

CANBERRA LIGHT RAIL FOLLIES – LETTERS TO EDITOR

Letters To Editor –2023-24

In the boxes below are selected letters to the Editor published (and unpublished) in the Canberra Times and Canberra City News, in 2023 and for 2024, about the continuing folly that is Canberra’s light rail.

It is heartening to still see such letters from interested Canberrans and that they be published for which Canberra Times and Canberra City News should be congratulated.

While the Greens/Labor Government has a tin ear when it comes to the waste of taxpayers’ money on light rail, that is no reason not to keep up the fight against this wasteful project that is 100% ideological and 0% logical).

And let us never forget that the Labor Party brought this on itself by selling its soul to the Greens to hold on to power after the 2012 election.

M.R. Flint

Principal, Australian Logistics Study Centre

1 October 2024

<p>City News [Published 19Sep24] Government has run out of fresh ideas Some years ago before the tram was installed on Northbourne Avenue, we got the tape measure out. We concluded it was possible to reduce the size of the green belt (where the tram now runs along Northbourne Ave), add another lane each way and have the tram run in a T-lane next to the kerb. They threw the idea out. Are these people stupid or not? A no brainer yet they failed the public. Yes, Andrew Barr, you should run away to Melbourne. Your mob doesn’t fix anything and has run out of fresh ideas. Secondly, while out walking, I came upon an elderly gent who had fallen on his backside near the Tuggeranong Health Centre. He lost his balance probably due to the pavers and uneven walkway. He needed three of us to pick him up. I hope he writes to the ACT government. Labor-Greens are all talk and no action, and put people’s lives at risk. The sooner they’re gone, the better. Russ Morison, Theodore</p>
<p>City News [Published 5Sep24] Bus rapid transit investment twice as effective light rail Mike Quirk incorrectly claims (Letters, August 20) that the ACT government has failed to evaluate bus rapid transport. The ACT government’s evaluations show that investing in bus rapid transit is twice as effective as investing in light rail. Using standard economic scenarios, the government concluded that each dollar invested in bus rapid transit stage 1 would generate \$1.98 worth of benefits, compared with only \$1.02 for light rail stage 1; 38 cents for light rail stage 2a and 72 cents for light rail stage 2b. Using more optimistic, but more questionable scenarios, the government concluded that each dollar invested in bus rapid transit stage 1 would generate \$4.78 worth of benefits, compared with only \$2.34 for light rail stage 1, 56 cents for light rail stage 2a and \$1.18 for light rail stage 2b. If the government had invested in bus rapid transit, then for the cost of light rail stage 1 buses would now be travelling from Gungahlin to Woden (via Civic) in 40 minutes. Light rail won’t be ready to travel from Gungahlin to Woden until 2033, would cost billions more and would take 10 minutes longer. Leon Arundell, Downer</p>
<p>City News [Published Sep24] Hilltops development as silly as a tram! I do not believe Mr Barr, if still in power, will build on hilltops as Monica Beran (letters, CN August 22) is concerned about. It would be the modern equivalent to the folly of building a tramline in Canberra in the 21st century. A cost/benefit study would show that even on purely financial grounds, it did not justify itself. Early in the development of Canberra, the water treatment plant was placed on Mt Stromlo at an elevation of 2800ft with water pumped from Cotter Dam. Later, water from Bendora could be obtained by gravity feed as Bendora is over 4000ft. Most are familiar with the pipelines along the Cotter Road. It was stipulated in the urban plans that no housing could be above 2500ft so reservoirs for each suburb (at about 2600ft) could also be gravity fed from Stromlo and thus also gravity feed the dwellings and group centres. The hills of Canberra would be retained as reserves enhancing the landscape. There would be significant engineering costs to supply water to residences on hilltops, above the current reservoirs, quite apart from the scenic vandalism that such a move would entail! Surely someone can find a Golden Sun Moth. Or what about the NCA doing its job for a change and rule it out at the start?</p>

<p>Peter Haddon, chartered professional engineer, Jerrabomberra</p> <p>Canberra Times [Published 2Sep24]</p> <p>Good transport system trashed</p> <p>Tony Williams (CT, August 30) asks why we can't have buses and trams. In a well-planned territory this would be a choice. But at almost \$1 million a metre, and with no convincing business case, a tram built for ideological, not logical reasons, is a poor choice. If we can have both, why was a functioning bus system destroyed over all of Canberra, when Gungahlin got Shane's tram? Assuming even more exorbitant rates could pay for a Woden tram, and the engineering challenges could be overcome, how would anyone get on or off it from nearby suburbs?</p> <p>With no upper house, and no local councils, we need sensible independents to have the balance of power and establish good government for a change.</p> <p>Maria Greene, Curtin</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 2Sep24]</p> <p>What's it really costing?</p> <p>When asked under a question on notice about the total costs associated with the 1.7km light rail stage 2b extension to Commonwealth Park, the Chief Minister provided the full value of the various contracts his government had signed, totalling \$1.46 billion.</p> <p>However, he argued that this entire amount should not be considered when calculating the project's total costs. Instead, Mr Barr claimed that only the \$577 million paid to Canberra Metro for the capital construction component should be identified as the project's true cost.</p> <p>He asserted that the additional \$900 million - allocated for raising London Circuit, acquiring additional rail vehicles, design, build support, and other expenses - was separate from the construction of the short extension line.</p> <p>Now, when it suits him politically, he includes every possible line item provided by a quick costing consultancy, to argue that any option for a brand-new stadium would cost close to \$2 or \$3 billion, putting it in the top five most expensive stadiums ever built. It's no wonder Canberrans are beginning to question the Chief Minister's financial skills and integrity.</p> <p>B Jones, Kambah</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 2Sep24]</p> <p>Our beautiful city is becoming an embarrassing mess</p> <p>I want to add my voice to the many people who are complaining about the neglect of all services in Canberra. We have no streetlights working in our street, our footpaths are in a shocking state. We can't even cross the road in the night as we can't see anything at all. After 32 years - and well over a million kilometres - the last of the orange-and-blue stalwarts of the capital's bus fleet have completed their final runs. There are a lot of elderly people living in our area and it's a disgrace. Recently, a friend tripped over at Mawson shops while posting a letter. She was taken by ambulance to the hospital and had plastic surgery to her face. She is unrecognisable right now and had to cancel a special overseas trip.</p> <p>I use Palmerston Lane in Manuka a lot and it's disgusting. It hasn't been cleaned for years. There is rubbish everywhere - cigarette butts, stinking bins. I remember when the ACT government did Palmerston Lane up and laid cobblestones which immediately cracked. We were told Palmerston Lane was going to be a feature in Manuka. What a joke. You have to take care not to trip on all the broken tiles. And watch out for the dog poo.</p> <p>My friends say that parts of Canberra are like a Third World country.</p> <p>Why can't this government look after this wonderful city? Yes, of course, as we get nearer to the election, Mr Barr will start making more and more promises he has no intention of keeping. No one believes a word of it. Even the Labor voters don't believe him now. All he cares about is that stupid tram, a tram that not many people get to use.</p> <p>We have lived in Canberra for 60 years. It was so beautiful when we came here and before we had self-government. The federal governments took pride in their capital city and maintained it. What a sad thing it is to see the state of Canberra now.</p> <p>Rae Harvey, Griffith</p>
<p>The Canberra Times [Published 9Sep24]</p> <p>Light Rail Fantasy</p> <p>Another great letter from Graham Downie (albeit somewhat rare these days) (letters 1Sep24), about the duplicity of the Greens in respect to claiming credit for improved Canberra's bus services while having forced the wastage of billions of dollars on light rail to the detriment of many bus patrons, in cancellation of bus routes to boost patronage of light rail.</p> <p>The very few who can access the Gungahlin-Civic line (about 4% of Canberra's population) may be happy, but the rest of Canberra sees it only as another tax imposition.</p> <p>At maximum capacity already, the patronage is 4.6 million a year whereas the Business Case predicted 6.3 million. The subsidy is some \$15-\$17 per boarding and will not reduce.</p> <p>A great deal in the eyes of the Greens and Labor who have zero respect for taxpayers! Ideology in power is a terrible thing for citizens.</p> <p>M. Flint Principal, Smart Canberra Transport 1Sep24</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 1Sep24]</p> <p>Greens are duplicitous</p>

<p>The ACT Greens are duplicitous claiming any credit for Labor's pre-election commitment to improve Canberra's bus service when it was the Greens who demanded billions of dollars be spent on light rail to the detriment of many bus patrons.</p> <p>The introduction of light rail in 2019 coincided with numerous bus routes being abolished, truncated or re-routed to prop up the tram. Most weekend bus services became almost worthless and despite claims to the contrary by the government, the tram is not an overall driver of public transport patronage .</p> <p>Recently the government, notably minister Chris Steel, cites the success of the tram with its carrying about 20 per cent of all public transport boardings. Meanwhile, figures from Transport and City Services show patronage on the Belconnen-Woden rapid bus routes makes up 19.75 per cent of all boardings. This does not include passengers already on buses before the Belconnen-City-Woden corridor, whose destinations are within the corridor. Neither does it include rapid routes R6, R7 and R10 nor local routes such as 32, 57 and 58.</p> <p>The tram has never stacked up financially, environmentally nor from a sound public transport option. The government's 2012 submission to Infrastructure Australia indicated bus rapid transit would cost less than half to establish and provide the same stimulus of light rail. But pressured by the Greens for their support, the government ultimately went ahead with light rail.</p> <p>The best the Greens can do now is to admit they were wrong and to urge their Labor partners to scrap the light rail extension.</p> <p>Graham Downie, O'Connor</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 27Aug24]</p> <p>Too Little, Too Late</p> <p>Oh, the irony of it all: Labor pledging to provide many more electric buses "if elected". Too late. They should have done it instead of wasting a billion or so dollars on the light rail. The ACT could have bought a lot of electric buses for that much money.</p> <p>B J Millar, Isabella Plains</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 8Aug24]</p> <p>Rail's snail pace</p> <p>Grace Brown cycled 32 kilometres at an average speed of 50kmh to win Australia's first Olympic gold medal for 2024. Olympians will soon run 1500 metres at speeds of around 25kmh. My old legs and my old two speed bicycle are no match for Grace Brown, but we can still manage more than 25kmh.</p> <p>The ACT government estimated that the steel-tyred vehicles of light rail stage 2A would average 23kmh over 1700 metres (compared with 34kmh for rubber-tyred vehicles) that stage 2A would cost less than \$300 million, and that it would provide only \$150 million worth of benefits.</p> <p>With a stroke of his pen ("Government sets completion date for next phase of light rail", December 7, 2023), ACT Transport Minister Chris Steel signed a \$570 million contract for only part of stage 2A.</p> <p>Rohan Goyne (Letters, August 6) is quite wrong to claim that Chris Steel has wasted "almost \$100 million" .</p> <p>Leon Arundell, Downer</p>
<p>City News [Published 11Jul24]</p> <p>Light Rail Costs</p> <p>I refer to the letter by Dave Rogers about light rail operating costs (4Jul24) commenting on my letter of 20Jun24. First, he did not 'clearly state the \$675m for Stage 1 was the capital cost' but, rather, he said 'the total cost of Stage 1, ...as audited... was \$675m...'. I checked the published letter. The rest of his letter ignores the fact that the contract was for \$1.78b (Auditor-General's figure) which included capital cost and 20 years of operations & maintenance costs (O&M). The ACT government paid \$350m upon commissioning in April 2019, with the balance of capital and O&M cost paid in annual instalments over the next 20 years. Although the contract itself has never been made public (ostensibly for confidentiality reasons), such contracts normally provide, within reason, for escalation of cost components over the course of the contract. But, we do not know for sure what the contract says, given the endemic propensity of the Government not to disclose light rail costs or contract terms and conditions.</p> <p>Max Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport 4Jul24</p>
<p>City News [Published 4Jul24]</p> <p>No government estimates operating costs for 20 years</p> <p>Max Flint of Smart Transport Canberra, accuses me of gullibility insofar as costings for the light rail are concerned (letters, CN June 20).</p>

<p>I clearly stated the \$675m for Stage 1 was the capital cost only. In project management, there are two separate and distinct cost elements; capital cost and, for a public utility like the tram, downstream operating costs. I am well aware of this distinction and would add from experience, no government estimates operating costs for 20 years, as the bases for such are unknown and inestimable. Normally, government budget provisions are made up to five years with forward estimates out to 10 at best. Why? No one knows the details on such aspects as inflation, interest rates, technology developments or even offsets such as sources of government revenue that far out. Auditors are competent in analysing the past data but even they don't have crystal balls to accurately predict the light rail operating costs for salaries, spare parts, consumables, equipment updates, power consumption, policies on fare revenue/subsidies etcetera, outside 10 years. To do so and claim accuracy is sheer folly. Ipso facto, using such estimates as evidence against the project is unprofessional and lacks credibility.</p> <p>There are experts in government and contractors who are fully across such matters, and prepare proposals on options and acquisition costs for extensive and forensic consideration by committees and eventually executive government before any decision is taken.</p> <p>Anyone can express their opposition to projects (as Mr Flint has been doing with little impact for years) but if done so on alleged unaffordable costs, they have a responsibility to ensure, unlike Douglas MacKenzie's recent forays, they are not just financial plucks from dubious sources. Personal opposition on other grounds should also be clearly justified to inform all, not just off-the-cuff thought bubbles.</p> <p>Downstream operating costs are very important to government budgets and the light rail is no different to every other service provided for the public such as hospitals, schools, roads, lighting, water and sewerage. It would no doubt carefully consider all the information for every project but they are, however, rarely the determining factor for selection of a particular element of future public infrastructure.</p> <p>I have had my tuppence worth and politely withdraw from this discussion.</p> <p>Dave Rogers, Woden, 4Jul24</p>
<p>City News [Published 27Jun24]</p> <p>Tunnel vision not the breakthrough</p> <p>When I saw a headline about a tunnel for light rail to Woden I thought – a breakthrough! No more worries about bridging the lake! No pesky gradients or sharp curves! No waiting for traffic lights! No running over pedestrians! And the tourist attraction of gliding through the limestone caverns under the Parliamentary Zone!</p> <p>Imagine my disappointment when I read on and found it would only be a tiny tunnel (or ditch)!</p> <p>Come on ACT government, be brave! You don't care how much it costs anyway. And there's that nice boring machine that doesn't seem to be doing much down at Snowy 2; I'm sure they'd be happy to lend it to you. What could go wrong?</p> <p>Richard Johnston, Kingston</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 23Jun24]</p> <p>Barr's proposed tram tunnel will be a disaster for Canberrans</p> <p>Labor's plan to build a tunnel for the tram will disrupt Canberra traffic for months, if not years. Picture supplied Labor's plan to build a tunnel for the tram will disrupt Canberra traffic for months, if not years. Picture supplied</p> <p>Daily we are subject to the ACT Government's pre-budget, pre-election deluge of "announcables". Many are simply, but somewhat boastfully, addressing prior delay, neglect, incompetence, or failure (medical staff numbers, footpath and mower funding and the like). But among those seemingly designed for a "wow" factor is the announcement of a tunnel for the tram stage 2B. A tunnel from Commonwealth Avenue to State Circle.</p> <p>What has so far escaped discussion is the fact that such a tunnel will involve a deep and wide trench across the Commonwealth Avenue accesses to Parliament House and State Circle - and likely Coronation Drive.</p> <p>These vital access routes would be severed for months even before factoring in the construction time and cost over-runs that typify public works construction in Canberra.</p> <p>The resultant traffic disruption, delay and diversion would impose material inconvenience and real costs on the community. Costs that, typically, the official tram cost-benefit analysis may omit from the costs side of the ledger, much like the pretence that removal and replanting of the mature heritage trees on Commonwealth Avenue - and Northbourne Avenue previously - would be cost-free to the community beyond felling and replanting costs.</p> <p>Is there no cure for this delusional tram folly?</p> <p>Mike Hutchinson, Reid</p>
<p>City News [Published 20Jun24]</p> <p>Trams won't 'save the planet', nor reduce rates</p> <p>Rail-borne public transport is something I understand, growing up in a tramline city and serving as chief surveyor for a major urban rail project.</p> <p>Trams don't suit Canberra's low density, disbursed residential and workplace commuting patterns. Trams are inherently inflexible. Trams cannot respond quickly or inexpensively to commuter traffic variations. Fixed tram routes serve a limited clientele. Making commuters change modes (bus to tram and vice versa) is shown to deter the use of public transport due to waiting times and inconvenience. Thus door-to-door cars are Canberra's commuter preference, especially in winter.</p> <p>For a low-density city like Canberra, trams are a costly luxury. The billion-dollar Gungahlin tram increased rates by more than 40 per cent in three years. It resulted from political pressure to establish a minority government and elevate a power-broker. Trams will never recoup the ACT government's borrowing costs.</p>

<p>Extending trams to Woden will cost another billion dollars, hiking rates and despoiling Commonwealth Avenue and parts of Civic, one of the world's few planned, attractive conurbations that works. Canberra's low-density environment suits efficient, flexible, economical, low-emission buses, sharing the cost of roads with other vehicles. Trams won't "save the planet" and definitely don't reduce the cost of rates. Anthony Horden, Jamison Centre</p>
<p>City News [Published 20Jun24] Fallen for the government's two-card trick Dave Rogers (Letters, CN June 13), is right to question Douglas Mackenzie's extraordinarily inaccurate claims of up to \$8-\$10 billion for the Stage 2B tram to Woden. Having been cost estimating the stages of light rail for 10 years, I don't know where Dr Mackenzie gets his \$9-\$10 billion cost from. My best estimate for Stage 2 (Civic-Woden) is \$4 billion for construction only, and \$5.3 billion, including 20 years of operations and maintenance (O&M). That said, Mr Rogers has fallen for the government's two-card trick that Stage 1 cost only \$675 million, but that was for construction only, whereas the total cost in 2016 was \$1.78 billion, including 20 years of O&M (auditor-general's figure). Max Flint, co-ordinator, Smart Canberra Transport, 12jun24</p>
<p>City News [Published 20Jun24] Tunnel, bridges and billions more Further to my letter and those by Tim Walshaw and Dave Rogers (CN June 13), I offer more examples of the madness gripping the increasingly desperate Barr-Rattenbury government. Having assumed that the Commonwealth Avenue bridge problem has been solved, the government plans to press ahead with Light Rail Stage 2B. The 100-year-old Himalayan cedars along the median of Commonwealth Avenue median will be destroyed. This has been indirectly confirmed by the Major Projects Canberra plans for planting trees. A "cut and cover" tunnel under Commonwealth Avenue to State Circle East has been proposed to solve the engineering problems posed by a tight left-hand bend on the preferred light rail route. The tunnel would carry the rail tracks under the Commonwealth Avenue median on the approach to Parliament House, then up on to the State Circle median. The rails would then follow the State Circle median until nearing Adelaide Avenue, where it is proposed to cut across the northbound lane of State Circle, across Capital Circle, presumably via a new bridge, another very tight bend, and another new bridge over State Circle; then on to the median of Adelaide Avenue. There are several other problems, but it is already clear that Stage 2B will cost multi-billions, take many years to build, and cause many months of severe road-traffic disruption. Dr Douglas Mackenzie, Deakin</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 17Jun24] An overlooked transport network Canberra has a complete road network, that connects to every driveway in the city. The ACT government is spending billions to modify a single public transport route that is already well-serviced. But it has no plan to complete the footpath network. Our footpath network connects to only two in five driveways. Another two in five Canberrans can reach a footpath only after crossing a road. One in five Canberra children can't walk or cycle to school without first either travelling on a road, or making their way across bumpy nature strips that are often obstructed by landscaping or parked vehicles. Will their parents be impressed to learn that most of the government's \$6 million of extra footpath funding will support people who already have good access to footpaths? ("New team to speed up Canberra's footpath repairs, extra roads funding," June 14). Leon Arundell, Downe</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 14Jun24] Why are we only learning of the need for a tunnel now? In May 2017, the ACT government let contract 2016-LRS02-003, "Technical Design Advisory Services - Light Rail Stage 2", valued at \$5.8m. Fourteen variations later, \$26.6m was spent on this contract. The contract deliverables were to enable the stage 2 procurement phase in 2018, including the "precise route alignment" and "bridge, tunnel and gradient engineering issues". In the subsequent seven years, dozens of further stage 2 contracts have been let, well over \$100m has been spent on route planning, and over \$1 billion has been spent or committed for works required to deliver the 1.7km of stage 2A. Yet it was only last week that a tunnel between State Circle and Commonwealth Ave emerged as a requirement. Ratepayers have the right to ask what has been achieved for all the time and money we've thrown into this pit (which at best will result in doubling the public transport travel time to Woden) and how the resources wasted could have reversed the decline of public housing, health, education, transport and city services we've witnessed over the last decade. Kent Fitch, Nicholls</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 14Jun24] A better route for the tram</p>

