

## Stop pushing driverless toys and consult with your community” – union

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Date : 25 May, 2020



The Rail, Tram and Bus Union NSW is urging the City of Newcastle to use the postponement of driverless shuttle trials as time to finally consult with the Newcastle community on how best to meet its public transport needs.

While the 11 seat vehicles can not comply with social distancing requirements, even prior to the Covid-19 outbreak the RTBU had flagged Keolis Downer’s disastrous cuts to bus stops and services amid growing demand, making the introduction of an unsafe, expensive, low-capacity service a ludicrous addition to Newcastle’s public transport offering.

Daniel Jagers, President of the RTBU NSW Tram and Bus Division, says the City of Newcastle must use the new delay to begin the community consultation that was neglected prior to the trial.

“Keolis Downer’s dangerous new toys have utterly failed to meet the public transport needs of a growing regional city,” says Mr Jagers. “As it stands, social distancing laws mean no more than 3 commuters can ride these shuttles at any one time.

“In a growing city in desperate need of reliable, high-capacity public transport, the wasted public funds poured into this pet project are sorely needed to put dozens of cancelled bus services back on the road and closed stops back into operation.

“In addition to obvious capacity issues, these autonomous vehicles are patently dangerous, relying on computers and sensing systems to detect obstacles and anticipate risk, with an operator on board to take control if necessary. A computer simply cannot assess risk and respond to protect commuters as an experienced human driver can – and a split second is all that’s needed for disaster to occur.

“This is the perfect time for the City of Newcastle to discontinue this project before any more precious time and funding is spent, and instead work with Transport for NSW, and the community it serves, on how to improve existing services.

“This can only be achieved by opening community consultation and hearing directly from the Newcastle locals who have been forced to tolerate inadequate, unreliable public transport for far too long.”