

Pets on Public Transportation

As our local population ages, many more residents will become reliant on public transportation. However, it's not just the older demographics that will be in this situation. In fact, all trends in Canberra are leading to fewer cars on the road as the tram and bus services plan to make public transportation more convenient and affordable especially as parking fees continue to rise.

Despite this trend, there are still no provisions in the ACT to allow pets on public transportation. Earlier local debates about this topic in 2015 found resistance as people had visions of dogs running wild on buses, trains and taxis. A sensible public transport policy is nowhere near this vision however.

Before moving to Canberra, I lived in Los Angeles where well behaved pets were welcomed almost everywhere including under the passenger seat of planes. In Australia, we have three states that lead the country in such policies: New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia – not the ACT, though we lead in almost every other area impacting animal welfare.

All places that allow pets on public transportation have specific rules that must be followed. These may include:

- The need for animals to be in appropriate containers or for larger dogs to be muzzled;
- Based on non-peak times or capacity;
- Appropriate care and control of the animal by the owner including cleanliness;
- Appropriate behaviour of the animal; and/or
- Restricted locations where the animals may sit or be held.

The positive and long-term adoption of such policies both in Australia and abroad prove that humans and animals can share space on public transportation without significantly impeding on others' rights.

At RSPCA ACT, we have a different reason for wanting to see a change in the ACT: our team receive way too many phone calls about pets needing emergency vet treatment from owners that don't have cars. Under the Animal Welfare Act 1992, owners have a duty of care to provide treatment for illness, disease and injury for their pets. Failure to provide this treatment could lead to not just criminal charges, but ultimately an animal that suffered unnecessarily.

But what if the owner wants to take their pet to a vet, but doesn't have a car?

Right now, the owner only has limited public options. They could take a taxi or Uber if they can find a driver that will allow for a furry passenger as it's the individual driver's decision. There is a pet ambulance service available too, but this can be expensive. Otherwise, other than a kind friend with a vehicle, our inspectors have to pick up the animal from the residence which is only possible if there is a medical emergency, and there is no other way for it to receive vet care.

The reality is that a responsible owner should take their pet to the vet for non-emergency reasons too such as for vaccinations. They might even want to take it to other places to exercise and socialise like to a dog park or an event like Million Paws Walk.



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Should the lack of a personal car prohibit their ability to be a responsible pet owner? Seems like a silly excuse to me when there are plenty of successful cases elsewhere that prove that pets on public transportation can work for everyone.

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