



RTBU

transport **NOW**

THE NATIONAL
MEMBER
NEWSLETTER

— of the —
RAIL, TRAM &
BUS UNION

ISSUE # 0027
APRIL 2024

A UNION THAT LEADS

**V/Line
workers
take
action**

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members
demand a
Fare Go**

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**Tassie
MPs vow
to fix
Metro**

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www.rtbu.org.au/transport_now

Just a sec!

For a mid-sized trade union, the RTBU punches well above its weight.

I'm lucky enough to do quite a bit of travel for work, and wherever I go around Australia I see our members fighting for fair pay and better conditions, advocating for their industries, and providing real leadership for their communities.

In fact, these days it seems like the RTBU is just about everywhere.

The RTBU has been constantly in the news in Victoria because of the fierce determination of members at V/Line to land a fair and reasonable Enterprise Agreement (see page 1). Over in the West, Transit Officers have

been taking action too – turning out in force at a rally in front of Perth Train Station (see page 2).

Then there's the incredible campaign by RTBU members at Metro Tasmania, who have spent two years trying to achieve better pay and conditions and a safer workplace. Members were able to make public transport one of the key issues in the recent Tasmanian state election – read Tasmanian Branch Secretary Byron Cubit's article on Page 16 to find out how they did it!

Up on the Gold Coast, weeks of industrial action by members at KDR – including work stoppage that coincided with a Pink concert – forced their employer to significantly increase their pay offer (see page 19).

But that's not all! In South Australia and the Northern Territory, members at Keolis Downer and Aurizon have voted in favour of taking protected industrial action as well. The pressure is now on their employers to come to the table (see page 20).

And in NSW, members are leading a high-profile community campaign to save the sleeper carriages on long-haul train services. The campaign is gaining momentum and there are hopes the NSW State Government will find a solution that not only sees sleeper

carriages retained for use by regional passengers, but will also lead to new sleeper carriages being built in Australia by local workers (see page 21).

Nationally, we've been pushing for more action on level crossing safety. The recent National Level Crossing Safety summit in Brisbane was a tentative step forward, but there is still a lot more work to be done (see page 4). In the industrial space our Vice President Leanne Holmes, has been traipsing all over the countryside meeting with workers in Aurizon Bulk and Containerised Freight Division to discuss their upcoming EA negotiations.

Finally, I urge you all to read the fantastic profile piece on 'The Voice of Flinders Street', Laurence Hewson (see page 27). Laurence has been all over the news himself in the past few months, but he's not letting his fame affect his down-to-earth nature and trade union values.

I couldn't be more proud of our union, and our amazing members right around Australia.

In Unity,

Mark Diamond

NATIONAL SECRETARY



Stopping all stations

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Queensland to conduct trial of level crossing cameras

The Queensland Government will conduct a trial of fixed and mobile level crossing safety cameras at both active and passive level crossings.

The commitment to conduct the trial was made at a national level crossing safety roundtable in Brisbane, and after the RTBU called for the use of safety cameras at level crossings across Australia.

Assistant National Secretary Shayne Kummerfeld said the trial would be the first step towards a national rollout of the technology.

“The RTBU has made it clear that there must be a zero tolerance approach to level crossing safety.

“Too many people have been killed in needless level crossing collisions in Australia. The madness has to stop.

“Our goal is for governments to eliminate the risk at level crossings through grade separations and the installation of boom gates. But with around 23,000 level crossings across Australia, we recognise that other strategies are needed as well.

“All motorists should know that if they enter a level crossing in front of a

train then they can be caught, and they could suffer a heavy penalty.

“The trial of cameras in Queensland is a good first step, and we will be working with the Queensland Government to evaluate the trial to speed up a national rollout of infringement-detering cameras.”

Shayne said other outcomes reached at the roundtable included:

- » Participants agreed Penalties for level-crossing infringements should be harmonised across Australia;
- » Major trucking companies would brief drivers on locations of level crossings before the start of their journey, and the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR) advised all level crossings that are included in the OpenStreetMap are now available as a layer on its National Network Map;
- » NHVR is commencing discussions with ARTC to understand how to obtain locations on a national scale

and then with other Rail Infrastructure Managers;

- » Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) and the RTBU will commence discussions on how to improve data collection to assist in identifying hot spots for enforcement programs; and
- » The rail and trucking industry, along with state, territories, and federal governments, will work together on a national driver education process to change behaviour around level crossings.

“The outcomes of the level crossing safety roundtable are just the first step. The RTBU membership is united to not let this end here,” Shayne said.

“The challenge is now to keep building the momentum for lasting change and to eliminate level crossing collisions altogether.



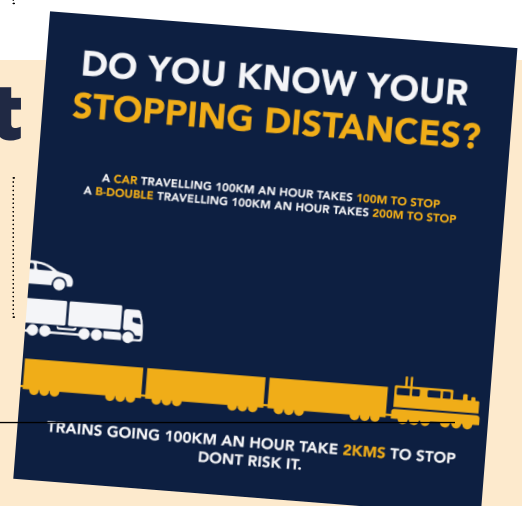
© Catherine King at the Level Crossing roundtable

Getting the message out

RTBU Member and train driver Chantelle Frey and her brother Nick were shocked and saddened by the tragic deaths of Kevin Baker and Mick Warren on New Year's Eve.

You can find the graphic and share it from our national Facebook page, www.facebook.com/RTBUAus

Chantelle and Nick decided to turn their grief into something constructive and came up with a graphic to help educate motorists about level crossing safety.



CLOSING LOOPHOLES STAGE 2 **ANOTHER WIN FOR WORKERS**



The second part of the Albanese government's Closing the Loopholes Bill passed the Senate in February.

Major changes introduced by the new legislation include creating a pathway for casual employees to become permanent and expanding minimum work rights to gig economy workers.

A new 'right to disconnect' will mean workers will be able to say no to unreasonable demands to stay digitally

WHAT'S THE 'RIGHT TO DISCONNECT'?

The rise of digital communications technology has seen a blurring of the lines between work and home life. Research indicates that 79 per cent of full-time workers in Australia have worked outside of scheduled hours—adding up to 280 hours of free work every year.

The right to disconnect law will empower employees to ignore unreasonable communication from their employer outside of work hours if they choose to—and not face penalties for it. It's a step in the right direction that takes into account the reality of many modern workplaces and responds to the needs of workers to prioritise mental health and work-life balance.

connected to their employer outside work hours.

