



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND
ENVIRONMENT**

(Reference: ACTION buses and the sustainable transport plan)

Members:

**MR M GENTLEMAN (The Chair)
MR Z SESELJA (The Deputy Chair)
MS M PORTER**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 15 JUNE 2007

**Secretary to the committee:
Dr H Jaireth (Ph: 6205 0137)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the committee office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

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The committee met at 9.32 am.

FLINT, MR PAUL, Executive Director, Council on the Ageing (ACT)

TEMPLAR, MR ROD, Board Member, Council on the Ageing (ACT)

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment's inquiry into ACTION buses and the sustainable transport plan. Before we begin, I will read out the privileges card for you.

The committee has authorised the recording, broadcasting and re-broadcasting of these proceedings in accordance with the rules contained in the resolution agreed by the Assembly on 7 March 2002 concerning the broadcasting of Assembly and committee proceedings.

Before the committee commences taking evidence, let me place on the record that all witnesses are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to submissions made to the committee in evidence given before it. Parliamentary privilege means special rights and immunities attach to parliament, its members and others necessary to the discharge of functions of the Assembly without obstruction and without fear of prosecution.

While the committee prefers to hear all evidence in public, if the committee accedes to such a request, the committee will take evidence in camera and record that evidence. Should the committee take evidence in this manner, I remind the committee and those present that it is within the power of the committee at a later date to publish or present all or part of the evidence to the Assembly. I should add that any decision regarding publication of in camera evidence or confidential submissions will not be taken by the committee without prior reference to the person whose evidence the committee may consider publishing.

Again, thank you for coming in. Would you like to begin with an opening statement?

Mr Templar: Yes, thank you. I am a board member of COTA (ACT) and chairman of COTA's infrastructure committee. First, COTA (ACT) would like to thank the standing committee for the opportunity to present a submission and to be here today. COTA has been involved in transport and road safety issues for many years, with programs and publications in the areas of elder driver training, retiring from driving and scooters. Two areas of transport-related research have been our focus in recent times. The first is the older person safety needs analysis. Secondly, COTA assisted MACA to conduct the transport forums earlier this year.

In 2005-06 COTA undertook an older person road safety needs analysis for the NRMA-ACT Road Safety Trust. This work involved a survey of around five per cent of older people here in the ACT; in addition, a number of focus groups and other consultation methods were undertaken. In total, more than 1,600 older people contributed to the effort. Sections on transport options, needs analysis and keeping seniors mobile, which are most likely to be relevant to this inquiry, were included in an attachment to our submission.

Some key outcomes of the survey element of this research concerning ACTION buses

were as follows. Forty-nine per cent of older persons surveyed said they found ACTION buses to be a convenient transport option. Forty per cent of older persons surveyed said they would use ACTION buses as a means of maintaining their independence. Thirty-four per cent said they minimised the use of ACTION buses due to cost. When asked to indicate which transport options would be avoided because of the time taken to complete the journey, ACTION buses rated the most avoided—at 40.7 per cent: more significant than walking, at 25.1 per cent, and taxis, at 16.2 per cent.

The focus groups and consultation processes revealed that there are insufficient alternatives to provide for the needs of seniors who are seeking to reduce their dependence on cars or retire from driving. The ACT needs to develop policies and programs to facilitate increased reliance on alternatives to private transport. In particular, there is significant scope for ACTION to both increase patronage and assist in road safety by specifically targeting services to meet the needs of older Canberrans. It must be stressed that these findings were applicable prior to ACTION significantly reducing its off-peak service frequency. As many off-peak services have now been reduced to an hourly service, it could safely be assumed that the findings would be much more negative were the research to be undertaken in the current situation.

The transport forum strongly reinforced the difficulties and social impacts of inadequate transport services. As MACA has met with this committee, I assume that you are already fully aware of its findings, and I will not cover that background here.

To COTA the key issues are as follows. Establishing effective alternative public transport measures for seniors, older groups, young people and those with a disability is necessary in order to meet the needs of the community. Effective public transport and alternative approaches are required in order to ensure that those unable or less willing to drive can access medical and social requirements, as well as the goods and services required for normal living. Once-an-hour off-peak ACTION services are inadequate to meet these objectives; COTA strongly urges the reinstatement of a more frequent service, using smaller buses if necessary.

In little more than a decade older people will make up almost one-quarter of the population here in Canberra. From this perspective, it is extremely important that broad community transport needs are able to be met, and the planning to meet this intensified need needs to be put in place. From a community obligation perspective, there are a number of important reasons—other than the personal need for transport—why it is critical to provide effective transport alternatives to the private vehicle, including the need to address environmental issues and global warming by reducing greenhouse gases, and the important role that effective public transport options play from a road safety perspective by facilitating the process of retiring from driving. To further this end, COTA recommends that seniors card concessions be offered on ACTION services at all times without restriction.

Deficiencies in public transport options impact adversely on those unable or unwilling to use private transport. This is a prime contributor to social isolation. Inadequate transport options have both a broad impact on the quality of life for many and a much more significant impact on those who become socially isolated. These community obligations are not primary responsibilities of ACTION; they should be viewed as the

responsibility of the broader community and funded accordingly. Older people are generally concerned that the current programs and plans set the basis for systems that are appropriate for the future. Consequently, current decisions concerning ACTION need to be part of a longer-term sustainable transport strategy. Thus a longer-term agreed transport strategy is required for the ACT, and policies and programs need to be consistent with this strategy and performance measured relative to it.

Canberra has historically been captive to the private motor car in its broader planning and transport infrastructure and service strategies. While acknowledging the cost and viability constraints for a city the size of Canberra, this captive-to-the-motor-car approach cannot go on indefinitely. The longer term sustainable strategy should include other public transport options to facilitate reduced dependence on the private motor car, particularly between city centres. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr Flint, would you like to add anything to that opening statement?

Mr Flint: No; that has covered all our points, hopefully.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. I might begin. Mr Templar, you mentioned in your statement that the study was undertaken prior to the changes to ACTION services in December. Have you heard any specific comments from your groups more recently?

Mr Templar: We have been receiving telephone calls since November, but Paul might be the best person to reply.

Mr Flint: Yes. The study that we were talking about was the road safety study. It was a major survey and those figures were from it. Since then, we have been involved with MACA in the transport forums and we have had a survey associated with that. So there has been significant work. It has shown that all of those things are occurring to a greater extent since the changes. As a general observation from that work, I was quite surprised at the extent of social dislocation caused by the changes—people not being able to do everyday things such as shopping and social outings because of the changes. The impacts on older people are quite extensive—on a specific group of older people that are totally dependent on public transport.

MS PORTER: Can I ask a supplementary?

THE CHAIR: Yes, certainly.

MS PORTER: Thank you. With regard to the social dislocation and isolation that you were referring to, can you explain this to me? If the buses are running less frequently—obviously some of them are not any more, but initially that was the case; they were all running hourly rosters or whatever you might want to call it. That meant the bus would come, say, at 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock and 12—just surmising.

Mr Flint: Yes.

MS PORTER: Previously it was coming more frequently. Can you explain to me why the fact that the bus is just arriving at a different time and going back at a

different time means that that person cannot go and do their shopping or go to the library or wherever else? I am just trying to clarify why it makes that amount of difference to them.

Mr Flint: There were two things that happened in the changes. One was the timing element; the other one was the routes. The route one is the easier one to understand. Basically, what happened was that the change forced people to make more changes of buses. They would have to go to a centre and then change routes, where previously it took them half an hour or 20 minutes to get from A to B, by the time they went to a centre, waited for a change and got back, that was sometimes three hours. It takes two hours and 50 minutes to get from Hughes to Curtin—to give a very simple example—because you have to go through Woden.

MS PORTER: Right.

Mr Flint: And the same sorts of things were happening around Civic because of the changes in the buses—people getting from Campbell to O'Connor, those sorts of problems.

That was one element of it. The other element is the one that you are talking about, the timing type issue. First of all, if there are multiple buses then it blows out. The gap between buses seemed to be about an hour—people were waiting 45 or 55 minutes. That extends the time of the trip quite significantly. The other one was that, because of the fixed timing of other elements, they are not all able to be varied—and people have things like having to get back home in time for Meals on Wheels; they cannot get out and back in the time. There is an extra hour in the journey; there is a problem.

Another one was the issue of what happened if they missed their bus. I was surprised at the number of people who had fixed events. They would go to their mahjong or whatever it was; it would start at a certain time—11 o'clock or 2 o'clock. If they went out and missed the bus, they would not bother to go. The thing that really surprised me was the number of people that that happened to once or twice, and then they just gave up. They did not bother to go out, because they knew they were going to miss the bus or there was a chance they would miss it. They gave up. That is another element where that infrequency has an unexpected impact.

MS PORTER: Yes, I see.

Mr Templar: I would like to provide another illustration. I am a course leader for U3A. The course I currently run is at the Irish club in Weston. I would surmise that about a third of that U3A class is dependent on ACTION buses to get to the class. When the new bus schedules came in, some people were taking one hour and 50 minutes to get to class and up to one hour and 50 minutes to get back from class; that is four hours travelling for a two-hour class. It is not that they cannot do it; it is not a preventative thing. It is just that it adds so much more time—which people do not want to spend travelling.

Mr Flint: Another complaint that came up quite significantly was that the people that are forced to do that—it was not necessarily that they could not do it but that, if you have spent two, three or four hours in travelling and you are an older person, you are

so worn out that you do not want to do anything social or get involved in other things. So going out was self-defeating. That extended time is wearing.

MS PORTER: Thank you.

MR SESELJA: Mr Flint, you talked about the two hours and 15 minutes from Hughes to Curtin. Has that been fixed now? As a result of the changes, has it now been addressed, or is that still the case?

Mr Flint: I think it is still the case on that one. We have had some positive feedback that a number of those issues have been fixed or reduced, but as far as I know that one is still occurring.

MR SESELJA: I know that is an issue in the south as well, in Tuggeranong. My mother does not drive. To go from Wanniasa to Kambah to visit her daughter now takes significantly longer. It does seem to be an issue that has not been addressed. On the issue around price, Mr Templar, I think you said that 35 per cent of those surveyed said that cost issues were important.

Mr Templar: Yes.

MR SESELJA: And you talked about seniors card concessions needing to apply all the time. Would that solve the price issues for most of those people, in your opinion, or is that just a small part of it?

Mr Templar: It would certainly help. As you probably know, other jurisdictions have moved to have the seniors card applicable 24 hours a day. It is very much a road safety issue as well—forcing people to drive in peak hours because they feel that if they are not getting the concession they might as well drive. I still think that the costing issue is reasonable. I think the \$1.30 is reasonable. I am not critical of the \$1.30; it is just interesting that that percentage of the survey participants still considered that cost.

THE CHAIR: Mr Flint, we have heard in other submissions that there is considered to be an approach to health issues by using public transport rather than private transport. Have you had any feedback on that from your groups? Do they think it is a healthier option to use public transport?

Mr Flint: No, but there is a body of research around obesity that has shown that good public transport has an externality of having a healthier population—purely because you have got to walk to the buses and you have to walk from them; it is not door to door as your car is. So it is good for the public. But I do not think that there has been much feedback on that, other than issues like standing in the cold and waiting—indirect health issues.

MS PORTER: Especially this morning, I would have thought.

Mr Flint: Yes. To come back to the costs, there was another one too, and it came up quite a lot. If you have fixed appointments—medical appointments, for example—even at 10 o'clock in the morning, with the bus service a lot of people are having

trouble getting an off-peak ticket or a seniors card discount and getting to a 10 o'clock appointment. People were saying that they finished at 3 o'clock and, because the bus was two or three minutes late or early, were getting charged full fares for the last bus home. There were those sorts of issues with the less frequent buses. That had a cost impact.

THE CHAIR: But if there was acceptance of the seniors card, then that would—

Mr Flint: That would do it, yes. Another thing that we should mention that was in our submission is that we do not see that ACTION is the only form of public transport or should always be the only form of public transport. There is a need for community transport, the taxi subsidy scheme, taxis and all those other elements to be working effectively. But at the moment there is pressure right across the system and there are deficiencies in them all.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to expand on that? That was my next question to you, actually. You have touched on that in your submission—other forms of public transport and you have referred to other cities. Which ones would you encourage, aside from ACTION?

