

Submission on ACTION services

With reference to your inquiry into services currently provided by ACTION buses:

First of all, ACTION is a great service, not easy to run because of Canberra's geography. Most ACTION drivers are really polite and helpful. Lately they have been under a lot of pressure, and the stress is beginning to show for drivers and commuters alike. I hope the route and timetable issues will be looked into and resolved soon, for the good of Canberra and its image.

SERVICES AROUND CAUSEWAY, KINGSTON, AND MANUKA.

I am a resident of Causeway (Kingston). I am also a University student, work part-time near Manuka and have a child in High School. Like many of the residents of this area, we rely almost entirely on public transport.

In this area there are approximately 100 households, most of which are occupied by public housing tenants, several being pensioners or on a low income. Only few lots are privately owned.

We are situated behind the Kingston Foreshore re-development, and tend to be somewhat neglected by Government services in general, possibly because the area is still zoned as temporary housing, although there are some residents who have lived here more than 50 years. Work on the construction site has effectively cut off all the shortcuts to Kingston used by cyclists and pedestrians. All the more need for buses.

The continuation of Dawes Street (on the east side of Wentworth Avenue) has been completed for some time. It connects to The Causeway, and could be used effectively by ACTION buses (such as the 80 or 83) as an alternative to the current loop up and down Cunningham Street, if only the ACT Government would open it to traffic sometime soon.

ROUTES 39, 84, AND ALTERNATIVES

Until the change in the ACTION bus timetables in December 2006, this area was serviced by two ACTION routes: 39 (going to Civic, Dickson and Watson), and 84 (going to Woden, via Yarralumla, Deakin and Woden Hospitals). There was limited access to weekend services.

Now the 84 has been altogether eliminated and the 83, although following a similar route does not pass by the Causeway, but only along Wentworth Avenue. There are NO buses into here on weekends and public holidays.

A number of people I have spoken to in the Kingston area have been forced to refuse positions in retail outlets with an early start in Fyshwick or Woden on weekends and in Manuka in the evening because of the lack of bus services. There is very little free parking for employees to access in Manuka even in the evening and on weekends.

Senior citizens residing in Causeway who need to go to the hospitals for medical services must now either walk all the way down to Wentworth Avenue and cross the road to catch the 83 (a 10 to 15-min walk), or catch the 39 into Kingston or Civic, then catch a second bus to take them to

the hospitals. This makes their trip twice the length it used to be with the 84. For some of these, even walking that distance is not an option, as it is as much as they can do to get to the Causeway bus stop.

Not only that, the 83 does not run on Saturdays, a common day chosen for medical treatments, nor does the 39. Evening and weekend bus services 38 and 935 are not a realistic alternative in this area, even though listed at the bottom of the 39 timetable.

There is no mention of the 80 route at the bottom of the 39 timetable, even though the 80 route is a valid alternative to get to Civic, the Universities, Hospital and Belconnen even on weekends.

Evening services are scarce, even though Kingston and Manuka supermarkets are open late, and Universities have classes finishing up to 7pm, and sometimes later.

School buses operate only in the afternoon from Kingston Shops to Causeway for Telopea School students, although it is a 15-minute walk from the School to the Shops, with no school crossings on Telopea Park West or East. In bad weather, this becomes a most unpleasant walk.

University of Canberra students leaving classes at 6 and 7pm can catch the 80, but only into Civic, as it does not continue to Kingston and Railway after 5pm. The 38 has a long gap between the 7:30pm and the 8:46pm service, which gets to Kingston. A Causeway or Wentworth Avenue resident's last 39 bus leaves at 8:20pm from Civic.

College and tertiary students in the ACT have different term dates to the Primary and High Schools, so student term tickets and 10-rides become unusable during school breaks when other students are still attending classes, effectively doubling the cost of transport (from around 80c to \$1.50 for a single ride or transfer). Some students have to use 4 or more rides a day (due also to off-peak cuts making the 90-minute transfers less viable), particularly those travelling between campuses.

OTHER RELATED ISSUES

Please note that even a 15-minute wait after dark at any interchange is quite scary, and particularly in winter many commuters have to catch buses after dark. It is no wonder that there are so many Canberrans preferring to use their own cars, if they have them, even though this Government would prefer them not to for environmental and other reasons.

Most of the cars I see driving around at any time of day have only one person in them. A waste.

If this Government wishes Canberrans to use buses, services have to meet the needs of the most likely users: commuters (who may be on flexi-time so able to use off-peak services), including the low-wage retail employees (who still have to pay for their parking in the shopping centres), pensioners, students, low-income earners using off-peak services, persons unable to drive for health or legal reasons and persons with a mental or physical disability.

Information gathered from ticket machines in this period (post December 2006) may not be reliable, since many commuters are losing patience with services and switching routes or walking, if they cannot get a lift.

