

**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AND
EXTERNAL TERRITORIES - INQUIRY INTO PAY PARKING IN THE
PARLIAMENTARY ZONE**

**SUBMISSION OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE & THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT
GALLERY**

TERMS OF REFERENCE

- The interests of visitors to the Parliamentary Zone
- The interests of those employed in the Parliamentary Zone and adjacent areas;
- The interests of the national institutions in the Parliamentary Zone
- Tourism and related issues; and
- Proposed parking policies or Forrest and Barton – areas adjacent to the Parliamentary zone managed by the ACT Government – and the effects of these policies on parking arrangement as in the Parliamentary zone

KEY POINTS OF OPH/NPG SUBMISSION

- OPH/NPG considers that a reformed parking regime based on the principles set out in this submission is capable of discouraging the overflow of commuter traffic into the Parliamentary Zone without unacceptably disadvantaging the key interest groups within the Zone at this time.
- A reformed system of parking controls and parking availability, properly implemented, will help continue the Zone's expected growth in tourist traffic.
- However at a time when greater emphasis is being placed on attracting more visitors to the Zone and its attractions, it is essential that any new regime of parking controls should not inadvertently undermine that growth.
- Any new parking regime must therefore take into account the likely long-term growth and needs of tourist visitation in the area. Existing parking facilities in the Zone generally, and near OPH/NPG in particular, are likely to become inadequate with the expected growth in tourist visitation over the next few years.
- New arrangements must also be based on consultation with all affected groups and coordination with any other relevant proposed reforms and projects.



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Old Parliament House and The National Portrait Gallery – Role, Visitor Profile and Current Parking Arrangements

Old Parliament House (OPH) and the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) are among the institutions in the Parliamentary Zone that will be directly affected by any reforms to the existing parking arrangements within the Zone. The NPG is located within OPH, with additional gallery space in Commonwealth Place. Both institutions are operated by a single management structure and governance arrangements that form part of the Commonwealth Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. Both are overseen by Minister-appointed advisory bodies, the Old Parliament House Governing Council and the National Portrait Gallery Board, which set their strategic directions and guide their development.

We understand that a separate submission will be made to the Inquiry on behalf of the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts as a whole. This submission focuses on OPH/NPG's specific views on the issue of parking in the Parliamentary Zone as a cultural institution and tourism venue located within the Zone.

Old Parliament House is now a museum of social and political history in a heritage site. The National Portrait Gallery houses, and continues to develop, a representative collection of portraits of subjects who have made a major impact upon Australia. Both develop and present appropriate exhibitions and provide a range of interpretative and educational programs and other activities. At the recent National Tourism Awards, OPH and the NPG were named Australia's best heritage and cultural tourism attraction. OPH and the NPG currently attract approximately 170,000 visitors per year.

As well as being a cultural institution, OPH has a wide range of other roles. Portions of the building operate as a function centre, a gift shop, a café and restaurant and a venue for a variety of activities including meetings, conferences, conventions, etc. The building also houses a small number of government-related tenants. Hence in addition to normal visitor traffic a wide range of groups, possibly totalling up to a thousand people, can make use of the building and travel to and from it in a single day.

This traffic is currently served only by a very limited number of car parking spaces (circa 235, some of which will soon be lost) in the immediate vicinity of the building (see **Attachment A** for details of OPH/NPG parking resources). In addition to visitor and venue-generated traffic, these parking facilities serve staff, OPH Volunteers and visiting tradesmen and contractors. Staff and Volunteers' parking alone can occupy 40-50 car spaces at any one time. While contractor traffic is variable, major projects, such as a substantial program of building refurbishment and restoration works that is

about to commence at OPH, can result in an additional 50 or more workers on-site at any one time and a commensurate increase in vehicle and heavy equipment traffic.

OPH/NPG's View on Pay Parking Issue

From OPH/NPG's perspective, the current arrangements for parking in the Parliamentary Zone have been broadly acceptable to date. Traffic overflow from adjoining office areas presently has limited impact on parking areas in the immediate vicinity of OPH (ie, on the front and sides of the building). Parking at the front of the building, which is largely used by tourists and other short-term visitors, is already short-term (currently a maximum of three hours) and thus of limited benefit to commuters seeking all-day parking. While the supply of long-term parking immediately adjacent to the building is limited, it is currently adequate for visitors and others, offsetting the lack of any dedicated parking in the area for staff, Volunteers and other on-site workers.