Mr Flint: In the way we have looked at it, the ACTION transport system has been the backbone of Canberra public transport, literally and physically. The thing that came out in the public hearings that we had was that cross-links are very poor under the new arrangement. If you had to go to your doctor two suburbs across, you had a real problem if you gave up your car. If you had to go to your church two suburbs in the other direction, or go to your children and your family, there was a problem. That is an area where the changes have exacerbated the ongoing problems.

There seems to be a need for some other more supportive system that is not necessarily a taxi-type system but that has some elements of a bus system and some elements of a taxi system to allow for those sorts of trips. The example that was given to us was the Arafura cabs, a minibus system that is on call like a taxi system but gets programmed and is much more flexible. We need some elements at that end that are more flexible; otherwise people are forced into community transport where they have to get a driver to come and take them to do those things. And there are people who are not able to use the bus system who will go to a town centre and then come back to their doctor, but would be quite able to use a minibus system or something like that. Those are the sorts of elements.

Older people genuinely want to see an effective system for Canberra for the future. It is a matter of having those core inter-centre routes working effectively, whether it is a bus system, fast lanes, monorail or whatever. There are different elements of the system that need to be addressed; it is not necessary that the present arrangement be made to fit them.

THE CHAIR: So you would support the forward planning for transport corridors?

Mr Flint: Yes, if that is chosen as the optimal system for the future—that we have that quick mass transport between centres.

THE CHAIR: Are there any further questions for our witnesses?

MS PORTER: I want to go back to the cost issue again. Do you get any feedback from your constituents—the people that use COTA or ring COTA up—about the cost of running their car? Yesterday on the radio we heard that it can cost 30 per cent of someone's income to run a car now. One of the factors is the current cost of petrol, the fuel. I wondered whether you get any feedback about the difference between catching a bus and having to use the car—whether they give you any feedback about that. Parking is another problem, of course—the cost of parking.

Mr Flint: The real difference is when people give up their car, because they do not have the fixed costs associated with the car. That is where the big difference is. It is a very difficult decision-making point for most older people—to actually give up their vehicle. I suppose our interest is to get them to significantly reduce their use of their own vehicle before that point. In that area, the cost differences are not as great except when you have pay parking and all those other issues around difficulties if you are going to the town centres. That is where we would like to see much more flexibility for those people to encourage them to do it.

MS PORTER: My question was around what motivates people to actually get out of the car and use the bus system. Is it cost? Is it convenience? What are the motivating factors? Which is higher than the other? Which is more motivating than the other?

Mr Flint: The biggest issue is what is easiest for them. Of course, that takes into account a lot of medical things about how confident they are at driving, how good their eyesight is, whether it is after dark or not—all these fringe issues that lead to that decision to use public transport.

Another element out of the survey that we have not mentioned is that people that use it more frequently sooner are the people that make that adjustment better. That is why we would try and encourage systems that will get people to start using it more.

MS PORTER: Earlier.

Mr Flint: This was a thing that amazed us. A lot of older people who live in the suburbs have never used the ACTION buses; they are the people who find it very traumatic to give up their vehicles.

MS PORTER: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you once again for coming in to the standing committee's inquiry. We will get a copy of the transcript to you as soon as we can—and also the report, at the conclusion.

Mr Templar: Thank you.

TULLY, MR WILLIAM JAMES, President, Advancement of Public Transport
WATSON, DR CHRISTOPHER LEX, Secretary, Advancement of Public Transport

THE CHAIR: Mr Tully and Dr Watson, were you here earlier for the reading of the privileges card?

Mr Tully: No.

THE CHAIR: Okay, I will read it to you. The committee has authorised the recording, broadcasting and rebroadcasting of these proceedings in accordance with the rules contained in the resolution agreed by the Assembly on 7 March 2002 concerning the broadcasting of Assembly and committee proceedings. Before the committee commences taking evidence, let me place on record that all witnesses are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to submissions made to the committee in evidence given before it. Parliamentary privilege means special rights and immunities attach to parliament, its members and others, necessary to the discharge of functions of the Assembly without obstruction and without fear of prosecution.

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Mr Tully and Dr Watson, thanks very much for coming in this morning. Would you like to make a statement to the committee.

Mr Tully: Certainly. I would like, first, to say that our group, Advancement of Public Transport, is a resurrection of an earlier group that operated in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s which Dr Chris Watson was the head of. It was a very broad organisation. We can't get as many people to our meetings as we did. We are taking a lot of the broad issues of public transport into consideration.

Just to give you a bit of a picture of what we do, we have presented a petition with around 230 signatures. A woman up in Ainslie, whom we liaised with, did one for about 1,000 people. Chris and I have been catching public transport ever since we have been here. I have been here almost 40 years; Chris a little less than that. You get the feel of public transport by using it. I have never had a car. Frankly, since the December events came in I have never, ever heard so much negative feedback from people about the cuts in the system.

The COTA people spoke very eloquently about their members, but it is more than the older people. The younger people, the students and people like myself—a retiree, superannuation funded, self-funded retiree, not with any big money problems—have found all those issues are applicable to a wider part of the population than to just one

particular sector, although there are sectors, which I have mentioned, who do feel it a lot more: the homeless and the people with medical problems. They vent their fury very vociferously in buses—there is no doubt about that. They are very angry and the anger has continued.

We have liaised with various groups: the Conservation Council of the ACT and Transit Australia. I have rung Dr Paul Mees in Melbourne and had a few talks with him. He will be giving some sort of submission later—I hope he will. I have also spoken to departmental people, in particular with Mike Zissler, about traffic issues: the way the roads are done and the way the buses operate with respect to libraries. That is another of my other things. To boil down my submission and, to some extent, that of Dr Watson, we have found an already flawed system. When I first came to Canberra I was quite disgusted at the way the buses operated. They have got a little better, but since December they have got considerably worse—there is no doubt about that. This needs instant rectification. To some extent, the budget mentioned that there will be some funds allocated, but I don't think those funds are sufficient.

There is a countervailing force at work here: there is an attempt at sustainability for Canberra, an attempt to get people aware of global warming and that means the use of transport other than the private motor vehicle which many people are enraptured with—I am not. That has to go, and the government has spoken about that. There have been reports and all sorts of findings of the need for it; meanwhile public transport has been cut. I would agree with the previous speakers from COTA that public transport can embrace a lot of things other than the buses. There are imaginative ways in which this can be done, but a start has to be made on better public transport in the bus sense.

There is a suspicion abroad—I may as well mention it here—that the cuts might presage further cuts in publicly funded transport like buses, pushed into the private sector. As a socialist I am a little worried about that, but as a bus user I am very worried about it because it will mean an increase in fares and all sorts of boutique services that might be operating which may not necessarily be adequate for people such as myself and lots of others.

As to recommendations, the minimum recommendation we would make would be to restore the December 2006 services—no doubt about that. The maximum one, I guess—to push it to a more involved community in public transport; indeed we did have it some years ago with ACTION for public transport—is for some sort of body, citizens group if you like, to be set up where we can have ongoing dialogue and community involvement in public transport. A lot of people out there need to have a say and have not yet really had much of a say. They feel disempowered; I certainly get that. I recommend the formation of a wide, inclusive and democratically elected citizens advisory group to be involved in the making of a more viable ACT public transport system.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Tully. You outlined quite a few criticisms in your submission. Do you have any suggestions on how we could improve the current services?

Mr Tully: Put simply, we need more buses, better routes in buses and more access to the transport system. At the moment I believe that in Civic there is some talk that the

little office we go into is going to be closed down and relocated. There are safety issues—

THE CHAIR: That is the interchange office?

Mr Tully: Yes, indeed, the civic interchange, as well as for our end: Woden, Belconnen and others. There needs to be a more sensitive investigation and there obviously need to be more funds put into it; that is the big thing. I know it is easy to call for more money to go into buses, but I think we certainly need that. We also need a more flexible system. I go back to COTA: they made very good account of themselves. We as the citizens of Canberra and you, of course, as the legislators, need to get a more flexible system—smaller buses and that sort of thing. This can be done too, because the system has been very inflexible. I don't know whether that has answered it but it is the best I can do.

THE CHAIR: Okay, thank you. Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Thank you, chair. With regard to providing the type of services that you believe the public need, and given that ours is the most expensive system to run in the whole of Australia currently, that smaller buses really don't solve the problem—it is not to do with the size of the bus or the expense; it is to do with other factors—and that people really don't want to pay any more money in bus fares, as demonstrated by what COTA just said—that is my understanding; maybe I am wrong—how would you suggest we then meet the cost of providing a better public service in the public transport area that obviously your group and COTA have said clearly is what is needed? How do you think that we could raise sufficient capital in order to meet the ongoing, quite significant costs to the whole of the community? It is not a cost to the ACT government; it is a cost to the whole of the community.

Mr Tully: With difficulty, I would say. The money at the moment seems to be going for places like the airport, which will not be serviced by buses at all but by private car, largely. The oil and car industry lobbies are much more powerful than the public sector lobby. So with difficulty; there is no doubt about it. It is a big problem, but it has not really been addressed in recent years. To what extent do governments have a responsibility to getting a service going, raising less money and making, if you like, public transport more sexy for people to use? There is a whole raft of issues.

Some cities have done it. Dr Mees has spoken about Toronto and places like that. It is a difficult one but it can be done. Again, I get back to my idea of a citizens group coming in—you could get all these ideas together. Certain ideas that COTA have raised have got my mind zapping in various directions. I don't deny that it is a difficult one.

THE CHAIR: Mr Tully, commented on whether Dr Mees had made a submission. He has. It is available on the website if you want to have a look at it.

Mr Tully: Good.

THE CHAIR: Mr Seselja.

MR SESELJA: Thanks, chair. Mr Tully, I am interested in exploring a bit further: you said that more money is needed. Is frequency of services the primary thing you think that is holding back our public transport system? We have heard the former minister talk about reliability, speed, things like the busway, real-time information—that sort of thing. In the opinion of your organisation, what are the top couple of issues that, if they were addressed, would see an increase in patronage?

Mr Tully: Certainly an increase in buses. The bus transport system is one; the other is the ageing stock that we have. To travel in buses now is often painful. The roads are not quite adequate and the buses are rocking a lot. There is tension increasingly between drivers and passengers which cannot be avoided. It is not just a few yahoos; it is many. There is a need to really look at where it is going. The December thing in my view was not, in any way, an improvement; it was a retrograde and savage step, presumably provoked by budgetary requirements, which in this budget, to some extent, have been put the other way.

Buses are seen as very popular stalking horses, I think, by not just the ACT government but other governments as well. It is very easy to chop away at it. It is the whole question of the stock that is being used, the drivers—the feel of public transport is not popular and never has been popular with kids. Kids think people who catch buses are mad. They love cars and they are going to have cars. That feeling is shared pretty widely by the older community.

THE CHAIR: Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Could you enlarge on your comment about the drivers, Mr Tully?

Mr Tully: Yes, sure.

MS PORTER: Are you saying that the drivers are not sufficiently trained? What are you saying about drivers?

Mr Tully: I think new drivers are not sufficiently trained. I think some of them are younger; there is not the training there. But the older ones that I have remembered over the years have been pretty good. They know how to psychologically deal with passengers. There are some really good drivers—there is no doubt about it. But it is not so much the drivers, it is what they have to drive, how they have to do it and the infrequency of the journeys they make.

One of the things that is increasing—it is not necessarily the driver's fault—is that they have to stop, have a cup of tea and a biscuit and all the rest of it. The union is looking after them very well on these things—or trying to look after them. But they are often late and many of them, I have noticed this year, just don't arrive. The access system by phone is not always very reliable. There seems to be a general breakdown in all the little services that we used to have—not that it was marvellous pre December 2006, but there is a breaking down of morale amongst the passengers, the drivers and, indeed, the people who occasionally catch them and people who don't. So it is in a mess at the moment.

THE CHAIR: Mr Tully, in your submission there isn't any comment on the

sustainable transport plan. Do you have any thoughts on how that is progressing?

