



**QUESTION TIME**  
OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**HANSARD**

Edited proof transcript

Wednesday, 15 May 2019

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## Questions without notice

### **ACTION bus services—weekend services**

**MR COE:** I have a question for the Minister for Transport. I refer to a *Canberra Times* article dated 8 May titled “Weekend buses cancelled after volunteer shortage”. The article stated that nearly 150 weekend bus services were cancelled due to driver shortages. Minister, why did you promise extra weekend services but fail to secure enough drivers for these routes?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Mr Coe for the question. As Mr Coe well knows, the arrangements that have been in place for some time regarding weekend services remain. It is the case that there are enough drivers. There were not enough volunteering on that weekend. But we are in very close discussions with bus drivers and with the TWU, their representatives, on how we can secure drivers for all the weekend bus services. I note that that was four per cent of services.

Transport Canberra works very carefully on these matters. On any given day there may be a variety of reasons why tweaks needs to be made to services but certainly on the first weekend of the new network, I think, the weekend bus services performed very well and, indeed, patronage on the weekend services was extremely high.

**MR COE:** Minister, what weekend loadings are currently in place and what changes will you have to make to encourage more drivers to take up these services?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** There are full-time, part-time and casual employees who work for Transport Canberra driving buses. There is a composite rate but I will take the specifics on notice and provide further advice to the Assembly.

**MISS C BURCH:** Minister, can you guarantee that this weekend’s bus services will be fully staffed and delivered?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I can guarantee that both the drivers and Transport Canberra will make every effort, as they have always done under an arrangement where drivers volunteer for weekend shifts, to ensure that we can deliver our much improved weekend network.

## Visitors

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I draw members’ attention to the presence in our gallery of some community members from U3A and COTA who have been in as part of our education program. Welcome to your Assembly.

## Questions without notice

### **Light rail—patronage**

**MS LE COUTEUR:** My question is also to the Minister for Transport and relates to the fantastic news that public transport use is substantially higher than at this time last year. Minister, if light rail overcrowding continues past the end of the free travel period, what options does the government have to increase capacity at peak periods?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** It is terrific that we see public transport patronage, boardings and the number of MyWay cards up right across the network. Certainly it is the case that patronage on light rail has been outstanding.

The question we are now faced with is how we can increase capacity and potentially increase the frequency. It has been the case that we have been able to request Canberra Metro to add an additional service in the 7.45 to 8.15 peak period. This will ensure that we can increase capacity during that peak period in the morning. We have also expanded the peak period in the afternoon, particularly to cover school services because there has been considerable take up of school services right along the route from 3 pm. The original peak period to 6 pm has now been extended to 6.30.

I note that the business case—which those opposite had many issues with, including that there would be very limited patronage on light rail, saying it would be, in their words, a “white elephant”; I also note that it is the first business case published by a government into an infrastructure project—had estimated patronage in 2021 of 15,120 boardings. Already we are 10 per cent above that, with 16,500 boardings.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Minister, what options is the government looking at to address the same problem, ie, full buses which are bypassing passengers on routes like the R4 rapid from Tuggeranong town centre to Belconnen town centre?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** We are now in week 3 of the new bus network. What we saw in week 1 was what you would see in week 1 of any new bus network rolling out, not least a bus network that had had the considerable change and addition of services as was seen three weeks ago. We have seen a number of issues with patronage being higher than we expected. Of course with rapid services during the peak times there is usually another rapid service following in the next five or six minutes.

We have been monitoring a number of routes very carefully. The rapid 4 is very successful. We can see it across from the Assembly here and how people are getting on particularly in the evenings. That suggests a very high take-up, which we are seeing right across the rapid network.

We are monitoring very closely the capacity on two other services in particular: the rapid 5 from Lanyon and also route 32 from Belconnen. On some occasions we have been able to—and will continue to—provide, on those services and some other school services, additional capacity largely in the form of larger buses. The deployment of our articulated buses is being looked at very carefully to ensure that we can meet what has been very high demand over the past couple of weeks.

