

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



2022-23 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 2022-23 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 supports the ACT Government's ongoing investment in expanding the bus and light rail network, as well as its active travel and public transport programs.

We support the ongoing effort to reduce transport emissions by expanding the light rail network and moving to a zero-emissions bus fleet. Our organisation believes that a reliable zero-emission bus fleet would complement the light rail network and encourage more people to adopt active and public transport, reducing private vehicle emissions.

PTCBR's submission has been considered in the context of these well-recognised benefits, as well as the ACT Government's recently adopted *ACT Transport Recovery Plan*, the *Zero-Emission Transition Plan* and the *ACT Transport Strategy 2020*. Our recommendations are consistent with the priorities outlined in these key documents.

In time, we expect public transport patronage across all modes to return to, and eventually exceed, pre-pandemic levels. To support this, Transport Canberra must be able to offer a seven-day integrated transport network. The full restoration of weekend bus services will be critical in meeting this goal.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ryan Hemsley'.

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

Summary of PTCBR Budget priorities for the 2022-23 ACT Budget

- 1.** Light rail network planning
- 2.** Enhanced bus driver recruitment and retention programs
- 3.** Rapid adoption of a new ticketing system
- 4.** Improved project delivery capabilities
- 5.** Sustainable transport depots
- 6.** Advertising of public transport services
- 7.** Regional public transport
- 8.** Improved signage and wayfinding
- 9.** Improved bus stop amenity
- 10.** Heritage listing of the iconic 'bunker' bus shelters

1. Light rail network planning

PTCBR strongly supports the ACT Government's investment in light rail. With the completion of light rail to Woden still being years away, there is an opportunity to conduct early consultation and feasibility work for future extensions, with a view to minimise the kind of costly planning delays that have affected light rail stage two.

Consistent with the strategic routes identified in the *ACT Transport Strategy 2020*, the *ACT Infrastructure Plan* and the *Light Rail Network Plan*, funding in the 2022-23 budget should be allocated towards conducting feasibility and consultation processes for future extensions, such as Belconnen to the Airport and Mawson to Tuggeranong.

To maximise transparency and facilitate an informed and civilised debate about the future form of Canberra's light rail network, the comparative costs, patronage estimates, journey times, development opportunities and environmental impacts of the various alignments should be investigated early and made available for public discussion.

2. Enhanced bus driver recruitment and retention programs

The introduction of Network 19 held great promise for the delivery of an integrated transport network with frequent, seven-day services. The inability of Transport Canberra to deliver the promised weekend bus services and the reduction in those services in late 2019 is an ongoing and unacceptable issue.

Transport Canberra should therefore invest heavily in a driver recruitment and training campaign, with the aim of restoring the full weekend timetable by the end of 2022. Consideration should be given to offering immediate starts to new bus drivers, as advertised by one local Queanbeyan bus operator.

3. Rapid adoption of a new ticketing system

Although PTCBR is aware of the recent announcement that tenders are being sought for the replacement of Transport Canberra's NXTBUS ticketing system, it is disappointing that this seemingly simple procurement process has taken so long to complete. PTCBR strongly recommends that this process be prioritised.

4. Improved project delivery capabilities

PTCBR reiterates its call for further investment in project delivery capabilities at Major Projects Canberra and Transport Canberra and City Services, to ensure that budgeted projects are actually delivered and not continually "re-profiled" into the future.

The 2021-22 budget re-profiled over \$26 million in transport-related capital works, including the new Woden bus depot for the 5th year in a row. These are significant investments the Canberra community is missing out on, and failing to deliver them undermines the ACT Government's public transport vision.

5. Sustainable transport depots

To support the zero-emission bus fleet, new bus depots will need to be delivered in both north and south Canberra. PTCBR recommends that Transport Canberra factor in solar generation with high-capacity flow (vanadium) battery storage capability, as well as water farming and recycling for vehicle washing in the design of these new depots. While this may add to the initial capital cost, there are significant longer-term sustainability benefits that can be achieved with this approach.

6. Advertising of public transport services

There is currently very little advertising to support Transport Canberra's public transport services, with the majority of public awareness campaigning being focused on light rail safety. While this is undeniable important, it is not going to encourage people to use public transport to get from the suburbs to the shops, school or work. PTCBR therefore suggests that Transport Canberra conduct a series of focused advertising campaigns to support and promote increased public transport use.

7. Regional public transport

PTCBR recommends that the ACT Government work closely with their NSW counterparts to develop an integrated, regional public transport system. This network should cover towns such as Queanbeyan, Yass and Goulburn, as well as the neighbouring suburbs of Jerrabomberra and Googong. Systematic interoperability would be the long-term goal, but an early investment in a seamless fare and payment structure would deliver real benefits to regional travellers and signal that there is a serious intention to improve public transport as a regional resource.

8. Improved signage and wayfinding

Real-time bus departure information at interchanges across the ACT is limited. That which does exist uses outdated technology and is not placed in convenient locations. PTCBR recommends that e-ink displays be considered as an integrated component of the new ticketing system. Ideal locations for these displays would be at interchange platforms and heavily-utilised bus stops.

PTCBR also encourages investment in additional signage and wayfinding at suburban bus shelters, advising passengers of nearby rapid services within easy walking distance.

9. Improved bus stop amenity

Improving bus stop amenity can be a key lever to encourage public transport use in our suburbs. At a minimum, PTCBR recommends that all morning inbound bus shelters should feature seating and lighting. Significant safety improvements can also be delivered by outfitting the iconic 'bunker' bus shelters with motion activated solar powered lighting, as trialled at Mitchell's Hoskins Street and Sandford Street. Over the longer term, all bus stops should feature seating, lighting and shelter from the harsh Canberra elements.

10. Heritage listing of the iconic 'bunker' bus shelters

Canberra's iconic bunker shelters are an enduring symbol of the city's commitment to public transport. While no existing shelters are currently being disposed of (those that are removed are either relocated or placed in storage) PTCBR encourages the heritage listing of these shelters, on the proviso that the listing does not prevent the relocation of any bunker shelter, or impact future amenity upgrades, such as solar powered lighting or ramps to improve accessibility.