



**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

TUESDAY, 7 AUGUST 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 1.00 pm.

WATCHIRS, DR HELEN, Human Rights and Discrimination Commissioner,
Human Rights Commission

CREBBIN, MS LINDA, Children and Young People Commissioner, Disability and
Community Services Commissioner, Human Rights Commission

EARLE, MS JENNY, Discrimination and Human Rights Legal Policy Adviser,
Human Rights Commission

THE CHAIR: Before I open the meeting, I ask members if they could authorise submissions from the National Capital Authority and this submission from the Human Rights Commission for publication. That is agreed, thank you.

I now open this public hearing of the Assembly's Standing Committee on Planning and Environment. The committee is inquiring into ACTION Buses and the sustainable transport plan. This afternoon we will hear from the Human Rights Commission and also the Children and Young People Commissioner and Disability Services Commissioner.

THE CHAIR: Thanks for coming this afternoon. To begin with, would you like to make any opening comments, Dr Watchirs?

Dr Watchirs: Sure. Basically, we are here to answer questions on the basis of our submission. Would it be helpful to the committee if I went through the submission briefly?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MR SESELJA: I think that would be helpful, yes.

Dr Watchirs: As you would know, the Human Rights Commission was formed in November last year and we have three commissioners. In our view your inquiry is relevant to two of our commissioners. Although ACTION transport does not fit the definition of a disability service or an aged person service, of course transport to those kind of services is important. There is an issue of whether there could be indirect discrimination by the lack of access by some members of the community to ACTION transport. So we have provided a legal advice. Jenny Earle is the main researcher for this. The main ground of relevance, of course, is disability. I applaud ACTION's movement in having wheelchair-accessible buses but there is some way to go for that to make them more accessible on more routes so people can actually have jobs and rely on those routes to get to and from work.

MR SESELJA: Can I just ask a question there? Given there is some way to go, are you saying that the Human Rights Act in relation to disability access is not being complied with? What was the conclusion that you have drawn?

Dr Watchirs: I feel awkward about this because we have confidentiality provisions not only under the Discrimination Act but also the Human Rights Commission Act. A term of some of those agreements that have been conciliated is confidentiality. So I

can't tell you about cases we've had, although you'll see in the advice there are cases like the Waters case in Melbourne—about tram conductors. Although that case didn't result in getting new tram conductors, the scratch system was very difficult for people with cerebral palsy. In my view, that is the situation here. People could be required to wear a pass like a dog tag around their neck which, in my view, impairs dignity of people with disabilities. Under the Human Rights Commission Act we have a power to name and shame, but in the middle of a consideration of a complaint, of course, I cannot reveal anything of any substance—

THE CHAIR: Dr Watchirs, I should interrupt too—

Dr Watchirs: without the person's consent. You may have that individual give you consent.

THE CHAIR: Yes. I should interrupt and remind people of the privileges applying to the Assembly. I forgot to read them at the beginning.

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 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. You are aware, of course, of the ability to call for an in camera hearing if you need to. Thank you, and I apologise for the interruption.

Dr Watchirs: Thank you for reminding me. I didn't talk about women as a category. If you look at the HREOC report *It's About Time*, it is about not just women but also about other people combining work and family responsibilities. Lack of accessible public transport can be a detriment in that area. The research shows that women have less access to cars as the owner or primary user and they are more responsible for getting children to and from childcare or caring for them full time.

Of course, people who are ageing—particularly frail aged—have difficulty in accessing transport and other forms of transport such as wheelchair-accessible taxis. There are problems which make the reliance on ACTION all the more important. In providing a service to a person with a disability there is an exception in the act where it causes unjustifiable hardship, and this means that we are not requiring every ACTION bus immediately to be wheelchair accessible.

But it is a matter of degree and proportionality and we need to be moving towards full compliance. Of course, there are commonwealth disability standards for accessible transport made under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. They are five years old and there is a national review happening at the moment. The Disability Services Commissioner and the rest of the commission are currently doing a submission to that review.

Where there is discrimination, there are two forms: first, direct discrimination. If someone with a pram is not allowed on a bus, that would be an interference with their caring responsibility. But more the case, particularly if you look at the cases in other jurisdictions, is indirect discrimination. There is a feature of that that is similar to the unjustifiable hardship exception in relation to people with disabilities. That means there is a reasonableness test.

You have to look at the kind of disadvantage on various grounds—not just disability but for aged persons and people with children and carers. You have to look at whether it is feasible to overcome the disadvantage they have in not being able to access a bus and whether it is disproportionate to accommodate them. You have to look at what kind of money you would need spend to have a platform now, the best example being the wheelchair-accessible arrangement—that it is level with the wheelchair so that they can easily board the bus.

There is also an issue I noticed when the chair of the committee wrote to us relating to concession fares. While we can't provide advice in advance—it depends on the circumstances of an individual case—there certainly needs to be care in having concession fares that they are not wholly inferior services in terms of taking longer, being slower, less frequent and going on longer routes. But on the other side, I can understand why a service that is not being utilised during the day would want to have cheap fares to encourage people to use it. I think more that it is all concession or no concession may be the problem. There may be some kind of concession you could use in peak hours rather than having no concession at all available that you may like to look at.

Importantly, we have recommended that public bodies have a duty to promote equality. We have said that in relation to the Discrimination Act generally, particularly in the employment context. I think in terms of your terms of reference we would support that happening in the area of public transport. It has been successfully used in the UK and you will see an example Ms Earle has discovered of a Dublin bus system that was changed by reviewing the needs of vulnerable populations and having better services and then better take-up. In fact, it resulted in a more sustainable transport system by meeting those unmet needs of disadvantaged people who would lack independence and who are isolated. They would, of course, be primary people wanting to use public transport. So I think that's very important.

There's also an issue of our Human Rights Act not applying to public agencies directly. It is an indirect, interpretative system through legislation whereas Victoria has a direct application to public authorities, the same as the UK and the WA bill also has that model. If we had that model then you might find transport standards being higher in the ACT and more accessible. I think that's it now for my opening statement, but I'm very happy to expand on any issues or answer any questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Are there any further comments that witnesses would like to make in support of the statement?

Ms Crebbin: Thank you. I would just like to make the point that I think there are a number of reasons why it is important for us as a community to focus on the accessibility of ACTION bus services. They are really self-evident reasons. The first

is that it is really our only form of public transport and likely to be our only form of public transport for the foreseeable future. So it's of fundamental importance to everyone in the community.

