Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the effectiveness of Fix My Street

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Submission to the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services

An Inquiry into the Effectiveness of the Fix My Street Service

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Content

1.0 Introduction: The Promise and the Reality of Fix My Street

1.1 Purpose of the Submission

This document is submitted for the consideration of the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services as part of its "Inquiry into the effectiveness of Fix My Street".[1] The inquiry, initiated on 30 May 2025 following community concerns and advocacy from members of the Legislative Assembly, presents a critical opportunity to examine a key piece of public-facing digital infrastructure.[1] This submission aims to provide a comprehensive, evidence-based analysis of the Fix My Street (FMS) service, operated by the Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) Directorate. It synthesises publicly available government data, official TCCS reports, and an extensive collection of documented citizen feedback from news media and public forums spanning the period of 2022 to 2025. The objective is to evaluate the platform's performance against its core purpose and provide actionable recommendations for its improvement.

1.2 The Role of Citizen Reporting in a Modern Canberra

In a contemporary, digitally-enabled city, platforms like Fix My Street are not merely convenient tools; they are essential components of civic infrastructure. They represent a modern social contract, enabling a collaborative relationship between citizens and the government directorates that serve them. By providing a direct channel for residents to report faults—from dangerous potholes and broken streetlights to overgrown grass and graffiti—these

systems empower the community to act as the eyes and ears of the city. As noted by the ACT Shadow Minister for City Services, James Milligan MLA, the high volume of requests lodged through FMS demonstrates that "people are willing to lean in and help the Government to achieve these goals" of a well-maintained, safe, and accessible city.[3] In principle, the FMS portal should facilitate this civic engagement, channelling citizen-generated data into a proactive, efficient, and responsive municipal maintenance program managed by TCCS.[4]

1.3 Central Thesis

This submission will argue that while Fix My Street is a conceptually sound and necessary tool for a modern Canberra, its implementation is beset by critical and systemic failures across its user interface, back-end processes, and communication protocols. These deficiencies have created a profound and damaging disconnect between the ACT Government's official narrative of improvement and the lived reality of its users. The evidence presented will demonstrate that the portal, for a significant portion of its users and use cases, is not functioning as a reliable service delivery mechanism. Instead, it often operates as a digital "black hole," where citizen reports disappear without action, communication, or resolution. The result is not merely a dysfunctional website, but an erosion of public trust, the creation of tangible safety risks, a quantifiable financial burden on both citizens and the government, and a visible degradation of Canberra's public amenity. The platform, intended to be a conduit for solutions, has for many become a symbol of frustration and neglect, leading to the widely held public perception that the system is, as one user bluntly stated, "pretty much useless".[4]

2.0 Is the Online Tool Fulfilling Its Intended Purpose?

2.1 Defining the Intended Purpose

The intended purpose of the Fix My Street portal, as defined by the ACT Government and TCCS, is to provide an online tool that "lets you report an issue to City Services for attention".[5] The scope of reportable issues is broad, covering community and cycle paths, grass, trees, roads, parks, public spaces, stormwater systems, and streetlights.[4] This definition implies a clear, two-part function: first, to act as a reliable mechanism for citizens to report a fault, and second, to serve as an effective system for *triggering a fix*. A successful fulfilment of this purpose requires not only the capture of information but the initiation of a workflow that leads to the timely and satisfactory resolution of the reported issue. The very name of the service—"Fix My Street"—sets a clear public expectation that its primary outcome is a tangible repair or action.

2.2 Analysis of Functionality vs. Efficacy

An analysis of the available data reveals a critical divergence between the portal's functionality as a data-entry form and its efficacy as a service delivery tool. On one hand, the system functions, to a limited degree, as a collection mechanism. Canberrans are clearly willing to

engage with the platform, lodging tens of thousands of requests annually. In 2023, 51,868 requests were submitted, followed by 46,976 in 2024, with a further 13,375 lodged by late March 2025.[4] These figures demonstrate that the first part of the system's purpose—reporting—is being attempted by the public on a massive scale.

However, a wealth of qualitative evidence overwhelmingly suggests that the portal frequently fails in its second, and more critical, purpose: ensuring a fix. The user experience is replete with instances where a successful submission of a report does not translate into a successful resolution. This failure is so profound that many residents have concluded the system is fundamentally broken. User testimonies describe the service as a "con job" [4] and a system where "nothing is moving," even for issues logged a year prior.[4] This indicates a systemic breakdown in the process that should occur after a citizen clicks "submit."

2.3 Evidence of Purpose-Failure: The "Black Hole" Phenomenon

The most common and frustrating failure of the FMS system is what can be termed the "black hole" phenomenon, where reports are submitted into the system and are met with inaction, inexplicable delays, or closure without resolution. This experience is not isolated to a specific type of issue but is a recurring theme across the spectrum of municipal services.

Numerous user accounts detail requests that languish in the system for months or, in some cases, years, with no discernible action or meaningful update. This long-term neglect has become a defining feature of the user experience.

