

Driverless buses an idiot investment amid pandemic

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The expansion of Keolis Downer's driverless shuttle project is fiscally ludicrous, unsafe and out of touch with the community, the Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) NSW has said, sinking millions into a project that doesn't create substantial jobs or contribute to Newcastle's high-capacity transport mix.

Feedback from the community has been lamenting for years the savage cuts to Newcastle's bus network, with route cuts, service cuts and stop closures meaning many are forced to catch three different buses to get by every day.

Daniel Jagers, President of the RTBU NSW Tram and Bus Division, says this is exactly the kind of

sentiment that should have been considered when funding this pet driverless project, if proper community consultation had taken place before Council commitment.

“This is quite simply an idiot project to pursue with a looming recession,” said Mr Jagers. “We need substantial investment that will both create jobs and contribute to Newcastle’s public services and economy.

“For years the Newcastle community has expressed deep anger and hopelessness about the hatchet job that Keolis Downer has made of their bus network. There are dozens of buses currently idling in the Depot because Keolis Downer won’t pay to put them on the road.

“But I’m sure the residents on Newcastle’s outskirts who are now forced to take three buses to get to work every day will be comforted by the fact they can now take a leisure ride in a shuttle going less than 20km an hour.”

The union is deeply concerned that these shuttles are being marketed as safe.

“It’s absurd to suggest these buses are safe,” said Mr Jagers. “Drivers balance speed with safety. Current technology can’t do that, as evidenced by these snail-paced trials.

“Now more than ever is the time for governments to listen to the community about what they need. Only substantial, strategic public investment can see us to the other side of the economic crisis of Covid-19. These tiny, shiny, expensive toys – which are so small they’d be lucky to fit 11 people - don’t make the cut.”