

# MELBOURNE METRO BUS PROTEST HELD: CONTRACTS “REPREHENSIBLE”

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MELBOURNE: 1 MAY, 2018 – An estimated 200 protesters representing hundreds of state-wide bus operators and organisations gathered outside on the Victorian Parliament House steps today to decry the “reprehensible” Melbourne Metro Bus contracts currently under negotiation and the State Labor Government’s plans to nationalise the private metropolitan bus network, according to organisers.



BusVic executive director Chris Lowe addressing the crowd at Victorian Parliament House

BusVic executive director Chris Lowe delivered an impassioned speech to those assembled, labelling the contracts being offered as, “reprehensible”, “unconscionable” and “anti-small business” among a raft of other terms.

Ultimately, his “anti-family business” assertion seemed to resonate strongly with listeners, it’s claimed.

“Minister Allan has told nine small-to-medium family business bus owners out of the 13 that operate in Melbourne that the Government will give them a new contract or license to operate only if they agree to transfer their new vehicles, non-managerial staff and know-how (intellectual property) to the Government, or their nominee at the end of the new five- and seven-year contract terms. Or that they agree to transfer all their vehicles, all their depots, all their non-managerial staff and know-how to the Government, or their nominee, at the end of the 10-year contract term.

“Well Minister Allan, we think this is ... bad for the economy. This is bad for the travelling public,” he said.

“Why would a family business work bloody hard, day in, day out, to build up a business and assets over generations and prepare for those assets to one day succeed to the next generation of their family, then with no say in the matter agree to sell their assets to the Government or their nominee at a non-market price?” he championed.

“These businesses are about continuance. If they do wish to exit, they will do so when ‘they’ decide, not when the Government decides,” he added.

Lowe says the community does not want this policy of acquiring family business bus operators' assets at the end of the next contract term because they know, "family business bus owners ... have been operating in their communities have become embedded, over generations - not just years or decades." And that they are, "some of the largest employers in their communities. They give to their communities ... and most importantly they make sure they reinvest their income locally".

"They can't do that if they don't own their assets. Some non-local operators don't or can't do that. They're flat out sending dividends back to shareholders overseas," he explained.

He adds that many of the [bus] drivers, "... have been employed with family business operators for 20-, 30-, 40-, even some for 50 years and they don't want to work for someone else. They don't want to be transferred to another employer at the end of the next contract term. They don't want to end up a number on the payroll of a large non-local multinational."

He says they are, "shocked and disgusted at this policy" and that, "They want to stay working for their family business bus operator, like Dysons, like Kastoria, like Ryans Bus Lines of Essendon, like Moonee Valley Bus Lines, like Cranbourne Transit, like McHarry's in Geelong, just to name a few."

Lowe continued that even the Victorian Transport Workers Union (TWU) doesn't want the Government to oblige family operators to transfer some or all of their assets.

"The TWU have said, and I quote, 'we want the Andrews Government to cease pursuing this appalling agenda in an election year and to support thousands of TWU bus drivers and their families. Victorians don't need another multinational monopolising a system that clearly works well for governments, industry, passengers, and thousands of hard-working bus drivers.' Unquote.

"The truth is folks that the only people who want this ridiculously regressive policy is a handful of bureaucrats in DTF, VAGO, PTV and TFV and a few Labor MPs. They want this policy implemented so they can control bus owners' assets. They want it so the Government can tender these assets and services off and deploy them perhaps to just a handful of large, multinational enterprise operators in 5-, 7- or 10 years' time. They want to strip the family businesses of their assets so they lose their competitive advantage."

"There's so much evidence from around the world that the publicly owned model doesn't work, it's not funny. It's called regulatory capture. Companies put in low bids to get the business, then expect the government to bail them out later on. This is all non- controversial. This has even happened in Melbourne."

The protest comes at a time [The Age newspaper reports](#) – under the category of Transport and the "Losers" – that: "Bus users. Metropolitan bus punctuality fell below target last year, and the number of regional passengers declining to 12.6 million, down from a target of 15 million."

ABC magazine has contacted Minister Allan's office for comment.

