

**FINAL DRAFT VARIATION TO THE TERRITORY PLAN # 281
MOLONGLO AND NORTH WESTON**

**SUBMISSION
from**

ACT EQUESTRIAN ASSOCIATION

Introduction

The ACT Equestrian Association (ACTEA) was established in 1970 as an umbrella organisation to represent all equestrians in their endeavours at all levels of achievement. ACTEA represents about 16 affiliated groups such as pony clubs, showjumping, trail riding, dressage, horse trials, eventing, endurance riding, polocrosse and vaulting. A list of ACTEA affiliates is at Appendix I.

ACTEA's objectives are to:

- Promote horse riding as a recognised healthy recreational activity;
- Promote the development of equestrian facilities in the ACT;
- Assist the efforts of affiliated associations and clubs to obtain and improve equipment and facilities;
- Improve the standard of horsemanship in the ACT;
- Promote the views of the equestrian public;
- Encourage the support of equestrian activities by the Commonwealth and ACT Government and other persons and organisations.

ACTEA made a submission in response to the "Preliminary assessment of a draft variation to the Territory Plan (DV281) and major infrastructure associated with urban development at Molonglo and North Weston, ACT Planning and Land Authority, August 2007" on 23 November 2007.

The President of ACTEA attended a "Meet the Minister" session at Weston Creek Community Centre in an attempt to raise awareness of equestrian issues and later met with Mr Bruce Frazer, Team Leader, Structure Planning, Land Use and Transport Planning in ACTPLA to discuss our issues with the planning process.

We are disappointed that, despite our active participation in the process, there is no evidence in the Final Variation that any attention at all has been paid to our concerns about the impact of these new developments on recreational riding in the Weston Creek Area.

Most of the issues raised by ACTEA in its submission appear to have been completely ignored by ACTPLA. ACTPLA's attitude is exemplified by its claim that "the Bicentennial National Trail is not within the proposed development area and therefore no impact is expected"¹ This is despite the Trail being clearly marked on both the

¹ "Key Issues and ACTPLA response" document # 17

Canberra street directory and the Canberra 1:200,000 map as traversing both Wright and Coombs as it connects the Stromlo Forest Park to the Equestrian Park at Curtin.

Issues

Recognition of Equestrian Activities in Weston Creek Area

The ACT has a high population of recreational horses. Before the 2003 bushfires it was estimated that there were about 2,000 horses used for sporting and recreational activities in the Territory. The numbers have been knocked back somewhat by the impact of the bushfires and the Equine Influenza epidemic, but they are beginning to come back to their previous level. The pleasure horse industry in Canberra supports a range of businesses from feed merchants and saddlers to veterinarians, equine dentists, farriers and chiropractors. In January 2002 Wayne Gregson and Graeme Taylor estimated the equestrian contribution to the annual ACT gross state product to be **\$13.85 million²**.

Horse riding is a sport that promotes independence, responsibility and healthy outdoor activity. It is an activity attractive to young girls, particularly those who might never become involved in team or contact sports. It allows life-long participation and there are riders in their 70s still using the equestrian trails in Canberra.

While many people choose a home because of proximity to schools for their children, the Weston Creek area is full of people who chose their home because of its proximity to agistment and riding facilities.

In the vicinity of the new Molonglo Development there are:

- Private agistment centres on the Cotter Road to the west of Uriarra Road (National Equestrian Centre, Stromlo Equestrian Centre and Riverview);
- Private agistment centres to the south west at Canberra Equestrian Centre off Hindmarsh Drive and Milaparu, off Hake Street, Kambah;
- Kambah Pony Club, off Hake Street, Kambah;
- Government Horse Paddocks at Yarralumla, North Curtin, Illoura, Arawang, Mt Neighbour and Mt Taylor;
- Stromlo Forest Park, where the government has spent \$500,000 on equestrian infrastructure and trails which the Chief Minister re-opened on 17 May;
- Forest Park Riding School, Cotter Road, Curtin;
- Equestrian Park, Curtin, which is managed by ACTEA as a competition ground and for which it has just been allocated \$300,000 to drought proof its arenas;
- Canberra Lakes Pony Club grounds near the Yarralumla Woolshed; and
- Bicentennial National Trail and camp near Yarralumla Woolshed.

