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PO Box 1489
Queanbeyan NSW 2620

The Secretary
Select Committee on Regional Development
GPO Box 1020
Canberra City ACT 2601
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Dear Madam/Sir

This submission is made on behalf of the Queanbeyan-Monaro Greens. Our submission focuses on transport. This is a matter of interest to our members and for the past five years we have taken many opportunities to raise the matter with local and NSW authorities and elected representatives. Despite the establishment of a cross-border transport forum three years ago there has been little progress. We welcome this inquiry by the ACT Legislative Assembly and hope it will assist with improving coordination of transport policy and service delivery between the ACT and adjoining communities in NSW.

Scope of issue

Queanbeyan City's resident population has grown from 38,000 in 2008 to around 42,000 in 2012. It is projected to grow to 68,000 by the year 2031 (according to the city council's population forecasts published on the council's website). Around half of this growth is to be accommodated in greenfields sites at Googong and Jerrabomberra Valley; the balance is to be accommodated by infill housing.

Thousands of Queanbeyan City residents travel to the ACT daily for work, study, medical appointments, shopping, and recreation and leisure activities. People from the ACT also travel to Queanbeyan for the same purposes.

Currently, most of this travel is undertaken by private motorcar. A small proportion of people use the Queanbeyan bus service, provided by Deanes Transit Group, travel by bicycle or car share. The increase in residential population that Queanbeyan has experienced in the past several years, coupled with the growth of rural-residential and village populations has lead to an increase in the volume of vehicular traffic, most notably in peak travel periods. The peak period has also lengthened. The result is increased traffic congestion, delays and frustration.

Queanbeyan's bus service is not, in our view, adequate or the ticket prices sufficiently attractive, to encourage a substantial increase in patronage. There is only one express morning service from Queanbeyan CBD to Civic, and six regular services between departing Queanbeyan for Civic between 6:15 am – 9 am. Services to Woden are of similar frequency and no express service. In

our personal experience, while patronage has increased in recent years, many services still travel with a lot of empty seats. The price of travelling from Queanbeyan to Civic, for example is about three times the cost of a journey on ACTION using a MyWay card, or twice the cost of a cash fare. The fare disparity is obvious when one notes that ACT residents (including people living in Oaks Estate) travel on Deanes services at ACT bus prices.

The high price, coupled with the limited service (both in respect of frequency and routes) is insufficient to attract most people who have the option of private vehicle travel. The poor bus service is a particular problem for people travelling late of an evening or on weekends. This largely affects people unable to drive, for a variety of reasons including medical conditions, disability or age, and people on low incomes, further adding to their social isolation and disadvantage.

Queanbeyan City transport policy

Queanbeyan City Council's response to increasing traffic volumes has been inadequate, in our view. In 2009, the Council determined to undertake a number of road projects to accommodate projected traffic volumes. One of the critical assumptions of the commissioned study upon which the Council relied was that there would be no change to the modal shares, that is, most people would continue to rely on private vehicles. However, the Council also acknowledged concerns raised by several groups, including our own, about the need to develop a sustainable, integrated transport plan for the city. Council adopted a resolution to prepare such a plan but never acted on this resolution. Currently, development of such a plan is slated for 2017, according to the Queanbeyan Community Climate Change Action Plan. This is well beyond the time that Googong will be filling with residents, and after the timeline for constructing the Ellerton Drive Extension. What use will a study be in 2017 when a major investment has been made in a roadway that locks people into car dependence for commuter travel?

The extension of Edwin Land Parkway resulted in the loss of an area of endangered ecological community (grassy box gum woodland). The Ellerton Drive Extension, in our view, will cause unacceptable environmental impacts to a regionally and locally significant wildlife corridor and critical part of Queanbeyan's green belt. The Ellerton Drive Extension, if it proceeds, would also funnel traffic into Yass Rd and Pialligo Avenue, adding to congestion on that major ACT commuter route.

Queanbeyan City Council has taken little to no interest in improving sustainable transport planning or services. Despite undertakings in the Queanbeyan Community Climate Change Action Plan to advocate for better public transport services, Council has not done so, as confirmed in response to questions lodged at the February 2013 Public Forum.

ACT transport policy

In contrast, the ACT Government is actively promoting sustainable transport by increasing the cost of car parking in Civic and town centres, introducing express bus services (the Rapid series), and constructing park and ride facilities for cars and bicycles. The two cities' policies are working at odds with each other. Without an improvement in public bus services, most Queanbeyan commuters will continue to rely on private vehicles, undermining the ACT Government's policy objectives of reducing vehicle trips in peak periods. Under existing policy settings, this problem will grow with the increase in Queanbeyan City's population. It will also be difficult to encourage more ACT residents to use public transport for commuter journeys to

Queanbeyan. Therefore, it is in the ACT Government's interests to work for better integration of cross-border transport planning and service delivery.

One option to do this is for the ACT and NSW Governments to reach agreement for the ACT to provide a commuter service in Queanbeyan City. This could be done on a similar basis to payment of a fee for treatment of NSW patients in Canberra hospitals. Currently, the NSW Government requires Deanes Transit Group to provide a commuter service as part of its contract but previous owners of Deanes told us that the commuter service does not generate a profit. Removing this requirement from Deanes' contract, and adjusting the contract fee accordingly, would provide funds for the NSW Government to redirect to paying the ACT Government to help cover the costs of extending the 200 Service to Queanbeyan CBD. A second service could operate from Queanbeyan CBD through Karabar (picking up Googong 'park and ride' passengers), on to Jerrabomberra and then to Woden, where passengers could pick up the 300 Service to travel north or south. There is little expectation of a private bus service operating from Googong to Queanbeyan in the early years of the township's development because of the low population but the new residents will, nevertheless, increase traffic volumes on Queanbeyan and ACT roads in peak travel times without a viable alternative travel option.