RTBU National Secretary Mark Diamond welcomed the changes.

"These laws will improve the lives of millions of workers across Australia, including those working in the rail, tram and bus industries," Mark said.

"Casual workers in these industries now have a clearer pathway to permanent employment and better job security, while maintaining their right to stay on as casuals if it suits them.

"The right to disconnect will improve work/life balance for workers and ensure they have ample time for rest, leisure, and spending time with family."

A PATH TO PERMANENT WORK FOR CASUALS

As a result of the Closing the Loopholes No. 2 Bill, every casual worker who has worked for their employer at least six months (or 12 months in the case of small business) will have the right to request to be made permanent.

This is a huge win for Australia's 2.7 million casual employees. Previously, more than 500,000 casual workers have said they would prefer to be permanent, but only about 28,000 (5 per cent) have been successful.

A FAIRER DEAL FOR GIG ECONOMY WORKERS

Many of Australia's 250,000 gig economy workers are forced to work long hours for less than minimum wage and are denied basic rights like paid sick leave.

The new legislation extends minimum working rights and protections to gig workers, ensuring they receive the same benefits other workers do and have the same fundamental rights.

Other changes in the Closing the Loopholes No. 2 Bill include empowering the Fair Work Commission to set minimum standards for the road transport industry to ensure it is safe, sustainable and viable, and strengthening union officials' rights of entry to workplaces to investigate wage theft.

These changes follow the first part of the Closing the Loopholes Bill, which was passed by the Senate last year and included reforms to stop employers from misusing labour hire to drive down wages and conditions, as well as changes to criminalise intentional wage theft.

The legislation is a huge win for working people and was made possible thanks to campaigns by the RTBU and other unions.



📷 Tony Burke in Parliament

WHAT THE 'COST-OF-LIVING BONUS' MEANS FOR YOU

The Albanese government's cost-of-living tax cuts passed the Senate in January and will come into effect from 1 July 2024.

Under the changes, all Australian workers will receive a cost-of-living bonus. The changes will take place automatically, with the tax office simply taking less tax out of your pay packet.

At a time when household budgets are under extreme pressure, and workers are worried about putting food on the table and paying bills, these changes will make a real difference to living standards.

The new tax plan will introduce the following changes from July:

- » Reduce the 19 per cent tax rate to 16 per cent (for incomes between \$18,200 and \$45,000).
- » Reduce the 32.5 per cent tax rate to 30 per cent (for incomes between \$45,000 and the new \$135,000 threshold).
- » Increase the threshold at which the 37 per cent tax rate applies from \$120,000 to \$135,000.
- » Increase the threshold at which the 45 per cent tax rate applies from \$180,000 to \$190,000.

EVERY WORKER IN AUSTRALIA WILL BE BETTER OFF AND WILL PAY LESS TAX AS A RESULT OF THESE CHANGES.

The size of the tax cut you receive will depend on what you earn. For example:

- » A retail worker earning \$45,000 per year will receive a tax cut of \$804.
- » A nurse earning \$80,000 per year will get a tax cut of \$1,679.
- » A train driver earning around \$100,000 per year will get a tax cut of \$2,179.
- » A person earning the median income of \$63,500 will get a tax cut of \$1,498.

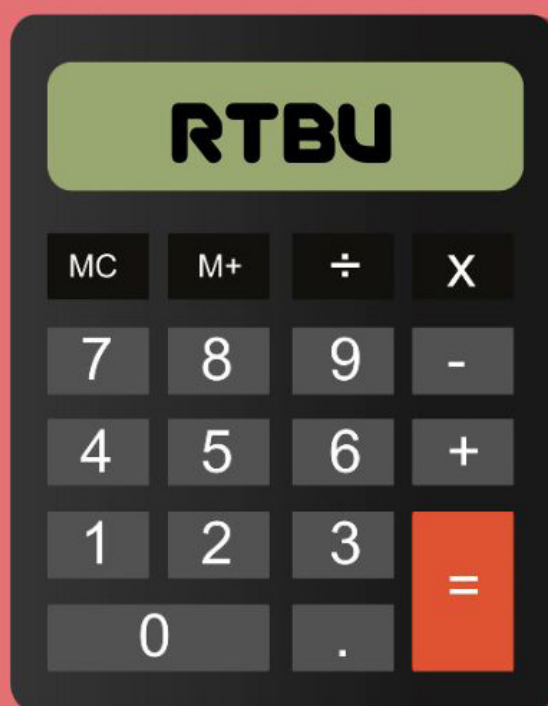
The RTBU welcomes the changes, which are good for workers, the economy and the country.

They will help to make the tax system fairer by delivering a cost-of-living bonus to those who need it most.

To find out how much your cost-of-living bonus will be, visit treasury.gov.au/tax-cuts/calculator and enter your current annual income.



RTBU



Aurizon depot tours brings members together

Aurizon members in bulk and containerised freight met up in a series of meetings during March to discuss their proposed Enterprise Agreement (EA).

The meetings were part of an epic depot tour into Parkes, Cootamundra, Dubbo, Broken Hill, Junee, Glenlee, Sunshine, Newcastle and Taree.

National Vice President Leanne Holmes – along with NSW Freight Divisional President Peter Munday, and NSW Locomotive Division Organiser Brian Head – travelled 2,887 km by road and a further 1,736 km by air to see members at the nine depots.

Leanne said the purpose of these visits was to hear from directly members about their views on the EA so far and voice any concerns about areas that need some work.

“All meetings were robust and forthright – exactly how we’d hoped,” Leanne said.

“A strong and healthy union encourages and supports truth and honesty from members, and we got it.”



📷 Aurizon Dubbo



📷 Aurizon Broken Hill



📷 Aurizon Glenlee

While there were varying issues from each region, members consistently identified five key issues:

- » the length of the Agreement (currently 2 years);
- » the standard of Aurizon's amenities and barracks;
- » the master roster not reflecting forecasts;
- » Aurizon not delivering on promises; and
- » too much car driving being rostered in dangerous times on dangerous roads.

Leanne said that another issue raised was the "Short Term Temporary Transfer" concept.

"This concept was brought to the table in the early days of bargaining by Aurizon as a mechanism to do seasonal grain work out of Gunnedah," Leanne said.

"At the time the RTBU spoke to affected members about the concept, understood that some Members supported the position, and did the work on a fair and reasonable clause to include in the EA.

"But it turns out that Aurizon now wants more.

"Not only has Aurizon now got more drivers on the books, it's also added two more depots to the original proposal. This is not acceptable.

"Aurizon is now the biggest operator in Australia and doesn't need any legs up with a proposal that is essentially relay-by-stealth."

Leanne thanked all members who took the time to attend the meetings and be part of the conversation.

