



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Wednesday, 6 October 2021

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of question time proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* should be lodged with the Hansard office as soon as possible. Answers to questions on notice will appear in the *Weekly Hansard*.

Wednesday, 6 October 2021

Questions without notice:

COVID-19—health directions.....	1
Schools—COVID-19.....	3
Economy—cost of living.....	4
Light rail—stage 2	5
Light rail—stage 2 economic analysis.....	7
Light rail—stage 2 economic analysis.....	9
Children and young people—Safe and Connected Youth Program	11
Roads—William Hovell Drive	13
Light rail—stage 2 economic analysis.....	14
Light rail—stage 2 economic analysis.....	15
Schools—air quality	16
Light rail—stage 2 economic analysis.....	17
Light rail—stage 2 economic analysis.....	18
Arts—Statement of Ambition.....	19

**Questions without notice
COVID-19—health directions**

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, I refer to your announcement about mandatory vaccinations for high-risk health workers yesterday. Last year's COVID select committee recommended that health directions have a statement of compatibility with human rights, including justification that they are reasonable and proportionate. This is a recommendation that was agreed to in principle by your government and has not happened for the last 10 directions made this year, leading to calls by the Human Rights Commissioner to re-establish the COVID select committee. Minister, why is the health order to mandate vaccinations in particular health settings not going to be introduced through primary legislation, as recommended by the Human Rights Commission?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I would, of course, refer the Leader of the Opposition to the human rights compatibility considerations from the Chief Health Officer that were tabled this morning. That follows last year's tabling of a general human rights compatibility consideration for the public health directions that were being made—

Ms Lee: Madam Speaker, a point of order—

MADAM SPEAKER: A point of order, Ms Lee.

Ms Lee: The question was specifically why the health order to mandate vaccinations is not being introduced as primary legislation, as recommended by the Human Rights Commission. I ask the minister to be relevant.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think she is responding to your question reasonably directly, Ms Lee, and I cannot direct the minister how to answer the question.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think I was about 23 seconds in and just covering the breadth of issues that were in Ms Lee's long introduction to her actual question. In response to her question, other jurisdictions are also using their public health directions, in line with the declaration of emergencies, to do the initial mandating of vaccinations for a range of workers. This is already the case in the ACT in relation to the requirement for aged-care workers to be vaccinated. And that public health direction, which is in effect already—the mandatory vaccination for healthcare workers is not—is in line with those that have been done by other jurisdictions. Of course, we are also doing work to understand what the longer term arrangements will be, because, inevitably, the public health emergency will come to an end as we are living with COVID and we will need to look at what those longer term arrangements might look like. That work is underway.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary, Ms Lee.

MS LEE: Minister, will you be introducing primary legislation on this vaccination mandate? And why, except for the Chief Health Officer's statement tabled this morning, has your government not been releasing human rights compatibility statements for all the public health orders, as you had agreed to last year?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Lee for her two questions. On the second one, as I have just indicated to her, the Chief Health Officer determined that she would do a general human rights compatibility consideration statement because the same human rights are engaged in each of her directions and the same reasons applied to making those directions. Therefore, her decision was to make a general statement around her considerations of human rights compatibility. In the context of the outbreak, she has now updated and expanded on that statement, given the lockdown arrangements that have been put in place, which, again, are consistent with those in other jurisdictions and consistent with the advice of the AHPPC.

In speaking about the advice from the AHPPC, there are two issues, Madam Speaker. First, a number of other jurisdictions have already moved in relation to requiring healthcare workers, particularly those on the front line, to be fully vaccinated. The AHPPC has recommended a time line around that which would make it very difficult to do through primary legislation. So, as other jurisdictions have done, the initial response to this is through a Chief Health Officer public health direction, which is perfectly allowable under the Public Health Act and is an appropriate response in this circumstance.

MRS JONES: A supplementary. Minister, why have you so far failed to act on consistent pleas from the disability community for disability support workers to be included in the vaccination mandate?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: On the one hand, mandatory vaccination is very concerning and needs primary legislation and, on the other hand, we have got to rush in and do something—

Opposition members interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: which does not really sit in our portfolio! As I indicated in a press conference today, which Mrs Jones may or may not have been watching, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee has been considering the potential to require vaccination of disability support workers. It was due to report back to national cabinet by the end of September, but, of course, the Prime Minister, setting the national cabinet agenda, did not bring on that item and did not ask for the AHPPC to expedite its consideration—in the same way that the commonwealth has been pretty much putting everything to do with

disability at the back of the queue and on the backburner in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are some challenges associated with identifying the workforce in disability settings and crafting a direction that relates to work that is undertaken in a person's private home. The same considerations relate to non-residential aged-care workers, so in-home aged-care workers. The ACT government has maintained that the commonwealth should be considering using its own regulatory power through NDIS worker screening to include the requirement for workers to be vaccinated, particularly those who work in high-risk settings.

Now, we recognise that that would not capture all disability support workers, but it would cover workers who work in residential care settings, who work in day programs and anyone who is working for a registered provider and is required to be screened under the NDIS worker screening program. Unfortunately, the commonwealth has steadfastly refused to consider this option. Therefore, ACT officials are considering what options are available to us. But, as I say, because disability support workers often provide services in a person's residential premises, this does present significant challenges in crafting a direction in this regard.

Schools—COVID-19

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister, on 14 September your government stated—and I quote from the ACT Education Directorate website—that:

Year 12 students will return to on-campus learning from the start of term four (Tuesday 5 October). This is a critical time for year 12 students, who are completing their final weeks of school and final exams and assessments.