### **ACTION bus services—school services**

**MISS C BURCH:** My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, I refer to Red Hill Primary School children who live at the Causeway, within the Red Hill catchment area, who no longer have a dedicated school bus to travel on to their local public school. Your journey planner recommends a 23 to 32 minute walk either side of a bus ride or a 57 minute, 4.1km walk for these students. Minister, noting that this

is similar for hundreds of students across Canberra, is it acceptable that your only solution for many Canberra kids is to suck it up and walk?

*An incident having occurred in the gallery—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members in the gallery, please, no clapping.

**MS FITZHARRIS:** That is certainly not the message that I have sent. Indeed, the journey planner does provide a number of options. Certainly, it is the case that it will provide options for walking, because it will provide options for walking for any journey. That is certainly not the message that I have sent in any, way, shape or form.

Transport Canberra, my office and I have been having extensive conversations over a long period about designing and delivering an effective and efficient bus network that services our whole city in the most effective way. Since the beginning of the new network there have been significant discussions as well, working particularly with schools, about how to access the services and whether or not we can make some tweaks at some certain schools. For example, some of those have been to capacity, as I mentioned earlier, on school services, the location of the bus stop itself and a number of other changes.

We will continue to have those conversations directly with schools. We have a very active schools committee. We also have a school bus liaison officer as well as our active transport and active travel school liaison officer. They have been in place for some time working extremely closely with schools right across the city.

**MISS C BURCH:** Minister, what are the transport alternatives to children walking without supervision for Canberra families that have relied on dedicated school buses and where both parents work full time?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I think I understand what Miss C Burch is trying to say but I note that—and this is where I have significant concern with some of the Canberra Liberals' positions on this—the implication that children walking to school without supervision is unsafe is patently wrong. I am sure that many of us walked to school and many of our children walk to school. It is simply not true to state that it is unsafe for children to walk to school unsupervised. It is simply not true.

I am happy to have a public debate and be questioned on these matters but the dog whistling that is implicit in the consistent approach from the Canberra Liberals does not help anyone. It is not unsafe for children to walk to school unsupervised. Children across this city do it every day. Children who live around the corner from their existing school walk to school every day safely in the safest city in the safest country in the world.

**Mrs Jones:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker, on relevance, the question asked what she would say to those who have relied on a dedicated school bus service. We have not had any information about that question.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The question was also linked to their having to walk to school.

**Mrs Jones:** There has not been an answer to the question. There should be direct relevance. That is the point of order.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** There is no point of order.

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will say—and I understand that there are members of the community in the chamber today, including representatives of parent bodies—that we will continue to work closely and provide alternatives, of which there are many for many families and many schools right across our community.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, how do you justify forcing hundreds of primary school aged children to walk long distances unsupervised—we are talking about primary school aged children—when most Australian jurisdictions, including Queensland and South Australia, expressly classify that as both unsafe and unlawful and, indeed, Queensland, New South Wales, Victorian and South Australian police advise against it for under-12s?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I refer Mr Parton to my previous answer.

### **Federal election—impact**

**MS CHEYNE:** My question is to the Chief Minister: how is the ACT government preparing for the differing impacts for the Canberra region between the major parties' election commitments?

**MR BARR:** I thank Ms Cheyne for the question. Certainly this Saturday will be a defining moment not just for the Australian nation but for our city. There is a very clear distinction in the policies of the two major parties, the two potential governments of this country, as they relate to Canberra and the broader Canberra region.

To date the difference in terms of infrastructure and recurrent funding commitments in areas like health, education and transport infrastructure now shows a gap of half a billion dollars between Labor's commitments and those of the coalition. The coalition appear not to be seriously campaigning in Canberra or, indeed, in Eden-Monaro, because they are not proposing any significant infrastructure investments in this region. The gap now is at half a billion dollars.

Federal Labor will, as has been well publicised, partner with the territory government on a future stage of light rail, committing \$200 million towards that project. Federal Labor have also committed to investing an additional \$100 million in the Barton Highway duplication, taking that federal Labor investment to \$250 million, and have put forward a \$67 million commitment to build Dunns Creek Road just on the New South Wales side of the territory border.