"Getting to hear directly from the rank-and-file members gives the bargaining team the mandate to go back to Aurizon and seek a better deal in the next EA."



REAL WAGES FINALLY GOING UP

By Greg Jericho

The latest wage price index figures bring some very welcome news.

For the first time since March 2021, real wages are now higher than they were a year ago.

This is because while inflation rose 4.1 per cent in 2023, wages went up 4.2 per cent. It says something about how greatly the purchasing power of workers has been destroyed over the past 3 years that this extremely small rise is worth noting and celebrating.

For nearly two years now, as inflation has risen and interest rates along with it, the Reserve Bank and others continued to warn that wage rises could spur inflation and lead to the dreaded (and

unsighted) wage-price spiral. What has happened in reality is that prices have risen so much faster than wages that the purchasing power of the average wage now is almost 5 per cent lower than it was before the pandemic.

A good way to look at this is to start with a wage around average earnings of \$52,000 in the middle of 2011. Had that wage increased in line with the wage price index it would have been worth the equivalent of June 2011 wage of \$54,563. That is a nice increase in real wages and living standards – being able to buy essentially \$2,563 more things.

But the pandemic and the rising inflation since then saw all that increase wiped away to the point where in March last year the average wage was only worth the equivalent in 2011 dollars of \$51,761. That means that in June 2023 you had effectively \$239 less to spend than you did 12 years earlier!

Now with wages finally rising faster than prices we are seeing real wages rise. But the fall was so steep that the recovery will be long. Right now, that average wage of \$52,000 in June 2011 is worth around \$52,080. We are ahead, but not by much and we need to ensure wages keep rising faster than inflation in order just to get back to where we were in 2020.

We should celebrate wages growing, but one quarter does not end the fight to regain the loss of workers' living standards.

Greg Jericho is the Chief Economist at the Centre for Future Work.

Centre for
**Future
Work**



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Bargaining in full swing

RTBU members at Metro Trains Melbourne have locked in a new Enterprise Agreement (EA) that delivers a fair pay rise and improvements to their conditions.

However, V/Line members are still battling to get a similar outcome from their new EA and have had to resort to a series of industrial actions to have their claims taken seriously.

The Metro Rail Operations EA was certified by the Fair Work Commission in late February after being overwhelmingly endorsed by RTBU members. The agreement came into effect on 6 March, with a nominal expiry date of 30 June 2027.

Branch Secretary Vik Sharma said it was a significant victory for RTBU members.

“This agreement was made possible thanks to the extraordinary efforts of members, delegates and the RTBU bargaining team, who showed united strength and support for one another throughout the bargaining process,” Vik said.

“The agreement secures jobs, classifications and additional bonus days off with solid wages and conditions including a 17 per cent wage increase

and backpay to July 2023. Importantly, it also guarantees that not a single condition of the previous EA has been lost.

“It is a win by RTBU members, for RTBU members, and shows how powerful our union is when we stand in solidarity together.”

V/LINE FIGHT CONTINUES

Meanwhile, RTBU members at V/Line are continuing to fight for a fair deal in their new EA.

Bargaining kicked off in June 2023. However, V/Line’s proposals failed to provide staff with the same fair pay, conditions and job security as their colleagues at Metro, forcing V/Line members to take protected industrial action which has escalated since December.

The dispute has been supported by a political campaign including letters to the Victorian State Government, and has generated significant media coverage.

In March members stepped up their fight with a 13-hour stoppage, and a



📷 V/Line counter closed



📷 Vik Sharma with the media

rally attended by hundreds of RTBU members who made their demands very clear to V/Line and the State Government.

“V/Line workers are seeking a fair and reasonable Enterprise Agreement that reflects the conditions already accepted by other employers across the industry,” Vik Sharma said.

“The offers previously made by V/Line would leave regional workers worse off than their metropolitan counterparts. This is not good enough. The RTBU will not accept a deal that treats regional workers and their communities as second-class citizens.”

Industrial action has now drawn concessions from V/Line who have finally provided information requested by the RTBU bargaining team, and conceded our request for the State Government to be at the bargaining table. At the time of going to press, the fight continues.

STOP PRESS

Following an unprecedented seven strikes and notification of further action across the regional network, RTBU members have built the pressure to secure a breakthrough in bargaining.

After a 4-week period of intensive bargaining that has included a mediator, government representative and information transparency from V/Line, the bargaining team has made significant progress. RTBU delegates are now being briefed to seek feedback and determine next steps.



MEMBERS UNITE TO DEMAND A 'FARE GO'

RTBU Western Australia members turned out in force for a rally outside Perth Train Station on 14 March in support of their campaign for a fair pay increase and improved conditions for Transit Officers.

The RTBU is seeking a 12 per cent pay rise over two years, as well as better career progression and improved shift penalties to help attract and retain officers for Perth's rapidly growing public transport network.

No ticket to ride for train users

JAKE DIETSCH

Perth train passengers could effectively be free next Friday after transit officers voted to support industrial action with no one to check SmartRiders.

The Rail, Transport and Union secured support from members at a rest place on afternoon for which comes



Josh Dekuyer talks to the media at the Transit rally

Train tickets to go unchecked as union launches industrial action

FROM PAGE 1

Government over a new pay deal.

RTBU State secretary Joshua Dekuyser said officers would not check fares or issue infringements on Friday, March 22 — or “Fair Wage Friday” — and would continue the action on the last day of every month until they

received an acceptable offer. In the event officers do check tickets on those days, the union said they would “educate” rather than “infringe” passengers.

Mr Dekuyser said the union received a late offer, the night before the rally, for a 4.75 per cent pay rise followed by 3 per cent in each of the next two years — the same as that offered to teachers.

But he said that proposal was rejected as it resulted in a lower base salary rise over two years for most of the union’s 1900 members than what would have occurred under the restrictive public sector wages policy lifted in December.

The union has called for a 12 per cent rise over two years — a 7 per cent increase in the first year

and 5 per cent in the second. Mr Dekuyser said the union would consider “other measures” if the monthly action did not result in an acceptable offer, but said options would have to be discussed within the union.

“There are certain work-to-rule actions that we can take, that we would consider. At this stage, we’re not at a point where

we would disrupt services, but we are frustrated,” he said.

Mr Dekuyser said officers did more than check tickets and had a difficult job that came with law enforcement powers on Public Transport Authority property.

The removal of the wages policy means unions are now engaged with the State on a case-by-case basis.



WA Branch Secretary Josh Dekuyser said members were fed up with being made to wait for a pay rise amid a cost-of-living crisis.

“Despite more than nine months of bargaining by the RTBU, the WA State Government has failed to even put forward an offer,” he said.

“Meanwhile, senior public servants on six-figure salaries have pocketed pay increases of up to \$50,000. This

is immensely frustrating for frontline workers doing it tough in the face of inflation and rapidly increasing living costs.

