

Budget submission - \$120 million per year to support healthy active travel

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Rationale

More funding for healthy walking and cycling is required, for the government to meet its walking and cycling targets.

Each year walking and cycling provide the ACT with half a billion dollars worth of health benefits¹. Support for walking and cycling reduces health system costs. Increased support for walking and cycling may reduce the Budget deficit.

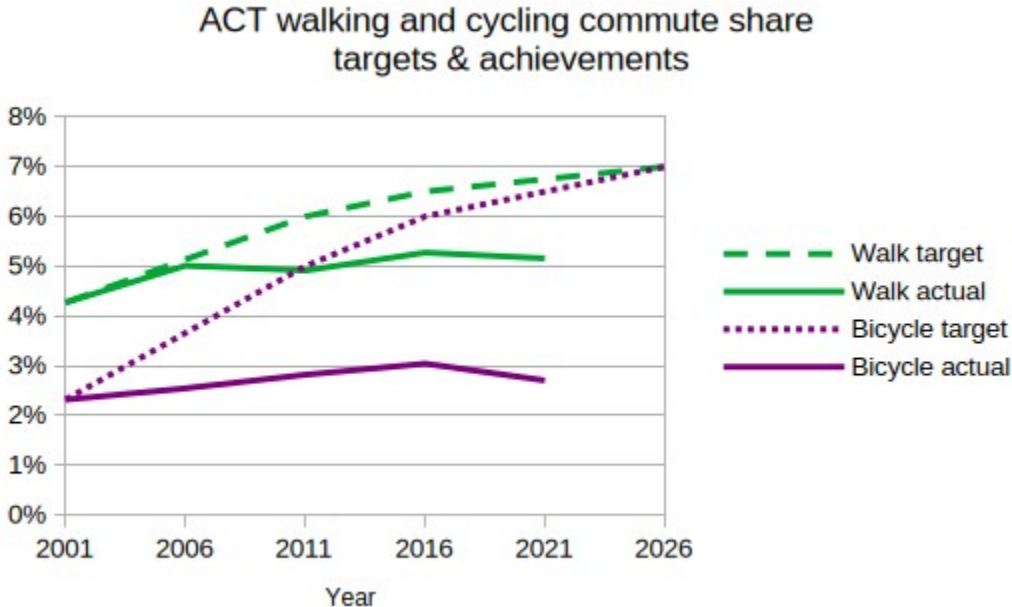
\$120 million per year would bring per-kilometre funding of healthy non-polluting active travel to the same level as funding for fossil-fuel-using, polluting public transport.²

Each year walking and cycling provide the ACT with more than a hundred million trips and more than 150 million kilometres of travel.³

Cycling is faster than public transport for short trips, and almost as fast for longer trips. A bicycle can travel several kilometres in the time it takes to walk to a bus stop and wait for a bus. The [2017 Household Travel Survey](#) showed that travelling a kilometre by public transport takes an average of almost five minutes, and travelling a kilometre by bicycle takes only seven seconds longer.

- 1 At \$5 per kilometre of walking and \$3 per kilometre of cycling ([NSW Active Transport Health Model Reference Outcome Values](#)), the ACT's daily [266,700 kilometres of walking and 166,100 kilometres of walking](#) produce annual health benefits worth \$667 million.
- 2 The 2025 ACT Budget allocated \$903 million over five years to public transport. The 2022 [Household Travel Survey](#) reported 266,700 daily ACT kilometres of walking, 166,100 kilometres of daily ACT bicycle travel and 645,000 daily ACT kilometres of public transport travel.
- 3 The 2022 [Household Travel Survey](#) reported 258,300 daily ACT walking trips, 36,000 daily ACT bicycle trips and 51,200 daily ACT public transport trips. The 2022 [Household Travel Survey](#) reported 266,700 daily ACT kilometres of walking, 166,100 kilometres of daily ACT bicycle travel and 645,000 daily ACT kilometres of public transport travel.

The ACT Government’s 2004 *Sustainable Transport Plan* set targets to increase the commute shares of walking and cycling from 4.1% and 2.3% (respectively) in 2001 to 6% and 5% in 2011, and to 7% each in 2026. The 2012 [Transport For Canberra](#) policy reaffirmed the 2026 targets, and added interim targets for 2016.



If overall walking and cycling rates match the targeted increases for walking and cycling to work, then health benefits from walking and cycling will increase to more than \$1,000 million per year.

The 2025 ACT Budget allocated \$180 million per year to public transport.

On an equitable per-trip basis, the Budget would allocate a billion dollars per year to active transport, plus allowances for health benefits and pollution reductions.

