

# ACT for Safe, Healthy, Active, Inclusive Streets

A shared, non-partisan platform of priorities for the ACT  
2024-28 Legislative Assembly and Government

Prepared by

## Living Streets Canberra



Also endorsed by



\* We focus on people who get about without a vehicle. When we use the term 'walking', we include any form of human-powered mobility that is not a bicycle: walking; using a wheelchair or other personal mobility device, including those with motors that can travel up to 10 km/h); pushing a pram; wheeling luggage; riding a scooter, skateboard, tricycle or rollerblades.

Authorised by Gillian King for Living Streets Canberra

# ACT for Safe, Healthy, Active, Inclusive Streets

OVERALL OBJECTIVE					
<p><b>All our roads, streets, paths and crossings are (and feel) safe, accessible, comfortable and convenient for <i>everyone</i>.</b></p>					
PRINCIPLES					
<p><b>Safety:</b> all environs where people may use active travel should be safe – not safer – and feel safe – for everyone to use active travel.</p>	<p><b>Equity, inclusion and accessibility:</b> transport system (including active travel) comply with or exceed anti-discrimination legislation and accessibility standards.</p>	<p><b>Clear transport hierarchy, reflected in clear legislation</b> with the basic and most vulnerable mode of travel (walking) as the top priority.</p>	<p><b>Evidence-based decision-making</b> aligned with maximising health of people and environment in a changing climate, safety and inclusion of the most vulnerable people, and limiting global warming to 1.5°C.</p>	<p><b>Attractive healthy transport options:</b> all active travel environs should be convenient, healthy, comfortable and physically attractive to use.</p>	<p><b>Urgency and universality:</b> rapidly deploy and scale up existing solutions (including quick and inexpensive remedies), not just piecemeal, slow and expensive changes.</p>

# ACT for Safe, Healthy, Active, Inclusive Streets

## Context

Walking\* is part of every trip and so is actually the most common form of transport.

The Australian Capital Territory:

- has legislated a target of zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2045, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transport is a key component of achieving this;
- is committed to prioritising human life and health and wellbeing of residents of the Territory;
- has adopted the Safe System approach and Vision Zero (zero road deaths) goal for transport policy-making road safety, and is working with other Australian jurisdictions to give effect to these and other elements of the National Road Safety Strategy 2021-30;
- has a policy of encouraging active travel and other initiatives to make the healthy decision-making the easy choice;
- has a reputation as a healthy, active and inclusive city;
- is aiming to make Canberra Australia's most walkable city and an age-friendly city;
- envisages a world class, integrated transport system that supports a compact, sustainable and vibrant city;
- has a rapidly growing and ageing population; and
- must comply with the ACT's Discrimination Act 1991 and Human Rights Act 2004 and Commonwealth's *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA)* and *Age Discrimination Act 2004 (ADA)*.

More action is also needed to address the challenges of living with greater climate variability and increased temperatures.

## SPECIFIC COMMITMENTS NEEDED

to set ACT on its path to achieving  
its goals for climate, road safety, health and inclusion

### During the first year of the new government:

1. **Legislate a clear hierarchy of road users that has with walking\* top, riding second** (like UK's Highway Code):
  - a. prioritise the most healthy, vulnerable and climate-friendly modes
  - b. make it clear that those who can do the greatest harm have the greatest responsibility to reduce the danger they may pose to others.



### Why?

Most ACT streets and roads are designed and operate exactly the opposite to the best-practice hierarchy that will facilitate modal shift to lower emissions forms of transport. Our streets currently prioritise driving over walking, rolling, cycling, or using public transport. Their design makes it difficult to move about safely.

As well, our current laws are complex and confusing, with contradictions and gaps.

Clarifying priority will improve safety of vulnerable road users; flow of traffic in different modes; and planning, design, construction and maintenance of transport infrastructure and urban areas.

2. **Make safe, accessible and convenient for vulnerable road users all streets and crossings within 2 km\*\* walking distance of every school, shops, public transport stop and retirement village in the the ACT via:**
  - a. **convenient pedestrian priority crossings and footpaths on streets that have speed limits of 40km/h or higher**  
**or**
  - b. **30km/h speed limits for streets where there are no (or cannot be) paths on both sides or convenient pedestrian priority crossings connecting paths across streets.**  
**BUDGET SAVINGS!**

\*\* approximately a 30-minute walk

### Why?

Vulnerable road users (particularly children, older people and people with disability) should be separated from fast-moving traffic so they can walk or ride to school and other places safely - by separate infrastructure of people-safe speeds.

