

MINUTES COMMUNITY FORUM

Tackling Transport – Bus Review

Woollahra Council Chambers, Committee Room – 6pm Thursday 24 July 2008

Present:

Councillors

Mayor Clr Geoff Rundle
Clr Christopher Dawson
Clr John Comino (in audience)

Staff

Kylie Walshe – Director of Community Services
Lorna Oliver – Traffic and Transport Planner
Kirstin Leslie – Building and Compliance Administration Officer

Proceedings:

- 6.05pm Welcome by Clr Geoff Rundle – Mayor
Apologies as cannot stay due to prior engagement
- 6.09pm Ed Osiowy – Senior Planner (Sydney Buses) – Corporate, STA
Christine McDavert – Community Consultation Officer – Corporate, STA

- Sydney Buses operates under a 7 year contract from the Ministry of Transport.
- Reviews of bus service network required under this contract.
- Also undertake regular annual reviews, one of which being a network review.
- Started the network review a few months ago, working with MOT identifying what areas of opportunities and need within the eastern region – looking at bus patronage (boardings), 131500 Your Say line, submissions from Councils, letters received and letters from the public. Also looking at the state plan, the sub regional and metro strategies developed through the Dept. of Planning as well as the urban transport statement.
- Network review is about the network rather than the levels of service although they are related.
- Current review – are the streets, roads and corridors that we are running along the most effective for serving the public and the most efficient for operating our services.
- STA is dependant on MOT for funding.
- Sydney metro region as a whole is experiencing patronage growth of 3% – 4% across the STA area.
- 45% growth in patronage over our major corridors.
- Review not about - levels of service, frequency or loadings on the buses. We keep an eye on that constantly.
(puts up ppt map)
- Most of network in eastern suburbs is well developed, all the major corridors are covered, no alternative routes into city.
- Most of feedback we get from the community is bus reliability and bus capacity.

- After going through the review and in consultation with MOT we've come up with a set of changes to bus routes –
 - * Route 311 – issue is service reliability mainly due to traffic congestion. Main change is taking the bus off Oxford and William St.
 - * Route 301 – from East Gardens Westfields to the City. Re-number as 344, will go along Elizabeth St. Will start from near Kingsford. Will work with the 343 to provide greater frequency.
 - * Route 302 – runs from Kingsford to the City. Re-number 341. Will start from East Gardens Shopping Centre. To more effectively service the Green Square / Victoria Park area.
 - * Route 303 – from Sans Souci to the City via UNSW. Re-number 342. MOT propose to redirect away from the City to Bondi Junction. MOT want to create a new strategic bus corridor from Bondi Junction to Hurstville, this forms the first part. To more effectively service the Green Square / Victoria Park area.
 - * Route 357 – runs from Bondi Junction to Eastlakes mainly with extension of some trips to Sydenham Station. The only change we're proposing to this route is a diversion to Randwick. Instead of coming straight down into the shops we're proposing a diversion along Stanley St and King St. The reason for this is to better serve some schools and the big retirement home and the TAFE college up here. So the only change to route 357 is the diversion along Stanley and King Sts then back down Alison back down into Randwick Shops. There is another small change in the route around here... I think we're taking ??? instead of Rainbow.
 - * Route 359 – is to be discontinued. Basically it follows the same route as the 357 up until Barker St at the other side of the hospital. Route 359 continues down Avoca St and down Anzac Pde Maroubra, past Maroubra Junction to East Gardens Shopping Centre. Patronage on this route has been low for quite a while and because a substantial portion of that route is covered by the 357. We are proposing to discontinue the 359. Residents in the area have other options to get to East Gardens or Bondi Junction by the 400 on Anzac Pde. We feel that the continued operation of the 359 is no longer justified.
 - * Route X03 – cancellation of this route. Runs from Sans Souci to the city via Southern Cross Dr, that's only a small number of trips per day and not much is happening with that particular service.
 - * Route X43 – which runs through the Kingsford area up through this area as well (pointing to map) and converting them to regular 343s to give people more chance to get on to address the capacity issues on the 343 corridor as well.
- I think that pretty much covers the changes. Again I'd like to just say that what we're trying to do with these route changes is we're trying to think of is there a better way of servicing the area by changing the relationship of the routes and changing the streets that they use to try and make services more reliable and more direct while also trying to maintain coverage as well. As I said previously most of the complaints that come through to State Transit are about people not being able to get on a bus because it's too full or otherwise it's unreliable. These are issues that we are always trying to tackle by putting on extra buses and reviewing our timetables and

