



Submission to the Inquiry into fostering and promoting the significance of Australia's National Capital

May 2023

**SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING
COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL CAPITAL
AND EXTERNAL TERRITORIES**
PUBLIC TRANSPORT ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA



The Public Transport Association of Canberra (PTCBR) appreciates the opportunity to provide this submission to the Committee's *Inquiry into fostering and promoting the significance of Australia's National Capital*.

PTCBR strongly believes that if Canberra is to become a vibrant national capital worthy of international recognition, it must be a place where people are more likely to use public or active transport to get around, and do not need to rely on private vehicles.

Unfortunately, the Parliamentary Zone is currently dominated by surface parking, and is not particularly welcome to visitors who do not have a private vehicle. As the Canberra region's voice for public transport, PTCBR receives regular complaints about the difficulties in accessing the Parliamentary Zone and the national institutions. While relatively straightforward to access by private vehicle, the legacy of planning the National Capital and its institutions around this mode of transport substantially diminishes the experience for visitors and workers. PTCBR supports any measures which would improve connections and bring life to the Parliamentary Zone as part of a dynamic city, rather than an isolated cultural and government district.

PTCBR believes that the current state of affairs also stems from divided responsibilities between the ACT (for public transport) and the Commonwealth (for the institutions). We understand the governance arrangements in the *Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988* are outside the scope of this Inquiry. Nevertheless, we encourage the Committee to continue to take notice of the roles of the ACT Government and National Capital Authority in developing the Central National Area, and whether there is scope to reform these arrangements.

PTCBR's submission makes three recommendations to the Committee:

Recommendation 1: the Commonwealth should assume primary funding responsibility for light rail through the Parliamentary Zone and Its Setting

Recommendation 2: the Commonwealth should fund the ACT to deliver an agreed level of public transport service to the National Institutions

Recommendation 3: there should be a pedestrian connection between Lennox Gardens and Acton Peninsula

Further details are provided in the remainder of this submission.



Recommendation 1: the Commonwealth should assume primary funding responsibility for light rail through the Parliamentary Zone and Its Setting

The ACT Government's Light Rail to Woden project (Light Rail Stage 2) will be the biggest infrastructure project in the Parliamentary Zone since the construction of Parliament House (see [Figure 1](#)). It will shape the entire character of the area and fulfil a key part of the National Capital Plan by linking national attractions, improving the quality of approach routes and formalising the gateway experiences at key city thresholds.¹

Light Rail to Woden has the potential to revitalise the Parliamentary Zone and encourage significant amounts of new activity, as it has already done along the Northbourne Avenue corridor. It will support not only the cultural institutions in the area, but also the governmental institutions of Parliament House and the Departments of State. It is clear the Commonwealth intends to develop this area further, given the planned relocation of the Australian Taxation Office and national security agencies, and light rail will play a key role in allowing several thousand more workers to access the area. PTCBR is also aware of the submission from Greater Canberra to encourage the development of mixed-use facilities in the area, and submits that light rail would also significantly support this.

Provision of light rail, and the increase in public transport passenger capacity in the Parliamentary Zone would enable the conversion of existing surface carparks to buildings and public spaces. If light rail were already operating, the questionable multi-storey car park structure adjacent to the John Gorton Building may not have been required.

For these reasons, light rail through the Parliamentary Zone should be considered as infrastructure raising the profile of Australia's national capital, and not just a transport project between Woden and the City. We acknowledge the Commonwealth already appreciates this, and the scrutiny the National Capital Authority and this Committee have paid to the project.²

Given this, it is entirely appropriate that the Commonwealth take a leading role in funding the project, so far as it travels through the Parliamentary Zone and Its Setting. The benefits to the National Capital are significant, and design requirements such as wire-free running and high-quality finishes have already added significant expense to the project.

PTCBR strongly encourages the Committee to support the project and encourage the Government to make a significant financial contribution.

¹ *National Capital Plan*, 4.1.2.7

² *Commonwealth approvals for ACT light rail: Commonwealth and Parliamentary approvals for the proposed Stage 2 of the Australian Capital Territory light rail project*, October 2018.



Figure 1: Modified extract from the *National Capital Plan*, showing light rail stage two in the context of the Parliamentary Zone, National Institutions and adjoining National Precincts



Recommendation 2: the Commonwealth should fund the ACT to deliver an agreed level of public transport service to the National Institutions

PTCBR receives regular feedback about the difficulty in accessing the various national institutions by public transport. While the institutions within the Parliamentary Zone are relatively well served by the R2 and R6 bus routes, which have frequent service during the week and at least half hourly service on weekends, many others do not offer a level of service suitable for visitors. This includes:

- Parliament House and the Royal Australian Mint (routes 57 and 58 combine to offer an hourly service on weekends and public holidays)
- the Australian War Memorial (route 54 has hourly service during off-peak periods, and 2 hourly service on weekends and public holidays)
- the National Museum of Australia (route 53 has 2 hourly service on weekends and public holidays)
- Australian National Botanic Gardens (no service)

A more detailed summary of public transport service levels to Canberra's institutions is set out in this submission's Appendix.