There have been a series of commitments from federal Labor inside the territory, including funding for oval upgrades in Kippax, a new netball and indoor sports centre in Tuggeranong, and two bike path upgrades across the city in partnership with the territory government.

The range of financial commitments in terms of infrastructure and health and education funding are also added to by a clear commitment to end the coalition's disruptive and harmful decentralisation agenda. (*Time expired.*)

**MS CHEYNE:** Chief Minister, what will this difference in support mean for Canberra region residents?

**MR BARR:** This significant infrastructure investment, half a billion dollars of additional investment, will clearly mean more jobs in our economy. It will mean faster commutes for residents in our region, and more time with family and friends. It will mean improved sporting facilities. It will mean better health facilities where and when you need them. This will all be delivered in a close working relationship with the territory government.

Just as importantly, for the first time in many years we would have a federal government that actually respects our city; that thinks that it is more than a bubble and more than an excuse to avoid answering hard political questions by describing them as being “from the Canberra bubble”; that does not take Canberra for granted like some on the other side of politics; and that recognises the importance of this city and this region.

We will work in close partnership with a federal Labor government. It is very clear that there is a stark difference between the announced commitments on the Labor side of politics for this city and this region and what we are not hearing, the absence of any meaningful commitments, from the coalition. Those opposite know that that is absolutely the case.

**MS CODY:** Chief Minister: what action will ACT ministers be taking to engage with a newly elected federal government?

**Mrs Dunne:** I rise on a point of order. Madam Speaker, you have to rule this question out of order. We do not know what the result of the election will be. It is hypothetical.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Please resume your seat.

**Mr Barr:** The question was: what action will we take with a newly elected federal government?

**Mrs Dunne:** The implication of a newly elected federal government is that there will be a change of government, which is hypothetical Madam Speaker.

*Members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members, please all settle down. There is no point of order. A government will be elected; by nature it will be new. Mr Barr, you have the floor.

**MR BARR:** Thank you. We will swiftly engage with incoming federal ministers. Clearly that engagement will be meaningful on identified projects that have been announced as commitments during and before the federal election campaign period.

One example: I expect to see significant progress on advancing light rail approvals to align with the ACT's investment in Stage 2 early works that I announced last week.

We will of course tailor our own fiscal and economic approach to reflect the result on Saturday. There will be a new budget if there is a new government. That will necessarily mean changes in terms of priorities between the incumbent government and a newly elected government. We know largely what to expect if the coalition is returned on Saturday, and that is: nothing for Canberra.

### **ACTION bus services—school services**

**MS LAWDER:** My question is to the minister for transport and city services. I refer to a *Canberra Times* article of 4 May this year entitled, "Bus timetable changes leave children in tears." Minister, why did you persist in cutting all dedicated school services to 51 schools, and a number of dedicated services to many others, despite community uproar?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** As the opposition is aware, prior to the new network starting a number of weeks ago there were a number of schools that did not receive dedicated school services. I guess my question is: are the Liberals going to commit to providing a dedicated school bus to every school in Canberra? That is the implication they are making.

As members know, we undertook a considerable amount of consultation over a series of different engagements. We acted on quite a considerable amount of feedback on the original network. This work was certainly one of the most significant community consultation processes. The government made a significant number of changes as a result.

**MS LAWDER:** Minister, what do you say to the hundreds of children who have—and I quote from that article—"gone to bed crying at night" and to their parents because of the bus cuts you made?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** This is something that we have thought about and been engaged in for a long time, and I know—and I understand that there are members in the gallery today—that for a number of people there have been significant changes to their services. But for a greater number of people there has also been a considerable improvement and increase in the number of services. Certainly in the first week we saw a lot of feedback. But I think members opposite will also agree on the range of feedback coming through now, as people are starting to understand the new system. It was a really big change. We have seen changes to the numbering of every route, the addition of a whole new level of services.

