

Major Projects Canberra
ACT Government Your Say Consultation
Light Rail: City to Woden

Via email. lightrailtowoden@act.gov.au

Dear consultation team

CONSULTATION: LIGHT RAIL: CITY TO WODEN

We are taking this opportunity to make a brief submission to the consultations on the next stage of light rail from the Alinga Street stop to the Woden town centre via Commonwealth Park.

The ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) advocates for social justice and represents not-for-profit community service organisations. Our vision is that Canberra is a just, safe and sustainable community in which everyone has the opportunity for self-determination and a fair share of resources and services.

With regards to the ACT's transport policy, this means that residents of any age or circumstances should be able to access affordable transport of a frequency, availability and accessibility that supports social and economic inclusion.

ACTCOSS advocates for a flexible and responsive transport system that addresses the barriers faced by population groups including older Canberrans, people with disability, people without a driver's licence, shift workers, students and young people, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, parents of young children, people on low incomes, recent migrants, people in insecure work and people with other complex needs.

Transport is vital in allowing people to access community amenities, social activities, health and community services, education and employment.

Access to transport plays a key role in successful life transitions, for example, as people become older or as young people leave education to find employment. Access to transport is also one of the social determinants of health.

Appropriate access to transport is essential if the ACT Government is to meet its obligations under the *ACT Human Rights Act 2004* by allowing people to exercise their civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights including the Right to Education and the Right to Work enshrined in the Act.

Canberra's overall transport strategy must go beyond buses and the tram to incorporate all modes of transport. It must include community-managed on-demand transport and be linked to building and planning decisions.

We have articulated these issues in submissions to the Moving Canberra Transport Review and in the 2016 ACTCOSS Policy Paper on Transport.

Cost of public transport

Travel is an essential cost of living. In a smart and compact city, travel costs should not stop people doing the things they have to do or the things they want to do.

ACTCOSS's recent *ACT Cost of Living Report* highlighted that the ACT's public transport CPI had increased by 9.1% compared with a national public transport CPI increase of only 4.2%.¹

We recommend that the ACT Government undertakes a cost benefit analysis on making public transport free.

At a minimum, concessions should be broadened and better targeted to individuals and families on low incomes or for whom public transport is a significant cost.

Light rail route and planning

ACTCOSS notes that the route for light rail continues to be a topic of public and political discussion in Canberra. We do not have a specific view on the route that Stage 2 should take.

However, there are issues that should be considered when making decisions on light rail to ensure that Canberrans on low incomes or who face disadvantage benefit equally from this type of major investment:

1. There are ongoing concerns in the Woden and Belconnen communities that, alongside gaps in transport provision, these ageing town centres have inadequate social, community and commercial infrastructure. The greater Woden area and parts of Belconnen have experienced demographic change without appropriate community facilities and community development resources. This should be considered alongside the development of transport infrastructure in the ACT.
2. Planning for Stage 2 should be driven by the findings of an **ACT-wide Needs and Gap Analysis for Transport**. ACTCOSS has been advocating for a needs and gap analysis which considers:
 - a. How public transport networks can connect people to all types of community infrastructure and services (including greenspace, education, leisure, health) beyond mass transit routes.

¹ ACTCOSS, [ACT Cost of Living Report: Tracking changes in the cost of living for low-income households in the Australian Capital Territory](#), ACTCOSS, September 2020.

- b. How to connect people who are isolated or disconnected. We need to ask why people do not travel (for example, because they cannot access appropriate transport) and how they want to travel in the future. Information collected should include data on people who do not currently use public transport and people who are isolated.
 - c. On-demand transport (community transport, wheelchair accessible taxis, and taxis) alongside mass transit options like the bus network and light rail. On-demand transport should not be considered a secondary or minor part of the ACT's transport infrastructure. It is critical to meet needs that cannot realistically be filled by mass transit so that people remain connected – especially older people and people with disabilities.
3. The light rail expansion will come at a significant cost to the ACT Budget. ACTCOSS calls for greater transparency on the cost of the project and greater transparency on the *opportunity cost* of this investment.

If, for example, investment in light rail expansion is done at the expense of further investment in public housing, health or community services, broader consultation with the Canberra community must be undertaken.

Other considerations are as follows:

- Work should be undertaken to ensure that the new light rail route aligns with bus and on-demand transport links, future population growth and the location of households facing disadvantage or on low incomes.
- Connectivity and the choice of stops must maximise the ability of people to connect with health services including Canberra Hospital, allied health and other specialist health services.
- Local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities must be consulted on areas of cultural significance that might be impacted by route construction work.
- A full assessment of the physical and sensory access features of the vehicles and the paths of travel to them should be undertaken by an appropriately qualified disability access consultant *and* people with lived experience of mobility barriers. There must be a seamless path of travel to pick-up and drop-off points. Stage 2 of the tram, including the vehicles and the path of travel to the platforms from other transport nodes, should meet and *exceed* the minimum access requirements (the [Disability Standards for Accessible Transport](#)), and representative groups for people with disability and older people, who may actually use the tram, should be involved early.
- Environmental impacts on flora and fauna should be considered, including impact assessment.

Our election [briefing paper on community infrastructure](#), including transport, sets out key asks for infrastructure as well as evidence on transport disadvantage.

Please feel free to contact me on 0424 910 617 if you wish to discuss any aspect of this submission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emma Campbell." The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

Dr Emma Campbell
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12 January 2021