OPH/NPG recognises, however, that such factors as the introduction of pay parking in adjoining areas, the likely resulting encroachment of commuter traffic into the Parliamentary Zone and the expected long-term growth of tourist visitation to the institutions within the Parliamentary Zone mean that it is no longer feasible to retain the current arrangements of free long and short-stay parking in the entire Zone. The National Capital Authority's 2000 Parliamentary Zone Review expressed concern that such traffic overflow was impacting on cultural institutions' parking areas, recognised the importance of tourism in the Zone and based its parking recommendations at least partially on the need to meet the requirements of the cultural institutions. The Review's "Car Parking" section for example specifically states *"It is proposed that pay parking be introduced where commuters are displacing visitors"*.

OPH/NPG is also concerned that our available parking supply will shortly become inadequate with the likely removal of the two car parks at the back of OPH as a result of the NCA's planned redevelopment of the OPH Gardens. This is expected to eliminate some 32 % of our current parking. This, combined with expected substantial growth in tourism visitation in the area over the next five years, means that parking problems in the vicinity of OPH/NPG are likely to become acute unless specific action is taken to improve parking arrangements and consider the development of additional parking facilities within easy walking distance of this site.

OPH/NPG therefore does not oppose the introduction of paid parking per se, and accepts that there is likely to be some real benefit to the area in the introduction of a carefully planned and controlled system.

Nonetheless, we are concerned that any changes to current parking arrangements must be handled carefully so as not to damage the interests of the main stakeholders cited in the Inquiry's terms of reference, including the institutions in the Parliamentary Zone, their staff, volunteers and visitors and enhanced levels of tourism in the sector generally.

The NCA, the cultural institutions and ACT tourism authorities all wish to make the Parliamentary Zone a more vibrant, exciting area that will be more attractive to

visitors. The recent success of many of the area's cultural institutions, as recognised at the recent National Tourism Awards, is evidence that these efforts are beginning to produce real benefits. Any negative effects of a changed parking system in the Parliamentary Zone must be avoided so as not to inadvertently compromise these achievements, or jeopardise the Zone's contribution to Canberra's growth as a major national tourist attraction. Easy access by car to the Zone and its attractions, albeit under somewhat changed conditions, is vital to that continued long-term growth.

From OPH/NPG's perspective, any new parking regime also should not disadvantage the OPH Volunteers. OPH has some 140 Volunteers, 8-10 of whom are on duty at any one time. The OPH Volunteers are essential to our continued operation but are unpaid for their services; paid parking without some offsetting mechanism would reduce the ability of most Volunteers to continue in that capacity. (A letter from the OPH Volunteers' Committee on parking is at **Attachment B**).

Suggested Parking Regime for OPH/NPG

Based on the above factors, OPH/NPG's preference is for a reformed parking system in the vicinity of the OPH site that incorporates such features as:-

- The closure of the parking areas at either side of OPH to through traffic, so that they are no longer publicly accessible through-roads, and the introduction of boom-gate parking. This will also improve pedestrian safety and access in the area.
- The vesting of control over parking in the area with OPH/NPG, which would receive any resulting revenue. OPH/NPG would then be in a position to allocate, charge and recompense staff, Volunteers, contractors and visitors for parking as appropriate. These proposals seem consistent with the suggestion in the Parliamentary Zone Review that "*mechanisms could also be explored for the reimbursement of visitors who choose long-stay pay parking*".
- Widening of the parking areas at the sides of OPH to allow additional manoeuvring space for those parked in the area.

Key Requirements for any Paid Parking System in the Parliamentary Zone

Regardless of the parking arrangements ultimately put in place in the vicinity of OPH/NPG we consider a number of key features essential to the development of any system of paid parking in the Zone. While some relate directly to OPH/NPG's needs and concerns, others will be relevant to all stakeholders. OPH/NPG notes that several of these features are consistent with proposals put forward in the Parliamentary Zone Review, and with the need to remedy commuter overflow traffic problems. They include:-

- Adequate bus parking areas need to be retained in the Zone for tourist / school bus groups. Existing dedicated bus parking areas should also remain free of parking charges, as commuter traffic presumably does not impact on these areas.

