

INQUIRY INTO PRIVATISATION OF BUS SERVICES

Organisation: Action for Public Transport (NSW) Inc.

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Action for Public Transport (N.S.W.) Inc.

P O Box K606
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31 March 2022

Secretary
Portfolio Committee No 6
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney 2000
Submitted via inquiry website

Dear Secretary,

Portfolio Committee No 6

Inquiry into the privatisation of bus services

Submission

Action for Public Transport (NSW) Inc. is a transport advocacy group which has been active in Sydney since 1974. We promote the interests of beneficiaries of public transport - passengers and the wider community alike.

We don't think that privatisation of bus services or any other change to ownership need or ought to have any effect on passengers. If the services to be provided are specifically and comprehensively detailed in the tender documents and contract, and adherence thereto is monitored, it should make no difference who provides the service. But sad experience is that it does make a difference which is why we make this submission.

Discussion of each term of reference

a. the modelling, rationale and process of privatising bus services

The official rationale seems to be that private organisations are inherently more efficient than publicly-owned institutions. Part of the process is making the subject bus service look more profitable by cutting corners. Little attention is paid to the truth of the rationale or to possible adverse consequences of corner-cutting.

b. the impact on the commuting public through the loss of bus stops and services

It's a complicated topic. This [web log](#) about service changes has a huge amount of information with specifics about which routes were changed, terminated or introduced. However, the provision of bus services involves more than what happens on the road. Doctors and other professional people provide a waiting room with seats for their clients. Shopping centres provide parking for customers' cars. Large malls provide lounges for waiting husbands. But the Sydney City Council demolishes (or allows demolition of) bus shelters months before replacements are provided - subjecting clients to months of

summer sun and autumn rains. And yet other factors come into play, such as new light rail services which are supposed to replace the deleted bus services.

Action for Public Transport first noticed a shift towards pruning bus services in 2015. A series of leaflets canvassing prunings issued, starting with Rozelle-Annandale buses in December 2015 and continuing until November 2017. These leaflets, misleadingly labelled "BUS PRIORITY", argued that bus services could be sped-up by eliminating stops which Opal data had shown to be lightly-used. The leaflets did not acknowledge that the time saved was proportional to the number of times buses actually stopped and therefore minimal. The underlying intentions seemed to be releasing a bit of kerb space for parking purposes and/or benefiting general traffic by allowing buses to travel slightly faster. It is concerning that the process was run by Roads & Maritime Services whose remit was to run roads rather than buses. **We attach** PDF of one of the leaflets.

In each case we made a submission demurring to the proposed cuts. All of those submissions can be found via [this index](#).

Some examples of trimming services:

- The treatment of bus stops in Norton Street, Leichhardt, was farcical. True, the former arrangement may not have met the standards of the new metrics for spacing, but this is (or was) a major retail and commercial street. The inbound stop outside Norton Plaza (site of Coles) was removed, but the outbound stop across the street was retained. Some flexibility in relocating bus stops is required to allow for local conditions.
- An outbound bus stop on the route 412 in Salisbury Road was deleted and the space is now permanently occupied by a caravan belonging to a local.
- Bus stop 2070048 (Pacific Hwy, Lindfield, currently outside KFC) has moved further away from the pedestrian-actuated traffic signals twice in recent years. Those signals are mid-block so the moves cannot be intended to clear an intersection. Why was it moved? Bus stops should be close to pedestrian crossing points.

The rate of trimming services accelerated through 2020 and 2021. Many people complained when their buses became less convenient but the matter received little attention from the media, perhaps because it simply wasn't news any more. The COVID epidemic substantially reduced bus patronage and presumably reduced the number of people who might have complained about bus cuts.

c. the economic, social, safety, employment and environmental implications of bus privatisation

Providing for general use of the motor car is very expensive. Not only are roads and parking facilities needed, but they take up a lot of land, making the city less dense, and thereby require people to travel more distance than in a compact city. Buses enable a city to be smaller, with economic benefits.

Buses cater for more of society than does the motor car, simply because bus fares are far lower than the cost of running a car. There are social benefits in ensuring that everyone can afford to travel.

Reducing car traffic is clearly an effective method of reducing motor vehicle accident trauma. Hence, there are safety benefits in having an efficient bus service.

Further, it is generally agreed that, by using less fuel per passenger-kilometre than single-occupant cars, buses are environmentally desirable.

If bus privatisation results in fewer people riding buses, it could be argued that privatisation has economic, social, safety and environmental disbenefits.

d. the transition to an electric bus fleet and supporting infrastructure

We point out that the service life of fuel-powered buses is about 12 years; any transition to electric vehicles therefore wouldn't happen overnight even if all the infrastructure (power supply, suitable workshops ...) was available.

e. the impact of bus privatisation on worker pay and conditions

We have no comment on this matter.

f. any other relevant matter

We have nothing to add.

Conclusion

We feel that the disadvantages of privatisation as practised with NSW bus services strongly outweigh any advantages.

Recommendations

We would like much more information about adjustments to bus services to be readily available than at present. Hence, we suggest that Transport for NSW should maintain a public-readable database of bus service adjustments showing *inter alia*:

- Title of any groups the adjustment belongs to
- Purpose of the adjustment
- Full details of routes and stops affected and how affected and when
- Relevant connections with other services including ferry and light rail
- Justification of the adjustment
- Date of adjustment
- Results of post-implementation assessment of the adjustment

In closing ...

We would be pleased to appear at hearings if desired.

Jim Donovan
Secretary
Action for Public Transport (NSW) Inc.