

 ACT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE OFFICE	
EXHIBIT	1
DATE RECEIVED	15 / 15 / 07
INQUIRY	ACTION BUSES

Seniors Transport Needs Survey



Purpose

To collect information about the transport needs of older Canberrans now and into the future.

Respondents were asked to answer the following questions:

1. Describe the nature of your transport problem, complaint or issue;
2. How does this problem affect or limit you?
3. What do you think could/should be done about it?

Respondents included older Canberrans, transport service providers, advocacy providers, and other providers of services to older Canberrans.

Target demographic

Older Canberra residents who currently use a range of transport modes.

Responses

There were over 200 responses to the surveys which were completed during the period 1 August 2006 to 31 December 2006.

Frequency of Buses (ACTION)

Issues Identified

- 80% of all respondents identified that they catch buses
- 60 minute delay between buses on weekends causing extensive waiting periods (prior to implementation of new bus timetable)
- 40 minutes waits between buses on week days
- Lack of bus services at night in all suburbs
- and all of them identified that it is tiresome and wearying to have to wait for long periods of time to catch buses. This is exacerbated by the fact that they are outside exposed to the elements.

Impact on Seniors

- All found it timesome and wearying to have to wait for long periods of time to catch buses. This is exacerbated by the fact that they are outside exposed to the elements.

- With recent cut backs at night services, 50% of respondents expressed difficulties in obtaining a bus in the evening to get home from social groups, especially when two bus trips are required.
- 46% of respondents reported that infrequent services discourage senior from taking ACTION buses, noting that ACTION is trying to attract senior users to their service.
- Many reported that it is too difficult to maintain social life, or attend to basic necessities such as shopping or attending medical appointments if it meant obtaining connecting buses as it could take all day for a return trip due to the frequency of buses and their timetables not connecting adequately. This was particularly evident with people reporting problems attending the eye hospital at Symondston and The Canberra Hospital.
- We were also informed that seniors concessional fares are only available outside of peak hours, but that it was not possible to only travel outside of peak hours to attend to medical appointments, especially when interconnecting bus routes were required.
- Some respondents also informed us that they needed to compete with school children and people traveling to work on peak hour buses and that with their advanced levels of frailty, it was just too hard to catch peak hour buses.

Bus Routes (ACTION)

Issues Identified

- All respondents who catch buses indicated that they have problems with the ACTION bus routes. They have stated that there are many bus routes that only cover small portions of the suburb they are servicing, and passengers had to take two buses to travel to a neighbouring suburb.
- The current bus schedule requires two buses to get to neighbouring suburbs.
- Many seniors need to travel to destinations within their own suburb but are not able to walk. They find that bus routes only cover a small portion of their suburb.
- Respondents claim a lack of bus services to many suburbs (no bus goes to Hall and many of the new Gungahlin suburbs.)

- 17% of respondents expressed concern that there are no ACTION bus services to and from the Airport
- 11% of respondents reported that train travel is a relatively inexpensive, safe and reliable transport option but insufficient ACTION buses have made train travel exceedingly difficult. Many seniors use the train to travel to Sydney but there is only a single bus to and from the railway station, with a one hour wait between services, even on weekdays.

Impact on Seniors

- Many seniors have to make long trips on foot to bus stops, which is very difficult especially with there is limited mobility or a person has a walker or wheelchair.
- People have to spend considerable time traveling minimal distances
- Adverse impact upon health, anxiety and perception of the value of ACTION.

Bus Shelters

Issues Identified

- No bus shelters in newer, northern suburbs, especially Gungahlin.
- Poor maintenance of bus shelters, bad graffiti and shelters falling apart.
- Bus shelters that do exist are at low volume and unused stops.

Impact upon Seniors

- 12% of respondents identified that there are very few bus shelters on many routes. This is of concern as they are outside exposed to the elements for long periods of time.
- 23% of respondents identified that there is a lack of bus shelters to protect passengers from the elements – this is of particular concern as in newer suburbs there are no established trees to provide shade or shelter.
- 9% of respondents expressed concern over the maintenance of bus shelters and provided details such as graffiti, crumbling structures.
- Graffiti is offensive and the crumbling structure made them hesitant to use the shelters.

Condition of Pathways

15% of respondents have express concern over the condition of footpaths and pavement.

Issues Identified

- State of pathways to and from bus shelters in poor condition
- State of waiting platforms (at bus stops) in poor condition
- Not many bus shelters have paved access, people have to walk across uneven grass and rocky ground.

Impact on Seniors

The condition of footpaths is a crucial issue for some older people as their motor skills and eyesight have deteriorated, and they have difficulty dealing with any form of challenging terrain.

Respondents reported that the poor condition of some pathways made it difficult for them to leave their homes and have a more socially oriented life.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Government prioritize its footpath repair program by identifying those suburbs with the highest concentrations of older people and then giving priority to rectifying unsafe footpaths in areas which lead to the more obvious bus stops utilized by older people. This could be near retirement villages, older persons units, seniors clubs etc. Equally, the seniors and community groups and organisations such as COTA would be able to assist with identifying those areas which should be considered for priority treatment.

Recommendation

MACA is aware that many seniors who might have driven a car all their life, do not understand how the ACTION bus service operates or how to catch a bus. Once they are unable to drive, and have no other support network, and are unable to access adequate public transport, they quickly become socially isolated and do not receive the medical treatments that they require. This then leads to become a major social and health issues for them and which has a significant impact upon the wider community, and especially the health system and the need for additional community services to be made available. This can also lead to older people feeling despair and having depression and necessitate premature admission to residential aged care.

MACA is of the opinion that whilst it might be possible to fix some of the timetabling issues identified in our survey, that most of the issues are specific to

older people and that a more tailored alternative mode of transport for the frail and elderly might be more appropriate. Our present thoughts are that it would be more efficient, and provide a higher quality of service to the elderly, if some of the resources were diverted from public transport to community transport scheme for the elderly.