Mr Tully: I think I might ask my colleague Chris Watson to speak on that. Chris is very much into that. I will just say that sustainability, as I understand it, means searching for systems of transport that are less prone to sending all sorts of horrible things into the ozone to the detriment of the planet. That means other forms of transport, I suppose—electric cars, maybe, and buses and things like that. But Chris is very wise in the ways of sustainability. I might ask him to answer that question, if that is all right with you.

THE CHAIR: Sure.

Dr Watson: Shall I talk to that now? I would like to talk to that when I make some comments on my submission. Would that be better?

THE CHAIR: Dr Watson, please go ahead and make your comments. You can talk to that after your comments.

Dr Watson: It is good to see this committee taking up the public transport cudgels and particularly using this document which was published in 2004 on a sustainable transport plan. It is really sad that one has to report that nothing much has happened since then. The drastic cuts in the budget last year put paid to this concept of sustainability and any increase in usage of public transport. As my colleague has said, the opposite has happened: people have become more disillusioned.

I started my submission with Professor Stewart saying that public transport, even across Australia, is seen as a form of punishment, which is this sad. All the economists I read in the paper—Rosslyn Beeby and a whole range of people, including the University of Canberra and so on—say that public transport is seen as the pits for poor students and that as we get older we don't drive. It is relegated to those categories. I don't travel much at peak hours now that I have retired. At ordinary hours you hardly see office workers or the general bulk of the public; it is all just students or poorer types of people. I don't like to classify people but the bulk of the public is not there. According to the statistics, only a few per cent of trips are made by public transport.

First of all, carrying on from COTA, I will concentrate on what my colleague has said. The hourly services that came, by and large, to suburbs from last December have made it very difficult. We older people, for instance, are often going across town. I go to a lot of doctors at Deakin from Latham. It is anything from 1½ to 2 hours each way, juggling times, and invariably your off-peak card won't work. I could not use my off-peak card; I had to leave before 9 am to get here. I have to get some stitches out next week at Deakin at quarter past nine and I will have to leave home at about 8 am to get there. I will probably say to my wife, "Look, let me use our car today." I have to go at peak hours to the jolly Glenloch interchange in order to get to Deakin by quarter past nine. It is a real business. The long time trips are the problem. In addition to my submission I say that perhaps the weakest link is frequency. I have had to travel at odd times during peak hours and I realise now what is jeopardising the use of public transport: the time taken at peak hours as we are getting gridlocks on various roads.

I had to pick up my son over the weekend from the airport. There is a de facto town centre, all the business buildings, the retail depot and big new buildings, and I was horrified. A huge de facto town centre was allowed to be built there without any public transport provision. Unfortunately everybody is at fault here. This was allowed to happen under the commonwealth government. Where was the NCA when all this building was allowed to take place and is still taking place?

I notice that the NCA head—I am not knocking her—got an Australia Day honour, a Queen’s birthday honour. Where is the professionalism with our own ACTPLA? They may have been jumping up and down, but, by the same token, they have allowed a huge retail centre to start at Fyshwick. We know in this town—the columnists are writing this—that ACTPLA, let alone ACTION, is really down on a number of good policy professional areas. They are emasculated.

I have been living here for a while. In the old NCDC days—I know they still built this town around the car—they had a good body of quality professional planners from all over the world. They were wonderful people, but they are not there now. At least they kept the philosophy of quality town centre nodes—Belconnen and Woden, particularly. Tuggeranong has not got many big office buildings and Gungahlin has none. So that has been thrown out the window. We now read that even the property council is talking about the concentration of activity in Civic. In the next couple of years they say that there are going to be extra thousands working in Civic. Just imagine what Belconnen Way and Northbourne Avenue are going to be like.

People are disillusioned. They will say, “I won’t use a bus because it will be caught in gridlock.” Why would they get in a bus that is going to take half an hour from Belconnen town centre to Civic—and they have to get there from the suburbs, for a start. It takes people terrifically long times to get from their suburb into Civic—let alone if they have to get across to Woden or Tuggeranong. No wonder there is disillusionment around this community.

I noticed that an editorial in the *Sunday Canberra Times* said, “Until such time as a superior public transport system is introduced there has been ongoing debate about the role of the car. A superior public transport system is currently a pipe dream.” That is true. I bet very few people ring you up as reps and say, “Let’s spend money on improving the public transport system,” because there is no genuine intellectual feeling in this town to improve it. We are in a very bad impasse.

Getting on to the sustainability question, Mr Chairman, you said that there has to be an ACT government climate change strategy. We are yet to see the details, unfortunately. Roslyn Beeby cast aspersions on that one that the emperor has no clothes. And there is an element of truth in that. Here we are, we have dwindling fossil fuel supplies and we are past our peak in oil—a few ups and downs. The price of oil and gas is going to be going up like that. It already has, of course, and will in the future. Now we have climatic warming and all major parties are now talking about how we are going to lower carbon emissions to cut climate warming.

I could not get any data for this submission. I went to the conservation council and said, “What does the average person in the ACT use for fuel? What proportion of our

carbon is via the passenger car?" Trish Harrup said that she thought it was about a quarter. I read a document in the *Canberra Times* which said that a typical English family is using up to a half for travel. This is a real problem.

I hope this committee will be able to find out what the average person is using in carbon via their car here in the ACT, and then find out how that could be cut for each of us—let alone the total emissions of the ACT—if we had a big proportion using public transport. This committee in its recommendations can say to the government, "Big money needs to be spent on this so that we can lower our per capita and total ACT emissions," a big percentage of which is obviously coming from the private car, because that is how most of us get around.

Heaven knows, now we are short water. There is plenty of data on water. Actew are publishing every week what we are using and what the targets are. What about targets for carbon from public transport?

THE CHAIR: Dr Watson, thanks very much for that.

Dr Watson: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Dr Watson, I advise you, first, that this committee has now opened an inquiry into water use in the ACT. We look forward to a submission from you on that.

Dr Watson: Good, right.

THE CHAIR: I refer to your comments on carbon emissions by cars in the ACT. The ACT government has made a submission to the committee, which is on the web and which estimates carbon use by cars.

Dr Watson: Good.

THE CHAIR: You talked about public interest in transport and said that not many people seemed interested in the sustainable transport plan. This inquiry, which has been very busy, has received 65 submissions. I think that shows quite a bit of interest from the community, which is good to see.

Dr Watson: Good.

MS PORTER: Dr Watson, you referred to the possibility of gridlock on the major roads into Civic, with the expansion of Civic.

Dr Watson: Yes.

MS PORTER: You seemed to be advocating or supporting dedicated transitways for public transport.

Dr Watson: Indeed.

MS PORTER: Are you in support of those?

Dr Watson: Yes. I thought immediately we could have buses on the major gridlocked roads. It is a pleasure to go from Civic to Woden because there are bus lanes for two-thirds of the way. Elsewhere there is nothing much, only the odd bus lane here and there. We could have an immediate bus lane to the Belconnen interchange, along Northbourne Avenue, or elsewhere around town, and the buses trip the lights. At the moment hardly any of the one dozen lights between Civic and the Belconnen interchange are tripped by buses. With a bus lane that would be marvellous. We really have to get on the drawing board and look for ACT and federal money to put in light railways or other separate busways. Money for that could be coming from the federal and ACT governments.

THE CHAIR: Do you think the idea of transit corridors and the commencement of busways with a view to light rail or something afterwards is the way to go?

Dr Watson: Yes, I think that is a good idea. Unfortunately, we were ambivalent about that at Belconnen because we lost all that land and vegetation with the Gungahlin freeway. As a land care person I was worried about the loss of more vegetation. The busways or transit lanes could go along the edge of existing roadways.

THE CHAIR: We have run out of time. Dr Watson, thank you again for appearing before the committee. We will get a copy of the transcript to you as soon as possible, and the report when it is finalised.

BAYLISS, Mr VIC, retiree

THE CHAIR: The committee has authorised the recording, broadcasting and re-broadcasting of these proceedings in accordance with the rules contained in the resolution agreed by the Assembly on 7 March 2002 concerning the broadcasting of Assembly and committee proceedings. Before the committee commences taking evidence I place on the record that all witnesses are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to submissions made to the committee in evidence given before it. Parliamentary privilege means that special rights and immunities attach to parliament, its members and others necessary to the discharge of functions of the Assembly without obstruction and without fear of prosecution.

While the committee prefers to hear all evidence in public, if it accedes to such a request it will take evidence in camera and record that evidence. Should the committee take evidence in this manner, I remind committee members and those present that it is within the power of the committee at a later date to publish or present all or part of the evidence to the Assembly. I should add that any decision regarding the publication of in-camera evidence or confidential submissions will not be taken by the committee without prior reference to the person whose evidence the committee may consider publishing.

Thank you, Mr Bayliss, for appearing before the committee. Would you like to make an opening presentation to the committee?

Mr Bayliss: Basically, my submission states most of what I would like to say. I would like to expand upon my submission, although I would much prefer to be asked questions about it.

THE CHAIR: Sure.

Mr Bayliss: Last night, when I was going to a meeting about water, an interesting thing happened concerning buses. I got to my bus stop five or six minutes early but there was no bus. I waited for about 20 minutes and still there was no bus. When I got home I rang up and was told that the bus had run on its scheduled route. I asked whether it had run early or late but they could not, or would not, tell me. As that is not unusual it is one of the major points I made in my submission. I thought I would like to add it at the beginning of my submission.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Bayliss. On what route was that?

Mr Bayliss: It was route 62, on the way to Woden from Tuggeranong. This occurred at Kambah shopping centre.

THE CHAIR: What time would that have been?

Mr Bayliss: This was the 6.08 pm bus. It was due at Kambah at 6.08 pm.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. Mr Bayliss, do you have any other comments before we ask questions?

Mr Bayliss: Basically, I would like to expand on what I have said in my submission. Near the end of my submission I encapsulated the most important measures. Strangely enough, I listed as very important the issue I just mentioned—increasing the frequency of buses on most routes. I also included improving the reliability of services, keeping to scheduled times and bringing on the minibuses. I have added a couple of things that were not in the submission. With regard to point 5, you might know that, since last July, there have been free bus trips for all aged pensioners in the United Kingdom 24 hours a day.

MS PORTER: Excuse me, Mr Bayliss, did you say free bus trips?

Mr Bayliss: Yes, free bus trips within the county. For instance, if you live in Devonshire you can catch any bus anywhere in Devonshire to anywhere else and back for nothing.

MS PORTER: Right.

Mr Bayliss: You can also go to the next county provided that bus service returns.

MS PORTER: Yes, I see.

Mr Bayliss: It is totally free all day, which I think is a good idea. That brings me to another point. I think that more bus usage results in better outcomes for businesses in the area. Even though an aged pensioner does not have a lot of money to spare, he would not go out for no reason. In other words, he wants to go out either to buy something or to see somebody. So money is spent, even if it is not spent on bus fares—a point that is often overlooked. It might cost more to run frequent bus services, but it generates additional money in the community.

The only other thing I added is the real lack of understanding of how a poor bus service impacts upon pensioners. As a pensioner I can verify that. This morning, if I had wanted to get a cheap fare, I would have had to wait until 10 o'clock. The bus that I caught arrived six minutes before 9 o'clock, so I had to pay full fare. Even in that area not enough thought has gone into this issue. Basically, that is all I can add to my submission.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Bayliss. Do you have any thoughts on a light rail system, or the busways that were discussed earlier today?

Mr Bayliss: Light rail sounds good but it would be expensive. The O-Bahn in Adelaide is expensive. It is good and fast and it gets people from A to B very quickly. It is a good idea if you can afford it. I put a lot of other things in my submission that are much more important than worrying several years hence about these issues. I think light rail should come eventually when you can afford it.

MR SESELJA: Mr Bayliss, COTA representatives appeared before us and spoke about price issues. You identified that by stating that you could not utilise your seniors card at peak times. Would a change in policy enabling seniors cards to be used all day make a significant difference to you?