We have received several representations that year 12 students did not return to on-campus learning on Tuesday, 5 October but will, in fact, be forced to continue with remote learning for at least a further two weeks. Minister, did year 12 students return to on-campus learning on the date promised or will they be required to continue remote learning for several weeks to come?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Hanson for the question. Yes, as we had indicated earlier around the return to face-to-face education for some year 12 students that that was about making sure they could do their assessments that were practical assessments that they needed to do in front of a teacher or at class, and they were able to return to college, as well as year 12 students who had been invited back by their schools to prepare for their AST or other exams next week on 12 and 13 October. So that has been the case, and a number of colleges have gotten in touch with their students to understand what those sorts of assessments were, what couldn't be done remotely and what students needed to go to college to do.

So some students, like the rest of the students in the ACT, will need to continue with remote education for the time being, But the year 11 and 12 students who are doing

their assessments are able to return to face-to-face education, but that will be a different case for each college, and each college will have been in contact with those individuals and their families.

MR HANSON: Minister, how many students will be required to continue with remote education?

MS BERRY: I do not have the answer to that. I understand there were some students, for example, at Lake Ginninderra College at Belconnen who went to school to attend their outdoor sports activities—to do rock climbing or abseiling—and that was part of their assessment as part of that that course. I do not know how many students attended that, but those are the kinds of assessment that some year 12 students were doing beyond and outside of their AST exams or International Baccalaureate exams—or their HSC exams, as is the case in some of our non-government schools.

MRS JONES: Minister, why does the education department website still state that on-campus learning commences on Tuesday, 5 October? Can you imagine how surprised some parents were to get an email on 5 October saying that students were not to come back?

MS BERRY: Well, I am one of those parents and so I know the correspondence that went out to year 12 students. And the correspondence that went out indicated that unless you needed to do an assessment at school you did not need to come back to school and you could continue your education remotely.

Economy—cost of living

MR DAVIS: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, Canberra is a wealthy city, but too many among us are slipping through the cracks and living in poverty. According to ACTCOSS, more than 38,000 Canberrans are currently living in poverty. What is the ACT government doing to eliminate poverty in Canberra and ensure that nobody is left behind?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Davis for the question. There are a range of policy responses that support those on the lowest incomes in the ACT, from public housing through to free public education and public health provision, as well as assistance through a range of concessions.

I have already announced an increase in the utilities concession for 31,000 low-income households in the ACT, to increase that to \$1,000 a year. That is a \$300 increase over the previous year's concession. We have also provided, through significant investment across multiple budgets, increased support for community sector organisations who provide support for lower income Canberrans. And across other areas of government service delivery—be that public transport, or be it in areas within the Community Services Directorate or Justice and Community Safety—where there are either zero or low-fee options to access particular services and supports, the ACT government plays its part in addressing income inequality.

But the single biggest determinant, clearly, is the level of income support that is provided. One thing that we saw last year was tens of thousands of people lifted out of

poverty when the JobSeeker or Newstart amount was supplemented by the coronavirus supplement at a national level.

MR DAVIS: Following on from that, Chief Minister, what barriers exist to the elimination of poverty in the ACT?

MR BARR: In some instances there is intergenerational poverty. This, clearly, requires whole-of-government and whole-of-community wraparound support for particular individuals and families. Clearly, having a job and having a level of income that gets you above the Henderson poverty line is one way that we can reduce the level of poverty in our community. Having a jobs-first and secure local jobs policy approach as well as a jobs target of more than 250,000 jobs by 2025, is one way that we can lift thousands of people out of poverty. So we are pursuing that policy agenda.

Not cutting penalty rates and not supporting the cutting of penalty rates in many industry sectors is another way that we can ensure that incomes are higher, and that those in highly casualised employment get the benefit of penalty rates applying to levels of pay. They are a couple of examples, but across all of the services that the ACT government provides, having a social safety net that is supported through the provision of public and community housing and through the provision of free public education and free access to public health care, are some of the fundamental tenets of the ACT government's responsibility. But it is a shared responsibility between our level of government and government at the national level.

MS CLAY: Chief Minister, what impact would the federal government raising income support payments above the Henderson poverty line have on the ACT government's commitment to the elimination of poverty in Canberra?

MR BARR: We saw the practical example when those payments were lifted last year. Indeed, even the COVID disaster payments now, the \$750 a week tax free, have in fact lifted the incomes of thousands of households. There is a combination of ways that we can lift more people out of poverty. There are two primary ways. One is more jobs; the other is better social security and income support. That takes the form not only of commonwealth statutory payments; it also goes to the entire construct of a social safety net that includes things that I have mentioned, including access to affordable housing, free public education, and access to free public health and concessions across a range of government services. We do see an important role, and the Labor Party will always see an important role, for well-paid, secure employment as being part of the solution to alleviate poverty.

Light rail—stage 2

DR PATERSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, can you please provide an update on the delivery of light rail stage 2 to Woden.

MR STEEL: I thank Dr Paterson for her question. It is very exciting that we have seen significant progress on this important project in recent months. In July we completed the translocation of the golden sun moth from the part of the Commonwealth Avenue median that is affected by the enabling utility works. In September, these enabling utility works commenced to relocate those utilities from London Circuit onto

Commonwealth Avenue and also Vernon Circle and Constitution Avenue in Braddon.