things but this proposal tries to address some of those problems on a route basis rather than just a level of service basis so that's pretty much what we are putting up to the public and what we're asking the public to comment on. This is not set in concrete, we're not fixed on any of these ideas at this time we're waiting for feedback from the community before we go ahead with these changes.

Changes to bus routes

Resident – You're renaming two routes which have changed to 341 and yet this publication says there is a route 341, no other changes to this route other than it being renamed 346. If you already have a route that exists then why would you bother renaming that and then using the old number for the new route for somewhere else, I really find that confusing.

Ed – Sydney Buses – the current route 341 is a little shopping service that runs, I think it's 4 trips a day and it runs from Kingsford along Rainbow St as far as Avoca and back. That's the current 341 it's only 4 trips a day. The current 342 is a small shopping service that runs down to Daceyville and again it only has 4 trips per day. What we wanted to do is create a more logical sequence of route numbers along these corridors and because these are very small with low patronage routes we thought that creating a more logical sequence of bus routes coming out of the city would make it easier to understand the network and that's the reason we have changed the route numbers around. Does that make sense? So what we're going to see is (pointing to map) this one going to be renumbered 346 and this little one here is going to be renumbered 347 and the people on these routes will have no change to their service other than the change in the route number.

Representative – Waverley Council – Does that mean they're going to add more buses on the 400?

Ed – Sydney Buses – are no, if patronage picks up we'll certainly put more buses on the 400. What we will do though is because the 357 and the 359 follow largely the same route we will be putting some extra services on the 357 to maintain an appropriate frequency along that corridor. So we're proposing to put extra trips on the 357 to make sure that area continues to be served properly.

Question Time – announced by Clr Dawson

Representative – Waverley Council – I don't see how the changes proposed are going to respond to the increase in patronage that you were indicating before. Redirecting some lines, changing some numbers but not actually increasing the frequency of buses or it seems to have some significant number of buses on the network, it seems to me it's a saving exercise more than anything else and I'm quite concerned about that. The other issue is, I'm from Waverley Council and a lot of the complaints we have is a lot of the buses are not accessible to people with prams or disable people, a lot of the fleet is very old, been used more than 20 years now and it causes a lot of pollution as well. How are you going to respond to that? What are your plans for the future?

Ed – Sydney Buses – The first question, in terms of increasing frequencies, this proposal tries to find better streets to use or more direct more reliable streets to use so that the network is a bit more robust when there's lots of traffic. There are instances for example here (points to map) where we're consolidating two routes onto one street the idea is to increase the frequency along this corridor here. A lot of the bus routes around Sydney are very spread out and by consolidating onto faster more direct corridors we'll be able to provide a higher frequency more reliable service.

That's one of the ideas behind trying to consolidate routes onto major roads instead of one route on one street and another route a few streets down if you bring them together you can get higher frequency on a common road. Some people may have to walk further to catch a bus to do that but we think that the service on the common road will be much better and be able to attract more passengers to the buses. In terms of frequencies, we're basically at this stage we're constrained in our funding and the amount of kilometres we can run by the Ministry of Transport so that the current frequencies that we have will continue under these changes and what happens is increased patronage for the MOT is the trigger for more kilometres coming out of the government allowing us to run more frequent services.

