

Supplementary Submission to the Inquiry into Commonwealth and Parliamentary approvals for the proposed Stage 2 of the Australian Capital Territory light rail project

June 27, 2018

This submission is made with respect to the following terms of reference of the inquiry and in addition to my previous submission on June 12.:

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 any other relevant matter the Committee wishes to examine.

Comments

1. There is a significant error in Figure 11 of the ACT Government's submission. The walking distance contours are incorrectly labelled 200m and 400m. If these contours are intended as the maximum walking distance to the nearest tram stop then they should be labelled 500 metres and 1 kilometre. The significance of this error is best gauged in conjunction with Figure 5 and the position of the contours in the densist employment areas of Barton and Capitol Hill.
2. Walking distance is a critical parameter in the patronage of public transport. There is a body of knowledge in the transport profession about this relationship. It is well known that people will walk further to rapid transit services than to the slower street level services. The proposed light rail service aims to provide a journey speed of 30 kilometres per hour (See ACT Government's Stage 1 design). The minimum speed accepted for rapid transit is 40 kilometres per hour.
3. The ACT Government has already agreed to add a new stop to the Stage 1 route at Mitchell after the Stage becomes operational, because of public outcry. Each new stop adds at least a minute to the travel time of the route. As time goes on there will undoubtedly be pressure for more stops – this is a natural trend for street level services that have an initial design with stops one kilometre apart. The initial journey speed of 30kph will not be maintained in the long term.
4. Seating is another important factor in the decision to use public transport. The light rail trains will carry a maximum of 207 passengers of whom 141 would be standing. Once standing time during a trip exceeds ten minutes it has a significant bearing on the decision to use the service. The travel time from Gungahlin to Barton will be more than 35 minutes.
5. There is no available analysis of the effect of walking distance and standing time on expected patronage.
6. A tourist visiting the four most popular sites in the Parliamentary precinct (Questacon, National Gallery, Old Parliament House, Parliament House) would walk a minimum of 4 kilometres from a light rail stop between venues and back to a light rail stop. The light rail has no utility in the excursion between venues. The likelihood is that

visitors to the Parliamentary precinct will continue to travel predominantly by coach and private car.

7. At the June 21 hearing the Chairman expressed interest in community consultations re the Light Rail Stage 2 project. However, the type of consultation undertaken by the ACT Government is of limited significance for the following reasons:
 - a. A survey conducted by Unions ACT and published in the Canberra Times on April 9, 2018 showed only 51.5 percent of respondents supported light rail. Unions ACT have strongly promoted light rail projects and hence would have been motivated to obtain the best supportive result in their survey;
 - b. The relevant community consultations conducted by the ACT Government have always been conducted exclusively in the light rail context.
 - c. Thus, half of the population has been excluded or severely limited from giving their main opinions.
8. At the June 21 hearing the Chairman posed questions about wire-free running on the 2.3km Adelaide Ave segment of the proposed route. The ACT Government raised the possibility of new technology permitting this, come the latter stages of construction and operation after 2021. That won't be the only transport technology prospect in four or five years time as the following examples indicate.
 - a. Flinders University, SA has just launched a shuttle driverless electric bus service between Clovelly Park Train Station and the Tonsley Innovation District, next to Flinders University. Interestingly, the main purpose of the project is not to test the technology but to understand cultural acceptance of driverless transport.
 - b. On May 8, 2018 Waymo(US) announced that it is launching a driverless car service in Phoenix later this year. Anyone in the city will be able to download the Waymo app and hail an autonomous vehicle.

Summary

These are important issues that have not been evaluated and that bear heavily on both the short term and the long term viability of the proposed Stage 2 project. There are also other related issues such as the Woden-Civic blue rapid bus service that have previously been raised which add to the need for an independent review by transport experts.

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