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***Submission to
'Draft Transport for Canberra Plan'***

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the ACT Government's draft 'Transport for Canberra' plan.

The ACT Greens are very concerned about the future of Canberra's transport system. One of our key goals is to see Canberra evolve into a national and international leader in sustainable transport. We believe that the provision of excellent public transport and excellent active transport opportunities is an essential response to the challenges of climate change, peak oil, housing affordability and social exclusion.

I would like to make the following comments regarding some key issues in the Plan.

1. The 'future strategy' strategy

The Transport for Canberra Plan (the Plan) – previously the "Sustainable Transport Action Plan" – has been due for quite some time and was delayed on several occasions. The ACT Greens are therefore disappointed that the Plan that was finally released, largely lacks detail and concrete commitments.

What the Plan does do, is refer to an intention to create future strategies in various areas of transport. For example, according to the Plan, in the future the Government intends to create:

- a freight strategy;
- an active travel to school strategy;
- a sustainable fleet strategy;
- a parking offset fund;
- incentives for better end of trip facilities; and
- incentives for green vehicles.

These are good intentions, however the ACT Greens expected that at least some of these strategies and initiatives would be finalised as part of the Plan. Each of these issues are ones that the ACT Greens are concerned about and that we have raised in various ways over this Assembly's term. All of these initiatives are now deferred to future strategies, which will take further time, further consultation, and further Government decisions. Our concern is that the actual implementation of these initiatives – many of which require courageous government decisions – are either many years away, or will be deferred in a cycle of new strategies, changing government priorities, and changing governments.

Unfortunately, there is a history of this occurring. Given that this Plan is yet to be finalised, the immediate concerns are that key initiatives will miss the next ACT Budget cycle.

...But no peak oil strategy

One strategy that the ACT Greens would particularly like the Plan to prioritise is a local peak oil strategy. The ACT Greens have raised on several occasions with the Government that the ACT will benefit from a local peak oil strategy. The ACT Government should recognise and acknowledge that peak oil presents a serious threat to our region, and develop a framework for implementing actions to tackle the issue. This would include contingency plans such as, for example, how to continue delivering services to citizens when faced with seriously constrained petrol supplies or with a sudden loss of access to imported goods.

2. Funding and priorities

The ACT Greens believe that realising a truly sustainable transport system in Canberra requires a significant shift in the transport priorities and funding decisions of the Government. We are hopeful that the Plan means that this will be the case. We have been concerned that the Government's focus – particularly reflected in its budget spending – continues to be on car travel.

The Plan reveals (p7-8) that Canberrans want 20% of transport funding spent on motorists, with the remaining 80% spent on public transport, pedestrians and cyclists. ACT Budgets have consistently provided significantly more funding for road projects than for sustainable transport.

The recent focus on building the Majura Parkway, for example, has come at the expense of other sustainable transport initiatives, which has ongoing funding repercussions. The Budget Estimates provide that if the Majura Parkway project proceeds, this will leave very limited funds for other new Territory and Municipality Services (TAMS) capital work initiatives in the later years of the forward estimates (with only \$2.74m for the final estimates year).

The Plan should clearly respond to the community's stated funding preferences, and the Government should move to revise transport funding priorities to strongly favour sustainable transport. Otherwise, the Plan should clearly state that the Government will not do this, and explain this rationale.

Efficiency and funding

The ACT Greens note that a key principle of the Plan is that: transport is "efficient and cost effective, providing value for money for the government, business and the community by managing travel demand across the whole transport system." The ACT Greens agree with this principle. However, we would emphasise that this principle must not be used as an excuse to continue prioritising the development of business-as-usual, unsustainable transport at the expense of sustainable transport

options.

Applying a strict “cost-effectiveness index” to compare road projects and public transport projects could result in a perverse favouring of roads and highways and make it very difficult to use Government money for public transport. The ACT Greens note that former American President George W Bush placed a “cost effectiveness” requirement on all new Federal transit programs. This has been criticised for its net effect of making it easy to build highways but almost impossible to use federal money for public transport projects.

Any comparative analysis must emphasise the considerable ongoing benefits of sustainable transport to the community and the environment – particularly in comparison to road projects. This is a factor that has been lacking from the ACT Government’s historical transport decisions, and has helped engrain existing transport and planning decisions.

