

INQUIRY INTO PRIVATISATION OF BUS SERVICES

Organisation: City of Sydney

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Ms Abigail Boyd MLC
Chair, Portfolio Committee 6
NSW Parliament
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Dear Ms Boyd,

Inquiry into the privatisation of bus services

I refer to your letter/email regarding the Committee's Inquiry into the privatisation of bus services via the Sydney Metropolitan Bus Contracts.

The City of Sydney believes that inner Sydney should primarily be a place where walking, bicycle riding and public transport are the priority for most trips. That approach to transport planning and management is the only way to achieve the "movement and place" outcomes that support environmental, social and economic outcomes outlined in various NSW Government strategies.

Within the public transport system, buses play an important role in providing access:

- to the city centre, especially on corridors not served by rail or light rail. These services provide access for more than 60,000 people daily
- cross-regionally, such as between Randwick/Green Square and Camperdown/Ultimo. This includes connections for universities and hospitals
- to local services and shops, especially for groups such as older residents, and people without access to a car.

While there is often significant anxiety that privatisation will reduce services and service quality, the City has generally not focussed its advocacy around buses on "who owns/runs the service". The City's focus rather is on improving the services and reducing the impact, to support connections in the City and improved amenity and productivity.

There are many specific opportunities for bus service improvement in inner Sydney:

- Rapid transition to zero emissions buses for city centre services and in Green Square
- More priority on the roads and at traffic signals, to improve travel times and reliability
- Increased frequency and capacity, in the peak and the off-peak, especially at places like Green Square
- Development of a more integrated network across Inner Sydney, connecting bus with bus, rail, light rail, ferries and the future Metro.

Generally, none of these are (or have ever been) in the control of bus operators, whether that is State Transit or the many private operators that provide services on behalf of Transport NSW.

It is therefore clear that privatising the operation of services will not, of its own, address any of these issues. A whole of government approach, led by Transport for NSW, is required. The City is pleased that there are recent improvements on some of these issues – but more needs to be done.

Specific points for each Term of Reference are:

(a) the modelling, rationale and process of privatising bus services

Transport for NSW must ensure that contracts for bus operation regions deliver on agreed Government policies and outcomes. The contracts must have the required flexibility to ensure the networks can respond to changes in context (such as new developments or interchange opportunities) during the life of the contract.

The City believes that contracts must also allow for services that cross contract boundaries. This can assist eliminating layover in places like the City Centre, and provide better cross-regional access for customers. With individual regions' contract renewals often out of alignment, it is possible the contracting system may limit the potential for beneficial change

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

Bus services are often crucial for local connections for particular groups (older people, people without cars etc).

Stop location often relates to land use, and historic patterns of use. The City understands that some rationalisation of stops could lead to more efficient services. This should only be supported where there is no significant impact on access, and when it results in benefits to customers, such as increased service levels due to reduced running time. However other strategies such as increasing bus priority over general traffic should always be the preferred approach.

Loss of services can also impact access to services. The City's submission to the Draft South East Bus Plan consultation in 2021 highlighted the importance of (a) consultation on and explanation of the potential benefits of proposed network changes, even where these respond to new opportunities such as light rail or Metro; and (b) maintaining key local connections, such as to Cleveland Street and Oxford Street.

With Waterloo Metro set to open in 2024, the City anticipates that Transport for NSW will consider further changes to bus services that respond to growth and interchange opportunities at Waterloo. The City seeks more information on the evolution of bus services around Redfern and Waterloo, and how the community and the City will be involved in bus network planning. Consultation with residents and businesses should precede the development of any subsequent bus plan.

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

The City's position is that the contracting and operation of bus services must focus on delivering services that contribute to environmental, social and economic outcomes agreed in existing NSW Government strategies. The City also supports a Net Zero vision for road safety trauma (zero fatalities and serious injuries).

(d) the transition to an electric bus fleet and supporting infrastructure,

The City has a Net Zero emissions by 2035 commitment, and reducing transport emissions is a key element of achieving that. The City welcomes the recent announcement by various Ministers for Transport that the bus fleet will be entirely zero emissions by 2030 at the latest. The City also welcomes the reduced impact of electric buses contributing to existing routes, such as the 470.

The City's view is that zero emissions buses are most appropriate where the route:

- serves high density housing or jobs
- brings the benefits of quiet, zero emission buses to vibrant main streets
- represents all or nearly all the services on a corridor
- operates at high frequencies.

Route 304 through Green Square and Surry Hills satisfies these criteria. It is the best option for a first move to a route served 100% by zero emissions buses (a "304Z") because it:

- operates a dedicated route serving very dense and vibrant areas between Green Square and City Centre
- serves Crown and Oxford Street main streets (should operate via Oxford Street instead of Campbell/Goulburn Streets)
- Operates at high frequency, with high reliability especially along the Eastern Transit Corridor through Green Square
- Can extend west along "Ashmore Connector" in Green Square when that opens
- It already operates 24/7
- It has minimal mixing with other bus routes outside City Centre
- The route is considered unlikely to change when Waterloo Metro opens.

The City has reviewed existing NSW Government material on the proposed electrification of the bus fleet. It remains unclear on the proposed approach e.g. which depots can transition most easily, and what services they currently provide. Without this information, the City is unable to comment on whether privatisation of these depots and contract regions assists or hinders the transition – whether generally, or in terms of supporting concepts such as the 304Z.

(e) the impact of bus privatisation on worker pay and conditions

The City has no specific view on this Term of Reference.

Yours sincerely

Monica Barone
Chief Executive Officer