



ACT
Government

ACT TRANSPORT RECOVERY PLAN

APRIL 2021



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Introduction

Public transport is central to making Canberra a more connected, sustainable and vibrant city.

Transport currently accounts for over 60 per cent of Canberra's harmful carbon emissions, so it is essential we work to reduce the number of private car trips taken across our city each day. As Canberra grows, encouraging more people to choose public transport will also be important for preventing the traffic gridlock that so many other cities struggle with.

The *ACT Planning Strategy* maps out a clear direction for limiting Canberra's urban sprawl and impact on our environment by delivering a majority of new housing in and around our major town centres and along key transport routes. This goal will be supported by better transport links that mean Canberrans can move around easily and sustainably without needing to rely on their cars. The *ACT Transport Strategy*, released in 2020, outlines our plans to support this shift through an emphasis on strengthening public transport and active travel.

We recognise that for people to choose public transport as their preferred mode of travel, it must be convenient, reliable, comfortable and safe.

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged community perceptions about whether public transport is a safe way to travel. This is understandable when clear health advice

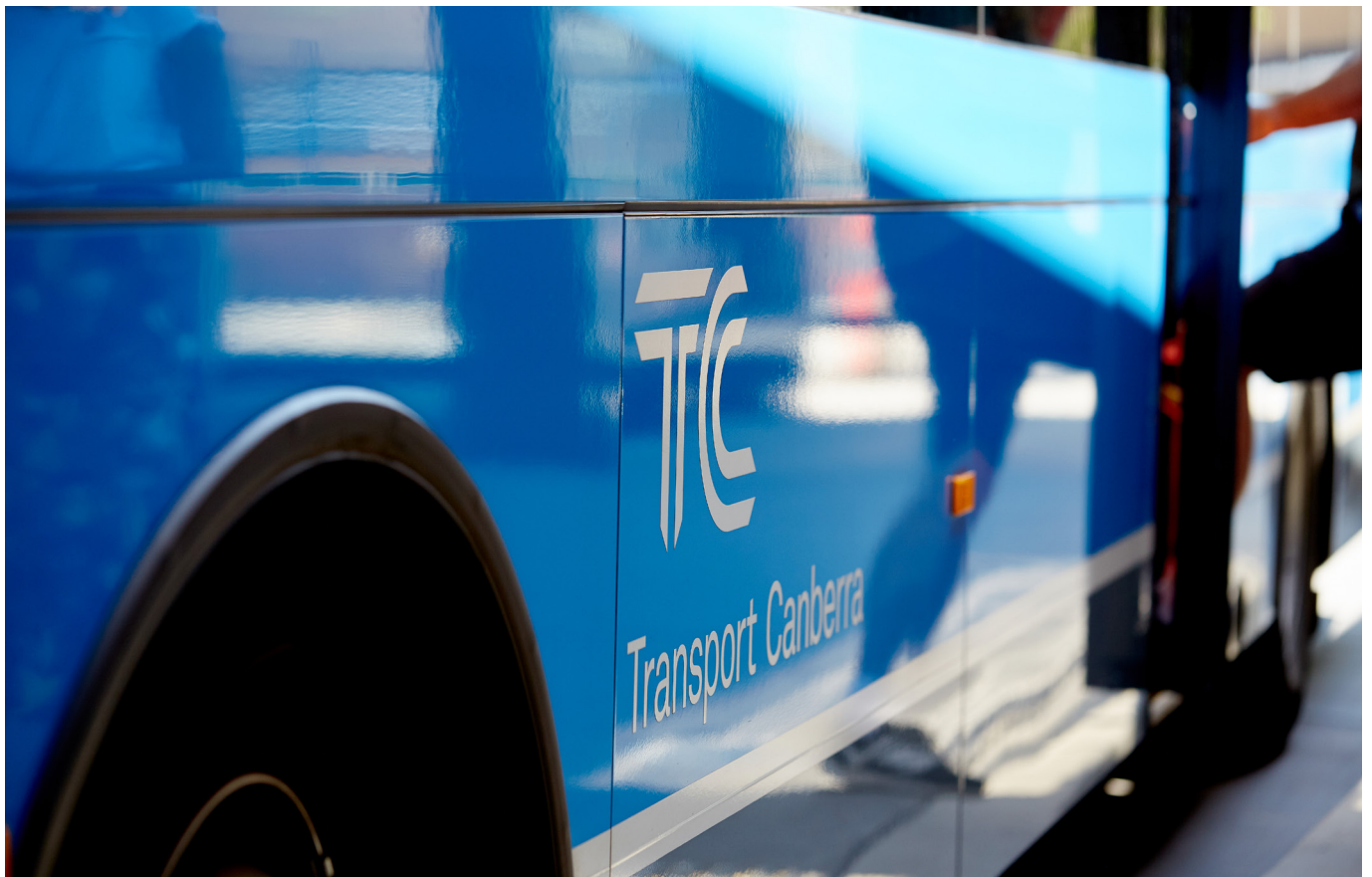
throughout 2020 emphasised avoiding non-essential travel on Canberra's buses and light rail.

