

Car Parking

Surface car parking accounts for 14 percent (some 14 hectares) of the total area of the Parliamentary Zone (excluding the site of Parliamentary House) compared with 10 percent of the surface area occupied by buildings. Large surface car parks are adjacent to every office building, the national institutions and Commonwealth and Kings Avenues. The car parks dominate the landscape of the Zone and alienate sites that should be available for further development of the Zone. For many visitors their first impression is one of sterile car parks.

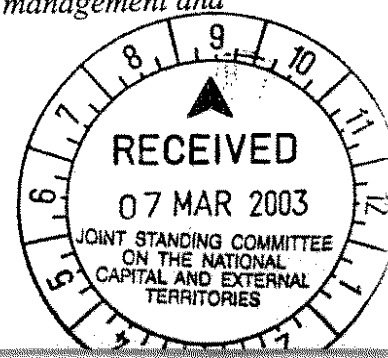
There are practical reasons as to why this amount of land has been given to car parking – people commuting to work in the Parliamentary zone need to park their cars! I am not convinced that the aesthetic sensitivities of the temporary visitor should be given precedence over the needs of commuters required to work in the area. I must say that I have never been struck by a perception of “sterile” (nee “utilised”) car parks dominating the vista of the Parliamentary Zone. In fact, the impression is more one of significant Government and other institutional buildings in an open, landscaped and vegetated area.

There also needs to be greater rationalisation and management of the use of the car parks. Visitors compete with commuters for parking. In a number of cases, commuters from offices in the Civic and Barton districts are parking - at no charge - all day in the Zone car parks, and catching bus services into Civic or walking into Barton. On occasion, during major exhibitions at the National Gallery of Australia, the underground car park has to be boom-gated until 9:30 am to prevent commuters occupying spaces set aside for Gallery visitors.

These case examples are an unconvincing justification for arguing the need for introducing pay parking. The examples are vague and do not provide any empirical data to support the contention that these are in any way significant issues. The numbers of people utilising car parks and then using bus services to commute to other areas such as Civic represent an insubstantial number of the total commuting population into the Parliamentary Zone. The example of the National Gallery seems rather trivial, a minor inconvenience for Gallery staff.

The parking initiative proposed for the place of the people is aimed at improving the experience of the visitor by creating convenient and safe parking areas, balancing parking demand and supply and reducing the use of the motor vehicle. The parking initiative is an important step toward applying more sustainable management and development practices and in establishing a ‘greener’ Zone.

Again the emphasis of this conceptual plan is on the temporary visitor rather than the majority of people who use the zone for work purposes. No evidence is provided to back up statements that new car parking facilities will be convenient and safe through squeezing the supply of car parking. In fact, the plan seems to advocate more inconvenient parking by segregating parking areas from work places and other institutions. The wording implies that current car parking is unsafe – this inference is again unsubstantiated. I fail to see how converting car parks into more buildings will bring about more sustainable management and establish a ‘greener’ zone.



To successfully establish the campuses in the Zone, future development must take place on some of the existing surface car parks. Obviously, as development increases there will be less surface car parking. Each new building will be required to provide space for its own parking needs either wholly or partly on-site. When buildings are sited on existing surface car parks, an assessment of the overall campus requirement will need to be made.

The experience of other new building developments in the Barton area has been that more buildings equals more demand for car spaces. Generally, new buildings only cater for a fraction of this increased demand and in most cases these on-site facilities are reserved for senior executive level or senior management staff. The above statement regarding "an assessment of the overall campus requirement" being made is just waffle – the outcome is completely foreseeable: more buildings = more workers = more demand for car parking = greater constraints on already constrained resources (which will be even more constrained if this proposed plan is implemented).

For the Parliamentary Zone to become the place of the people, there will have to be a reduction in the rate at which parking is provided. This will encourage commuters to make greater use of public transport and, in conjunction with other initiatives, such as completing a convenient and pleasant system of paths, the Zone will become a more accessible and vibrant place.

Perhaps more aptly named "the place of the disgruntled" as workers are forced (not encouraged) to use alternative means of transport. For some, such as myself, there is simply no viable alternative to commuting by car (owing to personal commitments and the hopelessly inadequate state of public transport to my place of abode). I fail to see how the removal of some car parks will magically make the zone more accessible and vibrant.