Mr Bayliss: I am glad that you asked that question in the way you did by mentioning the seniors card. Often, and this relates not just to bus services, people talk about seniors cards. You can have a lot of money and still get a seniors card. Those who are far more disadvantaged—aged pensioners or people on an Australian aged pension—cannot afford a lot of other things. I am sorry; I have lost the gist of your question.

MR SESELJA: You spoke about the difficulty of having to wait until a certain time to get a cheap fare.

Mr Bayliss: Yes.

MR SESELJA: If a seniors card or pensioners' discount applied all day would that make a big difference to you?

Mr Bayliss: It would. I emphasise that it should apply only to aged pensioners, which would mean you would not have to give cheap fares to everybody with a seniors card, as such, but only to aged pensioners. They have a card and I have an aged pensioner's card and all I have to show is that. As I said earlier, you do not have to be penniless to get a seniors card. So that difference could be made if you are thinking about the money side of things.

THE CHAIR: Mr Bayliss, the fourth item in your presentation refers to feeder buses. You suggested that they would not run on a set timetable but would be frequent and possibly circular in route, crossing over main highways with express routes bisecting. Do you think buses would still need to have time lines so that people like you could expect them at a certain time?

Mr Bayliss: I have not given this a hell of a lot of thought because it is quite involved, as you can imagine. If you had a feeder bus, a small bus without a specific timetable that took, shall we say, anything up to eight or 10 passengers that kept going round and round picking up passengers and dropping them off on arterial roads, as I call them, to be picked up by mainstream traffic, I believe that would be a much better way to go.

THE CHAIR: So you would envisage them as a non-stop service?

Mr Bayliss: In a sense, rather like the London Underground—buses that literally just kept on going. I know that buses in London have a timetable. Under the old London Passenger Transport Board buses frequently operated on smaller busy routes. I recall one in particular with a 22-minute run which covered four major railway stations. Often in the rush hour you would find four buses all together in a line. They could not possibly keep to a timetable. That occurred between 7.00 am and 9.00 am and usually between 3.30 pm and 5.30 pm or 6.00 pm.

Although this bus had a timetable most of the time it never kept to it. There literally used to be three or four buses in a row waiting at the station: the first one full, the second one full, the third one half full and the fourth one empty. Timetables are useful only on longer trips. With the feeder bus idea I would not have a timetable. People would wait as long as they knew that the buses would be five, 10 or 15 minutes late at the most.

MS PORTER: Mr Bayliss, I have asked other witnesses this question. Given that this is the most expensive bus system in the whole of Australia at the moment, how would taxpayers bear the cost of a public system? I cannot imagine that people would be comfortable with fares going up, or do you believe that they would be comfortable with fare increases so that we could pay for the services you have described?

Mr Bayliss: That is a difficult question. On the one hand, people who can afford it would pay, so I do not really envisage any problems. When most people go shopping they do not look at prices anyhow so what would be different with buses? On the other hand, with pensioners the opposite would occur. If pensioners got free transport I would not envisage problems with fares going up, provided the service was very good. The service would have to be good. I think I referred somewhere in my submission to route 62. Not so many years ago it was a 20-minute service. It then extended to a 30-minute service, then to a 40-minute service and now it is a 60-minute service.

If what happened last night occurred again, people would have a one-hour or two-hour wait. People with cars would not wait one or two hours for a bus; they would get into their cars. So it is really counterproductive not to have a good bus service. Nobody likes to pay more for something. If pensioners travelled free on buses or they paid \$1 for services 24 hours a day, those who are earning money would not really mind the bus fares going up. They might say that they do not want bus fares to go up but they would still pay those fares provided they could catch buses frequently.

MS PORTER: Mr Bayliss, are you suggesting that people who normally catch buses during peak hours—and that applies mostly to people going to paid work—would be willing to subsidise others such as pensioners who used buses during the day? Sometimes those buses do not run to capacity and carry only half a dozen people, but they would be subsidised by people catching buses during peak times when they run more frequently and usually are quite full. Some people complain that there are too many people on buses at those times.

Mr Bayliss: Nobody is willing to pay extra for anything but, having said that, I am sure they would pay. Again, this crosses the line with my suggestion about minibuses. You might be able to fill a minibus. Nearly every time I go out in the evening there are never more than about two or three people on the bus either way. I have had an argument with several former chief executive officers. They say it is just as expensive to run a small bus as it is to run a big bus. I would like to hear your opinions on that.

Taking it to the other extreme, if you bought a car that seated five people would it cost more to run that car than it would cost to run one of our buses? I do not know what they would cost. I am not a betting man but I would bet everything I have that it would not cost anything remotely approaching that—perhaps only 10 per cent. The only thing that would remain the same would be the cost of the driver. Everything else would be cheaper—the parts, the servicing and the tyres—but the driver would cost the same.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Bayliss. Your submission deals simply with buses and with ACTION services. You said earlier that you really did not have much to say

about busways or transitways. Have you had a look at the sustainable transport plan and do you have any comments?

Mr Bayliss: I have briefly. Again it comes down to what I said at the beginning of my submission. I always tend to look at the simple things because I find that they always work. I always found that in business. What is simple about a huge book such as this one that I have which has diagrams, pictures, information, ideas and roles? If you want my honest opinion, this is not necessary. People make things as difficult as they can and then they look at it, whereas they should start at the ground, think simply and work up. You can then make decisions relatively easily and people will understand those decisions if they are simple.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Mr Bayliss: But you cannot expect everybody to have a high IQ.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing before the committee, Mr Bayliss. We will provide you with a copy of the transcript as soon as we can and send you a link to the report when it is available.

Short adjournment

HARGREAVES, MR JOHN, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services
ZISSLER, MR MIKE, Chief Executive, Department of Territory and Municipal Services

TARDIF, MR PHILLIP, Executive Director, Department of Territory and Municipal Services

ELLIOTT, MR TOM, General Manager, ACTION

MacDONALD, MR BRIAN, Business Manager, ACTION

THE CHAIR: I welcome the Minister and officials from TAMS and ACTION to the hearing of the planning and environment committee into ACTION buses and the sustainable transport plan. Before we begin I will read the privileges card.

The committee has authorised the recording, broadcasting and re-broadcasting of these proceedings in accordance with the rules contained in the resolution agreed by the Assembly on 7 March 2002 concerning the broadcasting of Assembly and committee proceedings.

Before the committee commences taking evidence I place on the record that all witnesses are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to submissions made to the committee in evidence given before it. Parliamentary privilege means special rights and immunities attach to parliament, its members and others necessary to the discharge of functions of the Assembly without obstruction and without fear of prosecution.

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Minister, would you like to begin with an opening statement?

Mr Hargreaves: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman. Good morning to you, to committee members, and to the delightful committee secretary. It is lovely to be here. I have been looking forward to this occasion for some time. It is a highlight on Friday that cannot be matched, so I might go home when we have finished.

MS PORTER: It is certainly our highlight, minister.

Mr Hargreaves: I welcome the shadow minister for transport. The government welcomes the opportunity to address this inquiry or any process that attempts to provide a better and more reliable bus service in the future. For over 80 years ACTION has provided a core service to the community. It now provides over 17 million passenger trips each year for our citizens, operating 16 hours on most days. Patronage has continued to grow—about 4.2 per cent over 2005-06—but the targets that have been set under the sustainable transport plan are very challenging.

Without effective plans and strategies that focus on the customer first, the targets under the plan will not continue to be met. The government understands the importance of an efficient bus service to the community and the role that it can play in providing people with access to employment, goods and services, and opportunities for social and cultural interaction. In saying that, I acknowledge that recent reductions in the service have resulted in a significant negative response from the community.

This financial year has been very difficult for the travelling public and for ACTION staff. The service changes were a response to funding reductions based on the fact that ACTION can and should be more efficient. Changes made to the ACTION network in December 2006 focused on the less patronised off-peak services. For example, prior to Network 06 and between 6.00 am and 7.00 am at the weekends the lowest 88 patronised services carried a total of approximately 29 passengers. Seventy-four of those services had nobody on them, or nil patronage.

I want to address the terms of reference and to make some broad comments about the government's submission. However, before I do so I must put this point on the record. When we refer to statistics in the submission about the way in which members of the community view ACTION and its services we find that they are saying that they have confidence in the service, that they like the service, and that they enjoy the increased patronage. However, they are complaining that there are not enough good services on the roads for them to use. It must be understood that this is a very good system, but community members are complaining because they are not getting enough good services.

The committee's terms of reference talk about how well ACTION meets the needs of the community. ACTION provides regular route services to and from all suburbs, as well as dedicated school services for students at primary and secondary schools. ACTION provides special needs transport services for clients of the Department of Education and the Department of Health. ACTION provides chartered bus services for schools, sporting associations, conferences and territory events.

As I said earlier, in 2005-06 ACTION had over 17 million passenger boardings and operated over 23.4 million kilometres, and it provided 2,219 service trips per week day. The size of the area ACTION is required to service is challenging, particularly because of low population density and large distances between town centres. On average ACTION carries 0.7 passengers per kilometre travelled, compared to around 1.2 passengers in other jurisdictions. I would like to table a document that is already in the submission but as it is so small you do not get the full picture. This really is just an enhanced picture.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Hargreaves: This overlay of the ACTION area and the suburbs of Canberra can be found on page 15 of the submission. The overlay, which covers the greater part of the metropolitan area of Sydney, excluding the west, goes from Hornsby to Sutherland. Sydney has a population of about 4.5 million—we are looking at about three million in that overlay—and the ACT has 330,000 people. When we make comparisons with any bus operators in that area we must take into account that they have rail, ferries, and all manner of other forms of transport.

It is difficult to compare the distances travelled and the population catchments in Canberra with the distances travelled and the population catchments in Sydney. At this point I congratulate ACTION on providing an extensive service in that area. Patronage, in particular by adult passengers, has grown over the past 12 months or so. However, that patronage is showing signs of levelling out. In a recent departmental survey, 71 per cent of passengers indicated that overall they were satisfied with ACTION's service. Passengers also expressed a high 88 per cent satisfaction level with ACTION drivers. Those statistics are to be found on pages 19 and 20 of the report.

While ACTION is broadly meeting the needs of its customers, a recent survey shows that only 49 per cent of passengers were satisfied with current timetables. Those three statistics back up what I said a minute ago—the general public are dissatisfied with the amount of services they are receiving; not the quality of services on the road. They are particularly happy with our drivers, our buses and the fares, but they are not happy because buses do not turn up in their streets.

Peak commuter and school student service levels are constrained by the size of the fleet and the number of drivers that ACTION has available, and off-peak services are limited by the total budget available to offer frequent services to support suburban areas. The overall route design for Canberra that operates today was developed in 1998—10 years ago—as part of the Graham review of ACTION's services. So any comments about the Graham review must be taken in that context. In fact, no elected member in this room was in this chamber 10 years ago.

Since that time there have been incremental changes to the ACTION network. It is now time to conduct another comprehensive review of the network to optimise connectivity and efficiency. The government is committed to the provision of an accessible public transport system for people with a disability. To date, 25 per cent of the ACTION fleet is accessible and, over the next five years, we aim to have 55 per cent of the fleet accessible. In line with the increase in the accessible fleet we will also increase the number of routes that are accessible.

On a comparative analysis, all public transport services in Australia are struggling to cope with demand. That demand is generated by increasing fuel prices. A conscious effort must be made by governments to target investment in public transport infrastructure and services to respond appropriately to this demand. Passenger and staff safety and transport security are a consistent theme of any transport service. Members would be aware from media reports, for example, that Sydney Buses continues to experience problems with rocks being thrown at its buses in certain suburbs. While our experience is not as bad, we have taken steps to improve security across the board on buses and at interchanges. In fact, next week a police media event will target that issue.

Let me compare ACTION's benchmarks, its costs and revenues with the statistics of other public and private sector metropolitan bus operators in Australia. Between 2003-04 and 2005-06 the benchmark report shows that ACTION's costs increased by 14 per cent, but the fare box revenue remained relatively stable. Dead running increased marginally to 23.2 per cent of total kilometres travelled—one of the issues

that we are tackling—and fuel increased by 26.2 per cent. The benchmark shows that, on a comparative basis, other capital city bus operators, if operating in Canberra, for example, could run the bus service at a lower cost, with the exception of New South Wales and Darwin public bus operators.