The second is that we have been told for some time by the ABS, and we know I think ourselves, that this is an ageing population. With an ageing population will often come an increased reliance on public transport as people find they are unable to drive or feel uncomfortable about driving. They are still wanting to get around and we still value them as members of our community. We need to give them opportunities to participate in our community that anyone else has. We also know from ABS statistics, and again I believe from our own evidence of service delivery, that there is an increasing prevalence of disability, including mobility disability, within our community, quite aside from the ageing population, that increases mobility disabilities. We know that that is happening; so an increasing percentage of our population is more likely to have to rely on public transport services in order to participate in the community.

So those are three reasons that I think we should keep in mind in ensuring that there is a focus on accessibility in its broadest sense for ACTION Buses. By that I mean accessibility of the infrastructure in and around service delivery points—of bus stops, of interchanges themselves, accessibility of the buses themselves both in terms of being able to get on and off more easily, but also in terms of having dedicated spaces for people who use wheelchairs or need some sort of mobility aide and safe and secure anchorage points for those who are using wheelchairs or scooters more and more, and accessibility of the operations generally of the service.

There should also be easy and ready accessibility of information about the service including changes to the service that we have seen occur at short notice which I think has been quite inconveniencing and troublesome for people with disabilities and for those who don't have access necessarily to internet and electronic communication. I am referring to accessibility of things such as the ticketing system. I know that ACTION have a plan in place to scope replacement of their current system, which has a number of problems as far as accessibility goes. I am also referring to accessibility of drivers and staff of ACTION in terms of their attitude towards those who may need assistance in using the service.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Members, do you have questions for our witnesses?

MR SESELJA: Yes, thank you, chair. Dr Watchirs, I'm just getting across your submission, and thank you for providing a bit of a breakdown. In relation to the disabled population, aged population in the territory, is it your view that the current services are adequately servicing those needs? Obviously there are areas for improvement; there always will be. And you have identified some of those, but is it broadly your view that what is there now is reasonable in the circumstances and simply needs improvement, or are there some areas which are inadequate and are clearly inadequate?

Dr Watchirs: Probably in between those. Certainly there are inadequacies. I know people with vision impairment have trouble accessing changes. The other

commissioner has talked about timetabling. Certainly I think we're not at a great point in public transport. Those kinds of changes probably have meant less access and then people needing to come to us to complain about that. So I think what you will see is that if there are more inadequacies and they are not met by ACTION, we will be using our naming and shaming powers in individual cases. So it's more a case of "watch this space".

MR SESELJA: So for you at the moment it's a case-by-case basis and there are some cases you are aware of that are of concern but they're not public at the moment?

Dr Watchirs: That's correct.

MR SESELJA: But if more of those cases were to come to light of disabled or other disadvantaged groups being disadvantaged, then you would be looking to make that public, would you?

Dr Watchirs: Of course, we could do an own motion systemic inquiry of both commissioners. We are in kind of the middle of looking at that issue, but of course it depends on priorities in other areas. We can't commit ourselves to that but I think that if there is enough evidence at the moment to try and influence the review that's happening not only by your committee but ACTION itself. I think if it has a heart of equality in having a human rights, anti-discrimination and equality framework, then these kind of problems that we are seeing will disappear.

But it's an issue of continuous improvement and I think there have been some hiccups lately that have probably contributed to people coming to see us. Of course, just relying on complaints is not enough to ensure equality. To have substantive equality you need to look at the whole system. Given that we have already signed the convention relating to the rights of persons with disabilities, I think this would be a very good target area that we may be looking at as a commission.

Ms Crebbin: Could I just add to that? Dr Watchirs mentioned that the commonwealth is currently conducting a review of the disability transport standards. I haven't received any complaints in relation to accessibility of bus services generally because those are matters that would go to Dr Watchirs. But I have observed, consistent with what I've heard from other jurisdictions, that people with disabilities are often reluctant to make complaints. So the fact that we don't necessarily have lots of complaints doesn't mean that all is well.

I am aware that a number of individual consumers and peak organisations have made oral submissions to the review committee that was in Canberra, I think on about 24 and 25 July. It might have been 25 and 26 July. So a number of oral submissions have already been made from individuals which have highlighted concerns that they have with ACTION bus services that relate to issues such as accessibility, the number of routes that accessible buses are on, ticket validation systems and problems for people with vision impairment. Written submissions are also due to that committee by 24 August and I believe a number of local organisations will be making written submissions. We know that ACTION is on line to comply with the disability transport standards as required by those standards; so there's a compliance timetable that's very broad.

MR SESELJA: What do you mean when you say “broad”?

Ms Crebbin: Broad—20 to 30 years for compliance and ACTION’s reports on their progress against those standards indicate that in terms of things like the number of accessible buses, they are meeting or exceeding the target to date. So those are very, very positive things. But I believe that the submissions that have been made to that committee orally and those that will be made in writing by the end of August will highlight some important operational difficulties for the ACT that could usefully inform the larger review that ACTION has announced it will be undertaking.

Dr Watchirs: I think it’s probably fair to say that we would need more data to be more firm about systemic discrimination. I think you would need some baseline surveys to know exactly what’s happening. A big issue in human rights and discrimination terms is what we call disaggregated data. We would ask ABS to collect it not only just generally—how people use it—but what disadvantaged people currently using it think of the system and what areas they would like to see improved. Very importantly, what people aren’t using the public transport system and why. The number one reason I hear is convenience and timing.

It may be our low use. I think we’re only eight per cent. We were 12 per cent 10 years ago, so we’re nearly half the national average. Is that because we’re a wealthy community and have too many cars, or is it because people with a disadvantage find it is not worth their while engaging with the public transport system and they are isolated and they do lack independence? I think a lot of that kind of survey and consultation will reveal more of that.

THE CHAIR: I might just ask a question on a comment you made in your opening statement about direct discrimination. You said that people with prams would be a good example if they were not allowed on buses. Do you know whether it’s ACTION policy now not to allow prams or have they made provision for them?

Dr Watchirs: I just made that up as I came in. I’m not sure what the policy is. I have been on buses and people have had them and folded them.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Dr Watchirs: I’m sorry, you might have to ask ACTION about the current policy, but I assumed it was not a problem.

THE CHAIR: I don’t think we’ve put that question to them, but it’s something we can certainly have a look at. On concessional fares, you talked about the possibility of inferior services and whether or not they should move to look at accessibility in peak hours for those that need more accessible buses. How do you think that could impact on current commuters. Could there be a longer time, a longer bus wait while boarding? Have you had a look at those issues?

Dr Watchirs: I’m not an expert on the practicalities of that, but perhaps you could have more buses on the road during that period and a change of rostering and shift hours may be able to accommodate that. Certainly there does seem to be a need. My

children catch school buses. With the recent changes I know they were getting to school late because the bus service was servicing the boys grammar school first, as well as the school my daughters attend and there were problems, but I gather that this has been improved.

