



Deakin Residents Association

A garden Community for the Future

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9 March 2022

Shane Rattenbury MLA
ACT Legislative Assembly
Canberra

(By email)

Dear Shane

I am writing to follow-up on points made on Light Rail during last night's ISCCC meeting. We do not understand why you are maintaining support for Light Rail Stage 2 in the face of overwhelming evidence that this is not a good choice for the Civic to Woden route. You mentioned examples where light rail is being implemented elsewhere. We think that it is significant that recent decisions in other Australian jurisdictions have moved away from light rail because it has been found to be not cost-competitive. We think that light rail needs to be assessed in the context in which it is proposed.

The business case for Light Rail Stage 2 fails to justify the expenditure of what experts are telling us is likely to be \$3.8 billion. Against this, the business case indicates that fares are expected to yield less than \$17 million over the next 15 years (COVID induced changes in commuting would lower this figure). That leaves a massive burden to fall on ratepayers across Canberra, the vast majority of whom will never use Light Rail Stage 2.

The business case claims various benefits which the Auditor General has dismissed or questioned (the Auditor General's criticisms remain unanswered). Importantly, many of the claimed benefits will flow to developers rather than to the Government. The additional rates and land taxes that may be collected as a result of Light Rail Stage 2 will make only a very modest contribution to the ACT Government's finances. Electric buses would cost less than one tenth that of Light Rail Stage 2. If this project goes ahead, the ACT is going to be saddled with a massive debt.

Perhaps a more important consideration for The Greens is the environmental impact of Stage 2 light rail, when compared to that of electric buses. The proposed light rail would require extensive investment in new bridges and reinforced concrete track. It will also require removal of significant trees in Commonwealth Avenue and in the area around Parliament House. Trucking in 60,000 cubic metres of fill to raise London Circuit will generate significant quantities of greenhouse gases (to say nothing of the noise and congestion). All these greenhouse gases are very significant. By comparison, electric buses have none of these impacts. And the business case indicates that the expected reduction in car kilometres travelled as a result of Light Rail Stage 2 is less than 1 per cent.

One of the problems with light rail is its lack of flexibility. Sourcing energy from overhead wires can be problematic when the electricity supply fails because of interruptions caused by falling tree branches, heavy rain, or accidents. When a light rail vehicle breaks down or is involved in an accident, the entire network comes to a halt. Electric buses do not have these sorts of problems.

You commented that comparing the travel times of light rail and buses was not a "comparing apples with apples". The passengers who use the current express buses are not interested in stopping in Deakin, Yarralumla and probably not Curtin. Travellers going to these suburbs can use existing bus routes which

provide a reasonably fast service. Importantly, these other routes travel through the suburbs, meaning that passengers do not have a long walk to the bus stop, in contrast with having to walk to a light rail stop on Adelaide Avenue. For most residents of suburbs along the Civic to Woden light rail route, the local bus service would be more efficient than light rail (although we note that the business case indicates that bus services will be reduced to generate savings).

With the electric bus option, if in the longer term there is a case for stops along the Civic to Woden route, every second bus could be an express service, with the alternate service making additional stops as demand emerges. Some services could even be extended beyond Woden to the Canberra Hospital. This sort of flexibility is not available for light rail. In our view, the many users of medical facilities along the planned light rail route are very unlikely to walk between light rail stations and their appointment and would see the prospect of having to stand on light rail as highly unappealing.

There are sometime arguments advanced for light rail on capacity grounds. The new Brisbane electric buses are bi-articulated and carry 150 passengers seated. Canberra's light rail, on the other hand, achieves capacity through having some passengers stand. Having to stand is not attractive to people who have spent the day working in Civic. It also needs to be remembered that, for many of these passengers, catching a connecting service is necessary after travelling to Woden. Having to stand on part of a lengthened travel time will discourage commuters from using public transport.

We think that the time has come for a re-think of the Government's proposed Light Rail Stage 2. There are many other needs in Canberra that could be met with the funds saved from spending on Light Rail Stage 2.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Bell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

On behalf of

John Bell
President
Deakin Residents' Assn

David Denham
President
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