



## Roads Act 1993 Issues Paper

### Submission by BusNSW – April 2025

#### Introduction

BusNSW is the peak body for the NSW bus and coach industry. Our members provide essential services and are a key interface with the travelling public. BusNSW's mission is to foster the efficient and sustainable growth of public transport in NSW, and to promote the benefits of bus and coach travel.

BusNSW members provide bus services under Transport for NSW contracts in Sydney metropolitan and outer-metropolitan areas, and in NSW rural and regional areas. They also provide "non-contracted" services in the Long Distance, Tourist and Charter (LDTTC) sector.

Buses continue to be the most widely used mode of public transport in NSW, carrying over 40 per cent of all public transport passengers. However, they receive only around 15 per cent of the NSW Government's expenditure on operating and maintenance costs, and are allocated just 2.6 per cent of Transport for NSW's capital investment.

BusNSW welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Review of the *Roads Act 1993*. Bus and coach services play a vital role in NSW's transport network, supporting mobility, regional connectivity, tourism, and economic growth. This includes contracted regular passenger and school services, as well as non-contracted long-distance, tourist, and charter services.

As highlighted by the recent NSW Bus Industry Taskforce, many areas of Sydney are currently transport disadvantaged, with bus services the sole public transport option. Despite this, bus services in many of these areas are infrequent, and service coverage is poor. The situation is even more pronounced in rural and regional NSW. According to the Bus Industry Taskforce, 70 per cent of regional cities, regional centres, and towns in regional NSW have a 'very high' or 'high' need for improved public transport services. This is based on an index assessing transport supply, need, and socio-economic factors. Additionally, only 34 per cent of towns and centres have a daily connection to their nearest regional centre.

Long distance, tourist and charter services are often the forgotten mode in the public transport mix. However, these services play a crucial role in supporting tourism and stimulating regional economic development. In Regional NSW, long-distance coach travel and tours deliver \$292 million to the local economy, \$212 million from domestic visitors and \$80 million from international tourists<sup>1</sup>. As outlined in the Bus Taskforce's Second Report, coach travel provides an essential service across Regional NSW, particularly in connecting regional cities and centres. They also play a vital role in social inclusion by facilitating travel for schools, social groups, sporting teams and seniors.

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<sup>1</sup> Tourism Research Australia for year ending December 2023

Despite this, access decisions by road managers fail to take the public transport needs of the community into account and instead treat buses and coaches simply as “heavy vehicles” when determining road usage.

The review of the Roads Act and its associated decision-making processes therefore provides an opportunity to positively impact the operational viability and efficiency of bus and coach services across NSW. BusNSW’s submission is framed in the context of the four objectives of the Review.

## **1. Enable More Contemporary Uses for Roads and Streets**

While BusNSW supports modernising roads and streets to allow for greater community and place-making uses, it is essential that the importance of bus and coach services, both contracted and non-contracted, is prioritised in this evolving environment.

Currently, buses and coaches are lumped with trucks as “heavy vehicles” when road use is considered. This approach is based on a historical distinction between “traffic” and “people” within the road planning focus.

The need to balance “place” with “movement” in TfNSW’s *Movement and Place framework* is acknowledged. However, as the *Roads Act Issues Paper* points out, places where people gather to socialise, work, shop or access essential services need to be serviced by public transport. In that sense, buses facilitate both place and movement.

Public transport, including buses and coaches, connect people to essential services such as medical, employment, education and retail, enabling economic participation and social inclusion, and contributing to vibrant, sustainable communities. They directly align with the government’s Movement and Place framework.

Key Recommendations:

- Ensure that road and street designs incorporate bus and coach vehicle dimensions, including length, width, and mass, to avoid unintended restrictions on vehicle access. There are examples where roads have been built in new communities that are too narrow for buses, and public transport is therefore curtailed for those communities.<sup>2</sup> Public transport is a critical service that needs to be incorporated into road design and approval decisions. A cohesive road use plan is the only way to avoid the mistakes of the past. Some of the key features of this plan should be a road and footpath network that allows residents to be within 400 metres of a bus route.
- Protect and prioritise key bus corridors, particularly in town centres and high streets where outdoor dining, public events, or traffic calming measures are proposed, ensuring no adverse impact on bus movements, timetables, or passenger accessibility.
- Incorporate provisions that recognise the unique needs of tourist and charter coaches, including designated coach parking, drop-off, and layover areas with amenities, especially in areas with high tourism activity.
- Promote integration between streetscape upgrades (e.g., footpath widening, cycleways) and public transport requirements, ensuring clear passage and appropriate turning paths for buses.

