

Your local voice



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Comments on the Proposed New Bus Network

The Weston Creek Community Council [WCCC] welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposed new Bus Network for Canberra to commence in 2019.

The proposed Network is a radical change to the way that the Canberra Bus Network is currently running. This is particularly so for Weston Creek.

In theory the new network should be a positive for Canberra. The Transport Canberra slogans say 'More buses, more often'. Who can argue with that? And it's true that more rapid routes have been rolled out. But at what cost?

The new rapid bus routes are at the expense of local/suburban bus routes, school buses and Expresso services. Council cannot understand why all Expresso services are set to be cancelled, despite their popularity, and despite so many commuters relying on them during the morning and afternoon peaks.

Translated into the real world, the new bus network would mean that many current commuters would have to

- (a) walk further to a bus stop;
- (b) instead of direct services, they will have to change buses more often; and
- (c) many school children will lose their dedicated, direct routes and have to catch regular public buses – and in many cases will have to change buses several times.

There is a real risk that, if the new network is implemented as currently proposed, it will actually translate to more people abandoning public transport and driving instead.

If a bus commute turns from a single 20 – 30 minute trip on an Expresso bus or a dedicated School Bus Service under the current timetable to a marathon journey of an hour or more, involving having to change buses once or even twice, and/or walking long distances – human nature being what it is, most commuters will opt to drive instead.

Council notes that some 400 current Bus Stops [12%] will go under the proposed new Network. This will mean that there will be 400 less service points to a network which in one sense could be seen as shrinking now due to this loss.

The new network may look more efficient on paper, to transport planners and politicians, but for actual users of public transport it's a step backwards.

The remainder of this Submission will concentrate on the proposed Network for Weston Creek and Molonglo.

In broad there are three areas to comment on:

- 1. The Proposed Rapid Network**
- 2. The Proposed Changes to the Suburban Network**
- 3. The School Bus Network**

1. The Proposed Rapid Network.

On paper this looks to be very good for those residents in Weston Creek and Molonglo. However, without substantial additional infrastructure the Weston Creek Community Council cannot support the implementation of the Rapid Network to Weston Creek. We think the Molonglo Rapid Network proposal is fine for the moment, though we do have some comments on both the Rapid and the Suburban Network.

Park and Ride: Firstly, it is proposed to start 2 Rapid Services from the Weston Group Centre. There are only 10 Park and Ride parking spaces at the present time at the Centre.

Parking at Coleman Court has been under pressure since 2009 when RoadsACT undertook a survey based on a request from Council. This survey said that parking was full and over the next 6 years Council succeeded in gaining just 76 new parking spaces around Coleman Court. Parking here is now even fuller if that can be said – just ask the local residents and those in Molonglo.

To run such Rapid Services from Coleman Court requires a major increase in Park and Ride parking. **It cannot be taken from the current parking** and Council would not want to see the All-Day parking places being taken by commuters as this is likely to have a very negative impact on the local businesses and employees at the Weston Group Centre as well as those who are using the centre for shopping and services based here.

In summary, starting Rapid Services at Cooleman Court without the infrastructure has the potential to have a large negative economic impact on the Centre and the businesses located here.

Given that the last increase in parking places took Government 6 years, Council cannot see how a major increase in parking for Park and Ride can be made here in time for the proposed service to commence.

We then move to the Park and Ride on the Cotter Road at Kirkpatrick Street. This has 45 Park and Ride parking places and the heresay advice is that these parking places are all being taken early in the day. This “House Full” sign so early in the day may have a negative effect on the street parking at the RSPCA premises which are nearby.

Again, a major increase in the number of parking places is needed here to provide parking for users. Where and when is the question that is being asked.

The counter argument would be that commuters can bus to Cooleman Court on the local bus and return home on the same bus. However, this overlooks one main point that the suburban route only runs hourly, and so commuters could spend 50 or so minutes waiting for the suburban bus to take them home on that last stage. This is only likely to further discourage travel by bus.