COVID-19 has also changed working and social habits in ways that continue to affect people's transport needs and choices. More Canberrans are working from home or in adapted, flexible modes which can make the car seem like an easier choice than using public transport.

The pandemic is not over, but there are strong signs that Canberra's recovery is underway. Canberrans will progressively be vaccinated throughout the second half of 2021 and local businesses, shops and services are gradually returning to their pre-COVID rhythms. That means it is time to step up our efforts to encourage people back onto public transport in a safe and sustainable way.

Our goal is to return public transport patronage to its pre-pandemic levels and then keep growing it in the years ahead. This is essential for cutting Canberra's emissions and keeping our city moving as we grow.

The **ACT Transport Recovery Plan** has been developed to guide our work towards this goal and map out the key steps that will get us there. This summary document presents the strategic direction of that plan and the positive actions Canberrans will see in the coming months and years as we deliver it.



Objectives

The **ACT Transport Recovery Plan** has been designed around four important objectives. These reflect our focus on building a stronger and better transport system in the wake of COVID-19, with public transport and active travel at its centre.

We are working to:

- Restore community confidence in public transport as a safe and healthy way to move around Canberra.
- Drive sustainable public transport usage patterns which reflect different ways of working and rhythms of life in the 'new normal'.
- Return patronage to pre-COVID levels by the end of 2021 if expert health advice permits, and continue growing patronage in the years ahead.
- Prepare Canberra's public transport services to play a key role in mitigating traffic disruption associated with upcoming delivery of major ACT Government infrastructure projects in 2022 and beyond.



Public transport trends during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic was a major shock to transport systems across Australia and around the world.

Canberra's bus and light rail networks were not immune, with huge falls in patronage recorded almost overnight. While passengers have slowly been returning, there is still

a long way to go to get back to the uptake seen before the pandemic – and keep growing this.

As life begins to return to normal in 2021 we are seeing a positive uptick in public transport patronage. The priority now is to encourage and sustain this growth.

Journeys across the bus and light rail network fell by almost **87 %** from February to April last year



