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**Submission to the
2024-25 ACT Budget**

April 2024

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

2024-25 ACT BUDGET CONSULTATION

Dear Chief Minister,

The Public Transport Association of Canberra (PTCBR) appreciates the opportunity to present this submission as part of the ACT Government's 2024-25 Budget consultation. We have utilised ideas and feedback from our members and the public to create our recommendations.

Our submission takes as its framework PTCBR's **5 Point Plan for improving public transport in Canberra**: extend light rail, frequent services, timed connections, faster services, and active travel. Under each of these points we have identified priority areas for government funding within the financial year 2024-25 and have made a series of recommendations. The majority of our recommendations are projects and improvements that would provide considerable benefits for a modest price.

PTCBR is grateful for the ACT Government's careful consideration of our recommendations. We appreciate your ongoing engagement with us and our advocacy efforts, and look forward to continuing this relationship into the future as we work towards better public transport in Canberra and the surrounding region.

Yours sincerely,



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

A summary of PTCBR's recommendations for the 2024-25 ACT Budget is provided below:

- Fund enabling projects and resources to **ensure timely progress on current and future light rail stages**.
- Bring all bus services up to minimum one-hourly running, seven days a week – **no more two-hourly services**.
- **More peak hour bus trips served by articulated buses** to eliminate uncomfortably crowded trips.
- **Increase light rail service** on Fridays and weekends.
 - Friday night – increase service to every 10 minutes, 6.30pm-11.30pm
 - Saturday – 6am-9am every 15 minutes, 9am-9pm every 10 minutes 9pm-final service every 15 minutes
 - Sunday – 7am-9am every 15 minutes, 9am-6pm every 10 minutes, 6pm-final service every 15 minutes
- **Improve on-time running** as a top priority – this must be done to enable the possibility of timed connections.
- Ensure funding is allocated for work to begin on **implementing the final stage of the Belconnen Transitway**.
- Investigate and implement **small-scale bus priority measures**.
- Allocate funding to ensure **all major high-use stops meet a minimum standard of amenity and utility**.
- Fully implement the **2018 Transport Canberra Style Guide**.
- Allocate funding to investigate the **implementation of best-practice safety and design standards** / guidelines such as the Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) at stops and interchanges.

Each of these recommendations is intended to deliver on PTCBR's **5 Point Plan** and restore Canberra's standing as a city with a world-class public transport network.¹

Further details are provided in the remainder of this submission.

¹ ptcbr.org/2023/05/04/ptcbbrs-5-point-plan-for-improving-public-transport-in-canberra/



Extend Light Rail

Build one stage while planning for the next

PTCBR has been pleased to see real progress on Light Rail Stage 2A and 2B over the past 12 months, with each project advancing through key points and moving closer to implementation. However, these projects have fallen well behind promised timelines and are progressing at a rate that the public finds confusing and difficult to accept. Disappointingly, the ACT Government's previous commitment of one light rail stage per decade is clearly no longer feasible for light rail to Woden. We urge the ACT Government to learn from issues with Stages 2A and 2B and begin planning now to ensure smoother delivery of future light rail stages, while maintaining the ongoing progress of the light rail to Woden project.

- 1. RECOMMENDATION:** Fund enabling projects and resources to ensure timely progress on current and future light rail stages.

PTCBR calls for the ACT Government to **fund prefeasibility work for all future stages of light rail** identified in the *ACT Light Rail Network Plan*. Government must take a long view of light rail delivery and begin preliminary work now on future light rail line projects. This is an integral long-term planning task to ensure our city is liveable and resilient into the future.

PTCBR also calls for adequate resourcing of Major Projects Canberra (MPC), the body delivering light rail in the ACT. MPC was established in large part to deliver light rail - yet the project is currently falling well behind promised timelines. We call for an expansion of resources at MPC to increase capacity of the light rail project team and ensure multiple stages of light rail can be advanced concurrently, regardless of which specific phase of project delivery each stage is at.



Frequent Services

More buses, more often

A key aspect of an effective public transport system is frequency of service. Passengers want and need the flexibility and reassurance that comes with frequent bus and light rail services; no one wants to feel pressured to race to catch a once-hourly bus, to arrange their day around awkward trip times, or to risk being stranded at a stop. PTCBR recognises ongoing ACT Government efforts to improve transport frequency, including recruitment of more bus drivers to enable more services to run regularly and implementation of higher-frequency light rail timetables for special events.

