

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

**Name:** Dr Marjorie O'Neill MP, Member for Coogee

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# Dr Marjorie O'Neill MP

MEMBER FOR COOGEE

The following submission is being made by the Member for Coogee Dr Marjorie O'Neill on behalf of the Coogee Electorate and the Eastern Suburbs Community who have expressed their displeasure and anger with the significant changes that have been made to their public transport system, in particular the privatisation of their buses and the removal of 31 bus routes.

## **Background: The Importance of Public Transport**

Public transport is one of the most important, fundamental, and key services that State Governments have a responsibility to provide. The economic, social and environmental benefits of public transport in comparison to private vehicles include improved social equity, community well-being, health benefits, mobility and accessibility, as well as reduced fuel consumption, traffic congestion and air pollution. As inflationary pressures cut deep into the spending power of the community, as the impact of global warming tears through homes and towns, and as fuel prices escalate, the critical role of good public transport has never been greater.

Public transport plays a critical role in peoples' private and work lives, as well as the broader economy. Government has a responsibility to individuals and business to ensure that public transport is available to efficiently move people to the places they need to be. Such a fundamentally important aspect of community life cannot be left to the private sector and the whims of the market economy. Access to affordable and reliable public transport is a fundamental right of all individuals and a critical pillar of a fair and just society.

Accessible, reliable, affordable, and appropriate public transport that recognises where and when people need to move between places, is also a basic requirement of a properly functioning society and is crucial for the efficient operation of the state's economy.

## **Improves Community Mobility**

Inter and intra city transit systems help commuters move within and between suburbs, accessing important resources beyond their own immediate locality in commercial centres and the city. This enables individuals to access jobs, goods and services which simply are not available in every local area. The mobility facilitated by appropriate public transport is the life's blood of an efficient society. When public transport services are reduced, peoples' mobility is reduced.

## **Provides an Equitable Transportation System**

Affordable, reliable public transport available when and where needed, goes to the heart of an equitable society. Putting aside the environmental problems associated with more cars on the road, private transport is expensive, parking in the city is both sparse and costly, and many people simply do not have the capability to drive. A public transport system run by government is the surest way to provide subsidies for those most in need and ensure that community rather than profit interests comes first.

## **Economic Benefits to the Community**

### **Coogee Electorate Office:**

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**w** [marjorieoneill.com.au](http://marjorieoneill.com.au) **f** [MarjorieONeillCoogeeMP](https://www.facebook.com/MarjorieONeillCoogeeMP) **t** [@MarjorieSONeill](https://twitter.com/MarjorieSONeill) **ig** [marjorieoneillcoogee](https://www.instagram.com/marjorieoneillcoogee)





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Efficient and accessible public transport has a direct impact upon the economy of a locality. One way to expand the workforce and improve a city's economy is by giving more people the ability to get to their job, whilst also facilitating customers accessing the goods and services they need in a timely and cost-efficient manner. It is estimated that every dollar invested in public transportation produces four dollars in economic gains to the community. Reducing public transport accessibility increases travelling time and reduces economic activity.

## **Public Transportation Reduces Air Pollution**

Public transport has the potential to reduce the number of cars on the road that burn fossil fuels and to improve our air quality. Approximately 85% of the greenhouse gas emissions that come from transportation are due to day-to-day commutes. By leaving the car at home, a person can save up to 20 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions every day. Never before has it been so important to reduce our carbon emissions.

## **Improves Road Congestion**

Congestion on our roads is a major source of economic, social and environment waste. No one likes to be stuck in traffic, but addressing this problem through improvements in road infrastructure is costly and take a lot of time. Moreover, building new and bigger roads induces demand and does not reduce traffic congestion. Improving public transport is a major tool for reducing traffic congestion. Inversely, cutting public buses is a sure way to force more cars on to the roads and increase traffic congestion!

## **Public Transportation Improves Commuters Productivity**

When someone is driving a private vehicle, they should only be doing one thing: driving. Many states even have laws against using a smartphone at all while operating an automobile. This multi-tasking limitation of driving can result in hours of ineffective time. Alternatively, riders of public transportation have the ability to be more productive with their time during their commute. People can sleep, read, and relax on their way to work.

## **Changes to public transport in the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney**

In May 2021 the NSW Government announced the cutting of an additional 25 bus routes from the Eastern suburbs. Including the 300, 301, 302, 309X, 310X, 314, 316, 317, 338, 353, 357, 372, 373, 376, 377, 391, 393, 394, 395, 400, 400N, L94, X40, X93, and X99.

These cuts are in addition to the 6 routes the NSW government had already reduced and cut services, including the M10, M50, 891, 893, 378 and 361 bus services

These cuts are designed to force people to use the light rail, and remove the public service element of our public transport system before being sold off and privatised to a private provider.

On December 5<sup>th</sup> 2021, the NSW Government refused to listen to our community and removed an additional 24 bus routes and at least 50 bus stops from across the entire Eastern Suburbs.

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While the NSW Government made a commitment to continue the 373, they have removed two of the most significant stops to the bus route, with the route now terminating at Museum station rather than Circular Quay. The removal of these stops has resulted in an over a 1km walk from Museum Station to the Eye Hospital on Macquarie Street. Therefore, we refuse to accept that the government has retained the route our community needs.

