

Dr Hanna Jaireth  
Secretary  
Standing Committee on Planning and Environment  
ACT Legislative Assembly Committee Office  
GPO Box 1020  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Dr. Jaireth,

**SUBMISSION TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT  
INQUIRY INTO ACTION BUSES AND DV263**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the services provided by ACTION in the ACT region.

The aims of my submission are as follows;

1. To comment on the specific issues raised in the terms of reference, and
2. To comment on the overall appropriateness of the ACTION bus network

To do this, my submission has been structured into two parts. The first section uses *The Sustainable Transport Plan for the A.C.T.* as a basis for comment on the terms of reference. The second section uses selected excerpts from *The Sustainable Transport Plan for the A.C.T.* as a comment on the general direction that the current ACTION bus network is taking as a whole.

1. The Standing Committee on Planning and Environment would inquire into and investigate the services provided by ACTION buses, specifically: (a) examining how well it meets the needs of different segments of the community while recognising that ACTION's role is a mass transport provider;

*The Sustainable Transport Plan for the A.C.T.* recognises the need for "frequent, reliable, affordable, comfortable and 'understandable' public transport services that meet community needs". To understand the meaning of this aim, and how well the aim is met by the ACTION Bus Network, we must first define an accurate measure of "meet community needs".

One measure that can be employed is the overall usage of the transport system. The rationale behind this measurement is that the usage by the community can generally be seen as a gauge for the ease of use and satisfaction of the bus network. To get a better indication of why this is an accurate representation, we must look at the different type of user of a bus network, and their reliance on public transport.

Commuters on the bus network can, in general terms, be divided into four broad categories of user;

1. Those that use buses as their main form of transport, with no other option of transportation - This group of the community have the highest reliance on the

public transport system, and therefore have the least flexibility and choice in the use of buses and other public transport options. For use in this measurement, this category of user provides the largest and more static patronage of the bus network.

2. Those that use buses as their main form of transport, but have a secondary form of transportation- An example of this group can be the 2 parent family, with one employed and one caring for children, who own one car. In a situation such as this, a working parent will often use public transport and the other will use the car. This is only one example of people involved in this category, and the situations obviously can vary greatly, but the principle remains. This group also provides a large base for patronage, but flexibility in transportation options is slightly higher.
3. Those that use buses, but as a secondary form of transport - This group could be made up of those that have another source of primary transport, but wish to use buses for various reasons, such as parking hassles. This group makes up the highest variability of the patronage of the bus network, and in this measurement of meeting community needs, it represents the best indication of a successful bus network.
4. Those that do not use public transport - For all intents and purposes, this group is the last to use buses as a form of transport. It can be said that the ultimate aim of a sustainable transport plan is to move this group higher up the categories, towards the groups that utilise public transport.

ACTION publish annual reports on their website. It can be noted that there was an increase of 4.2% in total number of passenger boarding over the last financial year, but without this data being more temporally analysed, the recent advent of the New Action Network cannot be gauged as a success or failure. With the lack of hard data to measure the usage of the ACTION network within the financial year, a secondary measure must be employed.

The following list is a chronological list of media releases from the Chief Ministers Department relating to ACTION bus travel.

"FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS TO ACTION BUS SERVICES" 18-04-2007  
"Free off-peak bus travel for seniors all this week" 09-03-2007  
"NEW ACTION NETWORK" 09-10-2006  
"TAKE ACTION ON WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY"(sic) 03-06-2006  
"RECORD-BREAKING WEEK FOR ACTION!" 10-05-2006  
"CUSTOMERS TAKE ACTION IN RECORD NUMBERS" 15-02-2006  
"RECORD NUMBER OF ADULTS USING ACTION" 15-12-2005  
"NIGHTRIDER THE BEST CATCH AFTER 1:00am" 24-11-2005  
"BIKE RACKS ON BUSES – NOW YOU CAN BIKE ‘N RIDE" 17-11-2005  
"FLEXIBUS TO TAKE YOU DOOR TO DOOR" 18-07-2005

At first glance, a few interesting points can be made. From the 15th December, there are a steady number of record breaking days for patronage of ACTION buses. There are 3 instances of patronage that are worthy of media release by the Chief Minister. These instances span up until the 9th October, when a new ACTION network was announced. The periods up till this date between record breaking patronage levels

were 2, 3 and 5 months respectively. Since this date 7 months ago, there has been no mention of record breaking patronage levels. An interesting aspect of this is that since the new network arrangements, the only media releases related to ACTION are trying to promote the use of ACTION buses.

