



ACT TRANSPORT RECOVERY PLAN REFRESH

AUGUST 2022



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Introduction

Public transport is central to making Canberra a more connected, sustainable and vibrant city. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a substantial impact on public transport patronage in the ACT and around the world.

Public transport travel behaviours have changed during the pandemic, along with passengers' expectations, and it is important that we now respond to these changes appropriately.

In April 2021 the ACT Government published the **ACT Transport Recovery Plan**, developed to map out the return to 'normal' for public transport and encourage people to resume catching public transport at pre-pandemic levels as well as keep growing in the years ahead. This **ACT Transport Recovery Plan Refresh** provides an update to the original plan building on what we have learnt and how we have responded over the last two years.

The central goal of this Plan remains to articulate future decisions and actions aimed at ensuring a sustainable and reliable public transport system that continues to be guided by community need, while delivering on the Government's ambition for cleaner transport and building public transport patronage.

With pre-COVID transport accounting for over 60 per cent of Canberra's harmful carbon emissions, it is essential we continue to work to reduce the number of private car trips taken across our city each day. As Canberra grows, encouraging more people to choose public transport will also be important for preventing the traffic gridlock that so many other cities struggle with.

The **ACT Transport Strategy**, released during the pandemic in 2020, outlines our plans to support this shift through an emphasis on strengthening public transport and active travel.

The plan articulates the ACT Government's continuing commitment to delivering reliable and convenient

transport for the community in response to changes to Canberrans' travel behaviours, largely driven by COVID-19 and changes to working and social behaviours. We recognise that for people to choose public transport as their preferred mode of travel it must be convenient, reliable, comfortable and safe.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the need to tackle existing barriers to using public transport while creating new challenges and opportunities to rethink the way we move around. It is important we learn, change, plan and deliberately respond to rebuild patronage.

“Our goal continues to be encouraging people to return to public transport and then to keep growing in the years ahead. This is essential for cutting Canberra's emissions and keeping our city moving as we grow.”

The ACT Transport Recovery Plan was designed to guide our work towards this goal by mapping out the key steps that will get us there. This summary document presents the refreshed strategic direction of that plan and the positive actions Canberrans will see in the coming months and years as we continue to deliver it.

The ACT Government is committed to delivering future focused transport infrastructure projects, like mass-transit light rail, that encourage long term patronage growth as well as a more sustainable, vibrant and better connected city as we grow.

Major infrastructure projects will also result in some temporary disruption to our transport networks. To mitigate this, we will be delivering interventions that will reduce impacts to Canberrans and make alternatives, like public transport, more attractive.



Objectives

The **ACT Transport Recovery Plan Refresh** continues to be guided by objectives, which are aimed at building and sustaining public transport patronage growth:

- Build confidence in public transport as a safe and healthy way to move around Canberra.
- Drive sustainable public transport usage patterns, which reflect different ways of working and rhythms of life in the 'new normal'.
- Return patronage to pre-COVID levels as quickly as possible.
- Prepare Canberra's public transport services to play a key role in mitigating traffic disruption associated with upcoming delivery of major infrastructure projects in Canberra, which will provide long term benefits to the city's transport network.
- Improve connection and integration with other transport modes to facilitate and encourage multi-modal journeys.



Public transport trends during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic was a major shock to transport systems across Australia and around the world.

While passengers have slowly been returning since the lockdown in August 2021, journeys across bus and light rail have not returned to pre-COVID levels, and this has impacted on revenue and the broader transport network.