- Any parking charges should be relatively modest, or free in appropriate areas near institutions, for at least the first three hours. This will minimise any disincentive to tourist visitation in the area, while still discouraging additional commuter traffic from outside the Zone, and is consistent with suggestions in the Parliamentary Zone Review.
- Paid parking vouchers should be transferable - ie, an initial period of paid parking should not be linked to a single space, but should be useable anywhere in the Zone. Visitors using cars, who can be expected to move around between institutions in that period, could thus make a single payment, rather than paying every time they visit an institution regardless of the duration of that visit.
- The new parking system should be readily comprehensible to interstate visitors who may not be familiar with the voucher-style arrangements in place in Canberra car parks.
- Free parking should be provided in the Zone on the weekends and public holidays. Any commuter overflow problem will be absent at these times, and free parking will encourage greater visitation to the attractions in the Zone at weekends and public holidays. This is consistent with suggestions in the Parliamentary Zone Review.
- A certain amount of dedicated parking should be provided in the immediate vicinity of each institution in the Zone for allocated use by their staff, visiting contractors, etc. A strong case can be made for this to be granted to OPH/NPG since, as noted above, it is the only institution in the Zone that effectively has no dedicated parking.
- Provision should be made to exempt OPH Volunteers (and any similar volunteer programs run by other institutions) from any parking charges through the issue of special free parking stickers or vouchers, similar to the system of Volunteer Parking Permits provided by the ACT Government to volunteer organisations.
- Adequate levels of available parking must be retained in the Zone following the introduction of any system of paid parking. The Parliamentary Zone Review appears to favour a reduction in the amount of parking. Any introduction of paid parking that involved fewer available car spaces would simply exacerbate existing pressures and disadvantage Zone tenants, including OPH/NPG and visitors. Other forms of transport are simply not a viable alternative to cars for a large portion of OPH/NPG visitors and staff (and presumably for most other affected cultural institutions). In particular, many essential staff (eg, Security) commonly work outside the hours in which public transport is convenient.
- Any introduction of paid parking should be consistent with other current proposals for change and redevelopment in the affected area. For example, the "pathways" proposals contained in the Parliamentary Zone Review suggests the introduction of some form of pedestrian plaza around OPH. Apart from raising heritage issues, such a development could further reduce the amount of parking currently available in the vicinity. As noted above, the OPH Garden Redevelopment will

also substantially reduce parking in the vicinity of OPH, but is equally likely to increase visitation to the area. Without careful coordination the implementation of either of these proposals, in conjunction with the introduction of paid parking, could have a major impact on OPH/NPG by rendering it much less accessible to visitors.

Comments on Proposed Alternatives to Exiting Parking Arrangements

OPH/NPG is concerned that some of the alternatives to current traffic arrangements proposed in the Parliamentary Zone Review may be less effective than the Review suggests.

- The introduction of shuttle buses in the Zone as an alternative to commuter parking is likely to do little to offset the increased imposition that pay parking or fewer parking spaces will place on visitors. Tourists in the Zone primarily travel by car for matters of efficiency and convenience. As such they are unlikely to patronise shuttle buses (either within or to the Zone) in large numbers. Past experiments with tourist shuttle buses in the area have had minimal success. In September-December 1999 OPH/NPG trialed a shuttle bus between it and Parliament House; passenger levels remained relatively low throughout the trial period and the service was not considered cost-effective. It might be argued that the proposed changes would give visitors a strong incentive to make use of alternative transport. However, most tourists visit Canberra for only one or two days, and have only a limited time available to them. If tourist parking is not readily available at a reasonable rate then many tourists, rather than making use of shuttle buses, are likely to simply visit fewer attractions in the Zone in their time here or concentrate primarily on tourist activities outside of the Zone.
- The Review does not suggest viable alternatives to car transport for staff of cultural institutions. The Parliamentary Zone is already poorly serviced by commuter buses outside of peak office hours, and this is unlikely to change with the introduction of paid or reduced parking. There are also personal security concerns associated with the use of public transport or transit to remote parking areas at certain times.
- While the Parliamentary Zone Review's proposed improvement of walkways between major institutions in the Zone is welcome, for many visitors this will not provide a viable alternative to the use of cars and parking. Despite the Review's claims, many visitors will not "*walk 400-500 metres in 5 minutes if the route is easy to negotiate*", either because of added inconvenience and time constraints or for practical reasons (eg, the elderly or visitors with young children).
- The Parliamentary Zone Review proposes the introduction of structured car parking in the Zone. While this is a useful strategy to cope with future traffic growth in the Zone, reasonable levels of car parking still need to be retained in the immediate vicinity of cultural institutions so as not to severely disadvantage their visitors and staff and harm their viability.

Possible Impact of an Unsatisfactory Parking System on OPH/NPG and the Parliamentary Zone

The majority of visitor trips to Canberra are short, and car travel is the dominant form of transport for such visits. In 2001, almost 48% of all visits were day trips (with the remaining 52% overnight trips of one or more nights), some 28% of overnight visits were single-night stays and a further 28% of visits were two-night stays. Approximately 88% of the day trips, 70 % of overnight trips and 78% of total trips were by car. Research also indicates that the majority of visitors use their own vehicle to travel while visiting Canberra, and that both the availability and, to a lesser extent, value for money of current car parking in Canberra rate well with visitors (*Source – Canberra Tourism and Events Corporation*). We can surmise from this that most visitors to Canberra - and the Parliamentary Zone - are short-stay visitors travelling by car.