Some of our members are regular users of the Red Rapid (200) Service from Fyshwick, having combined cycling and bus travel on this route for more than two years. These members have noticed a steady increase in the number of Queanbeyan City residents using the 200 service, some combining with a cycling trip but most driving to the DFO and using the associated car parking facilities. Some bus users also park their bicycles in the DFO facilities. Some people even walk from Queanbeyan to the DFO to use the 200 bus service. This increased patronage demonstrates that people will use a bus service that meets their needs and is well priced. It is possible that extending the bus service through to Queanbeyan would pose no additional cost burden on ACTION, or only a small marginal cost, because there would likely be strong revenue from high patronage. We suggest the committee draw on the MyWay travel data to get a better understanding of how many passengers are travelling to/from the DFO terminus.

We are aware that the idea of ACTION operating in NSW was discussed through the cross-border transport forum several years ago but that little progress was made. We understand that ACTION buses are currently prohibited from operating in NSW but we have been unable to ascertain the nature of the obstacle. We lodged questions about this, and a number of related public transport matters including requirements of the Deanes contract, with the Member for Monaro, John Barilaro, in December 2012 but as yet have not received a response. The committee may have more success in discovering the nature of the problem and how it might be overcome.

The provision of bus services to Queanbeyan by ACTION offers a particular benefit of providing seamless travel. Currently, people using ACTION and Deanes services for a single journey have to negotiate two different bus systems, routes, timetables and fare structures. Extending ACTION operations to Queanbeyan would also provide a benefit to ACT residents travelling to Queanbeyan and likely encourage more ACT residents to choose bus travel over a car journey.

Cross-border transport forum

The cross-border transport forum, known as the Eastern Regional Transport Taskforce, was established in March 2010. As far as we can see, nothing of substance has emerged from this forum in three years. When questioned about progress on public transport matters, Queanbeyan

Mayor Tim Overall frequently responds that the topic is discussed during his regular meetings with the ACT Chief Minister. Clearly, neither of these avenues is delivering the breakthroughs required to put cross-border transport planning and services on a sustainable footing.

In addition, there seems to be a lack of coordination between planning for Canberra and Queanbeyan's projected growth. For example, QCC is proposing major road investments without reference to the ACT's Eastern Broadacre strategy and the proposed town centre of Kowen. Failure to better coordinate planning will lead to a waste of public and private infrastructure investment, poor outcomes, and inability to achieve policy objectives in the case of increasing the proportion of trips taken by bus, cycling, walking or a combination of these modes of transport.

Other regional transport issues

While our submission has focused primarily on issues affecting Queanbeyan City, we are aware of other regional transport matters that require attention. These include:

- The increasing number of commuters from Goulburn, Bungendore and Cooma to Canberra, some travelling through Queanbeyan. There is no commuter rail service for these people. The NSW Government has decommissioned the Cooma line. The CountryLink coach service to Cooma is not a commuter service (arriving in Canberra mid-morning). Any high-speed rail service is a generation away, according to the latest report from the Federal Government (issued 11 April 2013). We would like to see a feasibility study into provision of a commuter rail service from Goulburn through to Kingston to reduce reliance on private cars. The train service would meet the 200 bus service.
- A similar trend of people moving to Yass for more affordable housing raised another regional transport issue that needs attention. Deanes provides a service from Yass but it is infrequent and expensive. There are no evening or weekend services. While extending ACTION services to Yass is not as obviously attractive as extending them to Queanbeyan (greater distance of travel, smaller pool of potential passengers, and fewer people travelling out from Canberra to Yass), there may be an alternative solution through a jointly-subsidised service that is more responsive to community demand. A particular benefit for the ACT and NSW governments would be a reduction in costs of highway maintenance, as well as reduced risk of traffic accidents with associated costs.
- Heavy car traffic through Queanbeyan City and from north of the ACT through Bungendore is associated with the Headquarters Joint Operation Command (HQJOC). When the HQJOC was proposed, the Queanbeyan-Monaro Greens recommended to the federal parliamentary inquiry that Defence explore the possibility of providing transport services to the facility. While we understand the centre operates 24 hours a day, there must be potential to provide bus transport from centres in Canberra and Queanbeyan, and possibly Bungendore, to reduce some of the single car trips.
- Provision of sustainable transport services for smaller towns and villages surrounding the ACT is also a problem, particularly for ageing residents. This is a significant issue because the ACT is the major centre for many services, in particular health, in south-east NSW. This issue is not a subject we have studied in detail but we urge the committee to explore how comparable countries with small populations spread across large distances have addressed the problem. There may be lessons from Canada, for example. We understand a study was developed through the Sustaining Our Towns project several years ago looking at this matter in south-east NSW but to our knowledge the report was never published.

Recommendations

We recommend the ACT Government:

1. Initiate discussions with the NSW Government and Queanbeyan City Council about the possibility of extending ACTION bus services to Queanbeyan.
2. Initiate discussions with the NSW Government and Yass Valley Council about alternative public transport options to the existing expensive private bus service.
3. Initiate discussions with the NSW Government about jointly-funding a feasibility study into a commuter rail service from Goulburn to Kingston.
4. Initiate discussions with the Department of Defence and the NSW Government about alternative travel options for Defence staff working at HQJOC.
5. Initiate discussions with the NSW Government about alternative travel options for people living in small towns and villages surrounding the ACT.

Yours sincerely

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