

## SUBMISSION ON ACTIVE TRAVEL PLAN



The Public Transport Association of Canberra (PTCBR) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the draft Active Travel Plan.

PTCBR is the Canberra region's public transport advocacy group. Every public transport journey begins with some form of active travel, so we are pleased to see that the ACT Government has recognised the importance of active travel in making a city that is easy to move around.

We welcome the government's willingness to invest in separated cycleways and move away from the on-road cycling routes installed during the 2000s. Good design will minimise conflict points with vehicular traffic, and we hope this is accompanied by cultural change and active enforcement.

That said, we think this is a good opportunity to reflect on what aspects of the plan the ACT Government should prioritise, and how we can ensure the plan is delivered.

### **We should focus on short journeys: prioritise walking and local routes over the principal cycle network**

Too many Canberrans drive to school, their local shops or group centre. These short journeys of 0-5km are the low hanging fruit the plan should focus its resources on. This means allocating more resources to what the plan refers to as "main cycle routes", "local cycle routes" and "primary walking areas". There's also a lot of potential for creating new walking and cycling opportunities along our collector streets (see below).

The linear routes connecting town centres look nice on a map, but they will likely only serve the small section of the population which regularly rides lengthy distances. The 5% walk to work target suggests the ACT Government knows this too. If we want to change behaviours to get "more Canberrans walking and riding more often", we need to meet people where they are, and encourage them to take shorter journeys before they start heading across town. Even in the Netherlands, the average cycling journey is only 3.6km. For most people, longer journeys are better served by public transport (see below).

This doesn't mean that we shouldn't invest in bikeways. The Belconnen bikeway and Garden City cycle route are good examples of high traffic routes which will connect people to their nearby centres. But a number of the "potential future priorities" in the cycling network simply appear to mirror arterial roads. This may not be the best "bang for buck" compared to more local routes.

### **Our collector streets are ideal candidates for retrofitting into active streets**

The plan has an exciting vision for creating active streets, with changes to both our street infrastructure and the buildings that sit alongside them, so they will be more appealing places to walk and ride. PTCBR submits that our suburban collector streets are great places to try this out.

By collector streets, we mean those high traffic streets which feed cars out of a suburb onto an arterial road. Examples include Murrarji Street in Hawker, Knox Street in Watson, Namarang Cres in Waramanga. These streets often host a number of local destinations (schools, shops, sporting facilities), serve bus routes and have medium density housing. But they are also engineered for

car traffic: they're wide, with gentle curves, and unsurprisingly, cars drive fast on them, regardless of the posted speed limit. So they are rarely inviting places to walk or ride.

But because they are wide, they should also be easy to retrofit with structured parking, bikeways and tree plantings, and become walkable suburban high streets. This in turn makes them more logical places for infill development.

### **There needs to be better integration between active travel and public transport**

The plan doesn't say much about public transport's role. This is surprising, because the ACT Government has been relatively good on this front, promoting "bike and ride", installing bike rails at light rail stops and connecting e-scooters with public transport.

The best thing the plan can do is to enshrine public transport connections (particularly to rapid routes) into the walking and cycling network. PTCBR would like to see the plan expressly commit to this goal, to ensure that planning for public transport and active travel happen in tandem.

Longer term, the plan should also commit to improving bike storage facilities at interchanges and major stops. Modest investments in secure cages, monitored by CCTV and accessed by a registered MyWay would go a long way to encouraging people to ride their (sometimes quite expensive) bikes to public transport.

### **Delivering the plan will be hard. What is the government going to do to make it happen?**

While the ACT Government has quite ambitious goals for creating a walkable, livable city, these goals can sometimes be lost in translation in new urban and transport projects delivered by the Suburban Land Agency or Transport Canberra and City Services. Similarly, the ACT Planning and Land Authority has often allowed projects (both government and private) to proceed with less than optimal walking and cycling outcomes.

From the outside, it appears that active travel is often treated as a standalone project (eg build a bikeway), rather than integrated into new developments. The high quality pedestrian and cycling treatments in the Raising London Circuit project should be the new minimum standard of incorporating active travel into every new project affecting the streetscape (although PTCBR still has concerns about its failure to include bus stops).

The ACT Government needs to think carefully about how it's going to implement the plan.

- The proposed Design Guide and ACT Infrastructure Standards are really good starting points to give our designers the framework for building a better city.
- The ACT Government needs to invest in retrofitting our streets, rather than simply relying on signage and changes to speed limits. For example, the 40km/h zone has been difficult to enforce along Northbourne Ave and Barry Drive while they remain 6 lane thoroughfares.
- There need to be changes within directorates too, so active travel is built into the culture and expertise of how we build our city. There are a lot of committed ACT public servants, but many teams have historically been staffed by road engineers. Too often we see a "car first" mentality to designs, and a lack of interest in changing the geometry of our streets to make them safer.
- There also need to be ongoing reforms to procurement and delivery to ensure we actually see things get built. PTCBR has been very vocal on this topic. We see too many

good transport projects get delayed year after year due to lack of project delivery resources and expertise.

PTCBR is available to discuss any of the matters identified in this submission further if required.

Regards

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