“The State Government needs to step up and make a fair offer to the frontline workers who keep our public transport network running.”

At the rally, RTBU WA members overwhelmingly backed plans for industrial action in support of their claims.

Initially, this will mean Transit Officers will not be checking passenger fares on Fridays until the government comes to the table.

“RTBU members are united in seeking a fair go for all public sector workers – it’s time for the government to listen,” Josh said.

Photos continue next page



E 13 OPINION
Pay fight smack down
With wages going backwards, public sector unions ready for war

JOSH ZIMMERMAN
STATE POLITICAL EDITOR

Rather than another one of those “wage wars” that seem to be a thing of the past, there is a real battle brewing in the public sector. It’s a battle over pay, but it’s also a battle over the future of the public sector. The public sector is the backbone of our society, and it’s time we started treating it like one. The public sector is the backbone of our society, and it’s time we started treating it like one. The public sector is the backbone of our society, and it’s time we started treating it like one.

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MORE OPINION
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Fundraiser for Glen Howlett

Glen Howlett, a member of our RTBU WA community and dedicated Railcar Driver, has recently faced an unimaginable loss.

Just three days after welcoming their baby boy, Gibson, into the world, Glen's beloved wife Claire tragically passed away.

This heart-wrenching ordeal has left Glen grappling with the profound implications for his life, as well as the well-being of his two-year-old daughter, Laine, and newborn son, Gibson.

The RTBU WA Branch has worked with the WA Public Transport Authority to ensure Glen continues to receive income for a period during this difficult time. Additional support,

however, is crucial to provide Glen and his family with the necessary breathing space to navigate their grief and begin to heal.

In light of this, the RTBU is appealing to the generosity and compassion of members and friends. Your donations, no matter the size, will make a meaningful difference in Glen's life and offer vital support to his family during this period of immense loss and adjustment.

We also urge you to share this message within our community and beyond, inviting others to stand in solidarity with Glen as he navigates through his darkest days. Together, we can provide a beacon of hope and comfort for Glen and his family during this incredibly challenging time.

Glen's GoFundMe page can be accessed at the following link:
<https://gofund.me/1796962a>



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TRAINING
AHEAD
AUSTRALIA

‘Fix Metro’ campaign makes bus services an election issue

By Byron Cubit

Tasmania's state election was held on 23 March. The result was a hung parliament, but (at the time of writing) the most likely outcome will be a return of the Liberal State Government supported by the Jacqui Lambie Network.

The big issues of the election period were housing, health, the planned stadium, and public transport services. RTBU members were front-and-centre during the election campaign, demanding politicians commit to fixing Tasmania's government-owned bus operator, Metro Tasmania.

TWO YEARS OF ROLLING CRISIS MANAGEMENT AT METRO

The warning bells started ringing for the RTBU back in early 2022 when a survey of over 100 Metro Tasmania bus drivers found that 70 per cent of drivers had been threatened while working, and a staggering 98 per cent of drivers had been verbally abused.



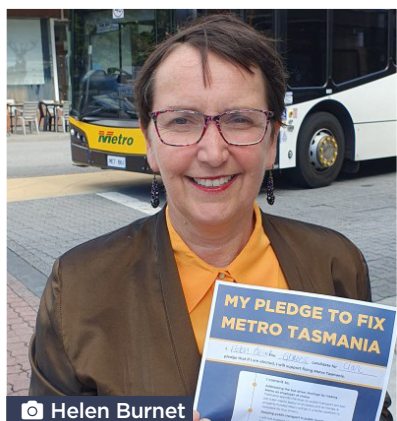
📷 Lara Alexander



📷 Simon Bailey



📷 Meg Brown



📷 Helen Burnet



📷 Simon Davis



📷 Martine Delaney



📷 Roshan Dhingra



📷 Amanda Diprose

70 per cent of drivers had been threatened ... and a staggering 98 per cent of drivers had been verbally abused.

Critically, 50 per cent said they were somewhat likely or very likely to resign from Metro.

Over the course of 2022, the problems with violent and anti-social behaviour got worse, and many drivers followed through on their threat to leave. And by the beginning of 2023, Metro was being forced to cancel hundreds of services a day due to crippling staff shortages.

The RTBU wrote to Transport and Infrastructure Michael Ferguson requesting an urgent meeting to discuss the crisis at Metro. We told the Minister that three things needed to happen: anti-social and violent behaviour needed to be addressed, pay and conditions for Metro workers needed to improve, and the adversarial management at Metro needed to change.

As a result of that meeting, the Minister agreed to set up a Safe Public Transport Working Group with Metro Tasmania, private operators, the Department of State Growth, local councils, Tasmanian Police and the RTBU to examine potential solutions. Soon after, the State Government

agreed to a trial of Transit Officers, and Metro and the RTBU launched the joint 'It's Not OK' community awareness campaign. Metro also started researching options for safety screens to protect drivers.

This was a good start, but Metro Tasmania bus drivers were still getting paid around 35 per cent less than drivers on the mainland, and complaints about the management culture at Metro had not been acted on. Drivers continued to leave in droves.

In late August of 2023, Metro "temporarily suspended" dozens of services from its timetable due to its chronic driver shortage. The Government finally was forced to act on pay and conditions, announcing a temporary 10 per cent pay rise for drivers. The RTBU and Metro management then worked together to ensure the pay rise was delivered to drivers before Christmas.

While these measures have helped, the underlying problems at Metro remain unresolved, and much more work needs to be done to get Metro back on a stable footing.

HOW WE MADE PUBLIC TRANSPORT AN ELECTION ISSUE

Early in the election campaign, the RTBU released a detailed research report into Tasmania's bus services, prepared by the McKell Institute. Among other things, the report found the Tasmanian Government spends just \$115 per head on public transport a year – the least of all Australian state and territories.

We then asked candidates from all parties, and independents, to endorse our #FixMetro pledge.

The pledge - which was informed by the findings of McKell Institute report - identified four key areas of public transport policy that require action from the next State Government

- » Addressing the bus driver shortage by making Metro an employer of choice;
- » Keeping public transport in public hands;
- » Making public transport safer and more accessible for all; and
- » Improving transparency and accountability in public transport.



Sam Campbell



Byron Cubit



Ivan Davis



Anita Dow



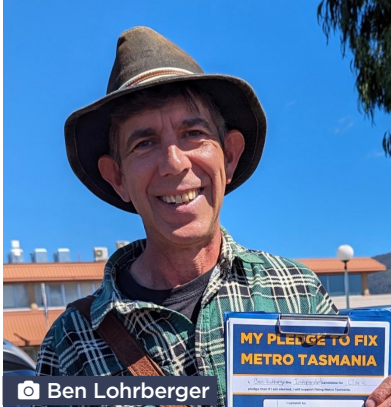
Janie Finlay



Will Gordon



Richard Goss



A total of 27 election candidates – including candidates from Labor, the Greens, and a number of independents and small parties – endorsed the pledge. Of those, 12 are likely to be elected to parliament once the final preferences are allocated.

