

ACTCOSS ACT 2016-17 Election Priorities – Improve transport choice and service for people experiencing disadvantage

The Issue – Transport investments do not prioritise the transport needs of people experiencing social disadvantage in the ACT:

Government investment in transport infrastructure is usually thought of in one of two ways: as addressing the problem of congestion in cities/moving people around the city at times of peak demand, and/or as encouraging people to change their mode of transport and/or adopt more active transport (e.g. walking, cycling). Such approaches to transport ignore the needs of many of residents who experience social disadvantage.

The tendency to focus on mass transit along trunk routes, and creating transport policy that is founded on trade-offs between efficiency and coverage, has also led to the transport needs of people experiencing social disadvantage in the ACT being marginalised in transport policy and planning.

Transport policy, planning and investment can drive and contribute to environmental, health and urban renewal objectives. But publicly funded transport services are core infrastructure that is especially valuable to people who experience social disadvantage. Marginalising the needs of socially disadvantaged groups is neither sustainable nor fair and a more nuanced and equitable solution to transport challenges are required.

The Impact

The impact on individuals of limited and/or low quality transport can be substantial. Local research has found transport disadvantage can exacerbate food insecurityⁱ and impede access to primary health services.ⁱⁱ Transport is a social determinant of health. When it is not provided adequately, and individuals are not able to absorb the considerable costs involved in accessing private transport, research shows that social and economic outcomes will be negatively affected.ⁱⁱⁱ

The 2016 Cost of Living Report published by ACTCOSS highlights the considerable costs of transport in the ACT. Our report found that in the ACT 'households spend almost as much on transport (\$232) as they do on food (\$235)'.^{iv} Anecdotally, we know that the high costs of car operation and maintenance lead people on low and moderate incomes to take on short-term loans and delay renewing vehicle registration, but without a local systematic study of this issue it is not possible to understand the full extent of this issue and the full pressure that private transport costs place on Canberra households on low and moderate incomes.

The impact of transport under-investment is not just borne by people on low incomes. A study of transport disadvantage in Melbourne calculated economic and social costs of transport disadvantage and found:

the overall scale of transport disadvantage in Victoria at some 120 million 'unmet trips' every year (2010) with an estimated economic impact of \$20 per trip (based on estimating the value lost from not being able to access activities). The total social cost is therefore \$2.4 billion each year which compares very closely to the estimated economic cost of traffic congestion in Melbourne.

Needless to say addressing this social cost does not seem to attract the same investment in transport that new road projects attract to tackle traffic congestion. The analysis suggests this lack of action doesn't make economic (or social) sense.^v

THE SOLUTION – Apply a social determinant of health approach to transport policy and planning:

ACTCOSS believes that transport policy, planning and investment decisions need to be guided by residents who are engaged as 'policy innovators' and 'problem solvers'. ACTCOSS advocates a strength-based approach that asks local communities about their needs and preferences. Decision

makers should learn from local initiatives that have already succeeded in reducing transport disadvantage for groups in the ACT not currently well-served by public transport (including taxis) such as community transport.

ACTCOSS would like to see increased investment in transport infrastructure that delivers greater coverage and frequency of services connecting local neighbourhoods and town centres outside of peak commuting hours. Additional cross-border services connecting Canberra and the local region, including Oaks Estate and Queanbeyan, are also needed.

Transport investments should accelerate delivery of measures that will ensure prompt compliance with legislated accessibility standards.

OUR ASK: Invest in transport infrastructure that will deliver for people experiencing social disadvantage:

1. Investigate transport needs for people experiencing social disadvantage and fund any improvements in public transport coverage and frequency required to meet the needs identified.
2. Evaluate accessibility of existing public transport infrastructure (vehicles and fixed infrastructure) and fund improvements to meet accessibility standards as an urgent priority.
3. Improve the fairness and adequacy of transport related concessions. This should include: license concessions for learner, probationary and restricted licenses and aligning the discount on license fees for Health Care Card holders (currently 50% of costs) with Pension Card Holders (100%).
4. Undertake a study of transport costs in order to examine how individuals on low and fixed incomes meet costs of vehicle operation and maintenance and if and to what extent this involves reliance on sub-prime loans. Address any findings on the broader relationship between transport costs, indebtedness and infringements (e.g. driving unregistered) for people on low and moderate incomes.
5. Fund community transport at sustainable levels and in a manner that will ensure that community transport continues to be available to all in our community who are in need of it. That means ensuring a community transport system that is not only available to people eligible for an individualised funding package through Commonwealth initiatives like the NDIS or an aged care package.

(Authorised by Susan Helyar)

i Anglicare ACT & Red Cross, *Mapping food insecurity in the ACT*, accessed 5 May 2016
<<http://www.anglicare.com.au/data/foodmappingbasic.pdf>>, 2013, p.28.

ii ACT Medicare Local, *Connecting Care: A Comprehensive Needs Assessment 2014: Major Issues and Key Points*, ACT Medicare Local, Canberra, accessed 16 June 2016,
<<https://www.chnact.org.au/sites/default/files/CNA%20Major%20Issues%20and%20Key%20Points.pdf>>, 2014.

iii See for example J Dodson, N Buchanan, B Gleeson & N Sipe, 'Investigating the Social Dimensions of Transport Disadvantage—I. Towards New Concepts and Methods', *Urban Policy and Research*, vol. 24, 4, 2006, pp.432-453; J Hine, 'Transport and Social Exclusion' in R Kitchin & N Thrift (eds), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, Elsevier Ltd, Oxford, 2009, pp. 429-434.

iv J Pilbrow, ACT Cost of Living Report: Transport, Full data report, ACTCOSS, Canberra,
<<http://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/2016-report-act-cost-of-living-transport-full-data.pdf>>, 2016, p. 1-2.

v G Currie, 'Where the wheels come off: transport poverty and disadvantage', *Insight*,
<<http://insight.vcoss.org.au/where-the-wheels-come-off-transport-poverty-and-disadvantage/>>, no date given