

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water

Inquiry into ACT Greenhouse Gas Reduction Targets - 2009

SUBMISSION BY THE ACT TRANSIT GROUP

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1. STANDING COMMITTEE REFERENCE

The ACT Transit Group looks to the reduction of greenhouse gases by increased use of public transport. An easy way to achieve this is the provision of improved information to Canberra residents plus some other small scale improvements.

- 1.1** The Transit Group notes that the ACT Legislative Assembly has resolved that:
 - (1) (a) expert scientific evidence confirms that human activity is causing a significant increase in global temperatures, which will have a dramatic impact on the sustainability of existing ecological systems and human settlements;
 - (b) climate change is one of the greatest economic, social and environmental challenges facing the ACT community, and must be addressed accordingly and that it is imperative that the ACT moves to a low carbon future both swiftly and equitably.
- 1.2** Further, the ACT Transit Group notes that the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water resolved to inquire into and report on 12 specific matters which are listed in the Standing Committee Reference

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1** While the ACT Transit Group is a non-scientific body and is thus unable to contribute to any debate or discussion on the scientific understanding of climate change or the establishment of specific targets and monitoring processes, the Transit Group can contribute positively to the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Target debate.
- 2.2** The Group wishes to focus on the already well publicised need to reduce greenhouse gases emitted by motor vehicles and the linked contribution that an increased use of public transport can make to achieve pre-determined gas reduction targets.
- 2.3** How can car drivers be enticed to use public transport in Canberra? The ACT Transit Group believes that a combination of measures that should be introduced by ACTION, the ACT Department of Territory and Municipal Services and ACT Planning and Land Management, would be extremely effective in achieving a significant increase in the number of persons using ACTION services. Some of the proposed measures would be surprisingly low cost in terms of the overall ACT Budget.
- 2.4** In a car orientated city such as Canberra, any attempt to increase the use of public transport could be fraught with problems. Unless the execution of a program containing accurate information is very carefully undertaken, ACTION and other Government agencies could be ridiculed by a disbelieving populace.

3. THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF THE DISSEMINATION OF PASSENGER INFORMATION

- 3.1** How can the problems referred to in the *Introduction* be eliminated or, at worst, substantially reduced? The answer lies in the dissemination of information. Over the past 40 to 50 years a very large percentage of the population has undertaken almost all their urban travel cocooned in a motor vehicle owned by the family, by a business enterprise, the Federal Government or the ACT Government. Most of the population probably have never travelled on an urban bus, except to a football match at Canberra Stadium, and would not have any idea of how to go about boarding a bus or paying a fare for a journey to work.
- 3.2** ACTION is responsible for the production of a range of attractive printed material – timetables and maps and the maintenance of a web site. Regretably, almost all of the printed material and the content of the web site assumes that the recipient is already well versed in the intricate structure of Canberra's public transport. Despite the complexity of the five tier network, the ACTION network is, in many respects, an admirable operation for a low density city. However, the efficiency of the service is weakened by deficiencies in the published information to such an extent that many residents would not even contemplate attempting to travel by bus. Fortunately, all eight challenges listed below have solutions, in many cases, surprisingly simple and straight forward

4. CURRENT CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS – PART I: PASSENGER INFORMATION

- 4.1 Challenge No. 1: Insufficient timetable information at bus stops**
Timetable information is unavailable at a very large number of bus stops in Canberra and much of the information which is currently supplied is deficient.
- 4.2 Solution No. 1:** It is recommended that timetable information should be installed at every bus stop in Canberra, as is the policy in Melbourne and in most cities throughout North America and Europe. While the Transit Group applauds the installation of the very well designed bus stop information modules along the intertown routes and at other busy stops, it is quite obvious that such panels could not be installed at all bus stops in Canberra, from a cost point of view. The content of information at all stops must be a vast improvement over what is currently supplied in the small blue timetable holders in Canberra. Again, the information currently displayed assumes that the potential traveller has an intimate knowledge of the network for the display lists a series of times against a series of route numbers without indicating the direction of travel or the route to be taken, or destination, by each route number. Each display should contain references to other services in the area with directions to other stops, especially if the specific stop in question is not serviced by a seven day route.

