



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES  
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

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

**Motions**

15 February 2018

**KEOLIS DOWNER BUS SERVICES**

**Ms SONIA HORNERY ( Wallsend ) ( 12:37pm ):**

I move:

That this House:

- (1) Acknowledges that Newcastle buses and ferries are operated by Keolis Downer after privatisation by the Government in July 2017.
- (2) Notes that a number of services has been cancelled without warning, stranding commuters from across the Wallsend electorate.
- (3) Urges the Minister for Transport to work with Keolis Downer to ensure that all Newcastle bus services operate reliably, so that commuters can get to work or school.

I make two points about the motion. My first point is that notice of the motion was given on 12 September last year. For a number of months we have been really worried about transport services in the Hunter, which, unfortunately, have been deteriorating.

**TEMPORARY SPEAKER ( Mr Greg Aplin ):** Order! Members who wish to have private conversations should do so outside the Chamber.

**Ms SONIA HORNERY:** My second point is the timing and the feigned outrage expressed during the last motion, notice of which was given yesterday. I have been waiting for my motion to be called on since September last year. The motion is important; it was put on the Business Paper in the appropriate way and I have waited for the matter to be called on. This important motion is about public transport for the people of Newcastle, who are extremely worried about it.

Prior to the transfer of Newcastle buses and ferries to a private operator last July many, including me and my Labor colleagues, publicly expressed reservations about the proposal. Although the Minister promised Newcastle a world-class transportation system, the experiences of the past few months have been far from ideal. Immediately following the changeover there was a spike in delayed or cancelled services. More than 300 bus services were cancelled in the Wallsend electorate alone, which left stranded hundreds of commuters and students relying on our buses to get to work or school. For months some drivers were unpaid or not paid on time, which caused them great consternation. Public consultation on the planned changes to the network was limited, particularly for people who live in the western suburbs who rely heavily on public transport.

When the changes were announced my office was flooded with phone calls. I know that other Hunter members of Parliament had the same experience. Our offices were flooded with phone calls from local commuters expressing their concern about the proposal. After the changes were rolled out our phones went into meltdown. My office received more than 100 calls and as many emails, as well as a social media explosion of complaints and concerns immediately within weeks of the changeover. No hard copies of timetables were available. Some bus stops were missing from the timetables, and no timetables or maps were posted. Online trip planners were not ready to cope with the demand. Parents were left to worry about how their kids would get to school or whether they would be stranded after school. The rerouting and rescheduling of services led to confusion amongst commuters, staff and bus drivers, who had no control over the situation. Bus drivers were left to cop the worst of commuter frustration. The Newcastle Herald reported:

Tempers frayed on day one of the city's bus timetable overhaul, with drivers subjected to widespread abuse.

On the first day alone numerous verbal altercations between drivers and passengers were reported. Most concerning of all, a brick was thrown at a bus in Newcastle West. Although Keolis Downer claimed that the incident was not related to the new timetables, it underlines how dangerous it can be, and has been, particularly for these drivers since the rollout and changeover. A constituent of mine, a pensioner who lives in Waratah and has health issues that limit her mobility, contacted my office soon after the changes and said:

It used to take me 15 minutes to get to Kotara from my house. I need to take the trip pretty frequently, but now it takes me an hour and 25 minutes. I used to be able to catch the 111 straight from Waratah through to Kotara and now I have to catch the 25 to Broadmeadow and transfer onto a 27. It's an absolute mess.

Another constituent told me about her children, who go to school in Kotara, who are now facing a much more difficult trip. She said:

They used to be able to catch a bus from right near our place straight to school. Now they need to leave much earlier and cross a major road to catch a bus which takes them to a major shopping centre so they can catch another bus which will drop them near school.

A young man with a disability who lives in my electorate and works in Warners Bay will have to catch four buses to get to work. The main bus route taking students from the southern and western suburbs of Newcastle into the University of Newcastle Callaghan Campus has disappeared. These are but a few examples. Worse still, so far the Minister has shown contempt for Wallsend commuters and their concerns. He has gone so far as to threaten funding to a major infrastructure project if we continue to complain. This is unacceptable. I call on the Premier and the Minister to intervene in this chaos. Our drivers need protection, commuters need certainty and security, and as for the world-class transport system promised by the transport Minister, we have a third-level, third-tier transport system at the moment.