



**CONSERVATION COUNCIL**  
**ACT REGION**

# **Submission: Moving Canberra 2019-2045 Integrated Transport Strategy**

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**MARCH 2019**

The **Conservation Council ACT Region** is the peak non-government environment organisation for the Canberra region. We have been the community's voice for the environment in the Canberra region since 1979. Our mission is to achieve an ecologically sustainable and zero net carbon society through advocacy, education, research and engagement with community, the private sector and with government.

We represent more than 45 member groups who in turn represent over 15,000 supporters. We harness the collective expertise and experience of our member groups and networks. We work collaboratively with Government, business and the community to achieve the highest quality environment for Canberra and its region.

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## Introduction

Transport defines human environments, shaping how individuals live, and how cities work. Transport systems are a driving factor in the environmental and public health of a city, from land use, urban development and carbon pollution, to influencing the population's health through their daily behaviour. Transport underpins the social connections and engagement in our community that we all need to support our wellbeing.

Transport has been identified as a key issue for the Conservation Council ACT Region (the Council) in that it impacts on our identified priority environmental outcomes including:

- reduction in carbon emissions
- reduction of ecological footprint
- a sustainable and inclusive city
- protection, conservation and restoration of nature

Implementation of good transport policy has the capacity to influence environmental, health, social and economic outcomes for Canberrans through:

- minimising air pollution, greenhouse emissions and habitat destruction from the construction of roads
- reducing car use, and the health and safety problems associated with car use
- increasing public and active transport modes, providing people with the infrastructure to make healthy, sustainable transport easier
- delivering urban planning that increases accessibility to services for residents & reduces the environmental footprint of the city
- creating a liveable city that promotes health for all residents, from exercise to low noise pollution to reduced commute times
- fostering wellbeing, connectedness and exchange of ideas through delivering safe, efficient and low cost ways for people to engage with employment, recreational, social and service opportunities.

### **The ACT Conservation Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *Moving Canberra 2019-2045: Integrated Transport Strategy*, and recommends:**

1. Public transport and active travel should be prioritised across the strategy
2. Legislated public transport and active transport targets
3. Investment must support the implementation of legislated targets
4. Electrify both public and private transport
5. Active travel should be easy, safe, attractive and convenient
6. Biodiversity and urban green space should be protected and promoted
7. Ensure transport equity
8. Ongoing community education and engagement is important

## Transport challenges for Canberra

The Council welcomes the ACT Government's latest strategic discussion of transport policy – *Moving Canberra: an Integrated Transport Strategy* – as a useful starting point to ensure that transport planning responds to the challenges of climate change, urban densification and population health, and aligns investment accordingly. While we are a relatively young city, much can be achieved if we address these challenges early, ensuring that we are both ready to meet the challenges head on and that investment and implementation can be undertaken in a thoughtful and considered way.

In 2017-18, the ACT's transport emissions were 34% of the ACT's total emissions profile. As the ACT moves towards 100% renewable electricity in 2020, this percentage will increase, leaving transport emissions as the next major contributor to our greenhouse emissions. Without addressing transport emissions, the ACT will face a significant challenge meeting the zero emissions target by 2045 and little chance of bettering this target.

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Canberra's reputation as a "car city" is under-pinned by one of the lowest population densities in the world, spacious high quality roads, and relatively high income levels, which facilitate private transport choices. Car ownership levels are high (613 passenger vehicles per 1,000 population compared to a national rate of only 580 per 1,000 population)<sup>1</sup>, and by far the majority of journeys taken in Canberra are by car. To date, public transport options within Canberra have extended to only the bus network, which has undergone changes in recent year to improve times between major centres, and increase integration across the network, rationalising local services in favour of rapid routes. Bus priority measures have been put in place in some locations, but in general terms, the bus network has continued to run on the road network alongside private vehicle traffic. The soon to be completed light rail from Civic to Gungahlin signals a significant shift of direction of Canberra's public transport infrastructure towards fixed dedicated corridors.

