



Submission on the ACT Draft Integrated Transport Strategy

Submission by the ACT Climate Change Council - April 2019

This submission comments on selected issues on the ACT Government's draft Integrated Transport Strategy ("the Strategy").

The Council finds the Strategy comprehensive and well considered overall, though in some respects we suggest stronger, more rapid or more extensive action.

Objectives

The Council notes that the Strategy aims to support the strategic ambitions of: economic growth, diversification and competitiveness; net zero emissions by 2045; urban renewal, increased vibrancy and liveability; a smart and connected digital city; and social inclusion.

The Council agrees with this framing for a transport strategy, and our comments in this submission are against the background of these stated objectives. Our main focus in this submission is how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transport, in the context of the broader objectives.

With regard to proposed actions, the Council comments as follows.

Actions

General principles for an integrated transport system

The Strategy sets out the vision of a fully integrated transport system for Canberra, which would enable and encourage seamless transfer between different modes of transport, and thereby help achieve modal shift towards public transport and active travel. This is the right approach.

- In the overall hierarchy of planning and implementation of the ACT transport system, priority needs to be given to pedestrians and cyclists, followed by public transport, with cars given lowest priority. **Priority for active and public transport** needs to be reflected in all planning and implementation, from relative public investment volumes to management decisions such as the wait times at traffic lights.
- Decisions about **ACT government investments, charges and regulations for transport** need to fully take into account the ancillary benefits of any shift from private car transport to public transport and active transport, including in any cost-benefit analysis that informs such decisions.



Pricing of transport options

Pricing of transport options should be reviewed, to create incentives for people to align their transport choices with the objectives as laid out in the Strategy. In doing so, social objectives need to be considered, especially so as not to disadvantage residents with long commutes.

- **Pricing of public transport** should be reviewed with a view to reducing fares in the near term, and moving towards free public transport in the medium to longer term. Public transport needs to be understood as an essential public service. Increased passenger volumes on public transport will translate into less individual car-based transport, with benefits in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, road wear, noise and pollution, and social interactivity. Cost-benefit analysis of public transport by government needs to fully take into account these co-benefits, and the case for stronger subsidization of the public transport system that arises from it. For example, Luxembourg is abolishing all charges on public transport in April 2019.
- Commensurately, **vehicle registration charges** should be reviewed with a view to increasing charges, and to differentiating registration charges on the basis of vehicle emissions. In the medium to longer term, the ACT should consider replacing fixed vehicle registration charges with charges based on total distance traveled, which will provide additional incentives to reduce car travel. This could be done in tandem with or ahead of a national approach to replace fuel excise with distance-based charges, in order to protect the revenue base in the shift to electric vehicles (as recommended by the Productivity Commission). The Strategy proposes that the ACT government “watch the development and implementation of road user pricing initiatives”; the Council suggests that the ACT take a more active role in promoting such change in Australia, via COAG.

Public transport provision

More, and more attractive, public transport infrastructure and services should be provided.

- The **light rail** should be expanded to Woden as proposed. **Future light rail developments** should not only be taken to pre-feasibility study stage but advanced further.
- The **bus network** should be overhauled with priorities and principles as laid out in the Strategy.
- Additional **Park&Ride** facilities should be created. Such facilities should provide significant local amenity, such as sufficient weather shelter, sufficient amounts of covered parking for bicycles, and areas that are pleasant to spend time at while waiting for public transport.



- The provision of public transport services to new suburbs should be classed as ‘essential’ and part of an ‘integrated master plan’. Currently the draft strategy states ‘consider feasibility of providing public transport services to new suburbs as soon as residents start to move in’. This is not adequate as the delay in public transport provision will lead to immediate car dependency out of necessity and potentially to an increasing ‘infrastructure deficit’ for communities on the urban fringe.

Parking and car sharing

Parking needs to become more expensive relative to the alternatives that do not require depositing a car at the point of destination. Over time, less public space in areas of high people traffic should be devoted to parking. Car sharing should be encouraged.