We strongly encourage the ACT Government to allocate more funding to enable necessary improvements in this fundamental area of public transport delivery.

2. RECOMMENDATION: Bring all bus services up to minimum one-hourly running seven days a week – no more two-hourly services.

PTCBR welcomes and commends improvements made to Transport Canberra's bus service frequency in recent months. However, suburban routes remain at a two-hourly frequency on Saturday nights and all day on Sundays – this is not good enough. Sparse service on routes that are often circuitous and lengthy is an unattractive prospect and poor offering for passengers. We call on the ACT Government to reverse what were supposed to be temporary service cuts on weekends with the introduction of Network 19, and **increase bus frequencies to a minimum of once per hour on all days of the week.**

3. RECOMMENDATION: More peak hour bus trips served by articulated buses to eliminate uncomfortably crowded trips.

PTCBR hears frequent complaints about crowded peak hour bus services. We call on the ACT Government to **implement increased peak hour bus trips that are specifically serviced by Transport Canberra's articulated bus fleet.** We again acknowledge the work being done to recruit more drivers to enable higher levels of service, but we also call for more drivers to gain the appropriate training and licence to operate articulated buses to ensure these vehicles can be deployed without restriction.

4. RECOMMENDATION: Increase light rail service on Fridays and weekends.

- ➔ Friday night – increase service to every 10 minutes, 6.30pm-11.30pm
- ➔ Saturday – 6am-9am every 15 minutes, 9am-9pm every 10 minutes, 9pm-final service every 15 minutes
- ➔ Sunday – 7am-9am every 15 minutes, 9am-6pm every 10 minutes, 6pm-final service every 15 minutes

PTCBR calls for an increase in light rail service frequency to reflect increased demand and make an already fantastic service even better. We regularly hear from our members and the public asking for a greater level of service provided over the weekend; this reflects the modern lives lived by Canberrans, who want to get around conveniently on all days of the week and enjoy the city's nightlife with assured and easy ways to get home. PTCBR believes that light rail service increases would generate a modest

rise in operational expenditure while making an outsized positive impact on the convenience and attractiveness of light rail.



Timed Connections

Don't wait more than 10 minutes for your connecting bus

Canberra is a sprawling city serviced by rapid bus routes along busy corridors and local bus routes in suburban areas. The nature of our city's planning and geographical layout means that many locations are only easily reached by utilising multi-leg journeys - that is, taking multiple buses or a combination of light rail and bus to get to a given destination and back again. Currently, this is not an attractive prospect for many passengers due to poor bus punctuality, low frequency on many services, and no robust effort to plan and ensure timed connections for passengers.

5. RECOMMENDATION: Improve on-time running as a top priority – this must be done to enable the possibility of timed connections.

According to analysis of figures provided by Transport Canberra, buses in the ACT run on time only 75 per cent of the time.² This is an unacceptable number and PTCBR expects the ACT Government to act to improve bus punctuality with urgency.

Passengers must be able to rely on all services to be on time in order to make connections; without buses reliably running on time, multi-leg journeys become impossible. The previous section addressed the issue of low frequency services – that issue greatly increases the need for on-time running to avoid the prospect of passengers suffering lengthy waits if they miss a connecting service to a bus that only runs once an hour or, even worse, once every two hours.

We further recommend that Transport Canberra utilises existing data and/or is allocated funding to research and report on improving timed connections and implement solutions. This would encompass:

1. Identifying which routes offer the best “return on investment” in terms of immediate improvement of timed connections that will benefit the greatest number of passengers. From looking at passenger data like travel patterns, where can we see passengers regularly making multi-leg journeys? Which routes and locations are commonly involved?

² Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly, Question 1499 – *Transport Canberra*, asked on 28 November 2023, answer published 11 December 2023; accessed at questions.parliament.act.gov.au/details/62556364bb214b3cb6bad94d39e10846

2. Creating reliable and timely connections on these frequently patronised multi-leg journeys by pinpointing issues and implementing solutions - e.g. fixing punctuality of particular services, fixing route points that regularly create delays, adjusting timetables as necessary.



Faster Services

Bus lanes and priority measures to skip through traffic

For public transport to be an attractive transport option, journeys must be easy, convenient, and fast. These factors are readily achieved by light rail due to a dedicated track and traffic light priority, but Canberra's buses are regularly caught in traffic due to a lack of priority measures. PTCBR calls on the ACT Government to facilitate easier bus travel by funding investigation into and implementation of bus priority measures at all levels, large- to small-scale.

