



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Economics,
Industry and Recreation

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Canberra's Night-Time Economy

Submission number: 003

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To: [LA Committee - Economics](#)
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I have been a resident of Canberra for over 8 years now. In that time, I have watched a modest night time economy fundamentally collapse due to inadequate infrastructure and negligent Government decision making.

I'll cut to the chase on the problems I have noted that contributed to my now-unwillingness to venture into the city or entertainment precincts.

1. The \$1b elephant in the room. The construction of the tram at the southern end of Northbourne has made it all but impossible to access the Sydney and Melbourne buildings, with parking and foot transit a nightmare to navigate, particularly in the dark. The tram was an unnecessary expense (a look at the annual report confirms that in spades), but to now impact business owners (i.e. still standing ventures like Bar Rochford, or the dearly departed Bleachers) genuinely trying to keep the city's nightlife alive demonstrates how poorly planned this expansion was. Blow it up and do something else.
2. The parking. Even before the tram destroyed what little incentive there was to venture into the city, the parking situation was dire. The parking on the far side of the legislative assembly has been halved for reasons I still do not fully understand, while over 1/3 of the Mooseheads-adjacent parking is reserved for MLAs and their staff, and yet another half of the parking across Northbourne is now gone for the tram. And this is not to mention the dire situation that has unfolded in Braddon where what little parking was left has been effectively removed to no real effect (oh cool, a few more trees to punctuate the litany of delivery drivers blocking the road because they have nowhere to stop). When one eventually finds a park within walking distance, they are gouged for a significant portion of what they intend to spend that evening, thereby reducing the amount available to spend at various bars and restaurants.
3. The public transport. The easiest defence to point 2 is to say, "well, catch a bus." Well, with respect, it's not that simple. For those of us in the inner suburbs, our public transport options are limited to one bus in one direction that stops at 9pm, while those in the outer suburbs can just forget about it (as a previous Lawson constituent, I can attest that the Transport Canberra app considers walking to the city a viable alternative to catching a bus). Given there is no viable pick up/drop off area/s for Ubers to pick up clientele without placing them in a dangerous situation for oncoming traffic, this problem is

compounded even further. The public transport-dependent city planning undertaken by this Government is missing a key feature; the public transport to get there. In cities like Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, there are a number of bus, tram and rail-based options to navigate the inner city night commute; in our fair city, unless you live in Gungahlin, there is little such luck.

4. The patronage (which is the nice, dignified way of saying, "the homeless"). Many of my nights out in the city have been punctuated by being harassed and threatened by the homeless people that punctuate the City Walk precinct. In more than a few cases, I have seen people surrounded by garbage, needle in arm and unconscious, in these main precincts. Now, obviously there is a broader socio-political body of work that needs to happen to address this problem, but this contributes to a sense of unease while out.
5. The venues. The last 5 years have been unprecedented as far as impacts on small businesses in Canberra. COVID, followed by the tram construction, compounded by a cost of living crisis impacting the price of raw materials, has led to the closure, or impending closure, of many of the best establishments in the Northborne precinct, with very few replacements willing to take the risk in these current times. Public statements made by the relevant Minister (Minister Stephen-Smith) have indicated a level of disdain or disinterest for these struggling businesses, and one is left to wonder what incentive there is for non-corporate contribution to the night economy.

To summarise - there are limited ways to access the city outside of using a car; there is no parking for this car; many of the best venues are increasingly inaccessible due to construction; and when one somehow navigates their way into the city, they are accosted by a growing number of homeless people.

What is the solution, then?

1. Free parking, and more of it. A multi story carpark in an accessible part of the city (I.e. not at ANU behind a wall of construction or in Canberra Centre where every means of access closes at 9pm) would raise revenue for the government while also providing an easy means of access for patrons who cannot, or choose not to (wild to think people might have freedom of choice, but anyway), use public transport.
2. Greater security/public safety presence to keep patrons and homeless people safe.
3. During this period of greater construction-based disruption, concessions to help struggling business in affected areas remain open. As my favourite venues continue to close due to low patronage, and all along the light rail corridor, more needs to be done to protect business owners from poor Government planning in this regard.

Your government will spend \$1b on light rail stage 1 over 10 years, and \$3b on stage 2; why not divert some of these resources to something that will ACTUALLY make a difference to the lives of business owners, and bring back patrons such as myself?

I WANT viable nightlife options. If you build it, I and others like me will most certainly come. However, at this point in time and without intervention, I just can't fathom the time and financial impost that exists to access the rapidly dwindling offer here.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kind regards,
Pedro Rivera

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