<p>The latest proposals, for the linking of Commonwealth and Adelaide avenues via State Circle, with an access tunnel to effect the link to Commonwealth Avenue, still render much of the Parkes and Barton office space difficult of access on foot, do nothing to minimise the time taken to travel between Woden and Civic, promise major traffic chaos during construction and do nothing to facilitate access from the rest of Canberra to the more distant parts of Barton, nor Kingston, Manuka, Fyshwick and Queanbeyan. Absolutely nothing has been said to date about the need for such an interchange - surely not on Commonwealth Avenue or State Circle.</p> <p>If the route between Woden and Civic were to travel down Flynn Drive, with a new tram plus pedestrian bridge to Hospital Point, and then over Parkes Way past the Shine Dome to London Circuit, this would not only facilitate non-existing public transport access to the National Museum, Shine Dome, Llewellyn Hall, ANU and West Civic, but it would offer a perfect site for an interchange behind the Hyatt Hotel. From here initially buses, but possibly later trams, could access Parkes, Barton, Kingston and Manuka, etc, via the existing underpass at the southern end of Commonwealth Avenue Bridge or by the existing Coronation Drive to Old Parliament House, Kings Avenue and beyond.</p> <p>Such an interchange is vital if future public transport in South Canberra is to offer more than just a link between Woden and Civic that is no faster than the existing bus service.</p> <p>Garth Setchell, Mawson</p>
<p>City News</p> <p>Light Rail Stage 2</p> <p>Dave Rogers (23Jun24), is right to question Douglas Mackenzie's extraordinarily inaccurate claims of up to \$8-\$10 billion for the Stage 2B tram to Woden. Having been cost estimating the stages of light rail for 10 years, I don't know either where Mackenzie gets his \$9-\$10 billion cost from.</p> <p>My best estimate for Stage 2 (Civic-Woden) is \$4 billion for construction only, and \$5.3 billion, including 20 Years of Operations and Maintenance (O&M).</p> <p>That said, Dave Rogers has fallen for the Government's two-card trick that Stage 1 cost only \$675 million, but that was for construction only, whereas the total cost in 2016 was \$1.78 billion, including 20 Years of O&M (Auditor-General figure).</p> <p>M. Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport 12Jun24</p>
<p>City News [Published 13Jun24]</p> <p>Why the tram bridge over lake will never be built</p> <p>The tram saga rolls on and on, and gets worse and worse.</p> <p>So, as pointed out by Dr Douglas Mackenzie and announced in the latest edition of Our CBR, it is planned to demolish the northbound span of the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge, and replace it with a new rail bridge and new road bridge. This is because, as I pointed out in previous letters, the gap between the existing road bridges is not wide enough for the rails.</p> <p>This scheme is beyond the financial capacity of both the ACT and Federal governments, and like many government projects around the world, will remain uncompleted.</p> <p>Why do I say this? Can't both governments keep borrowing billions without limit?</p> <p>I shall explain from the point of view of a monetary economist. Nowadays, government borrowing is done by printing money; the Reserve Bank issuing new money, that is paid to banks that, in turn, are asked to go through a sleight of hand by using this money to buy "government debt".</p> <p>It is all an illusion to prevent people questioning why they are being robbed. Anyway, this illusion is nearly over. A measure of this illusion, called velocity, is now very nearly zero.</p> <p>When it reaches zero, soon, the dollar won't head for hyperinflation, it will just cease to exist.</p> <p>As a consequence, besides governments being forced to balance their books, they will not be able to borrow and spend until a new market for government debt is created. We will be back to the equivalent to the Gold Standard. A currency beyond the control of the government.</p> <p>As for this wretched bridge, it will be left half completed for many generations. A lesson for all subsequent governments.</p> <p>Tim Walshaw, Watson</p>
<p>City News [Published 13Jun24]</p> <p>12 degrees and millions in cost</p> <p>In my letter on light rail stage 2B (CN May 30), I referred to the billions in cost to replace the northbound span of Commonwealth Avenue Bridge. I also referred to the "indirect costs of up to nine years of severe road traffic disruption between Commonwealth Park and Woden".</p> <p>I clearly recall when, in March-April 2023, the approaches to the Kent Street bridge were modified to include traffic lights causing six weeks of traffic congestion and chaos. It was not a large and complex construction problem.</p> <p>Fortuitously, on citynews.com.au, the editor included an artist's impression of the light rail stop at Kent Street on the Adelaide Avenue. It is evident that, compared to the photograph, the gradient of the median strip of Adelaide Avenue has mysteriously declined from about 12 degrees to near-horizontal, leaving the central pier untouched.</p> <p>In the real world, this result would have involved a huge amount of excavation and earthmoving, possibly the replacement of the central pier, many months of traffic disruption, and the expenditure of many more millions: for just one of many problems.</p> <p>Where is the benefit-cost analysis?</p>

<p>Dr Douglas Mackenzie, Deakin</p> <p>City News [Published 13Jun24]</p> <p>Using the obfuscation argument on tram costs</p> <p>Douglas Mackenzie (letters, CN June 30) uses the obfuscation argument (too many references to cite sources) to refute my criticism of his extraordinarily inaccurate claims of up to \$8-\$10 billion for the Stage 2B tram to Woden.</p> <p>Justifying his views by just quoting estimates of others, the validity of which is questionable, says little of his research. In fact, NO decision has been made to demolish the western bridge on Commonwealth Avenue to provide for as he claims, “replacement road bridge and new rail bridge” at again, his wild estimate of “multi billions”! The public comments on the engineering-derived concepts for 2B and crossing the lake closed on June 30.</p> <p>To put costs into a realistic perspective, the total cost for Stage 1 from Gunghalin to the city, including all the works, the trams, the depot and 13 stations was audited at \$675 million, \$108m under budget. The letter “b” does not appear.</p> <p>Unfortunately, most have no idea of how big one billion dollars really is. Bluntly, if you spent \$10,000 every day, you would spend one billion in 274 years!</p> <p>So, Douglas, by all means express your views on the tram, but please use facts not unscientific WAGs.</p> <p>Dave Rogers, Woden</p>
<p>Canberra Times</p> <p>Barr govt obfuscation over tram</p> <p>A good and accurate letter by Mike Hutchinson (11Jun24) on the idiocy of the tram to Woden, although said many times before. However, he could have mentioned that it is all Katy Gallagher’s fault for getting into bed with the Greens in 2012, in spite of her saying that she would not pay more than about \$650 million for Stage 1 that turned into \$1.78 billion. Now she holds the federal moneybags and happy to pour more good money after bad into Stage 2, your money that is, as well as local taxes. At \$4 billion for Stage 2B, every household in Canberra will be paying about \$18,500 for the privilege of watching five per cent of the population ride the tram.</p> <p>But the real idiocy of the Greens ideology is that it will have zero effect on global warming, let alone permanent climate change.</p> <p>M. Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport 11Jun24</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 11Jun24]</p> <p>Barr govt continues to mislead and obfuscate over tram</p> <p>Is there no end to the misleading promotion of the ACT government for its tram project? (“New tunnel pitch for light rail to Woden”, June 8).</p> <p>As a former transport planning practitioner, it is clear to me that this project will be grossly uneconomic; an outsized white elephant. Slower to Woden than a bus and unlikely, other than by flawed assertion, to divert car users to tram (unless because of tram-induced traffic congestion and reduced highway capacity). The much-vaunted en-route property development benefits are largely illusory. They are would also be available with simple rezoning served by modern buses. A remote tram in the median strip of a freeway is hardly a safe or attractive option, even for any adjacent properties.</p> <p>While little is known of the cost-benefit work it seems no allowance has been made for the costs of the massive traffic disruption during construction. It was claimed that the disruptive raising of London Circuit was not costed to the tram project, yet the work site is surrounded by signs announcing the coming of the tram.</p> <p>The planners seem as contemptuous of the community and heritage value of the Commonwealth Avenue tree scape as they were for the destruction of the Northbourne Avenue treescape - seemingly deeming replanting of saplings as a like-for-like replacement of healthy mature heritage-quality trees.</p> <p>Fortunately, Andrew Barr has said that the tram will only proceed with 50 per cent Commonwealth funding. The Department of Finance in which I once worked would never have advised that such expenditure was efficient or effective.</p> <p>Our growing city has much higher priority needs, for example in its failing health, education and justice sectors.</p> <p>Mike Hutchinson, Reid</p>
<p>City News [Published 29May24]</p> <p>Light rail to Woden not worth the cost</p> <p>In criticising me about the projected cost of light rail stage 2B Dave Rogers (Letters, CN May 23) overlooked some important details. The figures I used were from a range of publications on the subject too numerous to cite formally without excessive complexity and verbosity blurring the message.</p> <p>They were also the totals of expenditure over the full construction period, estimated at between about four and nine years. Furthermore, the quoted estimates did not take into account the cost of the planned demolition of the northbound span of Commonwealth Avenue Bridge announced in the latest edition of “Our CBR”, nor the cost of a replacement road bridge and new rail bridge. These costs alone would be in the multi-billions.</p> <p>The fundamental question has to be: is light rail stage 2B really worth it in terms of direct financial cost of construction, and the indirect costs of up to nine years of severe road traffic disruption between Commonwealth Park and Woden Town Centre?</p> <p>I, for one, think not.</p> <p>Dr Douglas Mackenzie, Deakin</p>

<p>Canberra Times [Published 28May24] Light rail lunacy Ian Pearson comments "the ACT government is treating us as fools" (Letters, May 27), using the example of the Campbell Primary School expansion. There are many more examples. The Barr-Rattenbury government's May 7 Our CBR online newsletter, with the innocuous heading "Commonwealth Avenue traffic changes in May" announced "The next stage of works (on the raising of London Circuit for light rail) will be to demolish the northbound Commonwealth Avenue Bridge". It was definitely not April 1. The cost and the resultant traffic chaos are almost unimaginable. This madness must be brought to a halt in the November 10 election. Douglas Mackenzie, Deakin</p>
<p>City News [Published 15May24] Government hell-bent on digging a bigger hole Minister Chris Steel, referencing an internal report Light Rail Five Years On: Benefits Realisation Report 2024, claimed light rail had encouraged \$2.3 billion in construction, had attracted new passengers to public transport, driven up land values and cut motor vehicle traffic. What the report did not assess was whether these benefits could have been delivered, at considerably lower cost, by a busway operating on its own right of way. The government's own submission to Infrastructure Australia in 2012 found that a busway was the superior option. The high demand for higher-density housing at Kingston and the town centres not served by light rail, further calls into question how essential light rail has been in increasing density along the corridor. The Greens also released its transport policy focusing on extending light rail, the electrification of the bus fleet, increasing the frequency of bus services, extra bus lanes and extending concessional fares. Other than developing light rail, the Greens policy is similar to that of the ACT Liberals. What Mr Steel (and the Greens) have not considered is whether the priority given to light rail has been at the expense of improving housing, health, education and disability services. As a community we cannot afford both light rail and the necessary transport improvements being advocated by the Greens and the Liberals. Busways, operating on their own right of way, on the intertown transport route would be a more prudent use of limited public funds than light rail. It has become increasingly apparent the government is hell-bent on digging an even larger financial and social hole by extending light rail. The government is well past its use-buy date. Mike Quirk, Garran</p>
<p>City News [Published 15May24] Tram propaganda for the October election The ACT government has released its report Light Rail Five Years On: Benefits Realisation Report 2024, prepared by Transport Canberra, thus by a government agency writing its own report card. While the report is well written, well presented and apparently well researched, it is not without some errors of fact and has deliberate omissions of importance to taxpayers. Essentially, it is a one-way street of claimed positive outcomes of Stage 1, but contains nothing of the many downsides to taxpayers. The report addresses only perceived benefits of light rail, from the government's point of view and, except for the claimed \$675 million for construction, does not attempt to identify the many actual costs to the taxpayer, nor direct benefits to the government (and taxpayer) by clawback from land sales or by taxes imposed on the claimed benefits to others such as the construction industry. There is no way of validating claimed figures – dollars or otherwise – without access to source data, but that would not be possible under this government, which is baldly saying "trust us!". However, a review of the report by the auditor-general, to validate claims, would be very useful and probably enlightening. While this long-awaited report gives some interesting data about light rail operations and claimed benefits (assuming validity), yet nothing at all on negative impacts, it can easily be seen as government propaganda leading to the ACT's October 2024 election. See a full critique at alogstudycentre.com.au/light rail Max Flint, co-ordinator, Smart Canberra Transport</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 10May24] Other transport options It seems to me that that the growing romance associated with light rail, as well as the ideology, is clouding rational consideration of two basic issues: the cost of light rail infrastructure compared to electric buses (and other options), as well as the many other pressing competing infrastructure needs of the ACT, including education, health, community facilities and, of course, public housing. It may be true that light rail has resulted in some financial and other benefits ("Billions in projects credited to light rail", May 1) leaving aside whether some "benefits" cited are worthy (ie rising land values). Comparing light rail with existing bus services is misleading if not mischievous in the context of Woden. The key difference is the dedicated public transport route.</p>

<p>Light rail for this project is much more costly than the alternatives. Benefits can be achieved at less cost by buses. Besides, buses can be designed to make them look and feel like light rail to satisfy the romance. The money saved could then be transferred to meet the many other pressing infrastructure needs. Warwick Williams, Nicholls</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 9May24] Ask the tough questions The Canberra Times has repeatedly regurgitated the Transport Minister's in-house report on the success of light rail apparently without undertaking even a modicum of independent analysis. At the very least I would expect a journalist to ask "Is light rail's 16 million trips over five years, in a city of almost half a million people, good use of residents' money?" Also "how many billions of construction dollars have been spent outside the light rail corridor?" Canberra readers need the full story to get a balanced understanding of the costs and the benefits of a light rail network. B Jones, Kambah</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 9May24] A Bulldust Alert I'm looking forward to the crocodile tears Jim and Katy shed when they explain why they can't improve health, education, disability services and women's refuges but can splurge \$50 million on the silliest tram route ever built. Hint: don't bother propping up an incompetent dying ACT government. Maria Greene, Curtin</p>
<p>Editors Canberra Times; City News Light rail – Stage 2B Federal Help The Canberra Times has reported "Woden light rail final route still undecided", 8Apr24. In the article, the federal Minister King is reported to have said how she "is looking forward to seeing the business case". I certainly hope the Feds pass a critical eye over such cases and not be duped by the ACT Government padding the benefits. Readers may recall that the Stage 1 business case claimed a Benefit to Cost Ratio (BCR) of 1.2 by putting imaginary dollar figures on a range of side (ephemeral) benefits. The Auditor-General examined the business case and determined that the real BCR was only 0.49, which will prove to be the case one day, contrary to what this ideological government might claim. The \$50 million promised by the Feds for Stage, at only 1.25 percent of the \$4 billion cost for Stage 2B, is but a token gesture by Katy Gallagher to give spruiking rights to Barr, Rattenbury and Steel in this ACT election year. Shame on all of them for wasting taxpayers' money! M. Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport 8May24</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 8May24] More Naysayers Please The editorial on Sunday, May 5, claimed that the existing light rail has driven up land values which is "bad news for the persistent naysayers". Hardly. higher land costs make houses and units even more unaffordable. More naysayers I contend. John Simsons, Holt</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 8May24] This Is Absurd The feds are giving the ACT government \$50 million towards light rail. It is all going on planning and not actual building. Can anyone else see the obscenity of this? The developers must rubbing their hands with glee. No wonder we can't trust our polliès. Ian Jannaway, Monash</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 8May24] Money not well spent Should the federal government pour taxpayers' money into a project whose costs exceed its benefits? ("Federal budget to include new funding for stage 2B of light rail," May 7). The ACT Auditor-General revealed that the government estimated that Stage 2A of light rail would cost \$268 million, and Stage 2B would cost \$905 million. So far the ACT government has spent over \$800 million on Stage 2A. That brings the expected cost of stage 2 to more than \$1,700 million. The government values Stage 2's estimated benefits at only \$1,217 million. Leon Arundell, Downer</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 7May24] The real questions Here are some "thorny questions" that your May 1 article, "A five-year report raises thorny questions for light rail opponents" failed to address. If the government had invested in rapid bus transit, bus commuters from Gungahlin would now be getting to Woden in 40 minutes. Light rail commuters will have to wait until 2033 to take more than 50 minutes for the same trip.</p>

<p>If the government had invested in transit lanes and rapid bus transit the 2021 census would probably not have recorded a record high proportion of commuters driving cars. Future development will be stifled by the higher rates and taxes needed to pay for light rail. Many of the new developments in suburbs serviced by light rail would have happened in any case. Those developments would also benefit more suburbs. Some of those developments resulted from selling off public housing along the light rail route. Some public housing tenants were relocated more than 2km from the nearest light rail stop. So it is hardly surprising that some "people are regularly travelling 1.2km to catch a light rail service". Canberrans are much more likely to transfer between buses than to transfer between light rail and buses. Almost one-third of Transport Canberra trips involve transfers to or from buses. As a result of the lack of interchanges between buses and light rail, only 6 per cent of light rail trips involve bus transfers. Leon Arundell, Downer</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 16May24] Canberra Times and City News Light rail – Stage 2B Federal Help On 7 April 24, the Canberra Times reported that the Federal Government will contribute \$50 million towards light rail Stage 2B. That sum would be just 1.25 percent of the \$4 billion cost for Stage 2B and, therefore, should be considered as nothing but a token gesture by Katy Gallagher to give spruiking rights to Barr, Rattenbury and Steel in this ACT election year. In giving funds to Canberra's light rail, the Labor Federal Government is also being somewhat disingenuous, having earlier said that such projects should be shown to be cost-effective to receive funds and, of course, light rail is a very long way from being economic or a competitive rapid transit system. M. Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport 7May24</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 7May24] Buy more electric buses Your recent report "A five-year report raises thorny questions for light rail opponents" (May 1) comprised little but credits to the pro City-to-Woden tram brigade. At no point was the fact stated that buses (electrified, if you must) can not only achieve the same thing for a third of the cost, but they can provide far greater flexibility and diversity than a rigid tram track. Suitable bus stops can be inserted along the Yarra Glenn/Adelaide Avenue corridor once the greedy development and real estate companies have had their appetites filled by a compliant government. I further question how many residents living along this future corridor of concrete would actually need to commute to the city in these modern days of diversification of workplaces. Instead of petulantly forging ahead with their tram, perhaps this ACT government should focus on fulfilling at least a few of their other promises prior to the upcoming election. Jeff Day, Greenway</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 6May24] ACT needs independents If several sensible independents were already in the ACT's Assembly a proper study of Canberra's transport needs, including public transport, would have been published years ago ("Billions in projects credited to light rail", May 1). The government's recently released report predictably attributes everything to the light rail. However, it falls far short of an overall study of the transport, environmental, financial and land-use impacts of a city-wide transport system, including a comparison between different options for public transport such as light rail and/or buses running in dedicated lanes. Nevertheless, ACT Labor is ploughing ahead with light rail. The Greens want to construct stage 2 more quickly than Labor. Neither party seems concerned about the opportunity cost. For every \$1 billion borrowed for light rail the local community could instead have around 500 more nurses. The Liberals have ruled out stage 2B. In October, vote for sensible independents before any other candidate. They will cooperate with MLAs on either side of the fence, provided the proposal being raised will improve our local community. Party MLAs nearly inevitably vote along party lines. This results in Labor/Greens scratching each other's back and opposing the Liberals as a matter of principle. Bruce Paine, Red Hill</p>
<p>City News Canberra Times Light rail – Stage 1 Benefits Analysis On 1 April 24, the Canberra Times reported on the ACT Government's report "Light Rail Five Years On: Benefits Realisation Report 2024", April 2024, prepared by Transport Canberra, thus by a government agency writing its own report card. While the report is well written, well presented an apparently well researched, it is not without some errors of fact and has deliberate omissions of importance to taxpayers. Essentially, it is a one-way street of claimed positive outcomes of Stage 1, but contains nothing of the many downsides to taxpayers.</p>

