

**Submission  
No 58**

## **INQUIRY INTO PRIVATISATION OF BUS SERVICES**

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# Inquiry into the privatisation of bus services

## Submission by Mr Ken Wilson

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## Introduction

I thank the committee for the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry.

I would like to start with a little about myself.

My first experience with a private bus service was when I started high school in 1970. My father was in the defence services and I and a number of other sons of defence service personnel were enrolled at Cranbrook School in the eastern suburbs. None of us lived there, and the reason for our enrolment had a lot to do with the availability of a cadets as an after-school activity and the perceived needs of our fathers for us to grow up in an environment with “good” discipline, most importantly during their long deployments overseas (usually six months or more).

My mother had managed to acquire a block of land on which to build a house, our plot of land was one of the cheapest in Sydney, at the time, as it was on a seriously steep block, but mum had noticed that Pettit and Sevit had started specialising in such builds and before we knew it we had an address in Mosman two doors down from the “golden tonsils” John Laws, a very manageable mortgage and a great view of middle harbour through gum trees.

It took us a while to work out how best to get to school and it was safe to say we took a different approach to our famous neighbour who at the time had no less than 9 motor cars including Australia’s first ever Holden Monaro. His bull terrier “Bully” would lie on the road watching the nose to tail traffic make its way slowly past (and around him) on a rat run that avoided Spit Road. We were never driven to school and instead ended up using a private bus service that took us from nearby Countess Street to Cremorne Point. There we boarded a ferry to Circular Quay then the 324 Watsons Bay Service to Cranbrook in Bellevue Hill.

The private service was run on a shoestring, but the drivers were all legends, and we never missed a ferry. The first service of the day was run by Frank as everyone knew him. One morning he slept in a bit and we found ourselves barrelling towards Cremorne point out of control as Frank was going so fast he missed a turn and careered down a very steep street that for good reason was not on his bus route, we caught the ferry – just!

Frank, while still younger than Shane Warne, suffered a massive heart attack and died. By then my dad had left the navy and joined us most mornings on Frank’s bus to the ferry and his job in the CBD. Dad did a little inquiry into Frank and found he had a family dependent largely on his bus driver income and no life insurance. So the “Fund for Frank” was invented and posters put up in all 4 buses owned and run by the bus company.

The 324 from Circular Quay to school was mostly serviced by the old double deckers. The commuter school gang included children from many Eastern Suburbs schools, including Cranbrook, Ascham, Scots, Kincoppie etc. We soon worked out that traffic congestion in Pitt Street was an issue when you had a ferry waiting at Circular and that you could change buses at the intersection of Park and Elizabeth for a quicker ride. It’s a wonder none of us were ever killed or injured as we jumped off the back of moving 324 buses and ran after a 388 on Elizabeth Street, much to the dismay of the conductor as we grabbed to pole fitted to the open rear end of the moving double decker and one at a time pulled ourselves aboard. Similar “heroics” were often used to board the ferry at circular quay after the gang plank was removed and the ferry had started its trip to the North Shore. On only one occasion did a girl from Ascham miss timed her jump and ended up in the harbour. Luckily the ferry crew manage to fish her out and she survived the experience a little wet but otherwise fine.

I came to live in Willoughby in 1992, three things attracted us to the location

1. The Willoughby Leisure Center
2. The 257 bus to Balmoral where parking is difficult and I keep a racing dingy in the Balmoral sailing Club
3. The 272-express service to the CBD which at the time became very reliable due to the bus lane that was introduced on the Warringah Freeway and Harbour Bridge when the Sydney Harbour tunnel opened that year.

Our three children all attended Willoughby Public school. I was working in the CBD when our son first went there and remember well dropping him at the school at 8.30am, as the first teacher arrived for morning playground duty. I would hop on a 272 and be at my desk at 8.45 in the city.

On one occasion I spotted the then state member for Willoughby, Peter Collins, heading to Macquarie Street in his vintage jag. I challenged him to a race and soon we were flying past his stationary vehicle in a 272 in the bus lane. Needless to say, our trip took less than a quarter of the time of the honourable member who joined us on the 272 the next day.

The 10 minute bus trip was popular with other parents and quickly became the unofficial WPS P&C committee as we planned and plotted new and interesting activities at the school including the then famous annual Walking Bus competition. This successful and fun effort aimed to reduce traffic congestion in and around the school. Walking buses were given points for getting politicians to join them on the walk to school. Every serving local representative, from all three levels of government, at one stage or another attended this annual event. I note it has recently been reinstated in a different form.

