

RTBU: COVID-19 latest update

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

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Yesterday we saw continued easing on the restrictions on our movement and freedoms as the National Cabinet announced a 3 stage plan to get Australia back to normal. It is now up to the states to implement the recommendations of National Cabinet.

This of course poses challenges for transport workers. Last week we reported on school going back on 11 May 2020 on a limited basis, and this week that was confirmed. However, that coupled with the gradual easing for the rest of society means that there is a very real possibility that there will be a “bounce back” and the transport network will be flooded as people take advantage of their new found freedom. Of course, there is the obvious risk of members coming into close contact with more and more commuters, but there are also less obvious risks like any expectation of the public that transport workers will enforce physical distancing. Unions have brought this less obvious risk to the attention of Transport for NSW who confirmed that transport workers will not be expected to enforce these measures. Nevertheless, there is still likely to be significant angst with commuters on the network and it's important that transport workers are protected from any type of aggressive behaviour.

In the middle of an unprecedented health crisis, where close to 1 million Australians have lost their jobs, Transport Minister Andrew Constance this week could only think about one thing – his job. Mr Constance has openly attacked us and the members we represent and continues his ideological war against publicly owned public transport, to the detriment of safe and efficient transport operations. It's therefore no coincidence that some members were celebrating when he made a decision to leave his job as Transport Minister and contest a Federal seat. However, the celebrations were short lived when he pulled out of the race less than 24 hours after announcing his candidacy – it has reminded some of 'Should I Stay or Should I Go' by The Clash. After all that, our target remains the same and we will continue to call on Mr Constance to reverse his decisions on buses and the New Intercity Fleet.

There has been a lot of talk this week in the media about companies and governments demanding that their workers take a pay freeze to help them cope with the fallout from the COVID-19 crisis. As

previously reported, we have already seen **QUBE** and **Pacific National** trying to take advantage of the crisis to benefit their bottom lines. However, it seems that most employers we deal with are trying to do the right thing – **Sydney and NSW Trains** members should see the 3% increase hit their accounts from next Friday, and ARTC have committed to the agreed 9% (3% per year over 3 years) negotiated for their salaried agreement. However, if the NSW Government proceeds with a plan to legislate a wage freeze, this will undoubtedly affect some of our members.

Any move to freeze the pay of those who have worked so hard during this pandemic to keep this state moving will be vigorously opposed not only by the RTBU but all of the unions in NSW led by UnionsNSW. If anyone should be taking a pay cut, it's the CEOs and politicians!

Train Crew

This week, **Sydney Trains** floated a proposal to move away from paper payslips to electronic payslips citing the COVID-19 crisis as the reason. The RTBU advised Sydney Trains that many of its members did not have the skills or means to access electronic payslips and this could pose a problem for much of the workforce. We believe that a sensible resolution can be reached on this issue.

In physical distancing news, there has been an issue raised about overcrowding in Lidcombe meal rooms which depends on overlapping shifts and crib breaks. We are advised that the situation continues to be monitored and that stand-by staff are directed to go to Flemington Maintenance Centre instead.

Unfortunately, there was no improvement this week in the reckless attitude of **NSW Trains** towards the health and welfare of its staff. **NSW Trains** only commenced meetings about COVID-19 on 9 April and very little progress has been made since that time. This week **NSW Trains** decided that it was doing enough and that meetings with the RTBU should be changed to fortnightly from weekly. This arrangement should only be in place if an employer has the situation under control, which NSW Trains definitely does not.

In fact, we have been informed that despite the clear guidelines around social distancing, **RailConnect NSW** (using **NSW Trains** staff) is forcing those in the NIF testing process to squeeze 3 people into a crew cab!

Tram and Bus Division

This week, we continued to push for the installation of screens on **STA** buses. We engaged in productive discussions with **TfNSW** about the design and placement of these protective screens and are hopeful that we will be seeing them out on the network soon.

As COVID-19 continues, the Tram and Bus Division is looking to step up its campaign against the pending privatisation of the last remaining buses in regions 7, 8, and 9. With the Transport Minister unable to decide whether to stay or go, it's important that we put as much pressure on him as possible to reverse this bad decision and ensure that our buses are kept public.

Freight

Negotiations kicked off again this week with **QUBE** who disgracefully reneged on the in-principle agreement reached with the union. **QUBE** are yet to put any money on the table, but members are angry, and absent a decent offer, this employer may have bitten off more than it can chew.

Salaried and Admin

Although we're sure that all our members working from home are aware, we wanted to reiterate, as we did last week, the importance of keeping yourselves fit and healthy during this difficult period. You can find several guides on how to reduce the risks of working outside the office environment [here](#).

As the restrictions are eased, there may be a request made for some members to return to the office on a semi regular basis. If you experience any issues managing this process, please ensure that you reach out to your delegate or organiser who will be able to assist.

Workshops

Under the shroud of COVID-19, **Sydney Trains Fleet Maintenance** tried to sneak through a change in cleaners' (all the way through to Area Managers) job descriptions this week. Delegates were onto it straight away, placing the matter immediately in dispute. One would have thought that the brilliant job cleaners have done throughout this crisis may win them some additional respect from management, but this move signals otherwise. We hope that management see the error in their ways and sit down and talk about proposals like this.

Stations

Like Train Crew, this week **NSW Trains** indicated they did not wish to meet this week and proposed that we met on a fortnightly basis from now. Many of concerns raised by members have not even been answered yet. Notwithstanding, **NSW Trains** denied an RTBU request that staff be allowed get their flu shot by extending their roster. This is disappointing as the flu shots locations are geographically spread out and are often difficult for station staff to get too during working hours.

At **Sydney Trains**, your delegates are still meeting with CSD management twice a week. **Sydney Trains** want to introduce an additional 140 contract cleaners per day for an in-transit cleaning for an extended period of time. Given this may be a long-term arrangement; we advised management that these additional 140 cleaning jobs should be performed by in-house Sydney Trains cleaners.

Disappointingly **Sydney Trains** responded with excuses on why contractors should be used.

Nevertheless, if this is going to be long term, contractors should not be the option. We are waiting for **Sydney Trains** to provide us the expected timeframe for these additional 140 cleaning jobs.

Sydney Trains also advised that patronage is starting to increase and they are developing a strategy to mitigate risks for station staff due to this influx. Some of the strategies include more education for passengers with regular signage reminding them of social distancing requirements. Further measures will be discussed at next week's meeting.

At **Metro Trains**, unfortunately the meeting this week was cancelled. We are scheduled to meet with them next Friday, 15 May.

Infrastructure

This week delegates and **Sydney Trains** met in both the shared vehicle committee and the HSR/WHS forums where concerns are starting to be raised in relation to people becoming slack in relation to cleaning, hygiene and the social distancing. At the shared vehicles meeting, management raised a concern about a noticed a drop in the number of vehicles coming in to be cleaned.

At the HSR/WHS meeting, **Sydney Trains** have agreed that they will continue to meet weekly with a focus over the next few weeks to move back to the arrangements in place prior to COVID- 19. However, delegates will ensure that this move is not premature given the ongoing nature of the pandemic.