

The following comments are provided by Ian Rucroft. I am contributing this information having been extensively involved in past ACT public transport consultations. The comments are made with a focus on Gungahlin public transport issues. However the issues have been considered from a whole of ACT regional perspective.

Public transport has to be an important part of planning for Gungahlin and other areas of the ACT. I understand that it is very difficult to convince people, who are supplied with a company car, or who have parenting considerations, to use public transport. However a viable public transport network, linking the areas of major employment, is essential for the ACT and region.

Bus transport suggestions:

1) The Action bus Intertown bus service must be extended to Gungahlin as a matter of urgency. Given that this high frequency bus service links Belconnen, City, Woden, and Tuggeranong Town Centres; the failure to extend the service to Gungahlin disadvantages the district; especially since there is very little employment in Gungahlin and a road network that makes it hard to access areas of employment during peak hours.

2) The relocation of the Belconnen bus depot to an area adjacent to EPIC would have many benefits A) This could be coupled to an extensive park-and-ride facility that would reduce traffic on Northbourne Avenue and other road networks. B) The costs associated with the relocation would be offset by the sale of the bus depot land in Belconnen. C) It would provide an employment base in the Gungahlin\ Mitchell district. D) It would provide for better utilization of the parking areas adjacent to EPIC. E) It could be developed so that it can be adapted to compliment future light rail or other mass public transport options.

3) An option to establish an express service from Gungahlin, via Flemington Road, Phillip Avenue, along the Monash\ Wolseley Drive corridor and into Ainslie Avenue would be a cost effective and environmentally attractive option. This single lane road, from Kellaway St Hackett to Limestone Avenue, could be limited to: 1) Bus use only 2) Reversed direction flow (to Civic in the morning – to Gungahlin in the afternoon) 3) Used only during peak traffic flow times.

Light Rail:

During the Public Transport consultations (held during 2002\ 2003) there was strong support for engaging a suitable qualified organisation to explore the possible options for establishing a light rail network linking all districts of the ACT and Queanbeyan. The scope of this project should have included a complete breakdown of costings for each district and options for sourcing funds or entering into private\ government construction and operation of the network. Current ACT government consideration of light rail is based on inaccurate costings that are estimated to be inflated by 300%.

For Gungahlin, commitment to light rail (or another quality mass transport option) will encourage people to the area who are in a position where the second car may be a convenience they can do without. It may also encourage organisations, planning to establish or relocate employment opportunities, to look at Gungahlin as an area with stability, endorsement, modern infrastructure and long-term vision.

Over the past 5 years, land along Flemington Road (in Mitchell, Harrison and Gungahlin) has been sold without a commitment to light rail. The opportunity to encourage suitable development and link betterment taxes to development focused around light rail boarding stations has been partly lost; but some development along the Flemington Road corridor could be held back until the light rail options are fully explored. Suitable "light rail focused" development along Constitution Ave, Northbourne Ave and Macarthur Ave should be held back until a comprehensive consideration of light rail is completed.

There is a desperate need to ensure that land sales or road and intersection construction does not take away the option of providing a light rail corridor along Flemington Road or any other suitable corridor identified for light rail, throughout the ACT.

Other new technologies are also an option, but the longer the delays in making a commitment to a quality mass public transport solution, the less money will be recouped from additional land revenue to help pay for it. At this time, indications are that a large proportion of the cost to build the light rail link from Civic to Gungahlin and other areas of the ACT region could be recouped from additional land revenue and betterment taxes received from the sale and development of land adjacent to light rail boarding stations.

Staging of light rail development:

With environmental issues now becoming an election issue there may be options for encouraging federal funding for light rail development. Also, now that the federal government has committed significant resources to the construction of the Defence facility at Bungendore, light rail may be a viable option that could provide an environmentally acceptable workforce transport solution for the facility. By utilising existing rail lines and coupling an ACT light rail network to this, a quick and cost-effective service could be provided with minimum resources. The first stages of this network would be:

1. Construct a park and ride facility adjacent to the rail line at Gilmore. This could be also used for bus transport
2. Junction the Cooma\ Queanbeyan\ Kingston and provide a north west turn for the Cooma\ Kingston turn
3. Construct a light rail line from Fyshwick (west of the Monaro Hwy underpass), along the Dairy Flat Rd to Russell Drive
4. Construct a light rail line along Constitution Ave to Vernon Circle
5. Construct a light rail line along Northbourne Ave to EPIC and construct a park and ride facility at EPIC
6. Construct a light rail line along Macarthur Ave to the AIS and construct a park and ride facility at the AIS

Note: Light rail drive motors could be powered by environmentally acceptable options, such as those being introduced into the Action Bus fleet.

