

The Case For & Against Pay Parking

Introduction

- 3.1 Although there has been strong opposition to the NCA's pay parking proposal, the Committee has received evidence which supports the concept of pay parking, but raises concerns as to how such a measure can be justified in light of the prevailing circumstances with regard to the Parliamentary Zone. In particular, there is concern over the absence of commercial and retail facilities and the lack of public transport options for commuters. Some of the Commonwealth agencies and national cultural institutions are not totally opposed to the idea of a pay parking regime, and can see benefits in such a system should it be implemented effectively.
- 3.2 While the ACT Government supports the NCA's policy as a measure to complement the introduction of pay parking in Barton, the proposal has also received backing from other corners. The management of Canberra International Airport and the Property Council of Australia (ACT Division), for example, are strong advocates of the NCA's policy. Old Parliament House and the National Portrait Gallery also support the principle of pay parking and recognises that "there may be advantages of a properly managed system of paid parking".¹ However, OPH/NPG emphasises the need

1 Old Parliament House and the National Portrait Gallery, Transcript, 9 May 2003, p 74.

to avoid a regime that would affect visitor access to the institutions. Groups such as Pedal Power ACT as well as a number of employees in the Zone also offer their support for pay parking due to the environmental gains such a system implies. The Committee, however, is sceptical as to whether the environment would really benefit from the proposal as it stands, given the CPSU's suggestion that even if pay parking were introduced, the majority of those who currently drive to work would continue to do so.² The views of the significant parties who contributed to the inquiry are discussed throughout this chapter.

The NCA's Position

- 3.3 One of the functions of the NCA is to foster an awareness of Canberra as the national capital of Australia.³ The Authority recognises that the Parliamentary Zone is essential to the visitor experience and understanding of the national capital. One of the initiatives identified in the NCA's *Parliamentary Zone Review: Outcomes Report* provides that car parking may enhance the experience of tourists by "creating convenient and safe parking areas, balancing parking demand and supply, and reducing the use of the motor vehicle".⁴ The proposal is envisaged by the Authority as being introduced where "commuters are displacing visitors".⁵ The NCA maintains that:

The only way of securing a continuing balance between demand and supply is through the provision of centralised car parking structures. For such structures to be commercially viable, pay parking needs to operate in the catchment area.⁶

- 3.4 The NCA concurs with views put forward by the ACTION Authority that "the areas of office concentration are on the edges of the Zone near Avenues that have services provided at a regular frequency".⁷ The NCA points out that while an increase in public transport use would be consistent with the National Greenhouse Strategy, it is not the sole reason for the proposed pay parking policy. The NCA expects that many employees and visitors will continue to use their private

2 Community and Public Sector Union, Transcript, 9 May 2003, p 4.

3 National Capital Authority, *Consolidated National Capital Plan*, February 2002, p 2.

4 National Capital Authority, Submissions, p 92.

5 National Capital Authority, Submissions, p 92.

6 National Capital Authority, Submissions, p 120.

7 National Capital Authority, Submissions, p 410.

vehicles even after pay parking is introduced.⁸ With regard to arguments about the reliability and efficiency of the public transport services in the ACT, the NCA points out that the ACTION bus service is an ACT Government responsibility.⁹

3.5 The NCA's proposed parking policy involves encouraging a shift to public transport and other ecologically sustainable modes of travel, such as walking, cycling or carpooling. Carpooling would be encouraged, under the new pay parking regime, through reduced costs for multiple passengers. However, the NCA have not proposed how such a system would be implemented and maintained.

3.6 Although the Parliamentary Zone is devoid of retail and service facilities the NCA believes that this does not mean commuters should not have to bear some cost for provided parking. The Authority also adds that pay parking is a measure towards being able to provide a range of services in the Zone in centralised parking structures.¹⁰

3.7 In response to the arguments that researchers, volunteers and low income visitors would be affected by pay parking, the NCA suggests that schemes can be developed to prevent costs being imposed on these groups. For instance, the Authority suggests that:

Pay parking can accommodate the particular needs of visitors, researchers and volunteers. There are technologies, including "pay and display" or boom gate control systems, that would permit differential payments, and/or ticket validation to eliminate or subsidise a specific parking charge.¹¹

3.8 The NCA also addresses the suggestion raised in submissions that structured car parks would be "visually displeasing"¹² and would affect the amenity synonymous with the Zone. The Authority notes these concerns but maintains that attention to detail in the design and operation of any parking structures will address aesthetics.¹³ The NCA also points out that by statute, the design of any such structures would need to be approved by both Houses of Parliament.¹⁴