4.3 Challenge No. 2: Zone – specific consolidated timetables are unavailable for employment and tertiary education nodes

A very large and growing market for public transport exists outside the town centres. Travel to employment and tertiary education nodes such as:

- . Australian National University
- . University of Canberra
- . Canberra Institute of Technology at Bruce, Fyshwick, Phillip, Reid and Weston
- . Brindabella Park and Fairbairn Park
- . Barton, Parkes and Russell Commonwealth Offices
- . Manuka and Kingston
- . Northbourne Avenue, Dickson and Mitchell
- . Fern Hill Technology Park at Bruce
- . Coolamon Court, Kippax, Lanyon Market Place, North Kaleen, Jamison and other Group Centres
- all require the assembly of a considerable number of timetables in order to assess the feasibility of travelling by bus as opposed to the car. Again, most persons do not have the time, self discipline or knowledge, or a combination of two or three of these attributes, to undertake the task. ACTION operates a very large number of under - utilized services to all the above areas.

For example ACTION operates a mix of two different standard route services to Brindabella Park (one peak period only – route 28 and one off-peak only – route 10) and three Xpresso routes. Thus, there are five different pieces of ACTION paper plus the two Deane’s Buslines routes to complete the picture. Moreover, the prospective passenger must know the route number and the region covered in order to quickly assess the potential usefulness of the service.

4.4 Solution No. 2: ACTION should produce zone specific guides to the public transport provided and should include services operated by Deane’s Buslines. Zone specific transit guides are currently a “fashion statement” in the transit industry in Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong, Perth and Hobart.

The transport guides to the Universities of Newcastle and Wollongong are excellent examples of what is being produced elsewhere in cities of a size similar to Canberra. Distribution of such guides, which should include a comprehensive set of maps showing the precise location of all stops, should be made to all employees and students in the appropriate areas.

4.5 Challenge No. 3: Additional information and timetable information with a higher standard of accuracy is required

Timetables do not contain relevant complementary information regarding other services in the area. For example, the timetable for Route 5 from Gungahlin to Kingston refers to a High Frequency Corridor, operating approximately every 15 minutes every weekday. Apart from the fact that the Transit Group does not consider a bus every 15 minutes as being “high frequency”, our main concern is that the Route 5 buses operate every 30 minutes.

There is an associated diagram referring to Route 4 operating over the same roads as Route 5 from Mitchell to City for part of the day. There is no reference at all as to how ACTION management is able to classify the 30 minute City to Kingston service as being a high frequency 15 minute service.

Some of the information contained on the ACTION website has been consistently incorrect and/or incomplete for some time, especially the Network 08 Route by Suburb Matrix (note the matrix has not been updated for Network 09). For example the bus services to Calvary Hospital are listed as 3 and 73/74 only on weekdays, completely ignoring the Intertown routes with the 900 prefix and at weekends ignoring route 934.

Further, the treatment of what is described as “Bruce Residential Area” (routes 3, 7 and 10) requires a complete revamp because the Bruce Residential Area has three distinct zones, several kilometres apart and served by many different bus routes, most of which are not listed on the matrix.

4.6 Solution No. 3: Much more care needs to be taken when compiling timetables and passenger information. Unfortunately, all too frequently the Transit Group is aware of examples of passenger information which requires the passenger to possess a high level of knowledge of the bus service route structure and associated timetables before questioning ACTION staff. It is essential that all timetables are cross referenced so that passengers are aware of all travel options in a given corridor, or to a particular node.

4.7 Challenge No. 4: “Your Guide to Canberra’s Bus Service” should include hard data on fares and ticketing to assist new passengers

At present ACTION’s community education program is mainly focused on school children. Many potential adult patrons are discouraged from using ACTION for fear of embarrassment of not knowing how to pay a fare and because of the perceived risk of boarding the wrong bus. ACTION has recently produced a high quality booklet “*Your Guide to Canberra’s Bus Service*” with a commendable summary of information for new residents and persons using ACTION for the first time. This booklet could have been the answer to the above mentioned problems facing the potential new passenger. However, unfortunately, there are several critical omissions from the Guide. Although the wide range of tickets that are available, on and off the bus, is summarised on pages 5 to 8, the most important single element, absolutely vital to every passenger before they board the bus, is missing: prices of all types of tickets. Also, there is no reference to the ticket validator – the item of equipment most widely used by passengers while on the bus, apart from the STOP button. For first time users, drivers are invariably obliged to explain to passengers the requirement to validate tickets and the method by which such validation can be achieved.