- A resident reported a dangerous tree, lodging the request three years ago, and as of May 2025, was "still waiting" for action.[4]
- Another user has been waiting for more than seven years for a path, which was damaged by an ACT Government truck, to be repaired.[4]
- In Hughes, a resident reported broken and overgrown pavement slabs in a public park, first in 2018 as part of an "age-friendly" suburb pilot, and again via FMS in January of the following year. The only action taken was the appearance of white spray paint on some slabs, before the request was eventually closed with the status "NFA – no further action".[6]
- Another user reported two sections of a cycleway that were "completely destroyed by trucks." Over a year later, the status of both reports was still "waiting to be assigned," indicating that no one had even looked at them.[4]

This systemic failure to act forces residents into a cycle of frustration, compelling them to either abandon their efforts, repeatedly re-lodge the same issue in the hope of prompting a response, or, in some cases, take matters into their own hands. This circumvention of the system is a clear indicator of its failure.

- A resident in Dickson, frustrated by persistent graffiti in a Kaleen underpass, threatened to "paint over [it] himself – for the fourth time in a month" if the government did not act.[4]
- A user reported a fallen tree blocking a trail, providing photos and GPS coordinates. After a month, the job was incorrectly closed as "complete." After re-lodging the request and being told crews went to the wrong spot, the user waited another month before giving up and removing the tree "myself with a chainsaw".[4]

The core promise of the Fix My Street service is not merely to log a report, but to get the reported issue fixed. While the data shows that the logging function is utilized, the extensive qualitative evidence from users demonstrates that the "fixing" component is profoundly and frequently broken. The system, in these instances, ceases to be a two-way service delivery channel and becomes a one-way communication tool—a digital suggestion box with no guarantee of action or even acknowledgement. This represents a fundamental failure to meet its own stated purpose and the reasonable expectations of the community it is designed to serve. It transforms the tool from a "Fix My Street" service into a "Report to My Street and Hope" service, a name that would more accurately reflect the experience of many of its users.

3.0 The Extent to Which it Provides a User-Friendly Experience

A successful public-facing digital service must be intuitive, accessible, and efficient, minimizing friction for the user. A user-friendly system encourages civic engagement by making the process of reporting issues as seamless as possible. The evidence indicates that the Fix My Street portal, in its current and recent iterations, fails to meet this standard. It is consistently described by users and stakeholders as "broken," "outdated," and "clunky," presenting multiple barriers that actively deter, rather than facilitate, citizen reporting.[3]

3.1 Barrier 1: The Mandatory Login and Removal of Anonymity

A significant change to the FMS portal was the removal of the ability for users to submit reports anonymously online, instead requiring them to create and log in with an ACT Digital Account.[5] The government's stated rationale for this change was to improve data quality, as anonymous requests often contained "insufficient detail" for crews to action, and to prevent frivolous or malicious reports.[4] Minister for City Services Tara Cheyne noted that the inability to follow up on anonymous reports "usually just resulted in job closure".[4] While the intent may have been to improve efficiency, the practical impact has been the creation of a significant barrier to entry for many users.

This mandatory login introduces considerable friction into the reporting process. Users have documented a range of frustrations associated with the system:

- **Password and Account Issues:** Users report forgetting passwords for an account they use infrequently, leading to a time-consuming reset process or account lockouts. One user, after being locked out and unable to reset their password, "gave up and just tweeted my concern about the broken pedestrian lights instead," demonstrating a direct channel shift to a less efficient method due to system friction.[7]
- **Deterrence from Reporting:** The added step of logging in is enough to discourage some residents from reporting issues altogether. As one user stated, "I have had good success with fix my street but now having to log in to submit a request is annoying. I don't mind giving details but having to log in is really annoying, so I don't bother".[4]
- **Privacy and Security Concerns:** The requirement to create an account has also raised privacy concerns. One user highlighted a particularly troubling experience, stating, "The fact you can now no longer anonymously request is also an issue. I know of three people whose emails are now compromised (as all three were different email servers and all three emails were set up solely to create a Fix My Street account). It's clear Fix My Street's account requirement has had leaks".[4] Such incidents, or even the perception of them, can severely undermine public trust in government digital platforms.

While anonymous reporting can still be done via a phone call to Access Canberra, this negates the convenience of the online portal and adds another layer of effort for the user.[5]

3.2 Barrier 2: The Critically Flawed Geolocation Function

A core function of any modern, location-based reporting tool is the ability to accurately pinpoint the location of an issue on a map. This feature should be the most efficient way to communicate "where" a problem is. For years, the FMS map function has been a persistent and widely cited point of failure, undermining the integrity of the data collected and creating significant downstream inefficiencies.

The fundamental problem is that the map function often defaults to the nearest residential address, rather than allowing the user to drop a pin on the precise location of the fault. This makes the tool, in the words of one user, "totally useless for reporting issues on main roads or cycleways!" or in parks and open spaces where no street address exists.[4] Another user confirmed, "Marking a point on the map is typically useless since it assigns the location to the nearest residential address".[4]

This design flaw has been officially acknowledged by the government. Minister Cheyne stated that this issue was previously responsible for a staggering "40 per cent of jobs being incorrectly allocated".[4] She noted that users were incorrectly pinning the location "on their house, or in the ocean – all things that were not particularly helpful".[4] However, this framing incorrectly assigns blame to the user. The system's inability to accept precise, non-address-based geolocations is a

fundamental design failure, not a user error. It forces residents to write lengthy, detailed text descriptions to counteract the map's inaccuracy, defeating the primary purpose of a visual, map-based interface and increasing the likelihood of misinterpretation by TCCS staff. This single flaw has been a direct cause of immense wasted resources, sending crews to the wrong locations and delaying the resolution of legitimate issues.