6. RECOMMENDATION: Ensure funding is allocated for work to begin on implementing the final stage of the Belconnen Transitway.

PTCBR was extremely pleased to see the ACT Government commit, in November 2023, to the delivery of bus priority between Belconnen and Civic – i.e. completing the Belconnen Transitway – by 2028. This is a vital project to improve bus travel times between Canberra's most populous town centre and Civic. Existing and future transport pressure stemming from increasing population in Belconnen has been understood and acknowledged for some time, and improvements to this transport corridor were identified as an infrastructure priority by Infrastructure Australia back in 2016. PTCBR calls on the ACT Government to ensure that the ACT Budget 2024-25 contains all necessary funding for the advancement of investigations and project delivery agreed to in the Belconnen Transitway Motion (amended) of 1 November 2023 in the ACT Legislative Assembly:³

a) “deliver an updated feasibility study which investigates upgrades to the Belconnen Bus Transitway, to inform the delivery of bus priority between Belconnen and Civic in the next term of Government;

b) consider other modes of transport during investigations, including future planning for light rail and active travel connections; and

³ Australian Capital Territory, Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, 2023, 3699.

c) report back to the Assembly on the progress of these matters by the last sitting day of the 10th Assembly in 2024.

d) commit to the delivery of bus priority between Belconnen and Civic before the election of 2028.”

7. RECOMMENDATION: Investigate and implement small-scale bus priority measures.

PTCBR calls on the ACT Government to fund research into and implementation of a suite of **bus priority measures** that will provide positive results for commuters by improving bus travel times, are of low-to-medium cost, and can be delivered promptly. We propose the following actions and timeline:

1. Utilise existing Transport Canberra data and/or fund research into opportunities for bus priority measures to be implemented with the goal of identifying key pressure points - e.g. severe congestion points, points at which buses frequently fall behind schedule route time.
2. Produce a research report, from the work described above, to be made publicly available by December 2025.
3. Allocate an initial sum for a set amount of works, identified through the research report, to be completed in the 2024-25 financial year.
4. Produce costings for future works and commit to allocating adequate funding in the 2025-26 ACT Budget, and create a plan for the implementation of these works in that financial year.



Active Travel

Combining public transport with walking, biking, and scooting

All passengers utilise the built environment around bus and light rail stops as pedestrians - first when they commence their journey, and again as they end it. All public transport stops must meet the needs of passengers at a given location and help to make their journey easy and pleasant. Canberra’s public transport stops are highly inconsistent when it comes to amenity and usability – while many are well-equipped, clean, and easy to use, sadly many others are aging, poorly maintained, and lacking in basic signage and key information displays. PTCBR calls on the ACT Government to improve and standardise public transport stop quality across the city.

8. RECOMMENDATION: Allocate funding to ensure all major high-use stops meet a minimum standard of amenity and utility.

All bus interchanges and multi-platform stops must: be designed and equipped appropriately to shield passengers from the various elements; have appropriate amounts of seating; display current maps and timetables; have a fresh water dispenser; have clear directions to the nearest toilets; and must generally have appropriate wayfinding features, including directions to nearby features including shops, parks, attractions, major roads, and so on. Currently these features are not present at all major bus stop locations in Canberra. PTCBR recommends the design and implementation of a **public transport infrastructure standard** to ensure all stops are appropriately appointed with the above features and the allocation of commensurate funding for implementation of this in the 2024-25 budget.

9. RECOMMENDATION: Fully implement the 2018 Transport Canberra Style Guide.

The **2018 Transport Canberra Style Guide** sets out a comprehensive, attractive, and highly usable set of guidelines for all aspects of Transport Canberra's visual and written communications. PTCBR calls for the full implementation of this guide - especially the Wayfinding guidelines and Passenger Information guidelines. This would greatly enhance passenger experience as well as strengthening the Transport Canberra brand and messaging.

10. RECOMMENDATION: Allocate funding to investigate the implementation of best-practice safety and design standards / guidelines such as the Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) at stops and interchanges.

Safety and accessibility at public transport stops is important for all community members and especially those who are vulnerable. PTCBR calls for funding to be allocated to investigate and audit our public transport stops to identify opportunities for implementation of standards and / or guidelines to **improve the built environment and enhance safety and accessibility for public transport passengers.**

Submission image sources:

Cover Page: *Light Rail Stage 2B in 2085* artwork by Circe for PTCBR, photos by Amy Jelacic and TransitGraphics.