



ACT Endurance Riders Association Inc
PO Box 852
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Australia

**SUBMISSION
to**

**FINAL DRAFT VARIATION TO THE TERRITORY PLAN # 281
MOLONGLO AND NORTH WESTON**

Introduction

The ACT Endurance Riders Association (ACTERA) was established almost 25 years ago to organise local endurance horse rides under the auspices of the NSW and Australian Endurance Riders Associations.

The ACTERA is affiliated with the ACT Equestrian Association but represents a particular point of view which we feel warrants a separate submission on the proposed development at Molonglo and its effect on our riders.

ACTERA aims to promote the sport of endurance horse riding in the Australian Capital Territory and its surrounding districts and to promote further public interest in the sport. We hold one or more endurance rides each year and hold other programs for public interest and education in the sport such as seminars, training rides and social rides.

Endurance riding is an international equestrian sport at which Australian horses and riders excel. Australian teams have won gold, silver and bronze at World Endurance Championships in recent years, including both the open and junior competitions.

The ACT and its surrounds have thrown up a number of very competitive endurance riders and horses, as well as many who simply enjoy completing rides. The minimum length for an affiliated endurance ride is 80kms, with single day rides of up to 160 kms being held.

The 160 kms Australian Championships held under Federation Equestrian Internationale rules were held several times in the ACT, most recently in 2003. The ride was based at Equestrian Park in Curtin with the five “leg” course running through the Stromlo Forest both east and west of the Tuggeranong Parkway.

ACTERA continues to regularly hold endurance rides, although unusual factors such as the bushfires, drought and most recently the equine influenza outbreak has forced cancellation of some rides.

Our next scheduled ride is on September 13 2008 with another planned for Australia Day 2009.

In recent years a number of our rides have been based at Equestrian Park and have used the excellent horse riding trails which exist in the ACT. These include the trails through Stromlo Forest/Molonglo and the Bicentennial National Trail.

Canberra is the only Australian city that the Trail actually traverses rather than circumnavigates. The BNT route from Belconnen passes through the Cork Oak Forest and circumnavigates the Canberra International Arboretum to Equestrian Park Curtin campsite. From there it crosses the Molonglo and continues through the proposed suburbs of Coombs and Wright to Stromlo Forest Park and then south to Tharwa via Kambah.

With development of the Stromlo Forest Park, ACTERA now has the prospect of holding rides using a base in Stromlo Forest Park. However, given the distance that must be travelled (minimum 80kms), a ride based in Stromlo would still need to access other trails, such as the BNT leading north and south.

The Bicentennial National Trail is within the proposed development area. It is essential for endurance riding that a safe route which is able to be ridden at speed is available linking Equestrian Park to Stromlo Forest Park, and linking Stromlo Forest Park with the BNT.

Contrary to ACTPLA’s claim that “the Bicentennial National Trail is not within the proposed development area”, the proposed development would cover a significant section of the Trail and make it impossible for anyone using the trail to ride safely through Canberra or access the camping facilities at Equestrian Park Curtin. This includes recreational riders, endurance riders in training and endurance riders competing in events.

Why support endurance riders?

Endurance riding is a very “Australian” sport. It reflects the history of Australia, of bushmen and stockmen riding their tough horses long distances. The sport has gathered a lot of international support and there is momentum for it to be made part of the Olympic Equestrian events.

At the elite level, ACT endurance riders surely deserve some support from the ACT Government. We do not receive funding, but we do ask for access to trails where we can train and run events.

At another level, endurance riding deserves support because it is a sport for everyone. Endurance is a sport in which riders of different levels can take part and gain great satisfaction. The motto of Australian endurance is “to complete is to win”.

COMPLETE means to finish the ride with a horse that is judged to be “fit to continue”, by the controlling vets. The rides are held as races but every person who completes receives a prize in honour of this motto.

People of all ages take part in endurance riding – Australia wide, competitors aged from 7 to 80 ride over the same courses. In the ACT, our training ride in 2007 had riders as young as 4 and as old as 67. Age is not a barrier, nor is sex; men and women compete as equals, according to their weight divisions.

