

Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Submission re: PETITION #94 – Bus Route #15

To: The Hon. Simon O'Brien MLC, Chair
Hon. Members of the Committee

21 Sep. '15

Thankyou for your acknowledgement letter, with the invitation and opportunity to make these submissions in support of petition #94 regarding the alteration of bus route #15. Please note that I have not approached the Parl. Commissioner for Administrative Investigations (Ombudsman) with regard to an investigation into this matter. However, both individual and group complaints have been lodged at the Equal Opportunity Commission with reference to the disability aspects. A 96 page report – covering the major issues – was presented to the EOC, a copy of which is available should the Committee require such or in the event that the SCEPA initiates an investigation into this matter. Should the Committee require oral evidence, I am also happy and available to provide it.

The Seniors AND Disabled Bus Action Group (which I convene/represent) requests that the SCEPA inquires and reports into the matters raised both in the petition and this submission, and, if possible, recommends and/or takes action to remedy the inequitable situation that exists in this matter. The following is tendered to assist the Committee in this regard and is proffered in good faith.

Brief History

Bus route #15 has serviced well the communities of Mount Hawthorn and Glendalough for decades. The only major change to the route occurred due to the construction of the Mitchell Freeway (in the 1970's), which resulted in the route being diverted from the now split Leeder Street to Powis Street, terminating in Leeder St, near the Little Sisters of the Poor nursing home. The other major event to impact on the #15 route, was the opening of the Glenalough train station in 1992, which resulted in bus patronage declining over time as passengers used the train in preference to the bus.

The issues – about the recent route #15 changes – are several in number:

1. No evidence of need for change.

The PTA simply decided that a change – a “streamlining” – was to be undertaken, ostensibly to address the purported lower patronage on the now-deleted parts of this route. SANDBAG research shows that #15 bus patronage was equal on the deleted and kept parts. The Urban Development Institute of Australia's report, “*Public Transport's Revival Has A Long Way To Go*”, shows that while public transport usage has increased in Perth, per capita usage is relatively low and static (this is typical throughout Australia – *please see graphs at the end*).

Public transport is currently far from being a profit-making exercise – it is not a business, but a public service. Unnecessary costs are to be avoided, of course, which ironically makes the PTA's decisions and actions concerning the #15 route a patent waste of taxpayers money.

2. Lack of proper local community consultation.

The PTA provided a consultation period of effectively only one week, and it advertised in local newspapers to ostensibly fulfil its notification obligations to the local community, yet it argued that it must accept feedback from the whole community, to cater for all bus users. The PTA then limited the options proffered to two predetermined routes (slight variations), which effectively allowed it to channel public opinion and claim it had “consulted” them.

PTA claims that it would not proceed against a 50% community objection were shown to be untrue with the #15 bus route. SANDBAG surveyed residents living on the #15 route (only 15% were aware of the change): of 255 public transport users, 58% objected to the changes

and only 12% were in favour. Also, bus patrons living on the unchanged parts of the route objected to the changes as well. Many Harborne St residents were only in favour of the #15 change as it gave two extra bus stop pairs on Harborne St, which could have been installed when the #85 bus route was implemented along Harborne into the train station, 2 years ago.

3. This action is contrary to the PTA customer service charter.

The PTA's customer service charter states that "The PTA will plan and review passenger transport services in consultation with the community to get the best results." That is far from true in this case – SANDBAG's experience is that: the consultation was loaded; and the PTA staff have been misleading, obfuscatory, and determined to implement the plan that THEY wanted implemented, which they have bent over backwards to achieve and defend.

The government paid for a Canadian expert to visit Perth who told PTA officials that public transport passengers should be "treated like people not like objects" and planners should not be planning for "speed and price". Disabled (and, indeed, all) bus users require a stable, proximate, reliable bus service to allow them true travel options and to live their lives well .

4. Disregard by the PTA for the impact to seniors, the disabled and schoolchildren.

People try to plan their lives over long periods. Those who have reached their senior years (and paid decades of taxes), those who are disabled, and those with families, often plan their lived many years (or even decades) in advance; this allows them a measure of certainty. Governments tend to be no different, especially in the areas of public housing and transport.

Transperth's drastic change to the #15 produced an immediate impediment to those of the most vulnerable in our community – those who require assistance for their mobility. Instead of easing their burden, Transperth has added to it in immeasurable ways, ultimately denying some of these afflicted people the reliable public transport which had existed for decades. Schoolchildren who live near the deleted sections must now tackle main roads, putting their safety at risk. While the addition of the #14 bus was welcome, it was a knee-jerk reaction to high community dissatisfaction (as evidenced by petition #94) and a token, temporary, face-saving measure by both the PTA and the Minister for Transport (a political manoeuvre).

5. Unnecessary disruption of the amenity to the local community.

The current re-routing was completely unnecessary and has resulted in disruption to local residents' travel. The able-bodied have been able to cope but feel hostility to the change, complaining that a Cayley St terminus could well have been established 20 years ago, at the train station. The PTA touts measures it put in place to mitigate the effects of relocation, but the fact is that the disabled are now burdened and all patrons have to walk much further to get to any bus stop. My understanding is that uptake of the bus #14 timetable is upwards of 500, showing a need for the #15 to be reinstated, as there is significant overall interest.

There are other – lower cost – alternatives to the plan the PTA implemented, but it did not consider them seriously. For example, Gary Merritt (PTA) mentioned to me an alternative plan for the #15/train station interface, but it was not mentioned in consultation nor publicly since. The interface option chosen (of 4 possible choices) is the least community-friendly.

6. Potential contravention of the *Equal Opportunity Act*.

The *Equal Opportunity Act* was enacted for a reason – a very good and compelling reason. Put simply, it is one of government's roles to protect the weak in our community; some of the weakest being the young, disabled, and elderly, from a physical and mental perspective. In this instance, the PTA has not done a disability impact study nor consulted with disabled groups, and when informed about the impact, has ignored this and defended its actions.

7. Measures to address similar issues arising.

It is suggested to the Committee that there should be legislation implemented to prevent a further recurrence of disadvantage to vulnerable people, and to ensure that government departments, especially, comply with Equal Opportunity legislation in a timely fashion. It is not good enough to expect members of local communities (especially the disadvantaged) to be forced to act as “watchdogs”, when such measures could have been put in place already.

To this end, SANDBAG proposes that the *Equal Opportunity Act (the Act)* be amended to reflect this requirement. It is envisaged government entities and large corporations should be required to assess the impact their decisions may have on a community (as in this case). Part of that requirement would be to produce an impact assessment, to be vetted by either an ombudsman or a panel which includes community representatives. Penalties could also be incorporated, to dissuade nonfeasance, misfeasance, or breach of such provisions of *the Act*.

In summary, this question remains to be answered:- Why are the PTA so intent on implementing a plan which: is ill-conceived; is a duplication of existing bus services into the station (#85, #990); will not result in much advantage to passengers; will not generate more patronage; will extremely disadvantage the most vulnerable in the local community, many of whom have been placed by Homeswest/the Department of Housing specifically because of bus #15 proximity; and, has been rejected by a majority of those living there? (This question remains unanswered from Feb. 2015)

On behalf of the Glendalough/Mount Hawthorn communities, Thankyou for your consideration,

Tad Krysiak
Convener,
SANDBAG #15

