



PT CBR

**Submission to the
2023-24 ACT Budget**

May 2023

Mr Andrew Barr MLA
Chief Minister & Treasurer
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA ACT 2601



2023-24 ACT BUDGET CONSULTATION

Public Transport Association of Canberra

Dear Chief Minister,

The Public Transport Association of Canberra (PTCBR) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the 2023-24 Budget Consultation process. This submission provides our views on the revenue and expenditure priorities of the ACT, with a specific focus on public transport.

As the Canberra region's leading advocacy group for public transport, PTCBR support the ACT Government's ongoing investment in expanding the bus and light rail network, as well as its active travel and public transport ambitions.

Recent figures indicate that public transport patronage will soon exceed pre-pandemic levels for both bus and light rail. To support this, Transport Canberra must be able to offer a seven-day integrated transport network. The extension of light rail to Woden and the full restoration of weekend bus services will be critical in meeting this goal.

To encourage more people to adopt public and active transport, PTCBR has developed a **5 Point Plan** to improve these aspects of our city's transport network. This plan and the budget allocation recommendations featured in this submission are consistent with the priorities outlined the ACT Government's *ACT Transport Recovery Plan*, the *Zero-Emission Transition Plan* and the *ACT Transport Strategy 2020*.

We encourage you to consider our budget submission carefully. Please feel free to contact us for any clarification on the items presented here.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ryan Hemsley', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ryan Hemsley
Chair,
Public Transport Association of Canberra
chair@ptcbr.org.au



PTCBR'S 5 POINT PLAN

FOR IMPROVING PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN CANBERRA

Public transport in Canberra is at an impasse. After some significant gains associated with the introduction of light rail and a network of rapid buses, projects such as light rail to Woden are now significantly delayed, while our bus network has entered a period of managed decline.¹ Despite costing less than 1 per cent of the ACT Government's annual expenditure, discussion about public transport remains heavily focused on light rail.²

To refocus the public debate, PTCBR have developed a **5 Point Plan** for improving public transport in Canberra. The ideas outlined in this plan are drawn from successful public transport systems in Australia and around the world, as well as our city's own bus network in the 1980s, which proved that high-quality public transport is feasible in a spread-out city like Canberra.

While many things have changed in the past four decades, the benefits of public transport in the context of a climate and cost of living crisis are more salient than ever. PTCBR's **5 Point Plan** is therefore designed to be sustainable, scalable, and able to service the 800,000 people expected to call Canberra home by 2060.

1. Extend Light Rail

Build one stage while planning for the next

Light rail to Woden was first announced in 2016. At the current rate of progress, Canberra might have a 1.7 kilometre extension by 2026, some 10 years later.³ In the same period, the Gold Coast will deliver two extensions totalling 13 kilometres, while planning for a fourth stage. We need to put more resources into planning for future light rail, so by the time one stage of construction is complete, the next is ready to go.

2. Frequent Services

More buses, more often

Canberra's off-peak bus services come hourly, and every two hours on the weekends, which severely limits their usefulness. During the 1980s, suburban peak services to places like Mawson and Kambah came as frequently as every 5-8 minutes, and every 30 minutes during the off-

¹ <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/8017247/next-years-bus-timetable-reveals-service-cuts-in-canberra/>

² <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-12-05/canberra-liberals-to-dump-light-rail-to-woden-if-elected-in-2024/101732014>

³ <https://ptcbr.org/2021/09/25/media-release-auditor-generals-report-reinforces-need-to-deliver-light-rail-to-woden/>

peak. A reasonable standard today is every 10 minutes for rapid services, 15 minutes in peak, 30 minutes off-peak, and hourly for evenings and weekends. To get there, we need to invest in more buses, depots and drivers.

3. Timed Connections

Don't wait more than 10 minutes for your connecting bus

Timed connections were the secret behind Canberra's public transport success in the 1970s and 80s. Passengers could take a bus to an interchange, and know their connecting service was no more than 5 minutes away.⁴ Unfortunately, people today can wait at an interchange for an hour or more on weekends. With smarter timetables, those times can be significantly reduced, and public transport made competitive for more journeys.

4. Faster Services

Bus lanes and priority measures to skip through traffic

Congestion is a growing problem across the ACT.⁵ We need to invest more in our bus corridors to help our buses skip through traffic and get to their destination faster. We want to see Transport Canberra develop and implement a plan for priority measures on all our rapid corridors, including bus lanes and traffic signal priority. During the early 2010s, the ACT Government installed these measures on places like Barry Drive and part of the Cotter Road. We should build on these successes to get people to their destination on time during those busy peak times.

