

Owners flag a fight

Campaign hits roads

ALEX SINNOTT

BUSES emblazoned with “Don’t Trust Labor” are set to be driven around Geelong’s marginal electorates as a dispute over transport contracts sours.

The Bus Association of Victoria brought its campaign against the State Government’s “nationalisation agenda” to Geelong this week and is likely to return before the November state election.

BAV executive director Chris Lowe said bus drivers and operators from the Geelong region were concerned the targeting of their Melbourne counterparts was the first step in a statewide push to alter the industry.

“Family business bus operators have been informed by the State Government that as part of their next contract, they must sell varying degrees of their new or old vehicles or other infrastructure to the state or their nominee,” Dr Lowe said.

“This up-ends the way the bus system has operated in Victoria for generations.

“Obviously the Government has a nationalisation agenda. It sees itself as being better managers than the people who are directly involved.

“The Government already has control over routes and other procedures and we have no problem with that.

“What we do have a problem with is the obligation to sell assets to the state as part of a contract.”

State Transport Minister

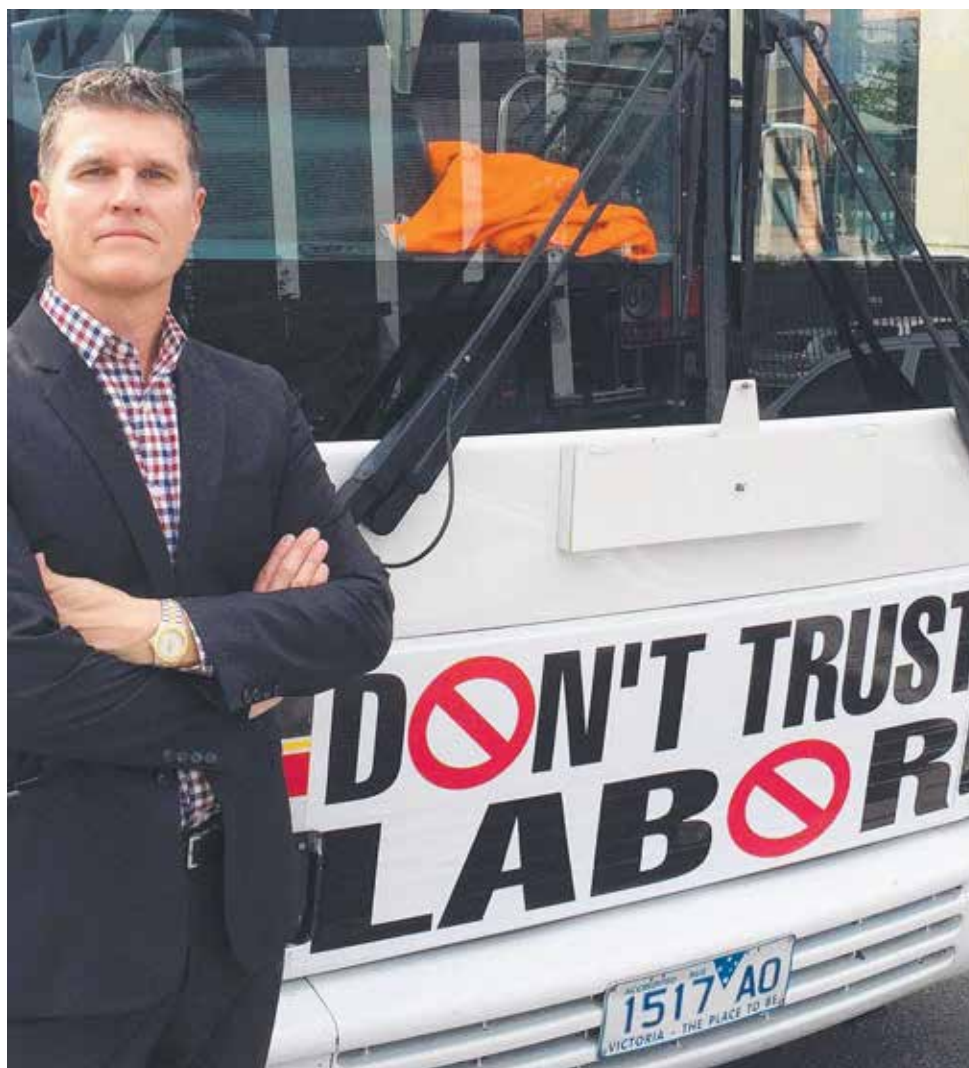
Jacinta Allan said there was no compulsory acquisition of assets involved in the current contract discussions.

Ms Allan said operators could choose 10-year contracts that included the state purchase of assets at market value or they could choose shorter-term options where they kept their existing assets.

“Melbourne deserves a bus network that puts passengers first — a network where buses go where people want to go,” she said.

“We know with patronage on buses declining, it is time to change things.

“We’ve already successfully negotiated with two-thirds of the industry and we’ll continue to negotiate with other providers so they get a fair deal.”



HITTING BACK: Bus Association of Victoria chief Chris Lowe with an anti-Labor sign. Picture: ALISON WYN