Road congestion in parts of Canberra is worse than before the pandemic – **8%**



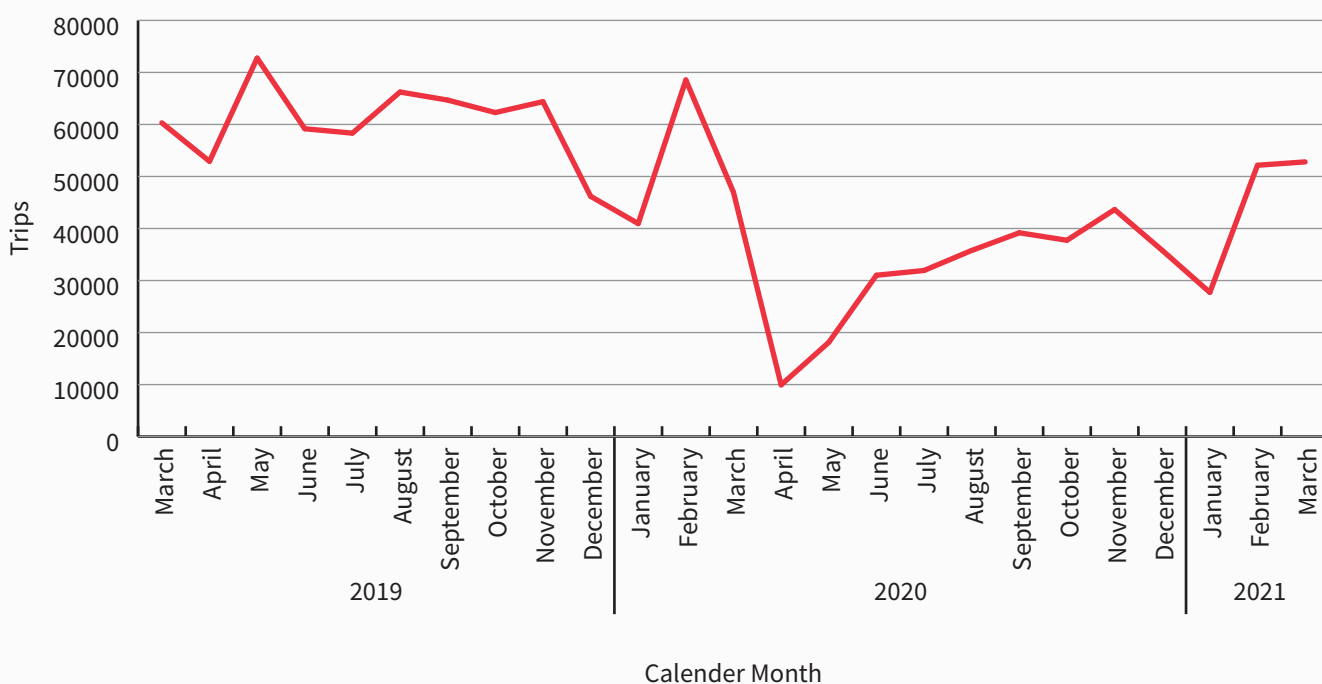
higher in the Woden region

One in six users of public transport have not been back on board since the COVID-19 pandemic



Farebox revenue is down by **\$9.3 million** this financial year

Network average daily trips (all days)



The journey ahead

In developing the **ACT Transport Recovery Plan**, Transport Canberra has consulted widely with experts and counterparts across Australia in addition to taking into account Canberra's unique transport environment. This has informed the development of a set of principles that will underpin our recovery efforts.

These principles have informed both the actions we will prioritise and the ways that we will engage with current and future public transport passengers in delivering this plan.

Principles for recovery

Protecting the health and wellbeing of passengers must always come first

We will be guided by expert health advice in deciding when and under what circumstances it is safe to encourage people back onto public transport.

A gradual ramp-up will best restore and maintain community confidence

We will align our investments and activities with the pace of Canberra's broader recovery, including the vaccination roll out and ongoing moves back towards office-based working for more Canberrans.

Data and engagement are core tools to drive more customer-centric outcomes

We will leverage data insights generated across Canberra's transport networks – including from buses, light rail, roads and more – to ensure services respond to the ways people want and need to travel now.

At the same time, we will step up our focus on passenger consultation and research so that we can better understand and prioritise their needs in a rapidly changing environment.

Now is the time for continued investment in service improvement and expansion – not cuts

We have made substantial investments in more and better public transport services and active travel infrastructure prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and throughout it. We will continue to invest strategically to make public transport more appealing, convenient and sustainable.

Our choices today should help drive a long-term and sustainable shift to public transport

We will make decisions for the immediate recovery period which support our longer-term agenda to see more Canberrans make a lasting switch to regular use of public transport. As the 'new normal' takes shape, we will focus on making services more adaptable and flexible so that our networks are robust enough to sustain strong patronage in a more volatile future.



Priority focus areas

The **ACT Transport Recovery Plan** identifies six key areas of focus for action and investment.



Focus area 1: Hygiene and safety

The advice of the Chief Health Officer has been paramount in managing the continued operation of Canberra's public transport system during the pandemic. This will continue throughout the recovery period to ensure that passengers and Transport Canberra workers can feel and be safe.

We have established important hygiene regimes including:

- increased cleaning of public transport stops and vehicles
- encouraging the use of rear bus doors for entry and exit where possible
- encouraging physical distancing on buses and light rail
- closing front bus seats.

These measures will continue for as long as they are needed and will be gradually phased out as health advice changes. In line with other public transport systems around Australia, we are already seeing a gradual increase in the number of passengers who can safely travel together on buses and light rail carriages.

We will continue to promote and encourage practices that help everyone feel safe and support Canberrans to use public transport at times which avoid a single peak-hour crush.



Focus area 2: Fares and ticketing

The pandemic has sparked a renewed focus on cashless and contactless ticketing options for public transport. Transport Canberra temporarily phased out of cash fares during 2020 and this has proved to be a positive shift both for passengers and network efficiency. Cashless ticketing allows drivers to focus on driving, helps streamline trips and offers passengers a more seamless travel experience that aligns with tap-and-go payment models which are increasingly common for other consumer services.