On an equitable per-kilometre basis, the Budget would allocate \$120 million per year to active transport, plus allowances for health benefits and pollution reductions.

Use the [Sustainable Household Scheme](#) to address the fuel crisis

Switching from fuel-guzzling car or public transport travel to walking or cycling can reduce fuel dependence, reduce pollution, and reduce greenhouse emissions.

Walking and cycling use no fossil fuel. Cars and public transport use about almost a litre of fuel per person per trip.

In 2023-24 Canberra's public transport system provided 14 million passenger journeys⁴. Transport Canberra's buses used 10,541 kilolitres of diesel and 70,140 GJ of compressed natural gas⁵. That's an average of three quarters of a litre of diesel and 5 MJ of natural gas for each passenger journey,

Bicycles

The Sustainable Household Scheme can encourage us to purchase bicycles that are better equipped to replace car trips.



The bicycle on the left, above, costs under \$300. It can be used for shopping trips, with the simple addition of a luggage basket or saddlebags.

The bicycle on the right costs over \$13,000. It sprays its rider with muddy water when it travels on wet roads.

Sustainable Household Scheme criteria, for low interest loans for bicycles, can be designed to encourage people to buy bicycles that are equipped to substitute for car trips, with equipment such as:

- lights, so we can use them when we may not return home until after sunset
- luggage racks and luggage baskets or saddlebags, so we can use them for shopping trips
- mudguards, so they won't spray us with with muddy water when we ride on wet roads
- puncture-resistant tyres, so we can be confident of getting back home if we ride farther than walking distance.

4 Source: ACT Government Open Data Portal – [Daily Public Transport Passenger Journeys by Service Type](#).

5 Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate Annual Report 2023–24

Bicycle improvements

Canberrans own more bicycles than cars. The [Household Travel Survey](#) found that we own 287,300 bicycles and 286,200 private vehicles.

But replacing car trips with bicycle trips is often problematic because, as [my survey of bicycles](#) showed:

- many of our bicycles need a service, to make them safe to ride
- most of our bicycles need lights, if we are to use them for trips that may extend past sunset
- most of our bicycles need luggage baskets or saddlebags, if we are to use them for shopping trips
- most of our bicycles need mudguards, if we are to be able to ride on wet roads without being sprayed with muddy water
- most of our bicycles need puncture-resistant tyres, if we are to be confident of getting home without a puncture if we ride beyond walking distance.

These improvements would cost around \$500 per bicycle. Including them in the Sustainable Household Scheme would allow people to pay off the cost of those improvements at 3% interest. The cost to the Budget would be the difference between 3% and commercial interest rates, which are currently about 8%.

Complete the walking and cycling network

Canberra's walking and cycling network includes:

- [approximately 3,800 kilometres of community paths](#) for walking and cycling
- on road cycle lanes
- shared zones for walking and vehicles
- approximately one kilometre of separated footpaths for pedestrians, and
- approximately one kilometre of separated footpaths for cycling

Footpaths are a long-term investment. Completing the footpath network, so that every person in Canberra can reach a footpath without needing to do more than cross a road, may cost as much as providing several kilometres of light rail. Allocating \$100 million per year to new footpaths, over a five year Budget period, will put us on track to complete the footpath network network at the same time that we convert our public transport to 100% renewable electricity.

Footpaths provide safe and convenient travel for children who want to walk or cycle to school, for parents pushing prams, for adult commuters and other people travelling to or from public transport, and for people in wheelchairs or mobility scooters.

In 2024 the ACT had 4,716 kilometres of paved roads, including 4,409 km of undivided roads.⁶ That indicates, in the context of our 3,800 kilometres of community paths we have 600 kilometres of residential roads with out footpaths.

Transport Canberra Annual Report report that since 2021 the length of community paths and separated cycle lanes have increased by 286 kilometres. If we build no new roads, it would be more than ten years before everybody has a footpath either past their driveway or across a road.

The map on the right shows streets in one suburb that have no footpaths (solid blue lines) and streets that footpaths along only part of their length (dashed or dotted blue lines).

Without footpaths, their only options are to walk or cycle on the road, or to struggle along bumpy nature strips that are often obstructed by landscaping or by parked cars.

Separated and non-separated on-road cycle lanes. off-road cycle paths, community paths and footpaths provide cyclists of all ages with convenient and relatively safe places to cycle.



Figure 1: Streets in one suburb (Downer) that have no or partial footpaths

Figure 2: Nature strips are often obstructed by landscaping



6 Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics, Australian Infrastructure and Transport Statistics Yearbook 2025.