Journeys across the bus and light rail network have returned to approx

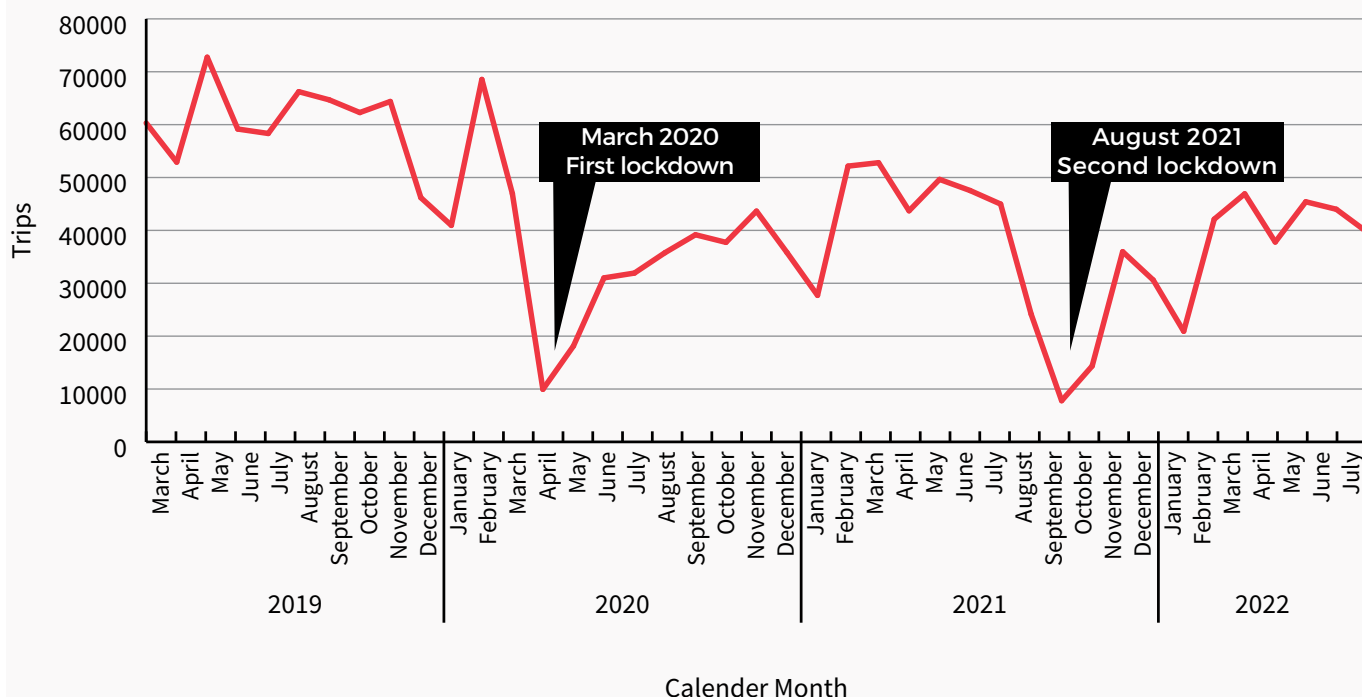
70 % of pre-COVID patronage levels*

*Whilst patronage continues to fluctuate in 2022, patronage is regularly reaching peaks of approximately 70% of February 2020 figures.

One in six users of public transport have not been back on board since the COVID-19 pandemic

Farebox revenue was down by **\$18.3 million** in 2020-21 due to COVID-19

Network average daily trips (all days)



Our journey to recovery so far

The ACT Government's primary focus throughout the pandemic has been to provide a consistent, safe and reliable service for Canberrans. We listened to our customers and understood how important reliability was to them.

During the pandemic we kept Canberrans moving, despite workforce impacts experienced across all industries, by providing reliable services and retaining our service levels:

- We continued to provide a critical service for our essential workers during the peak of lockdown.
- Following the lockdown in August 2021 we established an interim bus timetable to maintain frequent and reliable bus and light rail services, whilst providing flexibility to allow for driver absences. As a result, there have been minimal disruptions, unlike in other jurisdictions which experienced significant disruptions and cancelled services due to workforce availability. We continued to transport passengers for work, education and other essential reasons.
- We have continued to provide the flexible transport service for the elderly, vulnerable, and people with disabilities who depend on our services for medical appointments and support services.
- Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Bus has continued through the pandemic to keep people culturally connected.