5. Active Travel

Combining public transport with walking, biking, and scooting

Most people get to public transport on foot or by bike. With electric bikes and scooters becoming more popular, we have a great opportunity to build active travel connections to get more people out of their cars. This means making sure our public transport stops are easily accessible and well-lit, expanding the network of safe and protected paths, and having secure places for people to store their vehicles.

⁴ As detailed by Paul Mees in *A centenary review of transport planning in Canberra, Australia* (2012)

⁵ <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6024933/traffic-congestion-increasing-overall-canberra-travel-times-by-20-per-cent-report/>

A summary of PTCBR's recommendations for the 2023-24 ACT Budget is provided below:

- Fund the **prefeasibility work** for all future stages of light rail identified in the *ACT Light Rail Network Plan*.
- Explore further opportunities to **build more housing** around public transport corridors and interchanges.
- Fast track the detailed design of the **new Northside (fourth) and fifth bus depots** to meet the delivery targets outlined in the *Zero Emission Transition Plan for Transport Canberra*.
- Ensure the new **Enterprise Agreement** between Transport Canberra Operations and the Transport Workers Union enables the delivery of a seven-day bus network with frequent and reliable services across the entire week.
- Ensure there is sufficient capacity in the bus network to permit timed transfers between services by **hiring additional bus drivers** and **expanding the bus fleet**.
- Progress the detailed design and delivery of the remaining sections of the **Belconnen Transitway**, along College Street and Haydon Drive.
- Fund the detailed planning work to determine the future of bus operations in **Canberra's City Centre**, as recommended in the 2022 draft update of the *City Plan*.
- Commence a rolling program of works to improve the amenity and accessibility of **Canberra's bus stops**.
- Finalise and progress the key actions outlined in the ACT Government's **Active Travel Plan**.

Each of these recommendations is intended deliver on PTCBR's **5 Point Plan** and restore Canberra's standing as a city with a world-class public transport network.

Further details are provided in the remainder of this submission.



1. Extend Light Rail

Build one stage while planning for the next

PTCBR strongly support light rail as the best option for **frequent, high-capacity transport** on dense corridors. It is a tried, tested, and popular mode of transport that is best placed to meet Canberra's needs as we grow towards a city of 800,000 and beyond.

In our view, the delivery of light rail is not happening fast enough. The extension to Woden was first announced in 2016, was due for completion by 2025,⁶ but is now unlikely to be complete until the end of the decade. The planned delivery of one stage of light rail every decade means that we might not have a complete network until the 2070s.⁷

We need to put more resources into planning our future light rail lines, so by the time one stage of construction is complete, the next is ready to go.

1. Budget Recommendations

→ Fund the **prefeasibility work** for all future stages of light rail identified in the *ACT Light Rail Network Plan*.

Cost: ○○○

Timeframe: ○○○

The *Canberra Region City Partnership* proposed by ACT Senator David Pocock presents an opportunity to secure Federal Government support for detailed planning for light rail on National and Commonwealth land.⁸

→ Explore further opportunities to **build more housing** around public transport corridors and interchanges.

Cost: ○○○

Timeframe: ○○○

As with the light rail prefeasibility work, the proposed *Canberra Region City Partnership* should be leveraged to identify areas of National and Commonwealth land that are well serviced by public transport and suitable for housing intensification.

⁶ <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6133320/light-rail-to-woden-delayed-to-2025-barr/>

⁷ <https://www.transport.act.gov.au/travel-options/light-rail/network-planning>

⁸ <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/8154890/lets-make-this-happen-the-pocock-push-for-a-capital-city-deal-for-canberra-region/>



2. Frequent Services

More buses, more often

The more often a service comes, the more choice people have about when they travel and where they go. When services come **every 10 minutes or less**, people don't have to worry about timetables.⁹ They feel confident they can rely on public transport to get them around on their own schedule.

While we don't have sufficient drivers or buses to deliver frequent services everywhere at all hours of the day, a reasonable standard is every **10 minutes** or better on rapid routes, **15 minutes** in peak, **30 minutes** off-peak weekdays, and **60 minutes** late nights and weekends.

This was the standard Canberra had during the 1980s, with a population of 282,000 and a fleet of 479 buses, compared to a current population of 456,000 and 456 buses.¹⁰ By building new bus depots, modernising workplace practices, rolling out light rail and judiciously increasing the bus fleet, we can get those frequencies back.