On these benchmarks, Brisbane's public bus operator, if operating here, could deliver the service for around \$11 million less than ACTION. These statistics are to be found in table 4 on page 32 of the submission. ACTION drivers have a higher level of non-productive time than best practice operators, which costs around \$3 million a year more than best practice operators. As I mentioned earlier, ACTION also incurs higher levels of dead running—that is, empty buses coming from or returning to a depot—than its best practice private operator counterparts, and this costs around \$2.6 million a year based on private sector pay rates. For reference, that can be found on page 30 of the submission.

The percentage of ACTION's costs recovered through fares is very low, as can be seen on page 35 of the submission. With reference to labour costs, the current process of negotiating the ACTION collective workplace agreement demonstrates that entrenched work practices provide barriers to better services. Additional productive work practices would mean more and better services for the community. The government remains positive about an agreement without industrial action in the next few months and it remains committed to workplace reform through the life of the new agreement. The benchmarks also show the increasing age of the ACTION fleet relative to other jurisdictions.

In relation to the sustainable transport plan, the plan provides a framework that positively supports the growth of public transport and aspirational targets for public transport usage; for example, a shift to 16 per cent of trips to work by public transport by 2026. The majority of the STP and its targets are not about ACTION but the measures and initiatives are proposed to have an effect on ACTION's patronage. The primary target for ACTION is monthly adult patronage. The plan's target for 2006-07 is eight per cent, or 4,972,965 boardings. Adult journey-to-work trips for March 2007 were better than the target by 40,000 boardings, reflecting a growth in the journey-to-work market over the past few years.

Let us look at some of the principles and key priorities for future planning. The government has allocated \$16.5 million in the 2008 budget to replace the ticketing system, and \$8 million to replace around 16 of ACTION's ageing bus fleet and to complete the installation of security cameras on all ACTION buses. The current ticketing system is over 13 years old, its technology is outdated and it is becoming unreliable and difficult to maintain. Work has commenced on determining which of the available ticketing systems would best meet our needs.

Another significant piece of work is the development of a bus replacement strategy. The strategy will determine the optimal life of a bus in the Canberra environment; the number of buses that should be replaced each year, taking into account disability access commitments and whole-of-life maintenance costs; the brand of the bus to be purchased and the fuel to be used. It is expected that among other things the strategy will result in a regular number of buses being replaced each year. We will just have to wait and see how much that will cost. It will depend on the sorts of contracts we can

negotiate and whether or not we are talking about buses that are built predominantly in Australia.

A comprehensive service plan is being developed as the basis for a new bus network. The plan will be informed by counts at each and every bus stop to determine the number of passengers boarding and alighting, as well as passenger surveys to determine the origin and destination of the journeys to help us better understand the travel needs of customers. Community consultation at each stage of the planning process will help to ensure that the new network delivers the services the community needs. Work is being completed to reduce the level of dead running in the network.

It may be necessary to invest in additional infrastructure. Sites under consideration include the use of the old Woden bus depot and a new site in Gungahlin or Mitchell. Over the longer term the government will invest in infrastructure and bus priority measures that will improve bus travel time relative to the private car. However, in the first instance we must provide the fundamentals that will attract people to public transport. These include bus services that run at times and go to places to which people wish to travel, a bus network that is reliable and accessible, and buses that are accessible and comfortable.

I refer to the guiding principles that will assist the government in delivering improvements to ACTION. Firstly, we must recognise that ACTION is about moving people. ACTION is a mass passenger service that has as its primary function the moving of people. ACTION is not a great big yellow taxi that picks people up at their doors; it is a mass passenger service. I think that the ACT community must come to grips with that point. Secondly, the complexities of public transport delivery include policy and infrastructure developments that underpin better transporting outcomes. Thirdly, the integration of strategic planning and policy infrastructure, like roads, interchanges and passenger services will result in improved services and better value for money for the community. Fourthly, there is a need for structured investment and a deliberate focus on ACTION's inefficient areas.

In conclusion, I acknowledge the significant community response and the effort undertaken by so many individuals and organisations in making submissions to this inquiry. I also take this opportunity publicly to express appreciation to those members of the public who, in times of difficulty, shared their experiences with ACTION management to enable things to be adjusted. I also express appreciation to those ACTION staff members who took calls from people who were less than satisfied. I recognise that they have done an extraordinary and brilliant job. In most instances they had one-on-one conversations with people who were extremely irate. I am happy to answer any questions that committee members wish to ask.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. I begin by referring to the new map of comparative areas that you have provided to us.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

THE CHAIR: You referred in your submission to comparative data in the New South Wales transport system.

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Chairman, can you refer me to a page number?

THE CHAIR: Go to page 32 which refers to your index on comparative studies. As I said, your submission refers to comparative data in the New South Wales transport system. You said earlier that most service standards in the ACT are met.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Why are we comparing our system with the system in New South Wales when, as you explained today, New South Wales has vastly different transport resources and needs?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, sure, Mr Chairman. You will notice on page 32 a number of places with which we have done comparisons—Melbourne, Tasmania, private and public transport in two areas of Sydney, Newcastle, Canberra, Brisbane, Adelaide, Darwin and Perth. Basically, we have done a cross-city capital sweep. I have given you this map to point out the dangers of anybody picking up statistics and saying that, compared to Sydney, we are doing pretty ordinary work.

I referred earlier to the Brisbane example. Brisbane's public bus operator said that if we undertook that process and implemented it in Canberra it could be done for \$11 million less, which might well be so. I also referred earlier to Perth. Perth City Council, for example, has a free central area transit, or CAT, service which goes around certain parts of the city, but Perth City Council has a geographic area of about one square kilometre. Perth City Council has so much money coming from ratepayers in the CBD that it does not know what to do with it all. Perth City Council does not struggle for cash, as we do.

It is easy to put a free bus service around one square kilometre of council area but it is difficult to do that in an area the size of the ACT. These are the comparisons that people will make to prove that our service is inefficient. I do not think our service is as inefficient as it is being portrayed by some people. There is room for improvement, and industrial work practices must seriously be reviewed but, at the end of the day, people in the community like the ACTION bus service and they like its drivers. The biggest complaint that they have is that not enough ACTION buses are available on the roads.

THE CHAIR: Just continuing with the data and the comparative analysis, the data in your submission is from 2003-04.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Is there a more modern comparison that we can do?

Mr Hargreaves: There are two things that we can do. In a moment I will get Tom Elliott to identify himself and to give you some details. Essentially, we are moving forward to address the provision of services for people in Canberra. We are redesigning the network, we are doing surveys, we are working on the benchmarks and we are updating information. However, the analysis I provided to you is the most recent analysis. I will get Tom Elliott, acting general manager, to tell you everything

that you want to know.

Mr Elliott: The benchmark data that you see before you, which is for 2003-04, has been updated. The company that undertakes the benchmark on behalf of bus operators around Australia—about 65 people are benchmarked—does a new benchmark and updates information on request. What you are seeing in front of you is 2003-04 data indexed to 2005-06. We could not do it to 2006-07 because we are not at the end of the financial year. However, I guess that the intent would be to update that benchmark annually. There is a two-year gap here. What you are seeing in the report is 2003-04 data indexed to 2005-06. So that data is not three or four years old; it is the last financial year of data that we have available.

Mr MacDonald: I would like to correct my general manager. I gave him some information this morning which he has obviously misinterpreted. At the moment we are having some figures and benchmarking updated. That report is not quite ready. The figures here are for 2003-04. There is confusion because work is being done right now. We have a draft report with us but it has not as yet been settled. That will be available shortly. So I apologise to you, Tom, for not explaining that properly this morning when I was talking to you. These figures are for 2003-04. Work is being done right now to update those figures.

Mr Elliott: I apologise, Mr Chairman and committee members. I guess we are in the process of doing that benchmark. I believed that the information we had in front of us reflected the most current figures, and it is in fact the most current figures. One of the difficult processes we have to undertake is to take account of data we have and then run it back through our own information systems. I guess that the process is fairly arduous. With regard to that, we can stand on the information that is in the report and guarantee that the indices are accurate. We can update this information as soon as the final report is available and we can make the full benchmark report available for the committee as soon as it has been cleared.

Mr Hargreaves: Before the issuing of the full benchmark report the committee must understand that Mr Elliott is talking about clearance. IMDEC, the only company that does this benchmarking, has a copyright modelling system that it uses across all areas. All bus operators have to give approval for information to be released, because the operation of their bus services is commercially sensitive. If any of their information is published and put in the public arena, they will no longer participate in the system and the model will become flawed.

It is quite possible for IMDEC to say, “No, we will not clear the report for publication in its entirety because of those sensitivities.” However, I am quite happy to extract the comparative updated data that applies in the report. I am quite happy to release anything in the report that does not compromise the business operations of people contributing to that data set.

THE CHAIR: The committee is due to report to the Assembly by the end of August. Do you think we will see some updated figures by then?

Mr Elliott: Yes, I believe it could be finished by then but we would just need to have a look at it. In fact, we have asked the company to customise the report so that it does

not infringe any commercial in-confidence data that it has, particularly with private sector bus companies. Generally speaking, public transport operators are willing to share but private sector transport operators are not so willing to share. I guess that the company has to protect the commercial in-confidence data of private bus operators.

It is very useful data because it gives us a comparison at a number of levels of how well we are going, the areas in which we need to improve efficiency, and it helps us to focus our strategies on getting the best value for money out of our bus service at the end of the day. It is important work to do and it is important to read the data, understand it, and focus on key areas of improvement.

Mr Hargreaves: Let me make it quite clear to the committee that between now and the end of the year there are three elements to the revitalisation of the network. The first element is the surveys, which are about to commence. They relate not so much to passenger satisfaction and that sort of stuff but to travel behaviour. People who use public transport and those who do not must tell us about their travelling behaviour. That survey information will be added to the benchmarking information, the matter about which we are talking now, and that will inform the network design.

We hope to be able to provide the committee with updated figures but I cannot promise that at the moment because we are dependent on IMDEC finishing the exercise. I hope that we can provide those figures between now and the time that the committee is required to report. However, at that point we might not have an opportunity to digest it or to compare the benchmarking and survey information; we will probably only be starting that exercise because the survey information that is returned to us might not necessarily have been completed by that time.

MR SESELJA: Minister, in our earlier public hearings we heard from the TWU, which was quite critical of one issue. As you would know, it has experienced a lot of changes and I would like to touch on a number of issues that it raised. It described the network as the worst in 30 years. In fact, I think it said that it was not a network, or words to that effect. Is that just hyperbole on the part of the TWU, or do serious Network 06 issues still need to be addressed?

Mr Hargreaves: I think you are right on both counts, Mr Seselja.

MR SESELJA: It is hyperbole and serious issues need to be addressed?

Mr Hargreaves: Correct. It is hyperbole—the sort of hyperbole I am sure you would have used if you were trying to negotiate an AWA. It is certainly the hyperbole I would use if I were trying to participate in a collective bargaining agreement, and therein lies the difference between the pair of us.

MR SESELJA: One of us.

Mr Hargreaves: Some time ago I recognised publicly the difficulties concerning Network 06. Essentially, there are a number of reasons why Network 06 presented a number of difficulties. First, there was general agreement that the service was not as efficient as it could be, to the tune of about \$3 million or more, and that money was withdrawn from the authority. We addressed those inefficiencies in the following

manner. The first casualty was the authority itself, which was abolished.

We then looked at back-end services, administrative systems and staff, and those services and staff members were pruned. I say a big thank you to administrative staff in ACTION for all the effort they put into streamlining and changing things. At the end of the day we did not have enough so we looked at other inefficiencies in the service. A number of inefficiencies spring to mind very quickly; for example, 23 per cent dead running, which is not acceptable. It might well be that the way to solve that would be to address the lack of the take-up of services.

I said in my opening address that between 6.00 am and 7.00 am at the weekends the lowest 88 patronised services carried a total of approximately 29 passengers. Seventy-four of those services had nobody on them, or nil patronage, which is inefficient by anybody's standards. The minute we remove those services we will save some money but those 29 passengers will complain about it, and with some justification. However, we are obliged to look at those inefficiencies. We then looked at work practices to see whether or not they contributed to those inefficiencies.