- Guided by the latest ACT Health advice, we continued to inform our customers about ways to stay safe on public transport. This information was provided through information on buses and light rail and through online channels such as social media, via our website and email newsletter.
- There has also been an improvement in customer satisfaction with Transport Canberra buses, now at 78% from prior years' scores of 74% and 68%. With Canberra Metro, we have also maintained high customer satisfaction on light rail with scores of around 94%.
- We implemented measures to ensure services were clean and physical distancing could be maintained. We also followed ACT Health advice in mandating mask wearing on public transport.

These interventions have ensured reliable public transport continued to be provided for Canberrans from lockdowns and into the recovery period.

Public transport patronage in Canberra is at 70% of pre-COVID levels but we want to see this grow as the recovery from the pandemic continues.



Principles for recovery

The following principles continue to guide our responses and we continue to be guided by them.

Protecting the health and wellbeing of Canberrans must always come first

We will be guided by expert health advice in deciding when and under what circumstances it is safe to encourage people back onto public transport.

A gradual ramp-up will best restore and maintain community confidence.

We will align our investments and activities with the pace of Canberra's broader recovery, including the ongoing workforce impacts of the pandemic.

Data and engagement are core tools to drive more customer-centric outcomes

We will leverage data insights generated across Canberra's transport networks – including from buses, light rail, roads and more – to ensure services respond to the ways people want and need to travel now.

At the same time, we will step up our focus on passenger consultation and research so that we can better understand and prioritise their needs in a rapidly changing environment.

Ongoing investment in service improvement and expansion

We have made substantial investments in improving public transport services and active travel infrastructure prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and throughout it.

We will continue to invest strategically to make public transport more appealing, convenient and sustainable.

Our choices today should help drive a long term and sustainable shift to public transport

We will make decisions for the immediate recovery period which support our longer-term agenda to see more Canberrans make a lasting switch to regular use of public transport. We will focus on making services more adaptable and flexible so that our networks are robust enough to sustain strong patronage in a more volatile future.

What this means is that we recognise that there will continue to be variability in our public transport patronage and performance in the short term. Catering to public transport demand will continue to be a feature of, and shape, our public transport offering and our customers' experience.



What our customers and data are telling us

Understanding how customers use services and what they need is important in helping us to make beneficial changes for the future. A priority action of the Transport Recovery Plan was to listen to our customers and look to our data:

- We received valuable customer feedback through the YourSay panel and customer surveys during the pandemic as well as through general feedback to Transport Canberra.
- Data collected through our MyWay ticketing system has also been used to understand if and how customers are using our services in different ways.

What our **customers** told us:

- Reliability of our services (services showing up when promised) is important.
- There are lingering concerns with the risk of COVID-19 infections, and what Transport Canberra is doing to mitigate this.

What our travel **data** tells us:

- There has been an overall reduction of around 30% of people using public transport to travel since the start of the pandemic.
- Travel to work has changed during the pandemic, with people travelling to the office by public transport on fewer days – Tuesday to Thursday are currently the more popular days for travel.
- Off-peak passengers have been returning to public transport more quickly, which suggests our peak has flattened. We are also seeing a stronger return in patronage on evenings and weekends.
- The community is continuing to use public transport for making local trips.
- Passenger travel is evolving over time and will need to be monitored to ensure the transport system changes to reflect how people want to travel.



Priority focus areas

The refreshed **ACT Transport Recovery Plan** identifies eight key areas for action and investment.



Focus area 1: Health and safety

Health advice has been paramount in managing the continued operation of Canberra's public transport system during the pandemic and the recovery. We will continue to respond to the best health advice to ensure that passengers and Transport Canberra workers are safe. This includes ongoing use of masks on public transport until directed otherwise. We will continue to promote and encourage practises that help everyone feel safe and support Canberrans to use public transport.