I have been working in IT since leaving University in 1980. Our profession is involved in using technology to boost the productivity of workers, and rarely does anyone win a debate in the office by bagging public transport, particularly to and from the CBD.

As such I and many of my colleagues are totally dismayed at the recent apparent change of direction by Transport for NSW in our area. In particular the cancellation of so many bus services an apparent madness based on a new "vision" for Sydney by the state government:

*"The NSW Government's vision for Sydney is one of an integrated road and public transport network that gives you the freedom to choose how and when you get around, no matter where you live and work."*

Many of us in Willoughby like to think we use public transport and leave our cars at home so that rather than being part of the problem (traffic) we are part of the solution. The statement above appears to celebrate folk who, by their choice of transport, really don't care about their city.

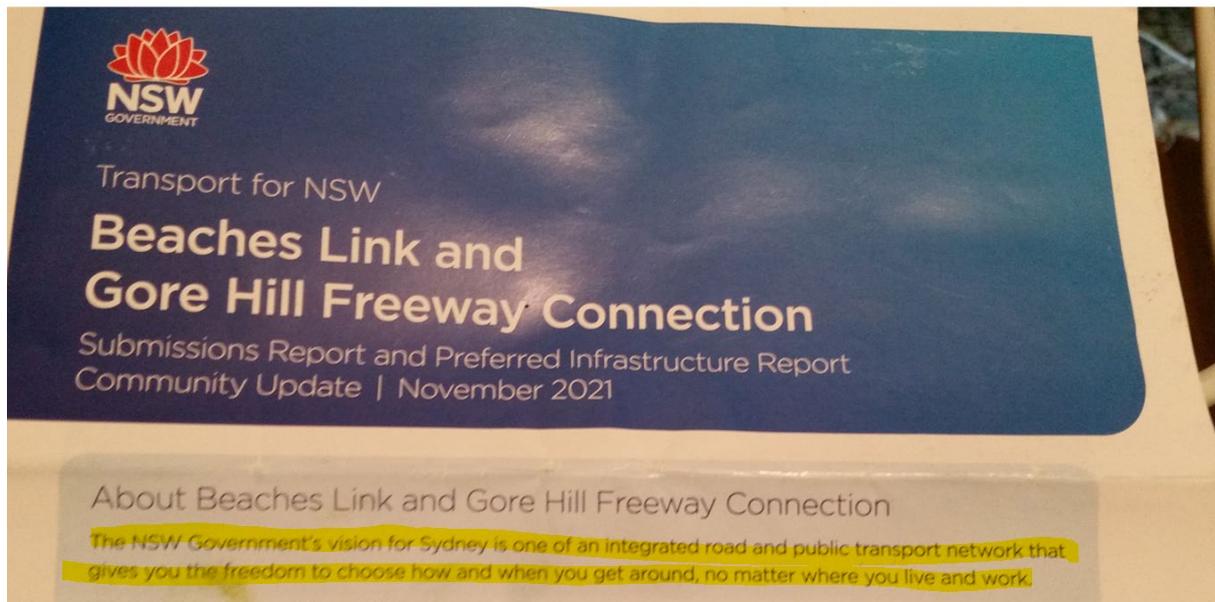


Figure 1 the NSW government's vision for Sydney.

For many years Willoughby South Progress Association ran a competition between real estate agents to see who could best mention our great bus services in their property advertisements. Not everyone in Willoughby can use a bus to get to work but the idea was to try to attract those who could by having the details in the property advertisements. The agents responded well and tried to out do each other in waxing lyrically about the 272 and other services.

Lastly a friend of mine was involved with the provision of the bus lane on the harbour bridge and has educated me, Willoughby South progress association and many of Willoughby Councils aldermen in the Mogridge Principle which makes it pretty clear that the current approach of cancelling and privatizing buses while spending tens of Billions of dollars on toll tunnels that, at the end of the day, will only encourage more people to drive, is a recipe for disaster in the lower north shore and could well be the greatest misuse of taxpayer funds and toll revenue this country has ever seen.

The inability of the Federal Government to stimulate wages growth consistently comes back to the question of how this is done and the best answer I have heard is that this can be achieved is by raising the productivity of Australian workers which is a metric that, recently, has been going backwards. To me it is unbelievable that the state government would, so aggressively, peruse an approach that locks commutes into more traffic for long periods and is so detrimental to our productivity at a time where families are struggling with low wages growth, the cost of living and housing.

