

**SUBMISSION TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY'S
STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND
ENVIRONMENT
INQUIRY INTO ACTION BUSES**

TERMS OF REFERENCE ADDRESSED

- (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.

SUBMISSION BY JAMIE GEYSEN

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Dear Dr Jaireth,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute this submission to the inquiry.

The aim of the Government's Sustainable Transport Plan (STP) is 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 Government's key to this plan is the increased use of public transport, through ACTION & the strategic direction of 'The Canberra Spatial Plan' which will centralise Canberra's population growth within 7.5km of the City Centre. Urban consolidation is specifically identified as the key to the STP's success.

The use of deliberate traffic congestion measures such as the closure of Vernon Circle to through traffic at London Circuit & the reduction of car-parking spaces in the city have both openly been embraced by the ACT Government as methods to discourage private motor car use.

In a city designed around the use of the motor car, logical people are asking the question – why? The Government concedes in their own literature that..."*The current transport system (and associated land use pattern) provides for relatively high levels of vehicular accessibility...*" It then begs the question, if it isn't broken, why spend \$400,000,000 dollars trying to fix it?

The answer is that Canberra's unique design is not conducive to profitable public transport. It is deliberately open & spacious with expansive vistas, wide open roads & room to move. The people enjoy a relaxed decentralised town-centre based city – just as it was designed. That is why I live here, as do most other Canberrans. Unfortunately these traits are an anathema to the ACT Government's unrealistic expectations for ACTION's place in Canberra's transport system.

In their short-sighted haste to make public transport (ACTION) attractive, the ACT Government has set upon changing our city to fit their public transport model, instead of changing their public transport model to fit our city. The hobbling of our city to make buses profitable is sheer lunacy.

A list of questions regarding the STP immediately comes to mind...

- Why is the Government spending millions on building the Gungahlin Drive Extension to facilitate car access to the City, only to provide no parking when commuters get there? (The same question applies to all other road upgrades currently underway & planned for the ACT.)
- Why should people be made walk or cycle around the city, when the Australian Federal Police is unable to protect the public from being robbed & bashed even in easily policed areas like bus interchanges?
- How can anyone be really reliant on public transport when the Government cannot even provide a reliable timetable, let alone a safe environment for ACTION workers and customers?
- Why isn't the ongoing loss of revenue resulting from the reduction of car-parks shown in any of the Government's figures?
- What will be the cost to city businesses & tourism, from the inevitable decline in Civic shopper numbers because there is nowhere to park?
- My time is valuable, so I simply shop where I can get a car park. Why would I spend an hour getting to Civic by bus, when I can be at Belconnen Mall in 5 minutes by car?
- Everyone's time is valuable – none of us live forever. Why doesn't the Government's STP 'benefit & cost' figures account for the massive losses of personal leisure time & workplace productivity directly attributable to the time inefficiencies of public transport?
- The Government concedes in its own literature "*Trips involving carrying luggage, goods or shopping, involving multiple destinations or dropping off other people are not considered suitable for public transport.*" Which begs the question – why make Civic so inaccessible to cars, when shopping for goods is the main reason many of us visit Civic in the first place?

From my view, the STP is riddled with contradiction, exaggeration & unsupported supposition. For example... Under the heading of 'Social Benefits' the claim is...

"Sustained community accessibility, in spite of an increase in (ACT) population of 21 per cent...by the year 2026".

However, the Australian Bureau of Statistics lists the ACT's average population growth rate at 0.6% per annum for the five years to June 2006. If this trend continues until 2026, Canberra's population will then be 370,588 - an increase of only 12.7 percent on 2006 figures.

- Why are the figures from the ABS so different to those of the ACT Government?
- Whose figures are wrong – The ABS or the ACT Government?
- Surely our water crisis will make even a 12.7% increase unsustainable over this period?

I believe the STP as part of The Canberra Spatial Plan has been founded on fatally flawed data. I find the 'benefits' rationale behind these plans is biased, unsubstantiated & misleading. Using readily available data, I can show that ACTION use is less environmentally friendly & more costly to the community than the use of private motor cars. I will show a different side of the STP.

Preface to my first argument

In order to effectively compare the environmental impact of ACTION Buses against private motor car use, a private vehicle type must be nominated as a base model for comparison – a control. This control-car needs reflect what the average private passenger car is likely to be once the impact of recent crude oil prices becomes apparent on passenger car sales as we move toward 2026. The emerging trend of 2006 was heavily weighted toward fuel efficient four-cylinder models & hybrid-electric cars. To May 2007, hybrid-electric sales were 50% higher than to May in 2006. I have chosen the Toyota Corolla for comparison for these reasons. (See note 1)

Argument 1 - Dispelling the myth of ACTION's environmental superiority to private car use.