There are strong drivers that underpin the need for a transport strategy that moves Canberra away from car dependency and towards increased public transport and active transport use, including:

- **Climate change**

We are in a global climate change crisis. There has been an unprecedented increase in average global temperatures that have exceeded scientific forecasts. We will be experiencing increasing impacts across our country and region: hotter, drier conditions, and increased bushfire risk and the incidence of heatwaves; and risks to biodiversity and the ecosystems that support us. Canberra, like every other community, has an obligation to take action to reduce our emissions, and move towards a carbon neutral future. The ACT Government has shown leadership through the establishment of emission reduction targets that respond to the climate science, with a 40% emission reduction target by 2020, and a commitment to be carbon neutral by 2045. While the Council supports these targets, and is committed to supporting their implementation, it seems evident that these targets could and should be improved.

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<sup>1</sup> 9309.0 - Motor Vehicle Census, Australia, 31 Jan 2018, Table 2

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- **Health**

Australian Health Tracker Data shows that the rate of obesity and overweightness in the adult Canberra population is consistent with the national average of 63.5%. While better than many other jurisdictions, that rate is still too high. Data also indicates that within the ACT, those who live in inner suburbs have lower rates of obesity and overweightness than those who live in outer suburbs such as Tuggeranong and West Belconnen, and who may not have the same access to bike paths and walking facilities, and are more likely to need cars to commute to work. Increasing active transport options for people across our city is important to improve health outcomes for all Canberrans, but especially in outer suburban areas.

- **Increasing population and urban densification**

Canberra is a growing city, and in 2018 experienced the second highest rate of population growth of all Australian capitals. Our population reached 422,500 in September 2018<sup>2</sup>, and is projected to reach half a million by 2027. The past ten years has seen 35,645 new residences built across in the ACT.<sup>3</sup> With Canberra's high rate of car ownership, increasing population will inevitably lead to more frequent traffic congestion, unless changes are made to reduce the reliance on private vehicle use. Even with a transition to electric vehicles, reducing vehicle numbers on our roads will be essential to free up space for public transport, cycling and walking, and ensure that we can maintain shorter travel times and reduce congestion. Increasing population will drive a need for better active and public transport infrastructure, and increasing urban density will deliver opportunities for building efficient, frequent and fast and reliable public transport and facilitate higher levels of engagement in active transport.

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<sup>2</sup> ABS <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mf/3101.0>

<sup>3</sup> ABS, 8752.0 - Building Activity, Australia, Sep 2018, Table 38

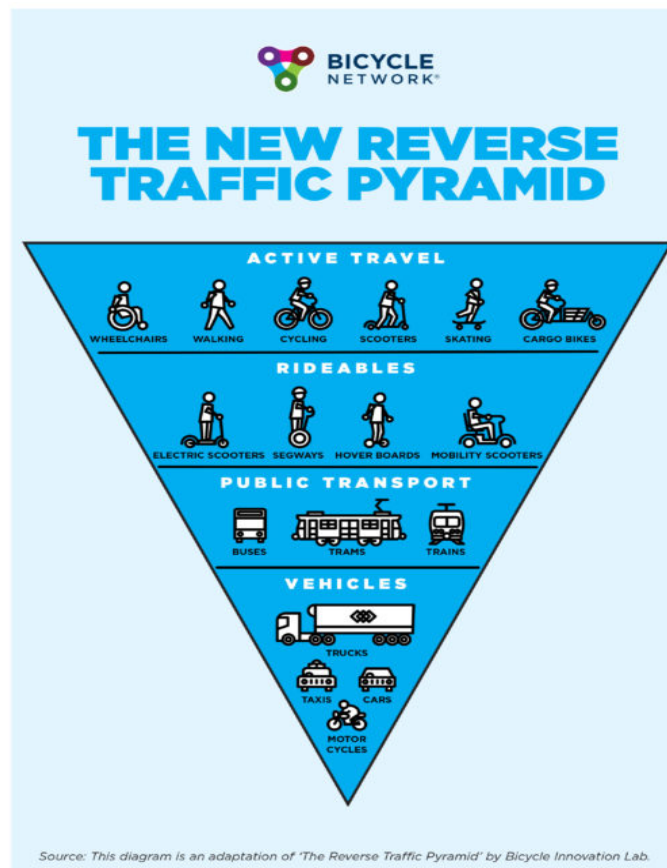
## Key principles

The Conservation Council ACT Region recommends that the *Moving Canberra 2019-2045: Integrated Transport Strategy* is implemented in alignment with the following principles:

### 1. Public transport and active travel should be prioritised across the strategy

Public transport and active travel should be prioritised across the transport strategy, whether it applies to investment and access or whether to implementation of measures on the ground, for example, traffic priority. The massive shift in mode share from private to public or active transport that will be required to achieve the ACT's emission reduction targets alone will require policy that provides incentives for active and public transport over private transport options. In addition, given that traffic congestion is predicted to cost the ACT economy \$700m by 2031, it is imperative that we reduce the numbers of private vehicles using our roads.

The graphic below, which outlines how transport funding should be prioritised, has featured on the Bicycle Network.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> Bicycle Network, [https://www.bicyclenetwork.com.au/tips-resources/bike-friendly-communities/new-reverse-traffic-pyramid/?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=In+the+Loop+-+NATIONAL+FRIENDS+14+February+2019&utm\\_content=bicyclenetwork.com.au%2Ftips-resources%2Fbike-friendly-communities%2Fnew-reverse-traffic-pyramid%2F&utm\\_source=www.vision6.com.au](https://www.bicyclenetwork.com.au/tips-resources/bike-friendly-communities/new-reverse-traffic-pyramid/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=In+the+Loop+-+NATIONAL+FRIENDS+14+February+2019&utm_content=bicyclenetwork.com.au%2Ftips-resources%2Fbike-friendly-communities%2Fnew-reverse-traffic-pyramid%2F&utm_source=www.vision6.com.au)

The Council supports policy measures that provide disincentives to private vehicle use, such as road user pricing and increasing parking fees, where they are supported by investment in active and public transport options, and applied equitably. It is important that road user charges do not disadvantage those who are least able to pay.

In regards to reducing the numbers of cars on our roads, the introduction of autonomous vehicles is not, in itself, a solution to the challenges on congestion or emissions reductions. However, autonomous cars may play a role in boosting shared private transport, and thereby reducing the need for car ownership, and may also have a role to play in supporting access to transport for disadvantaged groups in the community for whom using other forms of private and public transport might be difficult.

## 2. Legislate public transport and active transport targets

The *Moving Canberra* strategy outlines the case for change in regards to Canberra's transport options, citing climate change, changes to population, urban densification, technology and health and wellbeing as the imperatives for doing things differently. It articulates a vision of "providing real alternatives to driving and owning a car" (page 9), talks about the "need to reduce travel demand" (page 14). However, while at the end of the document under "Monitoring and Evaluation" a number of metrics and indicators are identified, the strategy puts no targets on most of those indicators, except in the section around emission reductions. The strategy fails to articulate the specific objectives that we should be trying to achieve in order to respond appropriately to the challenges our city will face, and as such, comes across as a menu of possibilities rather than conveying a clear, strategic direction.

It is clear that we need further targets to drive the changes that are required. For example, as the strategy notes, while Canberra has the highest mode share for cycling of any Australian capital city, the share of journeys to work by bicycle has remained the same for twenty years (page 48). The strategy identifies that the number of trips taken by women is significantly lower than that of men, but sets no targets to increase this, and that school trips would be ameliorated by improved safety and better walking and cycling networks, but sets no mode shift targets for school students. Aiming to increase modal share of walking and cycling is a useful indicator of the direction of the strategy, but provides little indication of the level of ambition of the strategy.

Any transport strategy for Canberra will necessarily need to integrate emissions reduction targets established in the ACT Climate Change Act, targets that are legislated and will require action. However, other targets, such as transport mode shift targets should be included in the *Moving Canberra* strategy. High-level targets on mode shift should be legislated in the same way emission reduction targets are legislated. While legislated targets may not be required for low level and/or specific objectives, legislation of high level targets would be a useful way to ensure Government commitments are maintained, that targets are reported via scheduled reporting obligations, and that investment decisions are aligned appropriately with desired outcomes. The ACT has a history of setting non-legislated targets: the last two transport strategies had targets that have not been met and the NoWaste by 2010 target was also not met. The Council believes that the reporting and accountability that accompanies legislated targets is powerful, and generally leads to a better outcome than

non-legislated targets. Legislated targets are obviously able to be changed by the Legislative Assembly, and so are not impervious to a clear change of political direction or strategy.