Employment in Gungahlin:

Transport problems for Gungahlin are indirectly proportional to employment in the district. Gungahlin is now 15 years old, its population is approximately 32,000 people. There are some current traffic problems which continue to be impacted by the traffic problems associated with the Glenloch Interchange redevelopment (which will be completed during 2008). However the traffic problems we currently have are nothing compared to what will eventuate without a well planned strategy for Gungahlin's development, especially in the areas of roads, public transport and employment.

Strategies to nurture local area employment in Gungahlin and Tuggeranong must be identified as a priority; with strategies and milestones set to enable the monitoring of progress towards attaining town centre employment distribution, which provides an equitable employment base for each district, reflecting the area's population.

Population and employment issues which need to be considered in relation to Gungahlin's public transport include:

- What will Gungahlin's eventual population be;
- What will be Gungahlin's employment base.

Gungahlin's eventual population:

Estimates of Gungahlin's population range from 90,000 to 120,000 people. There is a necessity to identify the maximum population figure and refocus planning efforts with the full knowledge of this population. There is also a need to develop a matrix of population milestones that link infrastructure, employment, services and community facilities to the population figures. This will need to be used as a reference guide to ensure that governments plan and implement actions to achieve outcomes that are monitored by the community, in open consultation.

Gungahlin's employment base:

"Figure C – Future population and employment –CADREF J:\17797\ 17797026 (2/12/96)". The table below identifies the current and projected population, jobs and job ratios for each district.

District	Population at 2006	Forecast Population	Forecast Jobs	Pop\ job ratio
Inner south	24,944	29,000	56,000	0.52
Inner North and City	42,427	54,000	78,000	0.69
Woden and Weston Creek	54, 201	65,000	29,000	1.45
Belconnen	85,385	95,000	30,000	3.16
Gungahlin	31,994	114,000	23,000	4.96
Tuggeranong	89,104	88,000	16,000	5.50

A town of 114,00 people will generate a number of job eg shops, schools and other services. To provide Gungahlin with the 23,000 estimated jobs, there is a need to do something more imaginative than counting all the jobs that already existed in Mitchell, and hope that private enterprise will do the rest. Especially with the down sizing, relocation or closure of organisations in Mitchell, ie Totalcare, National Archives and the brickworks. It should also be questioned why Gungahlin and Tuggeranong should be disadvantaged in the population\ job ratios compared to other districts. Tuggeranong should have 28,000 jobs and Gungahlin should have 36,000 jobs as a realistic target.

Government employment has been a cornerstone of Canberra's development. It provides security for retailers, commercial organisations and developers plus an endorsement of the Town Centre principal. The establishment of a government department is a long-term commitment with a realistic time frame of at least three years. We can see from the rapid expansion of employment at the Canberra Airport; Federal Government agencies will establish or relocate to districts that have suitable office space available.

Unfortunately this rapid expansion at the Airport has the potential to undermine Gungahlin's options for attracting employment to the district. It also impacts on the ACT's infrastructure and road networks, especially around the Airport and Fyshwick. The concentration of employment in Civic will also impact on employment in Gungahlin, unless strategies are implemented to coordinate complimentary development in both districts.

Gungahlin residents are concerned that there appears to be a tendency for the areas with reasonable employment bases to attract more, whilst other areas struggle to gain recognition. It is general knowledge that there are a number of government departments currently considering relocation. It is disappointing that Gungahlin isn't being seriously considered, given that geographically it is a comparable distance from the CBD as Belconnen and Woden.

Canberra didn't happen because people wanted to shift here. None of the other town centres would have survived if the government had not shown commitment to the area by locating extensive employment bases at their early stages of development. It is now Gungahlin's turn. We need a comprehensive employment plan that provides us with an equitable employment base, we also need planning strategies that will suitable land for this employment-related development. To make it happen is going to cost money, comparatively the same as is cost in other areas.

There is a need for Governments to face up to their responsibilities and if they are not prepared to do this, other alternatives are going to need to be found. At the moment we have the ACT Government saying that the Federal Government has to generate employment. The Federal Government is saying that the Department heads decide where they are going to shift. And so the buck is passed on but the social issues are not addressed. Betterment taxes (for commercial development) in areas such as Civic, Woden and Belconnen could be used as an incentive to make government departments and developers consider Gungahlin and Tuggeranong as areas that have a financial attraction when they are in the early stages of planning relocation, expansion or development. The development and social issues being created by the current expansion of an employment centre at the Canberra Airport requires resolution by the appropriate stakeholders.