Although this type of measurement is based on secondary evidence, and any conclusions based on this type of data should be taken as a broad indicator, it does raise the question of the link between the patronage levels prior to the new ACTION network and the influence on patronage levels after the new network was introduced. Can we draw a conclusion that levels of patronage have dropped since the inception of the new network? It would certainly be a conclusion most would make. And what does this mean for the aim of the *The Sustainable Transport Plan for the A.C.T* of "meeting community needs"? It would seem apparent that those commuters that have the option of using other forms of public transport, especially on category 3 and, to a lesser extent, category 4 (as illustrated previously), are moving away from the use of public transport. This also raises the question; if those commuters that use the bus network, but have the option of using other forms of transport, are not using the bus network due to a reduction in service levels, what effect does this have on the requirements for those that rely directly on the bus network as a primary source of transportation? The natural inclination is to draw a conclusion that their needs, as far as a "frequent, reliable, affordable, comfortable and 'understandable' public transport service" is concerned, is not being met.

It will be interesting to see ACTION's next annual report on bus patronage.

1. The Standing Committee on Planning and Environment would inquire into and investigate the services provided by ACTION buses, specifically: (b) incorporating comparative analysis of other bus transport operators in Australian jurisdictions;

Without having any particular detailed knowledge of other bus transport operators, I cannot provide any relevant comparative analysis.

1. The Standing Committee on Planning and Environment would inquire into and investigate the services provided by ACTION buses, specifically: (c) focussing on ACTION's services within the context of the sustainable transport plan with particular reference to:

(i) The appropriateness of the plan especially targets;

In this section, I wish to comment on the bus network's role within *The Sustainable Transport Plan for the A.C.T*, with reference to the targets, actions, and priorities and projects.

The first point that will be made is related to the general aim, and subsequent targets, of split-mode transport.

Split-mode transport is not a realistic goal. The economic considerations of the individual that are planning transport around the Nations Capital is first and foremost a priority, with travel times and ease of access secondary considerations. To take a hypothetical situation, an individual intending to travel a distance that is too far for

walking or bicycling (as illustrated in Figure 12: TRANSPORT MODES, THRESHOLD DISTANCES & TRIP LENGTH. *Sustainable Transport Plan for the A.C.T*), will not trade the time required (see - "efficiency - particularly minimised travel times" Key Issues for The Sustainable Transport Plan *Sustainable Transport Plan for the A.C.T*) to utilise the bicycling option for the part of the trip required to split-mode, while still paying a full fare for the bus section of the trip. This is especially when, and if, the bus network has satisfied its aims of providing "frequent, reliable, affordable, comfortable and 'understandable' public transport services that meet community needs". Put simply, why would patrons trade time and effort riding or walking, when the cost will be the same as taking a bus network from the start of the trip?

Secondly, those sectors of the community that physical activity is not appropriate cannot utilise the alternatives to public transport proposed in the *Sustainable Transport Plan for the A.C.T*, such as walking or bicycle riding. Physical activity is not an option for some. While the current bus network has identified this, and has made great strides in providing equitable access to the bus networks, this equitable access also applies to the rest of commuters who will access the network. The rest of the commuters will naturally drift towards the easiest form of transport, and the previous point applies here.

1. The Standing Committee on Planning and Environment would inquire into and investigate the services provided by ACTION buses, specifically:

(c) focussing on ACTION's services within the context of the sustainable transport plan with particular reference to:

(ii) Progress towards implementation;

In this issue, the argument can be made that significant progress had been made in the implementation of *The Sustainable Transport Plan* targets up until the point that the new ACTION network was implemented. This conclusion can only be made by using the analysis previously discussed under "Meeting the needs of the community" section.

As a personal comment, it is interesting that public comment is sought, yet without hard data to base comment on, all issues raised will be subjective at best (and let's hope that they will not be dismissed as such). A recommendation that I have is that the Territory and Municipal Services Network department of the ACT Government publish more regular information on ACT wide public transport user information.

I would like to illustrate one point that *The Sustainable Transport Plan for the A.C.T* has made. This is that there is a need for "Additional bus services: Additional services, peak and off-peak, to meet demand and achieve *The Sustainable Transport Plan* targets." This requirement, from the "Key Factors to be addressed to achieve mode-split targets", identifies that to achieve the targets, there needs to be a much more accessible and equitable bus transport system.

It is apparent that the recent changes to the bus network has resulted in a direct contradiction to this identified goal. It is very noticeable that there are less off-peak services, especially with feeder services. It is possible that the rationale behind

reducing these services is that this will encourage more split-mode transport utilisation. As I have illustrated earlier, this is not a particularly viable or wanted move by the community, and goes against the aims of *The Sustainable Transport Plan for the A.C.T.*

1. The Standing Committee on Planning and Environment would inquire into and investigate the services provided by ACTION buses, specifically: (c) focussing on ACTION's services within the context of the sustainable transport plan with particular reference to:

(iii) measures needed to ensure targets are met

To achieve "...a transport system that has lower overall costs, particularly lower greenhouse gas emissions, lower air pollution, reduced accidents and lower health costs, and provides more transport options for the community." (*The Sustainable Transport Plan for the A.C.T.*), more emphasis needs to be made on the utilisation of the bus network. Moreover, it must be a goal for the public transport options within the ACT to aim for utilisation of the bus network for the full length of the commuter's trip.

