CONSERVATION COUNCIL ACT REGION

Submission to Transport Canberra and City Services

Draft Design Guide: Best practices for urban intersections and other active travel infrastructure in the ACT

June 2023

The Conservation Council ACT Region is the peak non-government environment organisation for the Canberra region. Since 1981, we have spoken up for a healthy environment and a sustainable future for our region. We harness the collective energy, expertise and experience of our more than 40 member groups to promote sound policy and action on the environment.

We campaign for a safe climate, to protect biodiversity in our urban and natural areas, to protect and enhance our waterways, reduce waste, and promote sustainable transport and planning for our city. Working in the ACT and region to influence governments and build widespread support within the community and business, we put forward evidence-based solutions and innovative ideas for how we can live sustainably.

At a time when we need to reimagine a better future, we understand that the changes we need will only happen with the collective support of our community.

This submission has been developed in consultation with members of the Conservation Council's Transport Working Group: Australian Electric Vehicle Association, Living Streets Canberra, Pedal Power ACT, Public Transport Association of Canberra, SEE-Change, and ACT Council of Social Services, but may vary from the individual positions of each organisation.

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Introduction

The Conservation Council ACT Region welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the draft 'Design Guide: Best practices for urban intersections and other active travel infrastructure in the ACT'.[1]

The ACT Government is well aware of the climate science imperative to reduce emissions from transport, the Territory's largest source of emissions. Thus, the Council is pleased to see the release of this draft Design Guide as a promised key action from 2022's Draft Active Travel Plan. If implemented comprehensively across Canberra, it has the potential to significantly raise the appeal of car-free travel.

The Council reiterates the recommendation from our August 2022 submission[2] that the Active Travel Plan needs to commit to clear timelines, tangible actions, and funding priorities for active / low emissions travel in the ACT.

Safe active travel infrastructure integrated with efficient public transport and end-of-trip facilities is essential to enabling Canberrans to choose transport options that save them money and meaningfully tackle climate change.

The ACT Government must commit substantial funding to active travel infrastructure and facilities, equivalent to 20 percent of the roads budget. It is only through demonstrating the safety, convenience and viability of active travel for all Canberrans – supported by and integrated with efficient public transport – that people will feel confident to make the move out of private cars into other modes that have multiple benefits for individuals, public health, and the amenity of our city.

Good communication is needed to counter the "anti-car" rhetoric evident through talk-back radio, some media outlets and even the ACT Legislative Assembly[3]. It is a misperception that Canberra was designed for cars – it was originally designed with the expectation that people would live and work within a single town area so could travel easily on foot or bicycle between home and business centres, with rapid public transport corridors between town centres. It is unfortunate that cars were allowed to dominate planning considerations in the second half of the 20th century.

Policy documents and public communication campaigns need to reconceptualise transport: re-design our transport infrastructure and services from moving cars to moving people, with the objective of making it easy to travel anywhere without a car (i.e. not just commuter routes to the CBD). The hierarchy of pedestrians > bicycles > public transport > ride sharing then lastly private cars needs to be clearly articulated across all transport plans, road designs, and reflected in the Design Guide and its implementation. These principles need to be incorporated back into road planning and design.

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[1] ACT Government, 2023, 'Design Guide: Best practices for urban intersections and other active travel infrastructure in the ACT',
https://hdp-au-prod-app-act-yoursay-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/3216/8316/8412/Draft_Design_Guide_-_Best_practices_for_urban_intersections_and_other_active_travel_infrastructure_in_the_ACT.pdf

[2] Conservation Council ACT Region, 2022, 'Submission to TCCS, ACT Government on the Active Travel Plan-Consultation Draft',
https://conservationcouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/SUBMISSION_Draft-Active-Travel-Plan-20220901.pdf

[3] Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory, 2023, Minutes of Proceedings, No 87, 7 June 2023, see item 10 'Government vehicle policies',
https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/2234836/MoP087p.pdf

Implementation of the Design Guide and Active Travel Plan needs to be accompanied by education for motorists about prioritising active mobility and safety.

The Conservation Council defers to the technical expertise provided in submissions by Living Streets Canberra, Pedal Power ACT, and Public Transport Canberra, all members of the Council's Transport Working Group.

Comments on selected aspects of the draft Design Guide

Best practice and implementable standards

The Conservation Council supports the ambition of applying global best practice to active travel and the safety of pedestrians and cyclists, in an iterative approach. People who walk, cycle or use other micro mobility modes are significantly more vulnerable to injury and death than those who travel in motor vehicles. Their safety must be the absolute priority of our entire transport system.

Adjustments do need to be made for Canberra's unique context. For instance, our city's residential streets are predominantly curved rather than arranged in rectangular grids, creating visibility challenges.

Examples should be relevant to Canberra.