I shall address the TERMS OF REFERENCE under headings

The modelling, rationale and process of privatising bus services,

My main concern here is as follows:

As described above achieving good connections through the city are both problematic and sometimes dangerous, with different bus service and transport modes. In the run up to privatisation Transport for NSW has withdrawn the following services that in the past have offered trips where a change of bus is not necessary

1. 257 Chatswood to Balmoral via Crows Nest, Willoughby Rd and Willoughby netball courts
2. 340 Chatswood to Bondi Junction via Willoughby Rd, the Warringah Freeway and St Vincent's.
3. 430 Taronga zoo to Sydenham via Military Rd, Warringah Freeway and RPA hospital
4. 343 Chatswood to Kingsford via Willoughby Rd Crows Nest and North Sydney.

We are told that it is not unusual for people in Sydney to have to make one or more changes across two or more buses or modes when completing a trip so that this is not an issue for Transport NSW. However, it is a big issue for the folk who now need to allow up to double the time previously taken to get to work. According to the Mogridge principle many of these people (who can) will take to their cars adding to traffic congestion along these inner-city routes.

Also concerning is the removal of so many services that operate to and from our hospitals. As well as the 340 and 430 this includes the 144/143 route that no longer visits North Shore Hospital. Parking can be impossible at these facilities and a good bus service allows folk, who could be seriously distressed about the state, or death of a loved one to avoid being on the roads when they are perhaps less able to concentrate.

Mention should also be made of the peak hour 272 service – North Willoughby to Wynyard via Willoughby Rd and the freeway bus lane. This

service was arguably once the best example of effective, efficient, and profitable public transport in the country and adopted by Willoughby South progress association as the name of its quarterly newsletter "The 272" distributed to residents. While in part it is now replaced by the 120 service from Chatswood to the QVB, the 120 is less efficient in peak hour due to the longer route and has a service frequency that is 30% less than the 272. The result is that many commuters are now unable to board a bus to the CBD in peak hour and need to wait till after the peak hour is finished or even drive a car instead.

Other than just making life plain difficult for commuters in general the only explanation I can find for the deletion of these services was provided by Robert Samuel, councillor for Middle Harbour Ward who explained that the privatisation of Willoughby Depot to Busways this year achieved savings in the cost to the government based on reducing the number of bus routes that Busways would have to operate.

[The impact on the commuting public through the loss of bus stops and services,](#)

My research into bus services changes leading up to privatisation (see Appendix A) shows that the bus stops between Willoughby/Naremburn and the city along Willoughby Rd and the Pacific highway are now served by only half the number of services. Instead, there are now more freeway services mostly in the wee hours late at night and early in the morning when most commuters are asleep in their beds. The question arises is has this been done to improve service number metrics at the expense of those trying to use the services?

[The economic, social, safety, employment and environmental implications of bus privatisation,](#)

As I understand bus ways pays \$20 an hour less than State transit did for new drivers starting at Willoughby Depot. This is making it very difficult to attract new drivers and much coffee and overtime has been used to keep

the reduced services running under privatisation. A \$20 per hour pay cut doesn't bode well for wages growth in NSW and as drivers generally cannot afford to live in the area many face rapidly rising toll charges just to get to work. Tired bus drivers, forced to work additional hours, just to make ends meet has to amount to an accident waiting to happen.

The transition to an electric bus fleet and supporting infrastructure,  
Sounds like a good idea, haven't seen any details

The impact of bus privatisation on worker pay and conditions, and  
See my response to ( c ) above

#### Any other relevant matter

The manner in how the reduction of services and introduction of privatisation has been communication puts the propaganda staff at the Kremlin to same.

The deletion of the 257 bus that took us to Balmoral Beach, netballers to netball, school children to more than a dozen schools **and** many seniors to Chatswood Chase for shopping was announced on a Transport for NSW web page with the title [Northern Beaches and Lower North Shore bus service improvements](#)

It goes on to state that

*From the 20 December (2020) more than 2,000 additional weekly bus services will be added in Sydney's Northern Beaches and Lower North Shore.*

Only in the fine print does it mention that the popular 257 service was to be withdrawn. The first most people found out about the cancellation of their bus service was when they went to catch it and it didn't show up.



Figure 2 Sign near Willoughby Leisure Center posted on December 15 2020 giving 5 days' notice of the "change" to the 257 service which ended 99 years of a direct public transport connection between Chatswood and Balmoral beach.

The response from the government to our concerns about the withdrawals has been simply laughable. Andrew Constance took the trouble to write to us via Gladys to explain that journeys on the 257 can now be made by changing from a 343 to a 114 in Crows nest and that in many (other) cases the timetable should support a short wait for the second bus. He wrote this letter a whole week after the 343 was cancelled so, by my reckoning that is not a particularly efficient connection as anyone who took the honourable minister's advice would still be waiting for a 343 15 months later.