8 National Capital Authority, Submissions, p 379.

9 National Capital Authority, Submissions, p 379.

10 National Capital Authority, Submissions, p 410.

11 National Capital Authority, Submissions, p 379.

12 Rob Millington, Submissions, p 17.

13 National Capital Authority, Submissions, p 413.

14 National Capital Authority, Submissions, p 413.

The Territory's Position

- 3.9 The ACT Government has responsibility for strategic transport planning in Canberra and is aware that any parking strategies adopted by the Commonwealth in the Parliamentary Zone will have implications for the ACT Government's strategy. The Territory therefore believes that a joint approach between the ACT Government and the NCA is necessary to ensure the implementation of a parking management strategy is effective.¹⁵
- 3.10 The ACT Government has made it clear that it "strongly supports pay parking in all town centres and major commercial areas in the ACT".¹⁶ In Canberra, pay parking currently exists in Civic and Woden town centres, and at Deakin, Dickson, Kingston and Manuka, while there are plans to introduce pay parking to Belconnen and Tuggeranong town centres by 2004. The Territory's submission notes that:
- ...the ACT Government believes it is important in Barton/Forrest to progress pay parking in conjunction with the Commonwealth Government, as these actions will impact on the demand for parking in the Parliamentary Zone.¹⁷
- 3.11 The ACT Government acknowledges that the introduction of on-street pay parking in Barton/Forrest will have an immediate impact on parking in the Zone, due to a major increase in demand for parking as office commuters seek the available free parking spaces on a daily basis.¹⁸ The Territory believes that this would exacerbate the existing competition for parking spaces adjacent to the cultural institutions in the Zone.

The Views of Other Affected Parties & Individuals

National Institutions

- 3.12 While most of the cultural institutions in the Parliamentary Zone agree that parking is an issue which needs to be addressed, they are concerned as to how pay parking may impact on their visitors,

15 ACT Government, Submissions, p 317.

16 ACT Government, Submissions, p 318.

17 ACT Government, Submissions, p 315.

18 ACT Government, Submissions, p 315.

employees and volunteers. At present, of greatest concern to the institutions is the propensity for employees in the Zone to occupy parking space which is intended to accommodate visitors.

- 3.13 This is evident in the National Gallery of Australia's assertion that its primary concern is the increasing number of employees from the adjacent buildings using the Gallery's public car park.¹⁹ In terms of a solution to the problem, the Director of the Gallery, Dr Brian Kennedy, states that "it is quite clear that all that is really needed is additional car parking to absorb the office commuters".²⁰ The Gallery emphasises that:

Of paramount importance to us are the needs of our visiting public. As a public institution directed towards providing public access to our building, we are concerned to ensure that barriers to access are minimised or where possible eliminated.²¹

- 3.14 With regard to the NCA's proposal, the Gallery feels that there needs to be some distinction made between the demands on visitors to the area and the demands on those who work in the area. In terms of a short term solution to the traffic problems, the Gallery does "not see much option other than to create a distinction between those who are visitors and those who are office workers".²²
- 3.15 Whilst OPH/NPG shares some of the Gallery's concerns, it is not opposed to a system of pay parking. OPH/NPG believes that with ACT Government plans to introduce pay parking in areas adjacent to the Zone and an expected increase in visitor numbers to the cultural institutions, it is "no longer feasible to retain the current arrangements of free long and short-stay parking in the entire Zone".²³ However, OPH/NPG emphasises the need to avoid "a system of parking controls that is overpriced and inflexible,"²⁴ which would undermine the growth of tourism in the area.
- 3.16 OPH/NPG also acknowledges that any new parking system should recognise that the private motor vehicle will continue to be the primary means of transportation for visitors to the Parliamentary

19 National Gallery of Australia, Transcript, 9 May 2003, p 85.

20 National Gallery of Australia, Transcript, 9 May 2003, p 85.

21 National Gallery of Australia, Submissions, p 279.

22 National Gallery of Australia, Transcript, 9 May 2003, p 89.

23 Old Parliament House and the National Portrait Gallery, Submissions, p 291.

24 Old Parliament House and the National Portrait Gallery, Transcript, 9 May 2003, p 74.

Zone for the foreseeable future. It is also strongly opposed to any parking system likely to have negative impacts on staff and particularly its volunteers, who OPH/NPG describes as “the lifeblood of our exhibitions and presentations”.²⁵

