



Our Transport Community Consultation Report

Privatisation of bus services in regions 7, 8 and 9

Overview

In early 2020 the NSW Government opened tenders for the operation of public buses in Regions 7, 8 and 9. These are the last publicly operated bus regions in the state, covering Sydney's North West, Northern Beaches, North Shore and Eastern Suburbs.

There was enormous public opposition to the privatisation of the public bus network, with over 30,000 petition signatures triggering three debates in state parliament.

Residents in affected regions were not given the opportunity to consult with either the government or transport agencies about the decision and its impact on bus services. There has been no formal process to raise concerns and get transparent information about the process, despite Transport for NSW's clear policy which lays out its commitments to meaningful consultation and transparency.

In November 2020, the Our Transport campaign launched its own community consultation survey for Sydney residents in Regions 7, 8 and 9. Almost 2,000 people completed the survey.

Respondents were informed that the results would be provided to local MPs to spur a transparent community consultation process around potential changes to bus stops and services arising from privatisation.

Background

Transport for NSW Community Engagement Policy

Transport for NSW has a specific Community Engagement Policy which outlines its commitments around engaging with the community. It includes commitments to:

- Identify, develop and implement appropriate community engagement strategies for all stages of our projects
- Provide opportunities to encourage community feedback
- Keep the community regularly informed of the progress of our projects
- Provide easily accessible information
- Be transparent in all that we do
- Be accessible to answer questions and provide information
- Follow ethical principles of conduct, be open and accountable, and report back to the community and project team on engagement activities

[The full policy is available here.](#)

Over months of active campaigning and engagement with state MPs, the Our Transport campaign not aware of any such consultation taking place.



There have already been significant changes to bus services in the regions being privatised without consultation or discussion. These include school bus services removed in northern beaches,¹ and the cancellation of the M52 in Ryde,² and the M10 and M50 services connecting the eastern suburbs and inner west.

Transparency in decision-making

Leaked documents indicate that the routes currently being removed are based on opal data gathered throughout 2019 and 2020. The use of data gathered during this period is problematic for a variety of reasons.

Covid-19

Throughout 2020 there were a series of lockdowns in NSW and a rapid shift to employees working from home, or through hybrid arrangements. This had a clear impact on the efficacy of data collected and was gathered during a period where there was a significant decrease in the use of public transport.

In the community consultation survey 81% of respondents indicated that the pandemic had changed their public transport use.

Opal data for school students

In discussions with drivers across the RTBU membership it is well known that school students often do not “tap on” when travelling to and from school. Bus drivers have also discussed their responsibility to assist students to get to school or home whether they have an opal card or not.

It is reasonable to assume that the opal data being used to decide what routes stay or go are based on a time when commuter traffic was significantly decreased and based on non-reliable data collection methods.

The survey itself

Due to the lack of evidence of any community consultation taking place members of the Our Transport Community undertook a survey of community members about their views and concerns about impending privatisation.

The specific results of regions, including the routes and stops identified are linked below.

- [Region 7](#)
- [Region 8](#)
- [Region 9](#)

¹ <https://manlyobserver.com.au/balgowlah-bus-fury-after-school-kids-left-stranded-transport-issues-apology/>

² <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/northern-district-times/bus-services-overhaul-in-sydneys-north/news-story/89c2fd1d8667711e0551a4a9366e997d>



Who were the respondents?

Across all the surveys a total of 1870 responses were received.

Responses received from outside of these regions were excluded from the average scores in these reports.

While the survey did not ask specific age and demographic questions, it did explore frequency of travel, how this may have changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the importance of reliability, frequency and convenience of their buses.

The below are the average scores based on the three regional specific reports.

Key findings

- **Residents in Region 7, 8 and 9 rely heavily on public buses.** 90% of respondents said buses are their primary mode of public transport, while over 71% used the bus as least once a week. This is extremely significant given the impact COVID-19 has had on commuting, with over 70% stating the pandemic had changed their travel habits.
- **Conveniently located bus stops are extremely important to commuters in Regions 7, 8 and 9.** When asked the importance of having a bus stop close to both their home and destination, respondents gave an average importance rating of 88 (1 being not important at all and 100 being extremely important.)
- **A large majority of residents are concerned that privatisation will negatively impact bus services.** 92% agreed that privatisation will lead to routes and services being cut.
- **The community is concerned about the flow-on effects of privatisation.** 84% of respondents agree that bus privatisation will lead to the privatisation of other services.
- **The community has been excluded from the decision-making process.** 91% of respondents feel they have not been consulted or informed about changes to their local buses.

Specific reports for regions 7, 8 and 9 provide a detailed overview and a breakdown of these statistics geographically.



Recommendations

Drawing on this consultation data the Rail, Tram and Bus Union NSW, which runs the Our Transport campaign, has developed the following recommendations for the NSW Government and Transport for NSW.

These are consistent with Transport for NSW's consultation policy and will help the NSW Government identify the routes and stops that people rely on in those regions more effectively than by using Opal data alone.

1. Design and implement a formal consultation process where the public can raise their concerns about bus privatisation and give feedback on possible changes to services.
2. Clearly communicate to the public about how they can engage in the consultation process.
3. Be transparent about the methodology being used to decide which routes and stops will be cut or changed. Particular attention should be paid to the routes identified by constituents in the consultation survey.
4. Make no further changes to routes or stops until the formal consultation process is completed.
5. Remove the exclusion of State Transit Authority from tender applications for the operation of bus regions 7, 8 and 9.
6. Cease the use of Non-Disclosure Agreements for timetable workers to ensure transparency and improve public confidence.