



ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on  
Planning and Environment Inquiry into ACTION buses

**Property Council of Australia**

Submission

August 2007

---

**The Voice of Leadership**

Level 1 1Hobart Place AMP Building Canberra City 2601 - GPO Box 1025 Canberra ACT 2601  
PH 02 6248 6902 - FAX 02 6248 8210  
Email [act@propertyoz.com.au](mailto:act@propertyoz.com.au) - [www.propertyoz.com.au](http://www.propertyoz.com.au)





## **Submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Planning and Environment Inquiry into ACTION buses**

The Property Council of Australia (ACT) would like to make a number of comments in response to the Committee's inquiry into ACTION buses. The comments relate in particular to the following areas of the Committee's terms of reference:

*Part c) focusing on ACTION's services within the context of the sustainable transport plan; and*

*Part d) providing guidance on principles and key priorities for future service planning.*

### **1. Introduction**

The Property Council of Australia regards infrastructure as a critical policy issue for government at all levels across Australia. We believe an effective, integrated infrastructure strategy is the key to Canberra's economic, social and spatial development.

Canberra is currently at a critical point in its development, where factors such as a sharp increase in economic activity are resulting in employment and population growth, which is however hampered by ageing infrastructure, a shortfall in land release, and delayed upgrades of transport networks. In Civic and the town centres, where employment and business growth is most concentrated, the conflict between matching growth with adequate infrastructure is further exacerbated by an increasing shortage of car parking, and a lack of park and ride sites.

The Property Council believe that the issues facing ACTION today are only partly related to operational and staffing costs versus service output efficiencies, which are outlined in the ACT Government submission to the inquiry.

At least to the same degree, the future performance of ACTION is highly dependent on the resolution of current structural problems in aligning strategic urban planning (as per the Sustainable Transport Plan and the Canberra Spatial Plan) with the actual implementation and monitoring of initiatives and investment in transport infrastructure.

Unless this gap is closed, and more positive initiatives are offered to combine car and bus transport with parking options, long term goals such as the desired modal shift from car dependency to public transport, and hence the long term viability of ACTION, are unlikely.



## 2. Who we are

The Property Council of Australia represents the interests of the multi-billion dollar property investment industry, which helps shape, build and finance our cities.

Locally our members include the bulk of Canberra's investors in office buildings, shopping centres, industrial buildings, tourism, accommodation and infrastructure. Our members are also major developers of commercial and residential property.

More than nine million Australians have a direct stake in our industry through their superannuation, life insurance and managed funds. Together we have a long term interest in the future of our urban and regional centres, and in the future of the nation's capital, and our home, Canberra.

## 3. Transport planning and implementation – areas of concern

The Property Council has identified a number of key issues which are currently increasing the gap between transport planning and its effective implementation:

- Increased car usage due to lack of positive incentives and the absence of any linkage between car and bus transport to meet modern urban living needs.
- Understanding that better provision of car parking closely linked to public transport, park & ride, convenient bus stops and flexible and frequent bus services in and near town centres will have greater impact upon achieving a modal shift to public transport than reducing car parking.
- The need to develop a framework of positive and more creative incentives for both car and public transport users, which provides comparable and competitive choices for the public.
- The need for increased, and informed, public debate and awareness about ACTION's triple bottom line approach, marketing the increased environmental, social and economic benefits to the Territory and its citizens in achieving a greater modal shift towards public transport.



### **3.1 Increased car usage due to lack of positive incentives and the absence of any linkage between car and bus transport to meet modern urban living needs**

For a broad range of reasons, including the convenience of the multi-functional car, lifestyle choice or necessity, urban planning as well as the limitations of current public transport choices, Canberrans are highly car dependent.

The submission provided by the ACT Government to the inquiry states that the current levels of car use for trips to work is around 87 per cent (p.10) which leaves 13 per cent spread over other modal uses including walking, cycling and catching ACTION buses.

The Sustainable Transport Plan (STP) describes modal shifts in its 2004 publication (p.2) from 13.1 per cent non-car use in 2001 to 20 per cent in 2001 and 30 per cent in 2026. Yet, as quoted in the ACT Government submission above, today – in 2007 – we are still at 13 per cent non-car or 87 per cent car usage for work trips. This leads to the conclusion that, to date, no modal shift has in fact occurred.

These figures raise questions about the effectiveness of urban and transport planning and its implementation initiatives, as well as the increasing live/work/travel expectations of Canberrans.

For ACTION, this means a difficult starting position from which to improve passenger numbers, achieve long term financial viability and to initiate the modal shift.