Horse riders from all these places use the open space system, the multiple use fire trails and the verges of Uriarra and Cotter Roads and Streeton Drive to travel between

² David Hogg, "Strategic Development and Management Plan for Equestrian Sport and Recreation Facilities in the ACT", Vol 2, Phase 1 Discussion Paper, Appendix A.

these destinations. In addition riders travel to and from the government paddocks at Cook and agistment areas along Drake Brockman Drive.

All this is under threat from the Molonglo development and there are no indications in the Draft Variation that this is recognised or any obvious provisions to ensure that access and connectivity persist.

Recommendation

1. The Variation must recognise that equestrians are major users of the open space system in the Weston Creek area and include access and facilities for them in any new developments.

Piecemeal Approach to Equestrian Planning

The Structure Plan for Molonglo and North Canberra contains an admirable policy (#65), which states:

Horse trails are to be incorporated into the development. The trails shall link to existing equestrian facilities including the National Horse Trail, the Pegasus Disabled Riding School, Forest Park Riding School, the public Equestrian Park in Yarralumla, pony clubs and agistment facilities. The trails shall also connect to recreation trails in the International Arboretum and Stromlo Park

Unfortunately there is no evidence of any attempt to ensure that this is possible. It is quite clear that in all the planning stages equestrian access is an after- thought, to be fitted in where possible, around infrastructure, which has been set in stone by the process. At this stage we seem only able to talk about the Molonglo and North Weston infrastructure, when any serious intent to implement policy # 65 would result in a clear plan for linking such widely separated facilities as Pegasus Riding School the Arboretum and Equestrian Park at Curtin with other equestrian facilities on Cotter Road and to its south.

Recommendation

2. That ACTPLA produce an indicative map showing how they will implement Policy #65 from Belconnen to Weston Creek similar to the one they are able to produce to show indicative shared paths and on-road cycling routes in Figure 3 of the Final Variation.

The Bicentennial National Trail

The Bicentennial National Trail (BNT) is the longest, marked, non-motorised, self-reliant, multi-use trekking route in the world. Its 5330 kilometres link Cooktown in tropical North Queensland to Healesville in Victoria. It is disappointing to see it referred to in the Executive Summary of the Draft Variation as “an equestrian

pathway”. The trail has a large following amongst the horse riding community and has been very beneficial to them, especially as horses are banned from all Wilderness Areas and many national park areas.

Canberra is the only Australian city that the Trail actually traverses rather than circumnavigates. A map showing the Trail’s route through Canberra is at Appendix II. The BNT route from Belconnen passes through the Cork Oak Forest and circumnavigates the Canberra International Arboretum to Equestrian Park Curtin campsite. From there it crosses the Molonglo and continues through the proposed suburbs of Coombs and Wright to Stromlo Forest Park and then on to Tharwa.

The Trail is clearly marked in the Canberra Street Directory and the 1:200 000 topographic map of Canberra. There is also a series of 12 guidebooks that will guide you through the entire length of the Trail.

Contrary to ACTPLA’s claim that “the Bicentennial National Trail is not within the proposed development area” the proposed development will in fact obliterate a significant section of the Trail and make it next to impossible for anyone using the Trail on horseback to travel through Canberra or access the camping facilities at Equestrian Park Curtin.

Recommendation

3. The Draft Variation must include a commitment to the retention of the Bicentennial National Trail.

Recommendation

4. ACTPLA enter into close discussions with ACTEA and the custodians of the BNT about a suitable and permanent route for the Trail through Canberra.

Recreation Corridors and Shared Paths

While the equestrian community has been repeatedly assured by government representatives that they understood and supported the concept of connectivity between equestrian facilities in Weston Creek, there is no evidence that this has translated into any of the current planning proposals.