## 2. Investment must support implementation of legislated targets

To support clear targets and priorities in the strategy there is the need for a clear investment strategy that prioritises implementation of measures contained within the *Moving Canberra* strategy. While the strategy contains commentary about policies that need to be prioritised, nowhere does the strategy present these priorities in comparison with all the other actions that are on the table in a summarised clear format. For example, there is an acknowledgement that investment should reflect the modal hierarchy: “we need to prioritise active travel and consider the best way to decarbonise our public transport” (page 12); and “our transport priorities have shifted and our future investments need to reflect Canberra’s modal hierarchy” (page 12). In other places, investment to support urban renewal is also included in the commentary: “we will prioritise investment in transport that supports urban renewal and the creation of public spaces and places” (page 13).

Each section of the strategy discusses different opportunities for improving transport across Canberra, resulting in a document that conveys a sense that we need to do more of everything. Yet the reality is that with limited resources, decisions about prioritising investment will be made. It is of concern that, while the strategy talks positively about increasing the mode share of active travel and public transport, and highlights the importance of getting people out of their cars, the investment plan already committed to by the ACT Government seems primarily directed towards improving the major road network via road duplications and intersection upgrades. Acknowledging that there are a small number of identified works to enhance active travel and facilitate the extension of light rail, the ongoing investment in expanding the capacity of the road network is at odds with the strategic direction of the paper.

Future infrastructure investment decisions outside the list of currently identified projects seem vague, and left dependent on “the availability of future budgets and studies”. The seven identified investment principles are all in themselves worthy and useful, yet again the strategy does not prioritise them, nor lend them any weight.

Recent investment in active travel in the ACT has been welcome, however, Canberra needs much, much more. Many more dedicated bike and in many cases separated pedestrian pathways are needed to really change modal share, as well as upgrades to existing active transport infrastructure. Building and maintaining this infrastructure will require ongoing funding beyond two years, especially if we are to extend these paths right across Canberra and complete missing links; ensure they are available to a range of different types of users; and maintain their quality so as they remain safe.

No amount of promotion of active travel will change modal share unless there is a network of well-maintained cycling and walking paths that are safe and easy to use. While some will choose to ride in bike lanes on Northbourne Avenue, having bike lanes alongside such a busy traffic corridor is a disincentive to many cyclists, in particular younger and/or less experienced cyclists. A motto for Transport Canberra could be: *build it and they will come*. If you build fast, straight, attractive and well-connected bike and pedestrian facilities, you will attract users and achieve the required modal shift without having to market the facilities to drive behaviour change. Conversely, if Transport Canberra invests in new or upgraded roads,

demand for more private car use will be induced. The CEO of Vicroads in Victoria is on record having said “you can’t build your way out of congestion”.<sup>5</sup> The Council would support this sentiment.

It is critically important that the strategy should align investment in transport with clear, legislated priorities supporting public transport and active transport.

### **3. Public transport should be frequent, fast, reliable and comfortable**

The Council welcomes the support *Moving Canberra* provides for an integrated planning strategy for the city that encompasses different transport modes and acknowledges that many of the journeys taken by Canberrans will be by mixed modes. However, the strategy should clearly outline the objectives in terms of improving transport for the city, in particular the objectives that public transport should be frequent, fast, reliable and comfortable; the key principles that will ensure increased patronage across the network, resulting in a mode shift from private vehicles to public and active transport options.

The transport strategy outlines future light rail and bus networks for the city. With the Gungahlin to City light rail almost operational, the Council supports the extension of the light rail network to the south, all the way to Tuggeranong to increase the overall use and efficiency of the system.

While we support the development of the east-west spine, and acknowledge the additional benefits that segregated fixed rail services deliver over bus networks, we would also recommend that as new sections of the “fixed line” network are designed, an evaluation of technology is undertaken to ensure that people of the ACT are investing in technologies that will best suit the corridor. For example, trackless trams should be investigated for the east-west spine.