3.3 Barrier 3: Systemic Glitches and Data Integrity Failures

Beyond specific design flaws, the FMS platform has been plagued by general instability and a history of poor implementation, further eroding user confidence. A significant revamp of the Access Canberra website in 2021, which included FMS, was met with a chorus of criticism. The Canberra Liberals reported that the new platform offered "nothing 'new' only dead links and error messages," making it difficult for Canberrans to lodge issues.[8]

Most critically, this update led to a catastrophic loss of historical data from the user's perspective. Residents discovered they could no longer access their user history, including the status of any outstanding FMS requests they had previously lodged. As the Shadow Minister for Regulatory Services noted at the time, "all of that data collected prior to the changes has been lost and requests will need to start all over again".[8] This event was not a minor "teething issue," as described by a government spokesperson [8]; it was a fundamental breach of trust. It invalidated the time and effort citizens had invested in reporting issues and destroyed the continuity of their interactions with the government, forcing them to restart the entire frustrating process.

A citizen who takes the time to report a municipal fault is providing free labour and valuable data to the government. A well-designed, user-friendly system acknowledges and rewards this civic behaviour by making the process simple, quick, and reliable. The Fix My Street portal does the opposite. The combination of login barriers creating friction, a non-functional map creating ineffectiveness, and a history of data loss creating unreliability results in a user experience that is actively hostile to its purpose. It effectively punishes users for attempting to engage, leading directly to the outcome where they "don't bother" [4] or are forced to use less efficient, unstructured channels like social media to voice their concerns.[7] The 40% job misallocation rate is not an indictment of the public's mapping skills, but a clear metric of a fundamental design failure that has generated significant and avoidable downstream costs in wasted TCCS time and resources.

4.0 The Responsiveness of TCCS: From Receipt to Finalisation

The responsiveness of Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) is the ultimate measure of the Fix My Street system's success. This encompasses the entire lifecycle of a request, from the moment it is submitted to its final resolution and the communication that occurs throughout.

An examination of this process reveals a stark and irreconcilable disconnect between the performance metrics reported by the ACT Government and the lived experiences of Canberra residents. While TCCS presents a narrative of significant improvement and efficiency, the community tells a story of chronic delay, non-communication, and a frustrating lack of transparency.

4.1 Official Performance Metrics - A Narrative of Improvement

The ACT Government, and particularly the Minister for City Services, Tara Cheyne, has publicly presented data suggesting a dramatic improvement in the performance of the FMS system. These improvements have been attributed in part to the establishment of a new, dedicated "Fix My Street team" tasked with managing complaints and reducing pressure on operational crews.[4]

The key performance indicators cited by the government paint a picture of a system that is becoming increasingly responsive:

- **Average Resolution Time:** The government reported that in 2023, the average time to resolve an FMS request was 99 days, a figure acknowledged as "not good enough." However, due to improvements, this average had fallen to just 20 days by mid-2024.[4]
- **Rapid Resolution:** It was further claimed that by 2024, nearly half of all job requests were being resolved within 10 calendar days, compared to only 35% in the previous year.[4]
- **Meeting Demand:** TCCS reports that it receives approximately 1,000 requests per week and closes between 750 and 1,000 requests in the same period. This has led to the belief within government that the system is successfully "keeping up with demand".[4]
- **Service Standards:** The TCCS website outlines specific service level agreements for certain tasks, such as inspecting path-related requests within 10 business days.[10]

4.2 Citizen Experience - A Narrative of Neglect and Delay

This official narrative of rapid improvement is directly and consistently contradicted by a large and compelling body of evidence from citizens. Public forums and news articles from 2022 to 2025 are filled with testimonies of extreme and unacceptable delays that bear no resemblance to a 20-day average resolution time.

- A user reported waiting "at least two months" for non-working streetlights to be fixed, with the issue still unresolved.[4]
- A resident who "logged jobs for dangerous footpaths a year ago" stated they were still not fixed.[4]
- An avid cyclist reported two sections of a cycleway that were completely destroyed. More than a year after logging the issue, both reports were still marked as "waiting to be assigned," meaning they had not even entered the active workflow.[4]

- In a particularly concerning case of a potential safety hazard, a request concerning a "dangerous tree" remained outstanding after three years.[4]

These are not isolated incidents but representative examples of a widespread and persistent problem. The chasm between an official 20-day average and a user experience of waiting for months and years suggests a fundamental flaw in what is being measured and reported.

4.3 The Backlog: A Persistent Challenge

The existence of a significant backlog of unresolved requests further calls into question the claim that TCCS is "keeping up with demand." In early 2024, it was reported that the FMS system had a backlog of 38,000 requests.[9] While the government has since stated that this has been reduced to around 10,000, this figure still represents a substantial volume of unaddressed community issues.[9] A backlog of this magnitude is inconsistent with a system that is closing as many jobs as it receives each week and suggests that "closing" a job may not be synonymous with completing the required work.

4.4 Communication Failures and Opaque Status Updates

A primary driver of citizen frustration is the complete lack of meaningful communication from TCCS after a report is lodged. The process is opaque, leaving residents with no visibility of what is happening with their request. This is compounded by the use of misleading or uninformative status updates that often signal the end of the process for TCCS, but not for the resident who can see the problem still exists.

