



**CONSERVATION  
COUNCIL** ACT REGION

# Submission to TCCS: William Hovell Drive upgrade

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December 2021

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, the changes we need will only happen with the collective support of our community.

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# Introduction

The Conservation Council ACT Region appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the William Hovell Drive upgrade project.<sup>1</sup>

The Council appreciates the need to plan ahead for transport needs due to population growth in Belconnen and Molonglo. However, it is now well established that bigger roads do not solve congestion problems: they buy a brief window of relief and then attract even more cars that drive up emissions and demand for parking.<sup>2</sup>

The ACT Government should seize the opportunity provided by the upgrade project disruption to prioritise public and active transport over private car travel to alleviate the impacts of the latter and shift Canberrans' transport habits to more sustainable modes. There are multiple benefits to be realised from the intersection of biodiversity connectivity and active travel infrastructure. Additionally, invasive species must be contained throughout the construction.

Noting the advanced status of the project planning and previous consultation, the Conservation Council offers the following brief comments.

## Points of concern

### Public transport should be incorporated

The upgrade of William Hovell Drive should incorporate rapid bus routes. The current bus network has limited connections between north and south districts of Canberra, particularly for residents of western areas working in other western town centres. Bus passengers needing to travel between Tuggeranong or Weston Creek/Molonglo and western Belconnen are funnelled via the bottlenecks of Woden and Civic, with journey times of well over an hour compared with 20–30 minutes of driving via the Tuggeranong parkway, making public transport an impractical option. Yet William Hovell Drive and the other roads feeding from it into Belconnen could offer much more direct connections if serviced by rapid buses.

Major roadworks require some alteration of road use, but also constitute an opportunity to disrupt patterns of behaviour. Noting the concurrence of the imminent disruption due to the construction of light rail to (and later across) Commonwealth Avenue Bridge with the William Hovell Drive upgrade, the ACT Government should – and needs to – seize this opportunity to create alternative public transport routes with rapid bus services along the Tuggeranong Parkway, William Hovell Drive, Caswell Drive and/or Bindubi Street and/or Coulter Drive and John Gorton Drive (for when Coppins Crossing has been upgraded) to create “ring route” connections between the growing and densifying population centres in western Canberra. This would provide Canberrans with an alternative to driving and help alleviate traffic congestion in the short term at both the William Hovell Drive and light rail construction zones and into the

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<sup>1</sup> ACT Government Environment, Transport and City Services, n.d., [William Hovell Drive upgrade](#).

<sup>2</sup> Holland, B, 2021, [More lanes do not mean less traffic](#), RMI

future. The upgrade project should design for the needs of future bus routes, such as priority lanes and traffic signals.

If bus routes are created and prioritised through the construction of William Hovell Drive, and clearly promoted to commuters on William Hovell Drive, this could help persuade drivers delayed in roadwork traffic to switch travel modes.

## Active travel should be prioritised

The Conservation Council's submission to the ACT Government on [Draft Variation 357 End-of-trip facilities general code](#) describes the case for and benefits to be derived from prioritising active travel.

The Council welcomes the inclusion of both on-road cycling lanes and a separate off-road shared path for active travel, including the extension of the shared path to connect through to the Bindubi St path towards Lake Burley-Griffin.

The off-road path is critical for safe cycle commuting given the danger to cyclists of riding alongside traffic travelling at high speed on a major arterial road. However, the default approach to cycle path design appears to be that the road is designed first for the convenience of vehicle drivers – straight and unimpeded except for necessary intersections – and shared paths are added as the second priority, even an afterthought, with dog-legs, diversions and stoppages to dodge around and cross the roads, like the Z-bend through the underpass at the Kama and Pinnacle Nature Reserves access. Winding “scenic” routes might be suitable for recreation and tourism but do not support efficient cycle commuting. For the shared path to maximise efficiency and safety for cycle commuters, the path should minimise unnecessary bends, detours, tight – and potentially blind – corners and sudden stops.

Cyclists on both the shared path and the on-road cycle lanes must be given clear priority at all road crossings, particularly where vehicles are exiting the main road onto minor roads or slip lanes with no traffic signals, for instance the access road into the Kama Nature Reserve. These are moments where vehicles may be travelling at some speed without mindfulness to cyclists. The ACT Government should clarify details about how cyclists' safety will be communicated to vehicular road users, eg green surface paint, signage, physical separation from traffic (for the on-road lanes and where the shared path runs close beside the road), speed humps for vehicles turning onto side roads, open sight lines for both cyclists and vehicles, etc, and design these in consultation with Pedal Power ACT.

Routing the shared path through the off-leash dog area in Hawker is less than ideal. Dogs present a significant hazard to cyclists even when leashed. The cycle path should be relocated or at the very least, the dog area should be fenced to prevent unleashed dogs from interfering with cyclists.

Constructing the shared path before commencing road works would provide commuters with a viable alternative to driving so that when drivers experience delays due to road works, they may be more likely to switch to cycling. Temporary roadside posters or billboards could communicate the benefits of switching to public and active travel.