We are working very closely with schools right across the territory on ways that we can support them to support their students and their families to access all the information available because it has become apparent to me that not necessarily all schools have been able to access the information or been able to relay that to their parent community in the most effective way. And we are working closely with schools on that and we will continue to do so through the mechanisms that I outlined earlier.

**MISS C BURCH:** Minister, how many pieces of correspondence have you or your directorate received regarding safety concerns for schoolchildren under the new network?

*An incident having occurred in the gallery—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order!

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I cannot comment on that; I will see if I can get advice on that. I make the point that safety is a very high priority for me, for Transport Canberra and for every bus driver. Two months ago bus drivers were picking up school students on one route and perhaps members of the public, including school students, on other routes.

I reiterate that the vast majority of school students catching public transport in the ACT last month, and this month, travel on our regular route services. I understand changes, but I do not accept that we do not contemplate and treat with the highest priority the safety of passengers right across our network, particularly of school students. Our duty of care is very high; our operational procedures are clear.

I also reiterate that school students right across our city every day—as there always have been—are getting to school in a variety of ways. They will continue to do so. We will continue to support schools and school communities and students in providing the best information and the best access to the services that we can.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Before calling the next question, I recognise that there are a number of people in the gallery and I ask them to note that clapping or making comments is considered disorderly. It is good that you are here to be part of the discussion, but please let there be no more noise from the gallery.

### **ACTION bus services—school services**

**MRS KIKKERT:** My question is to the minister for transportation. I refer to a *Canberra Times* article dated 1 May which states:

Children at St Vincent's Primary School in Aranda who catch the bus home have no option but to leave school 15 minutes early under the territory's new transport system.

Minister, this means that children are missing 50 hours of school each year under the new bus network system. Why is the government forcing children who use public transport to get to and from St Vincent's to choose between their education and getting home at a reasonable hour?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I met with the principal of St Vincent's last week and we discussed this issue. We have undertaken to keep in touch very closely with St Vincent's over the coming weeks to see if there some adjustments—

**Mrs Kikkert:** In the meantime, let kids leave early.

**Mr Coe:** “We have undertaken.”

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members, the minister is on the floor providing an answer.

**MS FITZHARRIS:** and to work with Transport Canberra and St Vincent’s to look at the timetabling on this route. I understand that there are about 10 students and there were previously around two students using the network who boarded at St Vincent’s. There are some options that we may have to work through with St Vincent’s on that. I had those discussions with them last week. We will continue to work with them, because it is of concern to me.

There is a bus, as was noted in that article, that is available at 3.46, and the bus that arrives at 3.14 they believe does not provide them time to get to the bus stop. So we are looking very closely at those issues and responding, as we have been over the past two weeks, and working closely with a number of schools and school communities on how we can work with them. This is a very good example.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Minister: who owes a duty of care to students at St Vincent’s after hours who are forced to wait until 3.46 pm for the next bus service?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** The schools have a strong duty of care. As far as Transport Canberra goes, I mentioned previously that of course all its staff but particularly bus drivers have a duty of care as well.

**MISS C BURCH:** Minister, who is responsible for a duty of care for children that are then made to wait at bus interchanges for long periods under the new network?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Children have long waited at bus interchanges to connect to other buses. That was the case last month, last year and the year before that. Again, I would like to say that one of the reforms that we have made is to ensure that there are customer service assistants working at interchanges. They are working very closely with the community and taking a particular interest in assisting any schoolchildren who may need assistance as they are travelling through interchanges.

What I can advise in terms of interchanging is that across the network, interchanging in the same two-week period as the first two weeks of the new bus network there were on average 1.3 interchanges per journey. This year under the new network there have been 1.37 interchanges. I do have figures for schoolchildren—they are comparable figures—but to further clarity, I will take that question on notice.

