



**Chris Steel MLA**

Treasurer

Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development

Minister for Heritage

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 about petition E-PET 051-24, lodged by Mr Thomas Emerson MLA, regarding support for free public transport in Canberra.

The ACT Government recognises the benefits of public transport to this city and has an ambitious agenda to deliver more bus services more often, to make it easier and faster for Canberrans to take public transport. The Government's ambition is to improve the bus network to deliver more local and rapid services, and new services for our growing suburbs.

Transport Canberra currently operates a network of just over 450 buses, providing more than 4,00 daily weekday services and covering 97,000 kilometres per day. The network is designed to provide the best coverage possible for Canberrans, balancing the need to provide a comprehensive network with value for money. Additionally, Transport Canberra and the ACT Government are committed to ensuring that public transport remains accessible to all.

The ACT Government firmly believes that public transport should be viewed as a public investment, a tool for building inclusive, sustainable, and economically vibrant communities. While fare revenue does not cover the cost of its operation, it is an important source of funding to enable more services to be delivered for the community.

It is important to note that the cost to travel on public transport in Canberra represents good value for money – \$9.89 being the maximum anyone could be charged on a weekday no matter how many public transport services they tap on and off from. The ACT Government employs a flat fare model, which includes daily and monthly fare caps, for public transport so those who are travelling longer distances or utilising multiple public transport services in their journey. Distance-based fares, used in other Australian jurisdictions and metropolitan areas, may be inequitable in charging lower-income customers more if they live further away from the centre of the city.

Targeted relief through concession fares are also available to more vulnerable members of the community and free travel on all Transport Canberra bus and light rail services is also provided for a number of cohorts throughout the week including seniors and concession card holders. A full list of current fares and available travel concessions are available on the Transport Canberra website here: <https://www.transport.act.gov.au/tickets-and-myway/fares>

As you may be aware the ACT Government also commenced “Fare Free Fridays” across all bus and light rail services in December 2024 to provide non-targeted cost-of-living relief and encourage public transport uptake for all Canberrans. At the end of this twelve-month trial, it will be reviewed and a decision made on its continuation as part of a review of Transport Canberra’s future fare strategy.

In addition to these measures, free public transport has continued to be provided to support Canberrans and visitors travelling to major events across our city. This year alone, free travel has been provided to those attending the New Year’s Eve celebrations, events over the Australia Day long weekend, Skyfire, the National Multicultural Festival, Reconciliation Day events and the ANZAC Day Dawn Service and Veterans’ March.

The introduction of the new ticketing system, MyWay+, in November last year meant passengers can now also pay their fare by tapping on and off using their debit or credit card, including those stored on their mobile or smart device, in addition to the traditional paper tickets or travel cards. Doing so has removed a significant barrier and made it more convenient for interstate or non-regular users to choose to use public transport.

While the proposal in the E-Petition to make all public transport free is commendable, the removal of fare systems introduces a range of unintended consequences that could undermine the effectiveness and public perception of the transport network. These risks include a potential increase in antisocial behaviour, overcrowding during peak periods and lengthened journeys due to slower boarding processes, all which could lead to a decline in customer satisfaction and discourage Canberrans from choosing public transport for their journey. Managing these risks would require significant funding and intervention by Government, such as the procurement of additional buses, drivers, transport officers and depots to manage potential demand.

Additionally, failing to retain a mechanism to collect data (i.e. tap on tap off) and support the introduction of a fare free service with an extensive educational campaign, would result in service delivery and future planning being based on assumptions or customer complaints as opposed to data-driven endeavours. Acknowledging light rail vehicles are fitted with door-counters that provide an insight into patronage, this doesn’t provide the same level of detail

needed to inform strategic decisions and balanced investment into the public transport network through new and increased services and frequencies.

The ACT Government remains committed to exploring ways to encourage people onto public transport and to support them to rethink the way they travel around our city. This will be supported through ongoing investment in expanding our mass-transit light-rail system, expanding and modernising our bus network, and ensuring public transport services remain affordable and accessible.

The 2025-26 ACT Budget invests in initiatives which support the achievement of the Government's broader plan to deliver more public transport services more often, including 20-minute local services and future, new Rapid services. In total, \$37.4 million in funding will go towards:

- an additional 30 new, battery electric buses to further our transition to a cleaner, quieter, more comfortable and more reliable zero-emission bus fleet by 2040;
- increased frequency of bus services on Sundays, starting in Term 3 this year, to provide more public transport options to Canberrans; and
- a dedicated bus safety team with new frontline personnel to deter occupational violence and anti-social behaviour, including fare evasion.

We are also continuing the expansion of light rail to Woden, with construction of Stage 2A to Commonwealth Park underway and planning progress for Stage 2B recently reaching a major milestone with the public exhibition of the Draft Environmental Impact Assessment available at:

<https://www.act.gov.au/lightrailtowoden/stage-2b>

Thank you for raising this matter. I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



Chris Steel MLA  
Minister for Transport  
25 July 2025