- 3.17 In addition to serving as popular tourist attractions, the National Library of Australia and the National Archives of Australia also provide an excellent resource for research and as such are generally well used by students. Both institutions are concerned with affordability issues should pay parking be introduced in the Parliamentary Zone. The Library notes that half of its readers are either students, senior citizens or the unemployed. Forty-five per cent of visitors to the exhibitions are senior citizens.²⁶ The Library also points out that pay parking is likely to have more of an impact on its visitors than some of the other institutions because a number of its visitors are regular users:

Over 20 per cent of our readers visit the Library more than 50 times in a six-month period, and some 13 per cent of readers visit the Library between 21 and 50 times in a six-month period.²⁷

- 3.18 The CPSU raises concerns that if commercial car parking were to be introduced, “volunteers, students and visitors would have no more access to parking than they do today, except that they would be paying for it”.²⁸ If a pay parking regime were to be brought in, the Library favours a system that would minimise the impacts on both its readers and its seventy volunteers. The Library suggests that a boom-gate system where passes are required may be one means of managing the problems relating to parking.²⁹
- 3.19 The National Archives is of the view that if a restriction on parking is necessary, it would favour a time restriction rather than pay parking meters or boom gates which it feels would affect the amenity and the look of the area.³⁰ Director-General of the National Archives, Mr Ross Gibbs, noted the impracticality of public transport as an option for commuters:

25 Old Parliament House and the National Portrait Gallery, Transcript, 9 May 2003, p 74.

26 National Library of Australia, Submissions, p 23.

27 National Library of Australia, Transcript, 9 May 2003, p 23.

28 Community and Public Sector Union, Transcript, 9 May 2003, p 4.

29 National Library of Australia, Transcript, 9 May 2003, p 24.

30 National Archives of Australia, Transcript, 9 May 2003, p 59.

Public transport in the area is totally inadequate...there is no timeliness to it...if it were going to work as an effective alternative; the numbers of buses and the stops would have to increase dramatically.³¹

Commonwealth Agencies

- 3.20 The Parliamentary Zone and the adjacent Barton/Forrest area are home to a number of Commonwealth agencies. The Committee gathered evidence from a number of these agencies which would likely be affected by the introduction of a pay parking regime in the Zone.
- 3.21 The Australian Public Service Commission notes the importance for employees in the Parliamentary Zone and the adjacent Barton/Forrest area, of maintaining free parking to counter the absence of essential services in the area. The Commission notes that:
- ...free parking is an important element of the context in which staff consider and appraise the value of their terms and conditions of employment.³²
- 3.22 The Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet (PM & C) considers that the future parking policies for Barton are unlikely to be successful unless the parking arrangements in the Parliamentary Zone are also addressed and integrated policies are developed. PM & C also notes that existing public transport arrangements do not meet the needs of staff and therefore do not provide a suitable alternative. The Department suggests that:
- ...a rigorous review of commuter requirements and a significant increase in public transport availability would be required before further consideration could be given to the introduction of pay parking in the Parliamentary Zone or Barton precinct.³³
- 3.23 The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) is concerned about the availability of parking space. ANAO staff already make use of the on-street parking in Barton as a result of the agency not being able to meet the current demand for parking. The ANAO argues that:

31 National Archives of Australia, Transcript, 9 May 2003, p 61.

32 Australian Public Service Commission, Submissions, p 306.

33 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Transcript, 9 May 2003, p 65.

...there is an urgent need for a parking station to be built in the Barton area to assist in alleviating the already existing acute shortage of parking facilities.³⁴

- 3.24 The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (AFFA) points out that its employees do not expect to have to pay for parking in the precinct without “a commensurate improvement in access to public transport”.³⁵ AFFA also notes that irrespective of whether people are paying for parking, there is a severe lack of parking in the Barton precinct.³⁶
- 3.25 While Environment Australia supports measures to reduce the impact of greenhouse gas emissions, the agency questions whether implementation of the NCA’s parking policy is actually likely to lead to an increased use of public transport.³⁷