Ms Crebbin: It's really quite difficult to know the answer to that question without understanding how many more people might use the bus during peak hours if they were offered concessions.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Crebbin: We just don't have that type of information and data available. Certainly I have heard from probably two sources now that people with disabilities who have carers accompany them, save for those with vision impairment, I think, end up paying two sets of fees. They pay for themselves and their carer. I think ACTION have a concession for people with vision impairment and a carer is able to travel for free. So my sense of it is that the availability of a concession may well attract people to use services during peak hours who wouldn't otherwise. But we would simply be guessing and to make a decision not to trial it, I suppose, or not to have a look at it in greater detail on the chance that it might cause delays while people on wheelchairs get on and off buses seems a little harsh, I think. It's the sort of thing that we could look at surveying or trialling to see what difference it does make before we reject it out of hand.

THE CHAIR: Some further questions, members?

MS PORTER: Can I go back to the pram issue. I know that you said you just gave that as an example from the top of your head, but you did mention something about getting assistance or being refused assistance to get on the bus. Is that something also that you related from the top of your head, or did I misunderstand what you said? You said something about being refused assistance to get on and off the bus.

Dr Watchirs: I'm certainly aware of people in wheelchairs, particularly with a very disabling condition like cerebral palsy, finding difficulty in getting their tickets ready within the time required by the driver.

MS PORTER: Right.

Dr Watchirs: So they will take time to get on and off the ramp but there are other issues like requiring assistance with their tickets.

MS PORTER: So once they're on the bus, that's where the requiring of the assistance is needed rather than actually getting onto the bus in the first place?

Dr Watchirs: In the case of wheelchairs, that is what I was referring to.

MS PORTER: Okay. I guess there's also the duty of care of the driver to ensure that the rest of the passengers are safe while he or she is assisting the person who is not on the bus.

Dr Watchirs: Yes, I wasn't envisaging—

MS PORTER: I mean, there's issues of leaving a bus unattended or whatever.

Dr Watchirs: No, I wasn't envisaging them getting on and off the bus. It was once a person had boarded.

MS PORTER: You weren't envisaging the bus driver leaving the bus? Okay, I just wanted to clarify that.

Dr Watchirs: It's a good point.

MR SESELJA: Just on that, and I'm not sure if you raised this earlier in terms of the prams, is there a policy—sorry, you might not be aware of this either, but Mr Gentleman might know. In relation to bus drivers getting off and assisting—I'm thinking particularly mothers with prams—anecdotally I've heard that they no longer will generally assist mothers with prams getting onto buses, whereas in the past they have. Are we aware of whether there's been a policy shift at all there from ACTION?

THE CHAIR: I'm not aware. The questions aren't for me though.

MR SESELJA: No, I just thought you might have the knowledge.

THE CHAIR: But I can say anecdotally that I have witnessed assistance by bus drivers when travelling on ACTION services myself, but I'm not sure whether it's policy or not.

MR SESELJA: That might be something that we put to ACTION.

THE CHAIR: It's certainly something we should chase up.

MS PORTER: It is something we should chase.

Dr Watchirs: As well as consult with the community.

MR SESELJA: Yes.

MS PORTER: Yes.

Dr Watchirs: As I said, all the data seems to be that women seem to have a disproportionate burden of not having access to private cars and therefore relying on public transport.

MR SESELJA: Yes.

Dr Watchirs: Particularly women from lower socioeconomic groups.

MR SESELJA: Yes, and I've certainly had that feedback about difficulty for women with prams in particular.

THE CHAIR: I've just had some clarification there. It appears from the submissions that we've had that 80 or 90 per cent of people travelling on ACTION buses feel that the bus drivers are being very helpful. The issue is the time that the bus drivers have to actually get down and assist passengers.

MR SESELJA: Yes, that's right.

Dr Watchirs: As I said in relation to that Waters case, we can't require in discrimination law that you have conductors, but certainly you have to have a look at a cost-benefit analysis as well as meeting these equality obligations.

Ms Earle: Can I also add that that raises the issue of whether that data is disaggregated and whether it is a survey of current users. You have to look at who is missing from the data and also how much drilling down you have done of the data to find out if it's 80 to 90 per cent of able-bodied, unencumbered passengers who have that view or if that also represents the majority view of those who are looking after people, helping other people on and off the bus, or are themselves encumbered with perhaps some kind of disability that means they need the help more.

I suppose the main thrust of our submission is that it's really important that the needs of the disadvantaged, the needs of the marginalised, should be at the centre of ACTION's planning, that they shouldn't be an afterthought and that in doing that planning they're going to have to consult wider constituencies than just the bulk of their current users. I think that along with a lot of other public transport systems, the indications are that ACTION Buses caters best for the mainstream, for those who are working full-time. The commuter services are designed to meet those needs and not the needs of those who work shift work, who work part-time, who are using transport to access health services and other services, do their shopping, meet the needs of people in the community who need help, et cetera.

It is a different kind of planning process, I suspect, from the one that they have traditionally used and one of the things that we are suggesting is that if our Discrimination Act was amended to require public authorities like ACTION Buses to promote equality, they would be under a clear statutory obligation to put those needs into their planning and service delivery processes rather than have it come up as a result of complaints or inquiries like this.

THE CHAIR: I have a further question. The second part of our inquiry, of course, is on the sustainable transport plan. Do you have any comments on that plan in relation to human rights?

Ms Crebbin: I'm sorry, I haven't looked at it.

THE CHAIR: Okay. It does require agencies to review employee arrangements relating to vehicle purchase, parking availability, public transport use, cycling and other measure to ensure policies encourage sustainable transport. Does that happen within the commission? Is there encouragement within the offices of the Human Rights Commission along those lines?

Dr Watchirs: I'm afraid we would have to take this on notice, if that's possible, to

have a look at the plan. I looked at it when the submission was made some weeks ago and I haven't looked at it today. We just downloaded it before we left. Could we do that on notice?

THE CHAIR: Sure. Further questions?

Dr Watchirs: Sorry, I may have misunderstood the question. Is it in relation to staff or clients or is it—

THE CHAIR: Your office itself. Does it promote sustainable transport actions in the Human Rights Commission?

Ms Crebbin: We've talked about it.

THE CHAIR: We do put the acid on most people that appear before us to see what they're doing.

Dr Watchirs: We've certainly had that activist group in our building encouraging people to use buses, but I would have to say it wasn't commission-initiated. It happened in the last few weeks.

