



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

Private Members Statements

4 June 2019

PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN THE WALLSEND ELECTORATE

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) (13:05):

At the end of April, when IPART announced a review of public transport fares in NSW, I asked residents of the Wallsend electorate what they saw as the major issue keeping them off public transport.

Overwhelmingly, they nominated reliability—not price—as the major barrier preventing them from making greater use of public transport in the Wallsend electorate.

In a Facebook poll, 76% said they would make use of the buses in the Wallsend electorate if they were more reliable, while only 24% said they were too expensive.

Noel and Amanda said, “Very poor routes, virtually impossible to find out a timetable to follow.”

Sue said, “Poor routes and lack of connectivity. Notice how empty the buses are? Reroute them and they will be full!”

Other respondents provided more specific examples of how unreliable buses have become in the Wallsend electorate. Wes said, “From Elermore Vale there was previously one bus to get into the city. There are now two buses or two buses and a train for some locations. If they don’t sync up, the trip can take more than 99 minutes.”

All of this this isn’t surprising.

Keolis Downer has failed to meet the key performance indicator of 95% on-time running in all but five of the last twenty-one months. That's sixteen of twenty-one months where users of the Newcastle public transport network have received far less than the

Since the public transport system was offloaded by this Government to a private provider in July 2017, complaints about the reliability of the service have gone through the roof. The switch to new routes and timetables in January 2018 saw the flood of complaints become a tsunami.

Eventually, my Hunter colleagues and I presented a petition for debate in this place not once but twice after we brought in more than twenty thousand signatures calling on the Government to fix Newcastle buses.

Now, I am not contending that public transport in the Wallsend electorate was perfect before the change. It wasn't. I was calling for an overhaul of the system before the change, and there is no doubt that some of the alterations have been beneficial for some users. However, there are a great many people who have felt left behind and ignored by this process.

A resident of Noella Avenue in New Lambton visited my office on 30 May. She is over eighty, and reliant on public transport. Before the changeover to the new routes and timetables, she was easily able to catch a bus from near her home. Now, reliant on a cane, she is forced to cross major roads.

She was carrying a letter, written on behalf of her and other residents of Noella Avenue and surrounding streets, calling for a route adjustment to the 13 bus.

A minor diversion along the former route would alleviate issues for many local residents, including a couple in their eighties who require public transport to get to doctor's appointments for chronic medical conditions. They have lived in New Lambton all their lives, and the service they relied on abruptly disappeared a year and a half ago.

I have passed the letter in question on to private operator Keolis Downer and to the Minister, and I await a thoughtful response from each, but it is only one example of what has happened in the western suburbs of Newcastle over the last two years.

The change highlighted by the letter is the kind of change, made by bureaucrats who understand the facts on the ground only in terms of Opal data, which leaves a lot of Wallsend electorate residents out in the cold.

I call on the Minister for Transport, Keolis Downer and the NSW Government to work to provide the innovative, modern transport mix that the Wallsend electorate needs.

That means restoring, continuing and expanding the city's successful park and ride facilities, like the now-defunct service from Hunter Stadium to John Hunter

Hospital or the wildly successful service from Hunter Stadium to the Newcastle CBD.

That means delivering key promised infrastructure like Stage Five of the Newcastle Inner City Bypass.

That means committing to the Glendale Interchange.

That means delivering the world-class public transport system that this Government promised and has acknowledged Wallsend electorate residents deserve.

All of this requires talking with Wallsend electorate residents and public transport users the way I have, and coming up with a fair, equitable public transport system.