

# **Portfolio Committee No 6. – Transport**

## **Report on the online questionnaire**

### **Inquiry into privatisation of bus services**

As part of its inquiry into privatisation of bus services, Portfolio Committee No. 6 – Transport undertook an online questionnaire to encourage public participation in the inquiry in an efficient and accessible way.

The questionnaire was not intended as a statistically valid, random survey. Respondents self-selected in choosing to participate. This means that respondents are unlikely to be a representative sample of the New South Wales population. Instead, the responses represent a sample of interested members of the public who volunteered their time to have a say.

The questionnaire was complementary to and did not replace the usual submission process. The submissions process was available to individuals and organisations who wished to provide a more detailed response to the inquiry's terms of reference. In this regard, some respondents may have completed the questionnaire and also made a submission.

The online questionnaire was open from 18 February to 31 March 2022. The committee received 1,697 responses to the questionnaire. These responses will inform the committee's views throughout the inquiry.

This report summarises the views expressed by participants and provides samples of those views. Sample comments have been chosen to best represent the variety of views expressed by the participants.

### **Questions asked**

Participants were asked 17 questions including questions regarding the individual respondent's views on bus services in their region. The full list of questions is at Appendix 1. The survey consisted of two mandatory administrative questions to collect contact details and confirm if participants reside in Metropolitan Sydney. The remainder of the survey was not mandatory, and consisted of seven multiple choice questions, two where participants were asked to select all options that applied to their circumstances, and six questions allowing free text responses.

For questions which allowed participants to select more than one option, or all options that applied to their circumstance, it is noted that percentages of responses from the data received could not be extracted.

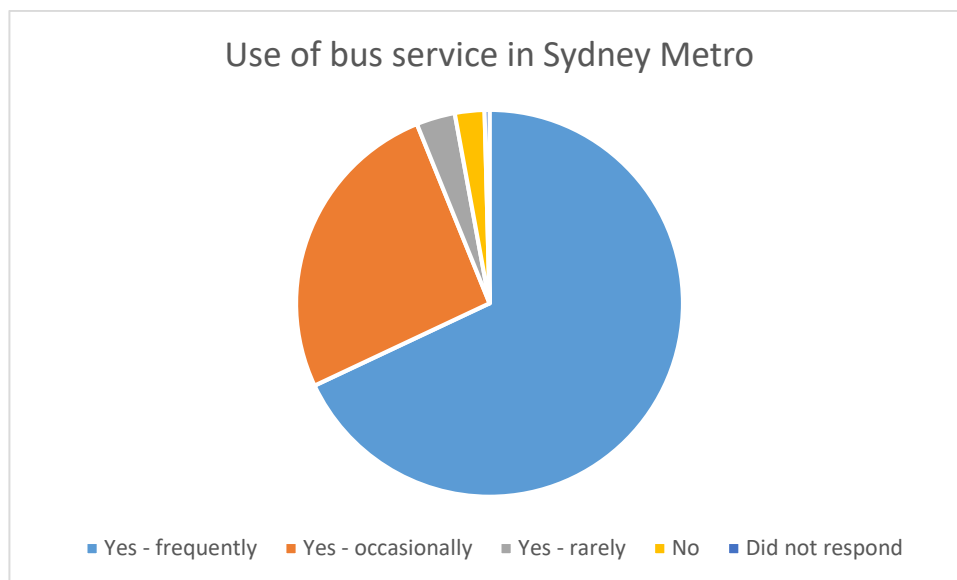
Six questions offered participants the opportunity to provide comments in a free text format, resulting in a large number of detailed comments. The questions around general satisfaction with services and the quality of services yielded similar results. On reviewing these results, a number of distinct themes emerged. This report explores those themes and provides a sample of the comments that best expressed the issues.

### **Responses to questions**

*Questions 1-3: Describe your usage of bus services*

Question one requested contact details. Question two asked participants to identify whether they reside in Metropolitan Sydney, outside Metropolitan Sydney or outside New South Wales. The vast majority of participants (1,196) selected Metropolitan Sydney. It is noted however that all responses (bar four) were made by residents of New South Wales. While most regions of Sydney were represented, it should be noted that a high proportion of the responses identified participants as residents of the Eastern Suburbs.

