

DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH

June 2021

Transport investment in the Molonglo Valley

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and Minister Steel.

As a local member for Murrumbidgee, I am always interested in matters affecting my local constituents.

Traffic concerns, and particularly rising congestion, is a matter that many people in the community have raised with me in recent months; as I know they have with my fellow Labor member for Murrumbidgee, Minister Steel, and with other local representatives here in the Assembly.

Molonglo Valley is the ACTs newest greenfield development, with a current population of around 10,000 people, and will – as Minister Steel said – continue to develop and grow considerably over the next decade.

As with any of our urban areas across the ACT, the travel and transport patterns and needs of the community are diverse and complex.

Due to the growing nature of the Molonglo Valley population, transport issues and initiatives affecting Molonglo Valley residents also affect those in neighbouring areas of Weston Creek and elsewhere.

I thank Mr Steel for the work he is doing, as Minister for Transport, together with the excellent work across the ACT Government and within the Transport Canberra Directorate, to address traffic issues and congestion in the region.

Following recent traffic monitoring and surveys, there have been a number of improvements implemented, including changes to the sequencing of traffic lights on Cotter Road. Constituent feedback about these changes has been positive, with a noticeable reduction in congestion in the morning peak hour.

I look forward to the Government's large-scale and major project infrastructure outcomes which will continue to address the needs of the growing population in the Molonglo Valley. Some of these works, as noted by Minister Steel, include the bridge over the Molonglo River and the extension and completion of John Gorton Drive.

Connecting the Molonglo Valley to Belconnen through the duplication of sections of William Hovell Drive will help relieve pressure from Cotter Road and the Tuggeranong Parkway.

The incorporation of on-road cycleways and off-road shared paths as part of major road upgrade projects is also welcomed.

It is also great to see a range of other investments being made by the ACT Government for public transport and active travel initiatives. The commitment to construct the missing network gap connecting the Molonglo Valley to the shared path near the RSPCA in Weston Creek is a significant step.

I note Minister Steel's comments and the commitment of the ACT Government to having fast-tracked a number of footpath and cycle path network upgrades since the start of 2020, and largely in response to the numbers of people who took up, or increased, walking and cycling during the pandemic.

The introduction of Light Rail to Canberra's southern suburbs will have significant positive impact for the communities of Woden Valley, and the people of Murrumbidgee more broadly.

Good connections and integrations between all forms of public transport – buses and light rail – as well as first/last mile solutions for people walking and people riding bikes, and together with continued and expanded Park and Ride opportunities, will be critical in contributing to Canberra's net zero greenhouse gas emissions strategy.

The Transport sector accounts for 62% of carbon emissions in the ACT and is the largest contributing sector. This figure is dominated by private vehicle use.

I welcome the ACT Conservation Council's 'Make the Move' campaign launched last week by Minister Rattenbury, and in conjunction with the Canberra Environment Centre. For anyone who is not yet familiar with this program, I encourage you to visit the Make the Move website and review the array of information to assist individuals, families and workplaces to change habits to embrace walking and cycling as regular modes of travel.

Canberrans make over a million trips every day. In the ACT, around 30% of trips made are either less than 5km or are between 5-10km. These are distances that are easily walk-able or ride-able. Shifting even a small proportion of these short distance commuters to active modes of travel would increase the capacity of Canberra's transport network.

Often, the hardest part for individuals is making the change and creating a new habit. 'Make the Move' supports people and workplaces to do just that.

Investments in major transport initiatives, informed by robust community input and experience, together with the expertise of traffic engineers, urban planners and others are – as Minister Steel notes – critical to retain the quality of life we have become accustomed to, and expect, in Canberra; and befitting of the nation's capital city.

Transport is an issue of health and wellbeing. The amount of time we each spend in our daily commutes to work, and also in other everyday activities and errands, contributes to our balance – or juggle! – of life, work, family, social activities and recreation. For most of us, getting from A to B is a means to an end, and the less time we can spend on the road, and particularly in private cars, the better!

I once heard a phrase – “you're not stuck in a traffic jam. You ARE the traffic jam”!

There is a lot of truth in this statement, and it is a very powerful one.

From this perspective, and that of a work-life balance for our community, I am very encouraged at the ACT Government's recent Transport Recovery Plan's reference to flexible working arrangements. There are some really important and interesting intersects between transport solutions and flexible working arrangements to bring about a range of benefits for individuals, large scale workplaces, local businesses, the economy and the environment.

I look forward to working closely with Minister Steel and other colleagues in coming years as we seek to undertake further work in this space, ultimately working to remove more cars from our roads, while developing robust, comprehensive solutions to a range of transport matters that address the needs of all Canberrans.

We need flexible, reliable and sustainable options for Canberrans to move around our city. Those options need to be affordable, easy and convenient. They need to be socially equitable and account for all sectors of our community including the elderly and aging.

I wish to thank Minister Steel, and the staff and executive of Transport Canberra, for their work to understand these important community issues around transport, and to develop holistic, long-term solutions for the benefit of our community and the environment.

Thank you.