Focus area 2: Fares and ticketing

The Government will reduce barriers to using public transport by introducing a new ticketing system.

Transport Canberra phased out cash fares being purchased on buses during 2020 and this has proved to be a positive shift both for passengers and network efficiency. Cashless ticketing allows drivers to focus on driving, helps streamline trips and offers passengers a more seamless travel experience that aligns with tap-and-go payment models, which are increasingly common for other consumer services.

The ACT Government is in the last stage of procuring a new modern, flexible ticketing system to replace MyWay. This system will reduce barriers to using public transport by allowing a range of payment options including contactless payments and payment using credit cards. The new system will also deliver improved real time information on transport services. This will support Transport Canberra to make better data-driven decisions on network design that is more responsive to community need. It will be designed to encompass all community users of public transport and focus on equity.

To ensure the needs of vulnerable Canberrans are met through this change, Transport Canberra has established an Accessibility Reference Group, which includes representatives of people with a disability, older Canberrans, young people, families and people experiencing disadvantage to understand how they can be supported during the transition including through 'contingent solutions' like purchasing pre-paid cards using cash.

Public transport fares in the ACT have not increased since January 2019. The Government will consider the tactical use of fare incentives to encourage the take-up of public transport during the disruption period associated with the construction of major infrastructure, and during the transition to a new ticketing system. A new ticketing system will also enable consideration of more flexible fare models going forward.



Focus area 3: A reliable public transport system

The ACT Government's primary focus throughout the pandemic has been to provide reliable services for Canberrans.

We listened to our customers and understood how important reliability was to them and we will continue to prioritise this approach.

In response to the lockdown in August 2021, Transport Canberra implemented an interim bus timetable to ensure frequent and reliable bus and light rail services could be maintained. We kept Canberrans moving, despite workforce impacts experienced across all industries, by providing reliable services. As a result, when driver absences have occurred there continues to be minimal disruptions from workforce availability. This contrasts with the approach in other cities where significant disruptions and service cancellations have been experienced due to driver absences.



The interim timetable has remained in place to minimise the workforce impacts on service levels. As an example, we maintained service levels in the peak of winter (July 2022) even though there was an average of around 90 drivers on personal leave on any given weekday. The ACT Government has ramped up recruitment and is aiming to onboard an additional 60 bus drivers by the end of 2022. We will closely monitor public transport patterns, reliability, and staffing availability as the COVID-19 situation progresses, and will increase service levels when possible. This will include providing public transport to new suburbs, including the purchase of three additional buses to extend the bus network into Whitlam as well as into Lawson.

Transport Canberra's priority will continue to be reliability with the bus network being updated to ensure Canberrans can travel on public transport during the delivery of major infrastructure projects and light rail stage 2. Further details on interventions to minimise the disruption impacts are outlined in **Focus area 8: Promoting public transport during the disruption period.**



Focus area 4: Integrated transport

For transport systems to be truly responsive to passenger needs, they must integrate different types of public transport and other on-demand modes for flexible 'last mile' travel.

Most public transport users are also walking, cycling, or scooting to connect with buses or light rail, so improving infrastructure for these modes also supports public transport use.

The ACT Government is embracing innovation and encouraging new forms of micro-mobility so that people

can easily combine a trip by bus or light rail with other convenient modes of travel.

In 2020, Canberra was the first jurisdiction in Australia to encourage and regulate ride sharing services, which was followed by the launch of shared e-scooter services. The e-scooters currently provide last-mile mobility in the city centre and surrounding inner suburbs. They are a popular choice for short trips, with Canberrans already logging over 2 million trips since September 2020. The e-scooter hire scheme will be expanded to other town centres to help connect Canberrans with Rapid bus routes and make it easier to get around for short trips. The next phase will connect Woden and Gungahlin regions to the city in coming months, with other regions expected by the end of the year.

