

**“Commemorating the 32nd Anniversary of the Granville Train Disaster”
Remarks by Barry O’Farrell MP, NSW Opposition Leader
Granville NSW, 18 January 2009**

John Hennessy and members of the Granville Memorial Trust;
Cr Tony Issa, Lord Mayor of Parramatta;
Hon David Borger MP;
Survivors, rescuers, their families and friends:

The provision of transport services – along with hospitals, schools and law and order – is one of the most basic roles of State Government. People – going to and from work, getting on with their lives – expect government to provide safe and reliable public transport services.

It’s what those who boarded the 6.09am service from Mt Victoria to Central expected on this day, thirty-two years ago. Yet, as we acknowledge by our presence today, they were failed.

The derailment of engine 4620, the shattering of the first carriage, and the crushing of carriages three and four resoundingly attest to that failure.

This commemoration rightly recalls the events of that Tuesday.

It honours the 83 people who died and the 220 who were injured.

It pays tribute to the response of the rescue services who, working in difficult and dangerous conditions, displayed incredible bravery and selflessness. That it took ten hours before the last injured passenger was freed – and more than thirty hours before the last body was finally removed – provides a glimpse of the disaster we recall today.

This service also acknowledges the contribution of others on that day – whether groups like the Red Cross or Salvation Army, or those individuals – John Hennessy and Garry Raymond’s ‘unsung heroes’ – the ministers of religion or members of the public who helped the injured and rescuers alike.

The rescue effort on that hot January day once again displayed the best of this country and its people at a time of crisis.

In the aftermath of the disaster – following all the inquiries and their findings about rail maintenance – those entrusted to govern the State pledged that it would never happen again.

As too often happens – now, as in the past – funds flowed, efforts were applied but only after tragedy occurred.

In recent years we have regrettably been reminded that even the best of intentions can be forgotten with the passage of time and the dimming of memories.

Passenger safety should be of paramount importance to all who serve their communities in State Parliament. The provision of safe public transport services should be an issue that transcends politics.

Yet, despite the lives lost and lessons learned, whether here at Granville or at Glenbrook and Waterfall, it doesn't.

And that's another reason why this annual commemoration is so important.

It should serve as a reminder of the need to constrain politics; of the necessity for government to always put public interest ahead of party interest; for transport services to be planned, operated and delivered according to the needs of commuters and this city's future – and not according to the future of those facing election.

Only by constraining politics can we guarantee to commuters – whether those boarding trains tomorrow or those who will do so in another 32 years – the safety and reliability of the rail services they need and this city deserves.

The restoration of accountability and openness, concepts that too often are only paid lip service by politicians, is essential to provide rail travellers with the guarantee of safety that those aboard train 108 took for granted on January 18th 1977.

It's why I have proposed a single, integrated transport agency to co-ordinate transport services across Sydney.

An agency to be over sighted by an independent panel of experts to ensure that accountability applies to ministers as much as those who run our train, bus and ferry services. An expert panel that could – and would – blow the whistle on a State Government who failed to provide the resources needed to ensure our public transport systems operated safely and reliably.

It's an approach in keeping with the needs of our great city and its people. It also keeps faith with the event we commemorate today.

Thirty-two years ago, I was 17 years old and waiting to start university, but I can still recall reports about this disaster.

The episode I most associate with Granville involved Sgt Joe Beecroft, a member of the Police Rescue Squad and concerns his encounter with a passenger trapped in one of the crushed carriages. A man whose face Joe Beecroft never saw.

The man was one of the 83 victims and he said to his would-be rescuer – “Don't worry about me, I am an old man and I'm dying. But before you go, will you hold my hand for a moment. Will you hold my hand before I die.”

Sgt Beecroft is no longer with us, but his compassion and his selflessness are: they're embodied in the service groups with us today – the representatives of the police, VRA, fire brigades, RFS, ambulance and emergency services.

They're reflected in those who, year in and year out, organise and attend this commemoration service. Those who ensure that we, public and politicians alike, never forget the tragedy and bravery associated with those events thirty-two years ago.

On behalf of my Liberal and Nationals colleagues, I offer my sincere condolences to those who suffered as a result of the Granville Train Disaster.

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