Just last week, we released the requests for expressions of interest for a construction partner to undertake raising London Circuit to deliver an upgraded intersection with Commonwealth Avenue. This is a key first step in the procurement process. We are continuing to progress design and stakeholder consultation works for all elements of the project and we are continuing to engage constructively with the National Capital Authority.

Finally, and somewhat separately, the Sandford Street stop in Mitchell has also now been completed and became operational on 13 September—the second stop in Mitchell. This stop is providing better access for Canberrans to the growing Mitchell business and industrial hub and will also serve the future residents of Kenny.

DR PATERSON: I have a supplementary question. Minister, what benefits will this important project bring to the Canberra community?

MR STEEL: There are many benefits, and I am always happy to talk about the benefits of this important project for Canberra. It will deliver over 6,000 jobs in taking light rail from the city to Woden in the construction sector, and many more indirect jobs during its delivery. But the benefits of light rail to Woden do not stop at construction. Extending light rail will help create frequent and reliable transport that better connects our major town centres and residential and employment hubs, as well as our recreational hubs along the way.

As our city grows, light rail is providing Canberra's first mass transit system, moving large numbers of people more efficiently using a dedicated right of way. One light rail vehicle can carry 256 people, which is the equivalent of five buses, and it can be expanded in the future when we need it. It will extend the benefits that we have seen in stage 1 to other parts of Canberra, giving people on the south side more transport options. Light rail stage 1 has been incredibly successful. We have seen the benefits of that project, with more people choosing to use public transport—much more than was expected in the 2014 business case for light rail stage 1. And the city-shaping benefits along that corridor have been considerable: again, we have seen more people moving in than we predicted in the business case back then. Light rail will also improve the sustainability of our transport system; it runs on 100 per cent renewable electricity, making it one of the cleanest options for getting around.

I acknowledge that we have more work to do make sure that these and other benefits are realised through this project. That is why we committed, again, in light rail stage 2A to a benefits realisation plan, as we did in stage 1. This is a very important process, and we will work to get delivery underway as soon as possible with the next stages of the project.

MR PETTERSSON: I have a supplementary question. Minister, can you please outline the project's next steps.

MR STEEL: We are progressing stakeholder engagement for the whole of light rail to Woden. The immediate next steps in the project relate to raising London Circuit to create an upgraded intersection with Commonwealth Avenue. Enabling utility works

are a prerequisite for delivering this project, and we will see the key utilities being relocated from their current position on London Circuit to Edinburgh Avenue, Constitution Avenue and Vernon Circle. This work just kicked off in the last fortnight. The compounds are up. There is work just metres away from the Assembly. We expect this part of the project will be completed early in the New Year.

We are also working collaboratively with the NCA, and we expect to submit a works approval application soon. There will be an opportunity for members of the public to provide comment during the public exhibition component of this process. The request for expressions of interest is in the market and closes on 14 October. Major Projects Canberra will evaluate the responses and shortlist the providers, which will then be invited to participate through a request for tender process later in the year. We expect to be in a position to commence construction in the first half of next year. Throughout all of this, we will continue to engage regularly and positively with the Canberra community. We understand how important it is that everyone has a chance to shape our city's biggest ever infrastructure project.

Light rail—stage 2 economic analysis

MR PARTON: Minister, I refer to the Auditor-General's report on the business case for light rail stage 2A. That report states that disruption costs were excluded even though expert advice suggested that an estimate of these should be included in the cost-benefit analysis. Minister, were you or were you not aware of the exclusion of the disruption costs from the cost-benefit analysis?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question and his interest in light rail. The ACT government is committed to getting on with investing in this future-focused infrastructure project, which will deliver major benefits. We have committed to maximising the benefits of this project by taking it from Gungahlin to Woden. We have shown an unparalleled transparency with this project in releasing the stage 2A business case to the public and also releasing the entire unredacted business case to the Auditor-General.

Mrs Jones: Point of order on relevance, Madam Speaker. The minister was asked succinctly whether he was aware of the exclusion of the disruption costs from the cost-benefit analysis. He has not said anything relatively interesting in that regard yet.

MADAM SPEAKER: Your commentary is unnecessary, Mrs Jones.

MR STEEL: Madam Speaker, I might continue my answer.

MADAM SPEAKER: Please.

MR STEEL: We have provided that information to the Auditor-General showing an unparalleled level of transparency so that they can undertake their performance evaluation, and the government will be responding.

Mrs Jones: Point of order, Madam Speaker. He has gone back to exactly the same answer as before. I know that you did not call my point of order, but—

MADAM SPEAKER: No, I did not Mrs Jones. Resume your seat. I will give a ruling on the point of order. He's in order. He can continue.

Mrs Jones: Correct, but the question I am asking is—

MADAM SPEAKER: Resume your seat. He can continue.

MR STEEL: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I will continue. This business case was undertaken based on best practice Infrastructure Australia guidelines for developing business cases.

Mrs Jones: Point of order, Madam Speaker. He has not at all answered the question. The question is very simple. It is yes or no. I know you cannot direct him to say yes or no, but it is nonetheless a very simple question that he has not answered in any shape or form. Was he or was he not aware of the exclusion of the information?

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Jones, I think you have answered your own question on the point of order. Mr Steel, you now have 10 seconds

MR STEEL: I will continue. Under Infrastructure Australia guidance, subsequently released in July 2021, where disruption and other externalities such as noise and neighbourhood disturbances are expected to be a significant factor— *(Time expired.)*

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members! Now we have silence, you can ask your supplementary, Mr Parton.