Question three asked participants to rate their own frequency of use of bus services (frequently, occasionally, rarely). The responses were as follows: Yes – frequently: 1154 or 68 per cent, Yes – occasionally: 439 or 26 per cent, Yes – rarely: 55 or three per cent, No: 42 or two per cent, Did not respond: 7 or less than one per cent.



Question four asked participants to select the capacity in which they use bus services (work, school, essential services, leisure), allowing them to choose all applicable. Noting data could not be extracted for questions where more than one option was selected, participants generally chose more than one option, and in many cases several options, in response to this question.

The responses to these questions provided useful context for the more substantive comments made in response to subsequent questions.

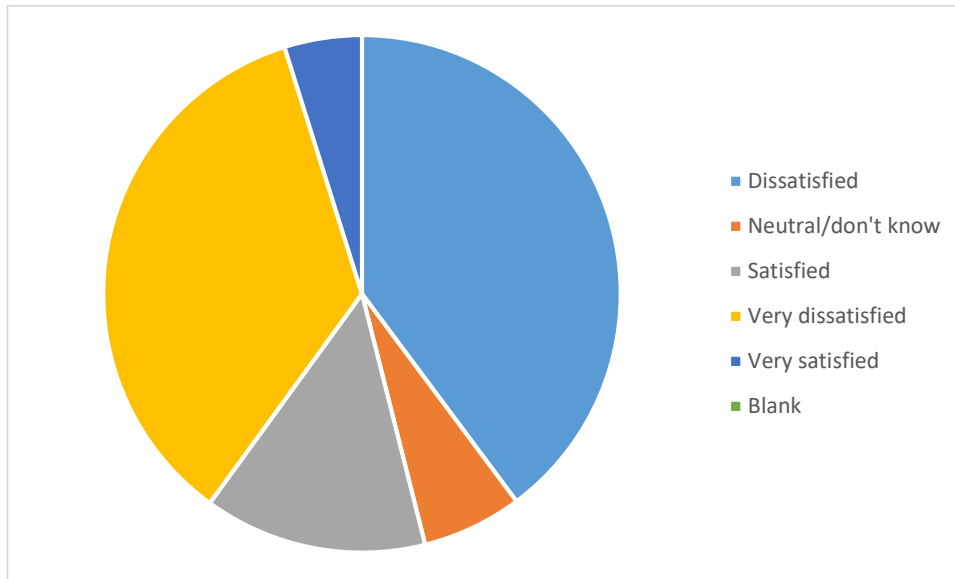
***Questions 5-6: In general, how satisfied are you with the current bus service in your area?***

Question five was presented in a multiple choice format and participants were able to choose from the options of 'very satisfied', 'satisfied', 'neutral/don't know', 'dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied'.

The vast majority of participants noted their dissatisfaction with current services (75 per cent, or 1,269 responses) choosing either 'dissatisfied;' or 'very dissatisfied'.

A smaller number of participants (19 per cent, or 318 responses) noted satisfaction with their service, choosing either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied'.

106 participants (6 per cent) were either neutral or did not respond to the question.



Question six asked participants to give reasons for their response. Samples of comments in respect of these views are set out below, according to theme. It is noted that these themes were also expressed in response to question eight.

#### Reduction of services

Many participants were critical of the reduction of services, particularly those outside of peak hour, and in areas also serviced by the light rail:

- 'Our bus routes have been completely cut. There was minimal information on what replacements and new routes would take place. The changes happened so quickly and it seems without any community consultation.'
- 'Bus services have been reduced. Buses are full in peak hour and often late causing connection issues. Buses from the city to east have been significantly reduced routes changed and stops removed.'
- 'The bus services have recently been reduced with many buses being taken away altogether. There is no longer a bus from the airport to Randwick. There are fewer buses, bus stops further away from shops and less connections. As a person with physical disabilities these changes have created a wider gap for me to safely access essential services. It feels as though there is no understanding or support for the people who are more vulnerable in the community.'

