*Remarks by AFI Head of Policy Craig Wallace at the launch of the Planning, Climate and Transport Shared Election Platform at a joint event with the Inner South Canberra Community Council on 2 May 2024*

Thank you Bo, Nick and Colin and I also acknowledge that I am coming to you from the lands of the Ngunnawal people and pay my respects to them and other families in the ACT.

As a person with a disability and an activist, I spend a lot of my time advocating about disability programs like the NDIS or the health care system here in Canberra yet our lives are still mostly defined by the homes and communities we experience around our front doors.

That is why we’ve decided to start AFI’s election advocacy on local and neighbourhood issues.

One of the reasons for doing that is it seems to be getting harder as a person with a disability to live in our homes and move around our neighbourhood.

Yet we all imagined it would be becoming easier.

This is important because we know social isolation has a powerful impact on health and wellbeing. Loneliness is a huge health risk factor equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

If you live in an older home it is getting hotter in summer and colder in winter. You may be one of the 25 per cent of Australian households without at least one form of aircon. Even if you have aircon, rising energy costs may be making it increasingly difficult to keep running. You might also struggle to use electric devices with touch screens and programming as your household moves to electricity.

Warm nights in Canberra helped deliver its warmest summer in four years. With summer becoming hotter and more volatile with climate change, people with disability are at risk of being impacted first, worst, and longest.

If you want to wheel out of your hot house down the street those streets are too often deteriorating and presenting trip hazards. As you mobilise down the street it’s increasingly crowded with heavy fast moving scooters whizzing by and sometimes blocking your path.

You might find yourself walking or wheeling in a shared zone with an array of e scooters, e bikes and electric cars that make no noise. In Canberra the direction that you usually walk or wheel might be blocked due to all our construction activity.

If all of this causes you to have a fall you risk being part of the more than 200,000 Australians needing to be in hospital after a fall. Falls are Australia’s leading cause of injury requiring hospital and death. They represent 43 per cent of injury admissions and 42 per cent of injury deaths.

If all of that makes you want to go by car that might be hard too it might be that you can’t charge your electric vehicle because the charging station is inaccessible. You might also have trouble driving your new car because its hard to fit disabled driver modifications or a new car is too high for you to clamber into.

If you decide to get a taxi you might be waiting a long time because ridesharing has overtaken taxis but there are no wheelchair accessible rideshares. If you want a wheelchair taxi you might feel unsafe or uncomfortable because Canberra’s wheelchair taxis are all modified transit vans.

If you want to go by bus *maybe* you’ll get a modern accessible bus but *maybe* you won’t and will be stranded. Are you prepared to take the chance? If you get on the bus *maybe* it will have audio descriptions and screens telling you where the next bus stop is but maybe it won’t. Breakfast in Belconnen becomes Brunch in Gunghalin.

Only about half of Australia’s public transport infrastructure actually met recent accessibility targets. Despite being phased out over the past couple of years, the older inaccessible Renault diesel buses are continuing to be used this year here in the ACT.

When you arrive in your destination *maybe* there will be kerb cuts and tactile indicators. *Maybe* the shop will have a ramp or maybe it won’t especially in older suburbs. *Maybe* there will be a fantastic new changing places toilet but maybe there will be none. Parts of the Inner South are a good case in point.

The point of this is that moving around is increasingly precarious for some of us while access has not improved in the ways we expected. We should not have to take this gamble every day.

And this is why as we approach the election, disability groups including WWDACT, MHCC and ACT DSAID are releasing our first election platform seeking an integrated thoughtful approach to social planning for vulnerable Canberrans.

We call for a new social planning unit to spearhead a rolling program of accessibility improvements, small grants focused on older areas and support to enable community councils and disability organisations to engage on municipal improvement.

We also need diversity in the wheelchair accessible taxi fleet, a firm timetable for the complete replacement of older buses, improvements to accessible information and guaranteed funding for community transport. We call for better regulation of ridesharing apps and micromobility devices.

A business case for free public transport should be developed to recognize the contribution of low incomes and poverty to transport disadvantage, especially for people with disability.

We seek actions to ensure that government policies for waste reduction, energy transition and climate change meet the needs of people with disabilities.

This includes a summit to agree a set of disability focused just transition principles plus a work program to push industry to ensure newer devices and electric vehicles are accessible.

A heat wave strategy for people with disability and chronic illness would include a program to install reverse cycle air-conditioning in the home of every frail and disabled public housing tenant by 2026. Securing energy supply for vulnerable people will also be important to us.

In 2024 Disability IS an ACT election issue. Accessible local neighborhoods, as well as great service systems, are needed to achieve inclusion that exists in the real world and not just on paper. Thank you.