible. The design situation is complicated by legitimate drug users (e.g. diabetics) needing to use the privacy of public toilets for the same purpose.

Public Toilet Design for Street and Park Environments

The most difficult public toilet to design is for the streets, where anyone can use it, at any time, and for a host of purposes.

The challenge is to make such a public toilet space and environment safe whilst fulfilling a host of essential requirements:

- Clean
- Dispose of bodily wastes in a clean hygienic manner
- High reliability
- 24/7 availability to minimise public urination and defecation.
- Provide hand washing.
- Low cleaning and maintenance costs
- Robust against vandalism
- Attractive appearance
- Maintain appropriate privacy and decency.
- Discourage illegal drug use.
- Discourage illegal sexual behaviour.
- Protect against being used in assaults.
- Sufficient capacity (users per day etc)
- Suitable for all users including the homeless and street present people, visitors from different cultures etc.

Well-used public toilets in street or park locations:

- have up to 300 flushes per day
- require cleaning 2-5 times per day.
- require storage capacity for at least a week if not connected to main sewage and water.

CPTED and Public Toilet Design for Streets

CPTED design methods are central to keeping such a public toilet safe and crime free.

From experience, essential CPTED design features include:

- Positioned in a publicly accessible location with good sight lines and guardianship.
- Wash facilities outside the toilet in public space.
- Robust easy to clean construction.
- Clear view into the toilet in ways that do not breach privacy.
- No entry vestibule (no loitering area)
- Attractive appearance
- Vandal-proof interior and exterior construction
- Blue interior lighting (more difficult to inject drugs)

Monitored CCTV can be used external to the toilet unit to provide support for users and to discourage misuse.

A core issue is that a public toilet should NOT be designed to be a welcoming pleasant place!

Example: Portland Loo

The **Portland Loo** (see above and below) is a now well-adopted example of excellent CPTED public toilet design that fulfills all the above requirements.



The Portland Loo is designed to be big enough to take in a bicycle/pram/wheelchair etc. No-one likes to take the risk of leaving their belongings outside. For more details see:

<https://portlandloo.com/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portland_Loo

<https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/its-austere-and-uncomfortable-thats-precisely-the-reason-the-portland-loo-is-finding-a-home-in-king-county/>

Example: Burley Restroom

The Australian **Burley Restroom** could be used in urban settings but is more suited to a park environment.



The Burley Restroom has four of the key CPTED features: sight lines under the doors and walls, external hand wash and water supply, space to take in a bicycle/pram/wheelchair etc. and robust construction. For more details see:

<http://www.outside.net.au/products/burley-restroom>

Temporary Public Toilets

There are good reasons to also use temporary stand-alone public toilets where an urgent and economic public toilet facility is needed. They can also be of benefit when planning and testing whether a public toilet would reduce problems in a location (e.g. reducing public defecation/urination).



Some of these kinds of temporary public toilets can also provide showering facilities.

These kinds of temporary toilets offer only a limited range of CPTED features. Their primary advantages are being able to quickly provide temporary toilet facilities in a reasonably robust format that limits the kinds of crime and antisocial behaviour that can occur. Their use for short term events is common. For CPTED they also provide a cost-effective means of temporarily implementing toilets to test changes in public toilet provisions on streets.

Temporary toilets can be rented or purchased. The cost of a temporary stand-alone public toilets are from around US\$450 not including transport and maintenance (see, e.g. https://www.alibaba.com/product-detail/Public-Mobile-HDPE-Portable-Toilet-Prefab_1600080084842.html?spm=a2700.galleryofferlist.normal_offer.d_image.4b6a3fe1dZM5H5&s=p)

CPTED for designing other kinds of public toilets

This article has focused on CPTED design for public toilets for urban streets and parks.

We will separately provide other articles on using CPTED in public toilet design in other contexts such as shopping malls, airports, hotels, offices, executive suites and the like.

Resources on CPTED Public Toilet Design

The **Design Out Crime and CPTED Centre** has made a number of resources on CPTED Public Toilet Design freely available [here](#) at

<https://designoutcrime.org/doc-cloud/index.php/s/fLZwejCjq6RM2cG>

CPTED Training, CPTED reviews and consultation

The **Design Out Crime and CPTED Centre** provides these articles as **[free CPTED resources](#)** for CPTED and Design Out Crime professionals.

These free resources add to the state-of-the-art CPTED training material for participants in our CPTED training courses.

Please see our website at www.designoutcrime.org or contact **Dr Terence Love** directly at t.love@designoutcrime.org and +61 (0)4 3497 5848 for in-person and online CPTED training for individuals and groups, CPTED reviews for development applications and CPTED reviews and consultation for local government, developers and other professionals

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