



TRANSPORT NOW

RTBU NATIONAL MEMBER NEWSLETTER

FROM THE NATIONAL SECRETARY

With parts of the country coming out of the COVID-19 lockdown, protecting the health and safety of rail, tram and bus workers from a “second wave” of the disease remains a key priority for our Union right around the country.

COVID-19 is a silent, invisible killer. It affects people differently: for some it is deadly, for others it is debilitating - for some it can be a mild flu, and for others it is barely noticeable.

It also has affected regions differently, with it rebounding some places while being effectively eliminated in others.

For these reasons, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to preventing the spread of COVID-19. That's why the RTBU has taken a branch-by-branch and workplace-by-workplace approach to this pandemic, to find the solutions that work best in each situation. We've also acknowledged that medical researchers are still discovering things about the virus, and a possible vaccine may be months if not years away.

There are, however, basic steps that need to be taken, and the RTBU has focused on three key factors to keep rail and public transport safe:

- PPE for all workers who need it - including face masks in some states;
- rigorous and regular cleaning; and
- measures to maintain physical distancing.

All of these present challenges, but public transport is going to be critical to reopening our cities, so no State Government can afford to take short cuts.

An important question for the public transport industry has been whether or not passengers should be forced to use masks. Increasingly, scientists are arguing that masks should be an important part of the public health response.

According to the World Health Organisation:

“in light of evolving evidence, the WHO advises that governments should encourage the general public to wear masks where there is widespread transmission and physical distancing is difficult, such as on public transport, in shops or in other confined or crowded environments.”

This issue has become more urgent in Victoria over the past couple of weeks, where the virus has surged. It has become clear that not enough is being done to protect workers, and that's why the Victorian Branch has made the call for all public transport users to be required to wear face coverings.

In the meantime, we'll continue to watch the research closely, and continue pressing for better protections to keep workers safe from this highly infectious disease.

In solidarity,

Mark Diamond
NATIONAL SECRETARY.

PRIVATISING PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN A PANDEMIC PUTS SAFETY AT RISK

While workers across Australia are doing their best to keep public transport safe, the NSW and South Australian State Governments are pushing ahead with dangerous plans to hand over control of services to private companies.

National Secretary Mark Diamond said keeping control of public transport services during a pandemic was a matter of national interest.

“These privatisations are all about cutting the cost of providing services. Inevitably that means taking short-cuts on cleaning and hygiene, which will put the health of both commuters and workers at risk,” Mark said.

Mark said the Spanish Government has nationalised private hospitals, while UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has brought passenger rail back under government control in response to the pandemic crisis.

“Now, more than ever, the people of Australia are relying on governments to provide them with the public services they need.”



SA: TRAM WORKERS SECURE 3-YEAR JOB GUARANTEE

Adelaide's tram workers will be protected by a three-year job guarantee, following the successful negotiation of a new Enterprise Agreement with the South Australian Rail Commissioner. The Enterprise Agreement also protects long-standing workplace conditions.

South Australia/Northern Territory Secretary Darren Phillips said workers, however, will continue their campaign against public transport cuts and privatisation.

“The take-over of tram operations is a sad day for the state of South Australia,” Darren said.

“Tram workers have done their very best to support the community during the pandemic crisis, despite the uncertainty caused by the privatisation of their jobs.

Darren said South Australia's tram and train systems have benefited from major State and Federal Government investments over the past ten years leading to significant improvements to efficiency and on time running.

“It is galling that the dividends of these public investments – paid for by taxpayers – are now being diverted into the pockets of private companies.

“Effective public transport systems are essential to reducing traffic congestion, minimising transport-related pollution, and to the overall liveability of modern cities.

“The Marshall Government does not believe that these public transport qualities are important to South Australians.”

WA PTA: TRANSWA WORKERS TO COME BACK INTO PUBLIC SECTOR

While Coalition State Governments are continuing with their privatisation agenda, it's a different story over in Western Australia.

In WA, the Minister for Transport Rita Saffioti MLA has announced that the State Government would bring Customer Service Officer jobs on-board the Prospector and Avon-Link/Merredin TransWA rail services, which are currently outsourced private contractor Delron, back in-house.

The contract currently covers 18 permanent part-time employees..

WA PTA Branch Secretary Josh Deuyer said the Branch strongly believed in the value of stable, well-managed and well-paid public sector employment and the provision of public sector passenger services.

"In 2019, the PTA Branch targeted transitioning all on-train staff on TransWA services to public sector positions of employment, by the end of the term of the contract, slated for March 2022," Josh said.

"Since then we've been lobbying the State Government to make sure they understood how important this was to our members, and to the communities they live in.

"For the workers involved, this means better security, better pay and a superior position to be serviced by the Industrial Relations system of WA, rather than subject to Federal system limitations and political whims."

NSW: BEREJIKLIAN GOVT PRESSING FOR PAY FREEZE

The NSW Government has announced its intention to freeze public sector wages.

Over 400,000 public sector employees would be forced to forego a 2.5% pay rise for 12 months, at a time when spending is sorely needed to help our shattered economy recover.

The proposed wage freeze will directly affect bus drivers and STA salaried members as well as those members that work for Transport for NSW directly.

The move, however, has been blocked in the NSW Legislative Council by NSW Labor, the Greens, the Animal Justice Party, and the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers.

Premier Gladys Berejiklian is now trying to get around Parliament taking her pay freeze proposal to the NSW Industrial Relations Commission.

NSW Secretary Alex Claassens said a pay freeze was the last thing that NSW public sector workers needed.

"Our members have helped their communities to get through droughts, fires and now the pandemic," Alex said.

