



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Economics,
Industry and Recreation

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Canberra's Night-Time Economy

Submission number: 001

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Date authorised for publication: 10 December 2025

From: [REDACTED]
To: [LA Committee - Economics](#)
Subject: Submission: Inquiry into Canberra's Night-Time Economy
Date: Friday, 5 December 2025 10:51:18 AM

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Dear Committee Members,

As a long-time resident of Canberra and landlord of several commercial venues in the CBD that operate into the evening, I warmly welcome this inquiry as an essential opportunity to address the increasing challenges facing our city's night-time economy. My submission focuses on key challenges from infrastructure disruptions in the CBD, particularly around the City bus interchange, London Cct and Alinga Street precinct. These align with the inquiry's terms of reference, including economic performance, the regulatory environment, opportunities for diversification and enhancement, and governance arrangements. Drawing from direct observations and local business feedback (my tenants), I highlight how these issues are eroding vibrancy and safety, while offering practical solutions to support recovery and growth.

Current Challenges: Compounding Disruptions to Accessibility and Trade

Canberra's night-time economy has been significantly damaged by a series of infrastructure projects that have restricted access, reduced foot traffic, and deterred patrons. These 'friction points' have compounded over time, creating a vicious cycle of declining trade, business closures, and reduced public safety. Key examples include:

- **Light Rail Stage 2A Construction:** Ongoing works have narrowed pedestrian pathways and disrupted traffic flow into the CBD, making it harder for evening visitors to reach venues.
- **Closure of the Law Courts Car Park:** The sale and subsequent closure of this facility has removed a critical parking option for late-night arrivals, forcing detours and longer walks through less-lit areas.
- **Garema Place Revitalisation Works:** Scaffolding and barriers have fragmented the pedestrian experience, turning a once-bustling hub into a construction zone that feels unwelcoming after dark.
- **Lyric Theatre Car Park Closure:** Most critically, the full closure of this car park—announced with just four weeks' notice to affected businesses—is unnecessary for the Lyric Theatre build. It has eliminated short-term parking options right in the heart of the interchange area, exacerbating accessibility woes.

These disruptions are set to continue for several years, with upcoming works on the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge threatening to choke the main southern entry to the city. The lack of meaningful public consultation—such as the rushed notice for the Lyric car park—highlights governance gaps, leaving businesses and patrons feeling sidelined.

Impacts on the Night-Time Economy

The regulatory and planning decisions enabling these closures have directly harmed economic performance and the role of venues in the CBD. Reduced accessibility has led to:

- **Declining Foot Traffic and Trade:** Patrons are visiting less frequently, staying for shorter periods, and spending less overall. Around the bus interchange, where many

night-time workers and revellers converge, turnover has dropped by an estimated 20-30% in affected venues (based on anecdotal reports from local operators).

- **Business Closures and Relocations:** Several hospitality spots have closed or relocated due to unsustainable revenue dips, thinning the diversity of entertainment options and weakening the area's identity as a dynamic night-time destination.
- **Eroded Safety and Increased Anti-Social Behaviour:** With fewer people on the streets, policing presence has waned, leading to more graffiti, vandalism, and incidents of violence. Women and families, in particular, report feeling less safe, further deterring evening outings.

These effects contradict best-practice principles for night-time economies, which emphasise seamless access and safety to encourage longer stays and higher spending. Without intervention, the CBD risks becoming a 'ghost town' after hours, undermining its contribution to the broader ACT economy.

Recommendations: Practical Solutions for Enhancement and Recovery

To address these challenges and unlock opportunities for diversification, I urge the Committee to recommend the following, prioritising minimal-disruption governance and community input:

- **Partial Reopening of the Lyric Theatre Car Park:** Retain at least 70% of spaces for short-term (e.g., 2-3 hour) parking during construction. This would maintain accessibility without delaying the build, directly boosting patronage around the interchange.
- **Relocate Construction Site Sheds:** Move temporary site offices to underutilised local spaces, such as available office areas at Mooseheads on London Circuit. This frees up prime CBD real estate for public use and demonstrates adaptive planning.
- **Aesthetic and Activation Improvements:** Enhance the visual appeal of disrupted areas to foster a welcoming night-time vibe:
 - Install pot plants, statues, and decorative coloured lighting along Alinga Street and Garema Place to soften construction impacts.
 - Program regular events, such as pop-up markets, live music, or food truck nights, incorporating the bus interchange precinct to draw crowds and extend dwell times.
- **Strengthen Governance and Consultation:** Mandate at least 12 weeks' notice and genuine stakeholder forums for future closures. Adopt best-practice models where a Night-time Economy Advisory Committee is engaged to bring together industry leaders to reduce red-tape, improve safety, and minimise disruptions to major infrastructure works.

These steps could enhance entertainment preferences by blending construction with activation, turning challenges into opportunities for a more resilient, inclusive night-time scene.

Conclusion

Canberra's night-time economy is at a crossroads: unchecked disruptions risk long-term decline, but targeted actions can elevate it as a vibrant cornerstone of our city's identity. I appreciate the Committee's attention to these issues and look forward to contributing further.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Kind regards,

Nesh Nikolic



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