MR SESELJA: I refer to page 9 of your submission, and I apologise ahead of time if there are other parts of this submission that deal with this, because I'm not across all of it. On page 9 reference is made to off-peak services and concession fares in relation to off-peak versus peak. It is stated that as long as off-peak services are significantly inferior to peak-hour services, there is a risk that a discrimination complaint may succeed if it meets the tests outlined above. I think that is referring to the grouping. Are you able to expand on that for us a little and talk the committee through how that might play out if a successful discrimination case was brought? What would be some of the possible outcomes? Would the person be financially compensated or would the government or ACTION be forced to change policy? What are some of the potential scenarios there?

Dr Watchirs: Of course, it would depend on the complaint, the kind of disadvantage the person had been subjected to. We would consider the case. If it was a clear case we would probably conciliate early. Most people who complain don't want just money for themselves. They actually want it fixed and they don't want other people to go through what they've been through. So it is quite common in discrimination cases, particularly against government agencies, for people to request a change in policy, a change in training. You may want more sensitisation of workers such as drivers, although I'm not saying there's a huge problem that we've discovered.

A lot of it is time-based in that they're concerned they can't keep up with the timetable if they're providing extra assistance. The fare structure, I think, was what I was trying to get at in that thing. It seems to be that the concession is only available in off-peak—was it 9 to 4.30 and then after 6 pm?—whereas you're treated as if you're a full wage payer any time out of that. Of course, people who are disadvantaged may have to get to places at those times for appointments that they may not have control over. I think having a complete lack of access to concession fares may ground a complaint and I think ACTION could be vulnerable on that ground.

MR SESELJA: You talk about conciliation, but if there's no agreement, what ability is there to force change in those circumstances?

Dr Watchirs: We would have the power to make a report and if we recommended a change in policy that wasn't implemented, then under the new Human Rights Commission Act we've got a power to name and shame. So we would do a media release and a report and put it also in our annual report. Of course, the individual would have the option of going to the Discrimination Tribunal but there have been delays there; so I think people are more minded to go the conciliation route than go to the tribunal.

MR SESELJA: And the Discrimination Tribunal can make binding determinations?

Dr Watchirs: Exactly.

THE CHAIR: I should note too, as the secretary has reminded me, that during Senior's Week the government did announce a review on concessions for seniors; so it will be interesting to see how that comes out as well. Any further questions for our witnesses? Thank you very much for coming in this afternoon. We'll look forward to your response to that question you took on notice. We will get a copy of the proof transcript to you as soon as we can.

Ms Crebbin: Thank you.

Dr Watchirs: Thank you very much.

Meeting adjourned from 1.33 to 3.21 pm.

HUNTER, MS MEREDITH, Director, Youth Coalition of the ACT
CHAKRABARTI, MR SIDDHARTHA, Policy and Communications Officer,
Youth Coalition of the ACT

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon and welcome to the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment's inquiry into ACTION Buses and the sustainable transport plan. Just before we kick off I will read you the privilege 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, 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 that 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. So once again, welcome. Would you like to make any opening comments this afternoon?

Mr Chakrabarti: Thank you. Basically, the most concerning thing for young people was frequency. We really did get a feel of this and we expected that frequency would be their number one concern. Not only was it their number one concern, but it was also their one concern that, if it was addressed, would make them use buses more; so it's quite significant in that sense. There are a lot of comments which we've attached to the end of the submission. It really would be worth while looking into those because they go through specific concerns, specific bus routes. That's just one of the things.

One of the other things we found was that quite a few young people actually commented that buses didn't turn up or for whatever reason they weren't there when they were at the bus stop. Some of them commented that when they called ACTION after this to inquire about why the buses hadn't turned up, they were told it was simply that they were there late or the students or the young people were there late and they just missed the bus. But we feel that the number of people who have made this type of comment means that this probably isn't just a one-off person missing the bus. I think it's probably a greater concern that ACTION should look into.

A lot of it is just communication. Communication is both something that's important to attract users to the bus service and to retain them. If a bus is cancelled then young people particularly should be told about it because it has a significant impact on them.

Young people as a group are largely captive passengers, which basically means that they have very few alternatives to catching buses to get to work or to get to school. So it's something that is of concern to us.

As an example of this, last week some journalism students from Narrabundah College came to the Youth Coalition to do an interview with us, actually on the buses inquiry. They were catching the bus from Narrabundah through to O'Connor. They were waiting on the wrong side of the road. Apparently the bus turned up and they said, "Does this go to O'Connor?" and he replied, "No, it doesn't," and drove off. Simply what he needed to do was just say, "Look, you're waiting on the wrong side of the road. If you cross to the other side of the road the real bus will come and take you." It is just a simple matter of communication. That's an example of where it was very poor and affected young people significantly in the sense that they were an hour late to the Youth Coalition. It meant that we had to drop them back at the bus stop, et cetera, on the way home because it was getting late. It's a significant concern.

When we considered young people getting to work, most of the young people said that frequency was the biggest issue. The same amount of people said that frequency was terrible as said it was reasonable. That's a significant concern because in none of the other sectors that we asked them questions about was frequency that bad. Another thing which suffered in getting to work was safety. We think this is because young people engage a lot in casual work; so they might finish a little bit late or they may finish halfway during the day and at these times the buses don't come very often.

But given the relatively young population of the ACT—second only to Tasmania—and given that 15 to 25-year-olds make up the highest proportion of the population of the ACT, we think it's significant and important that in order to get to work young people are provided with good public transport. Australian research into this—not specific to ACT—points out that some employers are less likely to hire people who catch public transport precisely because they might not turn up to work—they might be late—and that's a significant concern to us.

Finally, 'weekends' was the other area where we saw a difference from the average kind of results. Young people said the frequency of buses on the weekend was terrible and this affected a range of social, employment and other activities that they could do on the weekends. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Do you want to add any further comments?

Ms Hunter: No, not at this stage.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Questions?

MR SESELJA: Thank you, chair. I refer to recommendation 3, which you touched on it in your opening. You speak about services that enable young people to travel to work. What services in particular are you referring to? Are we talking about services at particular times? Are we talking about particular services to particular areas? What kind of services would really assist young people in terms of their work?

Ms Hunter: The detailed information is in the appendixes, but clearly it was after

hours and at weekend times that they felt they really were at a disadvantage. They were having to wait around for hours and hours for a connection or even for a bus to turn up at certain times. Sid, do you have particular route information?

Mr Chakrabarti: The particular route information is at the end. There are various ones ranging from the 900 series buses to, I think, it was the 34 which they talked about as well quite a bit.

