

**Submission
No 132**

INQUIRY INTO PRIVATISATION OF BUS SERVICES

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Date Received: 21 March 2022

Privatisation of Eastern Suburbs bus services

Cutting buses is a travesty.

What the NSW Government has done to parts of the eastern suburbs is a criminal.

The whole area was devastated during the construction of the light rail – trees chopped down, exceedingly slow traffic, disruptions and bright lights and noise at night. In the end we were handed a dud – a snail that wends its leisurely way to the city, passing sports facilities and schools but not reaching the beach or connecting with commuter hotspots.

Now this has been done the remaining skeleton of a bus service – too many people, not enough routes – will look good on paper and increase the value of the sale.

This is a travesty and must be reversed before more damage is done to the community.

Extending and combining the express buses

The Government has been very lucky we have COVID-19 because no one is travelling on public transport, especially commuters.

And commuters will be furious when they discover the deception that the Government has overseen, to reduce express services but at the same time increase the distance covered and the number of stops. So that when these services are offered for sale, the stats will look good – full buses with people who would have travelled on 4 routes previously.

We were told that the express buses wouldn't be impacted. But come 2022, anyone who travelled to and from work on the 373x or 377x would have quickly noted that the buses are now slower than the light rail – a clever ploy by Transport for NSW. They have endeavoured to merge the non-express routes with the express routes. The morning buses no longer start their non-stop route from Alison Rd to the city. Now they take the non-express routes via Cowper St.

The return journey express route is a joke. Express? Instead of travelling down Elizabeth St and turning left to Darlinghurst, the bus travels along congested Castlereagh St (recently reduced due to a cycle lane) all the way to Central Station and then up Albion St to Anzac Parade, where it becomes an express bus until it turns into Cowper St. So they have managed to combine 4 bus routes via Randwick into 1. Lucky for the Government, the majority of commuters haven't had to use the buses yet. When they do return to work, they'll soon discover the light rail now takes less time to get home because the journey has been extended.

Cultural disengagement

I don't have any data but eastern suburbs residents are strong supporters of the arts and culture. Cutting the buses has severed the access of patrons from Maroubra, Coogee, Randwick and Clovelly to events and venues. Older people, in particular, will think twice about going to the city, especially at night – there are no longer buses down Elizabeth St and this means poorer access to the Art Gallery of NSW, Botanic Gardens, MCA, Museum of Sydney and Sydney Recital Hall.

I went to the Sydney Opera House and had to get the light rail home after 10pm. On reaching the Randwick terminus, I looked for buses to Maroubra, Coogee and other parts of Randwick. Where are they? Are elderly patrons supposed to hang around Randwick Junction, get a taxi/uber, or stay at home? Again, COVID-19 has prolonged the impact of this.

Ditto for Belvoir St Theatre. There used to be a bus stop on Elizabeth St for the 372. No longer. So people living in Coogee and Randwick have to walk through a poorly lit park to the light rail and then get a bus when they finally arrive at Randwick. People are going to stop going out at night if they have to change modes of transport.

No buses to Central Station and Circular Quay is unfathomable. Cutting bus routes has not cut traffic. People are more reliant on the cars than ever before because options have been slashed. Shedding the 400, the quickest, limited stops route from Bondi Junction? Why? The replacement airport bus isn't selected stops only and totally bypasses Randwick. Parents are forced to drive their kids to school because there are no longer direct bus routes to many schools.

Fewer buses and routes means passengers are forced into taking longer journeys with more changes. This may look better on paper when trying to privatise the bus service but the impact on the community has been devastating and will further deteriorate when people recommence travelling to the city.

All this was done so the Government could sell off the bus system. It's a thoughtless, insensitive and selfish move to make money and penalise the community.