Previous tourist services (such as ACTION/Transport Canberra's route 81) have been discontinued, and the current privately operated Red Explorer is both expensive (\$25 for a one-hour loop) and infrequent.

Given this poor public transport offering, our institutions currently operate on the basis that most visitors will arrive by private vehicle, even though many visitors to Canberra will not have access to this mode of transport. Indeed, institutions such as the National Gallery and War Memorial have poor quality pedestrian links to nearby bus stops, suggesting neither the institutions nor Transport Canberra expects many visitors to arrive by public transport. Even Parliament House's bus stops are isolated, and the northbound and southbound stops are on opposite sides of the building.

The Commonwealth should take greater responsibility for ensuring appropriate public transport access to the institutions, and agreeing with the ACT on a public transport service standard for the various institutions. PTCBR submits that half hourly service during weekdays, and hourly service on weekends is an appropriate level of service. More frequent services should be expected for the cluster of institutions in the Parliamentary Zone.



Recommendation 3: there should be a pedestrian connection between Lennox Gardens and Acton Peninsula



Figure 2: Extract from Walter Burley Griffin's *Preliminary Plan for Canberra, Federal Capital of Australia* (1913)

Part of the difficulty of accessing the Parliamentary Zone and its attractions is due to the separation imposed by Lake Burley Griffin. The Griffins' original plan for Canberra recognised this and provided for additional crossings at the Causeway and Acton Peninsula (see [Figure 2](#)).

An active travel crossing at Acton Peninsula would significantly activate both sides of the lake, linking the National Museum of Australia to the Parliamentary Zone and the other cultural institutions along King Edward Terrace. It would also enhance the lake-based tourist experience.

The last attempt at realising this vision, the Immigration Bridge, ended in failure. We need not restate those events, of which this Committee is already aware.³

PTCBR recognises that any future proposals are likely to be as hotly contested as they were in 2009-10, given the conflict between the benefits the project would bring to the area, against the interests of certain lake users and the effects on existing vistas and heritage values. However, it is impossible to neatly "reconcile competing issues", as this Committee previously encouraged the Immigration Bridge's proponents.⁴ One set of priorities must ultimately prevail.

Any decision to build or not build this connection necessarily involves a deliberate decision of which interests and priorities should be given greater weight. While PTCBR's view is that improving the experience for the hundreds of thousands of people who visit the lake should be preferred, we encourage any future decision makers to be explicit about what they consider to be more important, rather than preserving the status quo for its own sake.

³ *Inquiry into the Immigration Bridge Proposal*, May 2009.

⁴ *ibid*, iv.



Appendix: Public transport services to national institutions

Commonwealth institutions

Institutions	Bus routes	Bus frequency		
		Peak	Off-peak	Weekends
Australian National Botanic Gardens	Nil (formerly served by route 81)	Nil	Nil	Nil
<i>Kings Park</i> (National Carillon, Boundless)	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
<i>Humanities and Science Campus</i> (National Library, Questacon)	R2, R6 57, 58	5-10 min	3-10 min	13-15 min
<i>Arts and Civic Campus</i> (National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery, Ngurra, National Archives, High Court, Old Parliament House)	R2, R6	5-10 min	3-12 min	13-17 min
Parliament House, Royal Australian Mint	57, 58 combined service	10-15 min	15 min	60 min
National Museum of Australia	53	20-30 min	30 min	2 hours
Australian War Memorial	54	20-30 min	60 min	2 hours
Australian Institute of Sport	R9	15 min	15 min	30 min
National Capital Exhibition	R2, R4, R5, R6, R7, R10, 57, 58, 180, 181		Frequent	

Non-Commonwealth institutions

Institutions	Bus routes	Peak	Off-peak	Weekends
<i>Gold Creek</i> (National Dinosaur Museum, Cockington Green)	24	30 min	60 min	2 hours
National Arboretum	Nil (formerly served by route 81a)	Nil	Nil	Nil
National Zoo and Aquarium	Nil (formerly served by route 81a)	Nil	Nil	Nil
Telstra Tower	Nil (formerly served by route 81a)	Nil	Nil	Nil

Submission image sources:

Cover Page: Artist's impression of the future Kings Avenue Light Rail Station, by Circe for PTCBR

Figure 1: Modified Figure 13, from page 54 of the National Capital Plan

Figure 2: National Library of Australia, MAP G8984.C3S1 Gri 1913