Representative – Waverley Council – What do you provide first? You have to provide the infrastructure to increase patronage, that's the logical thing to do.

Ed – Sydney Buses – I've got to say, State Transit Sydney Buses don't have the resources to go out and supply side. We're desperately trying to keep up with demand on our major corridors into the city and whenever we're trying to do that it leaves us very little scope to try and provide new links or any major changes to the network. So the answer to your question is we're constrained in terms of our funding, this is one way where we think we might be able to make some improvements without having to rely on funding, maybe there's a better way of arranging our bus routes where we can provide a better service without it costing the government more money and this is something we're trying to do. (Asks the second part of the question again). We have a program, all new buses that we purchase are accessible and we're progressively increasing the proportion of accessible buses in our fleet. Because we are under a lot of strain in terms of meeting demand we have to keep older buses on the road longer so buses that overseas would have been retired years ago we're still running because we don't have enough buses to meet the demand during peak hours we have no spare buses at all.

Representative – Waverley Council – How many of the old buses will be replaced with new buses for next year, the following year? Do you have any numbers on that?

Ed – Sydney Buses – No I can't I didn't have a look at our fleet statistics before coming here tonight. But certainly State Transit compared to any other private bus operator we certainly have a much higher proportion of low floor accessible buses than any bus company in Sydney and we're certainly striving to increase that proportion so that in time it will be 100%. I don't know how many years that's going to be but it's certainly the aim and I think one of the reasons why we can't renew our fleet... sorry what I meant to say is, one of the main reasons you're seeing a lot of old buses continue to run on our streets is that because we can't retire them, we just keep needing them and needing them but in time the fleet will be totally renewed.

Representative – Rose Bay Residents Association *It's not really a question. I'm sorry there are not so many people here tonight, our local paper changed hands and there are very few stories, they're full of ads so people don't read them any longer so there's not that publicity. I put a few ads round the other day but that's the reason because last time it was full.*

Representative – Rose Bay Residents Association – I again refer to the 359 as I did last year. Where the bus people were very interested in the 359 because they thought there would be a fewer bus drivers if we could have longer routes and we really thought they were going to put it on because they were very interested but anyway that bus went from Rose Bay to Bondi Junction, Randwick (near Prince of Wales Hospital), University of NSW and Pagewood. We were told it ran for 50 years and I worked at the university and I used it for about 20 years or so, more than that and suddenly about 15 years ago it was taken off. It took me so long from the UNSW to get to Rose Bay I got a taxi, I spent all that money on a taxi because I've got a family, it took me two

hours to get home because there weren't suitable buses. Since then I've noticed today that more and more people are going to university and with the expense of petrol and many older people in Watsons Bay, Vaucluse and Rose Bay this bus would be full today. It started from Rose Bay years ago but it's now suggested to start from Watsons Bay, Vaucluse, Rose Bay particularly past Elanora St, Manion Ave, Kent Rd because that area is full of older people and many mothers with children. Those people in that area who had the 359 bus then the 321 for many years haven't got a bus that will take them to the hospital or the university so those people in those areas need three buses, the old people the children, three buses to either get to St Vincents of the Prince of Wales Hospital. I think that is a disaster waiting to happen. Three buses, we told them that last year and they were so interested in this bus. A bus must past Kent Rd, Elanora St which is off Manion Ave because it's full of old people and young people with babies. Three buses they need to get to those hospitals. They can't go to Edgecliff because there are only steps and a lot of old people and mothers with babies can't get up the steps. They can't take prams up the steps with their babies so they can't use Edgecliff. We ask again that the 359 that ran for 50 years to come back but this time start from Watsons Bay, Vaucluse, Rose Bay, Bondi Junction, Randwick then past the UNSW and then today it would go onto East Gardens. The important areas are that so many young people are going to university and the hospital is so important and it's really urgent that we get that bus back and last year they said 'what a good idea, we won't need so many bus drivers, it will all that way and take everybody there'.

