



ACT Light Rail

An effective light rail network for the Capital Region.

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Submission by ACT Light Rail to the Inquiry into the investment of Commonwealth and State funds in public passenger transport infrastructure and services

Authorised by Damien Haas, Chair, ACT Light Rail

Background

ACT Light Rail (ACT LR) is a community based public transport lobby group comprised of members from various community groups within the ACT, who share the common goal of promoting the idea of Light Rail as the primary mode of mass transit in the Capital Region.

We thank the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport for the opportunity to present our submission to the Inquiry into the investment of Commonwealth and State funds in public passenger transport infrastructure and services.

ACT LR hope that the information provided in this submission is of assistance in preparing an audit of passenger transport in the Capital region, and that the suggestions and recommendation contained in this submission are considered by the Committee.

Passenger transport in the Capital region

The Capital region is a diverse area with several large towns (Yass, Goulburn, Queanbeyan) and one major city (Canberra). It also contains several medium sized towns.

Many residents of regional towns travel on a daily basis to Canberra for work. These journeys are primarily by private vehicle, as the passenger transport services are outdated, uncomfortable and infrequent.

Existing rail links between these towns are not ideal for passenger transport. Canberra is linked to Sydney by rail, with a branch line from Goulburn to Canberra using 19th century gradients and an irregular daily service. Canberra is not linked to Melbourne by rail, with passengers required to travel to Yass by coach before transferring to the Sydney – Melbourne train service.

Passenger transport by rail from Canberra to Sydney and Melbourne is decreasing annually, and indeed these trips are now performed primarily by air travel.

Taking this into consideration, serious thought should be given to changing the use of this rail line and upgrading the infrastructure to support an inter-town rail service. Residents of towns such as Braidwood and Bungendore that theoretically could utilize the rail line to Canberra for passenger transport to work, currently do not. The existing rail service is slow and irregular and the Canberra station is poorly served by the Action bus service, which takes passengers to Civic on a regular route.

There is also a proposal to close and move the Canberra station and rebuild a station more suited to its primary industrial and freight operations. This proposal would if implemented be the death knell for sustained passenger operations on the Canberra – Sydney rail line.

ACT LR recommends that Commonwealth funding be provided to upgrade the existing rail infrastructure to allow the use of high-speed passenger trains along the entire rail line, with a focus on a Braidwood to Canberra service operating at least six times a day.

ACT LR also recommends that Action or Deanes buses offer an increased service frequency to Canberra station and that these services operate to multiple locations within Canberra. This would require NSW and ACT government organizations liaising, and an increase in passenger rail services between Braidwood and Canberra.

Coach and Bus services

Coaches provide a limited passenger service between Canberra, Goulburn and Yass. Travel to Queanbeyan is by one coach company, Deanes, which transports passengers from Queanbeyan to several locations within Canberra. The Canberra public transport service, Action, has no services that carry passengers from Canberra to Queanbeyan.

Bowmans Coaches operate a daily commuter coach service between Canberra and Goulburn.

Canberra Airport public transport access

The Canberra Airport is serviced primarily by private vehicles, then by taxis, hire cars and a passenger bus service provided by Deanes and subsidized by the operators of the Airport. The service carries passengers and airport employees to Civic. An Action bus service operates to the Airport and the co-located Brindabella Business Park. Services are not frequent. They are provided primarily for and used by airport and business park employees.

Lack of integration between transport modes

Action and Deanes do not have any integration of services, ticketing or timetabling. The use of common bus stops is enabled only by the fact that bus stops in Canberra are administered by ACT Territory and Municipal services, and not by Action.

ACT LR recommends that the regulations preventing Action operating within Queanbeyan be removed. ACT LR also recommends that Deanes be allowed to operate passenger services with the ACT. This would enable enhanced passenger

services and an increase in areas serviced and an increase in service frequency.

Population and growth in the region

In its ‘*Capital Region Profile*’, the Capital Region Area Consultative Committee¹ reported a population in the Capital region of 417,059 as of June 2003. It noted that:

Overall, population forecasts clearly show strong growth for the whole region, with projected population increases of 12% in the period 2001- 2011 and 10% in the period 2011-2021. The population is projected to grow by 41,700 or 1.09% every year from 2001-2021.

Based on this conservative estimate of 1.09% population growth, the figures in the table below represent when the population of the ACT and the Canberra Region will reach half a million. Goulburn has been excluded from these calculations. The other figures were obtained from various open sources, all dated post 2000.

Area	2006 Population (000) latest ABS figures	2016 (Projected Growth)	2028 (Projected Growth)	2042 (Projected Growth)
Yass	12.3	13.7	15.6	18.2
Murrumbateman	1.3	1.4	1.6	1.9
Queanbeyan incl Jerrabomberra	32.4	36.1	41.1	47.8
Palerang Council	10.6	11.8	13.4	15.6
ACT	338.2	376.2	429.3	500.0
Total	394.8	440.0	500.0	583.2

These figures indicate that a growing population will require enhanced transport infrastructure within the Capital region. This infrastructure should be mass transit infrastructure, ideally grade separated rail, with the ability to carry heavy and light rail vehicles.

