QTON No. 01

Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory
Select Committee on the Fiscal Sustainability of the ACT

Inquiry into Fiscal Sustainability of the ACT

Answer to question taken on notice

Asked by: Ms Jo Clay MLA

Addressed to: Ms Ashlee Berry, Property Council of Australia, ACT and Capital Region Division.

In relation to: Comparative Infrastructure Costs

Hearing: 03 March 2026
Uncorrected Proof Transcript pp 21-22
Transcript provided: 10 March 2026
Answer Due: 24 March 2026

Ms Berry took on notice the following question(s):

Ms Berry: I think, I will answer that. One of the points that I really want to make is that if we just stopped all infrastructure, other than health or education, that would be a really dangerous thing for the territory. And so that would be – and it would be terrible in the sense of it would impact workforces. It would impact certainty and investor confidence here in the territory. And it would also delay all of these infrastructure projects that we have been talking about for many years. It would just push them further and further down the track.

So I think that is one of the key risks from our perspective, that we know what the state of the budget is. And we need to look at what are we getting value for money on? What is actually needed now? What could potentially be done in stages? But a real risk is just stopping everything. I think that would be – that would be catastrophic for the territory, and we certainly would not support that.

In terms of the current priorities, we need to be delivering infrastructure, a, that is needed by the territory; but also b, is going to have – or generate a return on investment. And so things like the Convention Centre, from our perspective, is something that will continue to generate economic activity. It will bring people to Canberra. And that is a good thing.

Potentially one of the things that could be done is looking at the scale and the size of the Convention Centre. But I also think it is risky if we start value engineering everything down just to try and save a buck now. I think that is really risky if we are trying to save money now and then need to spend more later. We need to look at it from a holistic perspective of what are we going to need in the long term? What is the most efficient way to get there?

And we see investors and developers do this with projects all the time when they deliver things in stages. And sometimes that is just what is needed in order to have a little bit of that capital investment now, a little bit in the future, but not jeopardise the integrity or the ability of the project to actually deliver. So that is on the Convention Centre.

I think we should be looking at all of our infrastructure projects though across the board as part of this process and determining, how we getting value for money? Are our workforces productive? And that is both in and out of government. And if they are not being productive, then why? And sometimes that can be, we are not productive because of design changes, or we are not productive because we are still waiting for approvals to come through.

We need to look at that process. But we need to still keep generating buildings. We need – you know, we need health infrastructure. We need to make sure that we have sufficient schools. We should also be looking at not cutting maintenance or things like that. That is actually really risky if we start doing that. And so whilst we—

THE CHAIR: It is a high-cost decision in future, is it not?

Ms Berry: Correct. So whilst we absolutely need to be frugal, we need to be looking at what we are spending money on. Simply saying, we are not going to spend anything on any infrastructure would be catastrophic.

THE CHAIR: I might just test you to see if you know any source of information we have not seen. Saul Eslake gave us a little bit of comparative information on value for money for our health spend, our education spend. But we do not really have a lot of information about whether the ACT is getting good value for money on our capital spend. Do you know any source of information on that?

Ms Berry: I am happy to take that on notice and see if I can—

THE CHAIR: Take it on notice. If you think of something, get back to us.

Ms Berry: Correct.

THE CHAIR: And if you do not, that is okay.

Ms Berry: Anecdotally we often hear that infrastructure and construction prices are higher in the territory. But in terms of sources for that and doing a comparison – but I will – I will see if there is anything that can provide some evidence on that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms Ashlee Berry, Property Council of Australia, ACT The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

While there is clear data on how much state, territory and the Federal government spend on infrastructure across Australia, there is very limited information on whether there is value for money in that expenditure.

Infrastructure Partnerships Australia publish information annually which does provide the ability for a comparison between capital allocations, per-capita infrastructure investments, as well as the pipeline stability and maturity. The information is published on the website infrastructure.org.au although some is available to members only.

Other information on pure expenditure would be available from the ABS or Infrastructure Australia.

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on the Fiscal Sustainability of the ACT

Signature: Date: 4 May 2026

Ashlee Berry

ACT & Capital Region Executive Director