The draft Design Guide reads inconsistently in places, clearly drawn from different sources, sometimes more like a discussion paper. For instance p27 section 8.5 *Recessed holding lines* includes the comment "however this would require a change to the road rules". And p31 section 9.5 *Signal timing* discusses walking speed and clearance time rather than clearly stating what speed should be implemented; 9.8 *Actuated vs automated signals* similarly reads like a research paper. Whereas section 13 includes clear "design objectives" and "recommended treatments".

There appear to be many different treatments and much discretion in the design of intersections, plus examples that do not embody the guiding principles, such as figures showing inconsistent turn angles or 'shark's teeth' markings facing the wrong way.

The more consistent the treatments recommended in the Guide and implemented across the city, the less confusion there will be for all road users, reducing the likelihood of pushback by motorists.

The content needs to be edited for consistent style. The Design Guide should provide clear standards to be implemented. Any theoretical discussions or supporting content should be provided as a supplement.

Equitable access

Designing a transport and pathway system intelligently for differently-abled people of any age improves access and accessibility for all travellers.

It is vital that the ACT's mobility options – including all streets, paths, crossings and public transport stops – comply with the ACT's *Discrimination Act 1991* and *Human Rights Act 2004* and the national *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and *Age Discrimination Act 2004*.

Many of Canberra's residential streets, particularly in older suburbs, do not have any footpaths, forcing all travellers to choose between uneven and often obstructed terrain through the front yards of homes, or onto roads with motor traffic driving at or even above the speed limit. This is a significant deterrent to pedestrians and cyclists of all ages and abilities.

Supporting behaviour change and partnering with the community

The Design Guide does not include specific mechanisms for behaviour change or how the community will be partnered with. The community should be actively involved in decisions about priorities and funding.

Separation of modes and continuity

Wherever possible throughout Canberra, faster wheeled transport (cyclists, scooters etc) should be separated from pedestrians for the safety of all path users, particularly on more central arterial routes through suburbs and particularly where paths run through areas of busy activity, such as past Chifley shops and parks (right). Separated cycle/wheeled mobility paths enables safer, faster, more efficient cycle commuting, making it more attractive.

Distinction between path/lane users needs to be clear throughout the Design Guide and in implementation. Implementation needs to ensure connectivity for each user category, particularly given the increasing popularity of electric scooters and confusion about where they can and cannot be legally vs safely ridden.

Intersection design and signals

The Conservation Council supports Pedal Power's recommendation that left-turn slip lanes be eliminated for the safety of cyclists. Cars often turn across green-painted cycle lanes at high speed, or queue on top of them, blocking cyclists or forcing them into traffic lanes, for example turning left from Hindmarsh Drive (eastbound) onto Melrose Drive (northbound) at morning peak traffic.

Prioritising transit times for active travellers will make active travel more attractive.

All traffic lights should prioritise active travel users. Crossing signals should be automatic at all signalised intersections, and should endure for long enough for the majority of active travellers to cross the whole road in a single cycle, not leave them stranded in the centre of the road. Wherever practicable, separate walking and cycling signals should be installed to account for the difference in clearance times.

Pedestrians and cyclists should be given the most direct route possible across intersections, not be diverted around obstacles. Facilitating the shortest route reduces j-walking and unsafe behaviour.

The Council supports prioritised queue-jump lanes for buses.

Lighting

Paths for walking and cycling need specific human-scale illumination for safety. Lighting directed at roads is often insufficient for adjacent paths, and much of Canberra's suburban street lighting leaves pools of darkness on footpaths. Ground-level lighting can be an effective alternative or supplement to overhead lighting.

Road classification, speed zones and traffic calming

There is mounting evidence from around the world about the relationship between mean travel speed and injury outcomes for pedestrians hit by vehicles.[4]

The Conservation Council recommends conducting public consultation about simplifying the classification of Canberra's roads by purpose, and lowering the speed of vehicle traffic in residential areas and around areas of high pedestrian activity. This might include diverting "through traffic" from destination precincts and tight spaces around public transport routes, lowering speed limits around schools and shops, installing traffic calming measures that reprioritise people over motor vehicles. Marked and signposted pedestrian 'zebra' crossings need to be far more common, particularly near schools, shops and all bus stops. Chicanes and more "shared zone" signage on residential streets could also alert drivers to slow down.