Streets that are regulated and designed for sharing at a maximum of 30 km/h travel speed save money because only one asset (the road surface) needs to be built and maintained: no construction or maintenance of paths and crossings is needed.

3. **Allocate - and spend - at least 20% of transport funding in ACT Budgets on active transport** (walking\*, wheeling, riding), in line with international best practice and reflecting the targets for mode share and extra work needed to shift Australia's transport infrastructure, systems and behaviour away from the current dominance of and preference for cars and trucks. This should include:
  - a. **Introduce policy and procedural changes for all transport budget, design and construction decisions to implement the transport hierarchy policy** (walking\* on top, instead of almost always lowest); for example, installing pedestrian crossings instead of pedestrian refuges.
  - b. **Change the accountability indicators in Budget Statements to reflect publicly-stated Government priorities and goals and ensure the indicators for active transport infrastructure match those for roads.** In particular, include concrete measures for:
    - i. the state of infrastructure for active transport, particularly community paths (eg 'Percentage of community paths in good condition')
    - ii. the availability and suitability of paths for active transport, and maintenance of the infrastructure for active transport (particularly community paths)
    - iii. satisfaction with the infrastructure for active transport (eg 'Percentage of customers satisfied with the community path network'). benchmarking and goals improving the wellbeing of every suburb (eg 'Percentage improvement in average walkscore for Canberra suburbs')

## Why?

Actions speak louder than words.

Governments demonstrate how serious they are about their commitments by how they make their decisions beyond the initial announcements and policy commitments. This is shown in Budget allocations, expenditures and reporting.

The commitments to reach net zero emissions (and other goals) therefore need to be reflected in other decisions, including Budgets.

- 4. Ensure that all systems and infrastructure for walking\* and public transport (including all streets, paths, crossings, and public transport stops) comply with all anti-discrimination laws and accessibility standards - with independent compliance verification.**

## Why?

Commonwealth and ACT anti-discrimination legislation and accessibility standards have not been routinely applied to ensure that all of our infrastructure and environments for active and public transport comply.

As a result, much of Australia's infrastructure for getting around without a car is inaccessible and/or inhospitable for people with disability, children, older people, and women. This is well documented, including on prime television.

- 5. Quickly upgrade all existing streets and roads to be safe, accessible, comfortable and convenient for everyone to use active travel - regardless of age, ability, gender, race, culture, or socioeconomic status. In particular:**
  - a. Alter all pedestrian signals at road intersections to:**
    - i. Eliminate 'beg buttons'. QUICK WIN!**
    - ii. Reduce waiting times** to less than 40 seconds
    - iii. Increase crossing times** by increasing walk signal duration so people who move more slowly can make it across the whole street safely and in one phase.
  - b. Introduce better infrastructure for and regulation and policing of micro-mobility devices so they are not left on paths – urgently, in the first 6 months of coming to government.**
  - c. Install safe, pedestrian-priority crossings at all places where people are likely to cross roads and driveways to change buses or walk between bus stops and schools, employment centres, shopping centres, and other destinations.**

## Why?

Some 25% of Australians do not have a driving licence (with estimates that up to 40% of Australians do not drive), so enabling active transport (like walking\*) and public transport to be easy and safe choices would enable them to travel autonomously and/or independently.

The unfolding climate emergency adds extra impetus for more people to use active and public transport: it can cut climate pollution further and faster than electrifying vehicles - and do so this decade - because the effects are seen immediately through reduced use of private motor vehicle travel.

This will only happen if we have infrastructure and information to address safety, convenience, comfort, and accessibility concerns that currently plague walking, wheeling, riding and using public transport.

All infrastructure and environments for active and public transport must be safe and accessible, not just some. The current approach of implementing slow and expensive changes in a few places is grossly inadequate.