<p>The report addresses only perceived 'benefits' of light rail, from the Government's point of view and, except for the claimed \$675 million for construction, does not attempt to identify the many actual costs to the taxpayer, nor direct benefits to the Government (and taxpayer) by 'claw back' from land sales or by taxes imposed on the claimed benefits to others such as the construction industry. There is no way of validating claimed figures - dollars or otherwise - without access to source data, but that would not be possible under this Government, which is baldly saying 'Trust us!' However, a revue of the report by the Auditor-General, to validate claims, would be very useful and probably enlightening.</p> <p>While this long-awaited report gives some interesting data about light rail operations and claimed benefits (assuming validity), yet nothing at all on negative impacts, it can easily be seen as government propaganda leading to the ACT's October 2024 election. See full critique on www.alogstudycente.com.au/light rail.</p> <p>M. Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport 4May24</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 3May24]</p> <p>Developers win again</p> <p>I note Chris Steel has jumped onto the report espousing the benefits of light rail construction that suggests that since its introduction into the ACT it has encouraged \$2 billion worth of construction activity and driven up land values.</p> <p>It's nice to know that Canberra's developers have reaped the rewards of light rail notwithstanding that it's the ACT ratepayers that have copped it in the hip pocket having to fund Labor-Greens pipe dream.</p> <p>Given the developers walked away with millions in profits from their multi-storey "housing" construction activities perhaps they should be the ones paying for light rail construction or at least making significant contributions thereto.</p> <p>Peter Toscan, Amaroo</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 3May24]</p> <p>Light rail a winner</p> <p>Your article in Wednesday's paper ("Billions in projects credited to light rail", May 1) shows the success and role of light rail as part of an integrated urban future for the national capital.</p> <p>It is important to press ahead as rapidly as possible with the project to enhance the benefits for more people.</p> <p>The clear preference of the public for rail over road transport when available should encourage the ACT government to seek additional financial support from the federal government to increase the pace of the work.</p> <p>David Purnell, Florey</p>
<p>City News [Published 24Apr24]</p> <p>October election can't come soon enough</p> <p>In their article "Nation's worst performer with no end in sight" (CN, April 18) Jon Stanhope and Khalid Ahmed show graphically how the ACT's financial position has declined since 2013-2014, and especially so since 2014-2015.</p> <p>I believe it is no coincidence that Andrew Barr was elected Chief Minister and Treasurer in November 2014.</p> <p>The well-researched and very informative article by Beatrice Bodart-Bailey in the same edition presents a damning analysis of the misguided and excessively politically pragmatic decision for the ACT government to press on, regardless, with the outdated light rail project. Never mind the abysmal benefit cost ratio and the decline of other aspects of this city such as health services, maintenance of roads and public land, and the general appearance of a national capital of which we should all be proud to show to our visitors.</p> <p>Messrs Stanhope and Ahmed were right to conclude there seems "no end in sight" to this profligate spending of ACT ratepayers' money. The October 19, 2024 ACT election can't come soon enough.</p> <p>Dr Douglas Mackenzie, Deakin</p>
<p>City News [Published 18-24Apr24]</p> <p>Barr's vision for Canberra 'confused and blurred'</p> <p>Mr Barr, reminiscent of Arthur Daley from Minder, is again spruiking light rail. His pitch, a great city needs light rail not buses. He is diverting attention from the dodgy 2012 decision to build light rail. It was made despite advice a busway from Gungahlin to Civic would provide similar benefits to light rail and half the cost.</p> <p>Great cities have citywide fast and reliable public transport; excellent hospital and education systems; high quality sport, recreation and cultural facilities; affordable housing; adequate land supply and sufficient public housing.</p> <p>Great cities develop from the guidance of competent and visionary leaders who determine priorities after careful consideration of the relative merits of projects.</p> <p>Unfortunately, Mr Barr's vision is confused and blurred, and his legacy diminished, by his obsession with the unsound development of a shiny red tram.</p> <p>Mike Quirk, Garran</p>
<p>City News [Published 18-24Apr24]</p> <p>Is it a tram? Is it a bus? Which Metro works best?</p> <p>Editor's Note: A cogent comparison of trams vs electric buses, by Beatrice Bodart-Bailey. Essentially a rehash of positions taken by the opponents of light rail for the past 10 years.</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 19Apr24]</p> <p>Good money after bad</p>

<p>Having spent millions on seven failed feasibility studies as to where or if a new sports stadium was to be built in Canberra, Chief Minister Andrew Barr has the gall to expect the federal government to kick in half the cost of the project when agreement is finally reached.</p> <p>Self-government was thrust upon us despite ACT residents (ratepayers), twice voting against it in referendums. The ACT's finances are in an appalling mess thanks to irresponsible decisions on how the ratepayers money is spent.</p> <p>The tram is just one example.</p> <p>Surely self-government means self-sufficiency.</p> <p>Tony May, Pearce</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 18Apr24]</p> <p>Money Makes Cities Great</p> <p>Barr is wrong about great cities. Cities become great when they have lots of money. In Australia, that was because of the gold rush. In Europe, it was trade and commerce, and then exploitation of other parts of the world, and then the industrial revolution. Then they built the trains and trams.</p> <p>Stewart Bath, Isabella Plains</p>
<p>Barr asking Feds for money</p> <p>What a joke Mr Barr is, asking the Federal Government to fund, 50:50, Infrastructure like a new convention centre (Page 1, 17Apr24), when he is wasting \$billions on light rail. If Katy Gallagher had any sense, she would tell Barr to divert to his other pet projects the some \$350 million she has promised towards Stag2 of light rail. What a farce!</p> <p>M. Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport 17Apr24</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 16Apr24]</p> <p>Tram on the nose</p> <p>The readers' panel results in The Canberra Times (April 13) are interesting.</p> <p>In all 70 per cent voted "yes" to Sam Mostyn as a good choice for Australia's next governor-general, suggestive of a progressive stance.</p> <p>Yet in a city that typically votes for the ALP, 56 per cent favoured the Liberals' busway proposal for Civic to Woden, as compared with only 35 per cent favouring the Labor-Greens light rail proposal to Woden.</p> <p>Could it be that ALP and Greens voters have finally woken up to the Civic to Woden light rail debacle?</p> <p>Murray May, Cook</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 15Apr24]</p> <p>Battery-powered buses now</p> <p>Andrew Barr says great cities are not built on bus lines but conveniently forgets all the great cities were built hundreds of years ago in the days of horse and cart, narrow muddy streets and no motor buses.</p> <p>Trams were the answer when they evolved and grew. Move forward to 2024 where technology has moved to battery-powered buses, able to use modern roads. No inconvenient power supply systems, more services over suburbs, no new bridges and a fraction of the cost and time. And since when have we been a great city?</p> <p>Geoff Davidson, Braddon</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 13Apr24]</p> <p>What makes us great?</p> <p>Yes, great cities are built on rail, but ignore buses at your peril says Ryan Hemsley (April 8). Really? I thought the quality of life of a city's residents made a city great and that particularly applies to housing.</p> <p>Unfortunately, at \$1.6 billion for 2A and up to \$6 billion for 2B, light rail is a budget killer and someone has to pay for it. Our patronage collectively over that 30 years is annually less than 7 per cent - hardly a warm and fuzzy number for the bean counters aiming to produce increased fare revenue let alone those whose rates and other living costs are skyrocketing.</p> <p>E-buses are a far better and cost effective alternative. They can be put into service very quickly. This light rail monster is out of control. Ask the 39,000 folk on the breadlines and the 2000 homeless if light rail will make them feel like they live in a great city.</p> <p>Light rail just doesn't cut the mustard.</p> <p>No more trams. More E-bus variants and more housing please.</p> <p>Russ Morison, Theodore</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 11Apr24]</p> <p>No vision splendid</p> <p>Mr Barr, reminiscent of Arthur Daley from Minder, is again spruiking light rail. His pitch, a great city needs light rail not buses. The government continues to divert attention from its dodgy 2012 decision to build light rail. It was made despite advice a bus-way from Gungahlin to Civic would provide similar benefits to light rail at half the cost.</p> <p>B Jones (Letters, April 8), exposes the shallowness of Barr's position by documenting what great cities have - excellent hospital and education systems; high quality sport, recreation and cultural facilities; city wide fast and reliable public transport; affordable housing; adequate land supply and sufficient public housing.</p> <p>Great cities develop from the guidance of visionary leaders. Mr Barr's vision is blurred by an obsession with a shiny red tram.</p> <p>Mike Quirk, Garran</p>

<p>Canberra Times [Published 11Apr24] Fix The Budget With the ACT's financial liability due to increase to \$13 billion by mid-2024 surely the solution to partly reduce this deficit is not to proceed with Stage 2B of the light rail. Further savings could be made by not wasting money on schemes such as hiring a systems and analyst thinker for CIT and the rebranding of the ACT Health logo. Richard Greene, Curtin</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 9Apr24] Cloud Cuckoo Land One hundred percent correct on all counts Douglas Mackenzie ("On the road to bankruptcy" Letters, April 2). Barr and Rattenbury are living in a "Cloud Cuckoo Land" of their own making and we are paying the price for it. Jeff Hart, Kingston</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 9Apr24] The car is still by far the best way to get around Canberra Mr Rattenbury wants Canberrans to have easy options to get around Canberra. So do I and, at 85, the easiest, simplest and quickest option is via car. The motor car is easily the best way to travel around Canberra given the distances involved. Picture by Keegan Carroll The motor car is easily the best way to travel around Canberra given the distances involved. Picture by Keegan Carroll If we wanted to visit a friend in Holder from Belconnen then by bus it is one hour and one minute with a long walk or one hour and 38 minutes with a shorter walk and multiple buses. The same trip is 25 minutes by car. It becomes impossible at night and in the dark to go via bus due to walking hazards. Canberra was designed by NCDC as a car city. It is 60 kilometres north to south. Only Olympians would cycle that distance on a regular basis. The Barr government is doing everything it can to penalise car users. The fantastic, safe, clover leaf intersection on the north side of the Commonwealth Bridge has been ripped up in favour of a traffic light intersection with the inevitable accidents and deaths from red-light runners. When can we get rid of this awful government? Dave Roberts, Belconnen</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 8Apr24] Libs in difficult spot The ACT Liberals have released their "people-focused public transport" policy, which commits to restore the bus network it says the current government has neglected. Although they have endorsed stage 2A they did so before knowing the outrageous contract cost. They would have good reason to cancel the contract if in power. But, one can be certain that cancellation costs built into the contract would be draconian and well in favour of our greedy contractor/unions consortium. They should promise to make public the terms of the contract so taxpayers can see how they are being exploited. M Flint, co-ordinator, Smart Canberra Transport, Erindale Centre</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 8Apr24] It will take more than light rail to make Canberra great again Chief Minister Andrew Barr tells us a great city needs light rail not buses. Yes great cities indeed need fast and reliable public transport, but it has to be effective for people across the entire city, not just for those lucky to live near a few narrow train lines and within the fewest possible stops from the CBD. Great cities also entertain their residents with modern sports stadiums, concert halls, theatres, ice rinks and basketball arenas. All those nice things that Mr Barr has promised for us years but never started because of the cost. Additionally, great cities don't have a poorly performing hospital system, reduced public housing numbers, declining education institutions, and a poor urban planning and land release system that puts house prices beyond the wages of an average worker. Mr Barr thinks you can magically make a city great by spending many billions of dollars on a city-wide but slow and stop-laden light rail network. But Canberrans need to wisely ask themselves, what is the real cost of putting too many eggs in one basket? B Jones, Kambah</p>
<p>City News [Published 3Apr24] Libs need a vision for the future At present, I could hardly contemplate yet another term of the Barr-Rattenbury government, but cannot see an attractive and viable alternative. As Andrew Hughes asks "Can the Liberals get momentum under Lee?" (CN March 28). The answer to that curly question is far from straightforward. To put it simply: not without a vision for the future. The Liberals need to do more than criticise, find fault or pick arguments: they must demonstrate that they can govern the ACT more efficiently, and much more openly than the Labor/Greens do. They must show that they have longer-term plans of how the Canberra of the 2040s – and the 2050s – will function and appeal to the eye. The Liberals could do well to begin with cancelling light rail stage 2B and investing in 21st century mass-transport technology, such as trackless trams with flexible rather than fixed routes.</p>

<p>They could also begin on the now-enormous task of restoring Canberra to a neat and tidy national capital that will not only attract more tourists, but attract favourable comments rather than the criticisms I often hear. Dr Douglas Mackenzie, Deakin</p>
<p>City News [Published 3Apr24] Drop tram, wake up to what's possible Raiders coach Ricky Stuart is envious of the new Christchurch stadium. I feel sorry for you and your fans, Ricky. The ACT government has put so much of our money into the light rail network – \$1.8 billion for Stage 1, about \$1.6 billion Stage 2A and likely \$4 billion for Stage 2B. You would think this was the only project worth pursuing and Canberrans are asleep to the possibilities. The current Civic to Woden bus route works magnificently – probably the best route in Canberra. It would be really easy to replace the diesel buses with emission-free electric ones, delivery in 12 months. Instead, we wait until 2033 for the emissions miracle to occur. If Minister Steel must have a tram, there are electric, tram-shaped buses that can carry up to 250 passengers. The government's proposed new trams will likely not increase patronage markedly; and a dogleg route through the Parliamentary Triangle is more likely to drive patrons away. Drop 2A and 2B from the shopping list, and there's a lot of change to get a new stadium with a roof and a convention centre, and the rest can be used to replace our diesel buses. Ah, but I forgot, we have a huge budget black hole and we shouldn't be doing any major projects of this magnitude at all. Wake up, Canberra. This has got to change. Russ Morison, Theodore</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 3Apr24] Editorial: ACT Libs plan has some merit – a Civic-Woden bus corridor has merit Canberra Liberals' public transport policy, April 3, 2024 The Canberra Liberals today released their "People-focused public transport" policy, which commits to restore the bus network it says the current government has neglected, and to make Canberra a major manufacturing hub for electric buses. It would, party leader Elizabeth Lee said, "get Canberrans where they want to go when they want to", while being faster and more affordable than light rail. Editor's comment: Although ACT Libs had endorsed Stage 2A, it had done so before knowing the outrageous contract cost. It has good reason now to cancel the contract if and when in power but, one can be certain that cancellation costs built into the contract would be draconian and well in favour of our greedy contractor/unions consortium. At the very least, Libs should promise to make the terms of the contract public so that taxpayers can see how they are being exploited.</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 3Apr24] ALP's commitment to light rail put us on the road to ruin The Chief Minister seems reluctant to specify how much it would cost to extend the tram to Woden and beyond. Given that the one kilometre extension from Civic to the lake edge is reportedly costing around \$1 billion and it is another 10 kilometres to Woden \$10 billion is perhaps not out of the question (given the need to build a new Commonwealth Avenue bridge). The decision to build light rail instead of high-speed, priority buses has locked the ACT into a future that cannot be financially sustained with our small population. Peter Moore, Kingston</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 3Apr24] Buses make more sense The Canberra Liberals' announcement that they will expand Canberra's bus service, including express buses between the City and Woden ("Libs back Woden busway", April 3, p1, 7) is very welcome. Apart from the proposed busway to Woden replacing the ACT government's narrow-minded fixation on light rail, the cost will be little more than a tenth of the Barr government's planned \$4 billion spending spree, using ratepayers' money. The ACT Opposition could make its plan even more attractive if it were to replace all diesel-powered buses with emissions-free electric versions, which are ideal for urban passenger transport. Douglas Mackenzie, Deakin</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 3Apr24] And in the meantime? What is the future for bus travel between Woden and Civic? Construction of Stage 2 of light rail is expected to cause delays along the Woden-Civic bus route for the next nine years. Those delays can be countered by providing more T2 transit lanes, on the approaches to congested intersections along the route. Unless light rail Stage 2 is completed by 2033, the T2 lanes will become congested unless we convert them to T3 lanes. In the absence of light rail stage 2, T3 lanes will be able to cater for traffic demand along the route until at least 2046. T3 lanes can provide faster travel for five per cent more people than can light rail or bus rapid transit, because they also carry cars (with three or more occupants), taxis and motorcycles. If light rail Stage 2 is completed by 2033 and bus services continue on the Civic-Woden route many commuters will prefer a 20 minute bus trip to a 30 minute light rail trip. Light rail passenger numbers will fall short of projections.</p>

<p>If Woden-Civic bus services end, many public transport passengers will switch to faster travel by car. That would cause more traffic congestion, and would add to transport emissions. Leon Arundell, Downer</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 3Apr24] Labor lost its way I was both disappointed and disgusted to read that the number of public housing properties fell from 11,848 to 11,612 between 2012 and 2023 - a fall of 2 per cent ("Govt has sold off \$1b of public housing", April 2). Meanwhile the 2012 territory population of 411,000 increased by 14 per cent to 469,000 in 2023. This means that the number of housing properties per 100,000 of population has fallen from 2,882 in 2012 to 2,476 in 2023. One of the principal reasons I voted for the Labor party in past elections is because I saw them as being more concerned for the disadvantaged in our community than were the Liberals. Well the public housing story certainly doesn't justify my voting behaviour. I will only gently allude to the tram and the alternative uses that its funding could have supported. Mr Barr, you are really challenging my faith. John R Baker, Griffith</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 1Apr24] It would be silly In the article "What Canberra's newest town centre could look like" (April 1) Simon Tennent is reported to have said it "would be silly" not to consider a light rail extension (into Molonglo) in the future. The Suburban Land Agency should not be considering, let alone planning, a backward technological step. As Ken Helm (Letters, April 1) points out, trams have long been established in inner Melbourne, and are used by millions each year. Inner Melbourne has a much higher population density than suburban Canberra, and is mostly flat - ideal for rail transport. Extending light rail into Molonglo would involve numerous engineering and construction problems costing billions. Light rail stage 2B is already problematic and expensive enough. Dr Douglas Mackenzie, Deakin</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 1Apr24] Proven Technology Doug Hurst (Letters, March 28) says that the tram is taking so long to build because it is 19th century technology. If he is right, it should take a long time to build a bicycle, a train, or a car with a petrol or diesel engine. Electric buses may be faster to build. Wikipedia says that the first ever battery-electric bus service started in 1907. Leon Arundell, Downer Editor's note: An April Fool's Day joke from a vocal anti-trammer?</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 1Apr24] Don't fall for the bus con Those who oppose the Canberra's light rail (tram) development proposal should look at the Sydney, and Melbourne public transport histories. Sydney had until 1961 one of the largest tram networks in the world moving 400 million passenger journeys a year. Then they were conned into replacing them with buses. Transport patronage plummeted, and private car usage soared, which caused traffic chaos with bus / car competition. Now after 60 years they are spending billions putting them back. Melbourne rejected the bus con, expanded their tram system, which now moves millions of people yearly, and on footy matches provides transport for thousands a day. Let's learn from history and not be conned by the bus lobby and politics. Ken Helm AM, Murrumbateman Editor's note: Well spoken by one who does not have to pay a cent for the light rail folly.</p>
<p>City News [Published 27Mar24] Canberra Metro's profits come at a cost Canberra Metro's profits are a high priority for the ACT government. Canberra Metro was a 2012 election commitment by then-Chief Minister Katy Gallagher. She committed to establish Canberra Metro as a "private sector partnership to plan, finance and develop the first stage of a light rail network for Canberra". She omitted to mention that Canberrans would pay for the finance. More recently, as federal Minister for Finance, Gallagher said: "Canberrans rightly expect that their taxpayer money will be spent with the best bang for buck and deliver the best outcome for our city." The ACT government concluded that stage 1 of bus rapid transit would cost \$280 million less than light rail, and would be twice as cost-effective. In choosing to fund Canberra Metro to build stage 1 of light rail, the government prioritised Canberra Metro's profits ahead of the best outcome for Canberra. The government then concluded that light rail stage 2A would provide only \$150 million worth of benefits. In choosing to pay Canberra Metro \$577 million to build Stage 2A, the government again prioritised Canberra Metro's profits ahead of the best outcome for Canberra. Leon Arundell, Downer</p>