The Hon Andrew Constance MP  
Minister for Transport and Roads

Our Ref: 01171448  
Your Ref: 20/ 2-5312

The Hon Gladys Berejiklian MP  
Premier  
Member for Willoughby  
PO Box 428  
NORTHBRIDGE NSW 1560

Dear Premier

Thank you for your correspondence on behalf of your constituents about changes to bus services on the Lower North Shore.

As your constituents are aware, on 20 December 2020 more than 2,000 additional weekly bus services were added across Sydney's Northern Beaches and Lower North Shore to improve frequency and give customers more choice.

Customers benefit from overnight B-Line services operating between Mona Vale and Sydney's CBD for the first time, and new frequent routes operating every 10 minutes, including:

- Route 100 – Mosman to the city
- Route 144 – Manly to Chatswood via St Leonards
- Route 160X – Dee Why to Chatswood
- Route 199 – Palm Beach to Manly via Mona Vale and Dee Why.

As your constituents may appreciate, a few service changes were made to other routes on the Northern Beaches and Lower North Shore to enable these improvements. Some routes were replaced by new ones or extra services added to existing routes.

Route 257 was replaced by routes 114 and 343. Customers travelling from Balmoral Beach to Willoughby or Chatswood can transfer from route 114 to route 343 at Crows Nest. While some customers may be required to change between services or modes of transport to get to their destinations, this situation is not uncommon for many customers across Sydney.

Thank you for taking the time to write.

Yours sincerely

The Hon Andrew Constance MP  
Minister for Transport and Roads

01/02/2021

GPO Box 5341, Sydney NSW 2001

Figure 3 Letter from Andrew Constance dated February 1 2021 advising commuters to catch the 343. The 343 was cancelled on January 26 2021.

All the buses removed from Willoughby Rd (340, 343, 257 and 272) are part of the traffic study for the new Channel 9 development which includes 460 apartment's some without car parking. The whole planning process has become a joke with residents who are now

determined to oppose any further development in the area given the speed at which the government threw us all under a bus, so to speak, as soon this development had been approved.

Finally, can I say that the complete disregard for the people of Willoughby by Transport for NSW and the state government demonstrated by the complete lack of any community consultation with commuters on bus service deletions and privatisation along with similar issues with the coming toll tunnels, makes the job of Tim James retaining the electorate of Willoughby at the election next year a Mission Impossible in my view.

## What can be done

I believe the government now has an opportunity to rethink its approach. The loss of seamless bus services where folk need to change bus, has been described as a move to a spoke and hub approach. The issue is they appear to have forgotten the hubs.

I note that the various trip apps recommend a trip once taken on the 257 be now done by catching a 120 to Wynyard and returning back over the bridge on a 100. A hub at the intersection of the Warringah Freeway and Falcon St/Military Rd would remove the need to travel via the city and result in a return to the use of buses along the old 257 route, reducing traffic on Military Road and opening up of many more traffic busting bus trips between the lower north shore and Mosman and the beaches.

An issue with the Beaches Link is the unanswered question “When we arrive at the Beach where will we park our car?”. This has not been addressed by the government yet the simple and inexpensive inclusion of such a hub at this location would solve this problem for thousands of commuters. Further much of the infrastructure needed for the hub already exists, yet in what highlights the madness of the government and Transport for NSW is about to be demolished by the Warringah Freeway upgrade, ironically advertised as an Integrated Transport project. In my dealings with the WHT group I have yet to find any evidence that this project is integrated and their indication that this infrastructure is about to be demolished only confirms the notion that it is nothing to do with integrating transport.



Figure 4 Existing infrastructure suitable for the creation of a Beaches Link Bus hub near Falcon Street on the Warringah Freeway

## Appendix A

Summary of my research on bus service reductions on Willoughby Rd provided to the member for Willoughby and her successor including comments from users and petitions lodged via change.org in an unsuccessful attempt to have these popular services restored

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1DvkOaAqKu3GRY0KrKY4l4yOvHi5fYrEtnrkYY80ZDQ/edit?usp=sharing>

## References

Announcement of bus service improvements that detailed the withdrawal of the 257

<https://transportnsw.info/news/2020/northern-beaches-lower-north-shore-bus-service-improvements>

Presentation to Willoughby South Progress Association on the Mogridge principle by Dr Michelle Ziebots and Matthew Housell, February 2021.

<https://vimeo.com/510234364>