

COVID-19: Latest RTBU update

Categories : [COVID19](#), [RTBU News](#)

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This week saw a continuation of the flattening of the curve as confirmed cases per day of COVID-19 drops lower and lower. We know this is in a large part due to the social distancing measures and ban on overseas arrivals.

Throughout the crisis, RTBU members have ensured that society continues to be where it needs to be and this is a great credit to us all. This week, Transport Minister Andrew Constance personally thanked all RTBU members for their dedication and courage through this crisis. We hope that the next time we need support, he comes to the party!

In a sneaky move that has severely undermined the trust and confidence built between the union movement and the Federal Government, Christian Porter, Minister for Industrial Relations, unilaterally changed the law stating that an employer needs to give 7 days' notice before asking workers to vote to vary the terms of their enterprise agreement. The change means that an employer now only has to give 24 hours' notice before asking workers to vote. What this means is that workers asked to vote have no time to seek advice from their union to ensure that they understand what the variation means for them. It also gives them no time to consider the effects of the change on them or their family.

If you are asked to vote on a variation to your enterprise agreement, ensure:

- That you immediately inform the union and seek advice;
- If you do not have time to reach the union about it, make sure you and everyone you speak to about it votes NO; or
- Ask your employer to provide more time so that you can consider the changes they propose.

If the majority of the workforce votes NO, then your employer cannot change your agreement.

You may have also seen that last week the NSW Government made it an offence carrying a \$5,000 fine to cough or spit on a healthcare worker. This is great news and protection that these workers need to make sure they are safe at work. However, it is a protection that we as transport workers need equally. We have asked the Government to extend this protection to all transport workers who are exposed to this type of vile behaviour.

As the COVID-19 virus lingers in society, there is an increasing chance that members may be exposed when they are at work. This means that you may be entitled to workers compensation payments and benefits. For the purposes of workers compensation, COVID-19 is no different to any other illness or injury you suffer at work. The ACTU have compiled a useful fact sheet for workers compensation due to COVID-19 which you can [access here.](#)

In some good news this week, despite mutterings from the NSW Government about wage freezes, Transport for NSW has confirmed that all pay rises that are due this year in enterprise agreements and awards will be honoured by the Government, and any wage freeze brought in will not affect these pay rises. However, we must remain diligent because a lot of our agreements and award are up for renegotiation soon and we will almost definitely be faced with employer calls to accept wage freezes.

This week we also received confirmation that despite COVID-19, Rail R U OK? Day will take place as planned this year on 30 April. Remember to take the opportunity to ask a co-worker "R U Ok?" It's important that we encourage each other to talk to each other, especially during this tough time.

Stations

This week, **Sydney Trains** told RTBU delegates that it would increase the supply of hand sanitiser, gloves and masks. These will be delivered to members to use when they require. There was also a proposal that some additional training being provided to station staff to ensure meaningful work is

available in the event of further slowdowns throughout the network.

Unfortunately **NSW Trains** did not meet with the RTBU this week; however they have undertaken to meet next week. HSR's met today with management to discuss issues including:

- ssues with the provision of PPE (sanitiser, gloves, masks) at some stations – **NSW Trains** has assured HSRs that there is now plenty to go around and that any station staff who needs more should contact their area manager.
- **NSW Trains** has engaged contract cleaners to clean the driver/guards cab at some locations like Kiama and Mount Victoria. However, they are still having CSAs perform these tasks in the Southern Highlands.

At **Metro Trains**, members have had a good week. Management are proposing to introduce a temperature scanner for all employees to ensure workers are safe. Metro Trains have also agreed to weekly COVID-19 communications and will be holding Q&A sessions with the company CEO via Microsoft Teams. Other measures that are now in place are:

- MTS are now stocked up on masks, gloves and sanitiser for all frontline staff. If any frontline employee requires any of these items, they are to contact their manager.
- Trains are being regularly cleaned by contract cleaners who clean high touch customer points – poles, handles, seats etc. In addition they have now engaged a fogging contractor.
- Free flu shots are available for all workers. It has also been agreed that any worker can get the flu shot on their own and be reimbursed the full payment.

Metro Trains also advised that there have been no workers and no known passengers having reported as positive to COVID-19 on the North West Rail Link.

Signallers/Area Controllers

Sydney Trains is proposing to implement body temperature checking of all people that enter into the Rail Operations Centre (ROC) past the reception area. The RTBU is still waiting for the draft procedure in relation to this to how this will be implemented. Once this occurs, the RTBU will ensure all affected workers are consulted.

In addition the RTBU has enquired if this will be rolled out in the Disaster Recovery Centres (DRC). **Sydney Trains** unfortunately did not have an answer but confirmed that they will advise the RTBU if this was to be implemented in the DRCs.

After RTBU requests, **Sydney Trains** confirmed that the cleaning in DRCs is being performed on an hourly basis and that contract cleaners are on site 24 hours per day to ensure the cleanliness of the workplace.

Infrastructure

This week, members working for **John Holland** raised concerns about the lack of temperature testing coming onto site on the weekend at the new stabling yard being built for the new intercity fleet in Kangy Angy on the Central Coast. This project sees workers enter the site from Sydney and all over the area increasing the risk of transmission of the virus. After RTBU enquiries the company stated that they believed they were doing enough to ensure social distancing. The jury is still out on this one.

ARTC members have raised concerns after there was a reported breach of social distancing and hygiene measures in relation to work vehicles. At one site, members observed 3 people arrive and depart a site in the same car. The RTBU is pleased to advise that, like **Sydney Trains**, **ARTC** is implementing sensible measures to ensure that members are at minimal risk when utilising shared work vehicles. Among the measures adopted are:

- Staggered starts;
- Ensuring that all contractors used are from the local region;

- Shared vehicles to only have 2 occupants with one in the front and one in the back where possible;
- Regularly disinfecting vehicles using spray bottles.

Airport link

Patronage has dropped by over 80% at the Domestic and International terminals with a knock on effect to staff on the stations. Management have undertaken to keep as many casuals employed as possible throughout this difficult period, and full time and part time staff have agreed to use their annual leave in a staggered fashion to assist with this effort. Some great solidarity here shown by members. Staff have also taken on additional duties that involved extra cleaning of hand rails and hard surfaces which has been acknowledged by commuters and management.

Train Crew

It was quiet this week when it came to COVID-19 developments for train crew, which can only be a good thing! Delegates continue to meet with management weekly to ensure that all concerns are addressed quickly and member's safety is ensured throughout the crisis.

Cleaners

Sydney Trains' cleaners have this week begun to concentrate special attention to cleaning crew cabs making sure that the environment our drivers and guards operate in are as safe as possible.

In every way, our cleaners continue to vigorously perform the important job of keeping all of our surfaces clean from COVID-19.

Tram and Bus

This week, the Tram and Bus Division continued to push their demand for masks to be provided to members to ensure they are protected as far as possible from unintentional transmission through their close contact with the public.

There has also been a renewed push for private operators to provide special leave entitlements to members. We have confirmed that the Government continues to pay them as normal, so there can be no reason to deny members this basic entitlement.

In solidarity,

RTBU NSW

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