MR SESELJA: So those buses being more frequent or—

Mr Chakrabarti: No. There was a range of concerns and I guess they're related in the sense that when they talk about frequency they're also talking about safety in the sense that if you have to wait for 40 minutes for a bus at night you're probably not going to do it, not purely because of the frequency but also because it might not be safe to do so. There are the concerns brought out about night-time travel. Also if you look at a breakdown of their concerns, I think all the indicators there also show the negative bias. It wasn't just frequency. So yes, every single one, except for safety, was clearly a negative. Even then, safety wasn't as positive as some of the other sectors.

MR SESELJA: With the safety issues, was it mainly around the interchanges or was it generally around bus stops?

Ms Hunter: There were some comments around interchanges but also while they were on the buses themselves.

MR SESELJA: On the buses, the safety issues?

Ms Hunter: There were particular comments made about some of the routes. Certainly interchanges, yes, that was part of it and one of our recommendations relates to safety at interchanges. But it was also people who felt a little unsafe on the buses with other people they might be travelling with.

Mr Chakrabarti: Yes, and it's not just the other people they were travelling with. Some people expressed concerns that when the bus drivers are running late, some may speed or do things that they shouldn't necessarily be doing. They're all captured in the comments. One young person comments that he was in a bus which ran a red light once and I've been in a bus which has run a red light. So it's not isolated.

MR SESELJA: That actually accords with some of the feedback we got from the TWU, from memory. Some bus drivers do feel pressured to speed at times and break road rules.

THE CHAIR: To try and make their appointment times.

Ms Hunter: Yes.

THE CHAIR: We've heard that employment patterns have changed now for younger people so more younger people are working weekends and different hours during the week. Do you think ACTION should look at those changes in conditions for younger people in relation to the way they service the sector?

Ms Hunter: We do think that. Because young people are such significant users of public transport, we believe that they are a critical stakeholder and not completely convinced that they have been seen as an important part of previous consultations around routes and putting together new networks. They are a critical constituency within the bus users group and therefore we think that effort should be made to involve them in those consultations, particularly when designing networks.

Mr Chakrabarti: And given the sort of younger population that we do have and given that they're quite captive users in the sense that most of them say they don't have any other source of transport, particularly in odd hours where their parents might be working, the effect on the ACT of not providing young people with good transport may not be bad now because we're in a boom and we've got very low unemployment, but in circumstances when that's not the case then youth unemployment may be high and purely because of indirect factors such as transport. So we definitely think that should be addressed.

THE CHAIR: You have also talked about faster transport. With that are you saying that routes should be aligned differently to make transport times shorter rather than having faster buses?

Ms Hunter: What we've seen in the last year is obviously a change to those routes, particularly the off-peak routes, to make them a longer loop—sort of looping around suburbs and whatever. What they were commenting on was the need to straighten out those services just so it doesn't take so long and you don't have to do scenic routes of five suburbs to get one suburb or two suburbs away.

Mr Chakrabarti: We have very specific comments about that considering Belconnen or Narrabundah College as well. In those kinds of places they said that it could take some people 15 minutes to walk from their school to the youth centre if that's where they're going. However, to catch a bus there would take them an hour.

Ms Hunter: That's particularly an issue out in Gungahlin. It used to be about 15 minutes to get on the bus to get from Gold Creek down to the youth centre. It now takes an hour.

MR SESELJA: An hour from Gold Creek down to the youth centre at Gungahlin?

Ms Hunter: Yes, because of the way the bus loops right around Gungahlin at that time, the afternoon.

Mr Chakrabarti: Which is after school.

THE CHAIR: You wouldn't think there would be enough room to drive for an hour in Gungahlin, would you?

Ms Hunter: No, but I suppose you have to stop at each bus stop and it all takes time.

THE CHAIR: I'm also interested in your comments on weekend bus travel off-peak. I had the opportunity to catch the 315. In this particular occurrence—it was late last

year—I was chatting to a student originally from China who's over here on a visit. I asked him particularly about the bus service that he was using. He was very happy with it. He said that normally where he is, of course, they're very crowded—everybody standing. Then I asked him about weekend work and he said that in his city where there are seven million people there are twice as many buses on the weekend than there are during the week and many more off-peak than there are during peak. He said this is because the families use the bus service to travel and visit families and friends in those out-of-work hours. Would you think that there would be enough demand from young people on weekends and out-of-hour service times to create a greater level of use?

Ms Hunter: That certainly came back in our comments. They felt that they were restricted on what they could and couldn't do or whether they could go and visit friends on the other side of town because there might not be a bus route back. So there are real issues there around that equity around social inclusion, being able to go and visit friends or go to the movies or whatever, particularly when we're looking at a place like Gungahlin. There is no swimming pool in Gungahlin. There are no movies in Gungahlin; so if young people do want to go and have a swim or go to the movies, they have to get to Belconnen. If they don't have someone to drive them there, it can be almost impossible to get in but then to get out in a reasonable amount of time. Sid, do we know clearly when the weekend bus from Belconnen back to Gungahlin stops running? It's quite an early hour.

Mr Chakrabarti: I'm not sure from Belconnen to Gungahlin. Another comment we did have though is that the shops close at 7.30 on the weekends. People who are working at the shopping centres—particularly young people but also other people—need to catch the bus home and yet there's no bus services after the shopping centres close on the weekends. That clearly is something that can be addressed because there would be demand during that specific period. So at least if there's going to be a bus there should be one then.

Another comment one of the kids made, and it was a great comment, was that to keep the youth off the streets, provide them a means of travel. This is very much related to weekends as much as it's related to night as well in the sense that if they don't have a means of travelling to see their friends further away, then Australian research shows—we believe this too—it could lead to social exclusion which has all kinds of flow-on effects. So it's not just employment-related.

MR SESELJA: Just further to what you were saying in relation to Gungahlin to Belconnen, I had feedback from a constituent recently who was saying from his home in Gungahlin to make an 8.30 movie on a Saturday you'd have to leave at about 6 pm, I think.

Ms Hunter: Yes.

MR SESELJA: So the services are obviously fairly infrequent, especially on weekends.

Ms Hunter: And I'm not even sure he'd get one back home again.

MR SESELJA: Yes, that's another thing. I don't think he gave me the further detail. I don't think he bothered because of the time it would take to actually get there. Your actual travel time is as long as the movie. I noticed on page 2 there's a quote from one of the young people interviewed. It talks about how the public transport system has become so bad he's been forced to buy a car again. Forgive me that I'm not totally familiar with all the detail in the submission, but is there through the submission or through the feedback a feeling from young people that it has gotten worse since the route changes, that they are more disadvantaged now than they would have been six or eight months ago before those network changes?