## Biodiversity and active travel are mutually beneficial

The Conservation Council urges the ACT Government to plant a wide corridor of new, local native woodland trees and grasses along the entire length of the road and shared path to begin reversing the clearing of the past century and reintroduce local biodiversity and wildlife habitat. The removal of mature native trees should also be minimised. If well-designed around the shared path, this woodland corridor could also provide shade and windbreak for cyclists, improving enjoyment and climate resilience. Attractive information signage adjacent to the shared path at points of interest such as the Nature Reserves and the old cemetery would encourage and facilitate greater visitation of these natural and cultural heritage sites by locals and tourists, in turn building greater support for their preservation.

## Biodiversity connectivity must be preserved

As identified by the ACT Government, the duplication of William Hovell Drive will have significant impacts on biodiversity connectivity across the ACT region by fragmenting the landscape between the Kama and Pinnacle Nature Reserves. The Conservation Council welcomes the consideration of this fragmentation in the design of the project.

We note that a range of measures have been proposed to alleviate the impacts of the road duplication on connectivity. Namely,

- Minimising the overall road width between the two nature reserves;
- Upgrading the existing underpass to be wildlife friendly and to have possum and reptile runs;
- Designing the road batters to allow kangaroos and wallabies to escape the roadway;
- Using fencing to direct wildlife towards the underpass, including the use of culverts for turtles and other wildlife into the underpass (via a skylight, or similar).

A variety of measures should be taken to accommodate a diversity of species needs.<sup>3</sup> The efficacy of specific measures to reduce fragmentation by roads is largely unknown.<sup>4</sup> Considering this, applying the precautionary principle to the development would be beneficial, that is: preventive action should be taken regardless of the unknown impacts of such measures. It is strongly recommended that all of the measures identified above be implemented.

Research has shown that best practice road management should evaluate whether the wildlife road mitigation measures have made an impact on wildlife populations.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, researchers need to be involved in the design of the evaluation programs of the project and remain informed throughout the project. It is recommended that, if not already included in the project, an ecological road manager should be appointed to achieve these outcomes.

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<sup>3</sup> Cleverger, AP and Waltho, N, 2005, [Performance indices to identify attributes of highway crossing structures facilitating movement of large mammals](#), Biol. Conserv. 121, pp. 453–464

<sup>4</sup> Lesbarrères, D and Fahrig, L, 2012, [Measures to reduce population fragmentation by roads: what has worked and how do we know?](#), Trends in Ecology and Evolution, vol 27, no 7

<sup>5</sup> Van der Grift, E.A., Van der Ree, R., Fahrig, L. et al. Evaluating the effectiveness of road mitigation measures. Biodivers Conserv 22, 425–448 (2013).

The ACT Government should continue to consult with community environment groups and wildlife experts to implement the most appropriate of the measures proposed. This is the best opportunity to implement best practices for wildlife management.

## Invasive species must be contained

Currently, the wayside of William Hovell Drive is of poor quality and heavily infested with weeds. While constructing the road, there is a high risk that the infestation of weeds, notably, African Lovegrass will be made worse by the disturbance; and potentially extend into reserves. This risk must be taken extremely seriously, and mitigation measures should be included in the construction plan. It is recommended that a weed management plan be created and implemented, as was completed for the Western Highway Duplication Project – Section 2, Beaufort to Ararat, Victoria.<sup>6</sup>

Early detection and control is considered the best strategy for weed management. Regarding road construction in particular, research has identified the following measures for best practice weed management:<sup>7</sup>

- Consistency of effort throughout the construction timeline, and
- Evaluation of weeds before road construction starts;
- Re-cultivation of the native flora

## Recommendations

- Seize the opportunity to prioritise public transport and active travel to shift behaviour patterns away from private vehicle use.
- Develop and prioritise bus routes between western areas of Canberra to provide commuters with alternatives to driving through the construction zone.
- Design the shared path and on-road cycle lanes (particularly where cyclists and vehicles interact) with cyclists' safety as the priority, in consultation with Pedal Power ACT.
- Prioritise cyclist safety by restricting unleashed dogs.
- Use roadside billboards to promote alternative transport modes to drivers.
- Restore a habitat corridor along the route that supports biodiversity and climate resilience for cyclists, and interest in natural heritage sites.
- Implement all suggested measures to protect wildlife and facilitate connectivity between the Kama and Pinnacle Nature Reserves.

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<sup>6</sup> Ecology & Heritage Partners, 2013, [Weed management plan, western highway duplication project – section 2, Beaufort to Ararat, Victoria](#), for VicRoads

<sup>7</sup> Controllroad, 2016, [Controlling the spread of invasive species with innovative methods in road construction and maintenance](#)

- Develop a weed management plan before construction begins to minimise the spread of invasive species.
- Appoint an ecological road manager to the project team to evaluate and advise on invasive species mitigation and wildlife connectivity measures.