### **Schools—cleaning services**

**MS CODY:** My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development. Minister, why has the government decided to insource cleaning services in ACT public schools?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Ms Cody for her question. The government has for some time been concerned about the treatment of vulnerable workers in our community. Within my portfolio responsibilities I have been particularly focused on improving the

employment conditions of government school cleaners who have been engaged by contracted service providers. These workers are employed to do often undervalued work in an industry where low pay and unfair and insecure employment are, unfortunately, structurally entrenched.

The government has high standards for ethical, industrially compliant employment and is particularly focused on supporting workers who are vulnerable to exploitation because of issues like the industry context and/or factors like English literacy or age. Achieving the government's high standards is difficult in the cleaning industry where margins are tight and the services are much the same. The required contract management has also proven very demanding.

The government has made numerous enhancements to contracts and contract management, with the aim of ensuring ethical, industrially compliant employment for government school cleaners. It has become clear, though, through this process that achieving the government's high standards of cleaning in our schools is best achieved through insourcing. Therefore the government has decided that from the beginning of 2020 the government will directly employ a cleaning workforce to clean government schools.

**MS CODY:** Minister, who will benefit from this decision?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Ms Cody for the supplementary. Of course, most importantly this decision will benefit people working as cleaners in government schools. Many of these workers, nearly 300 people, are migrants or refugees in our community. For example, a large number of these workers are from the S'gaw Karen people group and resident with us after fleeing conflict in Myanmar. There is also a cohort of Iranian refugees and some who are Bhutanese migrants.

Others, local people, typically come from a modest personal background. Members have noted the heartbreaking story of Karen Love, who works at Macquarie Primary School. Karen is a lovely woman whose personal story shows why we have made this decision. Karen is a grandmother and has not had the easiest of lives, but has worked as a cleaner in this school for more than a decade. She is deeply valued by the school community.

Members might also recall the troubling federal court decision about another local firm and the effect that it had on workers like Htoo Ywai at Alfred Deakin High School. While there are a range of technical details to resolve, through this process my intention is that the existing workers will be offered employment with the government to the greatest extent possible.

Through this, these workers will gain more secure employment and the financial stability that comes with it, and the opportunity to develop and grow their skills as valued members of the ACT public service. The government and schools will also benefit because of the opportunity to directly manage the delivery of high quality school cleaning through increased workforce diversity in the ACT public service as well as employment pathways for the ACT community.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, how does this decision contribute to the government's

commitment to secure, local jobs?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary. This decision will make an important contribution to the government's clear election commitment to defend working people in the ACT. I acknowledge my colleague Ms Stephen-Smith, the Minister for Employment and Workplace Safety, for her lead role in delivering the government's commitment in this area. Bringing school cleaning in house aligns with the intent of the Government Procurement (Secure Local Jobs) Amendment Bill 2018 to ensure fair working conditions for vulnerable workers.

On this side we are committed to pursuing fair working conditions and promoting permanent employment and job security for working people. The social and economic benefit of doing this is clear. All people deserve the opportunity for a decent, fulfilling life, and employment is a key part of that. For example, Canberra has a proud history of welcoming refugees. Securing good jobs for these people where they are respected and treated fairly will make an important contribution to continuing our shared commitment to embracing and celebrating cultural diversity.

Equally, for all these workers, regardless of where they come from, this decision will improve social inclusion and our response to problems like poverty, deprivation and disadvantage. The government will continue to take steps to improve the treatment of vulnerable workers in our community through a range of measures, and I look forward to supporting Ms Stephen-Smith as she continues to deliver in this area through a range of other initiatives.

### **ACTION bus services—new network**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is to Minister for Transport. Minister, amongst the stories received about the new bus network was one from Simone. Simone contacted us on behalf of her elderly neighbour in Harrison, an area that was previously well serviced. This senior resident used to be able to walk two minutes to catch a bus to the town centre to shop, visit the bank and go to the post office, retaining her independence. Under your new network her shortest walk is now 11 minutes up an incline. How should Simone's neighbour get to the post office under your network?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Not knowing where in Harrison Simone's neighbour lives, it is pretty difficult to answer that question.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister how does treating our elderly and vulnerable who rely on the bus network in such a manner align with your vision for an inclusive and better connected Canberra?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** As I have mentioned previously, this network is designed to operate right across the city and provide as much access as possible to as many Canberrans as possible, and that is what we are delivering.