3. Public transport coverage and interchange times

The ACT Greens believe the public transport ‘minimum coverage standards’ and the ‘wait time for coverage services’ should be improved.

Canberra requires fast and frequent feeder services which connect suburban areas quickly and conveniently to faster, more frequent, high-capacity trunk routes. These trunk routes can be effective using prioritised buses or light rail. Frequent feeders and fast connections are essential to a public transport system based on connecting networks. This type of connecting network is important for developing a future public transport system that provides quality services covering the entirety of Canberra. This can be used in conjunction with services connecting group centres, medium density developments and employment locations.

Canberra’s bus system currently provides a large number of direct services, which minimises interchanges, but uses longer and more circuitous routes. It also has a complex map and timetable, which is difficult for new or discretionary customers to use.

Higher frequency local services and connections needed

Frequent feeders

The Government has proposed a “coverage service”, which is described as the service that “feeds the frequent public transport network.” However, the proposed minimum frequency of coverage services is one hour. The ACT Greens are concerned that this makes it an infrequent service that will not meet the transport needs of many Canberrans, meaning the public transport system will not be a viable alternative to car travel.

Feeder services need to be frequent and allow easy, coordinated transfers with the frequent network. It may be appropriate to use smaller, cheaper-to-run vehicles on the feeder routes to enable them to economically serve the trunk routes, save resources, and limit congestion and heavy vehicle travel in suburbs. This is a strategy used effectively in Curitiba's bus system, which is a well-known success. This could also include a demand responsive style service.

The Plan should provide more clarity about why a minimum coverage time of one hour has been adopted, and what barriers prevented the Government from adopting a higher target. This would include the expected impacts in terms of costs, and in terms of patronage, equity and environmental impacts by increasing coverage to 30 minutes, or faster.

Frequent and easy connections

The connection times in the Plan mean an average wait time of 7.5 to 15 minutes to connect to and from a coverage service. Although an improvement on the existing situation, this is still a long wait that will be a deterrent for many commuters. The ACT Greens believe that this wait time should be lowered.

Transferring involves some inconvenience, and it is essential to reduce this as much as possible. Given driving is easy and fast in Canberra, it is important to minimise time and inconvenience to increase the competitiveness of public transport travel.

The ACT Greens support the use of harmonised connections, which require careful coordination of timetables and a high reliability of services. However, they can be very effective for reducing waiting times and improving convenience. They are used effectively in many cities around the world, for example, the lower density Cantons of Zurich use this approach very successfully. Increasing the frequency of connecting services will be an important factor in reducing transfer waiting times.

Dr Paul Mees has noted that fast and convenient interchanging was one of the features that made ACTION more successful 20 years ago. ACTION's standard was for a maximum wait of 4-5 minutes, with an average of 2-3 minutes, and the times of connecting 'intertown' services were also shown on local route timetables. This coincided with a period when Canberra had the third-highest rate of public transport use in Australia (trips per person). The Plan should discuss the expected impacts in terms of costs and patronage, and equity and environmental impacts of reducing the target waiting times.

As well as reducing transfer waiting times, it is essential to follow through on the promise of excellent passenger amenities and real time information mentioned in the plan. As part of improving transfers, the ACT Greens would like to see measures taken to create a positive transport experience for people needing to wait and transfer at interchanges, including:

- Comforts and incentives such as shelter, heating, and wifi access
- Security and lighting;

- Proximate, convenient connections

It will be important to design all new (and progressively redevelop existing) interchanges to eliminate inconveniences such as lengthy walks, obstacles, and exposure to weather. The new Belconnen Interchange requires passengers to walk a distance with no shelter and to cross intersections, which is a significant deterrent, especially for passengers with prams, wheelchairs or other mobility issues.

Making comfortable, convenient interchange locations along with lower wait times and increased frequencies of service, will provide a much more positive public transport experience.

2012 options for quality connections

The 2012 network improvements present opportunities for introducing more frequent, well-connected feeder services. One of the key aims should be to provide fast and frequent feeder services into the intertown routes. These feeder buses should be coordinated with the trunk route timetable and transfer should be quick, simple and no extra cost.



As an example, the 2012 network proposes a new Route 55 to service the new suburbs of Bonner and Forde (shown in green on the adjacent map). It connects to the Gungahlin interchange, which is the terminus for the Red Rapid.