Walking and cycling are also important modes connecting with public transport, improving transport flexibility, boosting health and wellbeing and supporting further emissions reduction. We are investing strongly in active travel infrastructure like safe separated cycling and pedestrian paths and filling in missing links in the network. Transport Canberra has developed a draft Active Travel Plan encouraging Canberrans to walk or ride more often. The plan aims to make it safer, more accessible, convenient and enjoyable to choose walking, cycling or micromobility. A supporting design guide is also being developed which will set out best practice guidance on the design of safe and people-friendly streets that will support walking and cycling in key parts of our city. This will include pop-up cycle and walkways, safe separated paths and improved intersection designs.

Park and Ride facilities for bikes and cars also supports better integration. Investment in these facilities will





continue to be an important part of our recovery agenda, particularly as remote working increases interest in local active travel options within and between our suburbs.

Focus area 5: Passenger experience

Passengers want public transport to be convenient, reliable, frequent, comfortable and safe. We are developing a new customer strategy so we can better capture and respond to our customers' experiences now and into the future. Our current and future investments in network upgrades will help ensure bus and light rail services are accessible.

We know that sustainability is important to our community and we are committed to delivering the strategic priorities set out in the Transport Canberra Zero Emissions Transition Plan. We are purchasing more battery electric buses to replace our ageing fleet, including 70 compressed natural gas buses. We are leasing 12 battery electric buses and 26 low emission buses, and procuring 90 battery electric buses, to provide customers with a quieter, healthier, and more sustainable public transport experience. We are also preparing existing and new depots for new technology and fuel types for a zero emission fleet.

To reduce another barrier for using public transport, we are reviewing our flexible transport service. We will identify opportunities to move to an 'on-demand' transport system which is more responsive and could allow bookings to be made within minutes (and not days

ahead of time), with services picking up and dropping off customers directly to their home.

Focus area 6: Listening and communicating

Input and feedback from Canberrans will be used to shape the design and delivery of recovery initiatives and the ACT Government's broader investments to drive public transport growth.

We are stepping up engagement with the community to ensure we are delivering what current and future passengers really want and need. This includes increasing consultation through tools such as YourSay and the ACT Government's community insights panel. It also involves engaging directly with dedicated consultative and stakeholder bodies like the Transport Canberra Access Advisory Group and the Public Transport Association of Canberra.

At the same time we will prioritise clear, effective and helpful communication with Canberrans about their transport options and how they can tailor different modes of travel to meet their needs. During the upcoming traffic disruption linked to major infrastructure works, this communication will have a particular focus on helping people avoid traffic congestion and extended commutes by changing up their transport habits – rethinking their routine.

Through a new customer strategy, Transport Canberra will enhance customer experience and guide our efforts

to provide the community a service they value while improving accessibility on our transport network.

Transport Canberra and City Services will undertake a household travel survey in 2022/23. This will help us to better understand how the pandemic has changed travel behaviours including public transport. The results will be used to inform improvements to transport services.

Transport Canberra is looking forward to strongly welcoming people back to public transport, when the time is right, based on the health and workforce situation. The ACT Government will then conduct a communication campaign to directly encourage people back on to public transport and promote the benefits and convenience of using Transport Canberra's services.



Focus area 7: Building transport infrastructure for a vibrant sustainable and connected city

The ACT Government will continue to invest in future-focused infrastructure that improve the city's transport network from extending light rail, upgrading strategic transport corridors, electrifying our bus fleet and depots and building safe infrastructure for walking and cycling.

These infrastructure projects, which are moving into the construction phases, will improve our transport network in the medium and long term and provide us with a better-connected, sustainable and more vibrant city.

The addition of mass transit in light rail will encourage more patronage growth, as it has on stage 1 of the

line, closely integrated with buses to the suburbs. The imperative of continued investment in mass-transit has been supported by 2021 Census data showing that the ACT is the fastest growing population in Australia.