In terms of policy commitments, the Liberals and Labor initially focused on cutting the price of bus fares, while The Greens promised to make buses free. The McKell Report and the #FixMetro pledge, however, steered the election debate back towards the underlying problems Metro.

The highlight of the campaign was when the Labor Party announced its public transport policy, including a commitment of \$4.2 million per year for improved pay and conditions for bus drivers and mechanics through enterprise bargaining negotiations. This amount was significantly more than the \$2m over one year provided by the current State Government, which funded the 10% ‘temporary’ pay rise.

Labor also committed to employing permanent, appropriately trained Transit Officers, and creating a new offence in the Criminal Code for intimidating, abusing or harassing public transport workers. Furthermore, Labor promised to appoint an independent expert to review Metro service delivery and governance and set up a Public Transport Advisory Board.

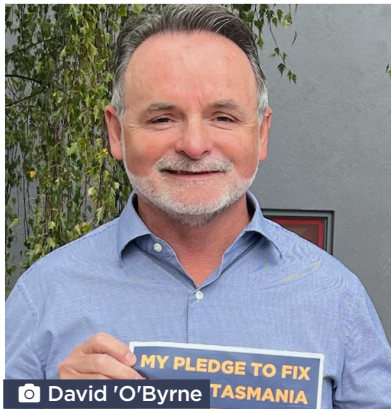
It was clear that RTBU advocacy played a major role in the development of the Labor party policy.

The Liberal Party, for its part, committed \$15 million over four years to expanding bus services to growing communities and schools, but did not say if any of this would be used to improve pay and conditions for workers.

The Greens announced a public transport policy too. While lacking in detail, it committed \$110 million over four years for more frequent bus and community transport services across rural, regional, and urban areas. The Jackie Lambie Network, however, did not release any policies or make comment on transport issues.

Now the election has been run, the time for promises is over. It is time for delivery. All members of the new parliament need to work together to get Metro Tasmania back on track so that Tasmanians can access the frequent, reliable and affordable public transport services they need and deserve.

The RTBU will be on the backs of every single Member of Parliament to make sure they don’t forget it.



G:Link in Pink Stink

RTBU members who drive G:Link trams for Keolis Downer Gold Coast (KDR) have strongly rejected a proposed Enterprise Agreement, with 59 per cent voting against it.

Queensland Assistant State Secretary Tom Brown said he was disappointed that KDR had failed to make a proposal that was acceptable to members.

“RTBU members are being hit hard by the skyrocketing cost of living, and are fighting for a fair agreement that will enable them to pay their bills and put food on the table for their families,” he said.

“While the latest proposal didn’t meet members’ expectations in terms of a fair pay increase, the industrial action we have taken to date has forced KDR to improve their initial offer, which was woefully inadequate.

“The rejection of KDR’s latest proposal sends a clear message that they need to come back to the table with a fair offer that recognises the hard work and commitment of our members and

Plan trip early to avoid a Pink fit

Tram strike ‘will impact’

Ashleigh Jansen

Tram services will effectively be halved by a driver strike planned to coincide with the highly-anticipated Gold Coast Pink concert as transport authorities scramble to avoid commuter mayhem.

Global superstar Alicia Moore, better known as Pink, performs her Summer Carnival stadium tour to an anticipated Heritage Bank Stadium sellout in Carrara.

Tram drivers will walk off the job from 1pm on Tuesday for a 24-hour strike as part of an ongoing breakdown in negotiations with union members and operators for an enterprise bargaining agreement.

On a normal day, G:Link services run every seven and a half minutes from 7am to 7pm. On Tuesday, tram frequency will slow to every 15 minutes from 1pm to 12.50am Wednesday due to the strike.

Buses will supplement tram operations to help the expected 45,000 concertgoers.

While trams will operate at a reduced rate, about seven buses will run the same route as the tram from Helensvale to Broadbeach South every hour.

G:Link’s CEO Phil Mumford encouraged commuters to plan their trips early.

“We will have enough capacity for people who want to get down to Broadbeach and get home from Broadbeach, but again it’s going to be a busy night – plan your trip accordingly,” Mr Mumford said.

“The industrial stoppage will have an impact, that’s why I’m



Pink will perform on the Gold Coast today. Picture: AFP

start of the Pink concert.”

More than 100 shuttle buses will run between the stadium and Nerang station, Broadbeach South station, and 12 buses will run from Parkwood station to Helensvale station.

These services will run in reverse after the concert.

An additional 18 shuttle buses will run from Marine Pde in Southport to Broadbeach South station; 15 buses will run from Cypress Ave to Broadbeach South station, and 12 buses will run from Parkwood station to Helensvale station.

On Friday, Mayor Tom Tate said he was “disappointed” the union’s strike would coincide with the gig. “We have been working on this for two years, it leaves a sour taste when you are all enthusiastic and wanting to go and don’t have the public transport to support it.”

The Rail, Tram and Bus Union said the mayor was “insulting” its members.

Gates to the Pink concert will open at 1pm and the show will begin from 7pm.

VIP ticketholders will



addresses the ongoing cost-of-living pressures they are under.

“The RTBU will continue to stand strong to ensure that our members get the fair deal that they deserve.”

KDR’s initial offer was a paltry 9.75 per cent pay increase over three years plus \$1,000 cash payments to address the cost-of-living crisis. After the RTBU rejected this offer outright, KDR came back with a marginal additional pay increase (an extra 0.25 per cent in the second year) which went to a vote and was rejected so resoundingly that the company refused to release the results

RTBU members continued to take industrial action and hold protests, including a 24-hour strike during the

PINK concert on February 20, which was attended by 40,000 people. This action helped pressure KDR to make their latest offer.

KDR came back with an updated draft EA that included a 12 per cent pay rise over three years, as well as cash payments to address cost-of-living pressures – however this was also rejected by members.

At the time of going to print, KDR had indicated that they intend to revise their current offer and put it to another vote—so watch this space.

For the latest updates, keep an eye on the RTBU Australia Facebook page – www.facebook.com/RTBUAus





Adelaide station platform

BRANCH NEWS SA/NT

MEMBERS GET SET FOR INDUSTRIAL ACTION

It's industrial action season in South Australia, with rail operations members at Keolis Downer Australia and Aurizon SA both voting in favour of taking Protected Industrial Action.

Members at Keolis Downer are seeking a fair and reasonable pay increase over four years and are fighting to protect Triple R (redeployment, redundancy and retraining) provisions that were inherited by the company when it bought the current contract from the State Government.