In the financial year 2005-06 the ACTION Fleet travelled a total of 23,450,000 kilometres. This total included both 'in' & 'out' of service figures. It is entirely appropriate that total kilometres be used in these calculations as the environmental impact of ACTION travel is not lessened by the absence of passengers. The bus engine is running all the same; whether in service or not.

ACTION recorded 16,928,000 passenger boardings in 05-06; however, ACTION cannot supply figures as to the length of each journey per boarding. For the purpose of this submission, I have assigned a hypothetical 'average trip distance' (see note 2) of 7 kilometres per passenger boarding. Using these figures, ACTION's annual average carriage rate was approximately 5 passengers per kilometre travelled, on buses licensed to carry 65 – that's about 7.7% of actual capacity. By comparison, figures obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics reveal that the average journey-to-work car trip in Canberra has approximately 1.125 passengers on board.

ACTION buses have an average diesel fuel economy rate of 36.5 litres per 100 kilometres, representing an annual average of about 7.3 litres to transport one passenger 100 kilometres. The Corolla has an average fuel economy rate of 7.7 litres per 100 kilometres, representing an annual average of about 6.9 litres to transport one passenger 100 kilometres. The Corolla uses less fuel than ACTION to move one passenger 100 kilometres! Additionally, ACTION's contribution to air pollution with its diesel fuelled fleet is significantly higher per passenger than emissions from the unleaded petrol fuelled Corolla per passenger.

ACTION's environmental Achilles-Heel is the endless off-peak trolling of hundreds of square kilometres of suburbs averaging just a few passengers. ACTION's peak hour journey-to-work services are nearing capacity, but these are not the services that need attention. Increasing public dependency on these already busy services may create a small increase in ACTION "farebox revenue", but ignoring the real problem only guarantees continued environmental damage.

Obviously, with some ACTION routes running at near capacity, journey-to-work-route comparisons with the Corolla will produce vastly different fuel-efficiency results - but these busy routes are not the problem. That is why it is important to use annual averages to get a view of the real picture. On an annual average basis for fuel-efficiency, ACTION is currently no more environmentally friendly than a Toyota Corolla.

A small increase in car-pooling will achieve more than a fully implemented \$400,000,000 STP. By simply encouraging car-pooling, the Government can achieve an exponentially greater result for the environment at relatively little cost. A reduced cost parking fee schedule for 'Car-poolers' may prove to be an adequate incentive. The addition of more 'T2' transit lanes may also help.

Another low cost environmental initiative could be a free registration scheme upon a new hybrid car purchase for a specified number of years. The flow-on environmental benefit from increased public investment in hybrid cars is self-evident. The STP makes no environmental consideration for the expected proliferation of hybrid-electric cars or the possible emergence of dedicated electric cars between now & 2026. (see note 3) Electric cars are coming & will completely surpass all other forms of transport for environmental friendliness. In any case, for any environmentally superior option to work, we need to preserve our roads & car-parking spaces for a 'green' future.

Argument 1 - Summation.

- ACTION averages 5 passengers per kilometre on buses designed to carry 65.
- ACTION uses 7.3 litres of diesel fuel to move one passenger 100 kilometres, roughly the same as a small private car – except the car runs on much cleaner burning petrol.
- The targets of the STP will barely improve this 7.3L/100km figure.
- Hybrid-electric cars on Canberra's roads right now are achieving 4.4L/100km.
- By 2026 fully electric cars will likely have emerged as a viable alternative to hybrids.
- Fully electric cars using grid power achieve 2.5L/100km with 66% less emissions.
- Fully electric cars charged by solar power achieve 0.0 L/100km & have zero emissions.
- Increasing journey-to-work passengers does not address ACTION's real problems.
- Simple car-pooling can achieve more than the STP ever will.
- By 2026, motor car fuel-efficiency will eclipse the best ACTION can ever achieve.

The environmental foundations of the STP are fatally flawed & any planned reduction of car use on 'green' credentials is fundamentally wrong. Creating a deliberate parking squeeze & constricting the flow of traffic through the city, as a Government planned measure to ensure ACTION's STP targets are met, will achieve almost nothing in reducing ACTION's environmental footprint, but the resulting downturn in city business activity & tourist access will be enormous. Electric cars are coming & will overshadow all other transport forms for environmental benefit including ACTION Buses. We need to plan for this eventuality & keep our roads & car-parks open.

