

VIEW FROM CANBERRA

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Car Drivers Need Choices

WHAT creates traffic congestion?

It all seems obvious. The road network cannot manage the traffic volume, it fills up with cars and it comes to a standstill, enraging drivers and creating productivity losses.

Let's not forget that cars are not the sole cause. There is a driver who made the decision to drive to work. We all love our cars and the freedom they provide and the convenience.

A reason congestion has become a problem in Australia is that travel options available to car owners do not offer an alternative that is as convenient to driving your own car.

But public transport and school services can be much improved to make it a closer competitor.

Have you ever noticed the drop off in congestion during school holidays?

What makes an individual change their choice of travel even if it is just once a week? And how do you change the NIMBY mentality of driving the car.

The Federal Government, and in particular Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's commitment to a Cities and Built Environment portfolio provides some hope for the future of Australian cities, but this will not solve the current and immediate congestion concerns.

The alternatives to driving your car need to provide a better offering, a better experience to provide people a real choice about leaving the car at home once a week, twice a week or every day, and not just to and from work but to other activities.

A starting point has to be about improving the usability of existing public transport networks.

You can improve cycling and walking options that provide better capacity to get to your end destination safely and away from traffic and you can improve access to bus stops by walking and cycling to them with secure places to store bikes or carry them on the bus. Walkers and cyclists are part of the solution.

There is great scope for bus network - wide improvements that connect outer metropolitan suburbs and towns to create an efficient and convenient public transport network. BRT is a big part of the solution as well.

BRT has the same characteristics as a Light Rail Transit (LRT) system - same dedicated right of way use, same stations, same ticketing, except on rubber wheels that can operate on and off the dedicated transit corridor.

BRT can be built to the right specification to be transformed into light rail in the future, if required. The beauty of BRT is it can be built for 4 to 10 times cheaper than light rail and provides flexibility.

Bus Australia Network



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How about these few initiatives to provide short to medium-term relief from the current congestion crisis in our cities and regions?

- Bus priority lanes on major city roads during peak times which can also be used by cars with 3 or more passengers: 7.30am to 9.30am and 4.30pm to 6.30pm.
- Reinforce this peak period bus priority by running buses on major and key routes during the peak times every 10 minutes.
- During non-peak periods services should run every 30 minutes at a minimum from 6.30am to 9.30pm for early starters and late finishers.
- Introduce bus priority lay off areas and “B lights” at all traffic lights so buses can get ahead of the traffic.
- Improve bus/rail interchange facilities to better link bus service providers to deliver seamless transfers between services.
- Undertake a full bus stop infrastructure program that provides enclosed bus stops to protect passengers from the weather, good lighting for security at night and be located 400 metres from every home and no more than 800 metres to improve access to services.
- Provide real time information at all bus stops and, through trip plan web applications, provide passengers information about when the bus is expected and the capacity to easily manage trip plans.
- Introduce Wi-Fi on all buses and continue to implement state wide integrated ticketing systems.
- Build Park and Ride facilities so drivers can park their car near to major bus stops.
- Implement a long-term bus replacement programs that reduces the average age of the bus fleet to a minimum of 12 years and invest in new vehicle and intelligent transport system technology.

Investment in existing public transport networks will save and reduce productivity losses due to congestion, will improve environmental outcomes, improve personal health through more incidental exercise to catch a bus or walk or cycle, improve road safety outcomes and just as importantly for those who do not own a car or can afford a car, improve social connectivity and social inclusion.

Bus Australia Network