Users frequently report receiving an automated "thanks for contacting us" email, followed by months of silence.[4] Subsequently, a job may be closed with no physical action having been taken. The status updates provided are a source of particular irritation.

- The Minister herself has acknowledged that the system is "irking" due to the unhelpful response that "no action was required".[9]
- Similarly, the Minister conceded that the common status update "rectified" provides insufficient information. As she noted, "What do you mean 'rectified'? Has it been painted? Has it been scrubbed off, or has it been left there because it's meant to be there?".[4]
- This lack of transparency and accountability has led users to believe that TCCS staff "play funny buggers with the resolution status to fudge KPIs," a sentiment that points to a deep-seated lack of trust in the system's integrity.[7]

The vast gulf between the government's reported performance and the public's experience cannot be explained by isolated errors. It points to a systemic issue rooted in the definition of "resolved." For TCCS, a request can be "closed" or "resolved" for a variety of administrative reasons: it may be assessed and deemed a low priority, it may be a duplicate, it may be

incorrectly allocated due to the faulty map and subsequently closed, or it may be passed to a different team's workflow. For a citizen, "resolved" has only one meaning: the pothole has been filled, the broken path has been repaired, or the overgrown grass has been mown. The government's claim of closing up to 1,000 jobs per week may be statistically accurate from an administrative perspective, but it is functionally misleading if a significant percentage of those closures do not correspond to a completed physical task. This indicates that the current performance metrics are measuring internal process rather than external outcomes, rendering them a poor and unreliable reflection of actual service delivery to the Canberra community.

5.0 The Effectiveness of the Online Tool in Its Current State

5.1 A Summative Assessment

Based on the extensive evidence presented in the preceding sections, the Fix My Street online tool, in its current state, is largely ineffective for a significant number of its users and use cases. Its overall effectiveness is severely undermined by a combination of poor usability, flawed core functionalities such as mapping, opaque and unresponsive back-end processes at TCCS, and a fundamental failure to provide a reliable and transparent feedback loop to the citizen. While the tool may function adequately for certain types of straightforward or high-priority requests, the widespread and consistent negative feedback indicates these are the exception rather than the rule. The system fails to meet the reasonable expectations of a modern digital government service.

5.2 Quantitative Performance Indicators

The TCCS Annual Reports and other government statements provide some quantitative data on the FMS system. However, these metrics often lack the granularity required for a truly insightful performance evaluation and, as previously discussed, may not reflect the actual on-the-ground outcomes.

- **Request Volumes:** The system processes a high volume of requests, with TCCS receiving 11,014 tree-related enquiries and 2,773 mowing requests in 2022-23.[11] In 2023-24, this rose to 13,077 tree-related enquiries and included 3,224 requests related to illegal dumping.[12] These figures confirm high community engagement.
- **Reactive Work:** In 2023-24, TCCS conducted 3,516 path inspections *in response to community requests*, highlighting the reactive nature of the current maintenance model.[12]
- **Customer Satisfaction:** A key performance indicator from the 2023-24 TCCS Annual Report provides official corroboration of the widespread public dissatisfaction. Customer satisfaction with the maintenance of community paths was only 69%, falling significantly short of the 75% target. TCCS itself attributes this failure to the "ongoing community need for pothole repairs and better regular maintenance of paths (e.g., uneven surfaces)".[12] This

official metric aligns perfectly with the citizen complaints detailed throughout this submission.

- **Pothole Repairs:** The number of pothole repairs has fluctuated significantly, often in response to weather conditions. In 2022-23, over 13,200 potholes were repaired, a substantial increase from the prior year.[11] This highlights the scale of the road maintenance challenge that FMS is supposed to help manage.

5.3 Qualitative Assessment

The qualitative data gathered from public sources provides a damning assessment of the tool's effectiveness. The language used by residents reflects a deep-seated frustration and a belief that the system is fundamentally failing to deliver on its promise.

- The sentiment is perhaps best captured by the recurring feedback received by the Shadow Minister for City Services: "If there were Google reviews on the Fix My Street website, I would give this a 0/5 rating".[4] This indicates a complete failure to meet even the most basic user expectations.
- This view is reinforced by the summary of public opinion provided by Mr. Milligan: "Everyone I've spoken to has told me the Fix My Street initiative is pretty much useless. The process takes too long, requires too many complaints, and is frustrating a lot of locals".[4]

The following table consolidates the available quantitative performance data to provide the Committee with a clear, at-a-glance overview of the system's performance over the 2022-2025 period.

Table 1: Fix My Street Performance Scorecard (2022-2025)

Metric	2022	2023	2024	2025 (YTD)	Source(s)
Total FMS Requests Lodged	-	51,868	46,976	13,375 (to 26 Mar)	4
Average Time to Resolve (days)	-	99	20	-	4
% of Jobs Resolved < 10 Days	-	~35%	~50%	-	4
Reported Backlog (Peak)	-	-	38,000	-	9
Reported Backlog (Current)	-	-	~10,000	-	9
Tree-related Enquiries	11,014 (FY22-23)	13,077 (FY23-24)	-	-	11
Illegal Dumping Requests	891 dumps cleared (FY22-23)	3,224 requests (FY23-24)	-	-	11
Path Maintenance Requests	-	3,516 inspections (FY23-24)	-	-	12
Customer Satisfaction:	-	69% (vs 75% target)	-	-	12