### **3.2 Understanding that better provision of car parking closely linked to public transport, park & ride, convenient bus stops and flexible and frequent bus services in and near town will have greater impact upon achieving a modal shift to public transport than reducing car parking.**

The ACT Government benchmark ACTION against other transport providers, which have on average around 50 per cent return from fares (p.6), while ACTION currently achieves only a 21.6 per cent return of cost from fares.

This highlights the importance of ACTION's initiatives to review staffing and other operational efficiencies, as well the need to develop broader service options such as the night bus, the flexi bus, more park and ride, plus Civic and town centre 'hop-on – hop-off' town centre services.

None of these initiatives will achieve significant improvement however unless they are closely related to urgent change in better linkage between park and ride options, more car parking near bus stops and stations, and the offer of frequent services to work and service centres.



The current low rates for all-day parking in the town centres of between \$5 to \$7 per day, matching current day pass bus fares, do not provide any financial incentive to give up the convenience of the car.

In line with other capitals, the cost for all day car parking needs to be gradually raised to around \$12 to \$14 per day, to support the current competitive pricing of public transport. This level of parking rates would allow private operators to build and manage parking structures and free up additional government funds currently required for parking infringement, maintenance, insurance, staffing and management.

It is recommended that the ACT Government should also periodically review car parking prices to keep pace with inflation and adjustments in the cost of living, so that the Government has sufficient funds available to it on an ongoing basis to maintain and improve access to both car parking for drivers and for those who park and ride.

These funds received could then be more effectively utilised in addressing and implementing public transport and infrastructure solutions.

### **3.3 The need to develop a framework of positive and more creative incentives for both car and public transport users, which provides comparable and competitive choices for the public**

At this point in time there is a conflict between strategies to achieve public transport feasibility in the ACT.

The Sustainable Transport Plan (p.24) sets out to increase public transport patronage by:

- increasing the real cost of parking in Civic and the town centres;
- reducing the supply of parking in Civic and the town centres; and
- limiting the provision of additional road capacity beyond the Gungahlin Drive Extension and the Majura Parkway and other roads to meet needs of new development areas like Molonglo.

The first point has been included by the ACT Government in its Draft Car Parking Strategy, and is supported by the Property Council.

However, it should be noted that the reduction in parking experienced over the last 12 to 18 months in Civic and the town centres, as shown by the figures above, has had no real impact on public transport passenger numbers. In fact, it may actually create a further negative effect on the economy and development of Civic in particular, as frustrated commuters choose to work/shop/recreate at other more transport and parking friendly locations.



### **3.4 The need for increased, and informed, public debate and awareness about ACTION's triple bottom line approach, marketing the increased environmental, social and economic benefits to the Territory and its citizens in achieving a greater modal shift towards public transport**

The ACT Government, through its planning and transport agencies, and in conjunction with ACTION, should provide via the media some simple triple bottom line calculations which highlight to the public that the cost of driving a car plus parking is, and will in future, become substantially higher than public transport to the individual and the community at large.

ACTION has a responsibility to communicate and validate that:

- Canberra has an affordable public transport system able to service its community on time.
- The true cost to the community of running ACTION and benchmark these costs against other similar sized communities.
- Positive choices to the community in their selection of transport mode to work are offered.
- Public transport reduces congestion and lowers long term pollution.

## **4. Summary**

This paper outlines the importance of a broader and more integrated approach across infrastructure and transport planning in the ACT, which needs to provide incentives to car users in particular to get them to make the change to public transport.

Whilst the Sustainable Transport Plan provides a useful working framework, it requires updating, review and more positive incentives to promote linkages between planning and subsequent implementation across all modes of transport.

Proposed improvements to the efficiency and more user-friendly and flexible transport services provided by ACTION need to be implemented in conjunction with a broader strategic review that includes monitoring of transport and infrastructure changes across all modes of transport, and which highlights the importance of long term social and environmental goals for Canberra.

Finally, it should also be noted that there is also a further inequity in the cost of parking in the ACT which is distorting office location and employment location. On street parking in the Barton/Parkes and the Russell Hill area is currently free. The Property Council believes that parking in these locations should be charged at the same rate as in Civic and the town centres. The ACT Government should continue to pursue this matter with the Commonwealth.



**Contact:**

Catherine Carter  
Executive Director  
Property Council of Australia (ACT)  
GPO Box 1025  
Canberra ACT 2601  
T: 02 6248 6902 F: 02 6248 8210 W: [www.propertyoz.com.au](http://www.propertyoz.com.au)