

**Submission
No 107**

INQUIRY INTO PRIVATISATION OF BUS SERVICES

Name: Mr Michael Berg

Date Received: 24 March 2022

Submission on the impact of changes to Eastern Suburbs bus services in anticipation of privatisation of those services particularly in relation to “(b) the impact on the commuting public through the loss of bus stops and services,”

As of last December, wholesale changes were made to bus routes in the lower half of the Eastern Suburbs, in particular Randwick, Coogee and Maroubra.

These were expressed as being in line with the desires of public transport users, in line with consultation documents and to provide a better service.

They appear to do nothing of the sort and, coupled with an express intention to privatise these services, appear to be driven by an agenda to facilitate that process and direct travellers onto the light rail to minimise the cost burden on government due to lower than anticipated ridership.

I wish to express my disappointment and, indeed, anger at the decision to implement the Eastern Suburbs bus route and timetable changes with so little regard to the interests of local bus users and in the face of the results of the “consultations”.

I draw the Committee’s attention to the results contained on the State Government bus changes website.

The survey information shows about 8800 respondents. 91% did not use light rail which is unsurprising as it fails to adequately replicate most buses from the Randwick, Coogee and Maroubra areas that service the eastern side of the CBD (Elizabeth St) while the light rail on George St side does not. It is clear that the light rail is not an adequate alternative to the existing bus routes and its patronage reflects that.

Questions 8 and 9 offered pre-set Dorothy Dix type answers reflecting the already claimed benefits of the changes. In both questions, respondents (>50% and 76% respectively) chose to present their own answers suggesting that many of them did not accept that any of the pre-set answers were fair or accurate representations of their likely responses. Certainly in my case, this was true as the changes negatively affect me and my family.

The survey’s own analysis notes that over half wanted more direct services to the CBD and 59% wanted less inter-modal transfers. Everything pointed to a majority of respondents seeking changes that did not accord with the proposals.

Despite this the consultation response dismissed the first element of direct transport to the CBD and refers to better cross-suburban access which may be useful to some but should be an addition not a substitute. The retention of some CBD links while removing others is not a solution. The second element of avoiding transfers (a generally accepted matter to be avoided in public transport planning) is dismissed by saying customers value frequency and access. Clearly the survey response shows the opposite is the case. A simple transfer is still a transfer, exposing travellers to the weather and, where they have mobility issues, greater discomfort. There is also the problem of trying to join already crowded services at the point of interchange.

The feedback in the “consultation” was practically ignored and clearly showed that the wishes and interests of public transport users were disregarded for other motives.

This is some of the reality of the claimed “improvements” to people like me and my family. I work part time from home and travel to the city for meetings and for leisure and recreation but generally outside of peak hour. As such, peak hour express services that have been marginally increased are irrelevant.

My nearest bus route- 374- prior to the changes, serviced Coogee and through to Randwick via Bream St, Carrington and Allison Roads to Circular quay along Elizabeth Street via Central. My nearest stop is 100m away and it then allowed me access to both ends of the CBD and the locations along Hyde park including the Downing Centre Courts, Hyde Park, Queens Square, Macquarie St precinct (State Library, Parliament, Art Gallery).

Prior to the changes, if I wanted to go to the Art Gallery of NSW or any nearby location, my door to door trip was 44 minutes, no interchanges and involved about 10 minutes walking from Martin Place to the Domain). After the changes now stopping the 374 at Central, where I now have to take either another bus, a train or the light rail, the fastest I can do the trip according to trip planner is 1 hour and requires a change of mode of transport. If I were to use just the light rail, it still takes an hour but involves a full 30 minutes walking- first up a steep hill to Randwick, then from George St up Martin Place. Both the changes of mode and longer walking distances are challenging if you have limited mobility or travelling with small children.

One of my children lives in South Maroubra and works in the CBD near Hyde Park. Prior to the changes he had the 397 with direct access to that area and to the Quay at any time including weekends. This is the only service that runs through this part of the suburb.

The 397 is now a shopping loop in the immediate area and requiring at least one change to access anywhere after Maroubra Junction. There is not even a direct connection to the light rail at Kingsford. His options are a 10 to 15 minute walk to the nearest point where he can then catch a bus to then switch to the light rail and finally a walk from George to Elizabeth Street if he wants to travel to work outside of peak times or visit the CBD at any other time.

There are now a few express services in peak hour weekdays only as the sole direct link to the CBD. These operate in a limited window and are not available if he works much later than 6pm. This inconveniences many residents of an area with numerous apartments and severely compromises their public transport options to Central Railway and the CBD.

In addition, the termination of services at the southern end of the CBD means that there is only one bus, the 396, that departs Circular Quay and travels along the eastern side of the CBD. To travel by bus to Randwick, Coogee, Maroubra or any point south without resorting to light rail requires catching the 396 and then transferring at points with little or no shelter to another route. Recent experience shows that where, prior to the changes, there were at least three routes that allowed direct access from Circular Quay via Elizabeth Street to Randwick shops, there are now none. A trip that was typically 25 minutes is now typically double that and involves one change of bus.

The changes do not help commuters and appear only to direct traffic onto the questionable light rail, which may have had some plausibility as a mode of transport if it did not terminate at Kingsford (despite the existing and largely untouched tram corridor down Anzac parade all the way to La Perouse and the despite the proposed massive development at Little Bay).

in summary, the changes to services-

1. Negatively impact travellers to the CBD, especially the eastern side and outside of peak commuting hours.
2. Encourage use of motor vehicles as they become a faster and more convenient alternative as public transport options are reduced not improved.

3. Are less convenient for those travelling with children or with restricted or limited mobility as they require more transfers and/or greater walking to reach a stop.
4. Limit access to the CBD and, to a greater extent, hinder return journeys, discouraging visits to the CBD.

Michael Berg