MR PARTON: Minister, how could you, the Minister for Transport, possibly not know about a major exclusion from a cost-benefit analysis for the biggest transport project in our city's history? If you did know, why did you deliberately exclude it?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I will continue to give my answer. This business case was developed based on best practice Infrastructure Australia guidance in relation to business cases where disruption and other externalities such as noise and neighbourhood disturbances are expected to be a significant factor. These could be considered for inclusion in a BCR calculation that might be provided in a business case and economic analysis therein. It is not expected that any such cost would have a bearing on the economic analysis in this case. That is why they were not included. If the opposition actually wanted to hear the answer, they would have given me the time to do so. They could have got the answer in the time allowed to answer the first question.

MR HANSON: Minister, how much will the protracted disruption cost our community in business sector productivity and our wider economy, already devastated by the COVID crisis?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. We will be working very closely with the business community. We have already been engaging heavily through Major Projects Canberra, and the Disruption Taskforce has been looking at how we can minimise—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR STEEL: We are talking about disruptions that will face some businesses along the 1.7-kilometre route extension from the city to Commonwealth Park. We will be engaging with those businesses as we continue to undertake the work of the Disruption Taskforce on ways we can minimise that disruption so that they can continue to operate and trade during the period.

Mr Hanson: Point of order on relevance, Madam Speaker. The question was about how much the economic cost was. If he does not know, he should just say so.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think he is responding appropriately to the question.

MR STEEL: In further extension of my answer, as I mentioned in the answer I gave to Dr Paterson's question, we are currently in negotiation with the delivery partner for stage 2A but also going out for an expression of interest and tender process for raising London Circuit, which will also be a significant project. Once we have the delivery partner on board, we can understand the constructability elements and what the program of work will look like, and we can work with them to make sure that we minimise that disruption.

It will not be possible to understand exactly what will happen during the project until we have those delivery partners on board, but we are already engaging with business at the earliest opportunity, because that is the feedback that they gave us on stage 1—that we needed to do that as soon as possible—to make sure that we can listen to them and their ideas as well as working out a whole range of solutions to minimise the disruption as we build this project. We are committed to building this project. The commonwealth are committed. They have chipped in \$132.5 million. It sounds as though the Liberals are not committed. *(Time expired.)*

Light rail—stage 2 economic analysis

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, I refer to the Auditor-General's report on the economic analysis of light rail stage 2A. The report noted that Major Projects Canberra did not seek or receive spreadsheets or an economic model demonstrating the validity of the benefits. The lack of a quality assurance process led the Auditor-General to say that it "impairs Major Projects Canberra's ability to demonstrate the accuracy and appropriateness of the economic appraisal of light rail stage 2A". Minister, why are you proceeding with contracts for light rail stage 2A when its benefits are neither understood, documented nor validated?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. There were spreadsheets provided, and not the specific spreadsheets that the Auditor-General was referring to, from the consultants, who are very well regarded, who provided the economic analysis for the stage 2A business case which, as I said, has been undertaken based on Infrastructure Australia guidelines. The audit was limited in scope to the project's economic appraisal but did not review the merits of the government's decision-making processes in relation to light rail.

The ACT government understands the benefits of light rail. The reason that we do is because we have built stage 1 of light rail and we have seen the significant benefits that have been provided—the transport benefits, with high levels of patronage, and the city shaping benefits, with more people choosing to work and live around the light rail route. The significant regeneration that has occurred continues to occur.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR STEEL: We have seen that benefit. That is the same benefit that we want to provide to the rest of Canberra and the south side. It sounds a lot like the Liberals are not committed to it.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Parton.

MR PARTON: Minister, what actions did you take to remedy that critical deficiency of the lack of an economic model and spreadsheets for assessing the validity of the benefits?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Of course, we will be responding comprehensively to the Auditor-General's report, which provided just three recommendations in relation to the stage 2A business case. We will be providing a response to that. I am sure that Mr Parton will be interested in seeing that response more fully.

The government has made a decision to progress with this project. The business case was developed to inform a government decision and it is in the context of our commitment to bring light rail all the way to Woden. This is a business case that just looked at stage 2A. That is an important first step to get it to Woden where we know that there are more significant benefits for our city—transport benefits, sustainability benefits and also city shaping benefits. While there are benefits for stage 2A, we know that our ultimate goal is to make sure that we deliver this light rail backbone, this mass transit backbone, from north directly to south to Woden. It is going to be a Gungahlin to Woden route, a Dickson to Deakin route, and it is going to provide significant benefits for our city.

We do not just look at the benefits along the 30-year BCR appraisal period. This is an infrastructure project that is going to benefit our city for generations to come, for 100 years. BCR numbers are an important part of the mix when we consider business cases, but they are not the only consideration. We have seen the benefits of stage 1, where the BCR actually went up—the benefits actually went up—because we delivered it underbudget. We have seen the extraordinary benefits—the transport patronage on that project and city shaping benefits—and we expect the same benefits to be delivered when we take it to Woden.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, how can you be confident that many millions of Canberrans' taxes and rates are being well spent on the project, given the lack of a proven business case, and what is it that you have to hide?

MR STEEL: We have got nothing to hide. We have shown an unparalleled level of transparency in relation to this project in releasing the business case and publishing it online for the community. It has been up there for some time, but you have not asked me any questions about it. We have also provided it to the Auditor-General unredacted so that he can undertake his performance audit of the business case. We are committed to this project. We have taken the stage 2 route to two elections. We have taken the entire project to three elections and it looks like the Canberra Liberals are determined to take it to four election-losing elections.

