

**Submission
No 97**

INQUIRY INTO PRIVATISATION OF BUS SERVICES

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Inquiry into Privatisation of Bus Services
 Portfolio Committee No. 6 Transport
 Legislative Council of NSW

SUBMISSION from Chloë Mason - on Privatisation of Bus Services

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to your inquiry.

Why do I make this submission? I feel impelled to contribute owing to my experience of the acute degradation of bus services into and around the inner city; and owing to my hope that this Committee can persuade the Minister for Transport and the department to remedy some of these problems.

My background relevant to terms of reference

For many years I have lived in Surry Hills where I have been able to be car-free, rely on public transport, walk, and ride a bicycle. Professionally I was a member of Australian Institute of Traffic Management. After working for State Rail-State Transit for five years (manager OH&S) and NSW EPA, I consulted in active travel – encouraging the use of public transport, walking and cycling by removing barriers (new pedestrian crossings) and improving communications, especially by large trip generators (Transport Access Guides). As a smartphone user, there still remains great value in real visual communications, route maps displayed at bus stops, for example.

Addressing the terms of reference.

I appreciate the breadth of the reference, items (a) to (f).

(a) Rationale of privatising bus services

To respond, it would have been helpful for the Committee to have had a discussion paper or research paper from the NSW Parliamentary Library.

In short, I have not seen the evidence justifying this change – perhaps driven more by ideology than good economics or social benefit.

I commend recent research from the Australia Institute (2019)¹ to the Committee: *The least popular way for the government to balance the books in its upcoming Budget would be to either cut or privatise services such as **public transport**, health and education or to increase taxes across the board.*

This was undertaken before the last state election in South Australia.

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

¹ *Budget Warning for State Gov: Voters Reject Service Cuts, Privatisation:*
<https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/budget-warning-for-state-gov-voters-reject-service-cuts-privatisation/>

Removal of bus stops in central Sydney now means a drop in bus service quality: not taking people closest to their destination and requiring much longer walk distances.

For example,

- buses from the east and south-east from Oxford Street no longer stop at the top of Liverpool Street (opposite the war memorial)
- Buses on Elizabeth Street –and buses joining from Oxford Street – stop at the corner of Bathurst Street and most routes do not have another stop until Hunter Street (removal of the stop opposite St James is sorely missed) – 1.4km. This is a long distance for many people, especially people with luggage, children, mobility difficulties.

The Broadway bus stop closest to the shopping centre was moved further away from the centre, yet many people are carrying shopping and/or been to medical appointments. The narrow footpath and construction has really created very poor conditions over years. Worse still, several bus services that linked this western sector to the east, by going up, either on Albion or Oxford Streets have been removed altogether leaving only Bus 440.

The re-allocation of bus stops reduces the service frequency for people who can take more than one route. E.g the Elizabeth Street stop at the corner of Martin Place a convenient location for many people. Now Buses 333 and 304 have been moved further south along Elizabeth Street. Pity.

This term is central to public satisfaction of transport services provided with government funding and regulation. The term is puzzling: why ‘commuting public’? Travel on public transport by many people is not for regular trips – in fact, the increases in public transport usage has been by non-work trips and at weekends. Perhaps and I hope this was a mistake in drafting.

People in the SE seem particularly hard hit by the withdrawal of bus services, making a trip to the CBD or to Bondi Junction necessitate changes. Yesterday, I learned of a workaround from a single bus trip: car trip from Coogee to Randwick (Centennial Park or privileged work parking) then light rail to city. This workaround is available only while they still have a licence to drive, and more widely available only to a limited group of people; this workaround increases traffic, and pollution by short motor vehicle trips.

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

Many service changes occurred concurrently with privatisation. And with City of Sydney’s removal of bus shelters and seating before their promised replacement (a badly managed contract)

The example above of reduced bus services from Coogee are obviously detrimental on these factors as well as reference (e) services operated by people on reduced wages and conditions.

From a perspective of service provision, I recommend the Committee commission maps to document access to level of service, taking into account necessity to change services.

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

A good society, in my view, rewards its service workers. I regret the reduced wages and conditions that are typical of privatisation.

Conclusion

My practical requests for the Committee's recommendations:

- 1) Practical changes:
 - a) more bus stops be designated in Elizabeth Street.
 - b) Bus services linking Broadway to the east up Oxford Street be restored and/or Bus 440 be increased in frequency.
 - c) Install bus service route maps at some bus stops, e.g. the Broadway bus stop (west side) showing the specific routes. Smartphones are of limited use.
 - d) Bus services go into the city and to the northern end – not stop at Railway Square, Martin Place, or Bridge Street. Buses do wait at the Quay, so please restore Elizabeth St buses to go down to Circular Quay!

I would be happy to answer questions about this subject.

Dr Chloë Mason