

3 May 2017

Ms Meegan Fitzharris MLA
Minister for Transport and City Services and Minister for Health
ACT Legislative Assembly
London Circuit
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Minister Fitzharris

Thank you for speaking at *And my dog comes too... new approaches to living with our pets* on 26 April 2017 and for being interested in the view of attendees.

A number of issues were raised by our speakers. Especially relevant to your portfolio was the RSPCA presentation in support of **pet friendly public transport** – that is public buses and the new light rail. The RSPCA presentation highlighted policies elsewhere in Australia and a schedule prepared by the RSPCA is attached. There are of course also many other precedents in Europe and North America.

We noted your willingness to consider pets on the flexible bus service and this would be a good start and essential for some of those passengers. However Pets and Positive Ageing strongly supports allowing pets on **all public transport** as a huge benefit to isolated and less mobile and older pet owners in our community. As the city densifies with government planning policies, it will also help the increasing number of people intentionally living without cars in higher density areas, including along the light rail corridor.

What has worked elsewhere could equally well work in the ACT which is otherwise at the forefront of pet friendly policies, but not in this respect. There would, of course, need to be some restrictions on what kinds of pets could be carried (eg limited to companion animals); conditions of carriage (such as requiring dogs be on lead and cats in suitable carriers); and owner responsibility (owners required to clean up after any accident or fined if they did not). There are policies in place elsewhere in Australia that can be a guide. We strongly urge the ACT government to adopt policies to allow pets on all public transport and suggest the launch of light rail could be the opportunity to announce this.

A number of other issues and requested actions were raised in the panel session or added to the whiteboard after the session. We agreed we would bring these to your attention and will do so over time. However along with public transport, we consider the second major priority identified on the day, and to accompany improved pet access, is a **public awareness program for responsible pet ownership**.

This program should include providing infrastructure to encourage pet owners to be responsible, such as bins and bags in parks and on walking tracks, to enable people to pick up droppings (in other states, councils provide these 'and everyone picks up'; 'responsibility is a two way street'). We note this request was made by the Belconnen Community Council in its 2017-8 Budget Consultation submission <http://www.belcouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/BCC-Budget-Submission-2017.pdf> and by our Chair, Tara Cheyne when Chair of that Council. <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/call-for-canberra-dog-poop-offensive--after-survey-exposes-health-hazard-20150107-12jbd.html>

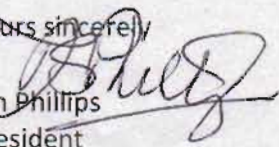
The program should also educate owners on their responsibilities and the costs of owning a pet. It should include education for people from diverse cultures about their responsibilities with information in other languages, especially about cat desexing. An attendee mentioned a private initiative using social media and

where requirements around cat ownership were translated into other languages using qualified translators. The website is <https://www.facebook.com/MultilingualCatEducational/>. The ACT government should promote the responsible pet ownership message through social media and diverse languages.

We heard on the day that local vets helpfully support responsible pet ownership through providing puppy packs (one is attached) and advice on care responsibilities to new owners. However, not all vets do this and so there may be a gap that the Government could appropriately fill here. In addition, the RSPCA will launch a program for primary schools to educate children about their pet responsibilities that would include elements about valuing animals and caring for them. The timing of the initial pilot is subject to funding and counterpart government funding for this might be considered.

We look forward to your response to the priorities we have identified and will put this letter and your response on our website. We would also ask that you pass to other Ministers elements relevant to their portfolios.

Yours sincerely,


Jan Phillips
President

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Attachment

Current State of Public Transportation

	Trains	Buses	Ferries	Light Rail/Tram	Taxis
ACT	No	No	N/A	No	Yes, but
NSW	No	Yes, but	Yes, but	Yes, but	Yes, but
VIC	Yes, but	Yes, but	Yes, but	Yes, but	Yes, but
SA	Yes, but	Yes, but	Yes, but	Yes, but	Yes, but
WA	No	No	No	No	Yes, but
QLD	No	No	No	No	Yes, but
TAS	No	No	No	No	Yes, but
NT	No	No	?	No	Yes, but

*Note that there are restrictions for those that allow animals on public transport. All states and territories have special provisions for qualified assistance dogs.

Right now NSW, SA and Victoria lead the way for allowing pets on Public Transport.



Based on available information that could be found on transportation websites across the country at the time of the speech