



Newtown Neighbourhood Centre Incorporated

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13th April, 2006.

Letters to the Editor,
THE GLEBE,
Suite 1,
35-39 Mountain Street,
ULTIMO 2007.

Newtown rail station access petition

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre wishes to thank the local community for their tireless support in our goal to upgrade access to Newtown railway station. The petition for easy access gained over 1100 signatures!

We also want to thank both the Honourable Carmel Tebbutt and the Honourable Penny Sharp, for their strong support in getting the Minister's attention and in getting our petition tabled in the NSW parliament.

The work being done on behalf of the community is essential to ensure everyone, regardless of mobility, is able to use Newtown station. Transport plays a vital part for the elderly, the disabled and parents with prams and young children to participate in their community.

Newtown is an "inner hub" for many services, including hospital, medical, educational, alternative therapy, shopping, restaurants, tourism, and rail/bus interchange. It is therefore essential that Newtown rail station access is upgraded as soon as possible, to the benefit of the whole community.

This petition is just the first step in our campaign to increase independence for the mobility-impaired in the inner west. We urge you to continue to lobby. Phone or write to the Minister of Transport, the Hon. John Watkins, to ask him **when** Newtown, Sydenham, Marrickville, Petersham, Stanmore, St. Peters, Dulwich Hill, Tempe and Lewisham stations are going to be made into easy access stations.

Lisa Burns
Co-ordinator
Newtown Neighbourhood Centre

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23rd March 2006

The Hon. John Watkins, MP
NSW Minister for Transport
Level 34 Governor Macquarie Tower
1 Farrer Place
Sydney 2000

Cc Carmel Tebbutt, Member for Marrickville

Re: NEWTOWN RAILWAY STATION EASY ACCESS

Dear Mr Watkins,

We are writing to highlight to you the ongoing accessibility problems that members of our community have at Newtown Railway station, and also with regard to other railway stations in the area and lack of appropriate alternatives. Newtown station's accessibility is extremely limited and unsafe for people with a range of mobility impairments, older people, parents with prams and anyone negotiating the station with heavy shopping bags.

A high percentage of our clients here at Newtown Neighbourhood Centre have a disability. Our services are also heavily used by older people with increasing levels of frailty. Many older people experience difficulty in maintaining mobility and social activities as a result of the effects of ageing. Transport is a key element in their ability to stay active, healthy and independent. It is important to note that accessibility does not just affect people with a disability and older people; it also affects parents and carers negotiating travel with young children.

The lack of access provisions, such as a lift, at Newtown station is preventing all these people from using the railway as an easy and safe means of transport. It is also preventing them from getting to our centre and the services and supports we provide. The inequity of this situation has been brought to our attention by those that use our centre as well as the general public.

We are concerned that the Ministry has given no commitment to correcting this situation by making Newtown an easy access station as a priority in its upgrade program.

Newtown is an important "inner hub" for medical and educational facilities and for access to further transport. We understand that priority for easy access upgrades depends on station patronage, access to educational and medical facilities, shopping and tourism and rail interchange. We would like to point out that Newtown fulfils all these criteria. In particular, Newtown station;

- Services students and staff on their way to and from the University and TAFE;
- Services medical staff and people undergoing treatment or visiting Royal Prince Alfred Hospital along with the many local medical therapists located close to the hospital, and
- Newtown is renowned as a key tourism precinct with a range of shopping, eating and extensive entertainment venues that attract people from all over the Sydney area.

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We feel that the case for Newtown Station to be upgraded is long overdue and now urgent.

In regards to other options and while we welcome the introduction of accessible low floor buses in the area our view is that they remain inadequate as an alternative. This view is formed from talking with local people who have a mobility disability and recounting that in their experience catching local buses is often at the discretion of the bus driver. Firstly it is hard to tell, unless you are extremely close, which buses are for easy access. The signage alerting travellers of an accessible bus are difficult to be seen from any distance.

We are aware that there are only four local bus routes available with a limited and infrequent service for wheelchair users. Users report to us that low-floor buses often do not arrive at all and when questioned the local depots are not able to confirm if or when an accessible bus will appear as promoted in the timetable. Another factor discouraging use is insufficient information for passengers with disabilities on how to use these buses. It seems apparent that although buses are supposed to have easy access, in practise, it is anything but easy.

It seems that the only recourse for some members of the community is to travel by taxi. I'm sure you are aware of the longstanding difficulties people experience in attempting to use the Wheelchair Accessible Taxi (WAT) system. The lack of WAT's to meet demand, booking delays, difficulty in hailing and prohibitive cost despite the Taxi Subsidy Scheme renders taxis to be impractical as an alternative to the lack of rail or bus access.

With the cost of petrol increasing, private car transport is not a good option. It is important to realise that not everyone can drive or can afford to buy and run a car or wants to. Designated mobility parking spaces are also extremely limited and competition for these spaces is fierce with the number of MPS authorities issued increasing.

All these factors indicate that there is a serious lack of any practical or reliable accessible transport options for many local people that live, work or visit this area, and that this has a considerable social and economic impact.

In review, there are eight railway stations within the Marrickville local government area and none of these are accessible and none that we are aware of are earmarked as 'easy access'. In addition there are a further six (including Newtown) bordering the LGA. The nearest with easy access are Summer Hill and Wolli Creek, but neither is staffed for all services which limits this accessibility.

We are aware that the Ministry of Transport has an Accessible Transport Action Plan to provide integrated access throughout Sydney and NSW. We would like to know when Newtown, Sydenham, Marrickville, Petersham, Stanmore, St. Peters, Dulwich Hill, Tempe and Lewisham station are to be made easy access stations.

To help prove the need for prioritising the easy access upgrade at Newtown railway station, we have formed a petition that has generated huge interest in the community. Most people who sign our petition indicate a personal need or interest in easy access because of a friend or relative who wishes to use the railway station, and many have taken petition sheets away to fill in.

We feel sure that the petition demonstrates the need for easy access at Newtown Railway station. It confirms that many people in our community are affected by not being able to have railway access, as well as many who come into the community to use the facilities here. We hope to hear from you regarding when Newtown and the other eight stations will be made accessible to all members of our community.

Yours sincerely

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Lisa Burns
Coordinator