<p>City News [Published 27Mar24] Bus case 'significantly stronger' than light rail May I be so bold and praise in a letter to the editor of CityNews an article in the Canberra Times with the title "Bus case 'significantly stronger' than light rail" ? I am glad the public is informed once again about the rather "interesting" way the decision to build the light rail line was made. CityNews already called attention to this problem with two of my opinion pieces (December 22, 2022 and January 25, 2023). The latter, with the heading "Funny business' on the way to the Assembly", mentions that in 2010 the Chinese automobile company BYD rolled out its BYD K9, a bus so much in demand in the US that soon afterwards it was manufactured there. Considering that instead the ACT government decided on a Spanish tram unable to climb hills for this hilly city of Canberra, costing a multiple of that of the bus, one must indeed wonder about the professionalism of the decision makers. Prof Beatrice Bodart-Bailey</p>
<p>City News [Published 27Mar24] Landscaping gets uglier by the day That rubbish on Northbourne Avenue complementing light rail, loosely called landscaping, is uglier by the day, if that's possible. Are standards so challenging in this place that rainbow-glazed eyes fail to comprehend the sight that greets visitors to this city? It's ugly Mr Barr, but I guess no one in authority cares so what's the panic, it's just continued deterioration! John Lawrence</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 26Mar24] Common sense at last over tram As one of the legion of contributors to the CT Letters page who have criticised the white elephant that is Canberra's tram system, it's good to see our common sense arguments being verified by "former executive director of the International Association Of Public Transport (Australia/NZ)" Peter Moore (Letters, March 22). Perhaps his voice will go some way towards halting this madness before the ACT government bankrupts us. Lee Welling, Nicholls</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 26Mar24] Let's Help Out With The Trams Far be it from me to tell you what to do with your hard-earned, Anne Willenborg. But if you are feeling charitable you could donate your \$56 of electricity savings to another 0.17mm of tram track. Every little helps. John Howarth, Weston</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 24Mar24] Too Right Sue Dyer (Letters, March 18) made good points about the awful bus "service" since the tram began. If our politicians had cared more about Canberra, rather than being in government, they could have made a bipartisan agreement that they wouldn't give in to the ridiculous Rattenbury demand of a tram in exchange for forming government. Roll on, independents. Maria Greene, Curtin</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 22Mar24] ACT missed the bus on affordable public transport long ago As the former executive director of the International Association of Public Transport (Australia/NZ) I was involved in an advocacy campaign to convince the ACT government to build a "guided busway" network for Canberra. The network would have looked and operated just like a "tram", and could have been largely built by modifying the existing road network. During the "campaign" a former ACT Urban Services Minister visited Europe (with our assistance) to see guided busways in operation. Construction site for Stage 2A of light rail in Canberra. That Minister returned to Canberra convinced guided busways were the way to proceed; no doubt influenced by the cost to build such a network being "considerably cheaper" than light rail and, most importantly, the ACTION bus system could have evolved into an integrated "guided busway" network. Guided busways look and operate just like a tram. The key was marketing that network as a new transport alternative. The legacy of the "tram decision" is a "forever" financial burden for almost all Canberrans that cannot access the tram, and a bus system in decline. If only that Urban Services Minister had remained in Canberra to implement what he observed in France, Canberra would have able to spend scarce funds on education, health and community benefits - rather than a very, very expensive tram system that goes to places where most people do not live. The tram going south has the potential to bankrupt the territory. Peter Moore, Kingston</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 21Mar24] What we've lost Google Earth does not update the views from space very frequently. It is still possible to travel down Northbourne Avenue "virtually" and enter the city with those magnificent gum trees down the middle of the road.</p>

<p>This entrance to Canberra had many open spaces beside the road. The Information Centre was conveniently located to greet all visitors. Light rail has cost the bush capital a lot, not just the billions of dollars spent. Eugene Holzapfel, Campbell</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 21Mar24] Deal with the devil Roger Quarterman (Letters, March 19) pointed out that we have the light rail thanks to a political horse-trade. Jasper Lindell (March 16) wrote that the case was stronger for a bus rapid transit system. Moreover, it apparently escaped the notice of the ACT government that in September 2010 the Chinese automobile company BYD rolled out its BYD K9, one of the most successful electric buses. The high demand for the bus in the US resulted in its production in California soon afterwards. In the meantime Canberra decided to import a Spanish tram that cannot climb hills for the hilly terrain of the ACT. The vehicles are shipped from Spain, fully assembled seats and all, at great cost. Trams in Melbourne and elsewhere can climb hills and are assembled in Australia with only parts imported. Must we continue to pay for the horse-trade that kept Labor in power when the money is desperately needed for health, housing, education, the police and other infrastructure expenses? Professor B M Bodart-Bailey,</p>
<p>City News [Published 20Mar24] Light rail could never survive a cost-benefit analysis In his letter "Light rail taking on farcical proportions" (CN March 14), Richard Johnston commented on the Barr government's undertaking to build light rail (to Woden) "by 2033". That "promise" was soon replaced with "working towards a construction period of 2028-2033 for future stages of the project". Mr Johnston concludes "it is difficult to see how (the light rail project) could possibly be viable". I would go further: at no stage could Barr's light rail project survive a cost-benefit analysis. If construction of light rail were to go ahead, and even if a network were extended to Belconnen, Tuggeranong and Canberra Airport, we would be left with a "skeleton" – Gungahlin to Woden being the "spine" – of high-rise apartment blocks with the surrounding single-level suburbia as the "flesh". The Walter Burley Griffin vision of a "bush capital" would be sacrificed – on the altar of political pressure. Dr Douglas Mackenzie, Deakin</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 19Mar24] Barr govt should campaign on a promise to drain the lake All right-thinking Canberrans are rightly concerned that Australia's "most progressive government" will go down the drain at the October polls. High on its catalogue of difficulties is our not being able to catch a tram to Woden before the 2032 poll. It is probably too late to stop gassing the bunnies so that they multiply and burrow to their heart's content until City Hill collapses enough not to bother to ship in more dirt. It is not too late, however, to solve the problem of getting the tram across the lake. Indeed, the solution is so obvious it's a wonder minister Steel hasn't thought of it himself. Drain the Lake. This is a win-win-win. The Greens can delight in restoring the Molonglo to its natural state. The Ngunnawal and Ngambri will have more country to claim. Once the "Barr-geoisie" is back in office, the hectares of reclaimed land can be sold off for development fees and to earn rates to bring the budget towards the black before 2032, 2036 or ... And sheep shall safely graze. Humphrey McQueen, Griffith, (author Suburbs of the Sacred: Transforming Australian Beliefs and Values)</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 19Mar24] How not to do it The steady flow of letters and the front page headline on March 12 all suggest that Canberra's light rail system is likely to become best known as a text book example of how not to manage major public works. The correct procedure is a well established four stage process: Define the overall objective, taking care not to use criteria that pre-empt the analysis; List all possible options for achieving the objective, remembering that a "do nothing" case is one of the options and provides a useful base line; Analyse each of the options according to objective criteria (e.g. benefit/cost ratio). Select and implement the best option. For Canberra's light rail system the process was quite different. The outcome of a local election had put one man with a rather starry eyed utopian view of light rail in a position where he could apply political pressure to each party by offering to provide support enabling that party to form government in return for a promise to construct a light rail system. No credible clinical analysis of this proposal was undertaken. Now that the first stage is completed the slipshod approach continues. The ludicrously expensive Stage 2A appears to have been undertaken with no assurance that approval to continue through the parliamentary triangle will be obtained. Thus there is a risk that Stage 2A could become a stranded asset as a line to nowhere, servicing nobody.</p>

<p>An obvious alternative was an extension along Constitution Avenue servicing the CIT/UNSW campus, Russel Offices and the high density residential and commercial developments already completed and still expanding. I have looked in vain for any publicly released information comparing these two alternatives. Roger Quarterman, Campbell</p>
<p>City News [Published 15Mar24] Light rail taking on farcical proportions Recent breathless headlines have said: "Light rail to Woden by 2033 says ACT govt", but Chief Minister Andrew Barr's media release said: "The government is working towards a construction period of 2028-2033 for future stages of the project". This seems to me to be a long way from a clear commitment to deliver light rail to Woden "by 2033". The Light Rail Stage 2 saga is taking on farcical proportions, quite apart from its lack of economic justification. The documents with the ACT government's referral under the EPBC Act indicate that its heritage and other environmental impacts are likely to be severe and need much more detailed investigation. The alternative "Barton dog-leg" route is said to be preferred by the community and may have a bit less impact on the historic trees in Commonwealth Avenue, but it is an extraordinarily convoluted route and would be disowned by any self-respecting dog! It is difficult to see how it could possibly be viable. Richard Johnston, Kingston</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 15Mar24] Vanity, sheer vanity It seems that every government (or aspiring government) needs to have a foolish, egregiously expensive project. The federal government has AUKUS, as time goes on looking more and more like a hugely expensive white elephant. The federal opposition has its plan for nuclear energy generation, widely and expertly acknowledged as inappropriate for Australia, far too expensive (compared with renewables in particular) and not realisable for decades. The ACT government has the tram (sorry, light rail), in particular its Stage 2B to Woden, clearly enormously expensive, destructive and inflexible. Oliver Raymond, Mawson</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 15Mar24] Step by Step I was thrilled to learn the ACT will receive another \$188 million in GST revenue. If my calculations are right, that's another 350 metres of tram track right there. John Howarth, Weston</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 14Mar24] Light rail – outrageous costs It is no surprise to critics of light rail to read of the "Tram builder snub" (article, 12Mar24) by the ACT Government. When it comes to light rail, this Labor/Greens government is in thrall to ideology and impotent against its paymasters. How else could it have signed sole-source contract for Stage 2A from Civic to Regatta Point for \$577M (excluding raising London circuit) for 1.7 km of track, being \$339M per kilometre. For comparison, Stage 1, Gungahlin-Civic, cost \$69M per km to build (in 2016-19). How could construction costs have possibly increased 500 per cent in five years? Yet that is only for the build. With costs largely known publicly, Stage 2A has already cost \$1.3B in various signed contracts and administration, including, for example, raising London Circuit, buying five extra trams and retro-fitting the existing 14 trams for batteries. With the addition of 20 years of Operations & Maintenance, Stage 2A is expected to cost \$1.66B. Extrapolating component costs for Stage 2A, the estimate for Stage 2B, Regatta Point to Woden, could be around \$3.5B for build plus 20 years of O&M, being a total of \$5.16B to get to Woden, sometime in the mid-2030s, if ever. But, the greater majority of Canberra voters have only themselves to blame for the continual gross wastage of taxpayer's money by this incompetent and impotent government. M. Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport 12Mar24</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 14Mar24] & City News [Published 20Mar24] Light rail – outrageous costs When are Canberrans ever going to wake up to how we taxpayers are being fleeced on light rail by the sole-source, contractor/unions consortium, with the impotent compliance of the Labor/Greens government. It can be shown from published sources that, to date, some \$3.3B has been committed (much of it spent) on Stage1 (\$1.78B) and on stage 2 planning and build contracts (\$1.524B). At this point, \$1.32B has been committed for Stage 2A (Civic-Regatta Point) for planning and a build contract alone. To this must be added the Operations & Maintenance (O&M) (20 years nominal) of \$0.384B, for a total cost of Stage 2A of \$1.7B. Not bad for 1.7km of track. For comparison (and a source of wonder), Stage 1 (12km) cost \$69M per km to build but Stage 2A (1.7km) will be \$305M per km to build (excluding raising London Circuit). How could that be short of snouts in the trough? The outrageous contract price of \$519M to build Stage 2A (excluding raising London Circuit, extra trams and facilities), for 1.7km has prompted a revision of probable costs of Stage 2B, Regatta Point to Woden.</p>

<p>The most probable build cost now for Stage 2B (10.1km) is \$2.2B. An extension from Woden to Mawson (2km) would be another \$0.32B. By the time 20 years of O&M and off-contract related expenditures are included, Stage 2B will be about \$3.5B.</p> <p>All up (build plus 20 years O&M), Stage 2 to Woden will be about \$5.20B (\$1.7B for 2A and \$3.5B for 2B).</p> <p>Hair-raising stuff!</p> <p>M. Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport 9Mar24</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 7Mar24] ACT govt faces a massive credibility gap over light rail plan Tuesday's editorial "Cynicism grows over tram timeline" (March 5) exposes a yawning credibility gap in the ACT government's plans for rapid transport to Woden. Your commentary was however optimistic regarding stage 2A's costs. The first section of light rail to Woden (Stage 2A) is the construction of three new stops between the City and Commonwealth Park. A combination of a savvy single supplier and a desperately naive buyer have meant that the ACT government has lost control of the project. The main stage 2A contract with Canberra Metro was signed last December for \$519 million. A \$162 million contract to "interface" between stages 1 and 2A was also awarded to Canberra Metro, adding to \$199 million the previous year to supply five more trams, expand the depot and retrofit batteries, all required by stage 2A. Add to these various "augmentation deeds" and work orders with Canberra Metro valued at over \$34 million, a separate \$14 million for certification and \$82 million for raising London Circuit, and the total is already \$1.01 billion. In addition a \$93 million contract was awarded in 2021 to AECOM for general design work on Stage 2. And then there's an \$85 million "Light Rail Technical Advisors Panel" contract. Layered on top is the Major Projects Canberra bureaucracy with over 260 full-time positions. It and its predecessor have been working on stage 2 since 2016 as a flagship project. An artist's impression of light rail stage 2. The cost of this project could blow out to billions of dollars. Picture supplied An artist's impression of light rail stage 2. The cost of this project could blow out to billions of dollars. Picture supplied We'll be lucky to get out of stage 2A for \$1.3 billion. All for 1.7 kilometres of track. And remember this is the easy part. The ACT government split the project because 2B was so complex. Kent Fitch, Nicholls</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 7Mar24] Here's a thought Your editorial "Cynicism grows over tram timeline" (March 5) contrasted the Woden tram plans with the speedy construction of the USA transcontinental railway. This got me thinking. How about you engage two contractors for the build, each starting at opposite ends of the line and meeting wherever they happen to reach. They get first dibs on developing any vacant land adjacent to track they lay. Ian Douglas, Jerrabomberra, NSW</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 7Mar24] The ACT's 'great tram robbery' When Ronald Biggs carried out the great train robbery in 1963 he and his mates took £2.6 million off the Royal Mail Train and then attempted to spend it. In the great ACT Labor/Greens tram robbery we have the reverse. Our government is taking billions of dollars from us, including the \$85.9 million that the federal government allocated towards the urgent upgrading of major roads and loading all the cash onto gold-plated trams for a select few. Robin Hood, where are you when we need you? Anthony Senti, Kaleen</p>
<p>City News [Published 6Mar24] Is Mr Barr allergic to budget surpluses? I am not at all surprised that our faithful and persistent Chief Minister-cum-Treasurer, Andrew Barr "has never recorded a budget surplus" ("Fact: Andrew Barr has never posted a surplus", CN February 29). One could be forgiven for concluding that Mr Barr is allergic to budget surpluses. The Barr administration – or should that be autocracy? – has been too busy spending ratepayers' money on an horrendously expensive but antiquated tram system, and trying to appease the developers, with whom he has allegedly become a little too familiar. These developers are leaving a legacy of new suburbs devoid of the upper soil horizons on which most plants depend in their "infancy". Overly large houses are crammed into small allotments, leaving little or no room for trees, or even green space such as real lawn. The last two comprise a surefire recipe for urban heat islands – the last thing a city needs is global heating advances relentlessly, enabled by a federal government that seems desperate to appease the fossil fuel industry. Dr Douglas Mackenzie</p>

<p>City News [Published 6Mar24] Read the auditor's report, Caroline The Australian Railways Association chief executive Caroline Wilkie claims that Light Rail Stage 2B will deliver wider economic, social and environmental benefits. She obviously has not read what the ACT auditor-general said about these claims. The sort of "urban renewal" referred to could occur just as easily with bus rapid transit or trackless trams. The auditor-general drew attention to the wider economic benefits being unsubstantiated and unduly large. They may benefit developers who build apartment blocks along the route, but that does not help Canberrans to pay for the cost of the tram. And far from Wilkie's "Renaissance of Light Rail", other jurisdictions such as NSW are getting cold feet about this expensive form of public transport. Ryan Hemsley is reported to have alleged that the report 21st Century Public Transport Solutions for Canberra is a "mish-mash of mistruths and half-baked proposals". This sort of unconstructive comment shows that the Public Transport Association is unable to offer any substantial input on Stage 2B. John Bell</p>
<p>City News [Published 6Mar24] Reduce bus and tram fares and make a profit! A recent correspondent said that the bus and tram fares are subsidised at the rate of \$10 per fare. There is a simple way to reduce this subsidy to zero and even allow ACTION to make a profit. How? Between 10am and 4pm, halve the fares or less. Why? The aim of the exercise is to fill every seat at all times. If all the seats are filled and the fare is above marginal cost (this is an economist talking) the bus/trams will make a profit. This is what airlines do. They attempt to fill all seats all the time. An unfilled seat is loss making. So they drop the price in a form of internet auction so that all seats are filled at all times. While an auction system would not work for buses, it would be easy enough to drop fares outside peak hours so as to attract customers and fill these loss-making seats. ACTION makes a profit at peak hours. It's all these empty buses roaming around at off-peak hours that lose money, Reduce fares at off-peak to fill these seats – and make a profit! Tim Walshaw, Watson</p>
<p>Editorial, Canberra Times [Published 5Mar24] Cynicism grows over tram timeline Questions need to be answered about the planning of stage 2. "... Given Canberrans are paying for this, they deserve to know how Stage 2 has been coted, what has determined the timeline for the build and the cost-benefit ratio is." Editor's Note: Another welcome editorial from the Caberra Times on this wasteful project.</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 5Mar24] Is it possible for Canberrans to have their lake and to eat it? I applaud the letter "A new era for the lake" by Juliet Ramsay (February 27) expressing her concerns about official support for the "activation" of the lake. This seeks to commercialise it rather than to preserve its value as a tranquil and informal city space. She suggests that instead of cluttering Commonwealth Avenue and its bridge by continuing light rail in that direction it should be redirected along Constitution Avenue and over Kings Avenue bridge. In light of many recent expressions of citizen dissatisfaction with the expense, slowness and lack of flexibility of the current 2B plan, and an expressed preference for the use of swift electric buses to Woden, there is still time for planners to reconfigure the best uses of light rail in a Canberra setting and to improve transport to all parts of Canberra. Planners could double the current planned uses of light rail by combining shorter distance with more efficient service for tourists and commuters in central areas. Stage 2B of light rail could continue across Commonwealth Avenue bridge as planned, but turn left at King Edward Terrace, passing Treasury on the right and then the National Library, the galleries and the High Court on the left, and on the right, at a distance, Old Parliament House. It would then loop back over Kings Avenue Bridge, up to Defence, then along Constitution Avenue and past Commonwealth Park back to Civic. A link with the airport and Kingston railway could also be made at a stop along Kings Avenue. This would have the added advantage of saving the vista, heritage and trees of Commonwealth Ave from the Albert Hall to Parliament House. The government could have its cake and eat it too. Ann Kent, Forrest</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 5Mar24] Light rail mitigation concerns The ludicrous notion of having to insert stage 2 light rail into the Canberra landscape is underlined by the "extensive mitigation measures" likely required to avoid heritage impacts ("Govt reveals timeline for building Woden light rail line", March 1).</p>

<p>Would the strong Commonwealth support for this project have anything to do with Katy Gallagher as Minister for Finance? After all she initiated light rail in Canberra originally. Murray May, Cook</p>	
	<p>A green dollar-gobbling monster Found on the Internet, somewhere, March 2024</p>
<p>Canberra Times [Published 5Mar24]</p> <p>Editor, Canberra Times As reported in today's CTimes, we can look forward to 9 to10 years of chaos from Civic to Woden whilst our Labor Green alliance turkeys stick to rolling out their beloved tram. Not only that they're going to wipe out the habitat of a variety of parrots that live in the corridor. But why should they worry...our government already pick up their rifles and wipe out hundreds of urban kangaroos each year; what's a few birds going to matter! But they're not taking into account the thousands of Canberra residents bank accounts that will be decimated with ever increasing rates, land taxes and rents to pay for their "dream" light rail. It's time for ACT voters to cull Labor and Greens from the ACT Legislative Assembly at the next election Regards Peter Toscan Amaroo ACT</p>	
<p>City News and Canberra Times NCA and Light Rail It looks as though the fix is in with the appointment as the new head of the National Capital Authority of Ms Karen Doran, the acting D-G of Transport Canberra & City Services and Acting Chief Project Manager of Major Projects Canberra (City News, 28Feb24). . How unbiased could this manager be in respect of the tram to Woden, through the parliamentary triangle., through the parliamentary triangle. One could easily believe this appointment to be the work of a scheming Mr Barr, with the involvement of Ms Katy Gallagher, of Ms Doran to a Federal Government position, so crucial to Stage 2B of light rail. The massive waste of taxpayers' money by Mr Barr and Ms Gallagher goes on. M. Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport, Erindale Centre 28Feb24</p>	
<p>Canberra Times Light Rail Of course, the CEO of Australasian Railway Association and spokesperson of Canberra's Public Transport Association would say that light rail is the best thing since sliced bread (article, 27Feb24). Their argument is that light rail generates development along the corridor as if only light rail (or suburban line) can do that. However, that is completely fallacious. The fact is that development will follow an effective and efficient transport corridor irrespective of the transport means. Light rail is an extremely costly option when such a corridor can be met much more cheaply with Bus Rapid Transit (RBT) systems, like that being implemented in Brisbane. The planned light rail corridor to Woden is a gross waste of taxpayer's money. M. Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport, Erindale Centre 27Feb24</p>	
<p>Canberra Times [Published 27Feb24] Light rail benefits are wider: peak body Article by Jasper Lindel [Article argues essentially that only rail corridors can attract development along a corridor. Editor's Note: See letter above for comment</p>	
<p>City News [Published 22Feb24] Arrogant Barr government is living in la-la land</p>	

