



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES  
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

**FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT**

**Private Members Statement**

6 February 2018

**WALLSEND ELECTORATE BUS SERVICES**

**Ms SONIA HORNERY ( Wallsend ) ( 12:52pm ):**

On the first day back at school the 870 bus failed to appear and pick up students from the Callaghan College Wallsend Campus. Parents were forced to leave work early to pick up their kids. Some students walked five kilometres to get home. The Newcastle Herald reported that Tony O'Leary thought that his 15- year-old daughter Alanah had missed the bus home when she rang him. He said:

It was a fluke that I happened to be home from work. She can get to her grandparents' pretty easily, but it's more about the kids that haven't got any alternatives.

Indeed, Mr O'Leary said that one teacher actually drove a number of students home. I acknowledge and applaud that teacher for going above and beyond the call of duty to ensure that the kids got home safely. The next day, a constituent messaged me to say that the 11 bus due at Jesmond at 9.23am . , never arrived. Neither did the next one. Illustrating the impact of unreliable nature of public transport in Newcastle these days, she said:

My daughter catches this bus to John Hunter Hospital to connect with bus 26 so she can get to Kotara for work. It's just disappointing when the government is encouraging us to use public transport, and we may be in the position of having to get a second car again.

That is because of the unreliability of public transport. These are only the latest of the problems that have occurred in the wake of the handover of Newcastle buses and ferries to private provider Keolis Downer. What started with hundreds of services cancelled without notice and drivers going without proper pay for weeks at a time in the aftermath of the handover has devolved into full-blown chaos. The rollout of new routes and a new timetable on 14 January this year was a catastrophe for many residents in Wallsend. One outrage d Walls end resident wrote to me and stated:

*Public Transport is a requirement by governments to supply and support, not sell off for a quick fix hit to private contractors who think in dollars in their pockets mentality. And here yet again is proof of the incompetence of these decisions.*

What does Keolis Downer have to say in the face of all these complaints and documented issues? The latest general manager, Mark Dunlop, told the Newcastle Herald:

*Overall, from what I've looked at this network, I'm very confident that the package overall is a quantum step up. The network here hasn't changed since 2008, and, whilst I haven't been in Newcastle for that long, but with any community the dynamics and geography and social parameters change over that time.*

Mr Dunlop is right about one thing: Some measured, responsible change would have done the Newcastle bus network the world of good. Keolis Downer has delivered full-blown transport chaos. Often without warning school children and commuters are left stranded and unable to get to school or work. Drivers are going without pay and entitlements and receive abuse from frustrated commuters when tensions boil over. Rather than a "quantum step up" of service delivery, inconvenience has skyrocketed. There is no direct service from Wallsend to inner-city Newcastle, and the services connecting Wallsend residents to commercial hubs such as Kotara and Charlestown have been cut.

When commuters complain—either directly to Newcastle Transport or via my office—their concerns go unaddressed. Last week after more than 100 representations had been made to the office of the Minister for Transport and to Keolis Downer, I had yet to receive a formal reply. I understand the Minister is under pressure at the moment, but so are the commuters of Wallsend. The bus network in Newcastle is in chaos.

I am calling on the Minister to intervene immediately and give our commuters some peace of mind.