Unfortunately, KDA has so far failed to make an acceptable proposal, offering an inadequate wage increase and continuing to attack the Triple R provisions.

SA/NT State Secretary Darren Phillips said KDA's initial offer was not good enough and has left members feeling undervalued.

"Despite an ongoing cost-of-living crisis, RTBU members at Keolis Downer Adelaide haven't seen a significant pay increase in three years," he said.

"KDA needs to come to the table and make an offer that takes into account the substantial value these workers bring to the company and the hard work they put in every day, not to mention the rising cost of living that

is continuing to impact workers and their families.

"The RTBU will always back its members to ensure they receive the pay and conditions they deserve."

At the time of writing, members were considering a range of protected industrial actions in pursuit of a better deal.

AURIZON MEMBERS ALSO BACK INDUSTRIAL ACTION

RTBU driver members at Aurizon Bulk Central in South Australia have overwhelmingly voted in favour of protected industrial action in support of their bid for a fair pay increase to help address skyrocketing living costs.

Members are seeking an 18 per cent increase over three years; however, Aurizon has so far only offered 12.5 per cent.

The poll in March saw 95 per cent of members participate, with an average of 90 per cent backing industrial action.

RTBU SA/NT State Secretary Darren Phillips says the overwhelming support for the Yes vote shows that members recognise the strength they have when they stand in solidarity.

"Our members are united in calling for a fair pay increase that recognises cost-of-living pressures and the hard work they put in every day," he said.

"Base rates for RTBU members at Aurizon Bulk Central are approximately \$15,000 less than those for their counterparts in Western Australia—it's time for Aurizon to stop short-changing South Australian workers."

Aurizon has put the EA out to the vote without union support, so the RTBU is running a 'No' campaign to ensure all members turn this offer down.

"Aurizon's current offer is woefully inadequate, and we encourage members to reject it so we can get the company back to the bargaining table with a more reasonable offer that provides a fair day's pay for a fair day's work," Darren said.

Regional communities wake up to looming loss of sleeper carriages

People in regional NSW are waking up to the looming loss of the sleeper carriages from overnight NSW Trains services to Melbourne, Casino and Brisbane.

Sleeper compartments are currently available on rail services from Sydney to Brisbane, Sydney to Melbourne, Melbourne to Sydney and from Casino to Sydney. Each compartment contains two single beds and has access to a shared bathroom and shower.

In 2019 the former NSW Coalition State Government signed a contract for the manufacture of the new Regional Rail Fleet to replace the ageing XPT, Endeavor and Xplorer train sets, however the contract didn't include replacement sleeper carriages.

NSW Branch Secretary Alex Claassens said the decision to not replace the sleeper carriages was regrettable and short-sighted.

"Around the world we're seeing more interest in rail tourism, and people

looking for niche experiences like sleeper trains. In fact, in NSW we're seeing an incredible uptake in regional train travel as we emerge from the pandemic," Alex said.

"No date has been set for the delivery of the new train sets, so there is still time to fix this mistake, and to make sure the new trains can provide the same level of service as the old trains.

"That's why we're calling for the NSW State Government to arrange for a local train manufacturer to design and build new sleeper carriages compatible with the new trains."

A community petition to retain the sleeper carriages started by the RTBU is gathering steam, with around 2,000 people signing on (at the time of writing).

The campaign has generated significant media interest, especially in regional areas such as Wagga Wagga and Albury.

The NSW Labor Government has ruled out ordering new sleeper carriages from the Spanish manufacturers

building the new regional rail fleet (CAF) but has said it is considering other options.

National Executive Director Stewart Prins, who lives in Lismore in regional NSW, said sleeper carriages played a vital transport role for people in regional areas.

"It's really important that regional communities have access to comfortable, convenient and affordable low-emission transport options to get them to and from the major cities," Stewart said.

"Not everyone can drive, and not everyone can afford a plane ticket. A ticket in a sleeper carriage however gets you all the way to central station, and you get a night's accommodation on the train as well.

"As a community, we need to show the State Government how much we value access to the sleeper carriages, and make our voice heard in Sydney."

To sign the Save Our Sleepers petition go to <https://www.megaphone.org.au/p/saveoursleepers>



📷 XPT Train



NEW INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT DEMOCRACY

In an historic year when more than four billion people will go to the polls, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has launched its *For Democracy* campaign, aiming to unify the power of working people towards a trade union vision for democracy.

ITUC General Secretary Luc Triangle said democracy around the world was critically ill.

“We see a rise in authoritarianism, far-right ideologies, malign corporate influence on politics and the undermining of workers’ rights,” Luc said.

“But trade unions of working people have the capacity to heal democracy, and a vision to rejuvenate it. This campaign will rally the collective power of workers’ trade unions worldwide

to advocate for democratic values and worker rights, starting in the workplace and continuing to the level of global institutions.

“Together, we can shape a world that values democracy, justice and equality for all.”

The For Democracy campaign will focus on three levels of democracy:

- » **Democracy at work:** Emphasising the fundamental workers’ rights of freedom of association, collective bargaining and the right to strike; to empower workers in their workplaces.
- » **Democracy in society:** Advocating for freedom of speech, equitable tax systems, gender equality, social protection and quality public services, and challenging the dominance of corporate interests and far-right ideologies.

» Democracy at a global level:

Calling for reform of international economic structures to prioritise human rights, a just global financial system, equitable cooperation among nations and peaceful common security.

“In the face of growing challenges to democracy and worker rights, it is imperative that we unite across borders to ensure that our voices are heard,” Luc said.

“We can push back against the rise of the far right and other threats to our democracy by mobilising trade unions worldwide to demand a New Social Contract with democratic values and workers’ rights, to demand a fair and just global society.”

For more information about this important global campaign go to
<https://www.ituc-csi.org/fordemocracy>





Brothers and sisters of the ITF. With all the challenges that are confronting us in an increasingly dysfunctional world. We have to continue with our work in building workplace accountability from the employer, in building safety, in building environmental sustainability, in building supply chains that add value and don't deplete value, that don't take and rob workers' wages, that don't kill workers.

These are big challenges.

I've been the ITF President since Mexico City and together with Steve Cotton and the Executive Board we're determined to continue to have the ITF right at the centre of the campaign for workers' rights, for human rights, for environmental rights, for employer accountability.

We need to join together in unity and determination. We've got some big challenges.

It's appalling for all of us to see the devastation in Palestine, the devastation on the Gaza Strip, the devastation even within the West Bank. There needs to be peace and the ITF has been right in the forefront of calling on peace.

But because of the essential nature of supply chains into that area, we've got special responsibilities to make sure that those communities are secured against all the odds, and secured in a way that sustains peace in that region. It can only be done by ceasefire; it can only be done by proper and dignified recognition and respect.

We're campaigning for seafarers' rights and trade union rights in Chile, where we had a recent meeting.