Children and young people—Safe and Connected Youth Program

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Families and Community Services. Minister, can you please update the Assembly on the outcome of the Safe and Connected Youth Pilot Program?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Pettersson for his question and his interest in welfare of young people who might be at risk. We know that young people who have serious problems at home can be at risk of disengaging from school, becoming homeless and even entering the child protection or youth justice system. The Safe and Connected Youth Program works with a child or young person and their family, offering outreach support, therapeutic case management and family mediation with the aim of reducing family conflict and ensuring a safe home environment, ultimately reducing the risk of homelessness for these young people.

The program was initially funded as a pilot in 2019 and was designed and delivered in collaboration with key community sector partners, led by the Youth Coalition of the ACT. In March this year, the Youth Coalition released an evaluation of the pilot, which demonstrated the program's impact for the young people who engaged with it, finding a reduced risk of homelessness, increased employment outcomes, increased educational outcomes, increased family communication, and improved access, integration and coordination of supports and services.

The Safe and Connected Youth Program fills a specific niche in the ACT's community services landscape by providing targeted early intervention support that works with the whole family to support young who may be at risk. That is why we were pleased to announce recently that the Safe and Connected Youth Program will be receiving ongoing government funding and, indeed, be expanded to include specific therapeutic respite accommodation.

The 2021-22 ACT budget will include \$7 million over four years for the program, including: \$185,000 for establishing the program as an ongoing program; \$157,000 for post-exit outreach services; \$2.6 million for early preservation outreach services, including mediation and case work; and \$4.1 million for the operational costs of the therapeutic respite accommodation.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how did the ACT government partner with the community sector in developing this program?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary. The program

supports young people in the middle years—generally considered either eight to 12 or eight to 15 years of age. This is an emerging area of need and focus in our community. Helping young people safely navigate this stage of life can have benefits that will extend well into adulthood.

In 2017 the ACT government supported Families ACT to conduct two middle years forums to discuss the challenges facing young people in this age group, particularly those who are vulnerable. At around the same time the Community Services Directorate commissioned the Australian Catholic University to engage directly with young people who had an experience of homelessness under 16 years of age, the lower age threshold for funded homelessness services.

In 2018 the Youth Coalition, Families ACT, ACTCOSS and ACT Shelter developed an action plan to prevent child homelessness, Included in this action plan was a proposal for a service model that would not only provide an accommodation service for young people at risk of homelessness or other harm but would seek to address the underlying causes by working with the whole family to address conflict and breakdown. This sector-led work helped inform the Safe and Connected Youth Pilot, which the government funded and delivered in partnership with the Youth Coalition, Conflict Resolution Service, Northside Community Services, Woden Community Service, Marymead and the Rotary Club of Canberra.

The pilot has been an outstanding success in demonstrating co-design and co-production with the community, and I would like to take this opportunity to make a special mention and thank Justin Barker from the Youth Coalition. Justin played a significant role in championing the Safe and Connected Youth Program, and his passion for this project, for youth workers and for the young people that they care for cannot be overestimated.

MS ORR: Minister, through the pilot, the Youth Coalition has identified that a purpose-built respite facility would be a valuable addition to the program's range of responses for young people. Can you please update the Assembly on the government's investment in such a facility?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary question. Through the Safe and Connected Youth Pilot an opportunity was identified to develop a purpose-built respite accommodation facility which could support the Safe and Connected Youth Program using a model based on the successful Ruby's Reunification Program in South Australia.

In 2020 the ACT government allocated a million dollars through the fast tracked 'screwdriver ready' program to refurbish a Housing property into a respite facility to support young people under the age of 16 who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The redevelopment which is currently underway has been informed by close engagement with young people themselves as well advice from the Ruby's Reunification Program.

These investments—firstly, in establishing a pilot program and then in extending the pilot to meet the increased need through the pandemic, in refurbishing the respite facility and, through the budget to be handed down this afternoon, in committing

\$7 million over four years to establish Safe and Connected Youth as an ongoing and expanded program—highlight the Barr Labor government’s commitment to supporting everyone in the Canberra community who is doing it tough. Canberrans vote Labor for a reason, and I think this is it.

Roads—William Hovell Drive

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, I have been approached by many Hawker residents who are concerned about the William Hovell Drive duplication, including a lack of consultation and the proposed location of the shared off-road path. I understand TCCS consultation was hampered by COVID last year, but there are firm consultation guidelines in the EIS scoping document for a range of communication methods to be used with stakeholders, including face to face, email and letters, community meetings and information sessions, digital and online tools, and website notifications. Consultation must occur as early as possible with the local community, community groups, business owners, and volunteer conservation or Landcare groups. We have heard that this is not taking place. Will there be specific consultations with the Belconnen Community Council, the Woden community council and the Molonglo Valley Community Forum?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I note the importance of this project in duplicating William Hovell Drive, a 4.1-kilometre stretch of road, to improve capacity and connections to a major area of our city which is growing—the Ginninderra and west Belconnen region. A lot of this work is happening in the road reserve corridor.

A development application was lodged some time ago—in fact, prior to those pre-DA consultation guidelines being a requirement. There has now been an ongoing process of notification where the public has had the opportunity to have their say on the plans. That has been extended for a period of time, particularly during the lockdown, to enable the community to have their say on the plans and on the environmental impact statement in relation to the project.

We expect that this will be assessed by the planning authority. The planning authority will no doubt make some comments, and any comments that have been made will be incorporated into the detailed design stage of the project, which will get underway. Indeed, any comments from the public can be taken into consideration as well.