**MS LAWDER:** Minister, why are older Canberrans constantly disadvantaged by the decisions of this government?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I certainly do not believe that they are.

### **ACTION bus services—bicycle racks**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, under the new bus network, children are forced to cover longer distances to catch buses, with many opting to ride their bikes to stops and interchanges. However, current bike storage infrastructure on buses themselves is limited to two bikes. Minister, what advice do you give to students when they are turned away from buses without bike capacity and are then made late to school?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I would be interested to hear from anyone who has not been able to board a bus because the bike rack has been full. Certainly, the new network is designed to give more people more options. If they are catching a rapid bus, there would be one coming. Because there are now nine rapid bus services and one rapid light rail service, people right across the city, with rapids extending to every corner of the city, now have many more options on how they move around the city. It is certainly the case that we are looking to further invest in bike storage facilities at school locations and also particularly along our rapid transport routes.

While we are speaking about school services, I note in relation to a previous question about Red Hill Primary School and residents living in the Causeway that there is a school route, school route 2024, that services that school.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, who is responsible for these primary school aged children at interchanges when they are unable to board a bus due to the bike racks being full?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Again, if there are instances of this I would be keen to hear of them. It would certainly be the case that our customer service assistants would work with them to make sure that they could get onto the next available bus.

**MISS C BURCH:** Minister, parents have been told by your directorate that if they have three children travelling with three bikes you do not have a service available for them. Do you stand by that advice?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I will take advice on that. If that particular instance has been raised with my directorate, I will talk to them about it.

### **Government—space industry policy**

**MR PETTERSSON:** My question is to the Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Advanced Technology and Space Industries. Minister, what update can you provide about the space sector in Canberra?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Pettersson for his interest in the sector. The space industry is growing quickly and is worth \$US345 billion globally today. It is expected to grow to more than \$US1.1 trillion by 2040. In Australia the space sector is expected to grow seven per cent over the next five years, outpacing Australia's gross domestic product, increasing from around 10,000 jobs to 30,000 jobs and is expected to be worth \$A12 billion per annum by 2030. Almost one in four of Australia's space sector jobs, around 2,000 jobs, are in Canberra.

Our city has a long and direct involvement with some of the biggest events in international space exploration, providing critical support to missions from the first moon landing in 1969 to the 2008 Mars *Phoenix* landing and beyond. The capability of our local industry is internationally renowned. Canberra's research and education institutions, innovative local SMEs, global exporters and multinational primes with large space programs already make a significant contribution to the global space economy.

The ACT's ecosystems include end-to-end capability for the design, test and manufacture of Australia's next generation of micro and small-scale satellites. The future of Australia's space industry and the economic and social opportunities that lie ahead for Canberra are very exciting.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, how is the ACT government supporting the local space sector?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** The space industry is a priority sector to achieve economic diversification and growth in the region. We have provided leadership in the national conversation to develop Australia's space industry, including the Space Agency. The ACT government is committed to working with Canberra's local space industry to help build a sustainable and globally competitive industry.

To date we have supported space projects to strengthen Canberra's space sector such as \$250,000 to the ANU's national space test facility to enable free access to Australia's largest space flight test facilities and \$375,000 to help establish the national space mission design facility to bring together industry, agencies and the research sector to rapidly design and test the viability of space missions.

Building on these investments the government has also committed \$9.7 million over the next three years, through the priority investment program, to support the growth of key sectors, including space, by facilitating collaboration between the ACT government, industry and the tertiary sectors.

Our actions are in stark contrast to the federal Liberal government, who have turned their backs on local businesses in this sector and refused to accept the clear evidence that Canberra leads the nation in space.

