

INQUIRY INTO PRIVATISATION OF BUS SERVICES

Organisation: City of Parramatta Council

Date Received: 6 April 2022



Ms. Abigail Boyd, MLC
Committee Chair, Portfolio Cttee No. 6 –
Transport and Customer Service
Legislative Council, Parliament of NSW

Our Reference F2004/08732

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6 April 2022

Dear Ms Boyd

RE: Inquiry into the privatisation of bus services - Invitation to make a submission

Thank you for inviting City of Parramatta Council (Council) to make a submission to the Committee's inquiry into the privatisation of bus services.

Council is pleased to make an officer submission based on previous resolutions Council has made in relation to the matter. This specifically relates to item (e) of point 1 of the inquiry's terms of reference: *the impact on the commuting public through the loss of bus stops and services*. Council is of a view that the community and key stakeholders should be thoroughly engaged and consulted with on any changes to routes, operations or stops connected to privatisation of services.

Council had recent experience with an announcement of public transport service changes following awarding of a private contract. In January 2020, following award of the Sydney Ferries contract, the contract operator announced a proposed overhaul of the ferry network with major impacts for services in Parramatta. Although this was consulted publicly, the scale of changes proposed was surprising to many councils and community members across the affected metropolitan area. Council considered the proposed changes on 10 February 2020 and resolved to make a submission opposing elements of the proposal and to write to other impacted councils. The proposed changes were ultimately withdrawn by Transport for NSW. Council considers that this was a missed opportunity for Transport for NSW to engage and consult with councils and community early, openly and thoroughly to find real improvements to services and operations which could have resulted in broad support.

In July 2020 Council considered the impacts of the State's intention to award contracts for bus service regions 7, 8, and 9 in metropolitan Sydney (Region 7 is the North shore and West region which serves a large part of the City of Parramatta LGA). Council resolved to request a meeting with representatives of the Transport Ministry and Transport for NSW to discuss the issue of safeguarding service levels and consultation with community, specifically seeking a commitment for the following:

- i. on time running will remain at or better than the current rate of 95 percentage,
- ii. there will be no reduction in the number of bus stops or movement of bus stops without a formal public consultation process,
- iii. there will be no changes to existing bus routes without a formal public consultation process.

Regarding on-time running, in July of 2019, Council surveyed residents of the Olympic Peninsula on their transport experiences and found that the Route 526 bus service – Burwood to Rhodes shopping centre (which runs via Newington and Wentworth Point) had the lowest experience rating (Poor/Very poor = 37%) of all bus services on the peninsula. One of the key issues highlighted (71% of respondents) for Route 526 was

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reliability, which included on-time performance. The Route 526 bus service was privatised as part of the Region 6 contract (Inner western and southern network) in mid-2018.

In December 2020 Transport for NSW announced changes to bus services in Region 7, including cancelling the M52 express bus services between Parramatta and Sydney CBD, replacing it with longer, all-stop services, and changing the endpoint in Sydney CBD. These changes were implemented during a period in which Transport for NSW was considering tenders for the Region 7 contract (which was awarded in July 2021). These changes were not publicly consulted before implementation.

These changes were observed by Council and the community as a degradation of existing service, and there was dissatisfaction that these changes were not consulted before the decision was made. Council considered the matter at its meeting of 8 February 2021 and resolved to meet with relevant State Ministers to advise that the cancellation of this service was not in the best interest of the community and to understand the following which should have occurred or been communicated publicly prior to the changes being implemented:

- i. The reasons the changes were not publicly consulted before the withdrawal of the M52 express bus Parramatta to the City;
- ii. Any statistics that support the withdrawal of the M52 express bus, Parramatta to the City. Including data relating to passenger movements at all stops en-route;
- iii. That in taking the decision to withdraw the M52 express bus, current and future developments occurring in and around Victoria Road including Melrose Park, were included in the decision making process.

In Council's *Community Engagement Strategy (2021)* we have adopted the principle that 'our stakeholders have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them'. This is an important principle because it helps us create good policies and services that have our people at the core of public activity. For the purposes of this inquiry, Council reiterates its calls for maintaining on-time running commitments at a minimum, and undertaking open and meaningful public engagement and consultation on changes to public transport services around awarding of contracts.

If you have any queries, or would like to discuss the matter further, please contact Michael Jollon, Council's Manager of Transport Planning.

Yours faithfully,


Executive Director City Planning and Design