Building on the success of stage 1, extending light rail to Woden will form the network's north-south spine, connecting the city and then to Gungahlin. Canberra's light rail network is projected to move 39,000 passengers a day as Canberra's population grows to over half a million people earlier than anticipated. This will ensure that the transport network better connects the city to work, family, learning, communities and events.

The growing densification of the city will also be leveraged to support the growth of public transport, with more people living and working closer to public transport. According to the State of the Environment Report (2021) Canberra is the number one city in Australia for providing access to a bus stop within 400m of a person's residence. The ACT Government will continue to closely integrate land-use planning with transport planning. This will ensure that the growth of the city, including new housing, both supports and is supported by new and existing transport infrastructure.

As we build these transport infrastructure projects the ACT Government will carefully consider how through these projects we create vibrant streets and places that people want to travel to, supporting further use of public transport to these destinations as well as connected modes like active travel.



Focus area 8: Promoting public transport during the disruption period

Public transport will play a significant role in managing the disruption associated with the construction phase of major infrastructure projects in Canberra.

These projects include construction of raising London Circuit, light rail stage 2 to Woden, the National Capital Authority's Commonwealth Avenue bridge project, several large private development projects around the city, as well as strategic transport corridor upgrades on the Monaro Highway, William Hovell Drive and Athllon Drive. These projects will see an unprecedented level of construction activity underway in the city over the next few years.

Whilst these projects will provide significant long-term benefits for Canberra, the construction work will create significant temporary disruption to our transport network. To mitigate the disruption, we will be delivering interventions that have been developed by the ACT's Disruption Taskforce. Despite the challenges presented by disruption, the ACT Government will harness the opportunity to support more people to use public transport as an efficient way of moving large numbers of people around the city, reducing congestion for other road users.

Examples of the measures to manage the disruption to date include:

- **Bus network** - The bus network and timetable will be updated to ensure people can travel reliably on public transport during delivery of major infrastructure projects and light rail stage 2.
- **Upgrading intersections** – Prior to road closures being implemented to enable construction to raise London Circuit, two key intersections will be upgraded to improve access to the city. Traffic lights will be installed on the westbound approach to the Coranderrk Street roundabout on Parkes Way, and temporary traffic lights will be installed on the northern side of Vernon Circle to allow safe right-turn movements for buses onto Constitution Avenue and London Circuit.

These upgrades will support the closure of the London Circuit cloverleafs, which means traffic (including buses) to the east side of the city will be re-routed during construction via Vernon Circle and Constitution Avenue. This re-routing of buses will ensure that after the closure of part of London Circuit passengers will still be able to get on and off buses on popular stops near the ACT Legislative Assembly.

- **Improved traffic monitoring** - Intelligent transport monitoring technology will be installed in key locations across central Canberra where congestion is likely. This will include new intersection cameras

and Bluetooth sensors capable of feeding traffic insights back to the central Traffic Operations Centre at Fyshwick. Data from these devices will be used to provide up-to-date information to customers to assist in plan their journey and avoid potential disruption through signage on our roads, radio and social media.

- **Park and Rides** - A new Park and Ride at Mawson oval will open in September 2022, providing a convenient option for people on the southside to connect with frequent bus services into the city. It is one of 24 Park and Ride locations across all regions of the ACT. Improved signage is also being installed this year at key Park and Ride locations that could be used during the construction period in the city area.
- **Consultation and education** - The ACT Government has been providing regular project updates to city-based businesses since 2021. A workplace travel program is being developed to provide city-based employers and their staff with resources to encourage car-pooling, bike riding and public transport. The program is due for launch by the start of next year ahead of the significant traffic impacts. We will also engage with school communities about any impacts the construction works may have on students, parents and teachers.
- **Further disruption mitigation measures** – Further measures to reduce travel impacts from construction and support public transport are being considered. These will be communicated to the community.



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