

PUBLIC SPACE FOR THE PUBLIC - AD-FREE CANBERRA

INTRODUCTION

Canberra's beautiful public space is a community asset and public good.

When we sell off our public spaces to advertisers, we are selling off something we collectively own, against the wishes of the majority of our community.

That's why the ACT Greens will ensure Canberrans continue to live in a city surrounded by nature's beauty, not corporate visual pollution.

REAFFIRMING CANBERRA'S STATUS AS AN AD-FREE CITY, THE ACT GREENS WILL:

1. Enforce existing signage laws and ensure the removal of any current illegal billboards
2. Further restrict roadside electoral advertising
3. Introduce specific offences for roadside advertising using illegally parked or idling vehicles for commercial or political purposes.
4. Roll back bus shelter advertising and ending Adshel contract
5. Roll back advertising both inside and outside buses

[Public space advertising](#) is [socially, economically and environmentally destructive](#). It is ugly and unpopular, and reduces public amenity. It benefits large corporations at the expense of small, local businesses. It encourages over-consumption, unhappiness and dissatisfaction, as well as being undemocratic, handing public space over to private profit.

People cherish Canberra's position as a relatively ad-free city. However, there has been a creeping incursion of prominent advertising in recent years. Clear examples are the large, [accidentally approved](#) billboards at the Canberra Centre, the video sign on the Convention Centre, and signage associated with sporting clubs. In these cases the advertising is clearly visible from traffic lights on high traffic roads. It highlights the need for the ACT Government [Signs General Code](#) which sits under the Territory Plan to be tightened and enforced.

In January 2017, Chief Minister Andrew Barr suggested that Canberra's regulation of public space advertising was out of date and needed review. The reaction from the community was swift and clear - Canberrans love the restrictions on visual pollution in Canberra, and want advertising restrictions to remain. The Assembly committee's [inquiry into billboards](#) found that most people wanted restrictions on outdoor advertising, with 155 of the 162 submissions opposing relaxing of restrictions. [Polling by the Green Institute](#) found overwhelming community opposition to public space advertising in the ACT, with 90% opposing expansion, of whom 48% believed there was already too much. 78% agreed that Canberra's ad-free status makes it more pleasant to live in than other cities.

In February 2018, the [ACT Government responded](#) to the inquiry, dismissing many of the community's concerns, and proposing only minimal action. However, no action has since been taken.

The ACT Greens will ensure that, in the next term, community opposition to public space advertising is respected, and will further tighten and enforce the existing restrictions in order to protect and enforce Canberra's ad free status.

1. ENFORCE EXISTING SIGNAGE LAWS AND ENSURE THE REMOVAL OF ANY CURRENT ILLEGAL BILLBOARDS

There are loopholes in the existing law, and spaces where it just isn't being applied properly, in word or spirit. Obvious examples of this are truck-bed advertising, with vehicles parked along major arterial roads, and the huge and intrusive advertising on construction hoardings.

There are also examples of egregious third party advertising, including on community sporting facilities.

The Greens will legislate to clarify that the law prohibits these and other breaches, and ensure that funding is allocated to monitor and enforce this law.

There are currently at least two billboards in the Canberra city centre which appear to breach the existing law: one outside the Canberra Centre on Coranderrk St, and one at the intersection of Constitution Ave and Coranderrk St, at the Convention Centre. They should be removed.

2. BAN ROADSIDE ELECTORAL ADVERTISING

The ACT Greens want a ban on roadside electoral signs during local election campaigns.

[Under current electoral signage laws](#), there is no limit to the number of roadside electoral corflutes that can be used in the ACT – which see thousands of plastic roadside corflutes flood the streets of Canberra six weeks out from each ACT election.

We know most Canberrans don't like seeing these roadside advertising signs polluting our streets, and we know that most of them end up going straight into landfill. The ACT Electoral Commission's report on the Legislative Assembly Election in 2016 noted that social media "indicated a relatively widespread degree of dissatisfaction with the proliferation of campaign signs (principally the signs on stakes known as corflutes) across Canberra's main roads and suburban streets" – but stopped short of recommending that the roadside electoral signs be banned entirely.

At the last federal election in May 2019, the Greens did not use roadside electoral signage – instead, corflutes were displayed in private yards or held by volunteers for limited times. This avoided the waste of thousands of plastic corflutes being destroyed often within hours of being erected.

The ACT Greens are aware that voters should know who the candidates are, and for that reason, we successfully amended the Electoral Act recently to require Elections ACT to host information about every candidate running in the ACT election on their website. Every candidate will have equal space and information - a bio and a photo, available online once nominations have been declared.

3. INTRODUCE SPECIFIC OFFENCES FOR ROADSIDE ADVERTISING USING ILLEGALLY PARKED VEHICLES

Canberrans are often subjected to roadside advertisements that are placed on a vehicle - such as a truck or trailer - with the vehicle parked or idling illegally. This is often advertising of a political nature, and it is common during an election period. As the fine for illegally parking is relatively low, political parties, or other advertisers, can factor this into the cost of their ad - that is if they are even caught and fined.

The Greens will deter this practice by creating a specific offence of 'commercial or political advertising using an illegally parked or idling vehicle', which attracts a much higher fine than the standard offence of illegal parking.

4. ROLL BACK BUS SHELTER ADS AND ENDING ADSHEL CONTRACT

The ACT's old bus shelters are iconic, and part of the character of our city. However, these shelters have not been produced since the 1990s. More recently, the ACT Government has entered into a contractual arrangement with Adshel, whereby the company builds and maintains standard transport shelters for no charge on certain busy routes, on the condition that they may use the space for advertising. It is arguable that this contractual arrangement breaches current regulation of public space advertising.

The contract with Adshel should be allowed to lapse at the end of its term and all future shelters built without advertising. The Government has continued to provide bus shelters on routes that are not deemed busy enough by Adshel.

5. ROLL BACK ADVERTISING INSIDE AND OUTSIDE BUSES

Advertising on ACTION buses used to be far more limited, both in size and in content. In recent years, the size of advertising has increased, with full wrap ads - advertising that covers the whole of buses - now common.

In addition to the intrusion on public space, full wrap ads are a public safety risk, obscuring the vision of drivers, and polling shows they are unpopular among those who ride inside the vehicles - limiting people's vision outside. Advertising on buses should not be allowed to cover windows.

While the Greens have already delivered regulation to ban certain types of ACT Government advertising, including junk food, alcohol, gambling and defence industries - now is the time to remove commercial advertising.

The Greens will legislate to restrict advertising on public transport to only those that deliver public benefit. Public consultation should be undertaken to help determine acceptable bus advertising policy.

For example, the Greens are aware that Alan Jones broadcasting on 2CC was not seen as an acceptable ad for the government to profit from. Last year the Greens [supported a community petition to remove Alan Jones' advertising from the back of buses](#) in the Transport Canberra fleet, stating that the government should not profit from Jones' "blatantly sexist, misogynistic dog-whistling".