Mr Chakrabarti: Absolutely. It's reflected, first, through the comments which are extremely strong. We haven't censored anything. We've obviously cut out names but if you read through them you really get a good understanding of it. But also, quantitatively, more than 50 per cent of people who replied to the survey said the bus service had become worse over the last year and only nine per cent believed that they'd improved. I think this is in contradiction a little to what ACTION says about meeting sustainable transport plan targets because they talk about meeting those targets and, therefore, the bus service is going well. But if you look at those statistics, what they're talking about is adult trips to work. So a quite significant proportion of our population, which is our young people, aren't captured in that sort of statistic and are captured here when more than 50 per cent say that they've got worse, 22 per cent believed they remained the same and nine per cent believe they have improved.

Ms Hunter: There is a quote there on page 11: "The bus system in Canberra is terrible this year even as compared to last year as well. I had troubles with the bus system last year but this year it's just terrible. I can't afford to buy a car, otherwise I would have done the first day this year. It leaves me no other choice rather than taking a bus. Totally crap. Bus frequency routes are just terrible this year and especially on the weekend. I didn't used to work on weekends just because of the bus service on the weekend."

MR SESELJA: That is pretty clear feedback coming through then from young people in relation to the changes. I think it's well-known that the changes have affected off-peak quite a bit and I suppose young people are disproportionately affected by that.

Ms Hunter: Yes.

THE CHAIR: On recommendation 7, it says, "ACTION identify the reasons why a number of young people are reporting that bus services are not actually arriving at stops and devise a strategy to resolve this issue." Are they reporting to you in your inquiry or are they reporting to ACTION as well that the buses aren't arriving?

Mr Chakrabarti: A number of them have clearly stated that they're reporting to ACTION and to those young people at least, ACTION's response has been, "Well, you know, you were late or you got the time wrong."

Ms Hunter: "You obviously got it wrong. You were obviously there late or you did the wrong thing because that bus went through." There seems to be a disconnect there and our feeling was that based on the number of comments we had around that, there wasn't something adding up; hence the recommendation. That actually does need to

be looked at.

THE CHAIR: Members, any further questions for the Youth Coalition? There being no further questions, I thank you very much for coming in. Do you have any final comments?

Ms Hunter: I just want to reiterate that the way that we've put this submission together was an online survey and over 200 young people responded to that survey. So we think we've got a pretty good sample. We didn't want a survey that just came back saying what we pretty much knew, which was there's a problem with particularly frequency and those off-peak times. We wanted some specific route information because we thought that that would be a useful thing to feed into any re-jigging of the next network that ACTION might be doing. So just to reiterate that we really think that the qualitative feedback that's in the annexures is incredibly important to have a look at.

THE CHAIR: We will take that on board. Thank you very much. We'll get a copy of the proof transcript to you as soon as we can. Of course, the report, when it's finalised, will be posted on the Assembly's website after we've given it to the Assembly.

GEYSEN, MR JAMIE, was called.

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, Jamie. Jamie and I have met each other before. We used to compete in rallying. Were you here when we read out the privileges card earlier on?

Mr Geysen: No, I was not.

THE CHAIR: I'll do that for you then. 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 that 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.

So welcome to the committee's inquiry on ACTION and the sustainable transport plan. Thank you very much for your submission. Would you like to open with any comments?

Mr Geysen: Basically, in regard to the submission, I'm assuming you've had a quick look through it. I don't really make any recommendations, as I'm sure many other people have. The main purpose of my submission was to try to bring about an awareness of the change in technology that is emerging in the way in which we get around. I see very much buses being dependent on diesel for quite some time, whereas automotive applications for electric vehicles and hybrid electric vehicles are coming along in leaps and bounds.

This has largely been brought about probably in the last 10 years through advancements in battery technology. From all places, this has been brought about largely by investment by companies in portable power tools. It's been the requirement for better batteries in that area of the market that has subsequently flowed on to electric car applications and particularly lithium ion batteries, which is an emerging technology. General Motors hopes to have a working prototype of a plug-in hybrid by 2010 which will be capable of travelling around 70 kilometres a day from a plug-in charge before the petrol motor actually has to kick in.

So for all intents and purposes just about every commuter in Canberra could do so without using a drop of fuel should that technology emerge within the timeframe that's been laid out for the implementation of the sustainable transport plan. Whilst the sustainable transport plan does make mention of the ACT government's use of some hybrid vehicles to gauge their ability to reduce fuel consumption, they're not talking about plug-in hybrids. The difference between a plug-in hybrid and, say, a Toyota Prius that's currently in use is that any of the electrical power that it uses is generated through a regenerative process from braking and other processes in the car, whereas the plug-in actually has sufficient battery capacity to be literally plugged in overnight.

I see that as being one of the largest problems with the sustainable transport plan. It's so heavily leaning towards public transport as being the only solution for environmental reasons. That's probably the largest issue that I can see that it has to justify itself on. From my point of view, on the information that I've easily gleaned from the internet and from newspapers—for example, the *Canberra Times*—it shouldn't be the case. There are a number of cost issues and many issues that I've brought up in here as arguments against the sustainable transport plan.

Probably my largest bug was where the STP targets claim, "These targets represent a more than doubling of the current proportion of trips used by environmentally friendly modes: walking, cycling, public transport." I'm just wondering how the author of that document deduces that public transport is environmentally friendly. I've come up with some figures here that show that given ACTION's fuel consumption, it's actually per passenger per 100 kilometres of travel no more fuel efficient than the biggest gas-guzzling V8 Commodore available with a six litre engine with just two people on board. No-one in their right mind would say that the latest model GTS Commodore was a green car, yet with just two people on board it can achieve the same fuel efficiency per passenger per 100 kilometres as that achieved by ACTION in the financial year 2005-2006.

I'm saying it's my opinion that using examples like that—I could go through and quote many more but in the interests of saving time I won't—the STP is a flawed document, that it's not taking truly into account the major changes in battery technology. Electric cars have been with us for about 150 years and actually up until the time and prior to the time when Henry Ford introduced his Model T with a petrol engine, there was almost an equal number of electric cars on the road as there were petrol-driven cars. Battery technology, basically, was stymied at that time.

I think it was actually Cadillac that developed an electric starter for an internal combustion engine just before 1920 which got rid of the necessity for a crank handle. At that time a large amount of low-cost oil was found in Texas; so in the birthplace of the automobile, as most of us will accept Detroit is, it was the choice to go for internal combustion engines for those reasons. Battery technology has basically sat on the shelf and done nothing largely for the most part of last century except for investment that was made through the power tool industry into devising ways of increasing bigger and better delivery of power from smaller and more efficient batteries.