This is a time when governments should be encouraging and facilitating physical activity among people of all ages, not closing off options for people who want to get out in the fresh air and enjoy a bond with their partner, their horse.

Of all the equestrian sports, endurance promotes horse welfare – as the rides are run under strict veterinary supervisions and rules – good horse management and respect between rider and horse. It is a sport which is about performance, not appearance.

The rise in petrol prices has made it harder for endurance riders to take part in their sport. It is important for local riders that we are able to continue holding our local events. As stated, this can only occur if we have access to appropriate trails.

The ACT is a heartland for many sports. It would be a terrible loss to our community if equestrian sports were overlooked while many other sports were promoted.

Access to trails in Molonglo

Endurance riders from all over Canberra will ride their horses to Stromlo/Molonglo for training because of the excellent trails. They use the open space system, the multiple use fire trails and the verges of Cotter Road and Streeton Drive to travel between these destinations. In addition riders travel to and from the government paddocks at Cook and agistment areas along Drake Brockman Drive.

The Structure Plan for Molonglo and North Canberra states:

Horse trails are to be incorporated into the development. The trails shall link to existing equestrian facilities including the National Horse Trail, the Pegasus Disabled Riding School, Forest Park Riding School, the public Equestrian Park in Yarralumla, pony clubs and agistment facilities. The trails shall also connect to recreation trails in the International Arboretum and Stromlo Park.

ACTERA believes this principle must be acted on, and that these links should be built into the planning of the housing development at Molonglo now – not as an afterthought.

We submit to you that the Variation to the territory plan must recognise that equestrians are major users of the open space system in the Weston Creek area and that access and facilities for them must be included in any new developments.

This recognition must take the form of clear maps showing the current trails and the proposed trails through the housing development.

As more and more land along the Molonglo River is surrendered to development it is important to the equestrian community that an integrated plan be developed to allow their continued use of existing connecting infrastructure such as causeways, bridges and underpasses. To date this has been a site-by-site battle with planning and development agencies.

The revised Concept Plans for Wright and Coombs detail link roads between the suburbs and Stromlo Forest Park but no arrangement for linkages for equestrians who are major users of Stromlo.

ACTERA does not require trails that are solely reserved for horses but trails must be wide enough to be safe to use during an event when endurance horses will be travelling at 20 kph or more ON AVERAGE and up to 40 kph on sections.

We submit that the Draft Variation should explicitly guarantee safe recreation corridors for horse riders connecting Equestrian Park, Curtin, to the Bicentennial National Trail, Equestrian Park Curtin to Stromlo Forest Park, Stromlo Forest Park north and south to the Bicentennial National Trail and Stromlo Forest Park to the Canberra International Arboretum,

Equestrian Safety

The development of the suburbs of Wright and Coombs will inevitably result in an increase in traffic. There are also plans for ACT Roads to stabilise the shoulders of the Cotter Road between the Parkway and Streeton Drive to allow on-road cyclists to travel more easily (and speedily) to Stromlo Forest Park.

Horse riders should be given the same – or greater – provision for safe crossing as cyclists as the potential for an accident with a horse, is greater.

All these changes will potentially increase the danger to equestrian users including endurance riders both in training and while competing in events.

The north-south arterial planned to bisect the development will be a four-lane traffic-way entirely uncrossable by equestrians. Cotter Rd is currently manageable for horse riders but the increased traffic will make this increasingly difficult.

Conclusion

Endurance riding in the ACT will suffer greatly if the proposed development in Molonglo goes ahead without sufficient consideration being given to safe equestrian trails.

Endurance riding is a popular sport for Canberrans of all ages, which should be encouraged. The ACTERA urges the Act Government and Planning Authority to consult closely with the ACT Equestrian Association on changes to the proposed developments to take account of our concerns and ensure that the national capital can again become a national centre for this great sport.

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ACTERA PRESIDENT