Nevertheless, demand and consolidation of parking will warrant the erection of structured car parks. It is proposed that these be located centrally in the John Gorton and Treasury campuses to serve the whole of the place of the people. These structured car parks will include some convenient amenities, such as dry cleaners, newsagents and flower shops. They could also be the home base for a shuttle bus that would operate at regular intervals connecting the car parks to the other campuses and buildings.

Please explain what a "structure car park" is. Is it simply a euphemism for a privately owned and operated multi-storey pay parking facility? If so, I would be interested to know how such facilities will positively contribute to the image of a sustainable green zone? As commuters we don't need the carrot of a few convenience stores ('flower shops' for goodness sakes!), we need convenient access to our places of work. A couple of paragraphs above, the plan envisages improved convenience of car parking. I fail to see how this is achieved if shuttle buses are required to transport commuters the presumably considerable distances between their place of work and the place at which they park their car. Presumably, commuters would also pay for this "improvement" in convenience.

Viable structured car parking could only be introduced with, or following, the introduction of pay parking.

Why? So that you first constrict demand before you restrict supply?

It is proposed that pay parking be introduced where commuters are displacing visitors. Combined with variable fees for preferential parking locations and improved public transport, pay parking may be an effective management tool. Whilst visitors would still be able to park free in some locations for short stays (1–3 hours), mechanisms could also be explored for the reimbursement of visitors who choose long-stay pay parking, through vouchers at the national attractions. All weekend and public holiday parking would be free.

The plan fails to identify the locations where visitors are currently being displaced by commuters and fails to quantify the scope of this perceived problem. The phrase "where commuters are displacing visitors" has not been defined and could be interpreted at a number of spatial levels (eg within 100m, 500m of a facility used by visitors). The above example of minor inconveniences during major exhibitions at the National Gallery hardly justifies the wholesale introduction of pay parking within the zone. The majority of car parks in the zone, outside of those adjoining the actual sites of high tourist visitation, have been provided for and are being fully utilised by commuters and their use is not in anyway displacing resources likely to be used by visitors. The key issue here appears to be the better management of existing car parking facilities at the national institutions so that visitors are adequately catered for and commuters are not unnecessarily using these resources.

There is also a high demand for parking in the Parkes and Barton districts, which are major employment centres adjacent to the Zone. Issues related to parking availability and equity for commuters in these areas will need to be addressed as the parking initiative is developed.

This is a throw-away statement. I see no evidence of the current plan taking account of commuter needs let alone providing for commuter equity. Its premise appears to be the forced restriction of commuter options and behaviour.

Providing parking in the Parliamentary Zone is an ongoing and significant management cost that should be equitably borne by the user. Pay parking would contribute funds to offset the maintenance of car parks and roads in the Parliamentary Zone, which at present escape the 'user-pays' principle.

Another unquantified statement. What are the costs and who are they borne by? The Commonwealth who is the major employer within the zone? The Commonwealth buildings currently within the zone contain basement car parking for only a select number of senior executives and the removal of adjoining surface car parking would not meet even basic car parking requirements for existing numbers of workers let alone increased numbers as proposed by this plan. It appears that under the plan only some users (ie commuters) would be subject to the user-pays principle, visitors would be exempt. Please provide an example of another place in the country (apart from private toll roads) where drivers are required to pay for road maintenance above and beyond local Government rates.

The car parking initiative is consistent with the National Greenhouse Strategy and will balance the needs of the visitor with those of the commuter in a fair and equitable manner.

This statement is the icing on the cake. None of the preceding discussion provides any evidence whatsoever that the needs of the commuter have been given any serious

consideration. It is a ridiculous conclusion that the introduction of pay parking for commuters will in any way provide a "fair and equitable" balance with the free parking to be made available to the temporary visitor. The only equity will be for the visitor and the senior executive who both will avoid the need to pay park through preferential treatment.

The discussion paper would be a much more honest document if it avoided all the unsubstantiated waffle and focussed on the key issues behind this "initiative": more dollars for the Commonwealth via increased rates from more building developments and commuter-based pay car parking. It is disingenuous to cloak these key issues in flowery planning dialogue without providing a balanced argument of the pros and cons (both qualitative and quantitative) associated with different planning options.