The targets set for ACTION in the \$400,000,000 STP are small, slow to implement, unrealistically expensive & potentially harmful. There are cheaper; 'greener'; easier; & quicker to implement alternatives available & they should be utilised. The STP has no valid environmental credentials.

Argument 2 - Dispelling the myth of ACTION's profitability.

ACTION is a loss making enterprise. In 2005-06 the cost of transporting each passenger was \$5.26, but the average fare paid was just \$1.01. These numbers are straight from ACTION.

In the financial year of 2005-06 ACTION Buses averaged 1 passenger boarding for every 1.38 kilometres of total travel. The average fare return from each kilometre of total travel was 73 cents. ACTION costs per kilometre were \$3.79. ACTION ran a fare-box operating deficit of \$3.06 for every one of the 23,450,000 kilometres it travelled. Please read this again & think about it.

In 2005-06, ACTION's cost to the Government through Community Service Obligation (CSO) funding was \$60,550,000. Even with this substantial subsidy & fare-box revenue of \$17,111,000, ACTION still posted a \$9,153,000 loss – bringing the Government's total contribution to around \$70,000,000. That is \$212 for every person in Canberra - whether they caught a bus or not.

When looked at objectively, ACTION will never make a real profit so why continue the pretence?

Argument 3 - Dispelling the myth that ACTION funding is being appropriately managed.

ACTION's actual costs per passenger boarding were \$5.26. Given that the average fare collected per boarding was \$1.01, it appears that for ACTION to be fully self-funded, the entire current fare structure needs to be multiplied by a factor of 5.2. For example... This would make the adult 'faresaver 10' ticket book cost \$114.40. (\$11.44 per ticket instead of the current \$2.20 per ticket.)

I doubt that the average person in the street of Canberra realises that able bodied, journey-to-work-travellers using 'faresaver 10' tickets are having their fares subsidised by \$9.24 each ticket; which is shamefully being diverted away from CSO funding intended to provide & improve transportation solutions for the poor; the disabled; the aged; the unemployed & school children.

The financial misappropriation of CSO funds to entice more journey-to-work-travellers into leaving their new BMW's at home is scandalous. The STP's target's will only exacerbate this absolutely outrageous situation as will the deliberate shorting of car spaces in the city & town centres.

We need proper management of ACTION's CSO funding to ensure effective outcomes for those it was truly intended to help. It should not be spent coercing the 'well-heeled' out of their new cars. We need a public transport plan that caters for those who need it - not those who milk it. The aged and disabled should be getting a much better service for the CSO funding dollar.

More Questions arising from the STP targets.

Under close scrutiny, the STP reveals itself to be an amateurish attempt at social engineering. This is highlighted by the much vaunted cycling & walking health benefits of the plan. The Government concedes in their own literature that states.... *“Compared with the Australian average for getting to and from work, Canberrans... cycle more, walk about the same...”* This begs the questions...

- If we are already cycling more & walking about the same, what is the ACT Government trying to force upon us - A cycling & pedestrian utopia?
- Is it the place of the ACT Government to force anything upon us that is outside the boundaries of Australian norms?
- Is it the place of a democratic Government to force anything upon us in any circumstance?

The STP targets identify walking trips of up to two kilometres & cycling trips of up to ten kilometres as public transport modes. I consider myself fit & able-bodied, but at age 44, after years of football & hard work, my knees are constantly sore. I know that being forced to walk & cycle those distances on a regular basis would erode my remaining mobility & I doubt I am alone in my health condition. Human longevity is increasing because of technology, not in spite of it. The STP targets ignore this fact. The quality of life & independence my motor car affords me is not achievable with public transport, even though I still enjoy walking & cycling in moderation as a pleasure pursuit.

- With this in mind, will the ACT Government proportionately increase disabled parking to allow for the huge number of people incapable of the physical activity level required by the STP?
- If so, what will be the social impact of deeming otherwise fit able-bodied people as disabled, simply because they cannot perform the physical activity required to make the STP work?

The increased possibility of deaths associated with an increase in public transport use is very real. One only need look at the recent stabbing, assaults, & robberies in bus interchanges. Pedestrians, cyclists & people waiting at bus stops do not have the security or benefit of seat belts, airbags, central locking or the ability to drive themselves away from danger.

- With this in mind, what will be the additional health costs of the plan if implemented?
- Why doesn't the STP acknowledge & address these additional public safety issues?