Expresso Services: The proposed Rapid Services will also see the Expresso Bus Services stopped. So, we will see the very people that now fill most of the Expresso buses, the ones who currently support the Transport system, being pushed into a system that they are not happy with and some are likely to change their mode of transport. It’s quite clear to Council that this will translate to current Expresso users – except the lucky few who live and work/go to school near a Rapid bus stop – opting to hop in their cars and drive instead.

Council would like to see the Expresso Services maintained in the new Network system at least in the interim to monitor usage of each service and particularly while there is no viable interchange and Park and Ride at Cooleman Court.

Cooleman Court Interchange: It is proposed that the interchange for the new Network be on Parkinson Street where there are current stops on either side of the road and to discontinue the use of the bus stop in Brierly Street.

The broad proposed network has 11 Services commencing hourly from Cooleman Court – two Rapid Services with 4 buses per hour and 3 Suburban services hourly. There will also be the termination of the same 11 services per hour here.

So, we have 22 movements to start. As well, there will be 3 arriving services each way [total 6] of bus services to and from Kambah/Tuggeranong to and from Woden and current route 27. This brings the total number of movements to 28 per hour or 1 bus arriving or leaving almost every two minutes or every 4 minutes from each side of Parkinson Street.

Clearly, what is in place currently at Cooleman Court in Parkinson Street is not “fit for purpose” nor a viable Interchange to cope with such a number of buses and passengers. The new Network also proposes that many School children will be catching regular bus services and will also use the interchange for their travel by bus to and from school.

In the proposed School Bus Policy Para 2.3 states - A reliance on CCTV and safety Officers to make interchanges a safe place for students. Transport Canberra may well argue that this will not be an “interchange” but Council can tell Transport Canberra that the Weston Creek and Molonglo communities will regard it as an Interchange with the proposed Network.

Many Weston school buses are proposed using the daily bus system that is predicated on going through the Weston Bus Station (what is an interchange when it is not one!). So, the questions being asked already by parents and commuters and schools are

- does it get CCTV and safety officers on an on-going basis?
- Or will a belated promise be made that is only good for the transition?
- Council makes the strong point that that primary school students will use the Weston Interchange/Bus Station/Waypoint, **an on-going safe environment is surely a must.**

Much work needs to be done here to make this area into a viable location for such a volume of bus services and anticipated passenger movement.

This work would need to include

- A Traffic Impact Assessment must be conducted before any new Network is introduced,
- a much longer bus bay on either side of the road to allow for at least two buses to park one behind the other and where that could be given that Parkinson Street is not straight where the current bus stops are,
- a pedestrian crossing to allow for the safe crossing of Parkinson Street wherever the bus stop is located, particularly now that primary school children will be travelling in some number through this Interchange,
- a need to look at the access to the southside parking area at Cooleman Court with perhaps one-way entry and exit to the parking area and/or a need to change these,
- the impact with Watling Place, and
- a safe Kiss and Ride and Pick-up and Kiss area

What we have now in Parkinson Street is simply unacceptable with what is being proposed for the Network and we haven’t even discussed the time that implementing measures to make it “fit for purpose” would take.

Molonglo: Council is pleased that Molonglo is gaining its own Rapid Network Line and strongly supports this. Council has always wanted Bus Services to be

provided early in the settling of new suburbs to enable travel patterns to be developed rather than wait several years and try to change these developed travel patterns.

Council would hope that this service would start at the new Denman Prospect shops which should open early in the New Year. In the short-term at least, Council would suggest that the start of this route should then not run to John Gorton Drive via Holborow Avenue but perform a slightly Suburban route via McMichael Terrace to Kondalea Way with a stop adjacent to the Ada Norris Avenue intersection and then follow Wyndham Avenue to John Gorton Drive with a stop adjacent to the School near Bielski Street. This probably adds one stop and a couple of minutes to the journey, but Council would hope that it may encourage new passengers to the service.

This would also provide a regular service to the Denman Prospect shops and medical services for those residents in Coombs and Wright who are without cars and would remove the hourly wait for buses as they need to wait now.

Comment: According to the 2016 Census approximately 6.2% of those people travelling to work from Weston Creek did so by bus. Individual Suburb percentages are Chapman 4.5, Duffy 5.2, Holder 7.6, Fisher 6.3, Rivett 6.8, Stirling 5.5, Waramanga 7.3 and Weston 6.6. This figure overall is approximately 25% below the Canberra average of 8.25% of travellers using the bus service although we believe that the figures here do not include School services.