#### Cancellation of direct services

Many responses described frustration with the cancellation of direct services, which has forced passengers to transfer between buses, or between modes of transport to complete their journey. A further negative effect of such circumstances is the time added to journeys:

- 'Numerous services I used to use have been cut - there is no direct service outside of a brief peak hour window into Martin place/circular quay, instead bus services now terminate at central. Taking multiple buses or bus and light rail has more than doubled my commute time.'
- 'Since the 378 was abolished there is no direct bus route to the CBD. Passengers are forced

to alight at Bondi Junction station and change. The difficulties of this for the elderly, disabled or parents with prams is considerable.'

- 'Where I use to catch one bus to my destination I now need two buses. The trip used to be a 25 minute ride, now it's 55 minutes and that's if the services are on time for the connection.'

### Redirection to light rail

As previously noted, a high proportion of responses were from residents of the Eastern Suburbs. Responses consistently stated that there have been excessive cuts to bus services in suburbs serviced by the light rail, which participants describe as an inferior option in terms of cost, accessibility and convenience:

- 'The NSW government removed various essential buses that I used to go to the CBD, Central, Cleveland St. Now it takes me longer to get where I need, spend more money and walk a longer distance to get alternative buses which do not take me to my end destination (I have to get 2 buses to get to Circular Quay for example). There is a clear objective from the government and it is to force people to use the light rail which is super slow and does not provide a direct route to where I need to go), hence longer trip, extra walk.'
- 'The South Eastern services have been drastically reduced to allow for the light rail. Travel time has increased, services to the Sydney CBD has been reduced and only travel to Museum. It used to take me 20 minutes to travel into the City CBD with the bus lanes, now it is over 35 minutes with additional bus changes or the light rail.'
- 'Transport between inner south-west and inner south-east is sparse and untimely. A 20-minute car trip is an hour at best by bus and requiring multiple changes, which is frustrating when one shows late, and you miss your change over on a route that is half an hour between services. The recent reroutes that have been made in attempt to drive people towards the light rail have only worsened this problem, as the scope of change seems far beyond what is reasonable or functional for anyone less than 5 km from the CBD.'

### Safety of passengers

Some participants also raised concerns around passenger safety caused by the cancellation of direct services:

- 'To get to and from work I now have to catch three buses instead of one - late at night. (It is) very unsafe having to keep getting off bus and waiting on streets (especially Oxford Street) and in all sorts of weather - takes much longer to get home after work.'
- 'Buses never arrive on time if at all. Buses at peak hour are often full of school children which means general public passengers cannot board. Bus cuts mean I now need to take 2 buses (instead of 1) to get to CBD. Light rail is too far for me to walk at night (safety concerns as I am a young adult female), and too far to walk if I am carrying shopping, with kids etc.'
- 'Since the bus service from Coogee to the city has been reduced, it is very difficult to get to and from work. The light rail is not a viable solution from Coogee as it is a 20-30 minute walk from my home to the light rail station. That adds a significant amount of time to the journey. Getting home direct from the City to Coogee on weekends is also a problem as you have to go via Central Station. As a woman, to not have a direct bus route is a safety

issue when it is late at night. Before, you could just get on the 374 and get dropped off near home. Now you have to go to Central Station and wait around for the 373 and then walk home (another 15 minutes). This is not acceptable solution and I fear for my safety. I urge the government to reinstate our buses.'

### Access to essential services

Many participants commented that the changes to bus routes has reduced accessibility to essential services, particularly medical services:

