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From: Sam Hussey-Smith [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, 18 June 2017 7:14 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Fwd: Submission to the Inquiry into Billboards - Standing Committee on Planning and Urban Renewal

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Apologies Annemieke - I had your address wrong in the below submission.

Regards - sam

 A.C.T. LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE OFFICE	
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From: Sam Hussey-Smith [REDACTED]
Date: Sun, Jun 18, 2017 at 7:01 PM
Subject: Submission to the Inquiry into Billboards - Standing Committee on Planning and Urban Renewal
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]

To the Committee Chair,

I moved to Canberra in 2011 and, shortly after my arrival, was made aware of the so-called 'ban' on billboards in the ACT. It was explained to me that this ordinance was in place to preserve the character, dignity and prestige of Canberra as the national capital.

Having come from Brisbane, where billboards - both traditional and electronic - have been thoughtlessly used across the city to monetise public space and make a significant contribution to the pollution of the visual environment in that city, this was a revelation.

Put simply, not having to contend with the visual contamination that billboards represent is one of the things that makes Canberra a great city to live in.

To pretend that billboards do not represent visual pollution is dishonest. Outdoor advertising - whether on buses, bus shelters on on publicly accessible private land - is a form of visual pollution that has to be consciously processed by the brain.

Clear Channel Outdoor, one of the world's largest outdoor advertising companies, states that: "When brands advertise on our street structures, they become part of the public social space, entering people's thoughts and conversations."

And yet no-one who sees a billboard as they are catching the bus to work, visiting a shopping centre or driving down the highway to Sydney has invited a company on a billboard to start such a "conversation" with them. It's a one-way engagement that makes public spaces less attractive and more polluted.

Aside from the aesthetic price we pay for outdoor advertising, there is also the other issue of stacking on further information to already overstimulated brains.

As Matthew Crawford notes in *The World Beyond Your Head*: "Attention is a resource - a person only has so much of it."

At no other time in human history has this statement been more relevant. Placing advertising in the public sphere imposes an attentional cost on society by adding further stimuli for people to process.

In an age when most people are overwhelmed with information, whether it be from smartphones, targeted social media advertising, interactive screens in shopping centres or video advertisements on loop at petrol pumps, it seems particularly derelict, even pernicious, for our local government to even consider doing anything that would undoubtedly worsen our attentional deficits.

I was therefore not only surprised but extremely disappointed to read the Chief Minister's comments earlier this year that he couldn't understand why there isn't outdoor advertising in areas outside of Canberra's Parliamentary Triangle.

I am inferring from this that he means areas outside of the Parliamentary Triangle aren't sufficiently special or of heritage value to protect from large billboards.

But this misses the point entirely. There's no doubt that Old Parliament House has greater heritage value than the Belconnen mall, or the Downer shops. But the point is not comparing heritage values, the point is that imposing large billboards on any public space will make that space worse.

This, then, makes the question of whether we should consider erecting billboards around Canberra a much simpler one: do we want to make Canberra's public spaces look worse? Whatever the aesthetic merits of Kingston Foreshore, Mount Ainslie, Fyshwick or Hume, they will all be poorer with advertising billboards.

Finally, any move to further pollute the public realm with advertising goes against what many of the world's leading cities are doing. Paris, Sao Paulo and New York have all recently moved to restrict (or, in Sao Paulo's case, ban entirely) billboards. Canberra is leading the way in so many other areas - renewable energy, drug and alcohol policies, public housing and cycling infrastructure to name a few - why on earth would we want to head in the wrong direction on the preservation of public space for all?

I therefore suggest that the Standing Committee on Planning and Urban Renewal should make the following recommendation to the ACT Government: any net increase in the amount of advertising in the public sphere is not acceptable nor desirable for Canberra. That should be a redline.

This is the first submission to a parliamentary inquiry I have ever written. I have done so because Canberra is a truly special city with a character worth preserving. I hope the Committee's recommendations will reflect that.

Kind Regards,

Sam Hussey-Smith



NOTE: I would ask that you not publish my street address (suburb is fine) or phone number unless this is mandatory for submissions.