In further looking at this Census data we see about 20% of Weston Creek residents who work are travelling by car to Civic and Barton – around 14% to Civic and 6% to Barton. Clearly, these would be the target of both the Expresso and Rapid Services and we need to know and understand what would encourage these residents to change their mode of transport to bus to work.

Conclusion: For the reasons outlined here Council is unable to support the implementation of the proposed Rapid Network for Weston Creek at this time.

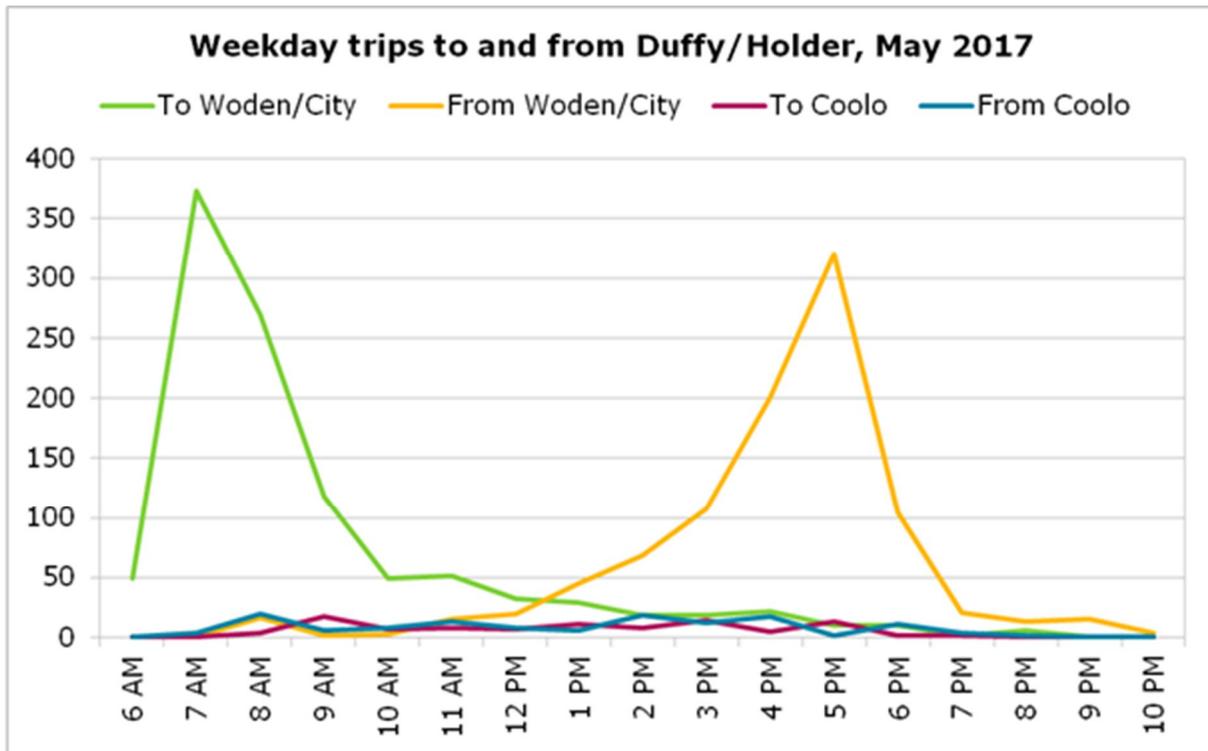
2. The Proposed Changes to the Suburban Network

The new Network proposes that 3 of the 4 Suburban services terminate at Cooleman Court and not continue as they do now to Woden. It will mean that the majority of residents in Weston Creek will need to catch two buses to go to their Town Centre in Woden. There is much discussion within the community as to whether these bus services should continue to run to Woden or not with the Woden Valley Community Council expressing its concern that these services will not continue through to Woden.

Approximately 10% of workers from Weston Creek travel to Woden by car for work according to the 2016 Census. Stopping the suburban buses at Cooleman Court

will only likely increase this number as the need to catch two buses to travel 5 km or so would likely lead to a change of travel.