Convenience leads to improved safety, accessibility and compliance. Altering all pedestrian signals to be more people-focused (not driving focused), means:

- people walking\* will have increased convenience because they will not have to press 'beg' button and miss crossing legally if they arrive too late
- reduced risk-taking by people walking\* and thus contribute to road safety and achieving the goals of Vision Zero and the ACT and Australian Road Safety Strategies
- improved accessibility for people with disabilities
- reduced infection transmission because numerous people will not touch 'beg buttons'

## 6. Set up a system to (a) audit at least every 2 yrs and (b) keep in good condition all infrastructure for walking, rolling and riding, including:

- a. an Asset Protection Scheme to keep paths useable** by encouraging building owners and people involved in the construction and demolition industries to keep pathways open (with new, temporary pathways as needed), to not damage paths and to require them to pay for any damage they incur. **BUDGET SAVINGS!**
- b. a publicly available map showing accessibility status of paths, work to be done, and status of repairs/upgrades needed.**

## Why?

The current system for maintenance is piecemeal, inefficient and widely regarded as haphazard.

It relies on reports from members of the public, placing an unfair burden on them.

It also places people at risk, particularly our most vulnerable people, who are most likely to use walking\* extensively for transport and exercise.

Issues with paths, crossings, lighting etc are dealt with separately, job by job. This results in repairs or upgrades that are adjacent or nearby being allocated and undertaken separately, instead of undertaking the work concurrently by making use of crews and equipment onsite at the same time - and saving money, time and greenhouse gases.

This is very inefficient for members of the public, for the staff processing reports and jobs, for people and contractors undertaking the work (with all the pollution involved in repeated travel to the same streets) and for the ACT's Budget.

Systematic assessment of infrastructure for walking every two years would bring the ACT up to the standard of other councils. (They also respond to ad hoc reports.) Technology can help assess and maintain path assets and improve efficiency and effectiveness in asset management activities.

The rest of Australia has schemes to help ensure that, during demolition and construction works, pathways are maintained, and public assets and infrastructure are not damaged. In contrast, path users in ACT are inconvenienced and put in danger (often for years) and the ACT government organises and pays for repairs.

A publicly available status map would aid accountability and help people plan their trips to avoid surprises.

## Over the 2024-28 term:

7. **Set 30 km/h as the evidence-based maximum default safe speed for most streets in built-up areas:**
  - a. Legislate 30 km/h as the default speed limit in built-up areas.
  - b. Commit to design and adapt streets to help people travel no faster than 30 km/h.
  - c. Establish a process to decide which streets or roads have a clear evidence-based \*need\* for motorised traffic to travel faster than 30 km/h and to ensure that those streets and roads are sign-posted accordingly and have convenient and fully accessible pedestrian-priority crossings joining footpaths on both sides of streets.

### Why?

Safe streets are vital for everyone to travel safely, regardless of transport mode.

Safe speeds and safe infrastructure (which are vital for the safe speeds and personal safety of active transport users) are key parts of the Safe System Approach to road safety used in Australia and key influencers of a large part of the demand for acute and chronic health services.

Streets with speed limits above 30 km/h but without paths on both sides and convenient (prioritised) crossings are not considered safe under the Safe System Approach - which means most of our streets are not safe.

The evidence is clear that potential impact speeds must be no greater than 30 km/h for healthy, robust adults (lower speeds for children and other adults). If a robust adult is hit by a vehicle at 30 km/h, they have a 10% chance of death, at 40 km/h it is 30%, and at 50 km/h, it is 80%. These risks apply at lower speeds for children and less-than-robust adults.

People respond to the environment in which they are moving. Currently, our streets and roads are giving them visual and physical cues that they are for driving fast. What we need are streets designed and regulated to cue drivers to drive at the appropriate speed.

There is a mountain of evidence and a global move (now led by WHO) for 30 km/h as the evidence-based maximum default safe speed on most streets, with higher speeds on selected streets

with separated paths and priority crossings for people walking, rolling and cycling. There is a substantive body of standards, guides and case studies to achieve it.

**8. Require that all ACT transport-related works and systems are independently verified to comply with Austroads guides, Australian Standards or global best practice guidelines (such as NACTO Design Guides) relevant to urban areas.**

**Why?**

Despite a substantive body of standards and guides to make our streets safe, healthy, active and inclusive, much of our transport infrastructure works and systems do not comply.