However, the indicative 2031 Public Transport Network Map lists services through this part of Gungahlin as 'coverage services' (ie. a minimum 1 hour service).

This new route 55 service *should not be an hourly service*; it should be a frequent service – ideally at least 15 minute frequency – designed to connect suburban residents to the frequent Red Rapid service. It should connect seamlessly with this service so that residents can transfer without wait times

(or with very short wait times).

This would be an example of a good quality suburban service, that is competitive with car travel. It would:

- provide a frequent service to an area that is still growing and developing (Gungahlin is estimated to more than double in population by 2031, with over 70,000 people);
- allow new residents to avoid buying second or third vehicles and to establish public transport patterns; and

- minimise transfer hassles, extending the benefits of the Red Rapid service out into Gungahlin's suburbs.

More reasons for better coverage services

The Plan and reference materials indicate that decisions about coverage services are, to some degree, based on assumptions about the efficacy of these services. Assumptions are made such as "patronage per hour will be low" or "most passengers will take non-time sensitive trips" or "cost per passenger will be high".

The ACT Greens suggest that many assumptions about low patronage underestimate opportunities for behavioural change - particularly when excellent services are made available. The following points are relevant to assumptions about people's use of public transport, and suggest a more positive should be adopted about the opportunities for growing patronage:

- Evidence is showing that car use is declining in western cities, suggesting that transport planners and transport modellers will need to reconfigure their assumptions about the way people will choose to travel¹.
- The public's awareness of and commitment to sustainable behaviour is growing rapidly.
- Rising petrol prices and likely pressures from peak oil will strongly influence people's transport choices.
- Canberra should make all areas within the urban growth boundary more conducive to public transport.
- Existing low levels of patronage and high car use primarily reflect the poor public transport services rather than immutable travel behaviour.

Neglected areas and equity

The ACT Greens would emphasise the important equity issues that arise when significant areas of Canberra do not have access to quality public transport. Rather than focus on the higher expense or lower patronage of particular services, these services should be thought of as a necessary part of the overall system, with the well-patronised trunk routes helping to subsidise the less busy suburban routes.

Many factors go into a person's choice of where they live, as they are not always able to choose to live in a highly serviced transport corridor. Areas such as Wanniassa, East Tuggeranong, Weston Creek and West Belconnen have low public transport coverage, but are also areas that have social disadvantage.

¹ Eg. See Peter Newman and Jeff Kenworthy's recent 'Peak car use' research

The ACT Greens would stress that these areas, and areas like them, should not be abandoned as being too difficult for the provision of public transport. Denying good public transport increases social exclusion, and makes people more vulnerable to the combination of rising oil prices and mortgage stress.² These neglected areas also have a large population. Tuggeranong, for example, is currently home to almost 88,000 residents - which is over a quarter of the ACT population – yet it receives poor public transport service.

Branding

The ACT Greens would like to see the Plan address the opportunities for ‘branding’ of Canberra’s public transport.

ACTION’S branding has improved, especially with the new coloured lines (blue rapid, red rapid, and gold). Canberra’s public transport system can benefit further from route and vehicle branding, particularly measures that will help passengers to develop a mental map of the network and to view it as a mass transit system as opposed to a plethora of different routes.

Curitiba’s coloured bus system is a good example of branding, where the buses are brightly coloured according to their purpose (eg. feeder lines are all orange buses). ACTION patrons already often refer to intertown buses as ‘green buses’ because most of them have the green ACTION design on them.

Distance to stops

The ACT Greens are supportive of the standards for ‘distance to stops’, which will see stops for each of the different services (frequent and coverage) within 5-7 minutes walking distance of 95% of households.

As the ACT Greens have emphasised in other submissions, it will be critical to develop new areas – and retrofit old areas – with much improved active transport infrastructure to enable people to access the stops by foot and bicycle. Many neighbourhoods need to be made much more ‘permeable’ and pedestrian friendly, and the Government should be looking at ways to prioritise walking and riding routes and connecting them to public transport stops. The ACT Greens also reiterate and recommend the changes to the estate development code, being considered through draft variation 301.³

² See for example, Jago Dodson and Neil Sipe’s work on Oil and Mortgage Vulnerability

³http://www.actpla.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/19304/23_ACT_Greens.pdf

4. Issues with modal shift targets

The ACT Greens have concerns with the modal shift targets that are set by the Plan. The primary concerns are:

1. The sustainable transport targets (30% work trips by sustainable transport by 2026) should be more ambitious.

The ACT Greens believe that dedicated efforts and investment can see higher proportions of trips made by sustainable transport in Canberra. The target of 16% of work trips by public transport by 2026, for example, could be significantly higher. The modelling done in the 2009 strategic network plan suggests that public transport usage could be higher than this – up to 25% of trips made by public transport under some scenarios.