The argument for this type of emphasis is that when used in conjunction with the goal of "Change community attitudes and behaviours, towards more sustainable transport." (*The Sustainable Transport Plan for the A.C.T.*), such as cycling and walking, then those that can utilise these forms of transport, will. Moreover, as discussed previously, those that require the use of a bus network that can satisfy all their needs and requirements will have access to one, and not be disadvantaged by the dominant paradigm of "split-mode" transport.

*The Sustainable Transport Plan for the A.C.T.* touches on this principle, by stating;

"While the trunk public transport routes are currently well patronised, one of the challenges will be to increase patronage of other services, particularly feeder services. Improving the quality of feeder services, especially after hours, is very important in order to encourage people to rely on the public transport system."

1. The Standing Committee on Planning and Environment would inquire into and investigate the services provided by ACTION buses, specifically: (d) providing guidance on principles and key priorities for future service planning

Before commenting directly on the future directions of the ACT Public Transport system, as it relates to the ACTION bus network, a comment must be made on the overall current paradigm that is apparent in planning the ACT public transport system.

The current thought, dominated by short-term economic considerations, is that cost-efficiency must be the first priority, which places it above service-level. This is wrong. As a public service, especially for the sectors of the public where it is a necessity, public transport should not be expected to be a money-making enterprise. The ACTION annual reports indicates that this is has not happened, and will most likely not happen. So in such a political climate, with greenhouse gas emissions and environmental issues at the fore, it should be of high priority to attract public transport users.

It is apparent that to attract more commuters, especially those that have the flexibility to use other forms of transport, the network must have more flexibility, especially in off-peak times. To achieve this, investment in a "frequent, reliable, affordable, comfortable and 'understandable' public transport services that meet community needs", which provides "Additional bus services: Additional services, peak and off-peak, to meet demand and achieve *The Sustainable Transport Plan* targets."

To quote a less than enjoyable Kevin Costner movie, *Field of Dreams* (1989), to illustrate the point; "If you build it, they will come".

*The Public Transport Futures Feasibility Study* (PTFFS), as illustrated in *The Sustainable Transport Plan for the A.C.T.*, has some very cogent points in relation to future directions of the public transport system, especially in regards to the ACTION bus network (or future equivalent).

"*The Public Transport Futures Feasibility Study* (PTFFS) concludes that a corridor system with public transport services operating on a fully or partly dedicated right-of-way that serves all core trunk routes is justified for Canberra.

"Achieving the patronage levels assumed in the PTFFS would require:

- increasing the real cost of parking in Civic and the town centres
- reducing the supply of parking in Civic and the town centres" (From Canberra's future public transport system in *The Sustainable Transport Plan for the A.C.T.*)

These points need to indicate that to increase patronage, an efficient transport system would need to be developed in conjunction with these initiatives.

In preface to the conclusion, the ACTION network has provided, up until recently, the ACT region with a bus service network that had very good success. The efficiency of the system was admirable when compared to the resources available, and the user-friendliness (such as ticketing systems) was, and still is, well above average.

As a personal note, I used the ACTION bus network as a 'Category 2' user - a commuter that uses the bus network as their primary source of transport, but has other secondary forms of transport. This was the situation up until recently, when the new ACTION bus network was implemented, at which point the usability of the system dropped to a level that meant that I changed my situation and stopped using the bus network and became a 'Category 4' user - those that do not use the bus network at all. This is disappointing, as my motivation to use the bus network was purely by choice, and not by necessity - I appreciated the ease of use, and the resulting environmental benefits.

In conclusion, there are some points that need to be made of the recent failure of the ACTION bus network, and particularly the "New ACTION Network, to meet *The Sustainable Transport Plan for the A.C.T.* aims. The failure occurs on 3 fronts;

1. Transport times (i.e. change to hourly off-peak feeder services increase time *in situ* travel.), and
2. Through the direct contravention of the Plans aims of additional peak and off-peak services.

3. Safety. The argument can be made that seeing as public transport does not cater for late night and off-peak transport, those that rely on it spend more time in transit, and this naturally increases risk for individuals.
4. Not meeting the needs of the public, especially when utilising the measurement of commuter utilisation of the bus network.

Recommendations that can be drawn from the comments discussed throughout this submission include;

- Increasing the "feeder" services
- Increasing the frequency of off-peak services

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the services provided by the ACTION bus network. I will anticipate the report produced by the Standing Committee, and look forward to seeing all the valid comments made in other submissions included in the future direction of the ACTION bus network.

Sincerely,

Chris Marshall  
18th May, 2007