I would like to speak about the Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate Half Yearly Statement of Performance (31 December 2022). I thank the Minister for tabling this update and I look forward to digging into the details over the next few days. We have carefully followed previous updates and tracked performance against accountability indicators and I’d like to flag some concerns I have noticed and concerns that have been raised with me by constituents.

On Monday 30th January Network 2023 was launched. Canberra’s bus users are not happy, I have heard this loud and clear. We are trying to encourage more people to use public transport in the short term due to construction disruption in the city, and in the longer term to address climate change and traffic congestion. But this network is not helping us.

Canberrans want a better bus network. People from all across Canberra in all parts of the community and from all walks of life have spoken to me about the need to improve our bus network. This is why I passed a motion last May in order to improve bus services by delivering minimum hourly services across the weekend and to see a return to a full bus network in 2022. Unfortunately, we have not seen either delivered yet.

We also have not seen the full transition away from Disability Discrimination Act non-compliant buses. I understand the supply issues detailed by the Minister earlier this week. That was a really detailed explanation and I thank the Minister for being so open about the issues. I understand the role COVID has had to play in this. But the ACT Government has had 20 years to become compliant with the new standard.

The Minister’s statement on Tuesday set out that the Government only finalised the procurement of the last 26 leased diesel buses to replace the remainder of the non-compliant buses in March 2022, nine Months before the due date. In an environment where we knew that Covid was creating significant supply chain constraints, we should not have left such an important procurement to such a late stage.

Accessibility is essential for many Canberrans who have no other option but to rely on our public transport network. I want many, many more to use our public transport network as their best and first choice, not as their only option. We must do better. All of these people have been let down by the delays in this procurement. We need to plan our upgrades better and implement them earlier.

We also need to deliver our infrastructure on time. We need a greater level of investment into building new infrastructure, including the long-awaited Woden Bus Depot, so that we can expand the bus network.

Despite contracts being signed in 2018 for the design and construction of the Woden Zero-Emissions Bus Depot, it was only last week that $26.3m was announced to deliver the electrical infrastructure upgrades to facilitate these buses at Woden and Tuggeranong. We have had no announcement at all about electrical upgrades to facilitate zero-emissions buses at Belconnen or any other future northside depot.

The September 2020 Zero-Emission Transition Plan for Transport Canberra put forward that the Woden Bus Depot would be completed by 2022 with another zero-emissions bus depot delivered by 2026. We are not on track. We are delayed. In November in response to my question on notice we found out that the Woden Depot is now not expected to be delivered until late 2024.

I am lodging more questions with the Minister this week. I want to find out when we’ll get a fourth bus depot for Canberra. I am concerned that this new zero-emissions depot may not be completed by the original deadline of 2026 based on what I’ve seen so far.

We also need more buses. We have not increased our bus fleet in line with our growing city and growing population, in fact in the last 33 years our bus fleet has shrunk.

In 1990 the ACT had around 282 thousand residents. In 2022 we had more than 456 thousand residents. That’s a population growth of more than 61%. We have also grown geographically in that time. Every single year new suburbs are being built; Lawson, Whitlam, Molonglo, Ginninderry, Jacka, Kenny and more.

In 1990 ACTION had 479 buses, this year we have 456. That is 23 fewer buses in our fleet 33 years later.

This is why we need to choose which services to run during our disruptions. We do not have enough buses. How can we deliver improved services to all these new suburbs and new people, and maintain our existing suburb routes, if we are running fewer buses than we had over 30 years ago?

Light rail is our great public transport success. I love light rail. The people who use it love it. I want to see it expand as soon as possible. But Light Rail is just one part of our public and active transport network.

We must also invest more in our buses. We must transition faster to zero-emissions buses. We need more bus lanes and bus priority measures, more bus shelters and better footpaths connecting them. Without this investment, next year’s bus network will be no better than this year. That will be the same story every year until we plan properly and invest sufficiently. We won’t have a better bus network until we have more buses and improved bus infrastructure.

I want to quote from the 2022 Infrastructure Australia Market Capacity Report. That report is not about ACT infrastructure specifically. It is about Australian infrastructure and it sets out the situation that will apply to all major projects from here on in. That report said, and I quote, “the market is arguably at capacity, so project slippage is now expected. It is no longer a question of if a project will slip, but more likely when, by how long and at what cost.”

I would also like to amplify one of their recommendations. They said we must “Improve industry capacity and capability by prioritising procurement and portfolio management and increasing pipeline transparency, certainty and confidence.”

It is going to get harder to deliver major projects and to do it well and on time. So when deciding on transport infrastructure priorities we need to prioritise. We need to choose public transport and active travel first. The Greens understand this. It is essential if we are going to reduce our climate emissions and keep Canberra as a liveable city we can all move around in comfort.

We need to plan well and follow through. We need to invest properly. We need to prioritise clearly. If we don’t, we will continue to have a bus service that does not meet the needs of our people.