

Rapid bus route trial delayed

By Graham Downie

The ACT Government's \$1 million trial of a new rapid bus route in Canberra will begin on November 16.

It will operate on 15-minute intervals from 7am to 7pm on weekdays between Gungahlin Marketplace and the Canberra railway station at Kingston, via Russell and Barton.

The trial, announced in April by Chief Minister Jon Stanhope, was to begin on October 12. It has been delayed to allow for the delivery of new buses.

It has also been changed to provide one shorter route instead of the originally proposed two longer routes. The chosen route will operate entirely on a 15-minute frequency instead of the originally proposed 30-minute frequencies from 9.30am to 3.30pm.

To be marketed as Redex, the rapid service will serve only designated stops. It will be operated by new, wheelchair accessible buses with information screens and audible messages to passengers. Bicycle racks will be on all buses on the route.

Standard fares will apply and standard pre-purchased tickets encouraged.

The initial proposal was for a route from Gungahlin, Dickson, City, Russell, Barton, Woden, Erindale and Tuggeranong; with the other from

Kippax, Belconnen, City, Russell, Barton, Woden, Erindale and Tuggeranong. The original proposal for the trial to operate only during school terms has been changed so the route will operate on all weekdays except over the Christmas and New Year period.

The proposed 12-month trial will now run for only eight months, during which time it will be evaluated to determine whether it will continue or extended.

The change was based on advice from a transport consultant, Jarrett Walker, of McCormick Rankin Cagney, which designed Canberra's draft public transport network plan.

ACTION acting general manager Liz Clarke said if the trial was successful, funds would be sought from the Government to allow the service to continue.

She said overall bus patronage had not increased recently. This was in part because many peak services were already at capacity.

In April, ACTION finalised two contracts for 100 new buses. These will include 24 buses which steer from the front and rear axles and can carry about 20 more passengers than standard rigid buses. Delivery of the new buses has begun. About 12 will be needed for the Redex trial.

ACTION will take over its former depot at Woden in about November to accommodate the increased fleet.

"That will place us well to service the Molonglo area," Ms Clarke said.

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