<p>"The ACT government is oblivious of the need to maximise the benefits from limited infrastructure funds, as its cavalier expenditure on the light rail money-pit is a prime example," says letter writer MIKE QUIRK, of Garran. I share the concerns of John Quinn (Letters, CN February 15) about the performance of the Barr government. The arrogant, tired government is living in la-la land having deceived itself into believing its overall performance is meritorious. Write to editor@citynews.com.au Its ongoing failures – the insufficient supply of social housing and greenfields land, the tram fiasco, the reduction in bus services, poor procurement (think HR upgrades, buses, CIT contracts), stadium paralysis, poorly managed redevelopment, the sick health system, ballooning debt, inadequate city maintenance and a failure to justify its actions – would be terminal for governments in most jurisdictions. It is having a deleterious impact on the quality of life of Canberrans, especially those of limited means. The government is oblivious of the need to maximise the benefits from limited infrastructure funds, as its cavalier expenditure on the light rail money-pit is a prime example. Its poor priority setting is a result of ideology and inadequate analysis. After serving Labor/Green governments since 2001, is the public service capable of providing frank, honest and timely advice based on the best available evidence; or does it simply implement government policy, no matter how half-baked? The community deserves better. Can alternative voices, including emerging independents, convince a largely disengaged community it is time for a change or will the community continue to consume the government's baloney and suffer the consequences of living in Barr-Barr land? Mike Quirk, Garran</p>
<p>City News [Published 22Feb24] Is the chief minister our Wizard of Aus? Am I becoming delusional when I see a colourful, artist impression of tram stops near Parliament House, without any mention of cost? And reportage of the ACT budget blow out (\$340 million) that apparently, was not Treasurer Barr's fault. It was the lower-than-expected tax revenue, stupid! Is our Wizard of Aus now conjuring up another illusion for Canberrans to dream of what's to come on the road to the emerald city of Woden? Canberrans will enjoy a slow, relaxing tourist ride, in a gold-plated tram, gliding smoothly on gold-plated tracks, around the "Big House" and around the picturesque streets of Barton. Workers to/from Woden, wishing to get to work quickly, can just relax and be enthralled with that scenery, every morning and afternoon, enjoying their slow and expensive tram. But I may be mistaken, he may be our "Dorothy" and Minister Steel, our "Tin Man", metaphorically speaking, embarking on the "Yellow Brick Road" to enlightenment and a deeper understanding of such mundane things as fiscal responsibility, budgetary constraints, accountability, transparency and compassion for Canberrans, struggling with cost-of-living issues, unaffordable housing, high rental costs and the like. Who knows? I might be dreaming or am I being "derailed" by a recurring nightmare? Anthony Senti, via email</p>
<p>City News [Published 13Feb24] Further support of this mob not in city's interest "What happens when you give one mob 20 years on the trot? You get what we have now: an arrogant government that knows it has the election in the bag," says letter writer JOHN QUINN, of Spence. Where in the world of current democracies would you find a government that has been in power continuously for 20 years? Nowhere. Write to editor@citynews.com.au Most thinking democracies give one mob a couple of terms and then give them the boot at election time and give the other mob a go. What happens when you give one mob 20 years on the trot? You get what we have now: an arrogant government that knows it has the election in the bag. And one that ignores its constituents with a "Bugger you Jack, I'm alright" attitude, sprouts a few promises to lull their supporters into pro-Labor mode and then continues as they have for 20 years. Any visitor to Canberra's suburbs would believe he/she is in a third-world country. Paspalum and other weeds are unmown for three months and reach a metre in height. Median strips with weeds growing out of the concrete because we no longer employ the chemical weeder crew. What are we getting for the astronomical rates that this mob have been charging – allegedly to get rid of stamp duty. A tram that is basically 19th century technology! Labor voters have done this town a serious disservice – retaining a government that serves its own ideological needs rather than the needs of its constituents. Cato, a Roman senator, concluded every speech with "Carthago delenda est" (Carthage must be destroyed) in an attempt to awaken his fellows to the danger Rome faced from Carthage. Carthage was destroyed. Rome was saved. I have been a Labor supporter all my life but Blind Freddy can see that further support of this mob is not in the city's long-term interest. We should be like Cato and give the rallying call: "Labor must go." It's time to look for fresh blood, different thinking, anything but the present government. John Quinn, Spence</p>
<p>Canberra Times[Published 3Feb24].....[Canberra's GP crisis</p>

<p>The sorry news that the ACT has the lowest rate of bulk billing in Australia is compounded by the Productivity Commission reporting that Canberra has the second lowest number of GPs per head of any jurisdiction.</p> <p>The typical Australian has 23 per cent greater access to GPs than us. People needing primary healthcare struggle to find a GP and struggle to afford it even when they can. If only the ACT government could build and run 60 bulk-billing GP clinics, each staffed by three full-time-equivalent doctors, nurses and support staff there would be one at your suburb's or your neighbouring suburb's local shops.</p> <p>But at an average of \$600,000 each to fit-out, that would \$40 million up front, and a net outlay of \$1.4 million each per year to run. That would cost about \$85m per year. How could they afford that?</p> <p>Well, to the \$577 million trumpeted by the ACT government for stage 2A tracks must be added \$650 million already spent on stage 2, including raising London Circuit, relocating services, expanding the depot, more trams and retrofitting batteries.</p> <p>If all goes well, the cost of the 1.7 kilometres to Commonwealth Park will be over \$1.2 billion.</p> <p>It seems there's no shortage of money, just no will to devote it to universal primary healthcare, reducing the burden of chronic disease on us, hospitals and emergency rooms.</p> <p>Kent Fitch, Nicholls</p>
<p>City News.....[Published 1Feb24].....[</p> <p>With 7% on public transport, tram doesn't stack up</p> <p>With only seven per cent of the ACT population using public transport, the question must be asked as to who, apart from fragile government egos, benefits from continuing to pour our rates into the bottomless tram pit.</p> <p>Of course, the answer is the developers, who seek to increase densification along the tram's route, not for the benefit of ACT residents, but for their bottom line. Imagine Yarra Glen as wall-to-wall apartment buildings, because that is what it will take to make Stage 2B come anywhere near to being financially viable for the ACT community – developers aside.</p> <p>This in turn must beg the question of who is running the ACT, the developers or their government lackeys?</p> <p>If the government must have the continuing support it receives from developers, then give them some projects that benefit more than seven per cent of our population – better sporting arenas, swimming pools and convention centres are possibilities that immediately come to mind, and that's before we start looking at sub-standard existing facilities such as our schools and hospitals.</p> <p>While we are still some way out from the next election, we must be fast approaching the time when the ACT Liberals start announcing their alternative vision for the ACT, with costed plans that reveal them to be a serious and viable alternative to the rabble that seems hellbent on burying the ACT in the landfill now covering London Circuit.</p> <p>Ian Pearson, Barton</p>
<p>City News.....[Published 1Feb24].....[</p> <p>Electric buses kill emissions</p> <p>Our new planning minister should realise that 30 years of failed public transport patronage says something – apparently, we like direct door-to-door, minister.</p> <p>I estimate 10,000 commuters use our buses, and we'll spend a staggering \$3-4 billion building the tram to Woden.</p> <p>Cancel Light Rail 2B and spend the money, \$1 million each, ie \$450 million, on replacing all of Action's buses with electric buses.</p> <p>That kills emissions as quick as!</p> <p>Russ Morison, Theodore</p>
<p>City News.....[Published 25Jan24].....[</p> <p>Light Rail Stage 2</p> <p>Jack Kershaw is perfectly correct in his criticism of The PPP (Public Private Partnership) delivery method (Letters, 18Jan24), which has been used from the inception on light rail, as a stitch-up by the lead contractors and the unions to exploit (even extort) the public purse. Remember that there has been a long-standing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the UnionsACT and the ACT Government which gives a virtual veto power over any ACT Government tender preparation and selection as well as conditions of any contract entered into.</p> <p>PPP contracts are also much more expensive in financing, in that the government can borrow money more cheaply than the contractors. Yet the Government chooses to pay the contractors more to borrow plus their profit mark-up on top of that.</p> <p>Of course, the whole light rail set-up stinks to high heaven but Labor must obey its union masters and to hell with the taxpayers.</p> <p>Given the outrageous contract price for Stage 2 of \$577M (for construction only mind you), the Liberal Party should revisit and qualify its support for Stage 2A and, at least during the election campaign, promise a detailed independent investigation into the Stage 2 contract, notwithstanding claimed contractual confidentiality.</p> <p>Light rail has been from the outset and remains a financial disgrace!</p> <p>M. Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport Erindale Centre 18Jan24</p>
<p>City News.....[Published 18Jan24].....[</p> <p>Stop the 'crazy' spending on the tram</p> <p>Since 1975, patronage of our public transport has fallen rapidly such that only 7 per cent of our working population use it. Thirty years ago a bus trip from the outer suburbs to Civic door-to-door took 90 minutes and, as of December 30, that figure is unchanged.</p>

So what? If you keep doing the same thing and nothing changes, perhaps you need to take a different approach. Stage 1 of light rail has cost us nearly \$2 billion and, to date, Stage 2A is heading to \$900,000. 2B will cost around \$3 billion for about 11,000 people. Just crazy.

According to government sources, Stage 2B will be a number of years off but we are all concerned about greenhouse emissions. We could solve that tomorrow by immediately reaching out to industry and buying and replacing our 451 diesel and gas buses with electric right now.

But what we need is a moratorium and cessation of further work on buying trams. During a moratorium period, we need to talk face-to-face with each catchment and find out what it would take to leave the car at a park and ride. It has never been done.

Clearly, the majority of the commuting public don't want to use public transport but the government continues to ignore the elephant in the room: waste our money on a project that doesn't stack up.

Light your candle folks. In 2024 let the government know you will not exchange municipal services, health, education etcetera for a money gobbling tram.

Ryss Morison, via email

City News.....[Published 18Jan24].....[

Catch the solar-powered, electric bus

Isn't it about time Chief Minister Barr and Minister Rattenbury dragged themselves out of the 19th century in wanting trams for Canberra's future public transport.

They need to do away with their three-piece suits and black homburgs that were appropriate for a sedate tram ride through Berlin or Prague in the 1880s and immediately reconsider Stage 2 of the light rail project.

Stage 2 is not only an economic and commercial joke, it is also an environmentally irresponsible option compared with 21st century solar-powered electric buses which do not require permanent steel rails and overhead wires produced from energy-intensive industries.

We have all heard the specious argument that light rail will give developers the certainty to invest in housing developments along the tram lines.

Looking around Canberra, I don't think developers need much incentive to invest in such a beautiful city. Moreover, it is unlikely that future demographics and associated demand for urban housing will always remain in lockstep with permanent tram tracks – electric buses are a much more flexible option.

Bob Allen, Fadden

City News.....[Published 18Jan24].....[

Health suffers as spending continues on 'stupid tram'

My experience at old Calvary hospital recently was the same as columnist Robert Macklin's at Canberra Hospital last year. I saw my GP at 5pm due to breathlessness and high pulse rate > 130 (I'm 84) and he called an ambulance and sent me to Calvary. I did go straight into emergency and a cubicle and bed, but from then on it was slow and, after 11 hours, I discharged myself at 5.30am and got an Uber home.

I had blood tests, a chest X-ray and a CT scan just after midnight. I had a brief discussion with the intern about the blood tests, not much about the X-ray and the CT result wasn't available after four hours.

No sleep was possible with the beep-beep of monitors, snoring patients, a troubled possibly autistic child (nurses were very good with him). Eventually at 5am Dr Google suggested I had an allergic reaction to the antibiotic cephalexin, breathlessness and breathing difficulties, so I discharged myself knowing that I wasn't going to have a heart attack and went home to have a sleep.

The state of the health care system is to be expected, given the bucket load of money being spent on a stupid tram.

Barr and co should go to Stirling in WA and check out the Chinese trackless tram that is being trialled. At about \$4 million each, we could have 200 of them, running on all the major roads in Canberra, just for the price of the tram extension to Commonwealth Park.

Of course, they won't look at a trackless tram as that would mean admitting that they were wrong in the first place.

How Barr et al can lie through their face about the state of the healthcare system, the swimming pools, the roads, basketball halls for Canberra Capitals to play on (Radford has a better facility than the ACT!) is beyond me and most of the ACT population.

Dave Roberts. via email

City News.....[Published 18Jan24].....[

ACT government 'suckered' into the PPP racket

Many are rightly appalled at the eye-wateringly high cost of light rail here.

The PPP ("Public Private Partnership") delivery method, put together by lawyers and giant "can-do" head contractors, is largely to blame.

PPPs are reportedly responsible for the excessive end costs of the new Cotter Dam and ACT Courts projects – and look at where Snowy Hydro 2 is going.

The ACT government has been suckered into this racket, largely abandoned elsewhere. Sub-contractors and suppliers frequently get screwed over. Design is often made expedient, or compromised – take a look at the way that the bulky new ACT Courts building blocks the important University Avenue vista to City Hill.

Scrap PPPs now, and, in the public interest, get back to thorough independent feasibility studies and systems assessments, comprehensive design documentation, watertight contracts and competitive tendering.

Jack Kershaw, Kambah

Canberra Times.....[Published 9Jan24]

<p>High-rise buildings and light rail both inevitable in Canberra Michael de Percy (January 8) asks a "serious question: do Canberrans really want to live in high-density housing"? To which I'd add an equally serious question: do you really think we get much of a choice? In the bipartisan business model, Australians adore the massive population growth, hate their barbecues and backyard swings, and younger people can't wait to embrace the exquisite vibrancy of vertical living (or schools). The current Treasury estimate for 2022-24 migration is 885,000. An astonishing 60 per cent higher than the previous Rudd record of around 560,000. In turn, that record was about three times higher than anything "normal" or sustainable. So, Michael, you better assume Canberra will double in population, whether you like it or not. The high density is coming, whether you like it or not. There's no good reason why light rail shouldn't come with it. For all the harrumphing of instant (especially southside) experts, the existing line is successful and effective. Even the Summernats punters piled on. I'm one of those Canberrans you mention, who'll catch light rail, not a bus. I behave the same, in large and small European and American cities from Darmstadt to Bordeaux to Portland. We can afford it. Four-hundred cities enjoy it; more than a few having torn up earlier tram systems. That will never be said of trackless trams - aka buses. Light rail and high-rise housing developments are the future of Canberra. Picture by Keegan Carroll Light rail and high-rise housing developments are the future of Canberra. Picture by Keegan Carroll Stephen Saunders, O'Connor</p>
<p>Canberra Times Light Rail Stage 2 Thank you for your editorial on light rail (8Jan24) and the article by Michael de Percy. A point first on Stage 1. You claim that Stage 1 has been very successful but that is only in the eyes of the very few (about 4% of Canberra's population) who can take advantage of it while everyone else pays for it. At maximum capacity already, the patronage is 4.6 million a year whereas the Business Case predicted 6.3 million. The subsidy is some \$15-\$17 per boarding and will not reduce. The Barr government has never published any figures of forecast or actual revenues from attributable land sales and tax claw-back, and never will, as it would expose the economic failure that light rail really is in Canberra. In respect of Stage 2A, from the city to Regatta Point, you make the valid point that any contribution from the Federal Government should be based on a business case that "stacks up" [economically] and subject to "due diligence". Given that Stage 2A (or 2B) could not possibly prove to be an economic proposition, I fail to see how the Federal Government has already promised so many funds for Stage 2A, other than on purely political grounds. Even that does not convince, given that any bribe from either a Labor or Coalition government, would make the slightest difference to the some 64 per cent of Canberrans who vote Labor/Greens. Simply money down the drain! M. Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport Erindale Centre 8Jan24</p>
<p>Canberra Times Feds to pay half for tram? Mr Barr is dreaming if he thinks the Federal government will ever pay half the \$4B cost of a tram to Woden. For a start, Federal Labor won't be in power to waste so much, as it is wont to do like drunken sailors. Hopefully, a saner Coalition government will recognise the shameful waste of taxpayer dollars that the tram would represent and that any expenditure to suck up to the voters of the ACT would be futile. M. Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport 30Dec23</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 27Dec23] Go north young man Transport Minister Steel should talk public transport with Sunshine Coast Mayor Mark Jamieson. Jamieson says, "Bus rapid transit is an area of amazing technological advancement and offers a standard of service that will attract people to use this comfortable, frequent and reliable public transport system". Leon Arundell, Downer</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 16Dec23] Transport subsidies I said (Letters, December 15) that the ACT government provides no subsidy to cycling, but subsidises public transport operating costs by \$10 per trip. Marguerite Castello (Letters, December 19) correctly points out that I did not include indirect subsidies. The government builds and maintains "cycle paths". That is an indirect subsidy of about 20 cents per walking or cycling trip. The government buys new buses and builds new public transport projects. That is an indirect subsidy of about \$30 per public transport trip.</p>

<p>Leon Arundell, Downer Canberra Times Light Rail Stage 2 Thank you for publishing my letter of 11Dec23, but the estimates therein were made in May23, well before the bombshell contract price of \$577M for delivery only of Stage 2A, to Regatta appoint, released 8Dec23. Given that this figure for 1.7 km of track, is indicative of the cost of Stage 2B of 10Km, Stage 2B would cost (2023 dollars) in the order of \$3.4B. However, as noted by others, the chosen route to Woden has many construction challenges, in addition to a bridge across the lake, and could easily reach \$4B. Then 20 years of Operations & Maintenance (O&M) on top of that of around \$2B, and we are staring at a construction and 20-year O&M cost of some \$6B. Can Canberrans really be expected to carry such ideological waste? M. Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport Erindale Centre, 19Dec23</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 16Dec23] There needs to be a proper cost-benefit analysis of light rail Given the startling revelation that a mere 1.7km stretch of light rail to Commonwealth Park will surpass the entire cost of Stage 1 from Gungahlin it begs the question: "When will the ACT and federal governments conduct a full re-assessment of Stage 2's potential cost-benefit?" Despite ongoing concerns from Infrastructure Australia, the ACT Auditor General, and the Institute of Logistics and Transport the ACT Transport Minister has consistently dismissed expert opinions on the limited benefits of Stage 2 to Woden. Just last year Chris Steel laughed off claims Stage 2 might escalate to \$3 billion. Future taxpayers and the Credit Rating Agency might not find this figure quite as funny. The ACT Government told us Stage 2 to Woden would cost less than \$1.6 billion. That figure is now clearly miles off the mark. Meanwhile, federal Labor has just pledged an ongoing 50/50 funding split despite previously promising to implement evidence-based infrastructure funding to stop the Coalition's wasteful spending on low-return infrastructure projects. Sensible infrastructure decision making seems to go out the window no matter which party is in power. B Jones, Kambah</p>
<p>Canberra Times and [Published City News/ 4Jan24] Light Rail Stage 2A The Canberra Times (8Dec23) reported a contract price for Light Rail Stage 2A of \$577M. However, the article failed to say exactly of what that figure comprised. It is, in fact, only the contract price for the Delivery Phase only, ie construction. To this must be added the following costs: Five (5) new trams, battery driven plus retrofitting the existing fleet (14 trams) with batteries, and additional facilities (\$181M); raising London Circuit (\$100M) and 20 years of Operations and Maintenance (\$604M); for a total of \$1,462M over construction plus 20 years of operations. To put this enormous sum into perspective, the equivalent contract price for Stage 1 from Gungahlin to Civic stood at \$1.149M in 2022, for 12 km of track, ie. \$95.6M/km. Stage 2A will cost \$860M for each of its 1.7 km – just on nine (9) times as much per km as for Stage 1. This wasteful government should have a lot of explaining to do for its wanton abuse of taxpayers. It should at least make public the cost composition of the \$577M. And let us not forget the probable effect of the long-standing MOU between this government and UnionsACT. M. Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport, 16Dec23 Erindale Centre 15Dec23</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 14Dec23] Campbell School Fiasco Simon Troeth's letter (12Dec23) describes the Campbell Primary School redevelopment as a travesty. I wonder how many Canberrans know that there has been a long-standing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the ACT Government and UnionsACT, under which the Government is obliged to pass, before release, all procurement tenders to the relevant unions for comment, in effect giving the unions an effective veto of any contract let by the Government. This is what happened in the case of the Campbell school. But how many others have gone uncontested? The most blatant case of late has been the single-source contract recently signed for light rail Stage 2A at \$577 M. M. Flint Erindale Centre 12Dec23</p>
<p>City News.....[Published 21Dec23].....[Light Rail Stage 2A The City News (7Dec23) reported a contract price for Light Rail Stage 2A of \$577M. However, the article fails to say whether that figure includes or not several very significant costs, namely the cost of raising London Circuit and crossing Parkes Way (an estimated \$200M) or 20 years of Operations and Maintenance (O&M at about \$112M). In short, the figure of \$577M is somewhat meaningless unless we know the components thereof and respective costs of each, as well as the baseline date and discount percentage applied to obtain the present value of \$577M. the government should be pressed to itemise the contract price.</p>