MR SESELJA: You mentioned those earlier. Have you identified some that need changing and do you want to share some of them with us?

Mr Hargreaves: I have identified some of them but at this point I do not want to share them with you, Mr Seselja. I do not want to do that at the moment because we are in discussions with the Transport Workers Union and the AMWU about enterprise bargaining agreements. An enormous amount of goodwill has been brought to the table by bus drivers, by the guys in the workshops, and by drivers in the special needs transport area. I have no intention of putting on the public record the subject of our discussions and conversations with those folks to enable others to make a judgement at this point. I merely want the general public to acknowledge, as I do, the goodwill that has been brought to the table by bus drivers.

MR SESELJA: They are putting their concerns on the record.

Mr Hargreaves: They are entitled to put their concerns on the record in whatever detail they like. I have explained to the committee that we must take a good hard look at some work practices. I undertake to continue to look at work practices, systems, rolling stock et cetera between now and the end of the year to ensure that the system is not only efficient but also attractive for people to use. If you like, we can drill down to the detail of all that, but I will not reveal the subject of conversations in an industrial bargaining environment. That would be tantamount to revealing negotiations in the award of a tender for the purchase of goods or services, and I do not propose to do that either.

MS PORTER: Minister, my question relates to some statements that were made on pages 6 and 7 of the submission. The third paragraph states:

The Grants Commission has assessed that the ACT expends more on public transport than any other jurisdiction. The Commission considers that the higher than average level of expenditure is due either to higher than average service levels or to inefficiencies.

The final paragraph refers to empty buses returning to depot, a matter to which you referred earlier.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

MS PORTER: At the top of page 7 you talk about the need for changes to infrastructure and facilities as one way of reducing dead running costs.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

MS PORTER: Am I interpreting this correctly?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, you are, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Could you give us a bit more information or point us to where information about changes to infrastructure and facilities can be found in the submission? What changes will alleviate costs?

Mr Hargreaves: We have not put that information in the submission, Ms Porter. We deliberately prepared the submission in such a way that it would not result in the committee coming to any conclusion. We just put the bald facts before the committee but I am happy to address those issues by responding to the submission. If we put that information in the submission it might have invited congratulations or criticism, so we just put the bald facts before you, but we would welcome any judgments that you might make.

You referred earlier to dead running. Let me refer to the following scenario: if a bus driver drives to work, parks his car at the Tuggeranong depot, does his shift and concludes his shift in Spence, that bus will then run empty down the Parkway to Tuggeranong so he can pick up his car and go home. We have a lot of that. We are not talking about a bus driving empty through the suburbs; we are talking about a bus that is returning to a depot or going to a depot. Perhaps some of that can be resolved by a network change. Remember though that, as a result of our infrastructure, we have depots only at Tuggeranong and Belconnen, so it is an either/or situation.

It is not easy in all cases to have a bus shift start and finish at the same depot, but we might well investigate the creation of another depot at Woden or another depot at Gungahlin or Mitchell. With the increase in the number of compressed natural gas buses we know that we need another fuelling point. So far as I know we have only one gas fuelling point and we need another. Instead of just saying, "We will just whack it in at Belconnen," we should consider creating a fuelling point at Mitchell or Gungahlin, or rejuvenating the old Woden depot. We are looking at the creation of another facility but we have not yet come to a conclusion. Examples of how we could do that include network changes, shift changes and infrastructure along the way.

THE CHAIR: Minister, you said earlier that one bus finished in Spence and it had to dead run all the way back.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Does that bus not need to return to Tuggeranong? I imagine it is the 315, my bus, which begins at Theodore and which has to come back to the other side of town to begin its run the next day.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, I do not dispute this at all. However, the bus is running empty from Spence to Tuggeranong and it is needed there. It is not just a case of letting the driver park the bus outside his house somewhere in Spence; it is a case of the bus having to return to the depot for its next run. You are right. The bus has to return for refuelling, detailing and all those sorts of things. The challenge is: does it need to return all the way to Tuggeranong? Can it return to Woden? Can it start and finish at Woden? If it started and finished at Woden perhaps its dead running distance would be halved. We will be addressing these questions, which are on our agenda, but we do not yet have an answer to them.

MS PORTER: I was interested in your earlier reference to gas. During your presentation you said that there had been a 22 per cent increase in costs. Will there be any reduction in costs with the new gas buses and alternative fuel buses coming into service?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes. Fuel costs for diesel have risen by 26 per cent. Everybody knows that diesel prices have rocketed over the past few years and all governments have suffered as a result. The additional revenue, or the allocations of resources for government operations and agencies dependent on fuel, has not kept pace with the increase in the price of diesel. One of the major reasons for the Gungahlin Drive extension cost blow-out was the 17 per cent increase in the price of diesel in an 18-month period—the same 18-month period in which the Save the Ridge people wanted to hold everything up. At the end of the day it cost more money.

We all know that compressed natural gas is a cheaper and cleaner fuel, but we have only a certain number of buses. Ultimately, our whole fleet will be the cleanest that we can get it. Diesel engines that are being developed overseas are a bit cleaner than some of the hybrids at the moment because the hybrids still rely on petrol. Some of the diesel engines are a bit better than that. At the moment we are happy with the CNG buses which are the best that we can get. All the buses that we will be buying with the \$8 million that the government gave us this year will be CNG-powered buses. The running costs and maintenance of those buses will be cheaper because they are brand new. The cost of fuel will be cheaper because it is a better fuel, but it will still cost us \$8 million. It still costs \$500,000 to buy a bus like that.

THE CHAIR: Minister, Mr Seselja referred earlier to the submission by the Transport Workers Union. In its presentation to the committee it raised strong concerns about the safety of staff and passengers. Have you done anything to alleviate any of those concerns?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes. There is something to that effect on pages 18 and 19 of the submission. You will notice, as usual, that when there are issues about public safety, hysteria can be whipped up pretty quickly. Safety at interchanges, on buses used by the travelling public, and for drivers and people at the interchange is of paramount concern. However, that has to be put into perspective. If you look at the graph on page

18 you will see that funding this year is slightly less than it was last year. We have implemented a number of initiatives. We have a formal relationship between ACTION management, the Transport Workers Union and police concerning strategies that must be employed at interchanges.

Response mechanisms are in place to ensure that police attend rather quickly. Just having the police station across the road from Woden is a good call. It does not take very long for Tuggeranong police to attend the Tuggeranong interchange. However, it is a little more difficult for Belconnen police because of the road system that they have to use. However, they do a great job. We are also installing CCTV cameras, in particular, on buses. By the end of this year all buses will be fitted with CCTV cameras. At one point it was our intention to install cameras on only 75 per cent of buses, but we accelerated that project and 100 per cent of buses will be fitted with cameras by the end of this year.

THE CHAIR: Do those cameras record on the bus or do they relay information directly back to base?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, they record on the bus. It should be remembered that buses also have an emergency response button, so whether the image goes back to base or it is recorded on the bus is immaterial; there is evidence available for prosecution. It is important that the bus driver receives assistance as quickly as possible and that is what the emergency button is about. Drivers also have a radio that they can use to talk to the interchange and, if necessary, they can request the police to meet them at the interchange or wherever a bus might be stopped.

Hitherto, because we did not have cameras on buses, we did not have sufficient evidence to conduct successful prosecutions as it might have been two or three people's word against the driver's word. But now that we have CCTV cameras on buses we hope that will act as a deterrent to those who are opportunistic in their behaviour.

THE CHAIR: Is there evidence that CCTV cameras have acted as a deterrent in the past?

Mr Hargreaves: When I was Minister for Police it was evident that we would not stop those people who were determined to commit some sort of crime. But those who wish to indulge in opportunistic crime are deterred by CCTV cameras. For example, they might sit on a bus and wait until there is a decent amount of money in the cash box and then they might try to do something about it. Usually they are opportunistic and they just wait.

High-profile prosecutions also result in a down surge of incidents. For example, an incident occurred recently at an interchange and the prosecution that ensued relied on images from the camera. We must use images that are available in the public arena to demonstrate to offenders that they will be successfully prosecuted. However, we must be careful as people should be presumed innocent before they are proven guilty. If we follow that course I am of the belief that some people will think twice before they go about their business.

CCTV cameras are not a panacea; they are just part of a suite of safety initiatives and should not be berated. Members would be aware that some people chuck rocks at buses, so we have installed hardened glass. Only a fair-size rock propelled by something other than a human being would penetrate the area where a bus driver sits. This government has implemented a suite of safety initiatives and training programs for staff at bus interchanges to ensure that they know how to cope with dangerous situations.

MR SESELJA: Minister, at the top of page 6 of the submission is a reference to 16.928 million passenger boardings in 2005-06.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

MR SESELJA: When TWU representatives spoke to us—you also touched on the problems being experienced with the ticketing system—I asked them how they knew how many passengers were boarding the buses when the ticketing system was not working all the time. They suggested that there is some guesswork. Are you able to extrapolate a little exactly how these figures are collated, given that we have an unreliable ticketing system at the moment?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes. I will get ACTION representatives to respond to that question but I will refer, first, to one scenario because I need to acknowledge that you are right. The ticketing system is so antiquated that we cannot get spare parts for it and when it goes down nobody pays for the trip. More importantly, in a sense, we do not count them.

MR SESELJA: So you do not count them or you do not estimate what the figures might be?

Mr Hargreaves: We cannot count passengers so we extrapolate figures. I will get ACTION representatives to tell you about that. The ticketing system should operate in such a way that it does not necessitate any extrapolation. There should be no guesswork about it but, clearly, the system is not reliable enough to ensure that. It does not give us enough information to justify or validate the figures. The figure that you see here is an underestimation of the people who are travelling on our buses. If the ticketing system goes down the passengers who are boarding the buses are not registered and the best we can do is to extrapolate figures.

The new ticketing system that we will be purchasing has a number of features to it. We are yet to get a supplier, but we are basing it on interstate experience. It is good enough to give us this sort of data and it will also tell us what sorts of people are travelling. When the time comes for us to put in real-time passenger information systems it will also interact with that. The current system does not do that. We now have a real-time passenger information system on our buses but we cannot properly activate it because of this bad ticketing system.

If my memory serves me correctly it will also have GPS capability. We will be able to track buses as they go along various routes. If buses experience any difficulties we will know exactly where they are; we will not have to guess their whereabouts. So it is a much more sophisticated system than the old system. I will get Tom Elliott to give

you some additional information.

Mr Elliott: Thanks, Minister. With regard to the accuracy of the data that we get from our ticketing system, without question the data you see has not been normalised; it is exactly what we get off the system. We are undertaking an audit which commenced in April this year to identify the exact variance. The variance would have an impact on our revenue figures and also on our patronage figures. You could assume that it might be anywhere up to 10 per cent based on the failure rate of consoles in our buses.

As part of the process of acquiring a new ticketing system we have been doing two things. First, we acquired new equipment from Darwin. Darwin used to use the same sort of system so we picked up some of its old equipment. It has moved on. In fact, it has moved backwards, but it has moved on. We acquired some of its old equipment and we now have some spare consoles.

We now have a process in place to try to improve our revenue and patronage data. If a console goes down or a part of a bus ticketing system goes down the driver radios ahead and we deliver a new console and pop it into the bus on the way. The most likely place for that to occur is at one of the interchanges. That is just a remedial measure to try to improve the accuracy of data that we are currently getting. But, without question, the data is inaccurate and we can record only what we get on the bus.

MR SESELJA: Can I confirm that that figure of 16.928 million is simply the figure that comes from the ticketing system? Any passengers boarding the buses when the ticketing system is down would be over and above that. So, rather than that being an estimate, when the system is down you know approximately how many people are likely to be on the bus?

Mr Elliott: Yes.

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Seselja, you were quite right in saying earlier that there would probably be missing passengers. Any extrapolation that we made would be scientific guesswork.

