



Chris Steel MLA

Minister for City Services
Minister for Multicultural Affairs
Minister for Recycling and Waste Reduction
Minister for Roads and Active Travel
Minister for Transport
Member for Murrumbidgee

Mr Tom Duncan
Clerk
ACT Legislative Assembly
London Circuit
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 26 November 2019 regarding petitions number 23-19 and 30-19 lodged by Ms Caroline Le Couteur MLA seeking action on transport measures to reduce carbon emissions across the ACT.

I am pleased to inform members and the community on what the Government is doing to continuously improve on our transport outcomes including reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transport in the ACT.

At the outset, I would like to highlight that the ACT Government is continually exploring ways to reduce carbon emissions from all responsible sectors in the ACT, not just emissions arising from transport. Our *Climate Change Strategy 2019-2025* outlines the next steps that we all, including our community, businesses and Government, can take as a collective to reduce the Territory's carbon footprint.

The *Transport for Canberra 2012-31* strategy supported the ACT Government in proactively meeting the City's transport needs. It supported the continued investment in Canberra's strategic road network, active travel network and public transport as well as the introduction of light rail in 2019, which has enabled Canberra to meet increasing demand and retain improve outcomes.

However, Canberra is going through considerable growth and change, so too is the transport sector. I am pleased to inform you that I have asked Transport Canberra and City Services to renew and finalise a transport strategy alongside the *ACT Planning Strategy 2018* and the *ACT Climate Change Strategy 2019-2025*. This is in recognition of the changing demands relationship between these three strategies.

The importance of transport in supporting a vibrant, liveable and zero emission city is critical to our success. This united approach will ensure our transport network complements the renewal and strengthening of inner precincts and suburbs as well as supporting the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions created through transport.

ACT Legislative Assembly

London Circuit, Canberra ACT 2601, Australia GPO Box 1020, Canberra ACT 2601, Australia
Phone +61 2 6205 1470 Email steel@act.gov.au



@ChrisSteelMLA



chrissteellabor



chrissteelmla



The forthcoming Transport Strategy will renew the ACT Government's focus on better coordinating land use and transport planning, which in turn will better inform our investment choices to meet the transport needs of Canberrans and address the current climate emergency.

The petitioners' have requested that the Assembly request the Government of the Territory to take several actions, to which I provide the following responses:

Setting legislated transport targets

In the ACT, we have set some of the most ambitious targets in the country to tackle climate emergency. Our *Climate Change Strategy* legislated targets and establishes a pathway for achieving net zero emissions by 2045. To support this, the ACT Government is working in concert and would like the support of the community and businesses.

Additionally, policy and targets for active travel are already outlined in the 2015: *Building an integrated transport network: active travel* (the framework). Active travel can also deliver health and wellbeing priorities through the *Preventative Health Plan 2020-2025* and economic development through the *CBR Cycle Tourism Strategy* (2018).

Following finalisation of a transport strategy, the ACT Government would like to review the framework and develop new walking and cycling strategies. In doing so, we intend to consider including region-specific targets for underrepresented demographics such as women and youth.

Active Travel Commissioner role

The current governance arrangements for active travel in the ACT include the Active Travel Office (ATO) within Transport Canberra and City Services. The ATO seeks to coordinate ACT Government action on active travel including an internal ACT Government working group and an external advisory group. These arrangements are currently under review and will take account of all the actions under the strategies mentioned above, in particular the *Climate Change Strategy*.

The Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment is an independent statutory position. The current Commissioner has assumed a leadership role in supporting initiatives to encourage walking and cycling such as *Spoke Up!—for women's health* (women's cycling initiative). On 13 February 2020 the Commissioner released the *ACT State of the Environment Report 2019* which includes a number of recommendations related to transport. The office of the Commissioner can also conduct investigations on its own or by reference from the responsible minister.

The Government does not believe that resourcing an additional Commissioner is a greater priority than directly investing in improvements to active travel upgrades around the City.

Redirect funding towards walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure

The importance of walking and cycling as efficient transport modes are well recognised. They can move large numbers of people without requiring a large space. These modes can provide better health outcomes for our community and are environmentally friendly as they emit zero air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and noise while improving the vibrancy of our places. They are ideal for short local trips and for connecting us to public transport journeys.

The *ACT Infrastructure Plan* (2019) sets out the future direction for our transport investments. It states the ACT Government's commitment to shifting our transport investment from expanding our road network to an integrated network of light rail, suburban bus routes, footpaths and cycleways. In line with the *ACT Infrastructure Plan*, in the coming years the ACT Government will increase the options available to community by shifting our focus to public transport, walking and cycling, while maintaining safe and reliable roads for driving and freight.

Zero-emissions electric buses

The Government has committed to a zero-emission bus fleet by 2040. Zero emission buses not only benefit our environment through reduced emissions, they provide a better travel experience, reduce local noise, air and visual pollutants and therefore create healthier streets and increase patronage.

I am pleased to inform you that the ACT Government is currently preparing a Zero-Emission Transition Plan to identify a pathway that allows Transport Canberra to grow and improve its service while transitioning to a zero-emission fleet in a financially sustainable manner.

The transition to a zero-emission bus fleet requires detailed preparation and planning, as it is important that we do not ignore the challenges and scale of the transition. While the purchasing of zero-emissions buses is at the forefront of our community's mind, we need to ensure that there is the infrastructure in place to support the operation of every zero-emissions bus, including the charging infrastructure, in both new and existing depots, and any upgrades to the electricity grid.

The ACT Government has set up a Zero-Emission Steering Committee, which will provide strategic direction and leadership to Transport Canberra in developing a comprehensive Zero-Emission Transition Plan. It will allow our Government to make informed decisions on how we transition our bus fleet to zero emissions – including the technology, timing, risks, costs, benefits, financing and funding options. Whilst also considering how we maintain operations and economic performance, customer experience and broader public transport objectives. A just and considered transition will not only reduce emissions, but also provide economic and social benefits to the ACT and surrounding region through cleaner air, reduced noise and a more sustainable modern public transport system that is comfortable, accessible and reliable for Transport Canberra's passengers.

In late 2019, the ACT Government invested in an electric public bus to achieve a more sustainable and environmentally future for Canberra. The electric bus will provide valuable operational information to guide the preparation of the ACT Government's plan to transition to a zero-emission bus fleet.

Importantly, we are committed to enhancing our overall service which in the immediate term involves replacement of non-euro emissions standard fleet which have been in service for nearly 30 years with newer low-emissions diesel vehicles. This enhancement will support our broader efforts in reducing the number of private vehicles on our roads by increasing public transport patronage.

Additionally, the ACT Government continues to facilitate greater zero emission transport choices for staff by making electric bikes and zero emission vehicles available for business travel and allowing staff to salary-sacrifice the purchase of electric bicycles and provide associated charging infrastructure at the workplace. This approach will help us to continue to learn first-hand the adjustments needed for this transition.

The ACT Government is working closely with the community and stakeholders so that we understand people's transport needs and concerns and to ensure that we can provide reliable services at the same time as achieving our emission reduction targets.

I appreciate your assistance in presenting my response to the Assembly on this important matter.

Yours sincerely



Chris Steel MLA
Minister for Transport