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<sup>2</sup> [Glenmore Park development](#)

## 2. Enable Faster Decision Making

Current decision-making processes for bus operators, particularly in relation to road access approvals and oversize vehicle permits, are slow, fragmented, and inconsistent across local road authorities. Local councils are responsible for 89 percent of the NSW road network, yet access decisions from councils can be inconsistent, delayed or entirely absent. BusNSW, with the assistance of the NHVR, has sought to expand the Controlled Access Bus Network in NSW through the National Class 2 Bus Authorisation Notice 2024 (No.1). However, delays and a lack of responses from some NSW councils have presented significant challenges to this process.

As highlighted by the *Roads Act Issues Paper*, one of the reasons behind this is the focus on general road management and construction powers in the *Roads Act*. This needs to change and public transport must be considered as part of road managers' decision-making processes. Simple public transport access decisions should be prioritised, particularly where the introduction of a new bus route requires approval from the relevant road manager.

While it is acknowledged that local government sometimes lack the resources and expertise for expedited access decisions, the bus industry and the communities it serves need a path around the current impasse.

Key Recommendations:

- Simplify and streamline decision-making frameworks, particularly for local (council controlled) roads used for contracted and non-contracted bus and coach services.
- Implement clear delegation and consultation protocols between TfNSW and councils, especially where local council decisions have implications for contracted school and passenger services.
- Require Road Managers (such as local councils) to consult with TfNSW when making decisions about roads and public transport.
- Establish a process where Road Managers must provide a decision on access within a prescribed timeframe, and a reason for any access refusal.
- Deem any refusal to provide a decision on access within a reasonable timeframe as a de facto approval.
- Establish a transparent and efficient process for resolving disputes regarding road access for buses and coaches.
- Provide greater use of standing delegations to councils for routine matters (as highlighted in the Bus Industry Taskforce recommendations (Refer to Chapter 6 of the [Second Taskforce Report](#)), balanced with state-level oversight to ensure bus priority and consistency across jurisdictions.

## 3. Create an Easier-to-Use Statute that Is Adaptable and Responsive to the Future

The current Roads Act lacks clarity in acknowledging modern public transport priorities and fails to accommodate evolving vehicle technologies, including larger and more sustainable buses (electric/hydrogen-powered, high-capacity vehicles).

New road developments should also be capable of accommodating zero emission buses, which tend to be heavier than diesel buses, as well as higher-productivity vehicles such as double deckers, articulated buses and other Controlled Access Buses (over 12.5 metres).

Key Recommendations:

- Explicitly reference public transport, including bus and coach services, in the objectives and key provisions of the Act to ensure alignment with government sustainability and mobility objectives.
- Clarify provisions around “traffic” to ensure multi-modal transport, particularly public transport, is properly considered in all road management and planning decisions.
- Ensure flexibility to accommodate emerging bus technologies, including electric and alternative fuel buses, which may have different vehicle characteristics (mass, turning radius).
- Provide guidelines for uniform vehicle access limits (length, width, mass) that reflect the practical needs of the modern bus fleet, avoiding unnecessary variations or limitations at a local level.

#### **4. Overcome Operating Challenges for Roads Authorities**

BusNSW recognises the administrative burden faced by local councils, particularly in regional areas. However, inconsistent management of access for buses and coaches, especially regarding vehicle length and mass restrictions, leads to inefficiencies and increased operating costs.

Key Recommendations:

- Develop a consistent, state-wide framework for assessing and approving road access for standard and higher-capacity buses, removing local variations in vehicle access rules where safety and infrastructure permit.
- Introduce shared digital systems between TfNSW/NHVR and local councils that allow real-time communication and streamlined permit approvals for events, detours, or temporary road changes affecting bus services.
- Provide councils with training and resources to better understand the operational needs of bus and coach operators, including specific guidance on issues such as bridge mass limits, turning bays, and safe stopping areas as per the Bus Industry Taskforce Recommendations (Refer to Chapter 6 of the [Second Taskforce Report](#)).

#### **Conclusion**

BusNSW supports a modernised Roads Act that better reflects the critical role of bus and coach services in NSW’s transport network. As the most widely used mode of public transport, buses must be properly recognised in road planning, access decisions, and infrastructure design. The current approach, treating buses and coaches as generic heavy vehicles, undermines service delivery, particularly in areas of high transport disadvantage.

This review presents an opportunity to embed public transport priorities in decision-making processes, streamline access approvals, and support the safe and efficient operation of evolving bus fleets across both contracted and non-contracted services. By implementing the recommendations in this submission, TfNSW can help ensure that the Roads Act facilitates improved mobility, regional connectivity, and a more sustainable, inclusive transport system.

BusNSW looks forward to engaging further as the Review progresses. In the interim, should you wish to discuss this submission, please contact BusNSW on (02) 8839 9500 or via [info@busnsw.com.au](mailto:info@busnsw.com.au)