I should say that, as part of this project—and I mentioned this in an answer to Ms Clay in the past—we are planning on building a seven-kilometre shared path link. Only part of that link is part of the DA application. The further link to Bindubi Street will be built within the road reserve, as part of a separate process.

MS CLAY: Can that off-road shared path be located on the other side of William Hovell Drive, so that it does not impact on the well-loved walking track that is already there?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. There are good reasons why it has to be located on that side of the road. I am happy to provide those on notice.

MR DAVIS: When will the online information sessions and other consultations with

the local community take place?

MR STEEL: The DA, as I said, has been notified and it has been up on the ACT planning and land authority website for people to view the plans and give feedback. Officers from Transport Canberra and City Services have been in touch directly with residents as well and have undertaken a range of different conversations with those who reside very nearby to the project, in Hawker in particular. A range of signage was put up to alert people about the process that has been underway. I know that a lot of people have seen those signs and have been engaged in the process. Some people have been in touch with me directly, and I have put those through to Transport Canberra and City Services, to have a direct conversation with those people about any issues that have been raised through the process.

Light rail—stage 2 economic analysis

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, I refer to the Auditor-General's report on the economic analysis of the light rail stage 2A project. The report noted that the economic analysis excluded the cost of a federal government requirement for wire-free operation of light rail vehicles. Minister, on what date did you become aware of the requirement for wire-free operation of light rail vehicles, given it was first reported in the *Canberra Times* on 23 July 2019?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. At the time that the business case was developed and put before government it was not an explicit requirement of the project to have wire-free running and other elements. Those were recommended by a joint parliamentary inquiry, but they were just a recommendation of the inquiry. It was noted by the Auditor General that it was not an explicit requirement at the time, and that was why it was not included in the business case. However, the government did know that there was a potential for that, and later on the commonwealth government contributed \$132.5 million to the project, which significantly contributed to those extra costs which are estimated to be in the realm of 17 per cent additional costs.

A lot has moved on since the light rail stage 2A business case was considered in 2019. A lot has moved on, and we know that there is now an explicit requirement for those things. The commonwealth has fronted up with the money and we are getting on with the project and getting it delivered. This is a project that we are committed to, to maximise the benefits of bringing it to Woden. We are looking forward to getting on with that work and realising the benefits that have been outlined.

MR HANSON: Why did you decide to continue excluding these costs for the economic analysis calculation, once you knew, as the Chief Minister has acknowledged, in 2019, that “one of the biggest determinants of the cost will be the extent of the wire free operation”?

MR STEEL: It was not an explicit requirement at that stage. But I can say that since then we have undertaken further discussions with the National Capital Authority about what requirements they will put on the project. It has since been determined through a formal process that they would require those things. So we will be including those in the project, and the commonwealth has fronted up to fund it. At the time, in 2019, the business case was developed in order to inform government decision-making. It was

developed in 2019 and a lot has changed since then in relation to the project. Those requirements are now known, and they have been paid for.

MR PARTON: Minister, what have you got to hide regarding the full costs of stage 2A of the light rail project?

MR STEEL: Nothing. We have shown an unparalleled level of transparency in relation to this project. We published the business case for stage 2 of the light rail. For other light rail projects around the country, governments have not published their business cases. We did that because we wanted to show that level of transparency, and we provided it to the Auditor General in order for them to undertake their performance audit of the business case. We have shown an unparalleled level of transparency, but we also want to achieve value for money for the project. As we continue to undertake our procurement process for the project, we want to make sure that, as part of that process, we achieve value for money. When we can make the final cost available, once that process has concluded, we will.

Light rail—stage 2 economic analysis

MRS JONES: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services and refers to the Auditor-General's report. The report provides a lengthy catalogue of omissions, methodology failures and seemingly arbitrary assumptions to create the appearance of a robust business case. There were "costs that were excluded" and a "lack of documented methodology and process for the quality assurance of the cost-benefit analysis". Minister, how will you assure Canberrans that they are getting value for money from the hundreds of millions of dollars being spent on light rail stage 2A?

MR STEEL: Because we have seen it on stage 1, Madam Speaker. We have delivered stage 1 of light rail, which has now shown itself to have provided greater public transport benefits and greater city shaping and land use benefits, and it was delivered underbudget. We did it very successfully. It has been seen to be a huge success. We are committed to taking this project to Woden. Of course, the first step to do that is to take it to Commonwealth Park. That is why the business case and the Auditor-General's report have focused on Commonwealth Park. It has to go via Commonwealth Park. Our ambition is to take it to Woden, and it does not sound like the Liberals are committed to that objective.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, when will you give the Assembly and Canberrans a proper and comprehensive business case that shows the true picture of costs and actual benefits, rather than discussing our views?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for the question. We will be comprehensively responding to the Auditor-General's report within the necessary time frame. We are committed to bringing it to Woden. We have taken this to two elections. We are going to get on with the job of building this project. We are currently already underway on early works, literally just a few metres away from the Assembly, in building this project.

A lot has passed since 2019. Business cases are there to inform government

decision-making. Our government has made the decision and we are getting on with the job of delivering a better public transport system for Canberra that will benefit our city not just for 30 years of an appraisal period but for 100 years and beyond.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary, Mr Parton.

MR PARTON: Minister, given the many concerns with the current business case, will you properly consult the community before finalising that updated document? And what do you have to hide on this project?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. We are getting on with consultation on delivering the project. I said that in my answer to Dr Paterson earlier. We are consulting on all elements of the project to take it to Woden, not just to Commonwealth Park. Our ambition is to take this all the way to Woden so that everyone in our city can benefit, from north to south. As we do that, we want to make sure that we maximise the benefits of the project.