Path Maintenance					
Pothole Repairs (Annual)	~8,000 (FY21-22)	>13,200 (FY22-23)	-	-	[11]

An effective municipal reporting system should do more than simply react to individual complaints. It should leverage the vast dataset of citizen reports to inform a strategic, proactive, and data-driven maintenance culture. The thousands of data points submitted by residents on potholes, path defects, and overgrown areas represent a valuable asset. This data should be used to identify systemic issues, predict future failures, and allocate resources preventatively. The TCCS Annual Reports show that FMS is used to *respond* to requests (e.g., path inspections in response to community reports).[12] However, the persistent backlog, the missed satisfaction targets, and the widespread complaints about basic maintenance issues like long grass and potholes strongly suggest that this data is not being used effectively to shift TCCS from a reactive "whack-a-mole" model to a more efficient, preventative one. This conclusion is reinforced by a past recommendation from the ACT Auditor-General, who called for a "systematic" approach to footpath inspection and repair specifically to avoid the "higher costs resulting from a failure to identify and rectify small defects before they become large".[14] The current FMS system appears ill-equipped to facilitate this crucial strategic shift.

6.0 The Impacts of Any Failures to Respond to Requests in an Appropriate and Timely Manner

The failure of the Fix My Street system and the subsequent lack of timely response from TCCS are not mere administrative shortcomings. They have tangible, far-reaching, and detrimental impacts on the Canberra community, affecting public safety, personal and government finances, the quality of the urban environment, and the fundamental relationship between citizens and their government.

6.1 Public Safety, Personal Injury, and Liability

The most severe consequence of failing to maintain public infrastructure is the creation of significant public safety hazards that lead to injury and, potentially, death. The FMS portal is the primary mechanism through which the government is notified of these hazards. A failure to act on these notifications in a timely manner exposes the community to unnecessary risk and the government to legal liability.

- **Evidence of Physical Harm:** There are documented cases where infrastructure failures, reportable through FMS, have caused serious injury. An active cyclist recounted breaking both his hip and wrist after hitting a patch of broken cycle path. This incident resulted in an out-of-court settlement with the ACT Government, indicating a tacit admission of liability.[4] In another case, a Reddit user reported, "Going downhill broke my arm and leg riding my bike on footbath that was uneven, sent the council pics and fixed it the next day".[15] The speed of the repair after the injury occurred highlights a reactive system that waits for harm to happen before acting.
- **Documented Near Misses:** Beyond actual injuries, residents frequently report near misses and dangerous conditions. The Deakin Residents Association has highlighted that the number of "broken and cracked footpaths is unacceptable," creating daily hazards.[2] Following the opening of the new Canberra Hospital Critical Services Building, numerous people complained on the Canberra Notice Board Group on Facebook about the "cobblestone effect" pavers at the entrance, with one person who was ill stating they "nearly face planted the ground as it kept tripping me".[16] Another commenter noted seeing a person with a freshly plastered ankle almost break their other ankle when their crutch got caught on the path.[16]
- **Traffic Hazards:** A Crace resident lodged repeated complaints about the "dangerous" height of grass near a roundabout, which impairs driver visibility and creates a clear traffic hazard.[4]
- **Legal and Financial Liability:** The ACT Government is not automatically liable for damage caused by infrastructure defects like potholes. However, its liability can be established if negligence is proven.[17] The government explicitly relies on public reporting through platforms like FMS to become aware of defects.[14] A documented failure to respond to a specific FMS report about a known hazard within a reasonable timeframe could form a strong basis for a successful negligence claim. These claims are managed by the ACT Insurance Authority, which insures the government against such losses, but the ultimate cost is borne by the taxpayer.[19]

6.2 Financial Costs to Residents and Government

Delayed maintenance is fiscally irresponsible. A report from the federal Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics reinforces the principle that deferred maintenance can result in "much higher overall costs," validating the adage "a stitch in time saves nine".[20]

- **Direct Costs to Citizens:** Residents bear the immediate financial burden of infrastructure failure, most commonly through vehicle damage caused by potholes. A Canberra Toyota service manager confirmed that hitting a pothole can cause damage ranging from tyre replacement to bent wheel rims and suspension damage, noting that costs "can start to add up pretty quickly".[22]

- **Direct Costs to Government:** These citizen costs are often transferred to the government through damage claims. In the 2022 calendar year alone, the ACT Government paid out over $43,000 to 50 motorists whose vehicles were damaged by potholes, with the average claim being $860.[13] This figure represents a direct and quantifiable financial loss to the Territory, stemming directly from a reactive road maintenance posture.

6.3 Degradation of Public Amenity and Civic Pride

The condition of a city's public spaces—its parks, footpaths, and streetscapes—has a profound impact on residents' quality of life, their enjoyment of their suburbs, and their pride in their city. The failure to address reported issues leads to a visible decline in public amenity.

- **Unmown Grass and Neglected Spaces:** A resident of Crace described how once well-maintained green spaces have been "abandoned for a number of years," long before recent wet weather or COVID-related excuses. This has restricted areas for children to play and for residents to walk their dogs, and in some cases, has made access ladders into nature reserves unusable due to the height of the grass.[24]
- **A Reflection of Neglect:** The visible state of disrepair affects the city's image. One user lamented the "shabby, overgrown public green areas, pothole ridden roads," which they feel reflects poorly on the ACT.[22] The Deakin Residents Association described the condition of footpaths in their suburb as "unacceptable and unbefitting of Australia's National Capital".[2] This decline in the built environment diminishes the unique character and high standard of living that Canberra is known for.