- 'I live in West Kensington and, because I have am in my seventies and have a disability and rely on a roller walker, I have found myself sidelined by changes made to public transport in recent years. I used to be able to catch buses to my dentist in the city, to my doctor at Darlinghurst, to my exercise class at Randwick and my physio at Maroubra but the routes I found so helpful were shredded one by one in recent years. The light rail doesn't take me where I want to go - Macquarie Street, Randwick, Darlinghurst, Maroubra all require multiple changes and the stops are so far apart they are useless. I loved being able to catch the 302 bus from close to my home in West Kensington to the city, but it was suddenly diverted to Redfern station - again useless for me. It is not just disabled people who resent having to change buses lots of times. We had a really comprehensive and integrated bus system that has been destroyed and now you want to flog the remnants off. "Dissatisfied" is not strong enough to express my resentment and disgust.'
- 'I used to be able to get the bus that stopped right outside my doctor and having mobility issues, this was great. Now they have removed that bus and the nearest I can get to my doctor is about 250 metres away! I cannot walk 250 metres. I had a social outing where I would go to Hillsdale bowling club. I would get the bus to Eastgardens and then a second bus to Hillsdale but the first bus has been removed and it is now 3 buses and the last one drops me 450 metres away. I can no longer go now. I have NDIS funding so if I want to go anywhere, it now costs \$52 an hour for a carer to take me. I no longer have my independence and sometimes I think about whether my life is actually worth living.'
- 'I'm on crutches. The 373 only goes to Museum Station- not to the old stop in Martin Place. It is now a very, very long walk to the Eye Hospital and my specialists in Macquarie St. If I get off at Belmore Road it is a long walk to the Light rail then a long walk from George St to Macquarie St. Double time. Double transfers. Double walking distance. I've been forced to get taxis- really expensive out of my limited budget. And it gets more expensive because traffic is slowed down by all the people who need to drive because they have been denied access to what was an excellent public transport service.'

### Access to social and leisure activities

Many participants described a reduction in access to social and leisure activities. Several participants voiced their frustration, given that they had chosen to live in areas that were well serviced by buses:

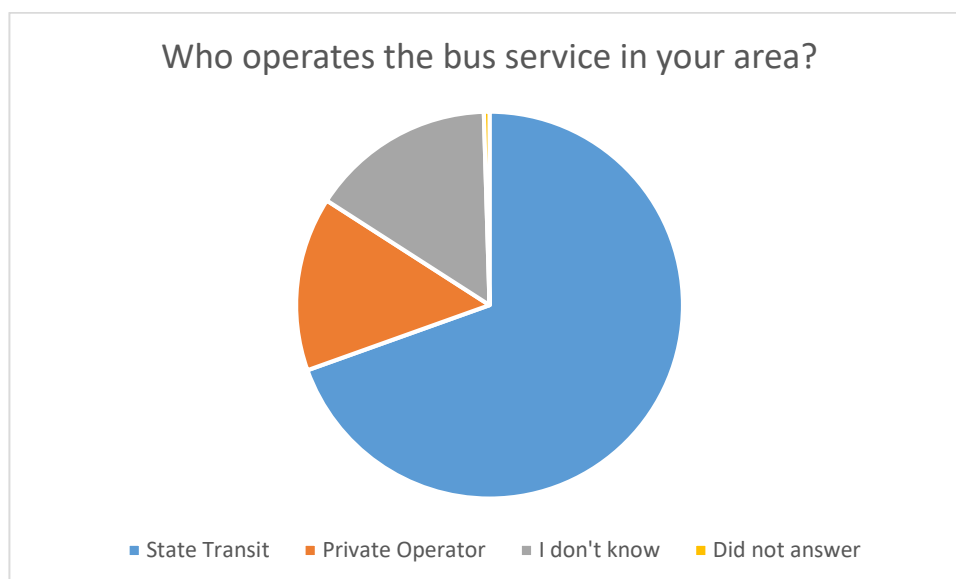
- 'No more direct bus services from the City to Coogee. Changing modes of transport is difficult when you are elderly and have arthritis, plus it adds more time to the trip. If I want to take the light rail from Randwick I have to walk the equivalent of two long blocks to get on the tram ... too much for me! I have had to actually give up some particular events because it was just that much harder to get to them than usual. My granddaughter took her little sister to a play last night but could not conveniently get home at a reasonable hour, which caused me a great deal of worry. I will now have to give up one of the choirs in

which I sing as the bus no longer goes to our rehearsal space.'