We're standing behind our Argentinian brothers and sisters in the extraordinary attacks under the newly elected government.

We need to go into Africa and continue to determine that we will fully support them in the integration and reintegration into the world economy.

As Asia Pacific grows larger and larger and larger, we need to concentrate on

the pension plans within India and across Asia Pacific itself, making sure that trade unionism goes along with economic growth and accountability.

We need to take on the issues of the rebuilding of aviation and make sure that we're determining that the industry will be rebuilt around the highest standards of employment and not cutting across into the lowest standards of employment that goes along with cheap airlines.

It's important that we tackle the gig economy, automation and AI in a way that enhances jobs and doesn't undermine them.

And we've got other great challenges. We've got to continue the consolidation of our international supply chains.

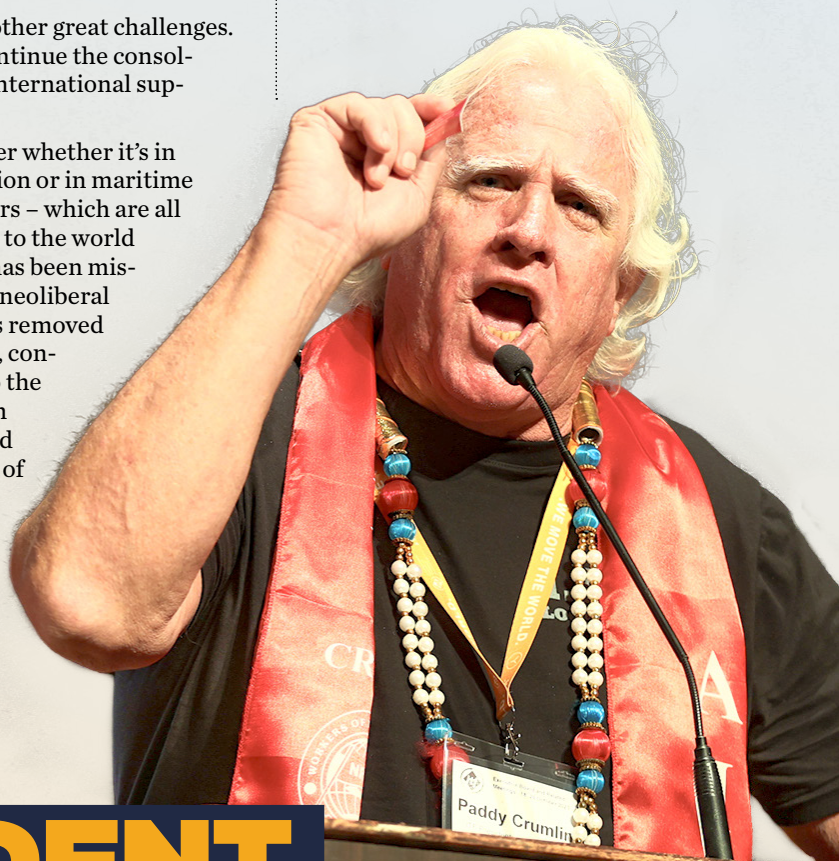
It doesn't matter whether it's in road, rail, aviation or in maritime and dockworkers – which are all are so essential to the world economy that has been mis-handled by the neoliberal agenda that has removed workers' rights, continued a race to the bottom through exploitation and tax evasion. All of the things that construct an international economy based on no accountability.

We are right at centre of that.

We're right at the centre of being able to hold investment accountable to the highest standards of environmental, socially responsible employment conditions and good governance, where these companies that we put our pension funds into, that we put our lifetime investment of deferred wages into, to build a better workplace and a better community.

There has to be accountability, and we're at the forefront of that as well. That's your ITF, that's our ITF.

Continued next page



ITF PRESIDENT PADDY CRUMLIN'S NEW YEAR MESSAGE

And when we come together in Marrakech [for the ITF Congress] at the end of the year, we'll be laying out a new programme. It's been a long time since we've met. Since we've had that democratic energy of working men and women in all of the areas, all the sections, all the regions.

I'll be standing again for your support and hope to have your support as President of the ITF so that we can continue the job that we started in Mexico City, continue to build on that construct of fairness, transparency, accountability, social justice and recognition.

For all people, regardless of gender, regardless of race, regardless of age.

It's an exciting time for us. Let's look forward with optimism, unity, determination and courage because that's what gets us along. That's what has got us here and that's what will continue to sustain us and the 20 million workers that we represent directly, and the many more millions of workers out there that haven't got a right to be in a trade union and to have the recognition. That's part of our mandate too.

These are many challenges, but with our wonderful team in London and around the world, in the regions and the sections, and with your support, affiliate support – real working men and women – we'll get the job done, all right.

So, let's have a 2024 to remember. Brothers and sisters, the ITF, we're here to stay.

Paddy Crumlin is the President of the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) and the National Secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA).

MEMORY LANE

June Lusk

Sydney's first female bus driver

On 27 November 1970, June Lusk drove a double-decker bus out of Manly's Brookvale depot, becoming, Sydney's first female bus driver.

June had worked on public transport as a 'connie' or conductor for 16 years before taking the step into the driving ranks.

Prior to her bus driving test, June said "I'm tired of looking out the back window. I want to know what it's like riding in the front."

June was part of a group of women who were trained to become bus drivers after a successful campaign led by another June - June de Lorenzo, who worked at the Waverley depot.

A letter to the editor in the Sydney Tribune newspaper from the time says that female conductors put the idea of employing women as bus drivers to the ATMOEA leadership, who then ran a survey of members at the Waverley depot.

"When 8 out of 10 voted overwhelmingly in favor [sic], the union then made the approach to the Department, which then invited applications from women who had been in its employ as conductresses for at least 10 years, and within weeks half a dozen applications were in."

Working on public transport was a labour of love for June's family, with son Richard Zmijewski and her grandson Jay Zmijewski both following in her footsteps. Jay is now the Chief Operating Officer of Keolis Downer's national bus division.

June's daughter Chris Zmijewski, and her mother Melba Cooper also worked on the buses as conductors.

June Lusk passed away in February 2022, but the legacy of Sydney's trail-blazing women bus drivers lives on.



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WHAT WE'VE BEEN READING

Divided Isles, by Edward Acton Cavanough

For most Australians, the politics of the Solomon Islands are something of a mystery.

We know the Solomons as one of our closest neighbours, but also as a place prone to ethnic tensions, and the occasional riot.

More recently, the Solomon Islands appeared on our news feeds when the Solomon Islands government abandoned its previous diplomatic recognition of Taiwan and forged a new diplomatic relationship with China.

This decision, which became known as 'The Switch', was seen as a diplomatic coup for Beijing, and made Solomon Islands politics a focus of intense global interest.

