

INQUIRY INTO PRIVATISATION OF BUS SERVICES

Organisation: Randwick City Council

Date Received: 7 April 2022



Parliament of New South Wales
Legislative Council
Parliament House, Macquarie Street Sydney
NSW, 2000 Australia

07 April 2022

Ref No: D04523859

Dear Representatives of Upper House Committees,

RE: Randwick City Council Submission on new inquiry into the privatisation of bus services

Randwick City Council appreciates this opportunity to provide input into the new inquiry into the privatisation of the bus services.

The Randwick community places significant importance on public transport within the Local Government Area (LGA) - especially buses. The number one key theme arising from community consultation for the recent Integrated Transport Study was:

“Randwick residents love their buses”.

As such, Randwick City Council has a keen interest in the South-East bus changes, privatisation of bus services and the impact on our community.

Our residents have deep concerns in relation to the losses in bus services as a result of the Light Rail service. Transport for NSW (TfNSW) has recently commenced its bus services changes in the South-East of Sydney and now an Upper House inquiry has been established examining the privatisation of bus services. The proposed privatisation of bus services has raised significant apprehension within the Randwick community and the Council.

Our submission (attached) provides recommendations to ensure public transport's important role in providing an essential mobility service to the Randwick community. It also raises concerns about the impact that has / may arise from the bus changes and privatisation.

Yours sincerely

Cr Dylan Parker
Mayor

Randwick City Council submission to the Legislative Council - Portfolio Committee no. 6 – Transport, - ‘Inquiry into Privatisation of Bus Services’

BACKGROUND

From October 2012, when Infrastructure NSW announced the proposed introduction of a Light Rail service, from Central to Moore Park and into Randwick, the Council has been regularly asking Transport for NSW (TfNSW) about how local bus services may be impacted. In parallel to this, the Council has been undertaking numerous community consultation activities to better understand community needs in relation to public transport.

The number one key theme arising from the recent community consultation for the Integrated Transport Study was:

“Randwick residents love their buses”.

Within the Randwick community there is a very high usage of public transport, especially buses. Viable and efficient public transport plays a significant role in reducing on road congestion, promoting green travel options and connecting communities. Our residents have a deep concern about any changes to their bus services and these concerns were clearly articulated when the Light Rail service was proposed. And, a number of bus changes have occurred since the introduction of the Light Rail service.

A high-level timeline of the recent changes is as follows:

- In October 2019, the NSW Government announced the planned privatisation of Sydney’s remaining public bus routes including in the eastern suburbs.
- On 6 May 2021, TfNSW announced the commencement of consultation with the community on proposed bus services changes in the South East of Sydney. It was advised that “the new light rail has changed how customers in the South East travel into and out of the CBD, providing modern, turn-up-and-go services”.
- In December 2021, significant changes were made to bus services in the eastern suburbs with 25 bus routes removed and 23 bus routes modified.

There are concerns raised by Council and the Randwick community over the changes proposed, and these are detailed below.

OUR CONCERNS

Randwick City Council has significant concerns over the privatisation of bus services and the changes to the bus services. There have already been a large number of rallies held and petitions submitted by the community, as the changes are perceived to be unsustainable and against public interest.

The concerns mainly relate to:

- Reduced efficiency of bus services;
- Reduced frequency of bus services;
- Reduced upkeep and maintenance;
- Risk of fare increases; and
- Risk of losses to employment.

With the significant bus service changes already having taken place, including 25 bus routes removed and 23 bus routes modified, the Randwick community is already significantly impacted.

These changes have led to the following impacts to the community:

- Reduced access to services for customers located along removed/modified routes;
- Reduced frequency of services due to removed and/or modified services; and
- Reduced directness of services due to removed and/or modified services.

With the privatisation of bus services, there is clear evidence and case studies in Australia and around the world of negative impacts on public transport services, with reduced service efficiency and frequency being a key outcome. A key concern with privatisation is the risk and the ability for the company to prioritise profitable routes and discontinue or reduce services that do not generate the same revenues.

