Commonwealth approvals for ACT light rail

Commonwealth and Parliamentary approvals for the proposed Stage 2 of the Australian Capital Territory light rail project

Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories

October 2018
Canberra
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Foreword

Canberra is the Commonwealth seat of government and the national capital of Australia. It is home to Australia’s principal governmental, judicial, cultural, scientific, educational, and military institutions and holds special meaning not only for its residents, but for all Australians. The Commonwealth and this committee have a responsibility to safeguard this character and heritage.

It is the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government’s responsibility to improve Canberra’s public transport network for residents and visitors. However, progress must never be prioritised over the protection of the nation’s most significant areas, institutions, and buildings. The development of light rail amenity must not come at the cost of the long-term character and heritage of the National Capital Area and the Parliamentary Zone.

The Light Rail Stage 2 project passes through and adjacent to a number of key cultural and heritage sites and, like all projects and proposals in these areas, must be consistent with the legal requirements imposed by the National Capital Plan. However, throughout the inquiry, we have become increasingly concerned that elements of the route alignment proposed by the ACT Government are not consistent with the Plan.

The ACT Government has presented arguments regarding the potential benefits offered by the proposed route alignment through the Parliamentary Zone. Nonetheless, we do not believe that those elements of the alignment that are found to be inconsistent with the National Capital Plan will be approved by the Commonwealth.

Therefore, we urge the National Capital Authority and the ACT Government to continue to work together to ensure that the proposed alignment for the project is consistent with the National Capital Plan. This may require the proposed route alignment to be revised to better reflect the routes outlined in the National Capital Plan. Alternatively, we understand that the ACT Government may need to work with the Commonwealth to amend the National Capital Plan.

We commend the ACT Government for its proactive approach in seeking guidance and advice, from both pre-application discussions with the National
Capital Authority and throughout this inquiry process. It is important to ensure that a proposed route alignment is feasible before committing the considerable funding required to develop detailed designs and Environmental Impact Statements.

We thank the ACT Government, the National Capital Authority, and all those who participated in the inquiry, for their assistance.

Mr Ben Morton MP
Chair
List of recommendations

2 Commonwealth jurisdiction and approval processes

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the Minister responsible for territories refer any Works Approval application or any amendment to the National Capital Plan relating to the light rail project to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories for inquiry, prior to its tabling in the Parliament.

3 Light rail stage 2

Recommendation 2

In the event that the ACT Government chooses to pursue a route alignment that is only partially consistent with the National Capital Plan, the committee recommends that there be a two-stage process for seeking Commonwealth approval:

- Stage 1: the ACT Government works with the National Capital Authority to ensure Commonwealth approval of the route alignment, by way of amendment to the National Capital Plan; and
- Stage 2: completion of Works Approval application and other Commonwealth approval processes.
Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that the National Capital Authority require any light rail bridge design on either the Commonwealth or Kings Avenue bridges to:

- be of equal quality to that of the existing bridges;
- have the same column spacing as the existing bridges;
- not reduce existing lake to underside of bridge clearances;
- be slimmer than the existing bridges so as not to visually impact on the existing two bridges; and
- have no impact on the structural soundness of the existing bridges.

4 Heritage

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that the Parliament require any light rail on, or crossing:

- Commonwealth Avenue;
- Kings Avenue;
- State Circle;
- Brisbane Avenue;
- Sydney Avenue;
- Canberra Avenue (to Manuka Circle);
- Hobart Avenue;
- Melbourne Avenue;
- Adelaide Avenue (to Kent Street);

and in the Parliamentary Zone, be wire-free.

Recommendation 5

The committee recommends that Parliament require the placement and appearance of light rail stops, landscaping, and signage to be unobtrusive and complementary to the heritage value of nearby buildings, views of Parliament, and the character of the Central National Area and Parliamentary Zone.

Recommendation 6

The committee recommends that Parliament require that the removal of any trees with heritage value, such as the Weston plantings, be met with an appropriate replanting and landscaping strategy that maintains heritage values in the Central National Area and the Parliamentary Zone.
## Membership of the Committee

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<th>Role</th>
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<td><strong>Chair</strong></td>
<td>Mr Ben Morton MP</td>
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<td><strong>Deputy Chair</strong></td>
<td>Ms Gai Brodtmann MP</td>
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<td><strong>Members</strong></td>
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<td>Mr Kevin Hogan MP</td>
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<td>Mr Julian Leeser MP</td>
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<td>Hon Sussan Ley MP (to 28/8/18)</td>
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<td>Hon Warren Snowdon MP</td>
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<td>Hon Dr John McVeigh MP (from 10/9/2018)</td>
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<td>Senator David Smith (from 28/6/2018)</td>
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<td>Senator Mehreen Faruqi (from 13/9/2018)</td>
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Committee Secretariat

Secretary
Ms Shennia Spillane
Ms Peggy Danaee

Inquiry Secretary
Ms Casey Mazzarella

Administrative Officer
Ms Kathleen Blunden
Terms of reference

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;
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.
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<td>ACT</td>
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<tr>
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The Plan       National Capital Plan