In the case of OPH/NPG, our visitor profile indicates that some 26% of our visitors are locals, 67% from interstate and 7 % from overseas. A high proportion of both interstate and local visitors can be expected to use car transport. Any reforms that reduce the convenience of travel within the Zone will further lessen their chances of visiting OPH/NPG (and possibly other affected cultural institutions) during their brief time in Canberra.

It is therefore likely that any measures that substantially affect tourists' ease of transport by car will reduce the Zone's attractiveness as a tourist destination. In such circumstances, visitors with limited time may be even more inclined to restrict their visits to Canberra's most popular tourist attractions, Parliament House (whose underground parking areas will presumably not be subject to the Review) and the Australian War Memorial (which is outside the area under review).

Conclusion

- OPH/NPG considers that a reformed parking regime based on the principles set out in this submission is capable of discouraging the overflow of commuter traffic into the Parliamentary Zone without unacceptably disadvantaging the key interest groups within the Zone at this time.
- A reformed system of parking controls and parking availability, properly implemented, will help continue the Zone's expected growth in tourist traffic.
- However at a time when greater emphasis is being placed on attracting more visitors to the Zone and its attractions, it is essential that any new regime of parking controls should not inadvertently undermine that growth.
- Any new parking regime must therefore take into account the likely long-term growth and needs of tourist visitation in the area. Existing parking facilities in the Zone generally, and near OPH/NPG in particular, are likely to become inadequate with the expected growth in tourist visitation over the next few years.

- New arrangements must also be based on consultation with all affected groups and coordination with any other relevant proposed reforms and projects.

ATTACHMENT A

OPH/NPG CURRENT PARKING FACILITIES

Currently public parking is generally available on three sides of the Old Parliament House site. The two sides of the building, in between the main site and the OPH Gardens, are bordered by public roads.

There are 48 car parking spaces on the Senate side, including one disabled and one Commonwealth car space, along with dedicated coach parking for 4 coaches. There are 49 car parking spaces (including one disabled and three Commonwealth car spaces) on the House of Representatives side. These spaces are open to the public and allow for unlimited free parking. The front of the site, which also provides a publicly accessible thoroughfare, provides 52 parking spaces (including two disabled spaces). These are available to the general public but have a maximum parking period of three hours.

It should be noted that there are also 11 car spaces at the rear of the building. While generally not used by the public (they tend to primarily be used by visiting tradesmen, restaurant staff, etc) they are nevertheless technically public car spaces.

This provides a total of 160 car spaces in the immediate vicinity of OPH. Of this available parking, none is dedicated for exclusive OPH/ NPG use, other than the four Commonwealth car spaces.

Also in close proximity to OPH are two small car parks at the back of the OPH Gardens on either side of the back of OPH, fronting onto Queen Victoria Terrace. These provide a further 39 spaces on the Senate side and 35 spaces on the Representatives side that are available for general public use. This brings the total parking in close proximity to OPH to 234. However, it is understood that these two car parks will be abolished as part of the NCA's Old Parliament House Gardens redevelopment project.

ATTACHMENT B

LETTER FROM THE OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE VOLUNTEERS' COMMITTEE ON PARKING ISSUES

Mr Arthur Blewitt
Chief General Manager
Old Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Blewitt

On behalf of the voluntary guides at Old Parliament House, we wish to express our deep concern at the plan to introduce paid parking in the parliamentary triangle.

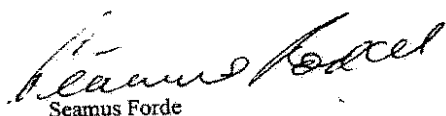
We should point out that the vast majority of guides are retirees or on a limited income. If a parking levy were introduced, this would impose an additional burden which might compel many to reconsider their continued involvement in voluntary work at Old Parliament House.

This could in turn pose grave consequences for the quality of service offered at this cultural institution. Many guides have worked in this building for a number of years and have acquired a "human" perspective as a result of long interaction with different kinds of visitors from all over Australia and the rest of the world. It would, therefore, not be a simple matter to replace such people who have built up such vast repositories of knowledge, and indeed, come to love this historic building.

It should also be noted that voluntary guides enjoy their contribution, and would be distressed to find themselves in a position where it is no longer feasible for them to continue their voluntary work.

In the light of the fact that Old Parliament House is an award winning tourist destination, we would urge you to bear in mind the necessity to retain the services of experienced guides so that high standards can be maintained.

Thank you for your consideration.



Seamus Forde
Chairperson
Old Parliament House Volunteers' Committee

5 March 2003