"They deserve the State Government's gratitude and thanks, but instead they're getting kicked in the guts.

"We'll be fighting this outrageous pay freeze proposal all the way."

WA: HOPE FOR RE-OPENING OF GRAIN LINES

The WA Branch is campaigning hard for the re-opening of Tier 3 grain lines, which were closed under previous WA Liberal State Government back in 2013 and 2014.

The lines are managed by Arc Infrastructure (a subsidiary of international infrastructure giant Brookfield) under a lease which runs until 2049. Rail freight operator CBH is keen to run services on the lines, but a significant amount of investment is needed to bring them up to scratch.

There is now cause for optimism that the Tier 3 lines could be brought back into service, following the WA Government's announcement that it will commission an independent engineering assessment of the state of the infrastructure.

Work on the assessment is being undertaken by independent engineering firm Agonis Group, and is expected to be complete before the end of the year.

WA Secretary Craig McKinley said one narrow gauge freight train could carry as much grain as 59 trucks.

"Moving grain transport back onto rail is good for the environment, good for road safety, and good for regional communities," Craig said.

"We'll keep campaigning with the grain industry and local councils in the wheatbelt until these lines are back open again."

QLD: SECRET PLAN TO CUT STAFF ACROSS QR UNCOVERED

Operation Quarry sounds like the plot of some spy-thriller or war movie, in actual fact it's a secret plan to slash the number of jobs at Queensland Rail. This covert operation has already wiped hundreds of jobs off Queensland Rail's books.

Queensland Secretary Owen Doogan said QR quietly started quietly deleting positions from its books in April or May of this year, without advising the Union. "

This is a very serious change to QR operations that will have profound impact on workers across all areas of the business," Owen said.

"Areas of the business have been told that if they have a vacant position, that position will be automatically deleted from the system.

"If managers in that area want to gain that position back, they need to make a business case – but even then it's not guaranteed because numbers of employees have been severely restricted.

"That means if that someone leaves QR for any reason, that position won't be refilled.

"There will be the same work to be done - but with fewer people. "

Owen said QR had a legal obligation to consult with unions before making any such changes under all its Enterprise Agreements.

The Queensland Branch is now compiling evidence from workers who have been affected by Operation Quarry – so stay tuned.

TAS: METRO TAS EA FINALLY IN THE BAG!

A marathon EA negotiation lasting almost two years has finally come to an end at Metro Tasmania, with members strongly voting in favour of a new agreement.

Tasmanian Branch Secretary Ric Bean said members held their ground for 22 months before in the in-principle agreement was reached.

“It’s been a roller coaster ride, and very stressful for all involved,” Ric said.

“Members took a number of industrial actions – including work stoppages - but in the end it took a change in management personnel for us to finally get the breakthrough we needed.

“We couldn’t have made it to that point if it wasn’t for the absolute determination of our members to make sure they got a fair deal.

“Congratulations must go to our Bus Division Secretary Jody Nichols and the whole negotiating team for their unending dedication and perseverance.”

Key elements of the new Metro Tasmania EA include:

- 3 per cent pay rise for the first two years, and a guaranteed 2 per cent annual pay rise for the following two years, plus a productivity bonus;
- A Sign-On bonus paid from July 2019;
- Changes for the Part Timers, including guaranteed hours in agreed contact form so that the hours remain the same unless mutually agreed;
- Clarification around the definition of Emergency Working;
- A member from each Depot and the RTBU Bus Divisional Secretary will form part of the Continuous Improvement Forum;
- A penalty rate applied for part time drivers working their 6th shift;
- Over time rate locked in, previously just an ‘accepted practice’ and;
- A rostering group made up from drivers from each depot roster



IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT FUTURE OF RT HEALTH

The current board of RT Health is putting the fund up for sale.

The RT Health board has issued a tender calling for other insurance funds to buy RT Health outright or to merge with it.

This means your health fund is at serious risk of being demutualised and taken over by a private business.

If that happens, RT Health will no longer be run for you: it will run for the profit of its new owners and shareholders.

RT Health has operated for almost 130 years. It was created by rail workers for workers. The current board wants to change all that.

The RTBU has been in discussions with the RT Health board over the past six months and has managed to get one of our own, Bruce Mackie, appointed to the board to ensure your interests are represented.

But despite our best efforts, the other members of the board continue to take actions behind our back to undermine the combined RTBU/RT Health membership - and we need to stop them.

We want to make sure your health insurer remains as a mutual fund – owned by members, and operated for the benefit of members.

In order to stop this tender process, we first need to know exactly how many of our members are also members of RT Health. So if you are an RT Health member please complete the short survey in the following link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RTBUrt>

Together, we will protect RT Health and ensure it stays there to benefit you.

VALE RON BRADFORD

Ron Bradford, the last General President of the AFULE and the first National President of the RTBU passed away on 6 May 2020 at the age of 90 years.

He was a full time official as President of both Unions from 1977 until his retirement in 1995.

Ron was instrumental in the amalgamation of the AFULE, ARU, ATMOEA and NURWA in 1993. He became the inaugural National President of the Public Transport Union (PTU), which subsequently changed its name to the Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU). He was also a stabilising force within the early years of the PTU/RTBU.

Ron guided the AFULE and the RTBU, through good times and bad, earning the respect and admiration of members, fellow unionists, politicians, Industrial Commissioners, and opponents.

He also earned the respect and friendship of representatives from international organisations.

Ron was a team player, a mentor, teacher and friend to his many comrades in the union movement.

A titan of our Union, Ron Bradford will be dearly missed, but his legacy will live on.



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