A future passenger transport network within the Capital region

Many residents of Capital region towns work in Canberra, leading to busy and congested roads. Building new or enhancing existing rail infrastructure to a standard in which it is attractive to commuters and offers a frequency of service which would make it viable to use for commuting needs to be investigated.

Light Rail within the ACT and Capital region

Passenger bus services operated by Action are not coping with existing service numbers, and the network is hampered by infrequent service (average of 55 minutes between services), overloaded buses and poor use by residents in outer suburban

¹ The Capital Region Area Consultative Committee Inc. comprises members drawn from the Capital Region’s communities, businesses and governments and is the Area Consultative Committee for the Capital Region – the ACT, and five surrounding NSW Local Government Areas of Goulburn Mulwaree, Upper Lachlan, Yass Valley, Palerang and Queanbeyan City.

areas. The large service area covered by Action also means that trip times are far longer than passengers expect, and as a result patronage suffers.

Within the ACT, a light rail network should be constructed which would serve as the primary mode of passenger travel between major employment, population and education centres. This passenger transport network would be fully integrated with Action buses servicing suburbs and delivering passengers to light rail hubs. This would decrease trip times, increase service frequency and deliver passengers in a timely fashion.

This light rail network should extend into Queanbeyan and Jerrabomberra.

Lobbying for a light rail network is the primary focus of ACT LR. We recommend that the phased implementation of light rail initially within the ACT, and integration with regional NSW transport infrastructure (initially to Queanbeyan) be considered.

The ACT Government has submitted a business case to Infrastructure Australia proposing the construction of a light rail network within Canberra. The ACT Government claims that it is unable to fund a light rail network without federal assistance or private investment.

Triple bottom line - economics, environment and society

The Committee should when assessing passenger transport infrastructure, take into consideration the 'triple bottom line' of economics, environment and society.

Roads, private transport and light rail all consume resources. In its resource use public transport has what economists call 'returns to scale'. The more users of public transport, the greater the economic benefit. The true cost of road construction is rarely quantified. It is simply accepted that more roads are required. Invariably new roads built to ease congestion succumb to the same congestion in defiance of predictions, and a call for more road construction. Investment in sustainable public transport can decrease the requirement for future road construction if approached in a planned and integrated manner.

The benefits to the environment of minimising private vehicle use in favour of increased public transport patronage can also be quantified in the ability to reduce road construction, lessen the use of green space for carparking and to better focus town planning around people and not roads. By making public transport comfortable, available and attractive patronage increases – decreasing the overall cost per passenger. Additionally, attractive public transport alternatives appeal not simply to the 'captive' passenger (student, elderly, economically deprived outer suburban resident) but to full-fare paying adults travelling to their place of work.

The advantages to society of greater public transport use and reduced private vehicle usage can also be calculated in variables such as time gained in reducing commuting hours (increasing family time) and reducing fatalities associated with road use. Many regional roads connecting towns within the Capital region are already congested carrying more cars than originally intended.

The increased walking associated with commuters walking from public transport nodes to their residences or places of education and employment also lead to an improvement in public health.

These factors are important when assessing funding priorities. ACT LR recommend that enhanced investment in regional passenger transport infrastructure should be oriented towards heavy and light rail, with a focus on making these services attractive to commuters and offering a frequency of service which would make people step out of their private vehicles and onto public transport. A light rail vehicle can carry 220 people. That is the capacity of three buses or 200 cars (with the majority of private vehicle trips carrying a single person).

By improving regional passenger transport infrastructure, trip times will be reduced and productivity increased. Reduced trip times will also provide a better quality of life to commuters.

Future actions that could facilitate passenger transport initiatives

ACT LR recommends that a study be prepared looking at the integration of transport infrastructure between the major towns of the Capital Region. This would focus on heavy rail links between the large regional towns and light rail within Canberra, linked to Queanbeyan and Jerrabomberra. Heavy rail and light rail would be integrated with bus services and use a common ticketing system.

The provision of heavy rail passenger transport infrastructure should be a long-term objective. A short-term objective must be the phased implementation of light rail within Canberra.

ACT LR accept that the private motor vehicle will continue to be the primary mode of passenger transport within the Capital Region. This does not mean that public transport should continue to be under-funded when compared with road funding. As discussed in this submission, investment in public transport infrastructure will produce significant benefits.

Conclusion

Within 35 years, the population of the Capital region will be approaching 600,000 people. The passenger transport infrastructure must be of a standard that will enable these residents to travel with ease and in a reasonable time between towns within the region. An investment in passenger transport infrastructure by the Commonwealth, and coordinated with the ACT and NSW governments will provide all three governments the opportunity to shape future regional development and provide sustainable transport options. A benefit of this investment will be a reduced strain on the environment by reducing private vehicle use and emissions, and an increase in productivity.