



09 Mar 2018
Herald Sun, Melbourne

Author: Matt Johnston • Section: General News • Article Type: News Item
Audience : 303,140 • Page: 11 • Printed size: 158.00cm² • Market: VIC
Country: Australia • ASR: AUD 8,773 • words: 266 • Item ID: 922852708



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Off the buses

Commuters' nightmare

MATT JOHNSTON

TRAIN and tram passengers could be left stranded during works on Labor's major projects as small bus operators declare war against the Andrews Government.

And in a warning of what may come, hundreds of regional commuters are likely to be left without transport near Ballarat today and over the long weekend after some operators pulled out of bus replacement programs during rail upgrades.

The companies, many of which are family businesses, say they may have no choice but to withdraw services because of treatment during new contract negotiations.

Melbourne projects that will rely on buses to take train or tram passengers during works include Sky Rail on the Cranbourne-Pakenham lines and Melbourne Metro rail tunnel works in St Kilda.

Bus Association of Victoria executive director Chris Lowe wrote to all Labor MPs last

month to outline concerns. The main sticking point has been the push by the government to compulsorily buy assets from businesses at the end of the next contract.

Dr Lowe said operators had no choice but to take action.

"They will not be co-operating with government as they have in the past because the government wants to compulsorily acquire some or all of their assets," he said.

The Transport Workers' Union has joined the bus association to slam the process, saying the government should not go back on its word.

"The Andrews Labor Government is considering breaking an election commitment to an entire industry and to passengers," the letter says.

V/Line will be scrambling to find alternatives to buses near Ballarat this morning after buses were cut late yesterday.

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