6.4 Erosion of Public Trust and Civic Engagement

Perhaps the most insidious impact of a failing FMS system is the erosion of public trust and the discouragement of civic engagement. When the primary channel for citizens to collaborate with their government is perceived as a "black hole," it breeds cynicism and apathy. Residents become "frustrated and disillusioned" with what they see as the "ongoing neglect of basic city services".[4] This breakdown in the relationship between the community and TCCS undermines the very purpose of a tool like FMS. A system designed to foster collaboration instead becomes a source of conflict and distrust, leading to a democratic deficit where citizens lose faith in the government's willingness or ability to perform its most basic functions.

The true cost of the FMS system's failures is therefore not confined to the number of open tickets in a database. It is a systemic cost measured in hospital visits, insurance claims paid from the public purse, personal vehicle repair bills, the reduced enjoyment of public spaces, and a significant decline in social capital and trust. These cascading liabilities represent a substantial and ongoing risk to the Territory that must be addressed.

7.0 Potential Improvements to the Online Tool with Reference to City Service Programs in Other Jurisdictions

Improving the Fix My Street service requires more than just technological fixes; it demands a fundamental shift towards adopting best-practice principles for public service delivery and learning from the successes and failures of other jurisdictions. A comparative analysis reveals that the ACT's system is a significant technological and procedural laggard compared to other major Australian cities.

7.1 Foundational Principles for Reform

Any reform of FMS should be grounded in established best-practice frameworks for complaint and service request handling. The Commonwealth Ombudsman's *Better Practice Complaint Handling Guide* [25] and the principles outlined in Australian Standard AS/NZS 10002:2014 for complaints management [26] provide a robust foundation. The current FMS system violates several key principles from these guides:

- **User-centred, simple, and accessible:** As demonstrated, the FMS portal is characterised by friction and accessibility barriers.
- **Responsiveness and transparency:** The system is defined by its lack of timely responses and opaque processes.
- **Visibility and no cost:** While the service is free, its processes are not visible, and the lack of an effective online anonymous option pushes users to more time-consuming phone calls.
- **Robust quality assurance and review:** The phenomenon of jobs being closed without action indicates a clear failure in quality assurance.
- **Adequate resourcing:** The persistent backlog and long resolution times suggest a fundamental mismatch between community demand and the resources allocated to TCCS to meet that demand.

7.2 Comparative Analysis: Snap Send Solve (SSS)

Snap Send Solve is a widely used third-party mobile application that serves a similar function to FMS across Australia and New Zealand.

- **Functionality:** SSS is a mobile-first platform that allows a user to "Snap" a photo of an issue, which is then automatically routed to the correct responsible authority ("Solver") based on the device's GPS location and the user's selected issue category.[27] This largely solves the critical geolocation problem that plagues FMS.
- **User Perception:** The app is generally praised by users for its simplicity and ease of use, with one reviewer calling it an "easy way to care".[28] However, it is not without criticism. Users report similar frustrations to those experienced with FMS when the responsible

authority fails to provide feedback or act on a report.[15] This underscores that the back-end process of the receiving authority is just as important as the front-end reporting tool.

- **Council Adoption and Business Model:** SSS is used by over 850 authorities, including many local councils, utilities, and even universities.[30] It operates on a freemium model, where councils can receive basic reports for free but must pay for a subscription to get enhanced features and better integration. This business model led to the ACCC issuing an infringement notice and a $12,600 penalty in 2019, as the company had been withholding photos from non-paying councils, thereby misleading users into thinking a full report had been sent.[32]
- **ACT Government Position:** TCCS has an official policy of not accepting or actioning reports logged through third-party applications.[5] Minister Cheyne justified this by stating that SSS was forwarding requests "to an email address that was defunct," meaning that "anyone who was using Snap Sense Solve was probably not going to get a response either".[4] This explanation points to a failure of basic administrative process management within TCCS (i.e., not updating a contact email address) rather than a fundamental flaw in the third-party app concept itself. This isolationist stance reduces the channels available to residents and contrasts with the integrated approach of many other councils.

7.3 Comparative Analysis: Other Major Australian Cities

A review of the systems used by other major capital city councils reveals that FMS is significantly behind in features, accessibility, and transparency.

- **Brisbane City Council:** Provides a multi-channel reporting system. For urgent issues, a 24/7 phone line is available. For non-urgent matters, residents can use online forms, email, mail, or a dedicated SMS service (0429 2 FIX IT).[34] The council also had a "Report It" mobile app, though it is being retired to streamline services into a single web portal.[35] Crucially, Brisbane City Council has a clear, publicly documented, multi-stage complaints process with target resolution timelines (14 to 45 days) and options for internal and external review if the complainant is dissatisfied.[36]
- **City of Melbourne:** Offers a highly detailed and granular online reporting portal with specific forms for dozens of distinct issue types, from faulty street lights and illegally parked vehicles to public health concerns and construction site compliance.[37] This structured approach likely improves data quality and routing efficiency. The city also provides a function to "Track an existing report" using a reference number, providing a degree of transparency absent in the ACT system. Melbourne also officially supports the use of Snap Send Solve.[38]
- **City of Sydney:** Utilises a comprehensive suite of online forms for reporting issues, applying for permits, and requesting records.[39] The council sets a public service standard of

aiming to respond to information access requests within 10 working days, creating a benchmark for accountability.[39]

The following table provides a comparative summary of the features offered by these different municipal reporting systems, starkly illustrating the capability gap of the ACT's Fix My Street.