From 2021 Transport Canberra will move towards permanently adopting cashless ticketing across both the bus network and light rail. The time is right to make this change because the ACT Government is in the process of procuring a Next Generation ticketing system to replace MyWay from 2023. This system will allow contactless payment, provide users with real time information on the timing and availability of services and allow Transport Canberra to make better data-driven decisions on network design.



This system will be account-based instead of card-based, significantly enhancing the ability of health officials to undertake contact tracing in the event of a future public health emergency. An account-based system also provides a stronger platform for innovation and adaptation such as in relation to fares. Many jurisdictions are trialling the provision of incentives for new or high frequency public transport users and these are options the ACT is also keen to explore as part of continuing to grow patronage over time.

To ensure the needs of vulnerable Canberrans are met through this change, Transport Canberra has established an Access Advisory Group, which includes representatives of people with a disability, older Canberrans, young people, families and people experiencing disadvantage.



Focus area 3: Network design and capacity

Many cities around the world cut public transport services in response to the revenue and patronage shocks brought about by COVID-19. The ACT Government has deliberately chosen to go the other way.

We have expanded services throughout 2020, providing an additional 700 bus services and increasing the frequency of morning light rail services. This supported increased physical distancing while giving Canberrans more options about when and how they travel. These are permanent service expansions that we will continue to build on through progressive network updates.

Top priorities for these upgrades will include improving the frequency of services outside of peak times – including on weekends – and strengthening services to Canberra's growing new regions and suburbs. We recognise that continuing to improve connections between the Rapid and suburban routes will help make public transport a viable alternative for more Canberrans, as will ongoing improvements to the frequency of services and hours of operation across the network as a whole.

In the longer term, building light rail to Woden will help create a fast and reliable transport spine that better connects some of our major town centres. This will make it easier to get between them as well as improving suburban accessibility in combination with our strengthened bus network. In time, this connection will form the backbone for future stages of light rail branching to other town centres and population hubs.

In a survey conducted in March 2021, around a third of Canberra light rail passengers said they had never used public transport before hopping on board Stage 1. This demonstrates that light rail can be a catalyst for more people choosing public transport, which is why it is an integral part of the ACT Government's forward transport agenda.



Focus area 4: Integrated transport

For transport systems to be truly responsive to passenger needs, they must integrate different types of public transport and other on-demand modes for flexible 'last



mile' travel. The ACT Government is embracing innovation and encouraging new forms of micro-mobility so that people can easily combine a trip by bus or light rail with other convenient modes of travel.

After becoming the first jurisdiction in Australia to encourage and fairly regulate ride sharing services, 2020 saw the launch of shared e-scooter services in Canberra. The scooters currently provide last-mile mobility in the city centre and surrounding inner suburbs. They have proven to be a popular choice for short trips with Canberrans already logging an average of 4,000 trips a day by April 2021. The ACT Government is currently undertaking a review of the shared e-scooter scheme to improve safety and integration with the broader transport network. The review will also consider licensed areas of operation and whether expansion of the scheme could further enhance travel options for Canberrans.

Active travel is also an important option for improving transport flexibility, boosting health and wellbeing and supporting further emissions reduction. We are investing strongly in active travel infrastructure like new cycling and pedestrian paths, Park and Ride facilities and filling in missing links between key cycling routes to support more Canberrans to make this choice. This investment will continue to be an important part of our recovery agenda, particularly as increased remote working increases interest in local active travel options within and between our suburbs.

Focus area 5: Passenger experience

Passengers want public transport to be convenient, reliable, frequent, comfortable and safe. Our current and future investments in network upgrades will help ensure bus and light rail services are accessible when and where Canberrans want to travel. Our ongoing focus on deep cleaning and hygiene etiquette across Transport Canberra will also help ensure Canberrans can feel safe onboard our services.

Going forward, Canberra's bus network will deliver quieter and more comfortable rides through the progressive Replacement of 90 ageing buses including 70 Compressed Natural Gas buses with clean and efficient zero emissions electric vehicles by 2024. This is part of our plan to transition the full Transport Canberra fleet to zero-emissions buses by 2040. These new buses will deliver a better passenger experience while also meaning people who make the switch to public transport are effectively cutting their personal transport emissions to zero.

Focus area 6: Listening and communicating

Input and feedback from Canberrans will be key to shaping the design and delivery of recovery initiatives and the ACT Government's broader investments to drive public transport growth.