We will continue to work with all members of the community to make sure that, as we design the project, both stage 2A and the final design, and as we go through the environmental impact statement consultation process and design for stage 2B as well, we will be working with the communities right along the route, often on a stationary basis, looking at how we can maximise the benefits for each community where there will be a stop, how they can access the stop, and how we can ensure that more people benefit from this project, which is going to be city shaping and future-focused in delivering major transport benefits for years and decades to come.

Schools—air quality

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the minister for education. Whether it be smoke or COVID, clean, fresh air is important for our students when they are in the classroom. What is the government doing to ensure that our students can breathe easily and safely when they return to school?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Braddock for his question. I can say that the ACT Education Directorate has been working very hard with our school communities to ensure the safe return to our schools, when it is time to do so, and acting on the health advice in that space. The health advice is that as much good ventilation and fresh air that can occur throughout the school and throughout the classrooms is the best way to mitigate the risk of contracting COVID.

Our ACT schools have been working on making sure that our ventilation systems have what they need in place to ensure that those ventilation systems can increase the amount of fresh air that is brought into the school communities. It also involves making sure that we open doors and windows that have been previously sealed to allow that fresh air to come in. In some ways, the fires last year created some challenges and some conflict with what we now face with COVID-19, but it also gave us a greater understanding of how our ventilation systems work across our ACT public schools.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Braddock, a supplementary.

MR BRADDOCK: Will the government prioritise work for those schools whose students are unable to access vaccinations—that is, the under-12 age group?

MS BERRY: All schools will have a ventilation plan in place before students return to school, which is what occurred for the year 11 and 12 students returning to colleges. They had a ventilation plan in place to ensure that that fresh air was able to flow through the school communities.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Clay, a supplementary.

MS CLAY: Will the implementation of the ventilation plans be complete before students return to school?

MS BERRY: Yes, they will be.

Light rail—stage 2 economic analysis

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. I refer to the Auditor-General's report on the economic analysis of light rail stage 2A. The report noted a high degree of reliance on the light rail project stimulating development of the Acton waterfront and other wider economic benefits to demonstrate a convincing economic argument. In the absence of this assumption, the economic benefit dropped from 56c per dollar to only 21c per dollar. Minister, how can you possibly argue that a tram stop in Acton, only a short walk from Civic, is going to stimulate a massive residential development in that area?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. And the benefits of stage 2A are weighted towards city shaping and land use benefits and the wider economic benefits. And this is unsurprising given that the route—1.7 kilometre route—extension goes to Commonwealth Park with three light rail stops adjacent to City Hill the Acton waterfront and West Basin. There is a lot of potential in this area. The approach taken by the ACT government's economic advisers was to quantify the city-shaping benefits within the stage 2A business case as an assumption that development of the Acton waterfront would be accelerated by two years compared to the base case without the impetus of the stage 2A project.

So light rail projects are a proven catalyst for urban renewal and development across the globe. If we had not included those benefits in the business case we could have seemed to have erred in our duty by not quantifying properly the benefits of this project. And we have seen in stage 1 of light rail the very significant land use and city-shaping benefits that have accrued in that project, far beyond expectations in the 2014 light rail business case with stage 1. So I think it is reasonable to assume that there is going to be some city-shaping benefits with this stage 2 extension.

We actually think the benefits of stage 2A are small in comparison with the extension to Woden, which is what we are intending to do to maximise the benefits. And there will be further city-shaping benefits as part of that, particularly in the Woden town centre. Indeed, we are already starting to see that occur even before the light rail project starts construction, off the back of our government being committed to it. It is very clear that the Liberals are not.

MR PARTON: Minister, what specific evidence and analysis have you seen to justify the assumption that Acton's development is dependent on light rail, and will you table that evidence?

MR STEEL: That is provided in the business case, that analysis of the benefits, both in terms of the city-shaping benefits and also in relation to what we expect around wider economic benefits. But, importantly, the business case looks at a whole different range of scenarios to test what those assumptions might be, in terms of excluding wider economic benefits and with them—there are a whole range of BCR numbers in there to look at the different permutations, if you exclude certain benefits. Ultimately the government has made the decision to get on with this project because we think this is important for Canberra's future in providing a mass transit system that is sustainable and that connects our city from north to south. We are committed to making sure we deliver it to Woden. And the stage 2A business case of the project should be seen as just that—a stepping stone to get us to Woden. We are committed to it, and you are not.

MR DAVIS: Minister, can you assure my constituents in Brindabella that the government's long-term ambition is to connect all Canberrans to a city-wide light rail network, particularly the Tuggeranong town centre?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Davis for his question. Yes, we want to see the transport benefits for our city. And that is why we have outlined the light rail master plan, demonstrating future connections of our light rail network to places like Belconnen and Kippax through to the airport as well as places like Tuggeranong. And when we deliver light rail stage 2 it will benefit people in Gungahlin as much as it will benefit many people in Woden. There are many people in Gungahlin who work in the Parliamentary Triangle, who need to go through Barton. They will be using this route. There will be many people connecting from buses in Calwell and Wanniasa who will be connecting with light rail to go into work in the city as well.

So we expect that this extension for stage 2 will benefit all Canberrans through our integrated public transport network, connecting with buses and other modes of transit like e-scooters and like active travel.