4.8 Solution No. 4: In all future guides information relating to fares and ticket prices, use of the validator and a list of ticket outlets should be included. A concerted and continuing program of public education on how to use the bus service, and profit from the experience, should be made a high priority. Perhaps such a program could be aligned with next year’s introduction of the new fare and ticketing system. Ticket outlets should distribute such guides to all new ACTION customers.

4.9 **Challenge No. 5: Improved distribution of timetables and other passenger information is required**

The distribution of information about ACTION services is restricted to the four interchanges, the internet and, it appears, one shopping centre – Tuggeranong Hyperdome, plus signs attached to bus stops. Such restrictions place considerable pressure on the population at large. Obviously some regular passengers will become aware of changes to their local service through the bus stop placard but such a display does not attract new passengers. And such residents are unlikely to go to an interchange to seek such information.

According to the Bureau of Statistics there remains a significant percentage of households in Canberra who do not have access to the internet. Such persons may also, because of their economic status, be largely dependant upon ACTION for transport. In addition there would also be many persons who normally would not be required to travel through an interchange, for example passengers on some Xpresso services and persons travelling on local services from, for example, Narrabundah and Red Hill to Manuka, Barton and Russell. Also, the buses are very poorly utilized to carry essential passenger information – many buses carry non - bus service advertising, or even private business fliers in the plastic display boxes on the side of the driver's cabin. Regretably, most boxes are empty for most of the time.

4.10 **Solution No. 5:** It is recommended that ACTION expands the number of displays of timetable information to include:

- . **information** on a wide range of timetable topics **in all buses** at all times
- . **displays** in the foyers of ACT and Federal Government offices, banks, post offices and shopping enters.
Such displays are commonplace in many North American cities. Some operators such as in Seattle and Portland target the populace in every possible manner with information, with very successful results.
- . **new residents** in apartment blocks (eg Kingston Foreshore) with zone specific and route specific timetables and maps, plus an offer of one week's free travel voucher. However, before making such an offer, ACTION staff must place themselves as a prospective passenger. Is such an offer an attractive alternative to the car? If the bus is going to take three times as long to get from A to B than the car, the bus service should be reviewed to determine whether the route and/or timetable, can be upgraded to ensure that ACTION is meeting its responsibilities under the ACT Government's Greenhouse Gas Reduction targets.
- . **"Community Notice Board"** published in *The Canberra Times* each Saturday.

4.11 Challenge No. 6: Bus Destination Displays can be detail deficient

The display of destination information on the bus appears to be at the whim of the driver and, in some cases, is grossly misleading. For example buses travelling on Routes 56 and 58 from City to Belconnen display BELCONNEN with no reference to the most important destination for passengers - GUNGAHLIN. The reverse takes place with city bound buses displaying CITY with no reference to GUNGAHLIN. Intertown buses travelling from Tuggeranong to Belconnen via Woden Town Centre, City and Belconnen Town Centre invariably display the northern outer suburban destination such as FRASER or SPENCE. While such destination displays are correct there is no reference to the most important destinations along the route – the town centres. ACTION carries each day a surprisingly large number of first time riders or passengers who may be riding out of their “home territory” and drivers are frequently obliged, every day, to explain to passengers “Yes I am going to City... or Woden...” Also, an excessive number of buses are seen every day displaying the sign SPECIAL. Either the bus has not been fitted with an appropriate sign or the driver has not had time, to find an appropriate sign.

4.12 Solution No. 6: The information supplied by the destination box on the bus must be aligned with the information shown in the timetable and at the bus stop. As a minimum, ACTION should ensure that the 300 series buses with electronic destination signs include references to all the town centres on the Intertown Route rather than just the terminus point. Also, field supervision is required to ensure that drivers display the correct destination at all times.

4.13 Challenge No. 7: Absence of Intertown connections on timetables

Intertown connections are not shown on any timetables, resulting in the need for passengers to lay out several timetables and attempt to compute the times of the connecting buses, especially if a feeder bus is required at both the start and end of the journey, linked by an intertown service. With hourly frequencies continuing to be the norm on the majority of routes in Canberra, such exercises are fraught with danger. Commuters and other passengers with tight deadlines do not have time to examine several timetables in an attempt to deduce the most appropriate bus to catch.