This means that since 2018, the NSW Government has removed 31 bus routes from across the Eastern Suburbs.

## **Community reaction to these changes:**

The Eastern Suburbs community have come together to oppose these cuts with over 100,000 signing multiple petitions, both against the direct removal of services as well as against the privatisation of our buses.

Furthermore, we have held multiple debates in NSW Parliament and organised multiple rally's to send the NSW Government a clear message about how we feel as a community about these outrageous changes and reduction to our services.

There has been an outpouring of community activism, fighting to save essential bus services and trying to stop the privatisation of our public transport system.

Our community is fervently against the privatisation of our services as we know that when a public services is privatised the interest of the community take a back seat to the interests of shareholders.

## **Implications of these cuts on our community:**

Since these cuts have come into effect, we have heard from thousands of people across our suburbs that it is now harder to access health care, get to work, do shopping and visit friends and family. Sadly, we have also heard that these cuts has also resulted in community's most vulnerable and isolated in the already isolating time of COVID-19 has made travel enormously difficult for everyone, many now experiencing discontent and disconnect and further isolation as they cannot no longer access public transport. Many traditional city workers as well have expressed that the changes to transport are now deeply hindering their desire to return to work in the city.

We have included a number of statements from community members about how the changes have impacted them and the way they access buses and public transport.

Joanne "The limitations and disruption caused by the changes to the bus routes are severely impacting our ability to hold down productive jobs. The current situation makes for at best an anxiety riddled commute and at worst regularly missed appointments or children waiting at school gates. "

Deidre – "Anyone who travels beyond the city for work has to now catch at least 3 forms of transport working from home helps mitigate the changes"

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Tina - "My Mum lives in Redfern & is elderly. Her bus service has been cut right back...She has to walk to the station and can't because of her arthritis. The area has a large population of elderly residents & affects them as they are unable to attend medical appointments in the City."

Jenny - ".That the changes to buses isolate the elderly, those with a disability and those with young children. It is just too difficult to take two buses to the CBD..... Prior to the cessation of the M50 there were many locations available to us as we could connect with buses in Park St.

Sue – "Cuts to busses now require a lot of walking to reach the light rail. Busses no longer take me to where I want to go, especially Elizabeth Street, City"

Mary –Jane: "The cuts affect working people -- extra money for changes of modes of transport, extra travel time which can result in late arrivals home, etc.

Andy- " Since the buses changed on 5 Dec 21, there are less buses, apps such as TripView to Google Maps are no longer accurate with bus times, so we can't trust them. We have to walk a lot more which is really inconvenient in the morning with school/pre-school drop offs and then trying to get into the city."

Kerry "We need a return of 373 to go beyond museum station. I cannot get to a later Macquarie St Doctors appointment without walking from museum station, or changing to light rail and walking from George St. On crutches or on my knee scooter. No thanks. "

Jenny "The light rail at night is not an option as waiting for a bus in Belmore Road can be unsafe.

Ms Shaw " While the elderly and most vulnerable have been impacted the most by these cuts we also continue to hear from younger city workers and commuters that it is now is now much more difficult for them to go to work in the city."

While public transport has the capacity to benefit many aspects of life in our community, the changes that have been imposed have had the following implications:

## Decreased Community Mobility

The changes to our transport system have limited our community's mobility and have resulted in isolation of many citizens.

## Reduced Equity

The cuts to public transport in our area have impacted most people seeking access to another suburb or the city, a business or shopping hub, universities, schools or hospitals, even friends and relatives. It has simply become more difficult for most people to travel anywhere on public transport. The most serious impact has been felt by those most in need, particularly the aged

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and those with mobility difficulties. We have witnessed a serious decline in equitable access to public transport.

## Barriers to Economic Activity

The cuts have a direct impact on our community's ability to access goods and services beyond their immediate locality and, for many, it has become more difficult to return to the CBD for work. This will have long term economic implications for our city and businesses that depend on this trade. The increased need for private vehicles also has a direct impact on commuter productivity and well-being.

## Increased Air Pollution and Road Congestion

The reduction in needed accessible bus services is resulting in a greater use and reliance upon private vehicles, with truly awful consequences for the environment. Increased air pollution and traffic congestion are bad for people and for the planet. When needed services are cut, when accessibility and equity are reduced, people have no choice but to travel by private vehicle regardless of the economic, social, health and environment impacts. The role of government is to make peoples' lives better not worse.

## Summary:

An integrated public transport network should maximise ease and efficiency for passengers in terms of time, cost, comfort, safety, accessibility, and convenience.

The privatisation of the buses in the Eastern Suburbs and the removal of the public service element has significantly reduced the ease and efficiency of public transport in the electorate of Coogee.

The removal of bus stops has made it more difficult to access buses, while the removal of 31 bus routes has resulted in increased difficulty for our community to get where they need to go, including accessing health care, work, friends, and family.

The privatisation of buses has disproportionately impacted the elderly and those with mobility issues and those who depend on public transport to move around our city. Notwithstanding, the removal of services to the city is also impacting all city workers with significantly longer commute times and increased transport costs.

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