

Public outrage at bus privatisation

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The privatisation of public services is an issue close to the hearts of public school teachers.

The privatisation of public bus services in Newcastle serves as a lesson as to why Federation remains resolute and antagonistic towards the concept.

The network is now in the hands of private operator Keolis Downer and the changes to bus routes have left many people literally stranded. Despite assertions from the private provider that patronage is up, an independent study suggests otherwise.

The privatisation of bus services has been, in a word, disastrous. For public schools, it has meant issues for students travelling to and from school and there have been prevalent stories in the local press of students with disabilities, in particular, no longer being able to travel to school.

The primary reason is that service routes have been radically revamped but not to the advantage of commuters, and more aimed at increasing profit margins for the new private providers.

A large protest, one of many recent actions, was held on 18 March, in front of the local bus depot. Speakers included a number of local state Labor MPs and a representative from the union representing bus drivers, the Rail Tram and Bus Union.

State Opposition MP Jodi McKay said Transport Minister Andrew Constance does not listen to the public's concerns. Mr Constance has made some references to changing the bus routes but apparently not in the short term.

A debate in State Parliament is scheduled for 12 April after more than 10,000 community members signed a petition. A rally will be held in Macquarie Street, Sydney at 4pm to coincide with the debate.