We've also requested last year the 200 bus a couple of times per day into the North Shore. The 200 from Edgecliff so that families and friends can visit their friends on the weekends. We also had a bus that went to Bondi Beach that we lost a few years ago so our young people are getting in their cars so we have gridlock because we haven't got the buses we use cars everywhere and with this lack of transport we have cars clogging the road and the carbon dioxide ruining the environment with the government desperately trying to reduce it. It's ludicrous that we haven't got this system.

Ed – Sydney Buses – I understand these links existed in the past and my understanding is they were withdrawn years ago due to very low patronage. In terms of looking at this area and reviewing what areas needed to be linked to others I've got to say that the Watsons Bay, Rose Bay, Bondi Junction, Randwick link hasn't come up in terms of our research about potential routes that would generate a lot of people. The feedback from last year's forum has been considered and we've had a look at it but from State Transit's point of view we still don't believe that there would be sufficient level of patronage to justify a route like that. There is opportunity to get from Rose Bay and Watsons Bay through to Bondi Junction and you do need to change buses and that is inconvenient getting on and off buses and waiting for the change. Also as I was saying previously we are struggling to handle our peak periods and in terms of directing resources towards links where we're not quite sure are really going to work out whether or not the services are going to be feasible financially we're not prepared to put those sorts of links forward at the present time. Things are changing, Sydney is changing, demand patterns are changing and oil prices and development and the way people travel are changing and that's true. I've just got to say at this time we didn't consider those links to be feasible as part of this review but certainly we will keep an eye on the way people are travelling and the patterns and whether or not in the future they might be a feasible addition to the network but from State Transit's point of view we don't think it's feasible at this time.

Christine – Sydney Buses – what we also have at State Transit where we do keep abreast of what the community needs, we have the 131 500 number which is available to everyone. It's a number that when people call they actually get a case number and everything that people say over that phone call is recorded and a case is raised. If someone rang or a number of people rang STA to complain about services, lack of services, problems with access or contacted MOT and it was a

recurring problem we would know about it. The Satisfy system as we call it actually flags recurring issues for us and the depot managers and the regional managers keep track of what the changing requests are from the community. In developing this proposal there hasn't been requests from the community or recurring desires expressed by the community that we need buses from this area never the less if that changed and we started to get a number of people requesting services obviously we would have to revisit it but at the moment whilst we've taken on board what you've said tonight we haven't got an indication in our call back services to the STA that there are a lot of people looking for this service, that could change.

Representative – Rose Bay Residents Association – the reason being that because the service has been so bad everybody is using cars and we gridlock everything.

Christine – Sydney Buses – Yes and I do accept what you are saying but we've also when you were mentioning about university students, one of the things when young people get to university and they start to look around for public transport we hear about that very quickly and there hasn't been a desire line expressed to the STA never the less it doesn't mean it won't change and perhaps we will start to get young people asking us where are the buses but it's not something we are conscious of at the moment.

Vaucluse Resident – I'd like to raise a couple of points. First of all I believe it is very important for the council to express it's deep concern that the MOT is not represented here tonight. To be fair to our friends from State Transit they're not the ones that control the money and are boxed in by a whole lot of issues that they have no control over and the people who we're complaining about or the issues we're complaining about need answers from the MOT and they're not here. I think council should raise this issue, if it's good enough for us to come here to a public forum, it's good enough for a ministry to be represented as well it doesn't require one person, they must have more than one person available so I think council should raise that.

The other issue I would like to look at is Bondi Junction interchange, I notice that they are going to have more buses running to this interchange. Bondi Junction interchange at the moment is a disgrace and can't carry the number of passengers that are going through there as it is. If you want to catch a bus to Bondi Junction from anywhere in the eastern suburbs this side of the eastern suburbs and interchange to go down Oxford St, you stand out in the street outside the interchange in the cold and the wet waiting for a bus and we're talking about now putting in more cross country buses and I wonder how you can do it and guarantee a reasonable service.