We are stepping up engagement with the community to ensure we are delivering what current and future passengers really want and need. This includes increasing consultation through tools such as YourSay and the Community Insights Panel. It also involves engaging directly with dedicated consultative and stakeholder bodies like the Transport Canberra Access Advisory Group and the Public Transport Association of Canberra.

At the same time, we will prioritise clear, effective and helpful communication with Canberrans about their transport options and how they can tailor different modes of travel to meet their needs. During the upcoming traffic disruption linked to major infrastructure works, this communication will have a particular focus on helping people avoid traffic jams and extended commutes by changing up their transport habits.

Our forthcoming investments in the Next Generation ticketing system will also provide a platform for real-time passenger information and communication about service changes as they happen, keeping all passengers better informed.



Delivering the ACT Transport Recovery Plan

The Recovery Plan on a Page overleaf steps out how we will sequence work across these focus areas throughout 2021 and beyond.

The timing of this work will primarily be driven by the pace of Canberra's broader economic and community recovery – particularly the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccination program. But it will also be informed by planning for the delivery of major infrastructure works in and around Canberra's city centre, including the raising of London Circuit, Stage 2A of Light Rail and Commonwealth Avenue bridge works.

These major projects are anticipated to affect traffic flows across the surrounding road network, and focused effort will be required to mitigate associated traffic disruption from 2022 onward. Encouraging more Canberrans to choose public transport and flatten the peak by varying their morning and afternoon commute times is an important action within the ACT Government's broader disruption mitigation planning.



Transport Canberra Recovery Plan – April 2021

The Transport Canberra Recovery Plan will drive the Government's strategy to encourage Canberrans back on board when the time is right by harnessing lessons learnt during the pandemic, setting us up for a future where more people choose public transport. The measures outlined in this plan will support Canberra's transition to net zero emissions and deliver a more connected, sustainable, and vibrant city.



Keep CBR
safe &
strong

	HEIGHT OF PANDEMIC 2020	EASING OF RESTRICTIONS 2020–2021		MAJOR INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERY From 2022		NEW NORMAL AND BEYOND
KEY FOCUS	Keeping people safe, including our transport workers	Supporting a gradual return to public transport		Encouraging new transport habits to cut emissions and avoid disruption		Driving ongoing uptake in a COVID normal world
INITIATIVES AND ACTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• MyWay or pre-paid tickets only• Increased cleaning services• Physical distancing recommendations• Hygiene reminders• More people walking, riding• Promotion of off-peak travel and fares• Full timetable running to allow distancing and support essential workers• Masks (voluntary), PPE, sanitiser and distancing protocols for workforce• Use of rear doors on buses• Closure of bus front seats• Auto doors on light rail	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• COVID Safe etiquette campaign• 692 weekday services added, mostly off peak• Launch of online capacity tool• Cashless ticketing• Harness increased uptake of walking and riding through education and micro-mobility shared schemes• More jobs for Canberrans (supporting additional cleaning efforts)• Fast track infrastructure program (better active travel connections, improved public transport facilities)• COVID-19 vaccine roll-out	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transport Canberra App - providing travellers with more choice and real time information (best times to travel, fastest connections)• Further review of off-peak and weekend fares• Opportunities to spread the peak/harness flexible working arrangements• Working with major employers, including the ACT and Commonwealth public sectors, to encourage uptake of flexible working arrangements outside of the standard 9–5• Increased investment in active travel and Park and Ride facilities• Opportunities for new and occasional users to try services, including through free event travel• Increased investment in active travel and Park and Ride facilities• Expanded micro-mobility options• Transition to zero emission bus fleet• Expanding the light rail network to Woden	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Next generation ticketing that is flexible and customer friendly• Increased services through network upgrades, including on weekends and off-peak times• Increased prioritisation of buses on our roads through the provision of additional bus lanes• On demand (ride share style) public transport services		
PATRONAGE	14% of pre COVID levels *as at May 2020	75% of pre COVID levels *as at April 2021		Encourage additional public transport uptake in line with pre-COVID patronage growth trends		Encourage ongoing steady growth and uptake in public transport patronage
GUIDING STRATEGIES	ACT Jobs and Economic Recovery Strategy	Canberra’s Recovery Plan	ACT Transport Strategy 2020	Zero Emission Transition Plan for Transport Canberra	ACT Climate Change Strategy 2019-2025	ACT Planning Strategy 2018

Transport Canberra's COVID Safety Plan means we are ready in the event of an uncontrolled transmission in the ACT.

For more information visit: www.transport.act.gov.au