<p>For an expected generous estimate of 1 million passengers pa for Stage 2A, the expected subsidy per passenger approaches \$29 per boarding. A real bargain. Max Flint Erindale Centre 11Dec23</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 19Dec23].....[Light Rail Stage 2B For the most part, Douglas Mackenzie (letters, 11Dec23) is correct in identifying the very significant and costly obstacles to the proposed construction of light rail Stage 2B, from Regatta {point to Woden. However, his \$10B cost figure is somewhat fantastic. In May23, I revised formal estimates for each stage for construction, financing and for 20 years of Operations & Maintenance (O&M), in 2023 prices. The most probable, minimum cost of Stage 2 is \$3.1B, comprising \$0.58B for Stage 2A and \$2.52B for Stage 2B. The mooted extension from Woden to Mawson would add a further \$0.35B, for a potential cost of \$3.45B for an extended Stage 2. On top of this, one needs to add about \$100M in off-contract attendant costs to the taxpayer. The equivalent cost, in 2023 dollars for Stage 1 (Gungahlin-Civic) is \$1.75B, for the same distance as Stage 2 (12km). But the real kicker is when patronage is taken into account. The expected subsidy per boarding on Stage 1 is about \$15 (less the average per boarding of actual fares paid). For Stage 2A, the expected subsidy could be as high as \$29 per boarding and for Stage 2, completed, a subsidy as high as \$44 per boarding). (posted to www.alogstudycentre.com.au). One can only imagine how rates and taxes will be hiked to pay for this folly. 11Dec23 M. Flint, Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 12Dec23] Light Rail Stage 2A The Canberra Times (8Dec23) reports a contract price for Stage 2A of \$577M. However, the article fails to say whether that figure includes or not several significant costs, namely the cost of raising London Circuit and crossing Parkes Way (an estimated \$200M) or 20 years of Operations and Maintenance (O&M at about \$112M). In short, the figure of \$577M is somewhat meaningless unless we know the components thereof and respective costs of each. For an expected generous estimate of 1 million passengers pa for Stage 2A, the expected subsidy per passenger approaches \$29 per boarding. A real bargain. Erindale Centre 9Dec23 M. Flint, Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 11Dec23] The cost of light rail stages 2A and 2B will be billions of dollars If the cost of light rail stage 2A from Alinga Street to Commonwealth Park is to be \$577 or \$800 million ("Light rail cost reveal", December 8), depending on whose estimate you accept, I shudder to think of the cost and traffic disruption caused by stage 2B from Commonwealth Park to Woden Town Centre. There are major engineering and construction problems at several locations along the route. These include a ramp from State Circle to Adelaide Avenue; the Adelaide Avenue overpass of Hopetoun Circuit - a long span that may require a central support; the Cotter Road overpass of Adelaide Avenue (a 15-degree slope and a massive pylon in the median strip); the Yarra Glen median near the Royal Australian Mint (a three-metre-high, 400-500-metres long hump with numerous trees), the Carruthers Street overpass of Yarra Glen (a massive mid-median pylon and large tree ; and the three-way intersection of Yarra Glen, Yamba Drive and Melrose Drive. The last involves complex vehicle traffic flow and a large concrete drain that is prone to flooding in the heavy rain that will become more common and extreme with the advance of global warming. Overcoming all of these issues will probably take at least 10 years, including extended disruption of traffic, and cost at least \$10 billion. A benefit-cost analysis would produce a horrifying result. Dr Douglas Mackenzie, Deakin</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 11Dec23] This Is Crazy Is the ACT Greens-Labor government mad? \$577 million for 1.7 kilometres of tram track? Were Messrs Rattenbury and Barr deprived of a toy train set in their childhoods? J Grant, Gowrie</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 25Nov23] Speed is the key The business case for light rail Stage 2A says that light rail would take more than 27 minutes to travel between Woden and Civic.</p>

<p>Transport Minister Chris Steel supports the case for transit lanes. He says that, unless we improve our public transport system, "with more congestion on the roads, buses are simply going to be caught up in that congestion". On Adelaide Avenue's T2 lanes buses zoom past congested traffic. Buses currently take less than 20 minutes to travel between Woden and Civic. Extending the T2 lanes could cut that travel time to 15 minutes. Cutting public transport travel time from 27 minutes to 15 minutes would increase patronage by 16 per cent according to the ACT Transport Demand Elasticities Study. Leon Arundell, Downer</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 13Nov23] Taking the slower ride A bus trip from Gungahlin to Woden used to take 40 minutes. Rosemary Walters (Letters, November 10) is pleased at the prospect of being able to take more than 50 minutes to make the same trip on a "rapid" tram. Leon Arundell, Downer</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 10Nov23] Chinese show the way The ACT government expects that by 2046 stage two of light rail will carry up to 23,000 passengers per day. Guangzhou's bus rapid transit line carries 850,000 passengers per day. It is the same length as stages one and two of Canberra's mass transit system. The transport minister claims "Buses alone won't deliver ... the mass transit we need to move more people as our city grows." ("ACT light rail reaches 15m passengers", October 29). There is some evidence that the minister is on the same planet as Guangzhou. Leon Arundell, Downer</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 10Nov23] Smooth Ride I am really glad the tram is being extended. I will be able to enjoy a smooth, rapid tram trip from Gungahlin to Woden without paying for petrol or parking. Electric buses are being introduced so I can catch them into other suburbs. Comfort for me and it's good for the environment, too. Rosemary Walters, Palmerston</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 10Nov23] Chinese show the way The ACT government expects that by 2046 stage two of light rail will carry up to 23,000 passengers per day. Guangzhou's bus rapid transit line carries 850,000 passengers per day. It is the same length as stages one and two of Canberra's mass transit system. The transport minister claims "Buses alone won't deliver ... the mass transit we need to move more people as our city grows." ("ACT light rail reaches 15m passengers", October 29). There is some evidence that the minister is on the same planet as Guangzhou. Leon Arundell, Downer</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 10Nov23] Hiding the bad stuff Lee Willing presents several arguments that suggest a BRT is better than the government's planned extension of light rail to Woden ("Buses offer more flexibility at a fraction of the cost", November 9). What Canberrans do not have from the current government is a detailed comparison between the two alternatives. The government surely has the information. However, they obviously only want to tell Canberrans the good news while withholding the bad including light rail's total cost. Most far-too-long-in-the-tooth governments get this way - think Howard and Morrison. Bruce Paine, Red Hill</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 28Oct23] Labor knew buses would be better than light rail in August 2012 The idea that buses are better than light rail ("Electric buses are cheaper, more flexible than Canberra light rail," October 22) will come as no surprise to ACT Labor. In 2012 the Greens estimated that stage one of light rail would cost \$200 million. The ACT Labor government's August 2012 submission to Infrastructure Australia concluded light rail would reduce daily ACT car travel in 2031 by 2.1 per cent (relative to business as usual), would produce \$11 million worth of net benefits, but would cost \$324 million more than the Greens had estimated (total \$524 million). The submission stated bus rapid transit would reduce daily car travel in 2031 by 1.9 per cent, would produce \$243 million worth of net benefits and would cost only \$49 million more than the Greens estimate for light rail (total \$249 million). Labor knew buses would be cheaper and more flexible than light rail long before it signed the deal with the Greens. Picture by Keegan Carroll Labor knew buses would be cheaper and more flexible than light rail long before it signed the deal with the Greens. Picture by Keegan Carroll The government did not publish this until nine months after the October 2012 election. That was long after the signing of the November 2012 Labor-Greens parliamentary agreement that committed to construction of a light rail "network". Was Greens MLA Shane Rattenbury aware of the government's conclusions, before he signed that agreement? Leon Arundell, Downer</p>

<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 25Oct23] Trams are so yesterday It was nice to see a common sense article about the tram by Dr Michael de Percy ("Electric buses are cheaper, more flexible than Canberra light rail", October 20). He correctly highlights that the tram public transport solution is a century out of date. I did ask the "community consultation" contact to give me just one advantage of the tram versus electric buses. Not surprisingly, to date I have not received an answer. Almost comically, the ACT government has decided to retain our disgusting fleet of smelly and toxic diesel buses until 2040 whilst banning new petrol powered cars in 2030. Theodore Levantis, Curtin</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 25Oct23] Trams are outdated Walter Burley Griffin's design for Canberra specified the then latest non-polluting transport: an electric tram. As Michael de Percy pointed out, in 1926 the government decided on buses, more suitable and less expensive for the decentralised garden city. One-hundred-and-one years after the Griffin's winning design, the ACT government decided to invest in trams. This was two years after the Chinese automobile company BYD produced its BYD K9, an electric bus so successful that by 2013 it was manufactured in California to satisfy US demand. The Gungahlin tram is great for anybody who can afford to live within 10 minutes' walk of a stop. The remaining odd 90 per cent of the population pays for it and suffers the resulting underfunding of essential public services. Worst of all, the tram is not climate change resilient. Heavy storms will damage overhead wires. Electricity outages and blockages from fallen objects can also stop the whole line. Electric buses can drive around blockages and dedicated bus lanes can be used by emergency vehicles during the predicted devastating fires. Professor B M Bodart-Bailey, Narrabundah</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 25Oct23] On the other hand I thought that the anti-tram lobbyists were still skulking in the back rooms of the ACT Liberal Party until I saw Dr Michael de Percy's contribution "Was light rail a step backwards for public transport?" (October 22). The distinction which should be drawn here is one between public transport and mass transport. I well remember the long lines of pre-tram buses and can contrast them with our efficient light rail vehicles which can move vast numbers of passengers quickly, including their bicycles, prams, mobility scooters and wheelchairs. I am grateful to the ACT voters for denying Alastair and Jeremy the opportunity of ripping up the tram tracks and replacing them with electric buses, which would travel in formation like their diesel forebears. John Mason, Latham</p>
<p>Canberra City News.....[Published 19Oct23] Imagine: politician stops rail plans when costs blow out In 2009, the UK announced plans to develop a high-speed rail network at a cost of some 20 billion pounds. In 2023, that cost is expected to be 100 billion pounds (\$A193 billion) at completion. This is a now familiar story; projections for the ACT light rail suggest a \$3 billion cost figure, more than doubling the original projection of \$1.3 billion in 2013. UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has recently announced that the London-to-Manchester leg of the proposed network will not proceed due to the fact that the costs are draining the economy. Instead, he will put a large injection of funds towards other existing transport systems, and to the improvement of roads. It is time for the ACT government to also reconsider its options. Cancellation of Stage 2B, given the technical difficulties of the route and the likely cost blow-out, would allow for much needed extra funds for our hospitals, schools and roads. The 11 kilometres from Civic to Woden could be serviced in a more cost effective way by fast and efficient electric buses or even the trackless trams being adopted by many other cities, such as Perth, WA. Sue Brudenall, Crace</p>
<p>Canberra City News.....[Published 19Oct23] Questions the government needs to answer DR Douglas Mackenzie (Letters, CN, October 5) mentions about the light rail that is a "disaster in the making". The ACT Labor/Greens government needs to answer these questions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will be the likely cost blow-outs? • How will they fit it across Commonwealth Avenue Bridge? • How will they reconfigure and raise the intersections of State Circle and Commonwealth Avenue and Adelaide Avenue? • What would be the impacts of traffic during construction? <p>With the government forgetting about investing in essential services, maybe it's for them to focus on other investments in the ACT such as fixing roads, hospitals, schools and more front-line police. Anton Rusanov, via email</p>

<p>Canberra City News.....[Published 16Sep23] Irony of the Greens wanting a busway I find it deeply ironic that, in 2023, the Greens and the Public Transport Association are arguing for bus rapid transit to Belconnen. The ACT Labor-Greens government's August 2012 submission to Infrastructure Australia concluded that a \$249 million busway to Gungahlin would replace 4800 car journeys a day while light rail, despite costing more than twice as much, would replace only 200 more car journeys. The government kept that submission secret until nine months after the 2012 election. In the meantime, Labor and the Greens committed to build light rail. The government now plans to spend billions of dollars to build a light rail extension that will add 10 minutes to the time public transport takes to travel between Civic and Woden. If Labor had published its August 2012 submission, we could by now have had a fast busway from Gungahlin to Woden. A busway to Belconnen would be nearing completion, and we would be discussing when to extend the busway network to Tuggeranong, Molonglo, Fyshwick and Queanbeyan. Leon Arundell, Downer</p>
<p>Canberra City News.....[Published 17Aug23] Mad as rabbits? The only attractive items on City Hill are the happy rabbits. With the contentious route for the eventual tram to Woden so many lanes are perpetually closed off that it's a joy to be reminded there remains some liveliness in our "bush capital". Now that most of our kangaroos have been culled yet again, it's appalling to witness the neglect. As to that tram, why did so much closure become necessary so early in the second stage of this seemingly endless project? With the costing still not revealed and a territory election next year, was this yet again a ploy to force us to allow this to proceed? Dream on Andrew Barr, Shane Rattenbury and et al; the ratepayers of Canberra have had enough! Renée Goossens, Turner</p>
<p>Canberra City News.....[Published 9Aug23] The tram – governments do run out of money The published information in "Light Rail 2A" is clear on only one point. It is proposed that the rail will proceed to a point stopping short of the bridge at Commonwealth Park. The rail is planned to proceed around west London Circuit, and then climb up to Commonwealth Avenue. (Trams do not climb slopes well). What is not clear is whether the line will go along the Commonwealth Avenue median strip, and then continue over a bridge between the two road bridges or, as stories I have heard, continue along the right hand side of Commonwealth Avenue, and then over a separately built bridge. As I have said in previous letters, a tram bridge built between the road bridges would be madness. But what is more immediate are the financial issues. Recently, it was in the news that the Victorian government ran out of credit (not just money). The ACT government is in the same position. Will the Commonwealth government come to the rescue? No. It is becoming clear that there are limits to its borrowing and money-printing capabilities. It looks as if the light rail will end up like the many uncompleted vainglorious government projects around the world. Governments do run out of money – it happened to the Australian government in 1975. Tim Walshaw, Watson</p>
<p>Canberra City News.....[Published 9Aug23] Given the economy, Barr should stop the tram Given the state of the economy and the increased costs of providing transport infrastructure, Chief Minister Andrew Barr should pause and review the timing of and need for major transport infrastructure, including light rail. Concerns about infrastructure costs blow-outs led the Victorian government to delay by up to four years construction of a rail link to Melbourne Airport. In NSW, the multi-billion dollar Beaches Link motorway has been put on hold indefinitely, the second stage of the Parramatta light rail line is delayed by about five years and the estimated cost of the Sydney Metro West has blown out by \$12 billion to more than \$25 billion. In response, the NSW Premier Chris Minns initiated an independent review of transport infrastructure projects. The findings will be made public in October. As the Premier stated: "We want transport infrastructure... but we want to make sure that it's done with a view to the costs of the NSW budget, and it's done efficiently". Andrew Barr should follow the responsible action of Premier Minns and commission an independent review of ACT transport infrastructure projects and commit to publicly releasing the findings. The review would assess the need for the projects; inform their timing and whether the funds would be better spent on other projects. The government could receive an election boost for undertaking a review. Failure to undertake the review would highlight the government's opaqueness and increase concerns about whether the projects are justified. Mike Quirk, Garran</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 5Aug23] A Line, not a Network</p>

<p>Canberra has one tram line between Gungahlin and Civic, and a proposal to extend that single line to Woden. What "network of trams" is B M Bodart-Bailey referring to (Letters, August 1)? Leon Arundell, Downer</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 5Aug23] No Tangible Benefit Further to Fred Pilcher's letter about the priority given by the ACT government to the light rail (Letters, August 2) of all the very significant problems I face as a result of living under the cruel rule of this government none is addressed by me being able to travel from Gungahlin to Civic using light rail. Gordon Fyfe, Kambah</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 14Jul23] Gambling with our money I agree with the letter "Steel has no cards" (Letters, July 13) and The Canberra Times's editorial of the same day calling out the poor performance of another minister. I add though that when Chris Steel and Canberra Metro play poker they are both using Canberrans' money. Time and time again, in the ACT and elsewhere, not releasing information due to claimed commercial-in-confidence concerns is a good indicator that a project will blow out in cost and time or is not warranted. I suggest Canberrans carefully consider if a Labor/Greens majority government is capable of governing for all Canberrans. It may be that Labor is too influenced by the construction sector and the union movement and that the Greens are not sufficiently interested in how much we pay in rates, rents, licenses, and fees. We would have a much better ACT government if the balance of power was held by sensible independents committed to transparency, even-handedness and value for money. Bruce Paine, Red Hill</p>
<p>The Canberra Times Steel on light rail Kent Fitch is correct in his letter about Minister Steel kidding himself on having any control over Capital Metro on contractual matters (Letters, 13Jul23). Politicians love to hide behind contract confidentiality to keep embarrassing details from the public, particularly about light rail. But claiming to be in a poker game with Canberra Metro – ridiculous. Under the Greens/Labor government, light rail is a gravy train that Canberrans will be paying for forever. M. Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport 13Jul23</p>
<p>Canberra Times.....[Published 13Jul23] Steel has no cards I was amused to hear the "Minister for Icebergs" on morning radio saying he couldn't provide budget estimates for stage 2A of the tram because he was in a "poker game" with Canberra Metro. When you've already contracted to spend over \$180 million on buying new trams, battery conversions and depot expansions and you've admitted Canberra Metro is the sole supplier and is committed to laying track next year, not only aren't you holding any cards, Mr Steel, you're not even playing poker, despite what the touts are whispering in your ear. You're being played, not playing. We're being taken for a long, slow ride whose cost will make Steel's IT debacle seem like a rounding error. Kent Fitch, Nicholls</p>
<p>Canberra City News.....[Published 12Jul23] Tram costs were clear, but not to the public Columnist Paul Costigan ("When trust runs dry and tram spinners take over", CN July 5) says that in 2012 the business case for the tram was not clear. The business case for the tram was not clear to the public, but it was clear to the government. The government's August 2012 submission to Infrastructure Australia included a strong business case for bus rapid transit between Gungahlin and Civic, and a weak case for light rail. Bus rapid transit would cost \$249 million, and would deliver net benefits of \$243 million. Light rail would cost \$524 million, and would deliver only \$11 million of net benefits. The government kept that information from the public until at least June 2013. Those figures indicate that stage 2A of bus rapid transit would deliver net benefits worth \$30 million, and stage 2B of bus rapid transit would deliver net benefits worth \$300 million. The government's August 2019 "City to Woden Light Rail: Stage 2A City to Commonwealth Park Business Case" estimated that Stage 2A would cost \$268 million, but would deliver only \$150 million worth of benefits (for a net cost of \$118 million). It also estimated that Stage 2B would have net benefits worth \$44 million, minus the cost of converting the existing light rail vehicles to dual energy operation, the additional cost of new dual energy LRVs, the cost of the extra LRVs that will be needed because dual energy LRVs will be slower, and the cost of replacing batteries every 10 to 15 years.</p>