Now that that's happened, in the last 10 years Toyota has released, I think it was just under 400 in number, a completely electric RAV4 derivative which had a range of

around 200 kilometres from an overnight plug-in charge. General Motors built what they called the EV1. It was a completely electric vehicle. The technology was developed in response to the California Air Resources Board requirement that there would be 10 per cent of cars sold, I think it was, by 2003 in California had to have zero emissions. These vehicles have a loyal following. They are very reliable, very powerful. These vehicles are capable of doing something in the region of 0 to 100 kilometres an hour in seven seconds, so they're not golf carts. They're not silly little bug-eyed shopping trolley things that you see in amusement parks. These are proper automotive transportation applications.

General Motors had at the time also developed a utility which was very successful as far as range—again, about 120 kilometres with a one tonne payload. Ford did a similar thing with the Ford Ranger in America. The technology is there. It's basically been waiting. The controlling technology is there. I am referring to the electronic controllers which are very important because the vehicle does not have transmission as such. It's basically just a transmission-less vehicle, which saves a lot of energy. What's been holding back this technology has been battery development.

This battery development, as I've said, has started to actually filter through from other applications to the point now where there is a small boutique manufacturer of sports cars in the United States, Tesla Motors, which in 2008 is hoping to release its sports car which is capable of travelling from 0 to 100 kilometres an hour in 3.5 seconds and have a range of 200 kilometres on an overnight charge. In using grid-supplied power, the Tesla will be capable of delivering something in the region of about 2.5 litres per 100 kilometres efficiency in regard to greenhouse emissions that were generated through the generation of power at a coal fired station.

If that car was to be charged with a solar application, a photovoltaic cell application, say, on a roof or whatever while the owner was at work, then the emissions from that vehicle are zero. Other than the processes of manufacturing the vehicle and of recycling the vehicle at the end of its useful life, including the battery packs, it's a zero emission vehicle for all intent and purpose. It has no environmental impact other than the visual. It makes no noise. It emits nothing other than perhaps the pleasure of going from 0 to 100 kilometres an hour in 3.5 seconds, which I imagine would be quite exhilarating, and the obvious impact of rubber and whatever else that's unavoidable in any form of transport for tyres.

The battery technology is changing so fast that in the past 10 years it's basically doubled and in many years over the last decade, battery technology has increased in its output between eight and 10 per cent. All of this is filtering through into modern plug-in hybrids. The sustainable transport plan says that it will not attempt to achieve any of its aims by bringing about any situation where car users are put at a disadvantage. In its wording in itself that is correct, but as I understand it the sustainable transport plan sits under the umbrella of the national capital plan and as I understand it, the national capital plan has plans to close Vernon Circle to through traffic in a north-south direction and send it all around London Circuit. That's going to create mayhem; so I don't know whether it's just a cleverly crafted document that seeks to shield certain changes to the efficiency of our road system or whether it's just that I'm paranoid. I don't know.

Certainly as a commuter I don't believe that there are any traffic problems in Canberra currently. I travel in peak hour traffic every day. Even if the increases in transport achieved by motor vehicle users, which I think they claim is up about 45 per cent by 2031, even with that increase, I still, not even on a bad day, would spend more than, say, 20 to 30 minutes in a car travelling from Belconnen to Parkes to drop off my partner and then head on to Woden and back. I could not, even in my wildest dream, achieve that on buses.

Under the heading "Current Issues and Challenges: Accessibility in Canberra", the STP recognises that "a good road system and ample parking mean accessibility levels in Canberra are high compared with other cities. Furthermore, Canberrans rate the ease of getting around the city as one of the best parts of living here and would like this preserved." I believe that we need to have car parks. We don't want to be closing down car parks for any reason. As far as I understand it, paid parking in Canberra returns about 50 per cent of the possible return that could be achieved on that block of land if it was sold off for other purposes; so given that there's no infrastructure required upon that site other than a few parking meters to facilitate that earning, I think it's a very good public earner. It is virtually maintenance-free.

I truly believe we should not be taking away car parks to try and coerce drivers out of their cars and onto buses. The people who would be taken out of their cars and put onto buses would all be seeking to utilise peak hour services, which are already full. The buses are already full. I see the Xpresso buses go past. They're chock-a-block. There's 42 people sitting and 20 people standing. So increasing demand on those services is not going to improve ACTION's efficiency one iota. It's just going to bring about a situation where they need to put on a second service and another driver to run at that time to pick up the slack. I don't see that as being a particularly intelligent thing to do when, by and large, Canberrans are prepared to accept the cost of running their own vehicle, of purchasing it, of the depreciation, of the fuel, of the insurance. They're quite happy to bear that expense themselves.

Having said that, most Canberrans like myself are more than happy for the government to spend the money that they currently are on preserving the system that we have as far as buses go. I don't feel that car users as such are getting a terribly fair shake in the media and in other forums. I think that a lot of advocates of public transport tend to portray or demonise car users as some sort of environmental vandals and that we're sucking huge amounts of government funds away from other purposes to maintain roads and other infrastructure required for cars.

I don't think the average car user is a mean-spirited person and I don't think they'd begrudge the money that the government puts in in the way of subsidies to keep ACTION going. I certainly recognise the social benefits of having that system but I also recognise the social problems that could be created by forcing parents out of their cars and onto buses, the increased time that children would spend at home in the morning and in the evening if parents had to park the car at home. Rather than have a 20 or 30 minute commute in their car, they would then signed up—like Meredith and Sid were talking about—to a 2.5 hour trip to get to work. So to get to work at 8.30 they'd be leaving home at 6 in the morning. What is the social impact on unattended children?

The STP makes much of extolling the virtues of so many things with absolutely nothing to back it up but it makes no mention of the other side of the coin. Theoretically, for an 8 hour working day if you've got a 2.5 hour commute or even a two hour commute, the parent is away from the home for 12 hours. So theoretically, starting work at 8.30 in the morning, they leave at 6.30 in the morning, they get home at 6.30 at night. Schoolchildren, as far as I understand, still attend school between about 9 and 3.30. What do they do during the other time? They're unsupervised largely for longer periods of time because of parents not driving a car. So there's pros and cons to everything and I think the STP makes much of the pro and extraordinarily little of the downside. I suppose I've prattled on for quite long enough and consumed enough of your time. I could go on.

THE CHAIR: What can I say? I think it's the first submission the committee has got that's pro-individual motor vehicle and not for public transport. Questions, members?

MS PORTER: Yes, thank you, chair. I just want to explore a little more the issue of the community service obligations and how you would see the government meeting those with regard to people who are not able to use private transport for whatever reason.

Mr Geysen: As I said, I have very few recommendations to make, Mary.

MS PORTER: No, but I'm just asking you, Jamie, how you would see us as a government meeting our community service obligations to those people. We're talking about frail aged people, people who may have a disability.