I'd also like to take issue with the fact that we're talking about running the 301 or the 303 along the same route as the 400. The 400 is already very well known as an appalling bus in terms of it's reliability, it's a banana service, you get 4 or 5 at once, nothing for 30 minutes and you find that you can't get to the UNSW from Bondi Junction in any reasonable time with any certainty because the 400 is so unreliable and you are going to put more buses into the same corridor which is already not working.

Another interesting that we need to look at too is to look at the question of, let's talk about research, I wonder if anyone from Sydney Buses has gone down to Rose Bay and seen the number of cars that are parked around the Rose Bay Ferry Wharf because there's a huge demand for parking in that area and it's 2, 3, 400 metres from the wharf people are parking. It raises the question why isn't there a bus running down to the ferry to meet it and have an interchange there. A bus that did that wouldn't have to go through the city and be caught in the gridlock on William St and New South Head Rd, it could do two or three trips to the ferry wharf in the time it would take one trip into the city. So I think it's an issue as well.

I'd just like to finish up, 131 500 was raised and it made me think back to about two years ago when I was standing at Edgecliff Station. I was very cold, very wet and very cheesed off because it was late and the 324 buses kept going past full. Finally another turned up and I asked the driver if he could call to get more buses and he said he'd call the police. I was calm, not causing any problems and he reacted badly.

Ed – Sydney Buses – Bondi Interchange will need to be looked at. We don't know why people are parking at Rose Bay Ferry Wharf.

Lorna – Woollahra Council – Ed we did surveys in 2006 on passengers catching the ferry from Rose Bay, we can give you a copy if you like.

Christine – Sydney Buses – 131 500 is used to monitor any issues with buses, drivers etc etc. This line is for the public to give us feedback. You should have called the line regarding this driver.

Resident – regarding the 311, this is a very densely populated area and you're thinking of cutting out the service to this Elizabeth Bay area. A lot of people are very dependant upon this service.

Ed – Sydney Buses – we thought one solution would be to change the 311 route.

Representative– Waverley Council – what about a bus lane?

Resident – have you thought about smaller buses?

Ed – Sydney Buses – smaller buses are a problem for State Transit. Once it's finished it's 311 route it couldn't be used for anything else. Mini buses cost a lot to operate but don't carry many people. It's not to say it won't be a case for mini buses, maybe in the future.

Resident – Rose Bay Wharf - ferries only go to Rose Bay in peak time, not to Watsons Bay. We then miss the 324 home to Watsons Bay and have to wait 30 minutes for another bus. Also just a thank you for getting the bus drivers to not leave if they are a few minutes early.

Clr John Comino – bus bunching is a problem. We need to ensure that they are spaced properly. Buses don't because they are full then we get all these ½ full or near empty buses. The Ministry of Transport coordinates buses, ferry and trains.

Ed – Sydney Buses – we've check bus bunching and we're trying to improve the timetable which was part of this review along with checking the running of the roads. Traffic is a major cause of bus bunching.

Resident – I live in Vaucluse and tried to use the bus. On this day the 325 came past 5 minutes early, I found out from talking to someone at the bus stop. How can they leave early? Why do they run late from Watsons Bay? How is this possible? Then there is the inconsistency of their driving, some are great but others drive like Fangio. Also, there are far too many cars coming out of Vaucluse.

Ed – Sydney Buses – we are trying to improve driver behaviour, it takes time and patience. Regarding late buses from Watsons Bay, it could be that it has come off it's last run late and therefore leaves Watsons Bay late. We do have stop points if the driver is running too early for the timetable.

