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INQUIRY INTO ACTION BUSES

Attached is my Submission to the Standing Committee.

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INQUIRY INTO ACTION BUSES

SUBMISSION FROM ROSEMARY ROTH TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT, LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Introduction

I have used ACT buses for over 30 years, first as a young mother, then as part time student and currently as full time worker. My comments concentrate on my current usage of the buses to travel to work, specifically between Kambah East and Parkes/Barton/Russell, and the problems I have encountered.

Basic premise

All citizens of a modern city should have access to reliable and efficient public transport.

Problems with using buses to get to work

Some of the things that put people off travelling to work by bus are: the long travelling times involved, overcrowding on some routes (eg Civic to Woden at peak times), and safety issues at interchanges. Factors that contribute to long travelling times include poor connections at interchanges, and a lack of buses before 7.00am and before 4.30pm.

The service between Kambah East and Barton/Russell is adequate at peak times but needs improving early in the morning and between 4.00pm and 4.30pm.

Poor connections

Poor connections at interchanges result in long waiting times between buses (up to 20 minutes or so in some cases). Ideally people should be able to get off one bus and straight on to the next. However, the connection should not be so tight that passengers miss the second bus if their feeder bus is slightly late (as has happened to passengers from Kambah East trying to catch the 313 bus that departs Woden at 6.46am). Passengers should not have to run the length of the platform in an effort to catch their bus.

Lack of buses during non-peak periods

There is a lack of buses at particular times, notably before 7.00am and just after 4.00pm. With the extension of flexible working provisions some public servants are able to start work at 7.00am and to finish work at 3.00pm. There are also many people who work part time. However, the current bus service doesn't really cater for people who start and finish work early. I think the bus service should adapt to changing work patterns.

Examples:

A connection which needs improving

Currently, people catching the 7.03 am 62 bus (Kambah Village timing), arriving Woden at 7.14am, have to wait until 7.29 to catch a bus (267) to Barton and Russell (a long wait on a cold and frosty morning). Yet there are two buses that depart within a couple of minutes of each other not long before the 62 bus arrives at Woden: the 63 which departs Woden at 7.09am, and the 225 departing at 7.10am. I would suggest delaying the departure of one of these buses by a few minutes so passengers on the 62 bus could catch it.

Lack of early morning buses

It is difficult to travel from Kambah East to the bus stop opposite the Edmund Barton Building early in the morning. The earliest I can arrive is 8.11am (or 8.05 if I am lucky), if I use only combinations of buses with reasonable connection times (ie less than 15 minutes) at Woden Interchange. The earliest bus from East Kambah (62 bus) arrives at Woden at 6.43am. The earliest bus to Barton and Russell departs Woden at 7.09am. Rather than wait 20 minutes or so at Woden Interchange, I generally catch the 6.46am 313 bus and walk to the Edmund Barton Building from the Albert Hall. People who work at Russell find it quicker to catch a third bus in Civic rather than waiting at the Woden Interchange till 7.09.

Lack of buses shortly after 4.00pm:

Currently, if I finish work at 4.00pm the earliest I can get to Kambah Village by bus is 5.16pm (catching a bus at the Edmund Barton Building at either 4.28pm, 4.39pm, or 4.48pm and then taking the 62 bus which departs Woden at 5.04pm). If I was in time to catch the 4.28 pm 62 bus from Woden, I could arrive at the Village at 4.40pm. Currently, there are no buses going past the Edmund Barton Building early enough to connect with the 4.28pm 62 bus from Woden.

There is a 67 service and a 27 service both leaving Woden at 4.28pm for Tuggeranong and Cooleman Court respectively. If one or both of these services started in Civic (ie if they were expanded to 267 and 227 buses) they could provide a connection to the 4.28pm No 62 Kambah bus, and to other buses that depart Woden at about this time.

A suggestion for decreasing the travel time to Russell: bring back the express bus

Some people may consider that it takes too long to travel from Woden to Russell. The buses currently travel via Barton which can add quite a few minutes to the travel time. However, there used to be a faster bus to Russell (the old 33?) before the new Foreign Affairs building opened about ten years ago. Instead of travelling through Barton this bus travelled clockwise around State Circle and then down King's Avenue where it stopped once or twice before reaching Russell. It could well make bus travel between Woden and Russell more popular if the route was reinstated (in combination with good connections at Woden of course).

Why not a bus from Kambah to Barton/Russell?

Service for Kambah people who work in Barton or Russell could be improved by having direct buses from Kambah East and Kambah West.

Difficulties of catching buses at a bus stop

Numbers too similar and numbers too small

It can be hard work catching the bus at a bus stop, particularly near the Edmund Barton Building a dozen or so different routes go past it at peak times.

Many people find that the bus numbers are difficult to read at a distance. The numbers are generally too small and many are too similar. I think that bus numbers should be bigger, though there is probably not a lot you can do about that for existing buses. Small numbers are satisfactory if buses are required to pull in at each stop (as occurs in intercity routes in some overseas cities) but it adds an unnecessary difficulty if you have to hail the bus.

It makes it difficult for people if the numbers on the same route are too similar - even young people have trouble telling 28 from 38 or 30 from 38 from a distance. Quite often buses with similar numbers are scheduled to arrive at the same time and that just adds to the problem. Sometimes the bus drivers are going so fast it is difficult to tell which number is displayed till the bus has almost gone past. So there is a dilemma: either you hail an approaching bus without being fully sure what the number is then realising it is the wrong one: or you wait till you are quite sure it is the right number, which doesn't give the bus driver much warning (and probably results in a lecture from the bus driver); or else you miss the bus you want because you would be much too embarrassed to try hailing the bus when it has almost gone past.

Timetables at bus stops inappropriately placed

Timetables at bus stops are a good idea and it would be useful if there were more. However they need to be suitably placed – the ones opposite the Albert Hall are too high.

Sunday buses

There used to be buses on Sunday nights 30 or so years ago and I think they should be reinstated. Many people do go out on Sunday nights. I would suggest gradually extending the Sunday evening service till a later hour.

Interchanges

There have been problems with safety at interchanges. Interchanges need to be safe and to offer protection from the weather. The underground interchange at Brisbane seems to work well. As a part-time student I know that evening classes often require lengthy waits at bus interchanges. It would make the wait more pleasant if there were cafes nearby.

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