

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Ways to foster and promote the significance of Australia's National Capital

Attached is my submission on how improvements to the rail service between Sydney and Canberra can assist with the above aim.

Yours faithfully

Barry Peffer

19-4-2023

Ways to foster and promote the significance of Australia's National Capital

in the past rail has played an integral part in the growth of Canberra and its National Institutions by bringing high numbers of visitors to the city. An effective, efficient rail service is vital for a strong and growing Canberra both today and into the future.

Without rail, many people, both Australians and international visitors, would experience difficulty in visiting Canberra and its Iconic Institutions. Small changes to the governance and maintenance arrangements of Canberra's rail line would facilitate improved access to our Iconic Institutions and promote the Nation's Capital as a destination of choice.

Railways are the glue which holds the country together for those without cars, and for those who want to get between cities sustainably and rapidly. Railways are not a 'nice to have extra' but a key component of our infrastructure.

Background

Rail has always been an important means of travelling to Canberra. In Canberra's earlier days rail was the premier method of arriving here from all over Australia until the 1940's when road and then air travel took over.

The rail line from Sydney was built in the later part of the 19th century, reaching Goulburn in 1869, arriving at Queanbeyan in 1887. The extension to Canberra opened in 1914 but until 1923 was a freight only line. The rail line out of Sydney followed the contour lines round hills to cater for low powered steam engines and to minimise construction costs.

Very little work in the way of track re-alignment to straighten the track has been undertaken since it was originally built about 140 years ago.

The curvature of the line and gradient was necessary for low powered steam engines of the day but totally inefficient for today's modern powerful diesel and electric trains. Due to the winding route that trains must follow, a train trip between Canberra and Sydney takes over four hours, making it a slow option for travellers. Despite this the rail service between Canberra and Sydney is very well patronised. Growth in patronage between 2013/14 and 2018/19 averaged 7% per annum with 2018/19 reaching 77.42% of train seating capacity.

Post COVID, rail patronage appears to have the same growth trend. Between September 2022 and December 2022 patronage was 82.48% of maximum capacity. January and February 2023 averaged 85.73%.

What has impeded rail's growth

Responsibility for the rail line between Sydney and Canberra rests with 3 governments: the Commonwealth Government, the NSW Government and the ACT Government

The Commonwealth Government is responsible for the National Rail Network which includes the Main Southern Line from Sydney to Melbourne. The Australian Rail Track

Corporation, a Government Business Enterprise, owned by the Commonwealth Government is responsible for maintaining this track from Campbelltown to Melbourne.

NSW Government is responsible for maintaining the Canberra Branch Line which runs from the Canberra side of Joppa Junction to Canberra. Joppa Junction is 6 kilometres south of Goulburn, The NSW government is responsible for providing the rolling stock and infrastructure on the Canberra Branch Line. It is also responsible for operating passenger trains between Sydney and Canberra.

ACT Government

Is responsible for the 8 km of track (approximately) and the station within the ACT. It has over the responsibility of maintenance and operations to NSW.

The division of responsibility amongst the three governments of differing political priorities has resulted in very little work being carried out on the Canberra to Sydney line to improve travel time in the past several decades.

Also with the destination, and major user of the track, being in a different territory from the controllers of the majority of the track there has been very little incentive to reduce travel time, nor increase service frequency which appears inadequate to assist the aim of supporting growing attendance at Canberra's Iconic Institutions.

Canberra, the Nation's Capital, with a population of 454,000, plus Queanbeyan's 63,000 has 3 return trips per day. Each train has 3 carriages giving one carriage per day for 57,444 people.

By comparison, Warrnambool in Victoria, is a city with a population of about 35,000, and 267 kms from Melbourne. It has 5 return trips per week day. Each train has 5 carriages giving one carriage per day per 1,400 people.

It is acknowledged that improved rail connections to Canberra cannot help many Australians, due to the size of the country and distances travelled to reach Canberra.

How rail can help achieve the aims of the Terms of Reference

Rail has the ability to transport considerable numbers of people to Canberra from Sydney. This in turn could facilitate a greater number of travellers visiting our city.

Co-ordination with Transport Canberra's bus network could make attendance at these Institutions or sporting events seamless, thus enhancing Canberra's image to make Canberra where a visitor without a car can easily reach landmarks and iconic locations.

However, to be successful in achieving this aim a number of steps need to be taken.

- Rail travel between Sydney and Canberra needs to be reduced to less than 3 hours to make rail a competitive transport option.
- The rail line from Joppa Junction (near Goulburn) to Canberra needs to become part of the National Rail Network. The nation's capital city is the only capital on the Australian mainland not part of the National Rail Network.
- Track re-alignment between Campbelltown and Canberra needs to be carried out progressively. Waiting decades for a Very Fast Train will do nothing to encourage visitation and enhancement of the Nation's Capital. There are a number of modest

projects that could be completed in a relatively short time. Professor McNaughton, a UK rail specialist bought in by the previous NSW Government in 2018 to assess improvements to the states regional rail network said that upgrading the line from Sydney to Canberra is a '*straightforward infrastructure management task*'.

- Additional trains need to be provided. The current 3 services per day initially need to be increased to 5 then progressively to 8. An extra 2 trains, per day, can bring an additional 100,000 people per year to events at National Institutions, and sporting/cultural events in Canberra.
- The Canberra station building, which currently looks, and feels like a suburban station, needs to be rebuilt to show Canberra's status as the National Capital of Australia. It should also be designed to be a modern interchange between various modes of public transport accessible to all users.
- To support international tourism multi language signage needs to be installed at the station.

Supporting rail supports Canberra

Rail is considered the most environmentally friendly method of transporting large numbers of People. Increased usage of the rail system would assist in limiting the emission of both greenhouse gases and non-exhaust emissions.

Rail allows those who have no alternate means, or cannot afford them, to travel long distances. Rail supports social mobility and integration. It assists in promoting the social value of improved connectivity.

A modern rail service would assist in bringing Canberra and its National Institutions into the 21st century and encourage attendance by being 'much closer' to a larger proportion of Australia's population.