Indeed, when we look at Action statistics we find for Duffy and Holder the following usage:



Here we see that 7 out of 8 trips are heading to and from Woden/City.

The Woden/City lines account for 600+ trips out of Duffy and Holder each day and a similar number returning. The proposed new Network will force 1,200 journeys to interchange at Cooleman Court. The question that Council doesn't have the answer to is how many of these commuters would take the Rapid Service to the City. Council would expect that the same figures would apply to Route 26 through Chapman and Rivett.

In relation to the specific Routes we offer the following comments and suggestions:

Current Route 27 to become Route 63: There appears to be no change to this Route and it continues to terminate and start from Woden.

Current Route 26 to become Route 64: There is no change to this Route apart from its termination and starting from Cooleman Court instead of Woden. Council would suggest that unless there were statistics to show that these commuters travel predominately to the City then this route should continue to Woden.

Current route 25 to become Route 65: There are changes to this Route as it no longer services Weston or goes to Woden. It also loses the "Wyangala Loop".

Council would suggest that the old Route through this “Wyangala Loop” area be reinstated and there be subsequent changes to the proposed Route 66/67. This would mean a circular route as before without the extension to Woden. Again, this loss of service to Woden has disappointed a number in the Community who use this as a direct service from Duffy, Holder and Weston to Woden.

Current Route 83 becomes Route 66/67: This Route no longer continues through to Woden via Heysen Street and Lyons. There are a number of people in both Weston Creek and Molonglo who would prefer that this Route continue to Woden. In the absence of that happening Council would suggest the following changes to the proposed Route 66/67.

Council would suggest that some of the proposed changes revert to what was the old Route 83 as follows. Revert the Route to run down Warragamba Avenue as this will service the Holder Wetlands which are due to be opened shortly. This would also service a large number of residents who would have been some distance from a Bus Stop. The bus would not run across the top of Duffy along Eucumbene Drive and down Hindmarsh Drive. Part of this loss would be covered by the changes that Council proposes to new Route 65.

We would also suggest that the route revert to running up Heysen Street to the Hilder Street/Heysen Street roundabout and then down Hilder Street to McGuinness Street before continuing down Conder Street to Coleman Court.

This would mean though that half of McGuinness Street still loses a bus service and that this southern end of Weston will virtually have no reasonable access to a bus service.

Council welcomes the loop proposed in Coombs and would suggest a stop adjacent to the School near the intersection of Annabelle View and Madgwick Street as this will provide access to the George Weston School and the proposed Molonglo River Reserve and service this part of Coombs.

3. Changes to the School Bus Network.

Council is concerned with the dramatic changes proposed for the School Bus Network. It took much searching and help to find the proposed network and also to suddenly find that there was also a Draft School Bus Policy that Council will comment on separately.

The main issues seem to be that a number of dedicated Bus Routes will not be part of the proposed Network and that school children will be expected to use the Suburban and Rapid Networks to get to and from School.

Council does have concerns for Primary School Children needing to catch the bus and for the majority, the need to change at the proposed Coleman Court Interchange. This is an issue which has been strongly voiced in the community with safety concerns being by far the most important point.

Council also does have concerns for those Primary School children living in Weston and North Weston who need to cross either Streeton Drive or Hindmarsh Drive to get to their local Primary School in Waramanga or Duffy.

Council is also concerned that for many current school students (both Primary and Secondary) currently using the School Bus system with dedicated services will, under the new network, find their journeys to and from school will take significantly longer and involve interchanging at least once. This will likely lead to more parents driving their children to and from school, adding traffic pressure to our roads.

Council also asks the question in relation to the proposed School Bus Policy in relation to Para 3.1 where the Appendix addresses diagrammatically the use of safety officers at schools. Is this resource shifting a responsibility to schools? For example, Mount Stromlo High School and St John Vianney's Primary School both have no crossing presence on Namatjira Drive but under this proposal invariably will have to have one each. Is this something that ACTION will provide or is this an issue that will be transferred the Education Department or to both schools to resource.

Council appreciates the opportunity to comment.

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