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Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Planning and Environment
ACT Legislative Assembly

Submission to Inquiry into ACTION Buses

Thank you for inviting me to comment to this inquiry.

In summary, I recommend that the Committee consider the following measures:

- Cut 30 minutes¹ from the time it takes to plan an ACTION Bus trip, by providing a complete on-line public transport trip planner similar to those available in other capital cities such as Perth², and similar to the service provided for Canberra motorists by the NRMA³.
 - A car trip can often be completed in the time it takes to plan an ACTION bus trip.
- Promote Bike'n'Ride as a way to cut up to 3½ hours from weekend and off-peak bus trips⁴ and increase bus patronage.
- Reduce passenger waiting time by up to several minutes, by providing timetable information for individual bus stops.
- Make the bus system more tourist- and family- friendly, and more cost- competitive, by allowing multi-ride tickets to be used for more than one person in a given trip.
 - This would allow tourists, families or friends to buy (e.g.) a single ten-ride ticket for five two-person rides, rather than a separate ten-ride ticket for each person.
- Introduce a “family fare” system to make the bus system cost-competitive (compared with car travel) for families.
 - NSW public transport, for example, allows whole families to travel for the cost of two adult fares plus one child fare.
 - Greyhound buses offer a 50% “mates rates” discount for a second passenger, when two people travel together
- Provide a viable alternative to car ownership by introducing car sharing⁵ and Sunday evening “area” buses.

My comments against the specific Terms of Reference of the Inquiry follow.

Regards

Leon Arundell
18 May 2007

¹ Forms A to E, attached, describe the trip planning process. As an example, planning a Sunday return trip from Conder to Florey requires identifying two bus routes from Conder and three routes to Florey, finding appropriate connecting routes, cross-matching multiple timetables for each of the three legs of the outward journey, and cross-matching timetables for each of the three legs of the return journey to confirm that the trip can be completed before bus services cease at 7 pm. Planning a weekday trip is more complex, because there are more timetables to cross-match for each leg of the journey.

² <http://www.transperth.wa.gov.au/> Click on “Journey Planner.”

³ The NRMA travel planner is available at www.mynrma.com.au. Click on “Motoring,” then on “Maps” and then on “Travel Planner.” The NRMA on-line trip planner takes less than 10 minutes to plan a trip by car – including the 5 minutes required to start the computer!

⁴ A Sunday bus trip from Florence Fuller Crescent Conder, to arrive at Le Soeuf Crescent Florey by 2.13 pm, takes 3 hours and 38 minutes. The same trip by Bike’n’Ride takes only 1 hour and 52 minutes. The time saved on a return trip could be over 3½ hours.

⁵ Car sharing is like car rental, but cars are located in residential areas and can be rented for short periods such as 1 to 2 hours. See for example the car sharing links at <http://www.travelsmart.gov.au/links/index.html#carsharing>

ACTION bus Inquiry – comments by Leon Arundell

(a) how well it meets the needs of different segments of the community

ACTION meets the needs of those members of the community who make regular bus trips along the same routes.

Some segments of the community are poorly served by ACTION, notably:

- Families
- Canberra residents who own cars
- Tourists
- The majority of Canberra residents, who do not currently use buses but who are potential bus users
- Canberra residents who would like to make casual bus trips, without needing to own a car for this purpose.

Canberra residents and family groups who own cars find that many trips are more expensive by bus than by car. The *average* cost of operating a car is around 60 cents per km, but most of this is accounted for by ‘fixed’ costs such as loan interest, depreciation and insurance. The fuel, wear and tear and maintenance costs of an extra kilometre of car travel are only around 25 cents. For the cost of bus tickets for the same trip, a car driver can travel almost 9 km, a family with three children can drive more than 18 km and five adults can drive 44 km. These distances are even greater if we allow for the cost of the extra time that it takes to travel by bus.

Bus travel can be made more cost-competitive for these groups by introducing a “family fare” system or a “mates rates” discount for a second passenger, when two people travel together.

Family groups and tourists would be assisted by allowing multi-ride tickets to be used for more than one person in a given trip. Instead of having to buy a separate ten-ride ticket for each person travelling, they could share the use of a single ticket. This could be achieved by, for example, allowing a ticket to register two fares if it is inserted twice in succession in the same ticket reader.

Tourists, Canberra residents who would like make casual bus trips, and the majority of Canberra residents who are potential bus users are faced with a daunting timetable-juggling exercise that can add more than 40 minutes of time to plan a single return trip. This exercise can be greatly simplified by providing a complete on-line public transport trip planner similar to those available in other capital cities such as Perth⁶, and similar to the service provided for Canberra motorists by the NRMA⁷.

