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More Canberrans cycling, more often, for a better community

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Ms Mary Porter AM

Chair

Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services

committees@parliament.act.gov.au.

Dear Ms Porter

Inquiry into RZ3 and RZ4 Residential Development Policies – Inner North Canberra

Here is the submission to the Inquiry from Pedal Power ACT Inc., a community organisation with over 3,000 members that promotes cycling for transport and recreation.

Our submission focuses on the potential of residential development policies to improve the liveability of Canberra by enabling more Canberrans to cycle and walk. Cycling, as an ideal form of active and sustainable travel, can be incorporated into urban development to provide an important part of the solution to many urban problems. Issues the Canberra community faces include greenhouse gas emissions, pollution, traffic congestion, parking shortages, the liveability of urban spaces and health problems such as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. Cycling can help address all these issues.

Pedal Power's comments on the inquiry's terms of reference are set out below.

- (1) *the merits of maintaining:*
 - (a) *the policies applying to the RZ4 areas north of Macarthur and Wakefield Avenues which limit development to a maximum two storey building height limit and a maximum plot ratio of 0.65 until 23.5 hectares of the 25.9 hectares of residential blocks in the RZ4 areas south of Macarthur and Wakefield Avenues and north of Cooyong Street and Donaldson Street have been developed for multi-dwelling housing; and*
 - (b) *the moratorium on redevelopment in Turner Section 47 and Part 63*
- (2) *whether similar redevelopment policies should be extended to other areas surrounding Northbourne Avenue in north Canberra and, if so, where and at what density*

A blanket limit on building height limits the opportunity for sensitive developments that increase the population density of the inner north. A higher density would enable more people to walk and cycle to Civic, helping to ease traffic congestion, contain greenhouse gas emissions and counter the health risks of inactivity that include heart disease, obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure.

Good on and off road cycling facilities and footpaths are essential part of this approach. The cost of lighting the Sullivan Ck cycle route between Civic and Dickson would be more justifiable if higher density areas fed more active travellers onto it.

Blanket height limitations and other impediments force development to outer urban areas where greater distances to shops and employment centres create disincentives for active travel. It also increases personal transport costs. The NRMA has costed the operation of a medium sized car at around \$180 per week. The operating costs of a commuting bicycle are minimal – around \$10 per week.

Inner north development should be assessed on its contribution to making Canberra more liveable and sustainable, not on a blanket and arbitrary building height or on a moratorium of indeterminate duration. A short moratorium might be justified until sustainable development plans are in place – see our proposal under other matters below.

(3) the Committee's view on higher density development along major transport corridors

Higher density development along transport corridors is consistent with and would help implement the Government's Sustainable Transport Plan for the ACT and its ACT Public Transport Strategic Network Plan. The former aims to reduce the overall cost of the transport system while maintaining high levels of accessibility. Providing convenient alternatives to private cars along major transport corridors will shift transport patterns towards more use of active and sustainable forms of transport.

(4) the inquiry should consider factors such as the demand for higher density development, the infrastructure capacity of transport and hydraulic networks to absorb additional development, the implications for housing affordability, the extent to which redevelopment policies reduce overall travel, the potential impacts of the policies on the amenity enjoyed by residents of the areas affected and how such impacts could be ameliorated

The capacity of Canberra's cycling facilities to cope with an increased population from higher level development should be examined wherever higher density levels are considered. Facilities should be expanded where necessary to meet increased usage.

If more people can live within 5 kilometres of town centres or with easy access to efficient on and off-road cycling facilities they will be more inclined to cycle or walk. At least 40% of car trips in Canberra are likely to be for less than 5 kms – a distance that can easily be cycled. These car trips cause traffic congestion and could easily be cycled, improving residents' amenity.

Ride to school programs and projects such as Pedal Power's Pedal Pod pilot projects at Lyneham and Rosary primary schools, where parents and children ride to school in groups, also reduce traffic congestion around schools and improve local amenity. These activities would help reduce congestion and hence parents and residents concerns in areas such as Turner Primary School.

Most people overestimate the time it takes to cycle or walk. The Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment found the average speed of a commuting car in Melbourne in 2006 was 19.7km/h. A person can comfortably cycle at an average 17km/h.

(5) any other relevant matter

If more people cycle, especially within 5 kms of town centres, it can lower bicycle crash rates and hence health costs. In London, when cycling numbers jumped 83%, the number of serious crashes involving bikes fell by 28%. People driving adjust their driving for the increased number of people cycling.

Finally, the ACT should urgently seek advice, using the inner north as a pilot, on integrating higher density developments in a way that incorporates active travel; makes better use of public spaces; and makes for a generally more liveable city.

Professor Jan Gehl, who delivered the Griffin Lecture last November for the Australian Institute of Architects ACT Chapter, would be ideal for this task. He has advised Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Perth on becoming more liveable.

Yours sincerely

Jeff Ibbotson
Vice President
Pedal Power ACT Inc.