There is an evident concern to cater for commuter and off-road cyclists, but horse riding corridors receive no such attention. The concept plans for Coombs and Wright seem to involve reducing the green spaces to the absolute minimum. Like everyone else, recreational riders want to enjoy peaceful and pleasant amenity when they ride. Horse riders are happy to share open space, if that space is designed as a ‘slow way’ and wide enough to allow safely for cycle paths and dog walkers. There are many areas in Canberra where this is the case but it requires a minimum width of 80 metres

and the minimum number of traffic intersections. Such green spaces would be an advantage to all members of the community.

As more and more land along the Molonglo River is surrendered to development it is important to the equestrian community that an integrated plan be developed to allow their continued use of existing connecting infrastructure such as causeways, bridges and underpasses. To date this has been a site-by-site battle with planning and development agencies.

The revised Concept Plans for Wright and Coombs detail link roads between the suburbs and Stromlo Forest Park but no arrangement for linkages for equestrians who are major users of Stromlo

Recommendation

- 5. The Draft variation contain explicit reference to creating and maintaining recreation corridors suitable for horse riders to use in safety, connecting:**
- a. the government agistment paddocks and Equestrian Park, Curtin, to the Bicentennial National Trail**
 - b. Equestrian Park Curtin and Forest Park Riding School to Stromlo Forest park**
 - c. Agistment centres on the Cotter Road to Stromlo Forest Park**
 - d. Stromlo Forest Park north and south to the Bicentennial National Trail**
 - e. Stromlo Forest Park to the Canberra International Arboretum**

Recommendation

- 6. The Draft Variation contain explicit reference to creating and maintaining recreation corridors suitable for horse riders to use in safety along either side of the Molonglo River from Misery Point to Equestrian Park, Curtin.**

Recommendation

- 7. The ACT Government commits to an overall concept plan which will ensure safe equestrian use of both sides of the Molonglo River over time, including access around the Canberra Zoo and Aquarium expansion and under the Tuggeranong parkway.**

Equestrian Safety

The development of the suburbs of Wright and Coombs appears to entail significant road development and will inevitably result in an increase in traffic. There are also plans for ACT Roads to stabilise the shoulders of the Cotter Road between the Parkway and Streeton Drive to allow on-road cyclists to travel more easily (and speedily) to Stromlo Forest Park. All these changes, if not ameliorated in some way,

increase the danger to equestrian users. Crossing heavily trafficked roads on horseback is a dangerous activity, even when motorists are considerate and aware.

The present plans for the lower Molonglo development appear intent on forcing horse riders onto road verges and into suburban streets. The north-south arterial planned to bisect the development will be a four-lane traffic-way entirely uncrossable by equestrians. While there are places where it is presently safe to cross the two-lane Cotter Road, this will not be the case well before Molonglo reaches its projected maximum capacity of 73,000 people.

There are several mentions in the Draft Variation of proposed measures to ensure cyclists can travel to Stromlo Forest Park. For horse riders to move between the agistment centres, Equestrian Park and Stromlo Forest Park it is also essential that appropriate infrastructure is installed to ensure their safety. This would include horse gates and cavaletti where appropriate and road underpasses under major traffic ways.

Recommendation

8. The Draft Variation includes specific provisions and infrastructure to enable equestrian access through urban development including safe, open trail areas away from back fences of suburbs, and equestrian underpasses on all major roads.

In Summary

There is high value public and private investment in the equestrian recreational industry surrounding the North Weston-Molonglo development. Horse riding is a significant recreational activity for Canberrans of all ages. Maintenance of this investment by the provision of interconnecting pleasant and safe trails is essential. Taking a strategic approach to planning will result in a much better outcome for all parties than ad hoc band-aid solutions after the fact.

Recommendation

9. In view of the failure to take any strategic approach to equestrian needs in any version of the Variation we urge that representatives of ACTPLA meet with the ACT Equestrian Association to agree on the provision of equestrian access and facilities in North Weston-Molonglo.