Individual Employees

- 3.26 The Committee received over a hundred submissions from individuals employed in the Barton/Parkes area. The majority of these recognise the need for improved parking management in the Parliamentary Zone. However, they also raise a number of concerns as to whether the NCA’s proposed policy is an equitable or effective way to achieve this, particularly in light of the current standard of public transport servicing the Zone.
- 3.27 One employee in the Zone, Mr Paul Starr, notes that parking is “certainly an issue deserving of serious attention”, but believes the NCA’s policy would have a negative impact if implemented before public transport was upgraded.³⁸ Mr Starr points out that it takes him fifteen minutes to travel to work via car as opposed to fifty minutes by bus.³⁹ The Committee received evidence from many employees in the Zone who would be faced with a similar situation if they commuted via public transport.
- 3.28 The suggestion that pay parking in the Zone could be justified because it would bring the Zone in line with other areas of major employment in the ACT which already have pay parking was not

34 Australian National Audit Office, Submissions, p 31.

35 Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Transcript, 9 May 2003, p 70.

36 Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Transcript, 9 May 2003, p 65.

37 Environment Australia, Submissions, p 83.

38 Paul Starr, Submissions, p 30.

39 Paul Starr, Submissions, p 29.

supported by employees. Unlike other centres of employment in Canberra, the Parliamentary Zone is isolated from retail outlets, banks, post offices and professional services such as doctors and dentists.⁴⁰ There are concerns that the NCA's proposed policy is a revenue-raising exercise rather than a genuine attempt to reduce the entry of single-occupant vehicles into the Parliamentary Zone. Mr Douglas McCloskey, for example, argues that:

Pay parking within the Parliamentary Zone is not a measure likely to reduce parking usage in light of prevailing transport conditions within Canberra. As such it can only be seen as a revenue grab, particularly in light of the absence of alternatives.⁴¹

Mr Tim Booth supports pay parking in the Zone in principle, but is deeply concerned about the lack of alternatives:

The simple introduction of pay parking into the Parliamentary Zone without viable modern, efficient, cheap, safe and frequent alternatives is intolerable.⁴²

Other Individuals / Organisations

- 3.29 Pedal Power ACT Inc. is a non-government organisation which acts as a rallying point for cyclists in the ACT and Queanbeyan.⁴³ The group supports the introduction of pay parking in the Parliamentary Zone and recommends that it be complimented by an enhanced public transport system and facilities for walking and cycling which would "help the Parliamentary Zone develop into a more accessible, dynamic and healthy place for all Australians".⁴⁴
- 3.30 The Committee received evidence from some Parliamentary Zone employees who, while acknowledging the need for improvements to public transport services, endorse pay parking on the basis that it would encourage people to use more ecologically sustainable forms of transport such as cycling or buses.⁴⁵ Canberra International Airport also supports the NCA's proposal for pay parking, on the basis that:

40 Boughey, Graham, Millington, Submissions.

41 Douglas McCloskey, Submissions, p 15.

42 Tim Booth, Submissions, p 333.

43 Pedal Power ACT Inc., *Cycling in Canberra, Australia and the Region*, www.pedalpower.org.au, accessed 3 May 2003.

44 Pedal Power ACT Inc., Submissions, p 299.

45 Susie Brown, Submissions, p 13.

The conflicts of providing easy and affordable car parking access for tourists in competition with commuting workers to the Parliamentary Zone and residents can only be resolved in the future by management methods including pay parking.⁴⁶

- 3.31 In his research paper titled *Capital Transit – A Proposal to Enhance Access to the Central National Area of the National Capital*, Mr John Lauder suggests that:

Paid parking may offer a useful mechanism to manage demand and raise revenue but to achieve the objectives outlined above, a more holistic approach focussing on a high quality alternative transport system serving a larger catchment and directly linked with Civic would be required.⁴⁷

The Committee's Views

- 3.32 The current parking arrangement in the Parliamentary Zone is clearly undesirable, and the overcrowding resulting from employees and visitors competing for parking space is not only affecting the amenity of the 'place of the people', it is affecting the level of access visitors should enjoy at the cultural institutions in the Zone. The Committee agrees that some form of strategy needs to be developed to alleviate these problems. However, the greatest concern to the Committee is that the solution proposed by the NCA, the introduction of pay parking, will not address the problem and will not see a significant reduction in the number of vehicles entering the Zone.
- 3.33 The Committee's view is that the Parliamentary Zone belongs to the people of Australia, and access to any of the culturally significant sites and buildings throughout the Zone must not incur a parking fee. The Committee also concurs with the view expressed by the national institutions that pay parking may reduce the appeal of visiting these attractions and represents the withdrawal of a fundamental right. The Committee is therefore reluctant to support any measures which may discourage people from visiting such symbolic icons. While the suggestion of a shuttle bus system may have limited merit, the Committee is concerned that it may not attract the level of demand such a system requires to remain practicable.