Our transport-related works and systems need to be made, maintained and retrofitted in compliance with best practice guides and standards to bring them up to scratch so that they are safe, accessible, and attractive for everyone to be able to choose to use active and public transport more often. Independent checking and certification is essential for this.

**9. Before 2026 require ACT regulators and transport designers, builders and maintainers to use active travel infrastructure of various types and locations at least once per month (and with people of differing abilities and ages) to help them understand how it works and how details matter.**

**Why?**

Experience is the greatest teacher.

**10. Extend the new system of auditing and maintaining all infrastructure for walking, wheeling and riding in good condition (item 5) to the rest of the ACT, including:**

- a. Developing a revised system for undertaking maintenance as required, so that maintenance is more timely and close-by maintenance already registered for work is undertaken at the same time even if not on the original maintenance specification.
- b. Legislating that from 2028 onwards at least 90% (at any time) of cycle lanes, shared paths and footpaths be maintained in good condition and are compliant with anti-discrimination laws.
- c. Allocate continuous funding to achieve these goals.

**Why?**

*All* our infrastructure for walking, wheeling and riding needs to be maintained so that it is safe, accessible and fit for purpose for everyone to use at any time.

**11. Develop and implement (with the community and construction and transport industries) campaigns to ensure that people can walk safely and conveniently on paths and off streets and to take away the social licence of parking on verges. This should target:**

- a. Parking across paths
- b. Placement of fences, gates, signs, fences, skips etc across paths without safe (and perceived to be safe), accessible and convenient alternatives
- c. Builders and construction projects occupying paths with project, fences and/or signs without providing safe and convenient access to path users at the same location
- d. Actively promoting the legal responsibilities and desirable behaviour of about people's responsibilities for (and the benefits of) keeping off verges and median strips
- e. Allocating 0.25 Ranger to randomly inspect verges for parking on verges and respond to community complaints about such parking.
- f. Educating people about how parking on nature strips damages trees, is unsightly and creates line-of-sight hazards.
- g. Creating a culture that it is not 'cool' to park on road verges and median strips.

### Why?

Safety, accessibility, convenience, comfort, and aesthetics play an important role in walking, wheeling and being outside.

Pathways need to be kept clear to be safe, accessible and convenient.

Trees and other vegetation provide shelter and amenity.

Extreme weather is worsening in our warming climate. Its consequences can both affect people's ability to be outside and active (because it is less desirable and less healthy) and disrupt transport infrastructure and systems. Trees provide shade and shelter and reduce heat.

Air and water access to roots is vital for healthy trees. Parking on verges and median strips is not only illegal but it compresses the soil, making it hard for water to infiltrate and plant roots to have air.

A community campaign and enforcement of the law could take away the social licence for parking on verges and median strips.

## **12. Implement pedestrian detection technology at traffic lights** (as used in Queensland and Victoria) to detect pedestrians automatically and adjust signal timing for people walking (shorter waiting times and longer time to cross the road).

### Why?

ACT should join other jurisdictions with automatically prioritising pedestrians at traffic lights. Such systems help optimise the flow and safety of people walking, wheeling and riding and in motor vehicles. For example, many pedestrian signals at consistently busy intersections in Victoria and Queensland now have detectors where pedestrians cross. The detectors modify the traffic signal timings to give more time to slower moving pedestrians and, if the pedestrians cross quickly, returns promptly to a green light for vehicles.

### **13. Ensure that transport expenditure is focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.**

#### **Why?**

Actions speak louder than words. Budget allocations and expenditures demonstrate how serious governments are about their announcements and policies.

Most of ACT's transport budget and expenditure is currently on roads, with very little invested in people-powered (active) transport.

Our transport expenditure affects our transport choices and they affect:

- climate and environmental outcomes
- the liveability and sustainability of our urban areas in particular
- budgets at personal, business/organisation and government level
- the health and lifespan of humans and other species.

The fastest way to improve all these is to move more people and freight by active and public transport. We can cut climate-damaging emissions from transport by more than 50% by 2030 - if we prioritise modal shift to active and public transport.

Expenditure should reflect the urgency and size of the changes needed to reduce emissions and achieve the co-benefits from modal shift.