**MS ORR:** Are there any partners who will assist the territory government's endeavours regarding the space sector?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary. As in so many areas, the future will be brighter for Canberra under a Shorten federal Labor government. In a Shorten government Canberrans will find a friend, a partner willing to grow and make our city even better than it is today. We will not have a government like the current federal government that has spent six years attacking Canberrans and their businesses, ripping out jobs so that they can pork-barrel.

The federal Labor Party recognise that this city is the national capital and that we are well placed in sectors such as space to help the nation grow and create more jobs.

Over \$55 million has been committed to help develop the national space industry and recently there was a \$20 million commitment to create a space industry cluster in our region, recognising the central role our region has in space. There was also a \$10 million boost to the capabilities of CSIRO. It is very clear that only under a Labor government will we see Canberra protected and the bush capital that we call home enhanced.

### **ACTION bus services—school services**

**MRS DUNNE:** My question is to the Minister for Transport. I refer the minister to a *Canberra Times* article dated 2 May in which a spokesperson for the ACT's peak body for public school parents stated that they unsuccessfully pushed for a "no child left behind" guarantee to be enforced across the new bus network.

Minister, why did you reject a "no child left behind" guarantee when you put forward the bus network?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** That reporting was, I believe, incorrect. It is certainly not the case. This is an important point about how the network operates. Under the previous network there were a number of dedicated school stops. In many instances the only bus to stop at that dedicated school stop was a school bus. If a child is waiting at a dedicated school bus stop and misses that bus, there is no other bus.

It was a very important principle to remove dedicated school buses, as I understand, in response to a number of issues that have been raised around the country of children being left at bus stops: not to have dedicated school bus stops where only one service in the morning and one service in the afternoon would be attending, because there was a view that this is not a good policy. That is why dedicated school services now largely stop at existing bus stops. That is actually an important principle around safety. I have followed up on this and I am assured of our policy.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, why did you launch a bus network based on so-called rigorous patronage data but fail to take account of buses at peak hour leaving school students stranded at bus stops across the territory?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** School students were not stranded at bus stops across the territory.

**MISS C BURCH:** Minister, why is it acceptable for Canberra students to be dangerously left behind under the new bus network?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** They are not. Certainly in the first week of operations we saw some capacity issues particularly at a number of schools, given that we are talking about school services, but also on regular services. That is because we have seen close to a 10 per cent increase in patronage, which is fantastic. We have responded where there are particular capacity issues. For example, at St Francis Xavier College and Burgmann College we have responded specifically to capacity issues either by having an additional service or by expanding the bus capacity at the schools.

Responding to Miss C Burch's earlier question about a family with three children

catching a bus, I note that when that family of three children were catching a bus last year—whether it was a dedicated school bus or a normal route bus—there were still only two bike racks on the front of every bus. So in that matter nothing has changed. Bike racks can take only two bikes. That was the case last year; it is the case right now.

In that instance they would not have an option because there would have been one dedicated school bus. In the new network there may be on occasion two dedicated school buses as well as the option to catch a normal route bus. So, in fact, as is the design of the network, there are now more options.

I certainly accept that there will be questions but not fanciful questions about differences. The difference between last year and right now is that there is no difference because bike racks can take only two bikes. That was the case last year; it is the case now.

### **ACTION bus services—school services**

**MRS JONES:** My question is to the minister for education. Minister, I refer to the serious concerns of many parents and schools over the cuts to dedicated school bus services and the significant amount of time many students are now spending at bus stops and interchanges, often being late for school or needing to leave early. Minister, how are you responding to the confusion and stress faced by many students as a result of these cuts?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mrs Jones for the question. For the most part, I refer to the responses of the Minister for Transport to most of the questions that have been asked today around buses and bus services at schools. The Education Directorate has actually had only very few concerns raised about the school services, government schools in particular. Ms Fitzharris has already talked about the changes that have been made to some of the other schools in the ACT that were facing capacity issues because of the significant increase in numbers of students who are now catching buses and who were not catching buses before.

I will continue to work very closely with Ms Fitzharris on issues around student capacity on buses. It is a good thing that more students are catching buses. That is a fact. If there are issues that arise, as the minister has said, and they are raised with our officers, we will work together to make sure that students are able to catch buses home from school.