<p>The government kept that information from the public until it was released by the Audit Office in September 2021. Leon Arundell, Downer</p>
<p>The Canberra Times [published 3Jul23] The NCA has a responsibility to protect Canberra from the Philistines I have always considered the National Capital Authority (NCA) to be just another government body that bowed to the whims and fancies of our Greens-Labor government in the ACT. Seaplanes on the lake, developer-friendly extensions into the West Basin, all without any resident consideration whatsoever. Finally, it looks like they have, as they say, "found some". ("Stage 2B of Canberra's light rail is 'proving technically difficult", canberratimes.com.au, June 30). Recent comments that it might just not be possible to take the tram off Commonwealth Avenue into State Circle because of "engineering problems" has given us some hope that the tram can be kept well away from Commonwealth Avenue and those wonderful glorious century-old trees planted opposite the Hyatt hotel. The NCA should be in the business of preserving our city from the coalition of philistines that currently occupy the ACT government benches and their flawed fascination with centuries-old, ultra expensive, transport technology. Bill Brown, Holt</p>
<p>The Canberra Times [published 3Jul23] Greens confusing The Greens nationally had a win when they forced the Albanese Government to spend an extra \$2 billion on affordable housing and gaining a guarantee at least \$500 million a year would flow to community housing providers if its Housing Australia Future Fund was legislated. Then they turned the win into a loss by blocking the fund and demanding a freeze on rent increases and a cap on rent increases, which more than likely would reduce the supply of housing. Yes more funds are needed to improve affordability but take the win, as it delivers more housing, and continue the fight. Such ineptitude is apparent in the ACT Greens zealotry regarding light rail, despite advice it was a poor use of funds, and its push for increased infill in the absence of analysis of whether it is the best way to deliver a sustainable and well-connected city. Labor has been complicit in its lazy support for these policy directions. Canberrans should think carefully at the next election about supporting a Labor-Green government which bases its decisions on ideology and virtue signalling not evidence. Mike Quirk, Garran</p>
<p>The Canberra Times [published 3Jul23]</p>
<p>The Australian The Voice and Higgins Affair I could not agree more with Paul Kelly on what he says about the Voice – my sentiments and analysis exactly. Nor could I agree more what Janet Albrechtsen has to say about Ms Katy Gallagher in respect of the Higgins affair (Australian 21Jun23). On the latter article, no one should give any credence to anything that Ms Gallagher has to say about the Higgins affair. Labor's Finance Minister has form when it comes to political manoeuvring for the Labor Party, in addition to the 'mean girl' label. At the 2012 ACT election, voters got rid of three of the four Greens MLAs and voted in equal numbers of Liberal and Labor MLAs. As the then ACT Chief Minister, Katy Gallagher opted to form a coalition with the one remaining Greens MLA when she did not have to, to stay government. She could have easily led a minority government. But instead, she chose to get into bed with the Greens, either out of stupidity but more likely as a deliberate act. The effect of her decision has been to condemn the ACT to a perpetual Labor/Greens government (already in power for 22 years). She has a lot yet to answer for. M. Flint Canberra 21Jun23</p>
<p>City News [published 15Jun23] City heads north as the tram goes south IF, as the ACT government claims, Canberra's centre of gravity is moving northwards, a justification for a replacement hospital to Calvary, why spend billions on a southbound tram to Woden? Greg Cornwell, Yarralumla</p>
<p>City News [published 21Jun23] The Canberra Times [published 12Jun23]</p>

<p>Higgins Affair</p> <p>In respect of the Higgins affair, Finance Minister Katy Gallagher has form when it comes to political manoeuvring for the Labor Party. At the 2012 ACT election, voters got rid of three of the four Greens MLAs and voted in equal numbers of Liberal and Labor MLAs. As the then ACT Chief Minister, Katy Gallagher opted to form a coalition with the one remaining Greens MLA when she did not have to, to stay government; she could have easily led a minority government. She did it either out of stupidity or deliberately. The effect of her decision has been to condemn the ACT to a perpetual Labor/Greens government (already in power for 22 years) and, among other things, burdening ACT taxpayers with an extremely wasteful light rail system to which the ACT Government has already committed to Stages 1 and 2 at an estimated cost of some \$4.5 billion dollars.</p> <p>M. Flint Erindale Centre 8Jun23</p>
<p>Canberra Times [published 26May23]</p> <p>Who Would Have Thought?</p> <p>The ACT government wants to "streamline" tram approvals which require details and community consultation. Colour me surprised. John Howarth, Weston</p>
<p>Canberra City News [& Canberra Times]</p> <p>Light rail Stage 2B</p> <p>From the article on light rail Stage 2 in the Canberra Times today (ACT calls for streamlined light rail approval, 23May23), it seems the ACT Government is still hell-bent on wasting over \$3 billion of taxpayers' money on an unnecessary tram to Woden. Recent estimates from independents sources have put the cost of Stage 2 A and 2B at a minimum of \$3.1 billion (it can only get worse).</p> <p>The truly sad part of the financial mess that is light rail in Canberra is that it could and should have been done with an Electric Bus Rapid Transit (EBRT) system at half the cost. Urban transformation – the much-touted justification by the Government for light rail – does not require light rail; it needs only an effective and efficient rapid transport corridor that a modern EBRT system would provide. How non-sensical is it for the ideologically-driven Greens/Labor Government to insist on light rail to Woden that would take twice the travel time than buses for twice the cost?</p> <p>Wake up Canberrans to this Greens/Labor Government boondoggle!</p> <p>M. Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport 23May23</p>
<p>City News [published 25May23] Canberra Times News [published 29May23]</p> <p>Light rail Cost Estimates</p> <p>Given the complexities of Stage 2 of light rail, Smart Canberra Transport (SCT) has revised its estimates for Stages 1, 2A, 2B and for the mooted extension to Mawson. Estimates for each stage are for construction, financing and for 20 years of Operations & Maintenance (O&M), in 2023 prices. The most probable, minimum cost of Stage 2 is \$3.1 billion, comprising \$0.580 billion for Stage 2A and \$2.520 billion for Stage 2B. The mooted extension from Woden to Mawson would add a further \$0.350 billion, for a potential cost of \$3.45B for an extended Stage 2.</p> <p>Readers may recall that, in March 2023, the ACT Liberal Party announced that it would formally oppose light rail Stage 2, citing a cost of \$3B for the project (excluding a Mawson extension).</p> <p>With the certain knowledge that such major projects virtually always blow-out, who knows what the final cost might be?</p> <p>The full analysis may be read on the website www.alogstudycentre.com.au/light rail</p> <p>M. Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport, 22May23</p>
<p>City News [published 27Apr23]</p> <p>Rethink the tram and fix failing services</p> <p>Max Flint (Letters, CN April 27) points out that the Liberal Party in Canberra is opposed to the proposed Stage 2B of light rail from Commonwealth Park to Woden.</p> <p>According to shadow transport minister Jeremy Hanson, the problems of Stage 2B light rail to Woden are:</p> <p>It will cost \$3 billion to build. It would cause traffic chaos to Woden.</p>

<p>It will take twice as long (compared to the current bus route to Woden). R4 bus services to Woden from the city will be cancelled. High rise apartments along the route will be built. \$400 million from health was cut to help pay for the tram. The government needs to rethink its investment and fix ailing services across Canberra such as spending more on hospital beds, frontline police and fixing roads. Anton Rusano</p>
<p>Canberra Times [published 27Apr23] If it was important as the tram ... Discussing this Voice issue over coffee with friends last week and I was heard to comment that if the Voice was as important (apparently) to the nation as the tram was (apparently) to Canberra, I would have by now wilted under the weight of "glossy brochures" - in some circles poorly titled as "business cases". Still upright! Michael Doyle, Fraser</p>
<p>City News [published 27Apr23] Light Rail It so heartening to see so many other writers now showing an interest in the waste that is light rail, such as Colin Lyons and Douglas Mackenzie (Letters, 20April23) as well as so valuable contributions from Dr Khalid Ahmed and Beatrice Bodart-Bailey. Then there is the recent decision of the Liberal Party to officially oppose Stage 2B to Woden. As one of two principals of CanTheTram Inc (with Dr John Smith) and as the Co-ordinator of its successor, Smart Canberra Transport, as the only formally organised opposition to light rail since 2014, I very much welcome this interest and the import of the Liberal Party decision. In early 2021, I submitted a history of the light rail saga to the National Library electronic depository (Neds) and a hard copy of the complete history to the ACT Heritage Library, for those interested in some detailed research. These histories are accessible through my web site www.alogstudycentre.com.au/light_rail. M. Flint Canberra, 18Apr23</p>
<p>City News [published 20Apr23] Why light rail needs to be stopped in its tracks "Given there's been a massive transfer of funding from health and public housing to pay for the tram, the government's arrogant determination to pursue light rail should be stopped in its tracks." <i>If anyone had any lingering belief that the ACT Light Rail Stage 1 had made a positive impact on traffic congestion on the corridor it serves, just observe Northbourne Avenue during peak hours.</i> Write to editor@citynews.com.au It is a parking lot, not helped by the ridiculous 40kmh limit. Light rail was promoted by the government on the basis it would increase public transport use and reduce congestion. Neither has occurred. In a presentation to the ACT branch of the Economics Society of Australia in March, former senior ACT Treasury officer Dr Khalid Ahmed revealed that between 2016 and 2021, the main method of travel for employed persons aged 15+ using bus and tram increased from 14,267 to 14,552, a trivial increase of 285 despite a very large increase in the number of employed persons aged 15+ in the same period of 43,000. Dr Ahmed also showed in his address to the society that for Stage 1 of light rail, the benefits were overstated, the costs understated and the counterfactual case (do nothing) was not correctly defined. The benefit to cost ratio (BCR) for light rail was 1.2, for Bus Rapid Transit, 2.4. These figures were from the government's business case. Furthermore, the auditor-general cited 0.49 as the BCR (Auditor-General's Report No. 5/2016; Initiation of the Light Rail Project) and added this was an optimistic figure. Even more significant in the debate as to whether we should persist with light rail in Canberra are the facts around the comparative construction costs of light rail versus trackless trams. The Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies located at the University of Sydney Business School is an acknowledged leader in the areas of transport, infrastructure, logistics and supply chain management. In a research paper written by Yale Wong from the ITLS in December 2018, the capital cost of a trackless tram, varied between \$US7-15 million per kilometre. The equivalent cost for light rail was \$US20-30 million per kilometre! There is no reason to believe that the relative difference in costs has changed. Construction costs have increased by about 30 per cent since. The capital cost of Stage 2 of light rail is staggering. Even setting aside the enormous dislocation to the CBD road network and the delays to bus services on the southside, it can't be justified because there are much cheaper and less disruptive alternatives.</p>

<p>Dr Ahmed further noted that Net ACT Government Debt in 2024-25 is forecast to reach \$8.659 billion with an interest cost exceeding \$500 million annually.</p> <p>Given that there has been a massive transfer of funding from health and public housing budgets to pay for the tram, the government's arrogant determination to pursue light rail extension should be stopped in its tracks.</p> <p>Colin Lyons, Weetangera</p>
<p>City News [published 20Apr23]</p> <p>And then we get to the overpasses...</p> <p>Although I am a geologist and not an engineer, I see some potential problems with the construction of light rail stage 2B to Woden, all involving overpasses.</p> <p>The Adelaide Avenue overpass at Hopetoun Circuit. Photo: Douglas Mackenzie</p> <p>The first is at the intersection of Adelaide Avenue and Hopetoun Circuit. The overpass is divided into two widely separated carriageways, each on a reinforced concrete platform with wall-like supports on either side of Hopetoun Circuit (see photo).</p> <p>The light rail system, presumably with two tracks, will obviously require a separate bridge. The potential problem is whether a concrete platform about 35 metres long will be strong enough to carry the light rail vehicles without central support.</p> <p>Either way, construction of an extra bridge will necessarily cause considerable traffic disruption, mainly on Hopetoun Circuit. If this work takes as long as did relatively minor modifications to the Kent Street overpass, about one kilometre further west, the disruption on busy Hopetoun Circuit could last for months.</p> <p>Has the cost of this work and its side effects been factored into the cost-benefit analysis of light rail stage 2B?</p> <p>Douglas Mackenzie, Deakin</p>
<p>Canberra Times</p> <p>Light rail Stage 2</p> <p>The article about light rail in the Canberra Times (23Mar23), although about Minister Stell trying to justify the disruption being caused by Stage 2A, as well as proceedings in the Assembly this week, again raises the question of the outrageous cost of Stage 2B estimated at \$3 billion, but which the government refuses to confirm or to make public the real costs. Governments love to hide behind "confidentiality of contracts" to keep real costs from the sucker taxpayers. The reason is political only; there is no sustainable economic or social argument for not letting the public know a project cost – it does not have to cite contractual figures.</p> <p>Readers should be aware that Stage 1 at \$1.78 billion (Auditor-General's figure) at maximum, rush-hour boardings pa to date of 4.5 million, the subsidy is just on \$18 per boarding (less between \$2.50 and \$5.00 for a fare). The subsidy for Stage 2 could be about \$35 per boarding. Do reader taxpayers really think they would be getting value for money when there are so many other higher spending priorities for this government?</p> <p>The irony of light rail is the result of the 2012 election at which Katy Gallagher chose to let the Greens into a coalition government when she did not have to. She could have easily led a minority government, under which there would not have been any light rail. So why did she let the Greens into a coalition when she did not have to? Was it a serious mistake or a deliberate political act, knowing the ACT would be condemned, probably forever, to a Labor/Greens government (already in power for 21 years), especially under the Hare-Clark system.</p> <p>Think about it hard!</p> <p>M. Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport 23Mar23</p>
<p>City News [published 9Mar23]</p> <p>How about a real light rail timetable?</p> <p>IS it too much to ask for a real light rail timetable?</p> <p>Light rail "timetables" tell us only how frequently trams are due to depart from Alinga Street or Gungahlin Place. They don't tell us when trams are due to depart from other stops, or when they are due to arrive anywhere.</p> <p>Too often I get to watch a tram depart without me, after I have walked for five minutes from home towards my local light rail station. If I miss one tram, I have to wait up to 15 minutes for the next. In that time, my ancient legs and my almost-as-ancient, two-speed bicycle can take me all the way from home to Civic.</p> <p>Leon Arundell, Downer</p>
<p>City News [published 23Feb23]</p> <p>Better still, how about electric buses?</p> <p>BEATRICE Bodart-Bailey is right again: the Rattenbury-Barr government's pet light rail project is no better than 19th-century technology ("As the world changes, the tram pushes blindly on", CN March 2).</p>

<p>Canberra should follow the examples of London, Paris and Berlin and move the “tram” with its ugly “mess of wires” underground; or, even better, use a much more practical and flexible network of electric buses or multi-carriage electric trams. Dr Douglas Mackenzie, Deakin</p>
<p>City News [published 23Feb23] The tram v social housing, health and high debt JACK Kershaw (Letters, CN February 16), in his quest for an alternative route for the light rail extension to Woden, argues the “optics” and “permanence of trams makes them appealing and reassuring” and, without evidence, suggests this “can justify the cost over time”. Jack needs to consider the opportunity cost of the tram. In the context of unmet needs in social housing and health, high debt, inadequate city maintenance, the need to increase the use of public transport by increasing the coverage and frequency of the bus network and to electrify the bus fleet, to proceed with the extension would be obscene, when more cost effective bus-based alternatives are available. Jack also suggests his alternate route, including a yacht-friendly lake crossing, would be assisted by “due substantial financial assistance from the Commonwealth”. It would be egregious if the project, not supported by the Productivity Commission or Infrastructure Australia, received Commonwealth funding when severe unmet needs exist in many areas including housing, health and in indigenous communities. Mike Quirk, Garran</p>
<p>City News [published 16Feb23] It’s logical to stick with road transport I AGREE with Jack Kershaw (Letters, CN February 14) that current plans for public transport between Civic and Woden don’t service enough national attractions; and critically, are mired in major planning, heritage, cultural-landscape, aesthetic, engineering, traffic, time and cost problems, mostly unresolvable. The current plan is to increase public transport travel time, between Civic and Woden, from less than 20 minutes to more than 27 minutes. That will probably result in fewer people using public transport, and consequently more people driving cars. On Canberra’s roads the average car trip causes less emissions than the average public transport trip. The “optics” and permanence of roads make them appealing and reassuring, and can justify the cost, over time. However, road “land-value-capture” property development needs to be carried out more sensitively. Users testify that roads are popular and operating well; and it’s now surely logical to continue with the citywide system, sensitively and expeditiously, for long-term benefit. Leon Arundell, Downer</p>
<p>City News [published 16Feb23] Keep the tram plan, change the route USERS testify that ACT light rail Stage 1 is popular and operating well; and it’s now surely logical to continue with the citywide system, sensitively and expeditiously, for long-term benefit. The “optics” and permanence of trams makes them appealing and reassuring, and can justify the cost, over time. However, tramline “land-value-capture” property development needs to be carried out more sensitively. Because the Central National Area is involved, the Civic-Woden tram surely needs to service as many national attractions as possible. The current Civic to Capital Hill section, via City Hill, and Commonwealth Avenue, doesn’t do that; and critically, is mired in major planning, heritage, cultural-landscape, aesthetic, engineering, traffic, time and cost problems, mostly unresolvable. With due substantial financial assistance from the Commonwealth, the Civic to Capital Hill tram route needs to change and be expedited to include, say, briefly, New Acton, the ANU, Acton Peninsula’s attractions, Griffin’s missing yacht-friendly lake crossing, Lennox Gardens North, Flynn Drive, Coronation Drive, Queen Victoria Terrace, Windsor Walk, State Circle, Capital Circle and on to Adelaide Avenue. If Stage 2A (Civic to Commonwealth Park) won’t be stopped, then the tramline could leave Commonwealth Avenue at a stop just south of Parkes Way, and traverse Acton Foreshore (mutually benefitting the new property development there), to ANU south, the Peninsula, and on, as outlined above. Jack Kershaw, Kambah</p>
<p>Canberra Times [published 16Feb23]. Electric buses, not tram Canberra’s new electric buses will have a range of 400 kilometres. This is surely the solution to the Civic to Woden route. Electric buses would have flexibility in route and population servicing and an express bus travel time half that of the proposed tram.</p>

<p>This would avoid the building of an expensive lake bridge and save the large heritage trees on the south side of the lake. The lowering of the bus floor and the building of a ramp and platform at bus stops would enable easy loading equivalent to the tram loading. The installation of fast electric charging at end locations would be an outlay, without the need for expensive tram raiing and overhead electric wires. This would also have a much lower capital cost than a tram system. Geoff Henkel, Farrer</p>
<p>Canberra Times [published 16Feb23]. Bus capacity limited Thanks for your article "Bus fleet will grow over time, Steel says" (canberratimes.com.au, February 14). In response to Jo Clay pointing out that there are less buses on the road now than there were in 1990, Steel says buses are now larger. Unfortunately your analysis reveals that an older bus had a total capacity of 70 passengers, compared to 68 for a new model. A light rail vehicle has about three times this (not four times as Steel says) but only with two-thirds of the passengers standing. Richard Johnston, Kingston</p>
<p>Canberra Times Light rail It's a welcome letter "Don't extend tram" (letters, 11Feb23) from the oft-published Dr Douglas Mackenzie, again exposing the \$3 billion to be wasted on the tram to Woden. Let us never forget that the Woden tram was an eleventh-hour brain-burst by the Chief Minister just before the 2016 election – untested, uncostered and not asked for. M. Flint, Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport 11Feb23</p>
<p>Canberra Times [published 11Feb23]. Don't extend tram Like the Canberra Liberals, I too oppose the construction of light rail stage 2 to Woden. The \$3 billion-plus cost will mean, for example, that improvements to the ACT health system and the chaotic, labyrinthine Canberra Hospital may need to be shelved, perhaps indefinitely. If stage 2 were to proceed a new bridge across the lake near Commonwealth Avenue would have to be built at great cost. Traffic disruption along the route will broaden and worsen. This is already occurring in Deakin and Yarralumla, with work on the Kent Street overpass of Adelaide Avenue causing 30-minute traffic jams along suburban streets. Far worse and longer-lasting disruption will result from the construction of light rail beneath Kent Street, Cotter Road and Carruthers Street. These are areas where the construction of new bridges may be necessary. A light rail route diversion onto existing roadways may also be required. A trackless electric tram system, combined with electric buses, would solve all these problems and save many millions. Dr Douglas Mackenzie, Deakin</p>
<p>City News [published 8Feb23] Why social housing spending should trump tram WE are all familiar with the "deep" concern of politicians about increasing homelessness and housing stress. Yet they fail to adopt policies to increase the supply of social housing, despite policy reviews over decades finding it to be the most effective action. Instead, funding priority has been given to rent assistance, negative gearing and capital gains tax concessions. These policy priorities have resulted in the share of social housing dwellings nationally falling from 9 per cent in 1990 to 4 per cent in 2022; increases in homelessness, housing stress from rapidly increasing rents and house prices, lengthening social housing waiting lists and a decline in the rate of home-ownership. Other outcomes include the subsidising of well-off households into multiple home-ownership and the construction of environmentally problematic large homes. The Parliamentary Library estimates the national shortage of social housing will increase from 524,200 dwellings in 2022 to 670,600 dwellings by 2032. The situation is no better in the ACT with the social housing share falling from 12 per cent of dwellings in 1990 to 6 per cent in 2022.</p>

