

## Media Release

# NSW Government releases first Bus Industry Taskforce Report

14 August 2023

The NSW Government has given in-principle support to seven key recommendations made by the Bus Industry Taskforce with its First Report into the industry released today.

The Taskforce, chaired by John Lee, was established on 1 May to make recommendations to improve the quality and reliability of services, and to ensure that bus networks across NSW meet community expectations.

The First Report reveals service quality in relation to on-time running and reliability has deteriorated, most notably in recently privatised regions where driver shortages and widespread cancellations are being acutely felt.

The First Report notes driver shortages should have been predicted and better managed and that the lack of basic driver facilities at layover areas is unacceptable.

It also highlights a focus on other transport infrastructure and capital investment has come at the expense of basic bus service requirements, such as digital infrastructure including real-time bus tracking, leading to over 10 per cent of buses not being visible to passengers - widely known as 'ghost buses'.

The 76-page reports also notes a focus on savings during the latest retendering has led to a loss of operators with local knowledge.

The responsibility for bus-related issues was found to be scattered across Transport for NSW, with a lack of focus on working together with operators to deliver the transport needs of their communities.

Work is already well underway to address some of the issues identified, with the NSW Government taking immediate action in June to tackle the driver shortage.

This included slashing red tape to make it cheaper and easier to get a Driver Authority; holding a Bus Industry Summit with more than 100 industry leaders and working with bus companies to improve the reliability of timetables.

A comprehensive bus driver recruitment campaign is underway to help attract new drivers to the industry which is dealing with up to 370 vacant roles across Greater Sydney.

Following the Hunter Valley bus crash tragedy on June 11, the NSW Government urgently expanded the Taskforce's terms of reference with the scope of work to include safety management, seat belt use and regulatory arrangements for buses.

After considering the findings of the First Report, the NSW Minister for Transport Jo Haylen has instructed Transport for NSW to begin developing a plan on how best to implement the remaining recommendations, which include:

- Transport for NSW working more collaboratively with industry to improve service delivery, including by consulting with bus operators, the workforce and unions.
- Establishing a long-term growth funding program to improve bus services to underserved communities around the state.
- Transport for NSW undertaking activities to improve rural and regional contracting, including engaging with industry to develop a modern, fit for purpose contract model.
- Transport for NSW undertaking organisational change to become more focused on delivering services by mode, including the agency creating a division headed by a Coordinator-General accountable for bus, ferry, and light rail, reporting directly to the Secretary.
- Consideration of further measures to improve bus driver recruitment and retention, including that Transport for NSW prepare a proposal for consideration by the Minister to provide a free Opal card to bus drivers and other operational staff.
- Transport for NSW investigating ways to better use technology and training so that staff in the Transport Management Centre, marshals and station staff can better coordinate public transport service disruptions.
- Transport for NSW reconsidering the way it manages replacement and emergency bussing and, within 6 months, establishing a team that has the accountability, authority, and capability to deliver contingent buses for major events, planned replacement services and unplanned incidents.

The Taskforce will provide a second report on 10 October 2023 with a final report and recommendations due by 1 May 2024.

The First report can be found at: <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/industry/independent-reviews/bus-industry-taskforce>

The Taskforce is chaired by a former CEO of the State Transit Authority and multiple private bus companies Mr John Lee. Its members are Matt Threlkeld, Executive Director, BusNSW; David Babineau, Rail Tram and Bus Union; Mick Pieri, Transport Workers Union; Joanna Quilty, CEO of NSW Council of Social Services; Darriea Turley, Local Government NSW; and Darren Lane, an independent safety expert.

### **Quotes attributable to NSW Minister for Transport Jo Haylen:**

“The Taskforce report is clear that on-time running and reliability has deteriorated over recent years and passengers expect and demand a better service.

“We promised the people of NSW we would take decisive action to help deliver better bus services for our communities and this Bus Industry Taskforce First Report provides a clear roadmap on what we need to do.

“We want better contract and performance management, better service planning and a thriving industry that will attract new bus drivers – ultimately this will give the hundreds of thousands of people who rely on our buses the service they deserve.”

### **Quotes attributable to Bus Industry Taskforce Chair John Lee:**

“The Taskforce clearly sets out where the problems are with the running of bus services, we have identified why this occurred and laid out our first set of recommendations to fix this mess.

“I was disappointed to learn that only 2% of the capital budget is allocated to buses when they move over 40% of public transport passengers.

“To take matter worse the former Government failed to reinvest the millions of dollars made from privatising Sydney Buses back into vital services, especially in underserved areas.

“There’s an opportunity to deliver some quick wins and turn things around. Basic facilities for drivers have been neglected and just some small improvements will make a big difference for this essential workforce and help attract new drivers into the system.

“People within Transport for NSW understand the challenge but struggle with an organisational structure that makes it hard to know who is accountable for improving services for passengers. They need a bus champion who can take responsibility for getting things back on track.

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