Canberra residents who would like to make casual bus trips, without needing to own a car for this purpose. People will only decide to live without a car if they believe that they can meet their transport needs in other ways. The complete lack of a Sunday evening bus is an incentive for people to keep their cars. Introducing a Sunday evening “area bus” system would help to make the ACT public transport system a viable alternative to car ownership.

(b) comparative analysis of other bus transport operators in Australian jurisdictions

As I have noted above, it can be cheaper for a family of five to drive 18 km, or for a group of 5 adults to drive 44 km, than for them to make the same trip by ACTION bus. This anomaly can be addressed by offering discounts for families or groups.

- NSW public transport allows whole families to travel for the cost of two adult fares and one child fare.
- Greyhound buses offer a 50% “mates rates” discount for a second passenger, when two people travel together

ACTION has fallen further behind other states in providing web-based trip planning. Its crude trip planner has been removed from the ACTION web site. It can now take more than 40 minutes of timetable-juggling to fully plan a return trip by ACTION bus.

Public Transport providers in other capital cities such as Perth⁸ provide an on-line public transport trip planner that can produce a complete door-to-door itinerary in less than 10 minutes – including a five minute allowance for the computer to start up!

ACTION could make a small improvement by providing web-based timetable information for individual bus stops. This would reduce inward passenger waiting time by up to several minutes. Existing timetables provide times only for major stops, with intermediate gaps of around five minutes covering several stops. This means that people have to leave home earlier because they don't know exactly when the bus is due at their local stop.

Stop-specific timetables are already provided at individual bus stops. This information could be made available from the ACTION web site.

(c) (i) ACTION's services within the context of the Sustainable Transport Plan with particular reference to the appropriateness of the plan, especially targets

The public transport targets of 9% by 2011 and 16% by 2026 appear to be merely symbolic. The Sustainable Transport Plan does not estimate how much any measure will contribute to this increase, nor does it appear to include a process to review progress towards the targets, or to allocate more resources if progress becomes inadequate.

(c) (ii) ACTION's services within the context of the Sustainable Transport Plan with particular reference to progress towards implementation

No comment.

(c) (iii) ACTION's services within the context of the Sustainable Transport Plan with particular reference to measures needed to ensure targets are met

ACTION cannot achieve its 2011 and 2026 targets unless it attracts new patrons.

The complexity of ACTION's timetable system is a serious disincentive to any prospective patron's attempt to travel by bus.

This could be partly addressed by providing a complete on-line public transport trip planner similar to those available in other capital cities such as Perth⁹, and similar to the service provided for Canberra motorists by the NRMA¹⁰.

A second disincentive is the extra time taken for bus trips on weekends, due to infrequent services. Infrequent services mean more time spent waiting for bus connections. They also mean that passengers must arrive at their destination up to an hour before they actually need to be there. For example, a Sunday bus trip from Conder, to arrive in Florey by a specific time, takes over 3½ hours by ACTION Bus. The same trip by Bike'n'Ride takes only 1 hour and 52 minutes, and requires less planning time.

Few round trips of 8 hours (including planning and travel time) are feasible to do within a day. Many such trips become feasible when the total planning and travel time is reduced to around 4 hours.

ACTION could increase its off-peak and weekend patronage by promoting Bike'n'Ride as a faster way to travel on weekends and at off-peak times.

(d) guidance on principles and key priorities for future service planning

People who have relinquished their cars are much more likely to use public transport. The marginal cost of their public-transport-alternative (taxi) travel is around \$1.50 per km, compared with only around \$0.25 per km if they were to retain their car.

It is important to provide a transport system that provides for adequate travel without the use of private cars. People will only relinquish their cars if they believe that they can meet their travel needs both during the week and at weekends, without needing to resort to a private car. Services such as car sharing¹¹ and Sunday night bus services can make a significant difference.

Greater emphasis needs to be placed on reducing total public transport travel time, and the associated cost of that time both to individuals and to the community. Estimates of travel time in the *ACT Transport Costing Study* may need be reviewed, to ensure that they include:

- Time required to plan a trip
- Time required to allow for contingencies such as early or late buses
- Time required to allow for buses that may not arrive, when the passenger has to wait for the next bus
- Time required to allow for uncertainty as to exactly when the bus is due to arrive at the nearest bus stop
- Time delays incurred when the bus schedule does not match the passenger's desired arrival or departure time.

⁶ <http://www.transperth.wa.gov.au/>. Click on "Journey Planner."

⁷ The NRMA travel planner is available at www.mynrma.com.au. Click on "Motoring," then on "Maps" and then on "Travel Planner." The NRMA on-line trip planner takes less than 10 minutes to plan a trip by car – including the time required to start the computer.

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