

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

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## SUBMISSION NO. 2 TO LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL BUS INQUIRY

This submission has been prepared for the NSW Legislative Council's Inquiry into the Privatisation of Bus Services. The closing date for submissions is 31 March 2022. The Inquiry expects to Report by 1 October 2022.

The terms of reference of the Inquiry state, inter alia, -

That Portfolio Committee No. 6 inquire into the privatisation of bus services via the Sydney Metropolitan Bus Contracts, and in particular:

- (a) the modelling, rationale and process of privatising bus services,
- (b) the impact on the commuting public through the loss of bus stops and services,
- (c) the economic, social, safety, employment and environmental implications of bus privatisation.

This submission deals primarily with changes to the bus services in the Victoria Road corridor, in Sydney's north-west, where the writer is resident.

### BACKGROUND

New bus routes and timetables were implemented in the Victoria Road corridor on Sunday 24 January 2021. They were widely condemned by users, in the local press (Ryde's "The Weekly Times" newspaper, 17.2.21), and to community representatives like councillors and members of parliament. There had been no consultation with users prior to the changes, and post-implementation complaints met a "brick wall". It is unfortunate that many of the bus users so inconvenienced by the new network would be unaware of this Inquiry.

On 14.1.21, I sought explanation of the proposed bus service changes from Mr. John Sidoti, MP. He just forwarded my questions to the Minister for Transport, who, in turn, passed my inquiry to Transport for NSW (TfNSW). TfNSW replied with a "public relations" blurb, from a "no-reply" email server, and referred me to their website for information.

### THE CURRENT BUS SERVICE

As has previously happened with other recent Sydney Metropolitan Bus Contracts, the new Victoria Road bus network requires users to change buses much more often, just to make a single point-to-point trip. Point-to-point trips now require passengers to change vehicles two or three times, where previously, one bus was sufficient. It means more walking to, and between bus stops, and having to remember, or refer to, more sequential information about route numbers, stop locations and departure times. This has not only added to travel times, but has made them much more variable and predictable. A typical trip which before took, say, forty minutes plus or minus five minutes, now takes fifty minutes plus or minus ten or fifteen!

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Inquiry, in making its report, should -

- 1 – Determine exactly what directions were issued within TfNSW, Treasury, or other entity, which contributed to, and/or resulted in, such user-unfriendly bus services.
- 2 – Seek options from TfNSW regarding new directives which might be implemented by TfNSW to ensure more user-focussed, as opposed to operator-focussed, bus services, with particular reference to older and/or disadvantaged persons, who might be expected to be more dependent on public bus services.
- 3 – Recommend that EVERY bus stop in Sydney be labelled as to whether express services do or do not stop there. (At present, intending passengers have no way of knowing whether an express bus will stop for them or not. They have to learn by experience!).

4 – Recommend that the responsible authority ensure the display of much better real-time information and route maps at “interchange” bus stops. If we must change vehicles, then it has to be facilitated.

5 – Find ways of speeding up Sydney's Eastern Suburbs' Light Rail. Many of the new bus services now connect with it, but interchanging means time lost, and it is very slow by international standards.

6 – Seek evidence that private franchisees can provide buses at a lower OVERALL cost than government entities, such as the now defunct State Transit Authority.

It has to be borne in mind that a franchisee's primary interest is a return to his shareholders. A public bus service should ALWAYS have much broader objectives, like community well-being, social interaction, and even improved economic productivity.

Kevin Eadie

30.3.22.

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