



Dear Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA,

Thank you for your considered response of the 31st of October regarding the recently announced changes to Canberra's bus network. While we acknowledge that your email does speak to some of our concerns, we believe that the bulk have not been considered or addressed.

Additionally, we wish to acknowledge Transport Canberra's invitation to a meeting which occurred today the 6th of November. We appreciated the time spent by the team justifying the choices made, but we believe that it is representative of the entire consultation process. This meeting was explanation instead of consultation, the same process employed with the 'YourSay' survey. Members of the community have expressed their discontent with the proposals, and the ACT Government has admitted these concerns and in the same breath refused to acknowledge their merit and make the required changes.

PARSA, as an organisation that represents students, including those from regions significantly affected by climate change, is wholly in agreement with the ACT Government in the need to increase the use of public transport within the Canberra community, and it is clear that route changes will serve as a significant part of the necessary reform process. However, removing crucial routes from this network that serve vulnerable communities who do not have access to alternatives is at best, misguided.

Your letter and other government communications have spoken to significant consultation with the community, and while we acknowledge that there was a single pop-up feedback session held on the ANU campus in August, despite the number of students affected, only 30 were spoken to. This feedback session was poorly advertised, and many students were unaware as to the implications of the bus network overhaul. A spokeswoman for Meegan Fitzharris acknowledged to The Canberra Times that the undergraduate students' association was separately consulted, but PARSA, which represents a larger student population was not offered the same opportunity to air our concerns.

The online survey 'YourSay' received 4,000 responses overall, with 84% of respondents expressing some level of concern over one or more of the changes. The report acknowledges these concerns and specifically the concerns of students over the loss of this route, but subsequent communications, including your letter of 31 October insists that these concerns have little merit, and that students will be adequately served by the new bus network, a claim which we vehemently refute.

The ACT Opposition Leader Mr Alistair Coe MLA and the Shadow Minister Ms Candice Burch MLA clearly expressed they are disappointed about the proposed new Transport Canberra network. The removal of routes such as the number 3 through the ANU would significantly impact students, and as you have mentioned, will particularly affect those with disabilities or lengthy commutes.

PARSA allows that most of the trips to and from ANU use the bus stations on Rimmer Street, Barry Drive and City West, but this does not mean that the current route is so underused to render it unnecessary. While in number, the people who use this route may be relatively few, for those who use it, the route is indispensable, and cannot be replaced by the private ANU shuttle bus. This bus is unreliable to the point of being unusable, particularly for students with disabilities. It is completely impractical for the thousands of students who reside on the ANU campus to rely on the ANU shuttle



bus to run their basic errands, and for students who are accessing urgent medical care, waiting up to half an hour for a shuttle to a different bus route is not a realistic solution.

We reiterate that the lack of accessible transport is a particular issue for students needing to access medical care, especially for those with a disability or chronic illness who need to travel to one of the two major Canberra hospitals, both of which lie on the current number 3 bus route. The ACT Transport Minister Meegan Fitzharris (who is also the Minister for Higher Education) has claimed that accessible transport is vital for enabling social inclusion and community participation. However, accessibility is not solely related to having wheelchair accessible buses; it is about having routes that meet the needs of the community.

The planned number 53 bus route does not fill the needs of the ANU community that are currently met by the number 3 bus route, it merely replaces the current number 7 bus route which serves a small portion of the ANU campus. This route which serves a very small portion of the huge ANU campus cannot be said to be sufficient to serve the growing student population. In addition to this, the stops at Rimmer St, Barry Drive and City West are all servicing the public servants in those areas, and that has very little relevance to students who need to travel from the south of the campus.

We also feel that your letter does not adequately address the needs of students with disabilities and other students who do not have easy access to alternative means of transportation. The removal of the number 3 bus route will mean that the large majority of the ANU campus will be under-served by public transport. Considering the residential population of the ANU is over 5,000 students (with capacity to be increased in the coming years), and the ANU student population is over 22,000 students, removing convenient bus access to the university will only be an incentive to investigate private transport options for those who can afford, increasing congestion and air pollution, and compounding inequality.

We strongly believe at PARSA that our students deserve better than a public transport system that ignores their significant needs and makes education less accessible for vulnerable members of the community. It is simply not enough to expect the ANU to be able to manage transportation (which requires time-consuming transfers and long waits) across the entirety of the campus when it is currently part of the public bus network. When running a system-wide review, to remove services to a large portion of the population is simply unacceptable.

We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you in person to discuss our concerns, and will be investigating other avenues for change, as we believe this is a crucial issue for our membership.

Yours sincerely,

Zyl Hovenga-Wauchope