**MRS JONES:** Minister, what alternatives, if any, are you providing to schools across the ACT when their dedicated bus services have been cut?

**MS BERRY:** I refer the member to the responses provided previously by the Minister for Transport.

**MISS C BURCH:** Minister, what advice have you received from your directorate regarding the impact of late arrivals and early departures and students missing up to 50 hours of school a year on children's educational outcomes?

**MS BERRY:** I refer the member to the responses already provided by the Minister for Transport on this matter.

### **Government—building documentation guidelines**

**MS ORR:** My question is to the Minister for Building Quality Improvement. Can the minister update the Assembly on the recent announcement regarding documentation guidelines for the building industry?

**MR RAMSAY:** I thank Ms Orr for her question. We are in the final round of consultation now on our new set of building documentation guidelines. These will complement the parts of the Building Act that state that building approval applications must contain sufficient information and that certifiers must make sure that all requirements for plans they are provided with are met.

We have been working to develop the guidelines over a significant period of time. Local industry associations who represent builders, certifiers, building designers, architects, engineers, heating and cooling experts, plumbers and electricians, and construction employee representatives have all been involved in this process.

This final round of consultation on the draft guidelines is ongoing. I look forward to the input from our stakeholders in industry and other partners. Today's announcement outlined a time line for implementation, including a date for release of the final guidelines, as well as a date for their implementation. However, of course, there is nothing to prevent developers and designers from working to this final draft of the guidelines from today. Certifiers can use this as a standard document from today.

I encourage all of our industry professionals to feed into the process to ensure that we create useful guidelines and to ensure that the quality of building documentation provided to builders in the territory is very high. This will help raise the quality of building throughout the territory.

**MS ORR:** Can the minister explain why these guidelines are important?

**MR RAMSAY:** I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary question. The change is to ensure that building work is not approved until there are good quality plans that properly describe what will be built. Some approvals do this already, but this change will clarify the law to ensure that this is always the case.

It will give certifiers a tool to insist on good building plans, giving them a standard to point to as a minimum requirement. It will give building designers, such as architects, guidance on the level of detail they must include when designing a building. This will give them the tools to better scope and contract for design services, to ensure that their designs have sufficient details to determine whether the building complies with legislated standards. It will give builders a minimum set of details that they can expect to receive, which will give them the ability to accurately price and plan building work and help them see what is needed for the building to meet those building standards.

The change will clarify the law to ensure that those building in the territory know what to expect in their design documents. It will provide standards that people must

meet. Through this it will ensure that everyone across the profession has a common understanding of what is required and how it is presented.

**MS CHEYNE:** Minister, can you outline how this change fits into the government's broader suite of reforms for the building industry?

**MR RAMSAY:** I thank Ms Cheyne for the supplementary question. We have a series of reforms with three purposes. We want to ensure that: we have the highest level of building quality in Australia; people have confidence in our building system; and we are able to get a good, strong regulatory outcome when things are not up to scratch. This change to design document requirements is a clear signal to all involved in the industry about all three of those intentions.

We expect our buildings to be thoughtfully designed with enough detail for building certifiers to determine compliance and for builders to reasonably build from. By clarifying the minimum documentation requirements, we are giving builders greater detail to work from to improve the outcomes of the building process.

We also want consumers to know what they are paying for. By insisting on good documentation requirements, consumers will have greater confidence that the buildings being built will conform to building standards.

These guidelines will also link into the new code of practice for building certifiers to be released for consultation shortly. Building certifiers have an obligation to make sure that the technical information required by building laws and the guideline is provided. This reform provides greater clarity in the regulatory system of what is expected and what will be required. It is part of our comprehensive reforms to lift the quality of buildings in the ACT.

We have set out to improve the quality of buildings in the territory, and this documentation guideline is one of the ways we are doing this. It is something we have promised we would do, and it is something we have delivered.

**Mr Barr:** Further questions can be placed on the notice paper.