### **4. Electrify both public and private transport**

The Council supports the electrification of transport in Canberra and believes that it is crucial to reducing our emission profile in both the public and private transport sectors. This becomes an effective emissions reduction strategy when the whole of the ACT’s electricity is sourced from renewable sources, however requires investment in infrastructure such as charging facilities, both in people’s homes and in public spaces, as well as changes in planning laws, and incentives to drive uptake. The ACT’s Transition to Zero Emissions Vehicles strategy outlines the supportive environment proposed by the ACT Government with regard to the use of private electric vehicles in Canberra, including bicycles.

The government should provide financial signals to the broader community that the desired direction is away from petrol vehicles. The Council welcomes incentives around stamp duty and registration to those investing in electric vehicles. Subsidies for retrofit kits for converting existing combustion engines to electric should also be supplied. Converting

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<sup>5</sup> ABC News, More roads not the answer to Melbourne’s congestion woes, VicRoads says, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-07-06/more-roads-not-the-answer-to-melbourne-congestion-woes/6597036>



existing vehicles to electric is known as the most carbon-conservative approach as the embedded energy of an existing vehicle is not wasted. The government should also investigate distance-based rather than fixed annual registration and insurance charges to provide incentives for using cars less.

When considering incentives, of note is that researchers from the Clean Air and Urban Landscapes Hub in Melbourne confirmed that people who live in outer suburbs, and who have less access to other forms of transport, have the highest emissions profiles through driving longer distances. Efforts targeting those in outer suburbs might have a higher impact in terms of emission reductions. Perverse outcomes of incentives should also be avoided for those who have low-incomes, and who are likely to be disadvantaged in the transition to electric vehicles given the substantial capital investment, and potentially the increasing cost of fuel.

Potential programs to increase EV uptake and the EV charge station network include:

- imposing requirements on or incentives to businesses with car parks to provide EV charge stations. For example, 22 kW AC charging for parking spots where average stay is over an hour;
- requiring CIT to develop a certification course for auto-electricians interested in retrofitting existing combustion engine vehicles. This will facilitate a more rapid transition to EVs as is required.

The ACT Government must also move quickly to ensure that public transport transitions quickly away from gas and diesel. While there has been a recent electric bus trial in the ACT, in 2018, the Government moved ahead with the purchase of an additional 45 diesel buses, thereby locking in diesel-run vehicles for a substantial amount of time. This would seem to be at odds with a city that is looking to take action to reduce transport emissions by such a significant amount.

Removing interstate freight off our roads and onto electric rail, and encouraging the take up of electric commercial vans and trucks for local deliveries should be an explicit objective of the *Moving Canberra* strategy, as part of decreasing transport emission as well as improving road safety.

## **5. Active travel should be easy, safe and convenient**

Active travel (walking, cycling, scooting, skating) delivers important health benefits as well as often being integrated into a multi-modal trip.

Walking is nearly always part of someone's journey when they use public transport, and is an easy, cheap and accessible way for people to get around. Walking will be more attractive if people can have access to safe, direct paths that are shaded, and wide enough to allow pedestrians to walk side by side. Paths need to facilitate activity for people from a range of ages and abilities.

Cycling also requires an investment in infrastructure that promotes cycling as an option to all Canberrans. This means that cycle paths need to be readily available, suitable for the volume of and type of users, and safe enough for those who might wish to cycle, but who do not due to concerns about riding near cars.

The investment plan in *Moving Canberra* fails to give the priority to active travel that will be required to encourage people to choose active travel over private car use. Infrastructure investment into supporting active travel would include building continuous walking and cycling networks and paths, with smooth transitions between paths and across intersections, and separated paths when there are high numbers of users travelling at different speeds. Investment in facilities can also support increased usage through building convenience for cyclists and those using other forms of active travel. For example, easy access to bike parking at shopping centres and transport hubs, charging stations for e-bikes, and secure storage for scooters and skateboards at shopping centres and other venues.