- 'Buses direct from Coogee, a very popular beach suburb, into the city were cut. They terminate at either Central or oddly, the very top of Hyde Park. I can no longer get from Coogee to the CBD (Pitt street Mall area, Martin Place) or Circular Quay without transferring at Central. It takes twice as long for me to get to popular places like the Opera House or Pitt Street Mall or to Circular Quay to catch a ferry. And I am an able-bodied person. My mother in law has stopped going into the city as it is hard for her to get around. It took me almost an hour to get home around 10pm last weekend, and that was with a 20 minute walk from the closest light rail stop to where I live which includes a massive hill. I will be driving my car and paying for weekend parking or not bothering to go into the CBD anymore. It is very upsetting.'
- 'We bought a home in an area that had a good public transport system. Now as we are older we have had the buses cut altogether or reduced in services. We can no longer get into the city by bus unless we travel during peak times or change modes of transport multiple times, Trips take so much longer and there is a lot of walking involved. As we age and become less mobile we will find it extremely difficult to access doctors, hospitals etc to say nothing of a very restricted social life!'
- 'The bus service used to be wonderful, going to all our grocers and chemists, the Eastgardens Mall, the libraries, our medical centre at Maroubra Junction, our dentist in Leichhardt, to Central, David Jones, and the State Library and the Quay. We felt able to give up our car some 20 years ago in order to help protect the environment. We never imagined that as we got old there would be fewer and far less convenient buses and routes, when public transport is one of the main answers to being able to get people to give up their reliance on cars. Getting anywhere now takes a lot of planning ahead, several changes of bus/tram/train, and often does not even take us all the way to our destination, leaving us to walk the last 20 minutes or so, rain or shine. One can be fed up by the time they arrive anywhere! There are still some destinations we have not figured out how to get to, as the new routing is so circuitous and puzzling. We are still more or less able-bodied but our elderly neighbours have become much more socially isolated for all the reasons I mentioned, and that is one of the worst things for elders' mental health and healthy ageing. There is nothing to say in favour of the elimination of all the buses, routes and stops that we have depended on for so long. It feels like the government is utterly ignoring the elderly, the disabled, mothers with toddlers and prams, etc. It is supposed to be a PUBLIC service.'

### ***Question 7: Who operates the bus service in your area?***

This question asked participants if, to their knowledge, their provider is public or private. The responses were as follows: State Transit: 1,180 or 70 per cent, Private operator: 247 or 15 per cent, I don't know: 262 or 15 per cent, Did not answer: 8 or less than one per cent.



***Question 8: Can you provide comments on the quality of your bus service?***

While many comments expressed similar views to the responses to questions four and five, some were specific to the bus operator employees and the physical condition of the buses. The responses were a mix of positive and negative, and there did not seem to be an obvious trend where quality directly related to either public or private providers.

- 'The state transit buses that I catch in the city are more frequent and more consistent than the private operator in my area. They are also cheaper.'
- 'The buses we have are clean and comfortable but there are just not enough of them.'
- 'Buses are clean but the frequency of service and the routes have decreased in the last few years.'
- 'The buses in my area are of a good standard. It is the cessation of routes/services/stops that is causing the trouble.'
- 'Currently overcrowded no social distancing and many not wearing masks despite signs indicating we must. Unsafe and unsatisfactory.'
- 'The 'new and improved' service to my area is often cancelled without notice or just fails to turn up and then pops up at a different location on the app maps, it's often too early or too late as it is now a looped service so that means it stays early or late until a new driver takes the route. The buses are often very dirty with opal card machines that don't work especially when it comes to tapping off. The drivers are fine, they're usually quite helpful and friendly.'

Some responses to this question particularly noted both appreciation and concern for drivers:

- 'The service itself is good, in the sense of the buses themselves being clean and comfortable, and of the drivers usually being friendly and helpful.'
- 'Drivers generally do what is required. What seems to have changed is that brief greeting when boarding or alighting the bus. More drivers are either looking away or looking stressed. They just don't seem to be enjoying their work.'