Ed – Sydney Buses –..... one of those complaints or comments get's a case number as is referred back to that depot and more often or not a complaint can be traced back to a driver so there is recourse through that system to get any particular driver issues resolved. So I guess if there are particular issues about the way some drivers operate their buses it is worthwhile if you'd like to refer those comments through 131 500. You do need to make a detailed response in order for that particular problem to be tracked down but it is worthwhile giving that feedback and making those comments in the interest of increasingly improving our level of service to the public.

Christine – Sydney Buses – we can identify repeat offenders and that's one of the things that we are constantly monitoring and that all comes through with public participation, getting back to us about poor service.

Resident – this is actually a comment, it's actually true about 131 500 if you do give feedback especially on the website it's hard to give a compliment on the website because you have to find the drop down menu but they do actually track it back if you can get the driver's number. I've noticed that a lot of drivers, bad one's, don't put their number up. One good thing about this is that I originally wrote in 2001 about the TAFE college only having one bus that serviced it directly from Bondi Junction which I'm glad to see hasn't been removed but now actually having a bus going down King St, I understand from your comment that's it probably retirement home that caused it to happen, but that's probably an asset so more TAFE students can get direct from Bondi Junction to their TAFE rather than rely on the one bus that goes fairly infrequently at the moment.

Ed – Sydney Buses – thanks we've noted that.

Christine – Sydney Buses – I just want to respond to your comment about the bus going down King St, one of the things that we need to keep in mind with this proposal is that it's exactly that, a proposal and whilst there was a request to the minister about putting the bus down King St to service a lot of the elderly that are in the retirement home, with regard to the feedback coming through from the community at them moment, there is a flip side to that coin and a lot of the community in that area are saying they don't want a bus down King St so that's the sort of thing that we actually as the STA have to weigh up very carefully with your comments that come back to us. At the moment whilst that's a plus there are a lot of residents in that area so it's always a very fine thing to balance with buses and where they run and who gets them.

Representative – Rose Bay Residents Association – proposing late Friday and Saturday night ferries.

Ed – Sydney Buses – advised Maureen that we're not part of STA anymore.

Resident – what sort of market research can you possibly do on bus routes? The bus route from Rose Bay... what would determine in your opinion that there probably insufficient demand and how you made that determination? How can you market research the possibilities of a new bus route without actually experimenting with putting the service on?

Ed – Sydney Buses – there is journey to work data and sensis data about where people live and where they work and what forms of transport they use and we can analyse that sort of data to see where the strong origin and destinations are in terms of strong links, strong desire lines between origins and destinations. I don't doubt that there would be some demand to Rose Bay Wharf, the thing is that we aren't aware of a sufficient level that would be financially viable for us to do so. Certainly there is demand but we're not getting a sense that there is enough that would make putting on a whole new route worth it at this stage but that may change in the future. There are

other things, you can do surveys and things like that. Part of this process has been learning about the sorts of links that people are talking about and getting feedback from the community is also a good indicator of where people are wanting to travel to and from.

Representative – Waverley Council – in Waverley Council we founded a bus going from Coogee to Bondi Beach on a trial period and it proved itself to be viable and we're now looking into this. I'm a strong believer that the only way you can find out is starting it on a trial period and seeing what the demand is after all we are living in a changing environment, petrol prices going up so the demand can be still there the only way you can find out is operate it and see what the demand is on a trial basis.

Ed – Sydney Buses – if we get a strong enough indication of a strong community desire to travel along a certain route or direction and if it looks like a trial might be feasible, if it's something we might like to try, it depends on all the bits coming together in terms of a community desire, it's demonstrated through surveys and research. What we want is a guaranteed patronage, at least a good chance of patronage and if we could be sure of this we might consider putting on a trial for six months or so, we've done that in other locations, see how the trial goes, if it's successful it might turn into a permanent route, if not we can pull it back and try something else. At least from our position at STA we're not getting an indication that a Rose Bay link at this time would be very feasible but if there's other data or community wishes that tell us something different well then we would like to get that feedback.

7.25 pm Cllr Dawson – thanks speakers and closes the meeting.