



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

Private Members' Statements

18 September 2018

WALLSEND ELECTORATE BUS SERVICES

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) (20:17):

In July last year, when this Government abrogated its responsibility to deliver public transport in Newcastle, Wallsend residents experienced a sharp drop-off in the quality of bus services. It was remarkable. It was as if on midnight 1 July 2017 someone flicked a switch and reduced the quality of our bus services by several notches for both passengers and workers. Services were cancelled without warning, leaving commuters and schoolkids stranded. Even the busiest routes in the network—such as the 225, which ferried people to the University of Newcastle and was, without fail, packed to the rafters throughout the day—were cancelled. I encouraged my constituents to report cancellations or problems with the service and network. Before long, we learnt that close to 600 services were cancelled in the first months after the handover. One frequent commuter said:

I used to be able to count on Newcastle buses. They might have been running a bit late sometimes, but that's understandable due to changing road conditions. After July last year, I found myself having to catch Ubers to get to work on time because my bus just never showed up. It was expensive and stressful. In January theHerald reported:

... on-time running fell from 90 per cent in July to 68 per cent in November.

The private operator blamed congestion, special events in Newcastle and, bizarrely, school formals for the drop-off. If things were bad for commuters, then they were even worse for staff. Staff were left unpaid. Staffing shortages crippled the network, putting pressure on workers who were already getting less than their due in wages and conditions. Unbelievably, the provider tried to blame the spike in cancellations to workers taking time off for the flu. Unfortunately, this chaos was just the start of what was to come. When the new routes and timetables were rolled out at the beginning of the year, there was widespread confusion amongst both passengers and drivers. Services that people had come to rely on to get to work, appointments or social events disappeared.

Overnight my office was inundated with complaints. Every one of those complaints—received via physical or electronic mail, over the phone or on social media—was forwarded to the

Minister for Transport and to the private provider within days of my office receiving it. Despite this, the Minister insisted in February that there had been no complaints about services in Wallsend. Ignorance must be bliss. Responses to representations to my office had been coming from the Parliamentary Secretary. When I spoke to a 10,000-signature petition on this issue, the Minister did not seem to be able to hear what was going on in the Chamber. He literally turned his back on the residents of Wallsend.

Do not get me wrong: Newcastle bus services needed to be upgraded. Changes needed to be made, and not all of the new routes or new timetables should be thrown out just because some of them could be. There have been some improvements. But it is simply not good enough that there was such limited consultation before the changes were rolled out. It is not good enough that the concerns of Wallsend residents and commuters have been ignored. There have been complaints. I have been sharing them with the Chamber all year—and not because I like the sound of my own voice; I do not. I invite the Minister for Transport to come to Wallsend. I can assure him that he has an open invitation to grab a cup of coffee on Nelson Street with me. We can have a chat, he can speak to some of the locals and we get a real feel for the community and their concerns with transport. We are very welcoming in Wallsend.