- 'I'm usually very happy with the drivers and the buses are usually pram friendly which has been essential for me in the past 8 years.'
- 'The drivers seem to be doing their usual best to provide an efficient, safe and friendly service. I have fears around what the private operator will do with our routes, timetable and employees conditions.'

**Questions 9-13: Impacts of privatisation**

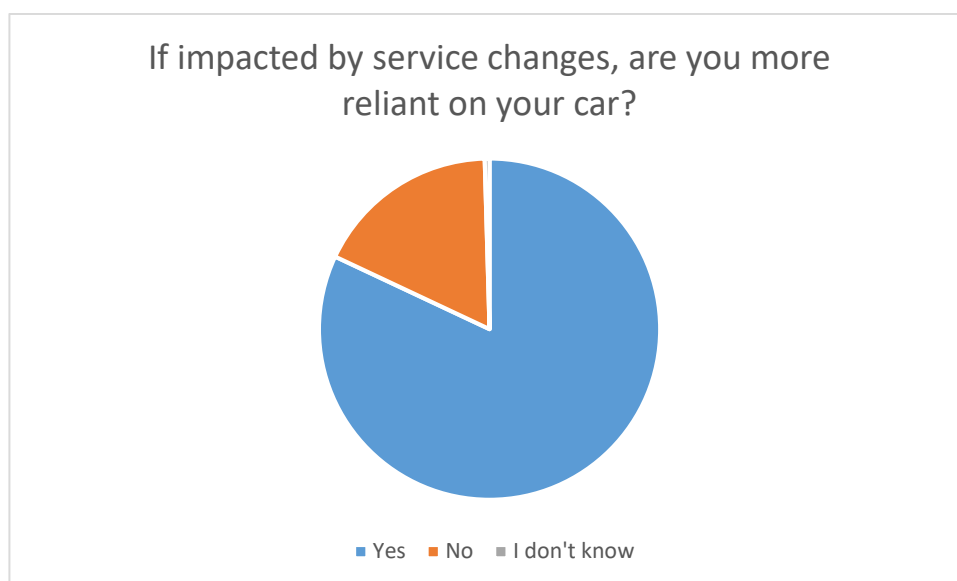
These questions sought participants' views on the impacts of privatisation on their service. The online questionnaire allowed participants to select all topics that applied to their situation, including:

- Frequency of services
- Accessibility to bus stops
- Removal of bus stops
- Changes to routes
- Length of commute
- Other (please specify)

The online questionnaire provided an opportunity for free text comments on the points above, responses to which again touched on the themes discussed in question six.

**Question 14: Have the changes to public transport in your region meant that you are more reliant on your car or other forms of transport?**

This question provided clear data on the number of participants who believed themselves to be more reliant on cars as a result of changes to bus services. 1,270 participants (82 per cent) stated they are now more likely to use a car than their bus service. 272 participants (18 per cent) responded in the negative, and less than one per cent selected 'I don't know'.



It is noted that comments in relation to the increased use of cars or other forms of transport because of changes to bus services were made in response to open ended questions about satisfaction and quality.



Some of these comments included concerns around contributing to traffic congestion:

- 'Public transport needs to be regular and efficient, as it was, to build confidence in use. Recent reduction in services has led to considerable delays to timetables. This leads to passengers abandoning public transport and using alternate transport such as car, uber or taxi which further compounds traffic problems and timetable difficulty.'
- 'I used to catch the 257 to Balmoral every week to swim. Now that it is gone and the alternative takes over an hour, I no longer go there for my exercise. When I do it is by car, joining the traffic jam and creating more congestion around the beach.'
- 'Not enough bus services to train stations. Used to have a service that would take you to a train station in town, not some random spot nowhere near connecting services. With mobility issues, if the bus doesn't take you near a connection, it's pointless. Plus if you need to drive and park to catch a bus, it also means people are more likely to drive.'
- 'I find that I am using my car much more. For example I attended a work Christmas party in Redfern that before I could have caught 1 bus to, I attend a photography club in Leichhardt which I would formerly catch a bus but now drive, I attend courses at Sydney Community College in Rozelle that formerly I would have caught the M50 to but now drive jamming yet more cars onto already overcrowded roads.'