I have lived in several Australian cities and although ACTION does a remarkably good job in some areas, in that their coverage seems to be quite vast, there are some aspects that could be improved upon for cost-efficiency and comfort of the commuters. In Rockhampton, where I lived for some time, I was impressed at the frequency of mini (12-20 seater) buses covering routes used mainly by students, pensioners and off-peak travellers. Most routes were fairly short, one was rarely in the bus for more than 45 minutes to get to any one point.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

CAUSEWAY-KINGSTON-FYSHWICK AREAS:

1. If not possible to reinstate the 84, that the 83 bus perform the loop into the Causeway and do pickups at least once an hour, straddled against the 39 at half -hour intervals.
2. That at least one bus route be assigned to loop into the Causeway on weekends. The 80, travelling along Wentworth Avenue, could easily do this without losing much time at all.
3. That the 9:11 am slot be reinstated from Causeway for the 39 going North (you have already reinstated the similar time slot going South in the amended timetable). It is very convenient for off-peak travel and flexi-time workers.
4. That off peak services run half-hourly from Kingston and Manuka, and possibly not all clustered within two or three minutes of each other (i.e. instead of having the 39 and 83 leave one at 5:29 and the next at 5:33, one could leave at 5:29 but the next at 5:45). Another example are the routes along National Circuit 30, 35,36, which leave also in clusters with 45-50 minute gaps between clusters.
5. That more buses serve the Fyshwick area during Fyshwick business hours (which include weekends) for employees needing to arrive before, or leave after, customers.

IN GENERAL:

6. That more evening services be established (using mini-buses), as well as late night shopping buses for Friday nights (this would also help employees in the retail industry who leave well after the customers yet still have to pay parking, and could therefore avoid using their motor vehicles altogether).
7. That ACTION use mini and midi buses for low-volume routes (see SunBus Service, in Queensland <http://www.sunbus.com.au>)
8. That more bus stops be fitted with timetables, and that these timetables state clearly which direction buses are going from that particular stop (at both Eyre St and Giles St Kingston, for example, from the same bus stop some buses go north and some buses go south). Tourists or new Canberrans in particular are flummoxed by the system.
9. That ACTION put a stop to "cluster" departures (i.e. buses on similar routes departing within 2-3 minutes of each other, then nothing for up to an hour, particularly during off-peak time), and

straddle departure times by 15 minutes. This would also help relieve interchange congestion, both in bus traffic and commuter numbers.

10. Given the requirement to signal buses for them to stop, that numbers and route names be more visible on the front, and that at least the number be visible also from the rear. As a matter of courtesy to the drivers, who need time to slow down for the stop, commuters should be able to recognise number or route ideally from a block away (it is also extremely useful to know which bus has just been missed, particularly at interchanges, if deciding between platforms!)

11. That there be automatic ticket distributors at interchanges, for transfers and 10-rides, and more places where to buy tickets from (the newsagency at Civic Interchange now has a \$10 minimum EFT purchase, which means you are forced to buy something else if you do not have the cash for a student 10-ride), OR bus drivers should be able to sell 10-rides as well as singles and transfers. A person with a banknote would then not put the driver into crisis mode, particularly on early-morning runs!

12. That ACTION establish hospital mini shuttle-buses servicing hospitals, medical centres, nursing homes and older suburbs, perhaps as a joint-venture with the taxi service or with the Department of Health, or even with the centres themselves.

13. That an ACTION bus service embassy routes during consular hours around Yarralumla. This would be useful both for tourists, employees and other persons needing to visit the consular sections for visas, etc. The 31, 32 and 83 routes could be adapted, or even the 34, which is a tourist route, and would probably be the most logical. Again, these buses are "clustering", and need to be spaced out.

14. That more information be available at interchanges, on buses (route/number display area) and on the front of timetables on intermediate stops for routes servicing some of the tourist hot spots, to alleviate the crush on the 34. The 39 (which uses the same platform at Civic) is often half empty, yet services both Old and New Parliament House, as well as stopping very close to the National Library. New Canberrans and tourists would not know this. Not only that, it also reaches Kingston and Manuka, well known for their shops, cafes and restaurants. The front of the timetable leaflets is the best place to advertise. "Parkes" says nothing to a non-Canberran.

14. That ACTION School bus routes be shorter, passing by less schools each, so children do not have to wait so long either for the bus, or on the bus (an example is the amount of time buses spend outside the Girls Grammar in Grey St, Deakin, students from Yarralumla Primary having to wait 15 minutes on the bus while the Grammar students are picked up). The ACT Government could also help by enforcing feeder areas for primary and High schools (criteria: residence or parents working nearby).

15. That some parents, teachers and student or relief teachers (with appropriate permit) be allowed to use the the ACTION school buses. This should help with student misbehaviour on buses, as well as help parents adjust the younger children to the service.

16. That student 10-rides could be made viable out of school term period and / or that students be able to access the pensioner off-peak daily (\$1.40) when term tickets cannot be used.

One last suggestion to the ACT Government, perhaps more coach-related than bus-related: have a Coach and Bus Terminal and or Mini-Interchange at Kingston Station, there is so much more space than at the Jolimont Centre, and it would revitalise the area.