



Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

SUBMISSION BY THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA ON THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF STAGE TWO OF THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY LIGHT RAIL  
PROJECT

Dear Secretary,

The Public Transport Association of Canberra (PTCBR) thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the development of stage two of the ACT light rail project. This is a major project for the nation and the territory, as it passes through the Parliamentary zone, linking the residents of Woden to Civic and providing improved public transport options to employees and visitors to the Parliamentary zone.

Improving public transport access to the Parliamentary zone benefits all Australians, both those living in Canberra, and those who visit. PTCBR supports the ACT Government's active and public transport programs, including the introduction of light rail and integrated public transport services. The continued budget focus placed by the Territory government on these important areas will improve Canberrans lives immediately, and for decades to come. We observe that, aside from some limited funding provided by the federal government's asset recycling initiative, light rail, the ACT's largest ever infrastructure project, is entirely funded by the Territory government.

We note the inquiry's Chair commented on 11 May 18, *"the land around the Federal Parliament is an important space for all Australians, and it is therefore appropriate that the Parliament has a role in ensuring that any proposals for change preserve this significance. The inquiry will also provide the ACT Government with an early indication of the Parliament's view of its proposal"*. PTCBR support this approach as we have great pride in the ACT's role hosting the seat of Government, and its historic significance in performing that task for the nation.

This submission addresses the specific questions posed by the Joint Standing Committee, with a distinct concentration on the benefits to the national capital that allowing this project to proceed through the Parliamentary zone, would realise.

PTCBR believe this project should be allowed to proceed. It is in the best interests, not only of the people of Canberra, but of those of the nation. The long standing cooperative relationship between the ACT Government and the National Capital



Authority should be effectively leveraged to determine the most appropriate route through the Parliamentary Triangle. In this way PTCBR believes light rail can best serve the interests of the nation, the residents of the ACT and the employees working in the many federal departments and national attractions located in the area.

The Committee of PTCBR is available to discuss our submission.

Sincerely

Damien Haas  
Chair,  
Public Transport Association of Canberra

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## Public Transport Association of Canberra Submission

The Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories will inquire into and report on the development of stage two of the Australian Capital Territory light rail project, with regard to:

1. the relevant parliamentary approval processes for works within the Parliamentary zone;
2. the roles of the National Capital Authority and the Australian Government, and the associated approval processes;
3. possible impacts on the Parliamentary zone and Parliamentary precincts, including any impacts on the heritage values and national importance of the Parliamentary zone and our national capital; and
4. the identification of matters that may be of concern prior to formal parliamentary or Australian Government consideration of the project; and
5. any other relevant matter the Committee wishes to examine.

### **1. The relevant parliamentary approval processes for works within the Parliamentary zone**

The Public Transport Association of Canberra (PTCBR) believe that extending light rail (from Gungahlin to Civic) to Woden through the Parliamentary zone is a sensible and much needed expansion of the ACT's public transport network. This extension serves the residents and employees of the Territory, and provides enhanced access to many National Attractions inside the Parliamentary zone for visitors from all over Australia visiting the national capital and the seat of government.

Light rail confers the same benefits as any other infrastructure built in the public good. Public transport services are constantly in demand by all sectors of society and require ongoing investment in new construction and maintenance.

The significant work jointly completed by the ACT Government and the National Capital Authority (NCA) in the course of light rail stage one, has cemented a productive working relationship that navigates the overlapping responsibilities and shared aims of both. This work has led to:

- approval by the NCA for a major infrastructure build of light rail along Northbourne Avenue
- sympathetic designs for light rail stations and associated facilities
- a provision for wire free light rail to be part of light rail stage two
- wire free light rail mandated for any crossing of Anzac Parade
- careful consideration of light rail routes through Parkes and Barton

- enhanced public discussion about motor vehicle, light rail and pedestrian priorities on Commonwealth Avenue

Jointly administering different parts of the national capital requires patience and attention to federal government and territory planning regulations and processes. The NCA administer the Parliamentary Zone Precinct Code in accordance with the Consolidated National Capital Plan. The NCA and the ACT Government have repeatedly demonstrated their good working relationship, by delivering well-received projects that benefit both the residents and employees of the ACT and visitors to the national capital, while adhering to the Parliamentary Zone Precinct Code.

PTCBBR strongly encourages both the ACT Government and the NCA to continue with this good working relationship, act in good faith to effectively navigate the relevant approval processes, and deliver light rail stage two through to Woden.

## **2 The roles of the National Capital Authority and the Australian Government, and the associated approval processes**

The NCA, its Board and the Federal government authorise any works performed on National Capital land. Planning approvals for this are derived from the Consolidated National Capital Plan and given effect in the Parliamentary Zone Precinct Code. This authority is then administered through carefully thought out and proven consultation, planning and approval processes. The work performed by the NCA and the ACT Government on light rail stage one also demonstrates how well these approval processes work.

Light rail stage two is of particular importance as it services areas within the Parliamentary zone which host national attractions and service the operations of the Federal Government and Australian Parliament. It is important the light rail route through this area is endorsed by the ACT Government in its role representing the people of the ACT, although approval rests with the Federal Government. Cooperation is important, as although approval rests with the Federal Government, financing, constructing and operation of this project will reside with the ACT Government.