***Questions 15 and 16: Do you have any comments on the operation of electric buses?***

These questions asked participants if they were aware of electric buses operating in their area, and their general thoughts on electric buses. While only a small proportion of participants responded to this question, the views expressed were overwhelmingly in favour of increasing provision of electric buses:

- 'Fabulous. Love to see more. Great initiative.'
- 'All metropolitan buses should be electric.'

More specific feedback on electric buses referred to benefits such as reduction of noise pollution and potential for use of clean energy:

- 'I've seen them when in the city, they seem to perform as well as any other bus, but they are quiet and with the peace of mind they are not adding to global warming.'
- 'The noise of actual normal buses is ridiculous, so noisy that I can't have a conversation with my friends. I can also hear them so much from my flat, this is so bad. I wish they would be electric and making less noise it will make a massive difference in people's life!'
- 'I have been on two and they are really nice and quiet. The design on the inside it nice as well. It is also great that they are much better for the environment. Electric buses will help lead us into a more sustainable and green future.'

One participant suggested further consideration of the infrastructure required to support an electric system:

- 'Bus routes run on a fixed route, so really these bulky batteries which are both heavy and costly are not as efficient as hooking up the bus to a power source that runs the length of the route, much like trams or trolley buses. They are certainly an improvement from the

current diesel buses, but I do think more thought should be put into the new bus technologies, our fleet and its connecting infrastructure.'

***Question 17: Do you have any other comments on the provision of bus services in your area?***

This provided a final opportunity for participants to make general comments. It is noted that the general themes of these comments have been captured in the sections above.

## **Conclusion**

The online questionnaire process was a valuable tool to seek the views of interested stakeholders on the significant issues raised in the terms of reference.

The material gathered will inform committee members' views as the inquiry progresses and will be considered in the inquiry report.

The committee notes that questionnaire participants cannot be considered to represent a statistically valid, random sample of views on the topic. The participants were self-selected in choosing to respond (in the same way that submission authors are self-selected) and should not be considered to be a representative sample of the population.

Nevertheless, the questionnaire provided an important opportunity for affected people to participate in the inquiry, and valuable input for the committee in formulating its findings.

## Appendix 1 – List of questions

1. Contact details
2. Where do you live?
  - a. New South Wales - metropolitan Sydney
  - b. New South Wales - outside metropolitan Sydney
  - c. Outside New South Wales
3. Do you use bus services in metropolitan Sydney?
  - a. Yes - frequently
  - b. Yes - occasionally
  - c. Yes – rarely
  - d. No
4. In what capacity do you use bus services in metropolitan Sydney? (tick all that apply)
  - a. Passenger - for work
  - b. Passenger – for school
  - c. Passenger – for essential services
  - d. Passenger - for leisure
5. In general, how satisfied are you with the current bus service in your area?
  - a. Very satisfied
  - b. Satisfied
  - c. Neutral/don't know
  - d. Dissatisfied
  - e. Very dissatisfied
6. Please explain the reasons for your answer. (Open-ended response, 250 words)
7. Who operates the bus service in your area?
  - a. State Transit
  - b. A private operator
  - c. I don't know
8. Can you provide comments on the quality of your bus service?
9. If your bus service has transitioned from a State Transit service to a private operator, has your service been impacted in any way?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I don't know
10. If you answered yes to question no. 9, what has been impacted? (Tick all that apply)
  - a. Frequency of services
  - b. Accessibility to bus stops
  - c. Other
11. Please explain your reasons for your answer to question no. 10. (Open-ended response, 250 words)
12. Have you been impacted by changes to bus routes or bus stop locations?
13. If you answered yes to question no. 12, please provide comments on the impact.

14. Have the changes to public transport in your region meant that you are more reliant on your car or other forms of transport?
15. Do electric buses currently operate in your area?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I don't know
16. If you answered yes to question no. 12, do you have any comments on the operation of this service? (Open-ended response, 250 words)
17. Do you have any other comments on the provision of bus services in your area? (Open-ended response, 250 words)