- **Parking charges** on ACT controlled land, including for government pay parking, should be reviewed with a view to higher charges, in order to strengthen incentives to move to public and active transport, and to ease congestion. For pay parking on private land, options should be investigated to introduce minimum charges, or for the ACT government to charge additional levies.
- **New residential developments** should not be required to provide car parking spaces. Relinquishing this requirement will reduce real estate prices in developments that choose not to offer car spaces, while leaving the choice to buy real estate with car parking included.
- **Car sharing networks** should be fostered and given preferential access to parking on ACT land. Car sharing networks should be encouraged to invest in electric and hybrid cars. Car sharing has the potential to greatly reduce overall required parking and save ACT residents money by alleviating the need for (additional) car ownership.

Cycling and walking

The Strategy’s objectives for Canberra to become Australia’s cycling capital and most walkable city, and the actions identified to achieve this, are applauded. The Council supports strong and rapid action along these lines, and encourages the ACT government not only to aim for leadership in Australia, but to **emulate international best practice**, which is far ahead of Australian best practice.

- **Foot paths and bike paths** should be continuously upgraded both in width and quality. Anecdotal evidence of the state of repair of minor roads relative to bike paths and foot paths suggests that the ACT government is under-investing in bike paths and foot paths. This needs to be reviewed, including through a review of spending on road maintenance versus maintenance of bike and foot paths.
- **New cycling paths and networks** need to include new routes also in established suburbs where there is high potential for cycling but few safe and convenient bike paths.



- The Strategy recognizes the need for “quality end-of-trip facilities” for cyclists. In particular, sufficient **bicycle parking** needs to be provided on public lands, including under-cover parking and ample opportunity to lock bikes up. This will increase in importance as more commuters choose to use costly e-bikes; a lack of bike parking could stymie progress.
- **Bike sharing** should be implemented as a priority especially in Civic, the town centres and high density suburbs.
- **Speed limits** on roads should be reviewed with a view to lowering maximum speeds, not only for reasons of personal safety as argued in the Strategy, but also to make cycling and walking more attractive. This is especially important in parts of the city where higher density housing is being developed, and therefore more pedestrians are crossing roads, often without the benefit of traffic lights or crosswalks.

Zero emissions road transport

In the pursuit of the ACT emissions reductions targets, road transport is becoming the major area for action, as petrol and diesel burned in vehicles will be the largest source of emissions once the ACT’s electricity supply is fully supplied from renewable power sources. Canberra has been historically designed as a car city, and road vehicles (private and public) will be part of our lives in the future. The solution in this regard is to move to electric (or hydrogen) power vehicles.

- The ACT should provide public infrastructure for electric vehicles, in particular **public charging points**, as a priority.
- The ACT’s policy to **buy only zero-emissions vehicles for government** from 2020 is a correct approach, as it will also stimulate a market in second hand zero-emissions cars.
- **Electric vehicle uptake should be supported** through other means, for example priority parking and access to transit lanes during a transition period, as per the Transition to Zero Emissions Vehicles Action Plan. Further measures, such as registration charge benefits, should be investigated once federal government policy settings on electric vehicles become clear.
- The **ACT public bus fleet should be electrified as a priority**. Benefits will include not only lower emissions, but also less urban air pollution and noise, and a signalling effect for the ACT’s leadership in Australia. The Strategy proposes to “consider the staged introduction of electric buses”. Consideration is not enough; action is needed.
- Insofar as operational and budgetary constraints present an obstacle to electric bus uptake, these aspects should be reviewed immediately, with due consideration accorded to future cost savings through lower fuel and maintenance costs of electric (or hydrogen powered) buses. Over time, existing diesel buses should be replaced with electric (or hydrogen) buses, ahead of their technical life times.



About the Council

The ACT Climate Change Council is an advisory body to the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability. The Council's main function is to provide advice on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to climate change. The Council also plays a pivotal role in informing climate change policies in the ACT and in providing leadership to the community, working to raise awareness of climate change risks and community benefits from effective climate action, influencing community views and attitudes, and encouraging everyone to take action towards a decarbonised economy and a more resilient Territory.

Members are appointed under the *Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act (2010)*. At the time of submission, membership was as follows:

- Professor Barbara Norman (Chair)
- Professor Penny Sackett (Deputy Chair)
- Ms Karen Jesson
- Mr Toby Roxburgh
- Professor Frank Jotzo
- Professor Will Steffen
- Mr Ben Ponton

Drafting of this submission was led by Professor Frank Jotzo with input from other Council members.