The STP targets also claim that...*“These targets represent a more than doubling of the current proportion of trips used by environmentally-friendly modes - walking, cycling and public transport & will reverse the downward trend in public transport usage that has occurred to 2001.”*

- On what basis does the ACT Government promote public transport as being environmentally-friendly, aren't ACTION buses still spewing tonnes of pollution into our atmosphere?
- Why was there a downward trend in public transport use to 2001 in the first place?

Private cars provide people with a freedom, security & efficiency of movement that public transport cannot match. Perhaps that is why the car has been so successful.

- What doesn't the Government understand about this statement?
- From where in the ACT Government's revenue base are the misappropriated CSO's funded?
- If these funds are being contributed to by charges & fees on motor vehicles; licenses; car registrations; parking fees & fines; sales taxes on cars; & fuel tax etc. – Doesn't the removal of car-parks under the STP become a double kick in the head to ACT motorists?

This list of questions is endless, but unfortunately the time I have available to ask them is not.

Conclusion

Public transport in Canberra is relatively poor compared to other cities. The reasons are many, but essentially we have a small decentralised population & excellent planned roads suitable for private car use - all by design mind you. In such circumstances, any public transport system will always struggle. Simon Corbell's brief seems to have been 'make public transport work at any cost'. Logically, Mr. Corbell systematically set about making plans to centralise the population & to constrict our city's road network. Then, to force the issue, the Government started selling off the car-parks. Mr. Corbell's actions were quite deliberate & logical - provided you don't have a problem with cutting off a perfectly healthy leg in order to have a wooden one... and a limp.

Canberra City's car infrastructure already exists & it works well. The STP states as much in its description of our current transport system. Our population has about reached its practical maximum for our available water resources, so we only need improve the inner city roads we have. A few multi-storey car-parks, replacing spaces recently lost, will not detract from the city's beauty, but will add to its accessibility for business & tourism.

We need an effective public transport system that properly concentrates the CSO funding on those it was intended for – not spent on futile plans to lever the fat bourgeoisie from their nice new cars. The STP is a deeply flawed strategy & it needs to be withdrawn immediately.

Canberra was designed around motor car use. Don't destroy our city just to force bus patronage; otherwise we'll be undoing it all in twenty years to encourage electric car use over dirty buses. A little foresight will go a long way. I thought that was what 'planning' was all about – the future. 100% environmentally friendly solar charged electric cars are the future – let's plan for them.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely

Jamie Geysen.
Wednesday, 16 May 2007

NOTES

NOTE 1 - In 2006, Toyota was the best selling motor vehicle brand in Australia, with a 22.2 per cent share of the total market & was the top-selling marque in passenger cars for the first time, selling 114,775 cars. The fuel-efficient four-cylinder models dominated these sales as the top-selling brand in the light (Yaris), small (Corolla) and medium (Camry) car markets. Sales of 24,221 four-cylinder Camry sedans represented more than one-quarter of all medium car sales. The Toyota Corolla, with steady sales of 46,256, ran second only to the Holden Commodore's sales of 56,531 in overall popularity. Toyota Yaris sales of 27,990 accounted for 24.8 per cent of the light car market. Demand for Toyota's Prius electric hybrid outstripped supply with 1,974 sales which represented a 38.7 per cent increase on 2005 sales figures. This growth is expected to continue. (To May 2007, hybrid-electric sales were 50% higher than to May in 2006.)

The fuel consumption figures in litres per 100km are as follows...Holden Commodore (10.9), Toyota's Camry (8.9), Corolla (7.7) Yaris (6) & Prius (4.4). In 2006, these passenger cars were the no.1 sellers in their respective categories of Large, Mid-size, Small, Light & Hybrid Passenger car Sales. (4WD's & SUV's were not included as they are special purpose vehicles with which ACTION is not a competitor.)

NOTE 2 - Nearly all of the ACT's residential dwellings are located within a 10 kilometre radius of a bus interchange. Based on a simple area equation, the assigned 7 kilometre average trip distance represents the approximate average distance of all ACT dwellings from a bus interchange.

NOTE 3 - Electric cars are currently in production in the USA. Most models can achieve 0 to 100kph acceleration in less than 7 seconds & have a range of at least 200km from a 2 hour charge. Their fuel-efficiency is approximately the equivalent of 2.5 litres per 100km whilst producing 66% less greenhouse gas emissions when charged from a coal fired power grid. If a solar charging system is used, these cars produce zero greenhouse gas emissions. Toyota's hybrid Prius experienced a 38.7 percent increase in sales in 2006 and this figure was curtailed by a lack of supply. (To May 2007, hybrid-electric sales were 50% higher than to May in 2006.)

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