2. Budget Recommendations

- Fast track the detailed design of the **new Northside (fourth) and fifth bus depots** to meet the delivery targets outlined in the *Zero Emission Transition Plan for Transport Canberra*.¹¹

Cost: ○○○

Timeframe: ○○○

- Ensure the new **Enterprise Agreement** between Transport Canberra Operations and the Transport Workers Union enables the delivery of a seven-day bus network with frequent and reliable services across the entire week.

Cost: ○○○

Timeframe: ○○○

The new Enterprise Agreement must provide a sound basis for reversing the poor weekend and steadily worsening weekday bus frequencies that have developed in recent years.

⁹ Jarrett Walker in *Human Transit* (2011) page 150.

¹⁰ <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/8080069/the-numbers-the-greens-say-show-the-problem-with-canberras-bus-fleet/>

¹¹ https://www.transport.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1625095/ZERO-EMISSION-TRANSITION-FINAL-.pdf



3. Timed Connections

Don't wait more than 10 minutes for your connecting bus

Transport networks where passengers transfer between services can be an efficient and effective way of getting people around.¹² No city is ever going to have enough buses to give people a direct service to everywhere they want to go. But to work, these transfers need to be comfortable and short.

In the 1980s, Canberra buses had timed connections. You could take a bus to an interchange, and know your connecting service was no more than 5 minutes away.¹³ This is why each town centre has its own purpose-built interchange.

Unfortunately, Canberrans today can wait at an interchange for an hour or more. This leads to frustrated passengers and a real economic loss by people missing work hours. With smarter timetables, we can get those times down, and make public transport competitive for many more journeys.

3. Budget Recommendations

→ Ensure there is sufficient capacity in the bus network to permit timed transfers between services by **hiring additional bus drivers** and **expanding the bus fleet**.

Cost: ○○○

Timeframe: ○○○

In exchange for increased resources, Transport Canberra Operations must be required to develop and implement a *Service Improvement Action Plan*, with an aggressive emphasis on delivering significant service integration and timetabling improvements across the network.

¹² <https://humantransit.org/2009/04/why-transferring-is-good-for-you-and-good-for-your-city.html>

¹³ As detailed by Paul Mees in *A centenary review of transport planning in Canberra, Australia* (2012)



4. Faster Services

Bus lanes and priority measures to skip through traffic

We need to do more to help Canberra's buses skip through traffic and get people to their destination faster. The ACT Government should develop a plan for identifying and implementing bus priority measures, including:

- bus lanes
- traffic signal priority, and
- bus jumps at traffic lights.

Good progress was made on rolling out bus priority measures on places like Barry Drive and parts of the Cotter Road in the early half of the last decade. We should build on those successes and make sure public transport has the best possible chance of getting people to their destination on time.

4. Budget Recommendations

→ Progress the detailed design and delivery of the remaining sections of the **Belconnen Transitway**, along College Street and Haydon Drive.

Cost: ○○○

Timeframe: ○○○

Funding in the 2023-24 budget should also be allocated towards developing a plan for future bus priority initiatives in areas of significant and growing congestion, such as the Cotter Road, Hindmarsh Drive, and the intersection of Northbourne Avenue and Mouat Street.

→ Fund the detailed planning work to determine the future of bus operations in **Canberra's City Centre**, as recommended in the 2022 draft update of the *City Plan*.¹⁴

Cost: ○○○

Timeframe: ○○○

To improve the speed, reliability and safety of buses operating through the City, consideration should be given to reinforcing the pavement and converting the entire length of Alinga Street to bus-only operations.

¹⁴ https://hdp-au-prod-app-act-yoursay-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/7316/7521/6878/City_Plan_-_Accessible_20230201.pdf



5. Active Travel

Combining public transport with walking, biking, and scooting

Most people get to public transport on foot or by bike. With electric bikes and scooters becoming more popular, we have a great opportunity to get more people out of their cars.

We need to make sure our transport stops are easily accessible and well-lit. We also need to expand the network of safe and protected paths, and have secure places for people to store their vehicles.

Transport Canberra needs a long-term plan for improving the active travel network and incorporating this into every new road and public transport project.

5. Budget Recommendations

- Commence a rolling program of works to improve the amenity and accessibility of **Canberra's bus stops**.

Cost: ○○○

Timeframe: ○○○

An interim target should be that all inbound bus shelters feature seating and lighting. Over the longer term, all bus stops should feature seating, lighting and shelter from the harsh Canberra elements.

- Finalise and progress the key actions outlined in the ACT Government's **Active Travel Plan**.

Cost: ○○○

Timeframe: ○○○

PTCBR want to see further investment in our path network as a matter of priority. We therefore support the recommendations detailed in Pedal Power ACT's *Budget Submission 2023-24*.