The role of the NCA in representing the Australian Government in negotiations with the ACT Government is well developed, carried out professionally, and in accordance with legislation governing NCA operations. In serving the interests of the Australian Government, and Australian people, the NCA are assisting the ACT Government provide better access to the Parliamentary Triangle through advice on routes, advice on appropriate technology to meet heritage and streetscape concerns, and adhering to the special role that Canberra has as host of the Australian Government.

It is important to note that light rail stage two through the Parliamentary zone is only one part of a broader network of light rail that the ACT Government have planned to build across the ACT in the following decades. Some parts of this light rail

network do not require Federal approval, as they do not impact upon National Capital land.

### **3 Possible impacts on the Parliamentary zone and Parliamentary precincts, including any impacts on the heritage values and national importance of the Parliamentary zone and our national capital**

It is important that the NCA, its Board and the Joint Standing Committee consider heritage and other impacts to the Parliamentary zone. Many of these concerns relate to the streetscape, and have been factored into proposed light rail stage two by mandating wire free power to light rail vehicles in the Parliamentary zone. Any other streetscape considerations such as stop designs, intersection modifications, location of infrastructure to support light rail operations (such as power substations) would be negotiated between the ACT Government and the NCA (who have the authority to approve or reject any proposals).

Further detailed discussion surrounding the future of the Commonwealth Avenue bridge is warranted. The proposals floated by the ACT Government and the NCA discuss the number of lanes allocated to motor vehicles, the space allocated to light rail, and any modifications to the bridge that may be required to accommodate light rail. PTCBBR are of the view that the accommodation of light rail is a higher priority than the loss of a traffic lane. We do not believe the heritage values of the bridge or the remainder of Commonwealth Avenue would be negatively impacted. The road surface and bridge have been subjected to numerous upgrades and changes since construction, and any changes to accommodate light rail, would provide a significant benefits to all users. Constructing light rail along Commonwealth Avenue would actually improve its visual aesthetic and provide greater accessibility to institutions alongside the road such as Old Parliament House, the Hyatt Hotel, Albert Hall etc.

The Committee may explore a light rail route that uses Constitution Avenue to Russell and across the Kings Avenue Bridge instead. This organisation has been advised that the bridge is not suitable in its current form for use by light rail and would require significant modification or replacement to service both light rail and motor vehicle traffic. The heritage values of the Kings Avenue bridge would be severely impacted. PTCBBR do not have a view on whether a light rail route to Woden via Russell is better than a light rail route via Commonwealth Avenue. We would observe that any extra cost imposed upon the ACT by a Committee decision to extend the route to cross Lake Burley Griffin using Kings Avenue, should be accompanied by a federal funding recommendation.

The national importance of the Parliamentary zone warrants better service by public transport than presently exists. Light rail is a future proofed technology, with strong domestic and international support. The growth of employment in the Parliamentary zone and visitor numbers to national attractions makes the provision of access more important. Parking for cars is becoming increasingly more expensive and many of the areas currently used for car parking are likely to be developed into new commercial or residential areas.

The decisions on the route that light rail stage two takes through the Parliamentary zone may determine the future use of some of these large empty blocks currently used for parking. The increase in value of currently empty land owned by the federal government along the proposed light rail route, or older commercial blocks that can be better utilised, can be captured by the federal government or the NCA and directed towards the operations of the NCA.

Light rail stage two may also offer an opportunity for the management of our national attractions to create more suitable parking options, directed towards people visiting Canberra from interstate. The provision of light rail stage two will make visiting national attractions far easier for all visitors to the Parliamentary zone – whether they be interstate visitors, foreign tourists, business visitors or employees supporting the operations of the federal government. Light rail stage one services commercial accommodation options ranging from low budget camping and school visit accommodation (around EPIC and Downer) to multiple hotels in varying price brackets along Northbourne Avenue. Light rail stage two will enable direct public transport access from people using those accommodation options.

#### **4 The identification of matters that may be of concern prior to formal parliamentary or Australian Government consideration of the project**

It is difficult to imagine what matters that may concern the federal government, that have not already been explored through the long consultation process conducted by the ACT Government as part of light rail stage two route consideration. It is important to stress that there is a small group of people implacably opposed to any light rail in the ACT, despite it being endorsed at two consecutive ACT Legislative Assembly elections.

The various arguments put forward by some local ACT residents in opposition to light rail, are not relevant to the Committee. One of the Parliamentary Zone Precinct Code objectives is to make access easy and open, another is to improve public transport. This ACT Government funded project, endorsed by the ACT community, demonstrably satisfies those objectives and at no cost to the Federal government.

If the matters that concern the committee regarding light rail stage two are technical or of a planning nature, the long positive record of cooperation between the NCA and the ACT Government should demonstrate they can be resolved, while allowing the light rail project to traverse the Parliamentary zone.

#### **5 Any other relevant matter the Committee wishes to examine**

This inquiry should only concern itself with design, heritage and access matters related to the light rail stage two project in the Parliamentary zone. The ACT government finances the light rail project, and the section traversing national capital land is an important part of that. The technology itself is uncontroversial, widely used domestically and internationally, and has proven benefits in decreasing carbon

emissions, increasing the value of land, and increasing the uptake of public transport and active travel.

The PTCBBR are strongly supportive of the second stage of light rail, not only for the benefits that it delivers to the ACT, but also in the way that it will provide greater access to the Parliamentary zone and the national attractions in it. Better access by public transport should be supported, and the Committee should endorse this project, and recommend to both houses of Parliament that it should proceed.

Damien Haas  
Chair, PTCBBR  
15 June 2018