

Submission to the Inquiry into Commonwealth and Parliamentary approvals for the proposed Stage 2 of the Australian Capital Territory light rail project

June 12, 2018

This submission is made with respect to the following terms of reference of the inquiry:

3. possible impacts on the Parliamentary zone and Parliamentary precincts, including any impacts on the heritage values and national importance of the Parliamentary zone and our national capital; and
4. the identification of matters that may be of concern prior to formal parliamentary or Australian Government consideration of the project; and any other relevant matter the Committee wishes to examine.

Comments

1. A light rail thoroughfare through the parliamentary precinct and adjacent precincts will introduce a large infrastructural footprint into these areas that will have major detrimental impacts on both traffic and the place of the people. The following are examples of likely detrimental outcomes of the light rail infrastructure for which there are no design details available and hence it is impossible to describe the effects precisely.
 - Elimination of a major road interchange between Parkes Way and Commonwealth Avenue and similar unspecified traffic impacts at Commonwealth Avenue on the south side of Lake Burley Griffin; unspecified impacts to traffic on Capital Circle heading south on Adelaide Avenue
 - The Commonwealth Avenue bridge and lakeshore approaches are a cultural, landscape and architectural masterwork that will be marred by the intrusion of a light rail line and its road intersections.
 - The whole route will be marred by unsightly overhead wires and their support infrastructure or the light rail vehicles will carry significant stored energy modules. In the latter case it will be necessary to have high power charging modules constructed at stopping points along the route and connected to the local grid.
 - A large number of mature trees will be removed to make the thoroughfare.
2. Tourists and other visitors generate a large number of movements within the area. The spread of individual national monuments and institutions in the precincts and the distances between them mean that a conservative transport route will not be useful to these tourists and visitors. This is exacerbated by the lack of any plan for a connected light rail network route to pass near the major sites of the Australian War Memorial and the National Museum.

3. The transit services associated with Stage 2 do not pose an improvement to the existing services are therefore unlikely to attract commuters.
 - The associated wider transport network is not rapid transit. That can only be achieved with grade separation. It is a street-level network consisting of the Stage 1 light rail segment and the major component that is a bus network that has only a few dedicated bus-way segments. This inevitably leads to long journey times/slow average journey speeds for public transport commuters. Without grade separation, these parameters will deteriorate even further with increasing population.
 - Canberra is very sparsely populated compared to the population density profiles of cities in which street level transit systems operate successfully. Journey distances are relatively long for the size of the population. As a result, 90 per cent of travel to work in Canberra is done by private motor vehicle. Almost all transport experts believe that the only established transport technology that can feasibly deliver rapid transit in Canberra is a bus-way network.
 - For some inexplicable reason the light rail Stage 2 is replacing the only rapid transit element in the entire ACT public transport network – the bus-way route from Woden town centre to Civic. The route of Stage 2 is a milk run deviating through Barton. As a result, commuters between Woden and Civic will have their travel time double from 12 minutes to more than 25 minutes when Stage 2 replaces the existing rapid service. The ACT Government has never given an explanation for this costly and ineffective replication.
4. **New public transport technologies are being demonstrated all around the world. These technologies are expected to change the nature of public transport particularly in low density distributed cities such as Canberra. It is possible that a conventional street transit system through the regulated precincts will become obsolete within a decade as the new shared demand responsive systems, that are attractive to commuters and tourists, are established, possibly by private operators.**
5. The proposed Stage 2 of the Australian Capital Territory light rail project does not occur at any level of priority in the Australian Government's Infrastructure Priority List published by Infrastructure Australia in March 2018.
6. To this date there has not been any expert comparative study of all the transport alternatives. There has not even been a business case published for Stage 2 although Ernst and Young were contracted by the ACT Government to develop a business case for Stage 2 in April 2017.

Recommendation

The committee and the parliament should not proceed with the approval process for any detail design that might be submitted by the ACT Government until the long-term viability of the proposed infrastructure has been established by recourse to independent experts. As a minimum there should be a substantial independent cost benefit study before proceeding.

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