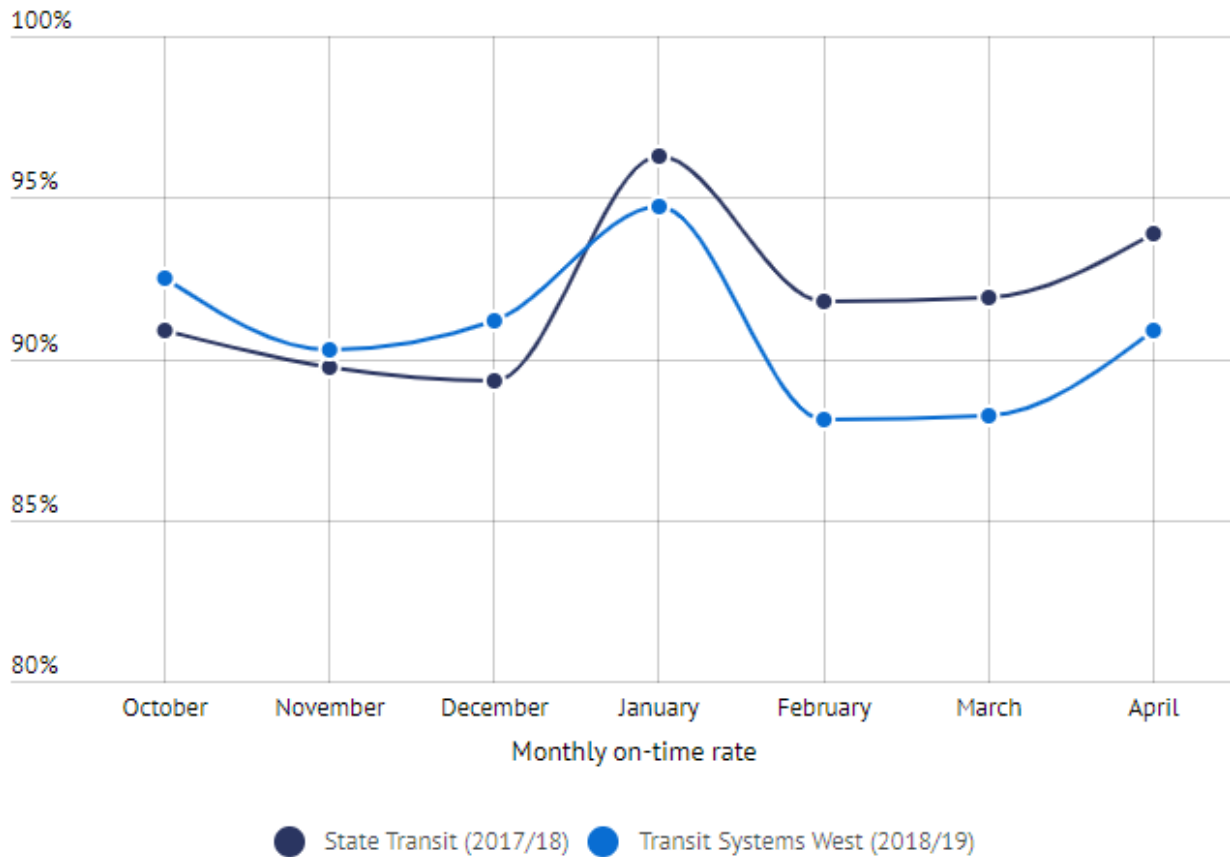
Furthermore, there have been numerous case studies which have shown an immediate decline in performance of bus services, post privatisation of services.

One such example is the Inner West bus privatisation for “region six”. A recent article by ‘Sydney Morning Herald’ quotes “data from NSW's transport agency shows the private operator, Transit Systems, has failed to beat the key performance measure of 95 per cent of buses running on time every month since it took over the contract in July 2018”.

The graph below clearly articulates the impact on performance once ‘Transit System West’ took over these services from the State government. It shows the decline in bus performance before and after privatisation. Similar trends have emerged in the Hunter and other regions of NSW, Australia and worldwide including privatisation of buses in London.

Region six buses on-time performance

Transport for NSW target for buses on-time is 95 per cent.



Source: Transport for NSW. Buses on-time running

As detailed above, the Randwick community has expressed significant concerns about these changes to bus services. Accordingly, Council makes this submission to the Upper House Committees, on behalf of its residents and workers, asking that the State Government reconsider the changes to the bus services and the now introduced privatisation of bus services. This submission is based on the concerns, risks and experience elsewhere, arising from the privatisation of bus services.

Randwick Council does not support the privatisation of bus services.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Randwick community has been significantly impacted by the recently introduced bus services changes in the South-East of Sydney. The changes included the removal of 25 bus routes and modification of 23 bus routes, resulting in indirect bus trips. The privatisation of the bus services will likely further impact the Randwick community. There are high risks of impact to frequency, efficiency, upkeep, fare increases and job losses over time.

As such, Randwick City Council makes the following recommendations to the Upper House Committees for their close consideration.

1. Randwick City Council does not support the proposal for privatisation of the bus services due to reasons outlined in this submission. Randwick Council requests that the State Government revert back, to the State, ownership and operation of the bus services within region nine.
2. Randwick City Council requests that the State Government reconsider the recently introduced bus changes, retain public ownership and re-instate all modified and cancelled bus routes in region Nine.
3. Randwick City Council requests that further investigations be undertaken, and funding options be explored, for local councils to implement sustainable public transport options (such as local public loop buses) to support their community.