Mr Elliott: Ticketing systems are fairly sophisticated and they have two functions. The first is to give you some patronage data so you understand how many patrons and what sorts of patrons are utilising the bus system. That is its primary function. The second is to collect revenue. The adequacy of the current system is not too bad in comparison to some, but it is antiquated and it is failing and therefore it needs to be replaced. Fortunately we have some money in the budget to commence that process.

In other jurisdictions the ability of other public transport operators to provide reasonable ticketing is driven a lot by customer behaviour. For example, Yarra Trams in Melbourne estimated that the loss of revenue is about 40 to 50 per cent, not so much because it does not have an adequate ticketing system but because people just got used to not paying. If you are a visitor to that town and you jump on a tram you will see a lot of people not buying or utilising a ticket because they have got used to not doing so.

Customer behaviour is an important part of the implementation of a new ticketing

system. When we get to a product and a solution I think the process of implementation might take some time and some community feedback to establish how best we might do that.

Mr Hargreaves: I emphasise that we need a decent ticketing system, but we must also encourage people not to use cash. If we do not have an effective ticketing system they are not going to do that.

MR SESELJA: With this new ticketing system will we move towards a smart card or will that be something for the next generation?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes. It is that sort of technology. The tender invitation will canvass that type of stuff, yes.

Mr Elliott: There are four possible solutions that you could use—paper tickets, a magnetic stripe, RFID, which is similar to the thing that is used when you walk through a shop front door and it beeps at you, or a smart card. All the jurisdictions around Australia that are undertaking new ticketing system projects at the moment are moving towards smart card technology. I guess it should be noted that if ACTION proceeded down that path it would be the first smart card implementation in the territory and therefore would become a platform for other smart card utilisation for territory and government service provision.

Mr Hargreaves: I was going to make a point about cash fares. One of the big complaints is that buses are late on bus routes. The loading levels of people or the number of people on buses is a contributor to buses being late. Funnily enough, another contributor is the loading of bikes on front racks. It is not significant but it is a contributor. Another contributor is cash fares. If it takes 15, 20 or 30 seconds for every person getting on the bus to complete a cash transaction it enhances the chances of the bus being late. If passengers only have to walk onto a bus and swipe their ticket past a little red light the boardings are completed much more quickly and the departure time of the bus is enhanced.

THE CHAIR: Minister, you talked about the introduction of some of this new technology which would give you some real-time patronage figures.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Are you moving towards using that technology with the GPS that you referred to earlier to give any real-time displays either at interchanges or bus stops?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, absolutely, Mr Chairman. It is one of our aspirations in the sustainable transport plan. I have ruled it out in the next budget, or at least in the current budget. I need to clarify for the public record that I will not be taking that forward. However, that should not to be taken as a lack of commitment by me to the real-time passenger information system because that is not true. I am committed to that system but it has to come after we have a system that can support it.

I have seen the real-time passenger information systems in Auckland and in Melbourne, which are great and fabulous for the travelling public, but we must do two

things. First, we must clean up the service itself. People must have confidence in the service, and that confidence is not there at the moment. I must deliver that to the people of Canberra and I am hoping to do so before Christmas.

Second, we must ensure that our system is compatible and that it works. It is a fat lot of good having a big sign at an interchange that does not work, or a sign at an interchange that tells passengers a bus is late. That is really silly on both counts. The first thing we must do is fix up the bus system. We must ensure that our ticketing system is capable of talking to the real-time passenger information system and then we can start talking about enhancements to bus stops, interchanges and all those sorts of areas. I am hoping that I will be able to fold that information system into our other systems in the not too distant future, but I cannot give members a timetable.

MS PORTER: Minister, earlier in your presentation I think you said—and correct me if I am wrong—that fares do not contribute a huge amount towards the costs of running the service. Did you say that?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, I did. In round figures it costs us \$80 million to run the bus service and we get \$20 million in the fare box. Depending on how the travelling public buy their tickets, it costs between \$3 and \$3.30. Essentially, we are paying at least half the contribution of other jurisdictions. We are paying 22 per cent recovery and some jurisdictions have 50 per cent recovery. So taxpayers who do not travel on buses are paying significantly more than they should be paying. Canberra has the cheapest per kilometre fare. For \$3 passengers can buy an hour and a half of fantastic entertainment. All they have to do is sit on a bus and watch the world go by. It would cost passengers anywhere else in the country \$5 to do that.

In Canberra we have a “one fare anywhere” system and zonal systems apply elsewhere. Travelling around Melbourne is a real pain unless someone lives there and is used to it. At the end of the day a 22 per cent contribution to the running costs of any public system is something that must be reviewed. I welcome any comments from committee members about keeping fares at the level that they are now to encourage people to travel by bus. Do committee members think that the travelling public would be happy to pay more for a better service, or do they believe that we, as financial managers of a bus system, must be responsible and at least look at more realistic fares? I would be interested to hear the views of committee members because, quite frankly, I do not have a view at the moment.

MR SESELJA: As you do not have a view on cost recovery I will ask you a question about advertising on buses. It appears that we are underutilising that resource at the moment. I am not sure of the figures off the top of my head but I do not think we get significant revenue from advertising on buses. What are we doing in order to increase that revenue? Obviously that is an area where potentially we could get some revenue without necessarily increasing fares.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes. I will get Mr MacDonald to give the financial details, Mr Seselja, but you are probably right. Driving around Canberra I have noticed a lot of vacant spaces on buses and we could more actively be promoting advertising on buses.

MR SESELJA: By way of background, passengers have told me that they inquired about advertising on buses, called ACTION and were given the number of a private company to call that handles this sort of advertising.

Mr Elliott: There is a contract, yes.

MR SESELJA: The contractor referred them to a website but the available information was pretty ordinary. In fact, the website contained broader information that did not relate specifically to advertising on ACTION buses in Canberra. That is the feedback that I have received. Some issues need to be addressed.

Mr Hargreaves: That is good feedback; thank you for that.

Mr Elliott: That is unfortunate because we always try to maximise our advertising revenue if we can. Without having an accurate number at my fingertips, I believe we get around \$1 million a year. We have a contract with a supplier of bus advertising. Most of the bus advertising is in fact vinyl. We do not paint buses; we stick on the advertisements and then take them off. The contracts, which are usually predicated on a period of time, are topical, or whatever they are. We are always looking for opportunities. From the sound of it I guess we need to improve our processes to maximise that revenue.

MR SESELJA: I think you might want to chat to the supplier.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes. You can guarantee that that conversation will happen, Mr Seselja; you can guarantee it.

MS PORTER: I go back to my earlier question. I wanted to talk about other jurisdictions. Mr Elliott, you said that Darwin had gone backwards in its ticketing system. What did you mean by that?

Mr Hargreaves: Apologies to the Northern Territory government.

Mr Elliott: Yes, with apologies to the Northern Territory. They have taken out their magnetic stripe ticketing system which uses Wayfarer technology, the same as us, and they have gone back to a paper ticket system and cash.

MS PORTER: Do you know why, Mr Elliott?

Mr Elliott: No. I do not know the reasoning behind that. I can only assume that the level of patronage and the level of investment in the bus service are well below that of Canberra and we have a far greater commitment to servicing public transport needs. It would be impossible to understand where and how passengers were moving around their public transport system and it would add complexity and time to the provision of services.

MS PORTER: You mentioned cash. I presume there are other advantages to be gained from people not bringing cash onto a bus. Cash has the propensity of encouraging others to sit on the bus and wait until the cash box is full, as you mentioned earlier, and they then try to steal that money. Have any studies been done

into people's behaviour when they are not asked to pay at all? For instance, when there are special events on in town I know that you run special events buses and that sometimes they are free. There may be no correlation there with the fact that the bus happens to be free; it might just be very convenient for those people. Are there any studies into those things?

Mr Hargreaves: Thanks, Ms Porter. They are not free. They are paid for by somebody else but not the travelling member.

MS PORTER: Sorry. I will clarify what I am saying. They are not free. Obviously they are paid for by taxpayers.

Mr Hargreaves: By the event.

MS PORTER: By the event. The event people pay for the buses?

Mr Hargreaves: It depends on who is putting it on. If it is rugby league the event management people pay for it; if it is Sky Fire, or whatever else it might be, the people involved in that pay for it.

MS PORTER: They pay for the buses.

Mr Hargreaves: It can be a government agency or a non-government agency. ACTION does not put on free bus services.

MS PORTER: Thank you for clarifying that. My question was not about who was paying for it; rather whether or not there is any study into people's behaviour. Is there any psychological link? If they are not being asked to part with their hard cash are they more likely to board a bus? Have we done any studies on that?

Mr Hargreaves: We can point to examples to see how that sort of thing has worked. The CAT system in Perth is free. Both Mr Zissler and I have travelled on the system around Perth. It is fairly well patronised, but it is not chock-a-block. You might recall the downtowner service or wheeled tram that we used to have in Canberra. It used to travel around various spots in Civic. That was stopped because it was not patronised. It was not as though it was not obvious, because it used to travel to backpacker places, and all that sort of thing, on a fairly regular route. You would see it around London Circuit as regular as clockwork. It used to go all the way over to Parliament House and back. It just was not used and it was free.

It is the sort of thing that we can look at and we will need to look at it in the service that we provide. There are a couple of things that you need to know. Whilst the CAT service in Perth, provided by the Perth City Council, is free to the person jumping on the bus, it is paid for by the car parking levy.

Businesses that have car parking in the central CBD part of the one square kilometre of Perth City Council pay a car parking levy, and that amount pays for the bus. The second thing is what the travelling public are doing. At any one time in Canberra we have enough buses on the road to move 8,000 people. Prior to Network 06 coming into play we were getting only 2,500 people on it. That is not efficient by any means.

We found that the trunk routes between the interchanges and the town centres were overloaded. People were complaining because they had to stand on the buses. The people in Canberra are not used to having to stand on a bus. They complain because they cannot get a seat on the bus.

That was telling us that we needed to satisfy, in my view, a semi-unreasonable demand by putting on more buses. On some routes we have had a 14 per cent increase; on others it is a really low eight per cent. There was hardly anybody on the bus from the suburb to the interchange. There were a few people on it at peak times, but in the off-peak nobody was on it.

The question is: how do we encourage use in off-peak, or do we say that we will tailor the bus services to the travelling public? That is where the survey is coming into it. If you have a look around, there are stacks of cars on the road during peak hour; there are not stacks of cars on the road during off-peak. Travelling behaviour is quite different in the off-peak than it is during peak hour. It would be really irresponsible for us to put enough buses on suburban off-peak routes and have some bus going through every 20 minutes, rolling around empty. We need to work out the travel behaviour of people in the off-peak—and the best way to do that is to ask them.

We need to understand that there are two ways of doing this: we must ask the community—the people who are doing it and the people who are not doing it—and the bus drivers. One of the things that we did not do so well last time we looked at Network 06 was to ask enough questions of bus drivers. Also, we need to remember that off-peak services carry with them a community service obligation. Some parts of Canberra are socially isolated because of their demographics and the type of people that live there.

For example, you might find that there are three or four kiddies in a family but only one car. The breadwinner goes to work. The non-breadwinner might have to take the kids to the doctor but cannot get there and they are socially isolated. We need to understand that we cannot just say that, because there are only two people on the bus, we will can the bus route. We cannot necessarily do that. That is another overlay. It is going to be uneconomic but we need to know, as a community, the extent to which we are prepared financially to support that community service obligation. Therein lies the challenge. It is a challenge for a government of whichever colour.

MS PORTER: Minister, numbers of people who have come before us have said that on the routes that you are talking about, where there are only one or two people on the buses, they felt that it would be cheaper for ACTION to run minibuses. I note, though, that on page 29 you talk about the cost of running a bus.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

MS PORTER: Witnesses have said that the cost of running a minibus in other areas—they recognise that the driver is the driver is the driver—such as servicing, parts, tyres et cetera, would be much cheaper and the bus itself would be cheaper to purchase. Would there be substantial savings in any way, shape or form in running minibuses where you have these routes?