Table 2: Comparative Features of Municipal Reporting Systems

Feature	ACT (Fix My Street)	Snap Send Solve	Brisbane City Council	City of Melbourne	City of Sydney
Dedicated Mobile App	No	Yes	No (Retiring)	Yes (via SSS)	No
SMS Reporting	No	No	Yes	No	No
24/7 Phone Reporting	Yes (Limited Service)	N/A	Yes	Yes (Urgent)	No
Anonymous Online Reporting	No	Yes	Yes (via form)	Yes (via form)	Yes (via form)
Public Case Tracking	No	No (Updates to user)	Yes (via phone)	Yes (online)	No
User Feedback on Resolution	No	Yes	No	No	No
Published Service Timelines	Limited (e.g. paths)	N/A	Yes (14-45 days)	No	Yes (10 days for info)

Formal Review Process	No (General complaints)	N/A	Yes (Internal/External)	Yes (Fine review)	Yes (Internal review)

This comparative analysis demonstrates that Fix My Street is not merely slightly behind its peers; it is fundamentally outdated in its design and operation. Other jurisdictions have embraced a multi-channel, user-centric approach that offers residents more choice, greater transparency, and clearer pathways for accountability. The ACT's single, flawed web portal and its policy of rejecting reports from widely used third-party apps represent a strategic failure that isolates TCCS and inconveniences the very citizens it is meant to serve.

8.0 The Possibility of Transforming Fix My Street into an Application

The inquiry's terms of reference explicitly invite consideration of transforming Fix My Street into an application.[2] This line of inquiry is not about a simple cosmetic upgrade; it addresses the need for a fundamental functional overhaul to meet modern user expectations and resolve the deep-seated problems plaguing the current web-based system. The development of a dedicated mobile application is not just a potential improvement but a necessary one.

8.1 Key Benefits of a Dedicated Mobile App

A native mobile application for iOS and Android offers numerous technical and user-experience advantages over a web portal, directly addressing the most significant failings of the current FMS system.

- **Superior Geolocation:** A native app can directly access a smartphone's high-precision GPS hardware. This would allow users to tag the exact location of a fault with far greater accuracy than the current web-based map. This single feature would solve the most critical data quality issue identified by TCCS—the 40% job misallocation rate caused by inaccurate mapping—and would drastically improve operational efficiency.[4]
- **Seamless Media Integration:** An app provides direct and intuitive integration with the phone's native camera and video functions. This allows for the quick and easy submission of high-quality photographic or video evidence, which is crucial for assessing the severity of an issue and ensuring crews are properly equipped.
- **Push Notifications:** This is arguably the most powerful feature for rebuilding trust. A mobile app can use push notifications to provide a direct, immediate, and proactive communication channel. TCCS could send automated updates at key stages of the workflow (e.g., "Job Received," "Assessed - High Priority," "Crew Assigned," "Work in Progress," "Job Completed"). This simple mechanism would close the communication

feedback loop, eliminate the "black hole" phenomenon, and restore resident confidence that their reports are being seen and actioned.

- **Improved User Experience (UX):** A well-designed native app offers a faster, more intuitive, and more reliable user experience than a mobile website. By reducing the number of steps and the friction involved in lodging a report, a good UX would encourage more citizens to participate.
- **Offline Capability:** Reports could be drafted and saved within the app in areas with poor or no mobile reception (such as in some nature reserves or suburban blackspots). The app could then automatically submit the report once connectivity is restored, ensuring no report is lost.

8.2 Cost-Benefit Analysis of App Development

Developing a custom government application is a significant undertaking with substantial costs. However, a proper cost-benefit analysis, as recommended by government best practice guidelines [42], must not only consider the upfront investment but also the significant ongoing costs and inefficiencies of the current dysfunctional system.

- **Costs:** The cost to develop a mobile app in Australia varies widely based on complexity. Estimates for a medium-complexity app, which FMS would likely be, range from AUD $60,000 to over $200,000.[44] In addition, there are ongoing annual maintenance costs, typically estimated at 15-20% of the initial development cost, to cover updates, bug fixes, and compatibility with new operating systems.[44]
- **Benefits (Cost Avoidance and Efficiency Gains):** These development costs must be weighed against the quantifiable financial benefits and cost savings that a functional app would deliver.
    1. **Reduced Wasted Resources:** The single greatest efficiency gain would come from eliminating the 40% of jobs that are incorrectly allocated due to the current portal's poor mapping.[4] Assuming TCCS receives approximately 50,000 requests per year, this equates to 20,000 misallocated jobs annually. The cost of staff time to receive, process, and incorrectly assign these jobs, plus the cost of crews travelling to the wrong locations, represents a massive and entirely avoidable operational expense. A functional app would virtually eliminate this waste.
    2. **Reduced Liability Payouts:** A more efficient and responsive system that fixes hazards like broken footpaths and potholes proactively would lead to fewer personal injury and property damage incidents. This would directly reduce the number and value of claims paid out by the ACT Insurance Authority. The more than $43,000 paid for 50 pothole damage claims in 2022 is a clear example of a cost that could be mitigated through better reporting and more timely maintenance.[13]

3. **Improved Data for Proactive Maintenance:** High-quality, accurately geolocated data from an app would provide TCCS with an invaluable asset for strategic planning. It would enable the directorate to move from a costly reactive maintenance model to a more cost-effective, preventative model, as recommended by both the ACT Auditor-General and federal transport economists.[14] This shift would reduce long-term infrastructure repair costs.
4. **Reduced Call Centre Load:** A trusted, functional, and communicative app would divert a significant volume of service requests and follow-up inquiries away from the more expensive Access Canberra phone channel.[5] Every report handled digitally via an app is a cost saving compared to a report handled by a call centre operator.