## **6. Biodiversity and urban green space should be protected and promoted**

The Council has undertaken much work advocating for the protection of Canberra's native plants and animals, both in our National Parks, but also nature reserves and where the bush interfaces with urban development. We consistently advocate for a whole of landscape approach to land planning, early investigation of biodiversity values and early work on habitat enhancements rather than leaving the identification of offsets and related improvements until much later in the development process.

While many of the transport corridors identified within the *Moving Canberra* strategy are already in use, mention of the Western Investigation study area raises concerns that once again urban development and land release is putting pressure on the urban footprint to extend into new greenfield sites, many of which may hold valuable ecological values. The Council does not support urban development extending into the Western Investigation area for a host of reasons including biodiversity values and bush fire risk. Before any more development of greenfield sites is allowed to proceed, the Council advocates development of a legislated urban growth boundary beyond which Canberra can not expand. There are many examples of these around the world.

The protection of urban tree cover in already-treed areas, and the enhancement of other areas to increase the cover of urban trees is an important consideration when encouraging active transport options such as walking and cycling. Areas with high tree cover generally improving the urban amenity and make it easier for people to be outside and engage in walking and cycling in hot summers. Increasing the rate of urban tree cover is also consistent with climate change objectives to reduce urban heat so boost the city's resilience in the face of extended hot spells, and to improve quality of life.

Building connectivity and protecting ourselves from the heat island effect through the planting of additional tree cover may be inconsistent with increasing the use of commercial drones across our city. *Moving Canberra* identifies that Canberra should be technology ready, and states "we will continue to work with the Civil Aviation Authority (CASA) to enable safe deployment of drones in Canberra". The Council recommends that investigation is undertaken as to the impact of drones in the urban area, in particular with regard to native birds species, as well as noise levels and intrusions on privacy for residents being overflown. Assessment and monitoring programs should be an integral part of any trial service. For example a monitoring program should be undertaken in the Gungahlin delivery trial area where Superb Parrots are commonly found flying across and around the suburbs.

## 7. Ensure transport equity

Public transport can provide high quality services to the whole community. However, it is important that transport policies support access by all members of the community, including disadvantaged groups such as the elderly, those with a disability, and those who live in areas with reduced transport access due to distance, planning, or cost of housing. Transport is an important factor in enabling community connection by facilitating access to employment, family and friends, recreational activities, retail outlets and services such as education, health and social support services.

There are many aspects of the *Moving Canberra* strategy that may adversely impact those who are already facing disadvantage. For example, a transition to electric vehicles is likely to happen more quickly for those who can afford to upgrade their vehicles, leaving those who can't facing potentially expensive fuels costs. People living in outer suburbs will rely more on cars if frequent and reliable public transport isn't made available, and yet may face higher penalties if road user pricing is adopted. People with physical and emotional disabilities may not be easily able to utilise public transport, and may need to utilise on-demand private transport. The government may need to regulate the closure of petrol stations in Canberra during the transition to a fully electric fleet to ensure that there is sufficient and equitable access to fuel across the city for those who can't immediately upgrade their vehicles.

The *Moving Canberra* strategy could more explicitly outline how transport disadvantage will be addressed and set specific objectives with regards to those who do not have easy access to private transport, who cannot easily utilise public transport, and who are not able to easily engage in active travel options. The strategy could more clearly articulate an objective of social equity in delivering the strategy that cuts across infrastructure investment, incentives for uptake on new technologies, road user pricing and other "car disincentives", the Movement and Place Framework, and the integration of on-demand transport into mainstream transport services.

## 8. Ongoing community education and engagement is important

The changes that are required in mode share to reduce the use of private vehicles and achieve substantial mode shift to public transport and active travel is significant. While investment in infrastructure is crucial to achieving this shift, it will be important that the government is on the front foot promoting the availability of services and networks, and continues to engage with the community over the long term to consolidate the required behaviour changes. This engagement needs to not only influence people's choices in the direction of active travel and public transport, but also building positive attitudes towards those road users who are not in private vehicles from those who are.

The *Moving Canberra* strategy currently is not explicit about the investment required in community engagement. While the investment in community education is small compared to the investment in infrastructure, it nevertheless remains important.