Cities across the world have increased sustainable transport usage significantly and rapidly when they have made a serious effort to prioritise these modes. Copenhagen has been well known for many years for having a high mode share of sustainable transport, however, through the 1960s it was congested with car traffic, and bicycle lanes were virtually eliminated. Copenhagen also has the third-largest urban sprawl in Europe, yet it still managed to create a sustainable transport system, demonstrating that with political drive, transport trends can be shifted substantially and in a limited time frame.

Brisbane provides a recent Australian example. In the three years from 2005, bus patronage in Brisbane increased by 35% in Brisbane city, and by 118% in the suburban region.

The ACT Greens also believe that a target of a 2% increase in cycling and a 1% increase in walking over the next 15 years is too low. With greater Government efforts put into walking and cycling, the number of people walking or riding can increase sharply. There are many opportunities for the Government to facilitate active travel – such as those recommended in the Greens' Active Transport Plan⁴ and the ACT Greens DV301 submission. Most of these have not been progressed, and active travel has continued to receive disproportionately low funding or attention from the Government.

One example is the Greens' recommendation for a 'cycle highway' linking the new suburbs of Molonglo to the high employment areas of Barton and Civic. Molonglo is expected to have close to 80,000 people by 2026. There are excellent opportunities to make it an active travel showcase, and we urge the Government to do this.

⁴http://act.greens.org.au/sites/greens.org.au/files/ACT_Greens_Active_Transport_Plan.pdf

b) The targets should be set in the context of the ACT's legislated greenhouse gas reduction target.

The Plan modal shift targets appear to have no connection to the ACT's legislated greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction target. It is notable that the 2026 targets are identical to those announced in the 2004 sustainable transport plan. This suggests that no modelling was done on how transport mode shift relates to achieving the 40% GHG reduction target.

It is very important that the mode shift targets relate specifically to the GHG reduction target. If the GHG reduction target mandates a higher modal shift target than the one proposed, then Government priorities and funding commitments will need to be commensurate. It is not adequate to set modal shift target based on some other standard, such as the traditional government standard of favouring car traffic and road building.

Also of concern is the brief discussion in the Plan about 'fuel switching' and the suggestion that the majority of short term emission reductions will be made by fuel switching (p32). The Plan should discuss what it means by fuel switching and what that means for the short term. It should project the number of private vehicles that would need to change to cleaner fuel in order to meet emissions reduction targets. As discussed above, the ACT Greens believe that improvements to the public transport network and active transport can make a very significant improvement to the sustainable transport mode share. We believe that this can be done in a relatively short time frame, which would reduce the need to rely on people making personal choices to 'fuel switch'. There are also many other benefits – community, health, and environmental – to having a high usage of public transport and active transport, and these benefits are lost if most of our trips are made in private vehicles.

5. Recognition of important transport principles

The ACT Greens acknowledge that there are many positive aspects to the Plan. It seeks to improve Canberra's transport system in important ways, and we congratulate the Government on the efforts it is making. The Plan recognises a number of important transport principles which the ACT Greens agree with, which we have been promoting. These include:

- The importance of active transport and the role the government plays in increasing the amount of active transport in the community;
- The importance of government involvement in travel demand management strategies – eg. shared space, parking reform;
- The recognition of the need for a sustainable transport contribution fund for developers;
- The need for planning controls to entrench transport corridors and prevent urban sprawl;
- Recognising the importance of slowing motor traffic in important shopping/community/school/pedestrianised areas; and

- The importance of improving the sustainability of freight travel in the ACT, which currently is trending sharply toward road freight.

We hope that the Government acts upon these issues in a timely way and with genuine commitment.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment. The ACT Greens would be willing to discuss any of the matters raised and would be interested to receive your response.

Sincerely,

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