4.14 Solution No. 7: It is recommended that Intertown connections be again shown on all timetables, as was the case in Canberra in the late 1980s. In the case of City and Woden interchanges, both northbound and southbound connections with departure and arrival times shown, should be incorporated with the feeder timetable. The incorporation of trunk service timetables on feeder timetables has been standard practice in most cities where buses act as feeders to rail services – the equivalent to Canberra’s Intertown 300/900 series of routes.

5. CURRENT DEFICIENCIES AND SOLUTIONS – PART II: NON-TIMETABLE CHALLENGES

5.1 Challenge No. 7: Improved seating in buses is required

It would appear that, as the standard of seating in cars and SUVs has improved, bus seating has become more uncomfortable. All ACTION's low floor buses have been fitted with very utilitarian bucket seating with minimal cushioning and upholstery. Canberra's Department of Interior Bus Service led the country in 1963 when it introduced the highest quality metropolitan bus seat in Australia with a deeply cushioned base and moulded back. Canberra's high quality standards have slipped markedly.

5.2 Solution No. 7: An increasing number of operators in this country are now realising that the fitment, in 2009, of such basic seating, as seen in new ACTION buses was a retrograde step and are returning to the installation of "traditional", fully cushioned, fully upholstered, bench seat. Also, with the harsh riding characteristics of most low floor buses, fully cushioned seating tends to offset some of the uncomfortable ride quality of these new buses. ACTION must follow other operators by returning to the traditional bus seat if it is to attract drivers from their comfortable car seats and thus assist in the challenge to reduce greenhouse gases.

5.3 Challenge No. 8: Additional Park and Ride sites are required

There is a distinct lack of high visibility, easily accessible and well publicised Park and Ride sites throughout Canberra. In fact existing Park and Ride sites are not publicised on the ACTION Network Map and there is no reference to Park and Ride in the list of main topics on ACTION's website. As the volume of car parking sites in the City is decreasing, relative to City employment, there is a need to develop park and ride sites in suburban Canberra to cater for those residents who, for a variety of reasons, need a car at the suburban end of their journey to work (for example setting down and picking up children from child care centres) but do not require the car in the City. Other residents may live in low density residential areas where bus services are not provided. Canberra has been slow to develop the large park and ride sites which, for example, have been created in Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth.

5.4 Solution No. 8: In association with ACTPLA and the TAMS Transport Planning Unit, ACTION should be encouraged to identify and develop high visibility and easily accessible (for both cars and buses) park and ride sites. Initially such activity should focus on the Intertown routes because such services operate on a very high frequency. Although Gungahlin has not yet been allocated an Intertown route, the Group believes that the future path for an Intertown Route should be included in such a priority list at this stage.

6. SUMMARY

- 6.1** The Transit Group does not under-estimate the size of the task facing ACTION. Canberrans have a very high level of expectations in transport. Many commuters believe there must be door to door transport available for approximately 18 hours each day with unlimited free car parking available at both ends of every journey and at any intermediate stop along the way.
- 6.2** However, on a positive note, the Transit Group believes that existing ACTION services are considerably under valued by the community because most residents do not appreciate the level of service offered and have little understanding of how the service operates. Following effective development, with minimal variation, coupled with the substantial promotion as outlined above, ACTION could contribute very substantially to the Government's resolve to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and assist in meeting the designated targets. Such activity will also assist agencies in reducing the land take for surface car parking.
- 6.3** The ACT Government Administration is a highly accessible potential market for bus passengers and it is recommended that TAMS Transport Planning Unit and ACTION co-ordinate a marketing campaign to target ACT Government employees at their work place, especially administration employees in each of the Town Centres. Although such an approach is counter to the traditional approach in Australia whereby commuters have been targeted at home, the work place method has been very popular in North American cities with considerable success. The ACT Administration could offer specific incentives to entice its employees to travel to and from work by bus and include such incentives in work place agreements.
- 6.4** Importantly, it should be acknowledged that the ACT Transit Group believes that most of the above outlined projects, with the exception of the development of the park and ride sites and any incentive scheme as referred to in 6.3 above, could be undertaken with an ongoing annual budget of approximately \$500,000 – a very economical contribution towards the Government's target to reduce the level of greenhouse gases in the ACT.