46 Canberra International Airport, Submissions, p 285.

47 John Lauder, Submissions, p 123.

- 3.34 The Committee believes that the Parliamentary Zone is unique and therefore should not be treated in the same way as commercial centres such as Civic and Woden. Such a comparison is inappropriate and misplaced. While pay parking may be a deterrent to private vehicle commuting for employees at those town centres, the Committee recognises that the isolation of the Zone from commercial facilities suggests that pay parking will not necessarily have the same impact.
- 3.35 While control of parking is an effective tool in managing demand for travel, the Committee believes that any restrictive measures on parking in areas of substantial employment should only be imposed where public transport access is adequate. The evidence which the Committee has received suggests that the bus service is inadequate for employees in the Zone. While the ACTION Authority claims that this perception is largely due to a lack of awareness with regards to the bus service, there is consistent evidence which supports the perception that the current public transport system does not meet the needs of commuters in the Zone.
- 3.36 The Committee faces great difficulty in that it has been asked to endorse a principle – which effectively entails signing a blank cheque – without having been presented with clearly defined details of the pay parking infrastructure which would be implemented in the event that the proposal is approved. The Committee acknowledges that the NCA has advised that it is awaiting the Committee’s ‘in-principle support’ before progressing with specifics regarding fees, parking meters and the design of multi-levelled parking structures. However, the Committee’s initial reasoning for embarking on this inquiry was to seek greater detail than was evident when the NCA and the ACT Government first presented their proposal to the Committee. At the conclusion of this inquiry, based on the evidence it has received, the Committee finds itself in no better position to advise the Parliament on the idea of pay parking in the Parliamentary Zone than it was in at the outset of the inquiry. The Committee is therefore unable to give the in-principle support the NCA is seeking.
- 3.37 The Committee believes that parking ratio policies determined by the NCA in the adjoining Barton/Forrest precinct have contributed directly to parking related problems in the Parliamentary Zone. Whilst well-motivated and designed to pursue a green agenda, policies to deliberately reduce the provision for on-site parking have not had the expected effect of reducing private vehicle commuting. Rather, it has worsened the parking problem, forcing Barton and Forrest workers to park in the Zone. It is ironic that the need to

manage traffic in the Parliamentary Zone has been brought about by the NCA's own development policies.

- 3.38 The Committee is also concerned that the NCA's consultation processes have failed to adequately address the concerns of key stakeholders, in particular, the national institutions throughout the Parliamentary Zone. Evidence suggests that the approach from the NCA has been not so much as to engage the institutions in the development of the proposal, but rather to impose its own policy upon the institutions and then to seek their approval.
- 3.39 The Committee understands that pay parking is going to have a far-reaching impact on a large number of people. In particular, pay parking will affect employees, who have reasonably viewed free parking as a measure to offset the absence of services in the Zone. There are also likely to be repercussions for the cultural institutions, which face the prospect of having to purchase parking for their volunteers, researchers and people with disabilities under the NCA's proposed regime. The Committee is not prepared to support the proposal without assurances that:
- Pay parking will not apply to visitors, volunteers and people with disabilities;
 - pay parking will create a significant reduction in the number of vehicles entering the Zone over time;
 - pay parking will in no way impede or discourage visitors, volunteers, researchers and students to the national institutions in the Zone; and
 - the prospect of having two different jurisdictions, side by side, implementing two different systems of pay parking, and being driven by different motivations, will not create a predicament more disconcerting than the current situation.

For these reasons, the Committee does not support the proposal for pay parking in the Parliamentary Zone, and is unable to do so until these issues have been adequately addressed.

Recommendation 1

That the National Capital Authority – in collaboration with the ACT Government and in thorough consultation with all relevant stakeholders, preferably with their consensus – develop a detailed parking policy proposal for the Parliamentary Zone that recognises the isolation of the Zone from commercial facilities and clearly defines the following characteristics:

- **the infrastructure to be built – including the timeframe and funding arrangements;**
- **the parking fees to be introduced - including provision to exclude visitors, volunteers and people with disabilities from payment; and**
- **contingencies should the Parliamentary Zone experience further encroachment of commuters from the adjacent Barton precinct.**

**Senator Ross Lightfoot
Chairman**