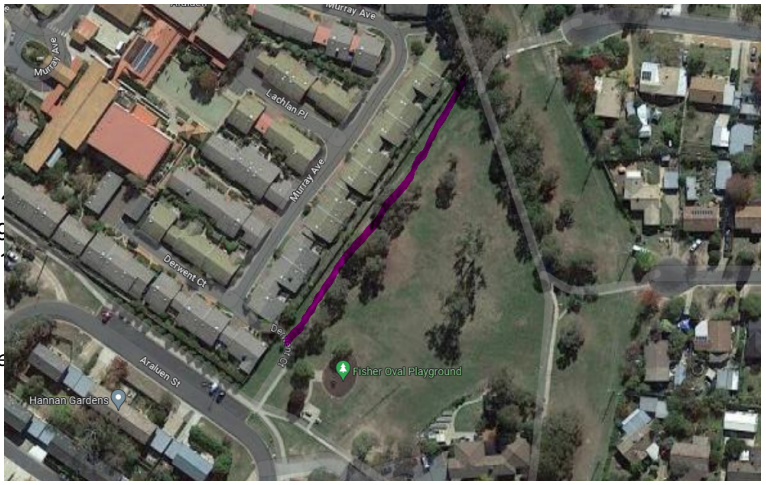
For instance, new speed humps were recently installed at intersections along Namatjira Drive between Chapman, Stirling, Fisher and Waramanga. These have been very effective at slowing traffic along this busy arterial road and making it easier for traffic turning onto it from suburb feeder roads. However, no priority was given to pedestrians wanting to cross Namatjira drive. This was a missed opportunity: the speed humps could have incorporated pedestrian 'zebra' crossings as standard practice, such as those on Corinna St around Woden town centre. Instead, hundreds of students flood in and out of Mount Stromlo High School and St John Vianney Primary School each day without a single pedestrian crossing on either Namatjira Drive or Badimara Street. Bus passengers also are forced to take their chances crossing between bus stops with no priority given to their safe and efficient passage. It is no wonder that so many families choose to drive their children rather than send them on foot.

Cycle lanes need to be continuous across all intersections, not disappear at the points where cyclists are most vulnerable to turning traffic. Again, for example, on Namatjira Street, the cycle lanes vanish at intersections even after the installation of the new speed humps.

Surfaces, maintenance and upgrade of existing paths

The Design Guide does not really address the design, upgrade and maintenance of walking and cycling paths not associated with roads and intersections.

Government should conduct an audit of "desire lines", with community input, to install paths where people actually walk or



[4] Höskuldur R.G. Kröyer, 2015, 'Is 30km/h a 'safe' speed' relation to travel speed and age', IATSS Research, vol 39 https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S03861

ride. For example, a well-worn track along the western edge of Fisher park (right) indicates a popular shortcut.

Suburban paths require greater planned investment in upgrading and maintenance to clear overgrown vegetation and debris, and upgrade surfaces to smooth out bumps. This is particularly apparent in older suburbs where paths consisting of concrete panels or sections are often very bumpy and unpleasant for cycling and present trip hazards for pedestrians.

Curbs between paths and road crossings need to be smoothed out or raised to slow road vehicles and allow smooth passage by active travellers. For instance, throughout Turner, the gutters where footpaths intersect roads are very deep and steep, presenting trip hazards for walkers and impediments to wheeled mobility.

On-road cycle lanes, often simply the shoulder of major roads, are often full of debris: leaves, branches, broken plastics and glass, gravel flung off roads by motor vehicles. Cycle lane shoulders are rarely included when the road is resurfaced but end up with loose gravel. Having to swerve or ride right next to the vehicle lane to avoid debris puts cyclists at risk. These shoulder lanes need regular sweeping to improve safety and reduce risks of punctures.

Maintenance plans need to be publicly available, with progress of works updated in real time. New builds and upgrades should include “user assessment” at various stages of planning and construction to evaluate efficiency and safety.

Attention also needs to be given to filling gaps in the cycle network, including upgrading major commuter routes.

Shelter

Bus shelters throughout the network need to provide effective shelter from wind, sun and rain. Provision of comfortable shelter and seating can significantly improve perception of wait time and rider satisfaction.[5] Solid transparent walls should screen prevailing winds and rain especially in winter, extending to the ground and continuously joined rather than leaving gaps around ankles or between panels. Effective shelter is particularly important anywhere that bus routes intersect where passengers may be forced to wait for more than a few minutes for connecting services. Suburban bus shelters can also provide refuge for walkers and cyclists in extreme weather, even if they are not taking buses.

Walkers and cyclists also need shelter en route. Hedges can be effective windbreaks on exposed sections of cycle routes, while trees provide shade. These considerations have not been included in the Design Guide.

Wherever possible, native species should be the default choice in the Design Guide, to provide the co-benefit of increasing habitat for wildlife and helping to connect urban greenspaces. The Guide should also include standards for fabricated screens along exposed paths, such as across bridges – Commonwealth Avenue Bridge, for example, is a high-wind stretch impacting comfort and safety for active travellers. Roofing exposed stretches, such as with solar panels[6], to provide shelter from sun and rain can greatly improve the experience of cycling in a broader

[5] National Association of City Transportation Officials, Transit Street Design Guide: Small transit shelter, https://nacto.org/publication/transit-street-design-guide/station-stop-elements/stop-elements/small-transit-shelter/
[6] Renewsable, 2017, ‘S. Korea has a 20 mile solar-covered bike lane in the middle of the freeway, https://renewsable.net/2017/06/28/south-korean-bike-highway-solar-panels-stretching-20-miles/

range of weather conditions. Roofing might also provide protection against swooping magpies, another significant deterrent to cycling.

Parking enforcement

Greater enforcement is needed to remove parked vehicles from cycle lanes and footpaths.