<p>The Productivity Commission’s Report on Government Services data found the ACT had Australia’s highest rate of long-term homelessness, that between 2013 and 2022 the expenditure on social housing fell and the number of public housing dwellings fell from 10,956 to 10,744.</p> <p>The construction of more social housing could be funded by increasing its budgetary priority, higher taxes, taxing high-value family homes, the removal of first home buyer assistance and reducing negative and capital gains tax concessions which largely benefit the wealthy.</p> <p>However, political action is constrained by community opposition to increased taxes and attitudes shaped by windfall gains from increases in property prices. Until such views change, significant reduction in housing inequality is unlikely.</p> <p>This places an onus on governments to increase the budgetary priority of social housing. Current actions include state governments providing \$10 billion for the construction of an additional 15,500 social housing dwellings and the Federal government’s plan to build 30,000 new social and affordable housing properties over five years through the Housing Australia Future Fund.</p> <p>Consideration could be given to targeting rent assistance to those on the lowest incomes, exploring rent-to-buy and build-to-rent schemes.</p> <p>The ACT government could demonstrate its social justice credentials by giving social housing a higher priority including the diversion of funds from the unnecessary light rail extension to Woden.</p> <p>Mike Quirk, Garran</p>
<p>City News [published 8Feb23]</p> <p>Government’s legacy of a ‘huge, white elephant’</p> <p>Well done, Frank Reade, of Macquarie (Letters, CN January 26), for voicing your disgust at the state of our once beautiful city. The hypocrisy of this woeful Greens/Labor government does not go unseen to all proud Canberrans.</p> <p>For the last two decades, on all sides of the city, we have the exact same weed infestations, dead trees lining every road way, on main roads and in all our suburbs.</p> <p>We now have St John’s Wort covering all of Canberra. It’s spread more and thicker than I have ever seen since 1963.</p> <p>Clearly our “devoted environmentalists” have totally ignored the government legislation on noxious weed control in the ACT. Yet, across the border in NSW, land owners cop massive fines by all councils, if they dare neglect weed control.</p> <p>The ACT government does not answer to anyone, not even the taxpayers that they are ripping off, blatantly wasting our taxes on “one huge white elephant” for the inner city and northside residents! Which, by the way, just happens to be Barr and Rattenbury’s electorate.</p> <p>Follow the money Canberra voters, and ask yourself: do you want your whole city beautiful and maintained again, rather than a bleeding tram that only services a minority of inner-city elites and a minority of northside suburbs?</p> <p>Not to mention the second, wasteful Stage 2 they are hell-bent on going ahead with.</p> <p>Barr and his Greens/Labor have absolutely no shame. Instead of a legacy being a huge white elephant, it could have been funding and finding homes for all Canberra’s desperate homeless. What hypocrisy, shame and failure this Greens/Labor government has forced upon us.</p> <p>Ros Thomas, Gordon</p>
<p>Canberra Times [published 8Feb23].</p> <p>On the Buses</p> <p>I was entranced by Jack Kershaw’s proposed scenic route for the Woden light rail (Letters February 3) except for the suggestion commuters be catered for by trams sitting in sidings waiting for the express inter-town tram to pass through. A better alternative would be an express 17-minute bus service.</p> <p>Ian Douglas, Jerrabomberra, NSW</p>
<p>Canberra Times [published 7Feb23].</p> <p>More cars, not less</p> <p>In combination with a 4 per cent expansion of Canberra’s public transport coverage, stage 1 of light rail increased local public transport journeys by 15 per cent.</p> <p>In the unlikely event that a slow tram to Woden will have the same impact, the proportion of Canberra’s trips that public transport provides will increase by less than one third. The 2017 ACT and Queanbeyan Household Travel Survey showed that public transport provided 4.3 per cent of trips.</p> <p>A one-third increase in public transport patronage will reduce car trips by less than 2 per cent.</p> <p>Light rail will have only a minimal impact on the overall need for car parking spaces. So what are the other “improvements to public transport” that the Planning Minister believes “will allow the planning authority to approve plans for buildings with vastly reduced car parks”?</p>

Leon Arundell, Downer
<p>City News [published 2Feb23]</p> <p>Light rail Stage 1</p> <p>At 3:15 PM, 23Jan23, the Chair of the Public Transport Association of Canberra (PTACBR), a Mr Hemsley, was being interviewed on 2CC. He was waxing lyrically about the raging success of Stage 1 light rail and claimed that it had come in within budget. First, Katy Gallagher said she would not pay more than about \$650 million for Stage 1, but it came in at \$1.78 billion (Auditor-General's figure). It may have come in within budget, but budgets adjusted every year by Rattenbury and Barr for escalation - it cannot be said to have come in within early cost estimates. Second, it cannot be called a raging success when the best it has done so far is 4.5 million boardings pa when a justification of the dodgy business case was 6.3 million. Third, at its best of 4.5 million boardings to date, the subsidy is just on \$15 a boarding (less between \$2.50 and \$5.00 for a fare). I am yet to hear an argument for light rail from PTCBR other than it's a great idea - like sliced bread and ice-cream.</p> <p>M. Flint Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport 23Jan23</p>
<p>City News Article [published 23Jan23]</p> <p>Will the Libs fall for the Greenslabor tram distraction?</p> <p>The Canberra Liberals have made headlines about going into the 2024 ACT elections not supporting the tram to Woden. These statements have been the catalyst for media interviews over the New Year break featuring the usual Greenslabor suspects, Andrew Barr, Chris Steel and Shane Rattenbury, writes PAUL COSTIGAN.</p> <p>THE latest entry on Joy Clay's (ACT Greens) Facebook references her joining with Shane Rattenbury to publish a gobbledegook mash-up of reasons why the ACT Greens support the huge and unwarranted expenditure to build the tram to Woden (Stage 2b). Essentially, they are saying for everyone in Canberra to have education, health, place to work, sustainable houses etcetera, we need to have a tram to Woden.</p> <p>They go on about investing in schools, hospitals, local amenities and a high-quality, frequent, reliable, and sustainable public transport. Yet with the coming of the Gungahlin tram, everyone has realised that ACT Greenslabor sneakily paid for that infrastructure with cuts to education, health and social program, and by minimal allocations to address housing affordability and homelessness. Most outrageous was the transfer to the tram of all the funds from sales of inner-north and inner-south social-housing estates. Who needs social housing?</p> <p>This Greenslabor cohort regularly claim credit for stuff they do not do. They busy themselves with announcements about how they are delivering on health, education, housing, transport and any other portfolio areas. They are expert at sidelining reality as they under-perform in all of these.</p> <p>The Rattenbury-Clay article is essentially a re-hash of policy statements. For good measure, they accused the Canberra Liberals of not having policies to address crucial matters such as liveability, transport, housing, emissions and more. Not true – but what's a little more misinformation?</p> <p>Greenslabor knows that is if they say something often enough, no matter how rubbish it is, then most local media give them the benefit of the doubt and report what they say as the truth. Surely, they would not lie?</p> <p>The ACT Greenslabor laugh off damning audit reports. They no longer worry too much (for now) that many residents regard them as being arrogant and openly dependent on their developer/ property supporters. Greenslabor no longer see it as important to care about the views of residents.</p> <p>However, there is a particular disingenuous purpose behind that Rattenbury-Clay piece referred to above. The Barr-Ratt leadership know they are almost guaranteed their seats at the next election given the profile of the Canberra Liberals. Granted things are improving under Elizabeth Lee's leadership but while the weird factions have a presence, the Canberra Liberals have trouble appealing to the electorate.</p> <p>Greenslabor actually do not need to enter into discussions yet about the tram south as it will be well after the next ACT elections before any decisions are confirmed. Knowing this, they have welcomed the Canberra Liberals honesty about their non-support of the Woden tram. That transparency and honesty will now be used against the Liberals in the run up to the 2024 elections.</p> <p>To win the next elections, Greenslabor need to keep the attention off their countless faults, their non-delivery of policy announcements, the mess being made of planning and that they continue to underspend on essentials such as climate, urban planning, education, health, housing and social issues. Greenslabor need to keep the tram as a lively contentious issue within the media.</p> <p>The concept, even though it is false, is to convince enough voters that the Canberra Liberals in government, by not supporting the tram south, would endanger the future of the city's landscapes, would threaten efficient public transport, undermine sustainability, threaten the education of children, and would hinder affordable housing – and much more.</p> <p>Having declared their position on something way off in the future, the Canberra Liberals need to be constantly publishing stuff about what they will do differently and better after the next election. They need to be clear about enabling real urban planning (a new</p>

<p>planning directorate and leadership), that they will look after waterways, enhance biodiversity, stop the building of heat island suburbs, and invest seriously in 21st century innovative public transport (buses). Get the message! Do not debate the tram. Instead shift the debate to public transport that delivers to more of Canberra for much less than the Barr-Ratt tram.</p> <p>There are residents who had recently thought Jo Clay was making some independent and relevant statements about a range of issues. Her joining with Rattenbury to publish that disingenuous nonsense might be making people think again. There's 20 months left for her to repair her credentials and her relevance – or to be replaced by a real independent, thinking candidate.</p> <p>Paul Costigan, City News</p>
<p>Canberra Times [published 23Jan23]</p> <p>Light rail</p> <p>I refer to the letter by Terry Gibson “Fund the tram” (Letters,19Jan23). Given his last two sentences, I think Mr Gibson could do with some education on the creation of money and what that means.</p> <p>M. Flint, Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport 19Jan23</p>
<p>Canberra Times [published 20Jan23]</p> <p>No Tram Mandate</p> <p>Brenton Hutchison "Silent majority backs tram" (Letters, January 15) suggests that the majority of Canberrans are happy with the tram based on the Barr government being re-elected. That's nonsense. Its re-election had more to do with the inability of the Liberals to come up with an electable alternative government.</p> <p>C Williams, Forrest</p>
<p>City News [published 19Jan23]</p> <p>Why developers love ‘smash-and-grab’ Tram Plan</p> <p>Promises, promises. The new Planning Bill denies genuine engagement and consultation with the community. It's hard to say, but YourSay is simply a wailing wall that absorbs people's ideas and discontent.</p> <p>In their wisdom, the planners have already decided to enable the “smash and grab” which is the 70/30 infill policy.</p> <p>The greater density and rezoning required to deliver this policy is the Holy Grail that developers have been seeking for decades.</p> <p>There is no evidence that infill policy delivers sustainable suburbs or greater affordability. Luxury townhouses and apartments are the go. The environmental outcomes are clearly negative.</p> <p>The proposed Planning Bill is certainly not protecting the rights of existing residents or the assets of the community. It's part of the great asset giveaway. We've had the Griffin Plan, the Y-Plan and now we're being offered the Tram Plan. It's simple, hyper-development around a transport corridor and a kilometre either side. Developers love this type of plan because there's loads of profitable opportunities and value capture for the government.</p> <p>Ian Hubbard, via citynews.com.au</p>
<p>City News [published 19Jan23]</p> <p>Set up for more social injustice</p> <p>ON the Canberra Planning Action Group's website, Bruin Christensen and I detail the current crisis in social housing in Canberra – a crisis that has already severely disadvantaged numerous needy Canberrans and is setting us up for even more social inequality and injustice in the future.</p> <p>We note ACTCOSS' concern that, despite the ACT Housing Strategy being in place for four years, increasing numbers of Canberrans are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness with a shortfall of more than 3000 social dwellings and 2000 Canberrans experiencing homelessness last year. This is because the share of social housing has declined from 7.6 per cent in 2014 to 6.7 per cent in 2020.</p> <p>A key factor in this crisis is that the ACT government diverted \$1,580,305 from the sale of ACT public housing plus incentive payments from the Commonwealth to fund the Light Rail Stage 1, not the construction and purchase of new public housing.</p> <p>This trend appears to be ongoing.</p> <p>The government has since written to some 300 ACT Housing tenants – many of whom were older people, people with chronic health issues and people with disability – informing them that they will need to vacate their properties, an act the ACTCOSS condemned as “heartless”.</p> <p>Separately, it has been publicly lobbying the federal government to waive the ACT's \$115 million housing debt, after it agreed to set aside Tasmania's own state housing debt.</p> <p>Will these monies also be diverted to light rail?</p> <p>Albert Oberdorf, via email</p>
<p>City News [published 19Jan23]</p>

<p>Hiding the tram figures doesn't wash</p> <p>PAUL Varsanyi (Letters, CN January) makes reference to the fact the ACT government, going into the 2016 election, stated that cancellation of Stage 1 of Light Rail, even before construction commenced, would trigger a penalty clause so large as to make it as expensive to walk away as to proceed.</p> <p>From memory, Chief Minister Andrew Barr quoted a figure of around \$400 million. While in hindsight, this is somewhere in the region of half of the eventual construction and commissioning cost, it is a staggering figure.</p> <p>I think it is beyond question that this claim, along with Barr's assertions that "we can afford light rail" had a material bearing on the outcome of that election.</p> <p>This has never been challenged. I believe it should be, for two reasons.</p> <p>Firstly, it beggars belief that any organisation, be it government, a public company or a private company, would be so naive and stupid as to agree to such a condition. Checks and balances within review processes, along with even a rudimentary understanding of how the real world works, would have identified and killed such a clause dead in its tracks (so to speak).</p> <p>Secondly, this government and its chief minister cannot claim any entitlement to have statements, particularly where they involve public finances, go unchallenged. Trying to hide behind "commercial-in-confidence" excuses doesn't wash.</p> <p>Tom Thompson, Gowrie</p>
<p>City News [published 19Jan23]</p> <p>Deputy Opposition Leader Jeremy Hanson is sponsoring a petition requesting the Assembly to call on the government to stop Light Rail Project 2B.</p> <p>The petition can be signed on-line (https://jeremyhanson.net/stop-the-tram).</p> <p>This is an opportunity for those who have canned the tram in letters to "CityNews" and their sympathisers to put some pressure on the government.</p> <p>John L Smith, Farrer</p>
<p>City News [published 19Jan23]</p> <p>ACT Labor has no interest in social justice</p> <p>A BIG thank you to Beatrice Bodart-Bailey for her expose of Labor's shonky decision in 2012 to develop light rail ("How Labor betrayed Canberra to stay in power", CN December 22).</p> <p>It should convince even the most ardent supporter that ACT Labor has no interest in social justice. Funds wasted on light rail should have been spent on social housing, health and education.</p> <p>If it were a government of substance it would apologise and abandon any extension of the light rail network and focus on real community needs.</p> <p>Unfortunately, the simplistic response to the sustainability challenges facing the city will continue to be promoted when more cost-effective alternatives are available.</p> <p>Mike Quirk, Garran</p>
<p>City News [published 19Jan23]</p> <p>Appeasing power-hungry Labor</p> <p>IN her analysis of the history of the ACT's light rail project, Beatrice Bodart-Bailey ("How Labor betrayed Canberra to stay in power", CN December 22)" made some very telling points.</p> <p>At the 2012 ACT election, the lone Greens MLA, Shane Rattenbury, demanded that Labor commit to a light rail connection between Civic and Gungahlin.</p> <p>In the same year, a feasibility study showed that a rapid-bus service, using easy-access buses (for the disabled or not-so-mobile) would produce twice the cost-benefit of the light rail equivalent.</p> <p>A rapid-bus service would also involve less than half the capital cost of light rail to establish development stimulus along the mass-transit corridors.</p> <p>It seems clear to me that ACT residents have effectively been coerced into supporting, and voting for, an inferior and much more disruptive and costly "mass" transport system. All to appease a power-hungry Labor government.</p> <p>Dr Douglas Mackenzie, Deakin</p>
<p>City News [published 19Jan23]</p> <p>Greenslabor, dictators with poor judgements</p> <p>PAUL Costigan's column "Precious Moments in Cedric's garden" (CN January 5) was one of his best and, as true as the sun rises in the east, the Greenslabor era in Canberra will be remembered for the monies that were fritted away on pet ideological stupid projects. They will not be remembered for cherishing good design, biodiversity and aesthetics – and for looking after those in need.</p>

<p>He should have added they will be remembered as dictators with poor judgement, self-importance and no regards for the community of the ACT, and both party's members' legacies will be awarded the wooden spoon for stupidity.</p> <p>Errol Good, Macgregor</p>
<p>Canberra Times [published 19Jan23]</p> <p>Fund the tram</p> <p>We need to stop believing that the tram extension to Woden must ultimately be self-funding. It does not need to be. Provided there are sufficient idle resources of labour, raw materials and technological know-how, the federal government could easily step in and fully fund the tram extension to Woden.</p> <p>It is, after all, the federal government that creates the money. Creating money to improve infrastructure is not inflationary.</p> <p>Terry Gibson, Kambah</p>
<p>Canberra Times [published 16Jan23]</p> <p>Ultimate Vanity Project</p> <p>Bruce Paine (Letters, January 11) probably got closest to the fixation the ACT Greens have with their little red tram set. It's their toy and no one is going to take it away from them. It's tied up with their identity. The ultimate vanity project.</p> <p>Richard Johnston, Kingston</p>
<p>Canberra Times [published 16Jan23]</p> <p>Safety First?</p> <p>A question I haven't seen answered in relation to the light rail being extended to Woden is will the stops along Adelaide Avenue be served by stairs or elevators to the overhead road bridges or will there be traffic lights for the passengers to safely cross Adelaide Avenue?</p> <p>Kim Fitzgerald, Deakin</p>
<p>Canberra Times [published 16Jan23]</p> <p>Think Big Canberra</p> <p>What a small, parochial mindset so many Canberrans have. Scrap the expansion of public transport infrastructure and do something else instead? We are a growing city. The naysayers need to realise this isn't the 1980s anymore.</p> <p>Erin Cook, Waramanga</p>
<p>Canberra Times[Published 15Jan23]</p> <p>Canberra workers need more buses, not another tram</p> <p>We don't all work in Civic. I haven't been there for years. It has become a horrible concrete jungle. Canberrans work all over town, and not just in the town centres.</p> <p>I live in Weston Creek and work in Symonston. As a result of paying for the first tram it now takes at least three hours, four buses and five kilometres of walking for me to get to and from work by public transport versus less than 40 minutes by car.</p> <p>We used to have two bus routes to our building of over 600 people. What do I expect from more trams? Nothing positive for me or my coworkers, and more reduction in the rest of Canberra's public transport system, which is clearly now designed for the young unemployed, and those with no other choice, because they are the only ones with the time and fitness to use it.</p> <p>And don't get me started on the money that needs to be spent on Canberra's hospitals.</p> <p>Cathy Brown, Fisher</p>
<p>City News</p> <p>Light rail corridors</p> <p>Great letters about light rail in the City News (5Jan23). In respect of Dr Mackenzie's letter, as I have written on several occasions, I am a firm believer that development will follow fast and efficient public transport corridors, whether serviced by Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) services or light rail. Perhaps Dr Mackenzie would care to make his case for very expensive Light Rail Transit (LRT) over a much cheaper BRT.</p> <p>M. Flint, Coordinator, Smart Canberra Transport 6Jan23</p>
<p>City News [published 5Jan23]</p> <p>Tram shoes government incompetence on display</p> <p>Mike Quirk</p>

[Lists 11 things where the government is incompetent]

City News [published 5Jan23]

Beware of tram's "poison pill"

Paul Vasayni

[[Warns of the poison pill used in some contracts by governments in danger of losing government, whereby they write contracts (for light rail in this case) that makes cancellation untenable. However, that did not stop the new Premier Andrews in 2014 from cancelling a huge infrastructure contract at a penalty of over \$1 billion. Labor government have no shame in wasting other people's money.]