Mr Hargreaves: Thanks, Ms Porter. I recall asking Mr Smyth the very same question when he was Minister for Urban Services. The response that I got was, yes, it is a bit cheaper, but it is only marginal. The major cost is for labour, for driving the bus. The amount of fuel used is only marginally different. The cost of the bus is a problem, because it can be used for nothing else. As you know, we do the school bus runs. After the school bus runs the buses go onto normal routes. Bus drivers are multiskilled.

It is not quite as easy as that with the smaller ones. It depends on the route. One reason we are having difficulty in the cost of the maintenance of our buses is that we have so many different types of buses. There are economies by having, as much as we can anyway, two sizes of bus—essentially, just for the sake of the argument, the accessible CNG buses and the artics. I am very keen to have only two types of buses, so we can achieve economies of scale savings out of that.

The actual cost differential of putting a smaller 20-seater on a bus route is marginal. If we are going to go to that level we do not want to go to all that cost. Just off the top of my head we could say, “We will get someone else to run that bus service for us between the suburbs and the interchange.” Get Dean’s, Keir’s or somebody else to do it. They have a stack of little buses; they can do it.

MR SESELJA: Is that something that is being considered?

Mr Hargreaves: I just thought of it this second.

MR SESELJA: There you go—policy.

Mr Hargreaves: Do you recommend that we do that? Will I see that as a paragraph in the report? I do not think so.

MR SESELJA: Quite possibly; who knows? Just following on from Ms Porter and your comments about social isolation, we heard earlier from COTA about some of the bus routes under the new network. They used an example of Curtin to Hughes now taking now two hours 50 minutes at certain times of the day. Obviously that is a concern. Obviously we need an efficient service, but, as you have recognised, it is not just about efficiency and it is not just about getting people to work; it is also about the elderly, the disabled and others who do not have many options. It is about providing that community service.

Apart from the idea that you have come up with now of going to Dean’s, how are you taking account of that and ensuring that in these network changes people are not falling through the cracks and really suffering as a result?

Mr Hargreaves: There are a couple of things, and I will get Mr Elliott to give you some more technical detail. You must understand this is not a big yellow taxi taking people from door to door; this is a mass passenger transport system. We are transporting as many people who need to go from point A to B as economically as we can, for the travelling public as much as for ourselves. So sometimes wanting to go from adjoining suburb to adjoining suburb is not on; they have to go into the interchange and out again. It has always been that way and it will always be that way.

Another thing is that one of the problems for our networking system that emerged out of the difficulties we experienced at Network 06 was that we were overlaying two different types of network. The first one was the hub system, where you have an interchange as a hub and everything comes in from the suburb, hits another bus, goes on and the same thing happens at another interchange. People were not happy with that because they were catching three buses to complete a journey. In your instance it would be two. So you would be going from Curtin to Woden, Woden to Hughes, even though you could walk there quicker. Or if you are really old, like my father, you can hop on your scooter and get there before the bus.

The other system is the through routing system. Mr Gentleman knows that, if he wants to go to the northern reaches of Belconnen—why anybody would want to do that I am blessed if I know—

MS PORTER: Because I live there.

THE CHAIR: There is a nice club over there.

Mr Hargreaves: Except to visit Ms Porter who is a fabulous cook.

MS PORTER: That is right. Exactly.

Mr Hargreaves: You can get on a bus at Mr Gentleman's place and end up in north Belconnen. The two systems did not connect properly for the people who were wanting to travel on it, causing the sorts of delays that you have talked about here. The challenge for the networking company that is going to be doing the networking for us is to give us a network which integrates all those things and to try, as best we can, to stop the sort of thing you are talking about. I will get Mr Elliott to give you some technical detail because he is good at that.

Mr Elliott: I think we appreciate that the community transport area of ACTION services, which is the off-peak services, is one of the most challenging for us. I reiterate what the minister just said: it comes down to a matter of what the community service obligation is perceived to be and what level of service we believe should be provided. Certainly, in the current service design, which has been not reviewed for over nine years, the style of service has been twofold: a hub system which is based around inner town services and also through routing from one end to the other, which is why you have some of those very long trips.

In the current network we have reduced the frequency of those very long trips and so it has become an even longer trip now. That is where we saw efficiency. That reduction was based on patronage and levels of patronage. Certainly a lot of the community feedback we have had from that group of the community who use our off-peak service has been quite negative about the levels of service. It is certainly one of the areas we hope to attend to in our service plan.

Just to give you a feel for the timetable for that service as planned—we have not done anything like this for nine years—the broad timetable is that there will be a pre-consultation stage, which has pretty well commenced. It means a lot of questions and feedback from the community through a variety of forums. That will run from

June to August. There will be a second stage, which is design planning. In that stage, and prior to that, there will be a bus stop survey. There will be people on buses asking people what they are trying to do. Within those two processes we are trying to target existing patrons and we are also trying to target non-users. We are trying to pick up those people who may want to travel but who are impeded by a perception that there is no bus, or we are trying to find out what would make them get on the bus service, effectively. That system and its design will be completed around October.

Our third stage is a post-design consultation. Having come up with what we think are viable solutions, we want to go back to the community and ask them what they think about that change. We hope to do this visually by way of maps so that people can see what the service was versus what the service is proposed to be, and get another round of feedback on that.

Over Christmas 2007 we will be putting together that design and the scheduling and then we will have a bit of a dilemma. We will probably be ready to deliver that new network on the first day of the school term in February 2008. Unfortunately, if we have a lot of changes we need to communicate to our existing patrons what those changes will be. Most of Canberra is down the coast on holidays in January, so we will probably need to implement the new network on the first day of the second term of the 2008 school year. That is just the practicality of going about adequate public consultation before we implement.

In the last network we were fairly roundly criticised, first, for the reduction in services and, second, for the lack of sophisticated communication and also the lack of appropriate consultation. We are trying to respond to that by putting a fairly thorough process in place. That means it will take some time to deliver whatever the solution is at the end of the day.

MR SESELJA: Mr Elliott, we heard from Liz Ampt from Sinclair Knight Merz who has done some voluntary behaviour change work. I am not sure whether Mr Zissler might be able to answer this question.

Mr Hargreaves: Or maybe me. Maybe I can. I am here too.

MR SESELJA: That is good, maybe Mr Hargreaves too—who knows? She spoke about some of the work that was being done to bring about voluntary behaviour change in relation to transport services and buses, but we did not have the results or a study of how that had worked. Mr Zissler or Mr Hargreaves can tell us whether that analysis has been done and whether we can be provided with it.

Mr Hargreaves: We have not got the stuff to give you, but I can give you an idea of where we are going. It is not actually around ACTION, so it is not for these guys in total; it is broader than that. It is around the travel smart program that is done by the Office of Transport. They are not here, but they responded to me. It is about initially trying to influence travel behaviour or patterns. It is about trying to have behavioural change to get outcomes the community feels is proper. For example, the worst thing that people can do is drive a gas guzzling four-wheel drive from a suburb into the city and back. Have you got a gas guzzling four-wheel drive?

MR SESELJA: No, I have a rear wheel drive.

Mr Hargreaves: You have only a little one, don't you?

MR SESELJA: Yes. He has a four-wheel drive.

Mr Hargreaves: Have you got a little gas guzzling one? No.

MS PORTER: Do you want to ask all of us what we have now, minister?

Mr Hargreaves: No, I do not.

THE CHAIR: Just answer the question.

Mr Hargreaves: I know that Ms Porter has a hybrid and she is very responsible. Mr Gentleman is into antique cars. Mr Seselja, we know your propensity for bicycle riding and I congratulate you on that.

MR SESELJA: Thank you—and running. But go on.

Mr Hargreaves: And running. It is a real difficulty. The travel smart issue is about behavioural change, trying to get people out of their cars, onto buses, onto bicycles, onto motorbikes and on foot wherever we can in their normal travel behaviour, realising that there are two parts to travel behaviour: one is commuting travel and the other is recreational travel. The travel smart program is where we have been trying to encourage people to change their mode of travel. I think we have reached about 40,000 people in the process and the signs are encouraging.

I have not received the details yet, which is why I cannot give them to you. I have only had responsibility for the Office of Transport for about a month or two—if that. I had my first meeting with them two days ago. We talked about the whole of the transport challenges around the ACT. I am still coming to grips with that stuff, but I am encouraged by what I was told about the travel smart program, which addresses what you are talking about.

THE CHAIR: Minister, we are almost out of time.

Mr Hargreaves: That is a shame.

THE CHAIR: If I could just bring you to the sustainable transport plan. One of the initiatives in there is busways and priority measures.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, a wonderful idea.

THE CHAIR: We have had a couple of submissions from experts supporting busways and transitways.

Mr Hargreaves: They are a great idea.

THE CHAIR: But I do recall your statement, minister: “not in my lifetime”.

Mr Hargreaves: Indeed.

THE CHAIR: Were you talking about your parliamentary lifetime?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Do you plan to expire early?

Mr Hargreaves: No, I don't intend to expire particularly early, Mr Gentleman. I hope, in fact, to live to see a new Assembly building. I suspect that that will not happen in my parliamentary lifetime either.

The issue about busways has to be considered in the context of, in a sense, the Gungahlin Drive extension. Land was provided for that extension in the 1960s and planning started in the 1960s. If you have a look at some of the major roads around town—Johnson Drive, down your area, for example—you will see that there is provision for another lane. That other lane will not happen for another 20 or 30 years.

MR SESELJA: But that did not cost \$4 million. Sorry, go on.

Mr Hargreaves: As a matter of fact, Mr Seselja, it did cost the equivalent of that.

MR SESELJA: It did?

Mr Hargreaves: I challenge you to do the research and then prove me wrong. If you prove me wrong—

MR SESELJA: We have asked the Chief Minister but he has not given us—

Mr Hargreaves: I will bring an apple into the Assembly and give it to you. The issue, of course, is that with the newer suburbs you can make those sorts of provisions. If you are going to try to retrofit something, you have to look at it and do the planning processes well in advance of being able to do the construction itself. We are talking about the provision of bus lanes. Let us be really simple about that: this is a dedicated road. You can call it a transitway or you can call it Brenda, if you want; it is a dedicated road alongside existing roads where only buses travel.

You can also use the same piece of real estate to do light rail, if you make that provision and you make it early enough and appropriately enough and you do the technical work to go with it. I am very supportive of that preliminary work going ahead. It is within the planning portfolio. I encourage my colleague to continue to do that work, remembering that the work around the busway was to be a Civic to Belconnen busway. We have a Gungahlin to city one and there should be another one from Gungahlin to Belconnen. There should be one from the city to Phillip, from Phillip to Tuggeranong, from Phillip to Weston Creek, and from Weston Creek to Tuggeranong. If every one of those costs \$150 million, you have to do it when you can do it.

MR SESELJA: When is the detailed planning work being done for those?

Mr Hargreaves: You will need to ask the Minister for Planning that, Mr Seselja. I do not aspire to such dizzy heights.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, minister.

MS PORTER: I know we have to stop now.

THE CHAIR: We have a private meeting due, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: I know.

MR SESELJA: This is due to go to 12.30 pm.

Mr Hargreaves: I am happy to go for another five minutes.

MS PORTER: I just wanted to go back to the survey that Mr Elliott was talking about. One of the questions that people are being asked is how they receive information on the inquiry line; how satisfactory that experience is.

Mr Hargreaves: That is in our satisfaction study.

MS PORTER: Yes, but is that part of the survey?

Mr Hargreaves: That is in the normal survey where we talk about the efficacy of ACTION. It does not have to be part of this exercise; it is the normal work that we do to evaluate.

MS PORTER: They have always asked that question?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

MS PORTER: That is all I wanted to know. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, minister and officials for appearing before the committee this afternoon. We will get a copy of the transcript to you as soon as we can—and, of course, the report when it is finalised.

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Chairman, thank you very much to the committee for the time. The entertainment, Mr Seselja, has been wonderful. I also express my appreciation to officers in my department: in particular, Mr Zissler, Mr Elliott, Mr MacDonald and Mr Tardif. They have done an enormous amount of work to prepare the submission for you. I reiterate what I said at the beginning, Mr Chairman: the submission that we have given to you is just a warts and all statement of fact. We look forward to the contribution of the committee to making this the best bus service in the country. Thank you very much. We appreciate it very much.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 12.26 pm.