Comments on draft Greater Canberra City Area Coordinated Action Plan 2010-2016

Overall comments

Like Copenhagen, Canberra can transform itself from a city with a congested centre, into one of the world's most liveable cities. These photos from Jan Gehl show one of Copenhagen's main streets in 1960 (left) and in

2005 (right).

The Canberra Pedestrian Forum believes that increasing the **quality** of Civic is more important than simply increasing the **amount** of employment and commercial activity that occurs in Civic – especially if that increase occurs at the cost of employment and commerce elsewhere in Canberra.

The importance of pedestrians to this Action Plan becomes obvious when you consider the three main ways that people use Civic:

1. travel through Civic by car, bus or bicycle, on their way to other destinations;
2. use Civic's drive-through facilities such as petrol stations and MacDonald's drive-through;
3. arrive by various modes of transport, and access Civic's commercial and employment facilities as pedestrians.

One strategy that Copenhagen used to turn itself into a liveable city was to progressively reduce the number of car parking spaces in the city centre. This created new commercial and public space in the city centre. It also reduced traffic congestion and pollution, as people switched to less polluting transport modes that require less road space.

Planning for Civic should consider the temporal and spatial environment. Transport fuel costs are likely to increase during 2011-2016, as global demand increases faster than supply. As transport costs increase, people who live in outlying suburbs will become less inclined to travel to Civic for work or shopping purposes, preferring instead to travel to closer and more accessible centres.

The need to reduce greenhouse emissions is likely to further increase transport costs. These costs will be felt most by people who live in suburbs in which it is not practical to walk, cycle or catch public transport to destinations like Civic.

The most effective ways to address rising travel costs will be to minimise the distances that people must travel (e.g. by increasing the number of people who live within walking distance of Civic – Target 1) and to ensure that people have practical alternatives to car travel.

Comments on the Targets

Each of the nine Targets can – if appropriately defined – improve the quality of Civic as Canberra's employment and commercial hub. We believe that each Target should be considered not as single issue, but as an objective that can be achieved by a range of measures.

Target 1: *Residential: By 2016 the number of people living in the Greater City Area will double to 10,400*.

This initiative will effectively reduce the travel needs of the people who live within Civic. If they work in Civic they can walk to work. If they work in other Town Centres or Employment nodes, they can bus to work.

An appropriate complementary initiative would be to *increase the number of people who live within walking distance (~1 km) or cycling distance (~5km) of Civic*, *or who live within easy walking distance of trunk route bus stops* (see also Target 3).

Target 2: *Employment:: By 2016, total employment in the Greater Canberra City Area will exceed 45,000* (up 24% from 36,400 in 2006).

In conjunction with the Target 1, this will result in a net increase of at least 4,200 people commuting into Civic.

Congestion and travel costs would be reduced if some of this employment were located nearer to where people live.

Target 3: *Journey to work: By 2016 the majority of people will get to work in Canberra City by walking, riding, public transport or as a car passenger*.

This target should be at least 57%, which is the “business as usual” target that can be calculated by projecting the 2001-2006 trend through to 2016.

"*Improvements to the pedestrian path network*" should address the current barriers to pedestrian movement that are constituted by Northbourne Avenue, Barry Drive and Ballumbir St.

"*Continuing improvement to bus frequency along higher density corridors*" should be complemented by "*increasing residential density along high frequency bus routes*."

Target 4: *Active street frontages: By 2016 external active frontages visible from the public realm will increase by 50%.*

We support this target. Mixed use development – including the businesses needed to service the needs of the 5,200 additional Civic residents - can contribute to achieving this target.

Target 5: *Public parking: By 2016 17,500 publicly accessible car parking spaces are available in Greater Canberra City area 7 days a week* (up 23% from 14,186 in 2009).

This target should be to have no additional public parking spaces in Civic. This will allow land in Civic to be used for more valuable commercial and public uses. Demand for parking spaces can be minimised by housing more people in and near Civic, locating places of employment closer to where employees live, and improving access by foot, bicycle and public transport.

Figures 7 and 9 indicate that around a fifth of the commercially valuable land area of Civic is currently used for car parking. Under draft Targets 5 and 6, this proportion is likely to increase.

The 17,500 target effectively maintains the status quo, relative to the targeted 24% increase in employment, and undermines the objective of increasing walking, cycling and public transport. It will require an additional 65,000 square metres of public parking space, which could otherwise be used for public or commercial purposes.

Cities like Copenhagen (see photos on page 1) have become more liveable by *reducing* car parking space.

Target 6: *Short stay convenience parking: By 2016 a minimum 10% spare capacity in short stay (<3 hours) public parking is evenly distributed across the Greater City Area between 12 noon – 2.00 pm on an "average traffic" day* (compared with 73.4% measured between 10am and noon in 2009).

The target for 2016 should be to have no additional short stay convenience parking spaces in the centre of Civic. Retail premises that sell goods that are too large to carry on foot should be relocated to more appropriate locations such as Braddon. As noted above under Target 5, this will allow more valuable commercial and public land uses; several strategies can minimise demand for parking spaces.

"*Minimum 10% spare capacity*" means that this target can be met through providing excess parking capacity. This is contrary to

the overall objective to "*optimise the utilisation of existing transport and other infrastructure"*
(p.1 of the draft report) .

It is not clear whether the "*minimum 10% spare capacity between 12 noon and 2pm"* target is intended to mean greater or lesser capacity utilisation, since the 2009 benchmark figure given in the draft plan is for a different period - 10am to noon.

Target 7: *The public realm: By 2016 at least half the study area's public realm is upgraded to higher standards of safety, serviceability and appearance.*

We endorse this Target.

Target 8: *The road network: By 2016 investment in road network improvements has achieved the predicted traffic performance and resultant economic and qualitative benefits.*

Noting that "economic" benefits include both "quantitative" and "qualitative" benefits, we recommend that this Target be re-phrased to " ... *achieve the optimum overall financial and qualitative benefits for all traffic including buses, cars, bicycles and foot traffic,"* and that modelling of bicycle and foot traffic be undertaken in order to carry out bicycle and foot traffic modelling, that can be used in conjunction with car and bus modelling to determine the economic optimum.

Target 9: *Cycle and pedestrian networks: By 2016 two kilometres of new and upgraded shared use path is constructed to improve bicycle and pedestrian access through areas east of Northbourne Avenue, and to improve connections between City East and City West..*

This Target should also address the connections between Civic and Turner (across Barry Drive), Braddon and Reid (across Cooyong and Ballumbir Sts).

The connections between City East and City West can be improved by relatively simple means including:

(1) re-timing pedestrian signals so that people can walk across Northbourne Avenue in a single traffic light sequence. This can be facilitated by realigning the roads closer to the centre of Northbourne Avenue at intersections controlled by traffic lights, so that people can cross in less time; and

(2) reducing motor traffic on Northbourne Avenue by diverting through-traffic around the outside of Civic.

With my best regards

Leon Arundell, Convenor

16 March 2010