

Citation – Neil Smith
26 May 2026, 2.30pm

Deputy Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to present Neil Espie Smith to you, for admission as an Honorary Fellow of the University.

Neil is an esteemed alumnus and one of Australia's most respected leaders of the passenger transport industry. Neil obtained a Bachelor of Arts in 1971 and a Master of Transport Management in 1994. His lifelong dedication and passion for improving transport systems shaped his remarkable career. He began as a trainee manager with the Busways Group in 1972, and shortly after, purchased Manly Bus Service. In 1975, he established Urban Transport Systems, and from 1978 developed bus services in NSW and Queensland and served on the Bus & Coach Association (NSW) Executive Committee.

Following the challenges of his early business years, Neil took a step back from operating services and returned to the University to undertake the Master of Transport Management from 1991 to 1994 – a period he credits to rebuilding his business capability. He also became involved in the establishment of the accredited Certificate of Transport Management (CTM) at the University of Sydney's Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies (ITLS), where he lectured in service design, marketing and government relations.

Equipped with new skills, he successfully re-entered the sector in 1995, winning the Midland Bus Service contract in Perth. Transit Systems went on to secure further contracts across every major Australian city, becoming the largest privately owned bus and ferry operator in the country.

In 2012, Neil led the acquisition of part of First Group's London bus operation, founding Tower Transit Operations Limited, which operated buses for Transport for London. By 2016, Tower Transit secured Singapore's first competitively tendered urban bus contract. Together these operations carried over 340 million passengers annually. In 2020, his interests were acquired by the Kelsian Group – today Australia's largest passenger carrier and a global leader in zero-emission transport. In 2023 he played a key role in Kelsian's acquisition of All Aboard America Holdings Inc, now the second largest motor coach operator in the United States. Neil remained a Non-Executive Director of Kelsian, retiring in February 2026. He continues to be a major shareholder in the Kelsian Group.

Beyond transport, Neil has demonstrated deep commitment to community development. In 2016, he was instrumental in establishing The Relay Trust based in the UK, working to enable local churches in Africa to equip their leaders in caring for their communities.

In 2022, Neil made the largest philanthropic gift in the University of Sydney Business School's history – \$7.9 million to establish the Chair of Sustainable Transport Futures, advancing research in green mobility. Most recently, he has contributed more than \$1.5 million to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Business Program.

Deputy Chancellor, in recognition of his generosity and unwavering commitment to advancing our community, I present Neil Espie Smith and invite you to confer upon him, the title of Honorary Fellow of the University.