Mr Geysen: Yes.

MS PORTER: Young people who don't yet have a licence or people who can't afford to purchase a car. There are a few examples.

Mr Geysen: As I said, Mary, I would really like to see ACTION buses continue. I think it's a very vital public service and a very good tool in preserving social order and fairness. It could be run better. ACTION's Achilles heel is the endless trolling of the suburbs during the day when there is just nobody on the bus. If that didn't happen they could almost be profitable, but that's never going to happen and I don't think there's a bus system in the world that actually makes money if you take out the CSOs and whatever else that are funded to them.

I think government consultation is probably the best way. This forum is probably an excellent way of meeting with groups. I know Meredith. I used to go to school with Meredith at Lyneham high school many, many years ago and she's a good person. I truly believe that she is an excellent advocate of the views of young people who are dependent on this service. So I'd listen very carefully to what people like Meredith had to say; probably more community consultation. There must be other processes available that could get down to the nuts and bolts of how to run this system a bit better. I was going to look into the possibility of running a smaller fleet, different modes, but unfortunately I've just started a new job at the end of May and I'm basically up to my neck in learning the new processes. It's just been a very stressful time and I haven't had time to get around to coming up with alternatives.

THE CHAIR: Can I just ask a question? You talked about plug-in hybrid cars in some detail and battery technology. What about the deconstruction of those vehicles? What do we do with the batteries?

Mr Geysen: There's much happening at the moment with that, Mick, because previously lithium ion batteries had a return cycle of around 750 discharges, charge and decharge cycles. That was the case up until just a couple of years ago. That's now up to about 10,000 cycles. So if you were to assume that you would get 200 kilometres on a cycle, for the average commuter in Canberra you're looking at about 1.5 cycles a week. So it's 75 cycles a year. It's up to 10,000 cycles this battery is capable of. You're looking at almost a 100 year battery life for a car.

However, it will not give its peak battery return or charge return for that entire period. That will drop off, I'm not sure of the exact number, but I think it's a few per cent a year. So probably the useful battery life would be in the region of around 10 to 15 years, which is about what a petrol engine car will get from an engine anyway. There are significant problems with recycling these batteries and much is currently being looked into for other applications for these cells, these batteries, after their automotive application is finished. That's all the news I have on that at the moment.

Certainly the technology is being driven by the market and I believe that the market will bring about a point in time where these batteries are fully recyclable. I just don't believe that we've come this far for that not to happen. Even your most recent initiative, which I commend, is a wonderful thing—the solar cells and to put the rebate up four or seven times?

THE CHAIR: It is 3.8. But we don't want to go into targets.

Mr Geysen: All right, about four, okay. I think this is how we will make plans for the future. It is to look at the future, look at the emerging technologies. Don't look back at diesel-fuelled buses and CNG-powered buses and things like this. It's not the future of public transport. I don't see Canberra's population increasing too much more. We just don't have the water resources to sustain a population probably more than about 400,000 or so. If our road network is currently handling the automotive traffic we have, why won't it continue to do so? And if we can take away the environmental need to get cars off the road by making cars environmentally benign, it just seems like a large part of the footing for the STP has been washed away.

THE CHAIR: Are there any more questions for Mr Geysen?

MR SESELJA: Yes, just one. Firstly, thank you for coming in and for making the submission. I refer to page 6, (vi), of your submission under argument 3. You talk about the \$9.24 subsidy per ticket. Is that just an average of every passenger on every fleet and then you've taken into account the subsidy and you divide it?

Mr Geysen: Yes.

MR SESELJA: If so, have you done any analysis for those at peak times, what the subsidy would be like for those because there's obviously more travelling, and if so

do you think that sort of changes the equation? I know you are sort of saying we should keep the status quo largely, but there are probably some things in there which would discourage some of these people from getting on ACTION buses. If fewer people are getting on at the peak times, is there an economic argument that the subsidy would actually become bigger to subsidise more of the less profitable routes?

Mr Geysen: It's very difficult to separate the peak hour routes from the out-of-hours routes. Yes, the \$9.24 per ticket subsidy is based on the straight out numbers. If I remember rightly, ACTION in 2005-06 did about 23,450,000 kilometres. I think they had 16,928,000 passengers. I've assumed that there was an average trip distance of seven kilometres per passenger, and that was based on a simple area equation of a map of ACT. I basically just ran a compass around each bus interchange and said, "Okay, the average Canberra home is within seven kilometres of a bus interchange." Given that most travel will begin in a residential area and terminate at a terminal, at a bus interchange, and then travel will be measured again as ACTION does between terminal and terminal, when they come up with their 16,928,000 passenger boardings I figured that was a fairly reasonable way of measuring out average trip distance.

I just worked the numbers down and basically it came down to working on the \$2.20 fare ticket. Given that ACTION's actual costs per passenger boarding were \$5.26, and given that the average fare collected per boarding was \$1.01, it's actually a very neat little number. It comes up to about 5.2. You multiply the \$2.20 ticket by 5.2, you get an \$11.44 cost to fund each boarding. Given that that boarding is only collecting \$2.20, it appears that there's a deficit of \$9.24, and given that a lot of those boardings are taking place on peak hour services, it appears that each of those peak hour services is being subsidised by \$9.24 by the taxpayer, even though a large percentage of those boardings—and I think I have put it here—entice more journey-to-work travellers into leaving their new BMWs at home. It is scandalous, and I stand by that statement.

Obviously if you were to separate away all of the out-of-hours troling and only concentrate on the numbers from peak hour services, yes, ACTION is a million dollar business. I'd be investing money in it tomorrow. I'd be making a fortune, but the fact is that you can't do that because we're looking at ACTION as an overall—

THE CHAIR: Service provider.

Mr Geysen: entity, service provider.

MR SESELJA: Sure.

Mr Geysen: And you can only look at it that way. Unless you can come up with a way of separating those two services and taking away the liability side of the service, you're stuck with it. You're stuck with the average numbers. I've been over them a million times and I know them inside out and back to front. I've run them past accountants and actuaries and they've said, "Yes, you're correct."

THE CHAIR: Any further questions for Mr Geysen? There being no further questions, thanks very much for coming in, Jamie. We'll get a copy of the proof transcript to you as soon as we can.

Mr Geysen: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: And of course, you'll be able to have a look at the final report on the website when we give it to the Assembly.

Mr Geysen: Terrific. Thank you very much for hearing me out.

THE CHAIR: Pleasure.

Mr Geysen: Thank you. It's good to see you, Mick.

THE CHAIR: Yes, you too.

The committee adjourned at 4.12 pm.