When the upfront cost of app development is viewed through the lens of a proper cost-benefit analysis, it becomes clear that it is not an optional luxury but a fiscally responsible investment. The current system imposes significant, hidden, and ongoing costs on the Territory through wasted staff time, financial payouts for damages, higher long-term repair bills due to neglect, and the administrative burden of handling frustrated citizen follow-ups. Investing in a modern, functional application is an investment in efficiency, public safety, risk mitigation, and substantial long-term cost savings for the ACT Government and its taxpayers.

9.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

9.1 Summary of Findings

The Fix My Street service, envisioned as a cornerstone of modern, collaborative city management in Canberra, is failing to meet its fundamental purpose. The evidence gathered from government reports, media coverage, and extensive citizen testimony between 2022 and 2025 paints a clear picture of a system in crisis. It is characterised by a hostile and friction-laden user experience, critical functional flaws in its core technology, opaque and chronically unresponsive back-end processes within TCCS, and a profound lack of meaningful communication with the public.

This is not a matter of minor glitches or "teething issues." It is a systemic failure that has led to tangible and severe negative impacts. These include direct risks to public safety resulting in personal injury, quantifiable financial costs to both residents and the ACT Government, a visible degradation of public amenity that diminishes civic pride, and a corrosive erosion of public trust in the government's ability to deliver basic municipal services. The stark disconnect between the government's performance reporting, which suggests rapid improvement, and the lived experience of citizens, who report years of neglect, indicates that current metrics are not measuring what matters: a fixed street. For many Canberrans, the Fix My Street portal is not a solution; it is part of the problem.

9.2 Recommendations for Systemic Reform

Meaningful and lasting change requires a holistic approach that addresses not only the technology of the portal itself, but also the underlying processes, communication culture, and resource allocation within TCCS. A new website or app alone will fail if the system it feeds into remains broken. Therefore, this submission puts forward the following recommendations for the Committee's consideration, urging the ACT Government to:

1. IMMEDIATELY OVERHAUL THE FMS PORTAL:
As a critical interim measure, TCCS must dedicate immediate resources to fixing the most egregious flaws of the current web portal. Priority must be given to replacing the inaccurate, address-based geolocation tool with a precise pin-drop function and reducing the friction associated with the mandatory login process. Concurrently, a simple, multi-stage public tracking system should be implemented to provide users with basic visibility of their existing requests.

2. COMMIT TO AND FUND A DEDICATED FMS MOBILE APPLICATION:
The government must formally commit to and fund the development of a native mobile application for iOS and Android, with a target launch within an 18 to 24-month timeframe. This application must be built on best-practice principles and include, as a minimum set of features: precise GPS-based location tagging, seamless native camera and video integration, push notifications for real-time status updates, and a user-friendly interface designed to minimise reporting effort.

3. REFORM TCCS BACK-END PROCESSES AND COMMUNICATION:
Technology is only as good as the process it enables. TCCS must undertake a comprehensive reform of its FMS workflow, including:

- **Redefining "Resolved":** The status of "resolved" or "closed" must be redefined to mean that the reported issue has been physically fixed on-site, not merely processed administratively.
- **Implementing a Transparent Status System:** A multi-stage status system (e.g., Received, Assessed-Priority Level, Crew Assigned, Work in Progress, Completed) must be implemented and made visible to the public for each request.
- **Mandating Proof of Work:** Where feasible, crews should be required to take a "photo on completion" and attach it to the job file, providing verifiable evidence that the work has been done.
- **Introducing a Feedback Mechanism:** A simple user feedback function (e.g., a one-click "Was this issue resolved to your satisfaction?" poll) must be added to all closed jobs to generate a meaningful and publicly reported Customer Satisfaction (CSAT) score.

4. ESTABLISH A PUBLIC PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD:
To rebuild trust through transparency and accountability, TCCS should move beyond high-level annual report figures and publish a near-real-time, public-facing dashboard. This dashboard should display key

performance metrics for FMS, filterable by suburb and issue type, including the number of open/closed requests, the genuine average time to complete work, and the citizen-generated CSAT score.

5. ADEQUATELY RESOURCE CITY SERVICES TO MEET DEMAND:
A better, more accessible reporting tool will inevitably increase the volume of legitimate service requests. The ACT Government must recognise this and align its budget and staffing levels for TCCS maintenance crews accordingly.24 Sufficient resources must be allocated to not only clear the existing backlog of thousands of jobs but also to meet newly established and publicly stated Service Level Agreements. A new front-end system cannot succeed if the back-end service delivery capacity is not adequately funded to meet the demand it generates.

Source

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