Light rail—stage 2 economic analysis

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, I refer to the Auditor-General's report on the economic analysis of the light rail stage 2A project. The report noted a consultant's advice that the demand model should be revised to reflect light rail stage 1 performance. It seems that this advice was rejected and reliance was placed on the figures for south Queensland, Sydney and Melbourne. Minister, why was the decision made to use a demand model for light rail stage 2A based on Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, when we have our own data from stage 1?

MR STEEL: Because light rail stage 1 was not operational then. The whole point about this business case is that it was developed a couple of years ago, before light rail had actually become operational. What we have seen since then is that patronage figures were higher than what we were expecting in the 2014 business case. We saw over

15,000 people using it each weekday. That is incredible—much higher than what was expected when we originally agreed to develop that very successful project.

I think we have shown a very strong track record of delivering the transport benefits, and I see no reason why we will not be doing that with stage 2. I expect that more people will be using public transport as a result of that. Indeed, that is the objective of this whole project.

MR HANSON: Have you questioned the validity of the patronage assumptions that have used Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne? Has the business case been updated to reflect stage 1?

MR STEEL: As I said, we have seen significant benefits from people using public transport and stage 1 of light rail, and that has informed the decision-making process on the stage 2A business case. We want to continue those benefits by extending the line down to the south side so that more people can catch it on the south side as well. Those assumptions are something that we are not planning on unpicking. They have been delivered in a business case that has already informed the decision to move forward with this project. We have seen since then, through the benefits realisation plan that was delivered for the stage 1 project, the significant extra benefits that have accrued from delivering light rail, and we expect those to continue in the second stage.

MR PARTON: Minister, when can the people of Woden and Tuggeranong expect to see the first trams rolling into their respective stations?

MR STEEL: As I have outlined, there are some significant milestones for this project which we are moving through. Work is underway on the early works, and now we have to get work underway on raising London Circuit, which will be an important project for the southern end of the CBD, and which will also help to facilitate light rail stage 2A. Many of those decisions are not in the hands of the ACT government. Of course, we also need to go through a procurement process. It is contingent on that procurement process being delivered, and the outcome and program delivery time line will be available once we go through that important process over the coming months.

Arts—Statement of Ambition

MS ORR: Minister, you released a Statement of Ambition for the Arts late last week. Can you update the Assembly on what the ambition is for the arts in the ACT?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Orr for the question. The Statement of Ambition for the Arts proudly aims for Canberra to be recognised as Australia's arts capital. What this means in practice is that no matter who you are, no matter where you are, you will want to be creating, participating or engaging in the arts in Canberra. This ambition is drawn from the many conversations I have had with our city's beloved artists, creators, arts workers and organisations about the value and potential of the arts to our economy and to our way of life.

This is a bold step, but it is not a leap. Canberra has always been a place for people who embrace arts, culture and creativity. This is about taking it to the next level. This ambition and its associated strategies will guide short- and medium-term decisions,

acting as the framework and context to craft our ACT arts policy and ACT arts funding model, in partnership with the community. The ambition also includes two significant announcements along the way. The ACT will host an arts expo—a festival likely to be held in 2023-24 showcasing “Australia’s Arts Capital” to locals and interstate and international visitors, and, secondly, a commitment by the ACT government to formally explore how to position the ACT internationally as a “city of design”.

MS ORR: Minister, can you please detail the three key strategies which underpin your Statement of Ambition for the Arts?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary question. Canberra will become recognised as Australia’s arts capital through three core strategies. The first is to create amazing art and culture—everywhere, at any time, for everyone. The second is to develop arts, cultural and creative industry, practice, and facilities—supporting creation and culture at all levels, via any path. The third is to promote our arts and culture to attract artists and creators, arts workers, visitors and investment.

These are distinct but related; each strategy supports the others. Creation of amazing art and culture is supported through investing in artistic capacity and capability, and in our arts and cultural facilities. By relentlessly and proudly promoting our arts and culture, we attract artists, creators, arts workers, visitors and investors—and they, in turn, enhance and increase our industry, practices, and creations. This ambition and the strategies which support it will be the lenses through which our short- and medium-term decisions will be made.

DR PATERSON: Minister, what funding initiatives support your Statement of Ambition?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Dr Paterson for the question. One of the first steps of the Statement of Ambition is a range of significant funding initiatives. To be truly recognised as Australia’s arts capital, the ACT needs to compete on a national level and beyond. The ACT government is investing more than \$10 million in additional arts funding for the growth of opportunities and outcomes for our local artists and arts workers, and in the arts organisations and cultural facilities that can further enable Canberra’s artists and arts workers to thrive.

Our investments will grow the sector through creating local jobs, building our region’s capacity and capability to create, develop and celebrate art and culture, and attracting visitors and investments in our world-class offerings right here in the ACT, which, in turn, creates more opportunities and more support for artists and more jobs. A rising tide lifts all boats, and our ambition aims to do just that by supporting the entire Canberra arts ecosystem, ranging from small-scale arts and crafts hawkers to big-production tours and concerts.

Just some of our initiatives include: more than \$4 million to progress site investigations and planning for an expansion and redevelopment of the Canberra Theatre Centre, and for upgrades to it in the short-term; \$2 million for the Tuggeranong Arts Centre theatre upgrade; \$960,000 for the expansion and activation of Canberra Museum and Gallery; \$350,000 for HOMEFRONT 3; \$246,000 to support training of theatre technicians at Canberra Theatre Centre; \$200,000 for a new public art commission, where the subject

and artist are female or non-binary artists; and abolishing hawker permit fees.

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