

ISCCC Public Meeting 13th September 2022

Light rail and Urban Intensification: City to Woden

Summary of Issues raised in Q&A sessions

Speakers:

Ashley Cahif, Major Projects Canberra, Project Director, Canberra Light Rail

Dr Khalid Ahmed, former senior ACT Government Treasury Official.

Graham O’Loughlin, Fellow of Engineers Australia, former national engineering firm director and management consultant on major projects.

Dr John Bell, President Deakin Residents Association (DRA).

This summary record of the Q & A sessions supplements the presentations by the speakers above (uploaded to the ISCCC website).

- In response to a question on Parkes Way, the ACT Government representative indicated that Parkes Way will pass under Commonwealth Avenue (and the Light Rail) as now. See the Environmental Assessment report¹. There are traffic lights at Albert St (near Commonwealth Park).
- The 40 kph zone in Civic will not be extended south onto Commonwealth Avenue.
- Pedestrian access is currently being worked on for Stage 2A.
- In response to a query about his statement that the ACT government has to borrow to pay interest on its debt, Dr Ahmed stated that it can be seen in the on-line audited financial statements. The General Financial Statement (GFS) is at the end of the budget papers. If the Primary Cash balance is negative, then the government is borrowing to pay interest.
- There was a question about what is the threshold at which Stage 2 costs become unacceptable to ardent supporters of Light Rail. The answer was to look at what works and alternatives. What must be given up to keep going? ACT Liberal representatives at the meeting indicated they have been asking these questions and have significant concerns based on the very little information given.
- Dr Ahmed clarified that under the ACT Government’s National Partnership Agreement on Asset Recycling with the federal government of 2018, 100% of the sale of public housing went to Light Rail Stage 1.

¹ <https://www.act.gov.au/lightrailtowoden/media-centre/fact-sheets>

- In response to a comment that building and maintaining roads is also very costly, the reply was that light rail is much bigger than most road projects such as building Athlon Drive. It was noted that potholes occur when roads are under-maintained. Preventing potholes is not popular because the results are not seen.
- There was a view that one benefit of Light Rail is that it is part of a network and allows buses to be integrated. As Canberra's population grows, it will look different.
- One participant commented that their reading of journals about urban intensification came to a different conclusion to that presented.
- It was commented that some community surveys suggest a roughly 50-50 split in support for Light Rail Stage 2. Urban intensification is an integral part of Stage 2 and the community should be fully consulted on proposed land use along the light rail corridor before Stage 2 commences.
- A younger meeting participant supported urban intensification to enable younger people to live in Deakin or Yarralumla which are currently too expensive for them. Dr Bell pointed out that the literature shows that intensification does not increase affordability.
- Another meeting participant said that the Environment Defenders Office could stop this project if it is breaking environmental laws.
- Others commented that money shouldn't be spent on stage 2 until the environmental impact statement is ticked off, that raising London Circuit would increase congestion, and that electric buses are 1/10th the cost of light rail.
- Another posed the question that if 2B never happens, how many people would use Light Rail 2A to go to Commonwealth Park?