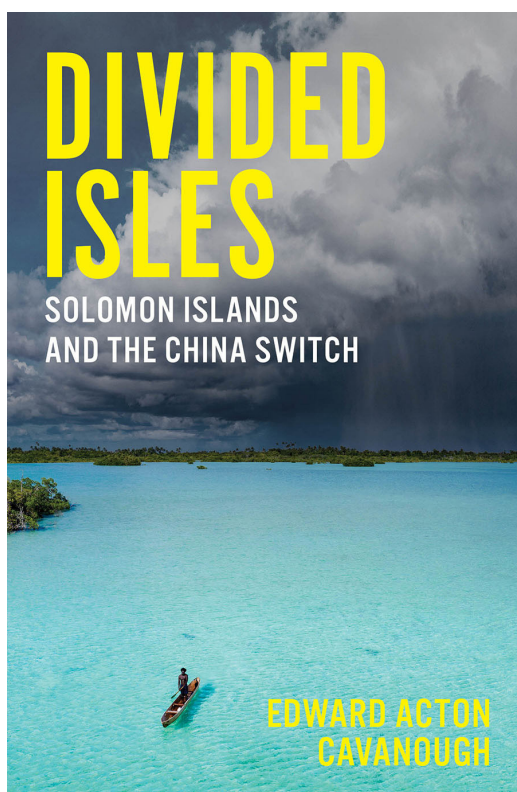
And then, during the middle of the 2022 Australian federal election campaign, came news the Solomon Island Prime Minister, Manassah Sogavare, was set to enter into an agreement with China on 'law enforcement and security matters'.

The Australian media – and Australian politicians – reacted to the news of the pact with alarm. Then Shadow Minister for Foreign Penny Wong, blasted the Morrison Government for failing to see it coming.

"Yet again Mr Morrison has gone missing and might talk a tough game, but what we are seeing on his watch is the worst Australian foreign policy blunder in the Pacific since the end of World War Two," she thundered.

The shocked reaction to the Solomon Island's partnership with Beijing was indicative of the way in which Australians have traditionally seen the South Pacific region as 'our patch'.

Few politicians, or journalists, however, bothered to look behind the outrage and to understand what was actually going on inside the Solomon Islands. That is, except for Edward Cavanough



– a freelance journalist, researcher and (in his day job) CEO of the McKell Institute. *

Cavanough's book *Divided Isles: Solomon Islands and the China Switch* goes beyond the headlines, and deep into the jungle to understand why and how the Solomon Islands entered into its new diplomatic romance with China.

He literally packs a bag and hitches a ride into the rugged, isolated poverty-stricken interior of this fascinating country to get the inside story of the Solomons and its people.

The book considers the historical context of colonialism, including the loathsome practice of 'blackbirding', and the World War 2 fighting – such as the bloody Battle of Guadalcanal

– which left a legacy of death and destruction that continues to this day.

It considers the tensions between the tribes that inhabit the 900 islands. It looks at the political structures that have developed since the country achieved independence in 1978, and the personalities who have dominated the political scene.

Cavanough investigates the reasons why Australia's relationship with the Solomons Islands has seemingly gone off the rails. He asks questions, and provides explanations, but doesn't attempt to give all the answers.

Most of all, *Divided Isles: Solomon Islands and the China Switch* shows how we can all get a better understanding of the world around us when we stop talking and start listening.

And as the biggest and wealthiest country in the South Pacific, Australia simply must get better at listening and understanding if we are to forge genuine partnerships with our closest regional neighbours.

You can buy a copy of Edward Cavanough's book by going to <https://www.blackincbooks.com.au/books/divided-isles>

And for more background we recommend listening to ABC's If You're Listening podcast titled 'China's play to win the heart of the Pacific': <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/if-youre-listening/china-s-play-to-win-the-heart-of-the-pacific/103137252>

*The McKell Institute has been doing some great research for the RTBU – see Byron Cubit's article about the **Fix Metro** campaign on page 16.

LAURENCE HEWSON

THE 'VOICE OF FLINDERS STREET'

He's gone viral online, featured in news stories in Australia and internationally, and become a cult hit among Melbourne commuters. But what you may not know is that Laurence Hewson—aka The Voice of Flinders Street Station—is also a proud RTBU Delegate and a staunch union man.

"Mate, I'm audibly crackling in the heat right now," Laurence tells Transport NOW as he takes a break from his day job as a station announcer at Flinders Street Station. It's a taste of the laid-back humour that has seen him rocket to fame since starting his role last November—and has gained him more than 116,000 followers on Instagram and close to half a million likes on TikTok.

Laurence brought this humorous approach to the job from day one.

"When I was in training I came to work one day and the trainer wasn't there. So they put me on Platform 10 and told me to do my best," he says.

"Then the network came crashing down because someone had jumped into the pit and walked along the tracks. I started cracking jokes to keep everyone entertained and people responded to that really well. Metro got a lot of emails after that from customers saying they felt really well looked after.

"Once I started doing peak-hour days routinely I started coming up with all this material, jokes and ad-libbing and improv. People were cracking up on the platform."

Around this time, he noticed some commuters filming his routines, but assumed they were posting the videos to their own social media accounts.

"Then one woman who was coming through the station on her daily commute started the tribute accounts on Instagram, TikTok and Twitter," he says.

"It got insanely popular after that. I eventually got in touch with her and asked if we could collaborate so I could promote my music through the pages [Laurence plays in a rock band called Sordid Ordeal], and it took off from there."

Media attention quickly followed. Laurence has been featured in the Melbourne Age, SBS News, the ABC, the Herald Sun and has appeared on 7NEWS Australia. He's spotted videos of his routines on news channels from America and the UK.

While he says his newfound fame has been surprising, he's clearly taking it in his stride.

"We live in a society where our lives are dictated by whatever media has gone viral in the last few days ... it's just the nature of the beast—it shows how media has become so important in our lives."

The comments show a thoughtful side that may not come through in Laurence's light-hearted station banter, but is apparent when talks about his involvement in the union movement.

"I've always believed heavily in the union, and I will always involve myself in it 100 per cent," he says.

He was instrumental in unionising employees at a previous job, taking a creative approach to recruitment.

"We had this thing called 'Spaghetti Wednesday' where we'd approach three or four core members of the staff a week, invite them over to my place for beers and spag bol and sit around and talk about the necessity of unionising," he says.

"Now it's a happily unionised company."

He signed up to become an RTBU delegate when he started in his role at Metro and has some good advice for anyone who's hesitating about joining the union.

"The first thing I would say to someone joining a company—whether it's in the rail and public transport industries or anywhere—is that you'll need the union when you least expect it.

"You might think it'll all go swimmingly or that you're just here to do your job and go home at the end of the day, but if something goes wrong ... that's when you're going to need union representation. It might even save your job.

"The union gives you a safety net, a community of workers behind you who will defend you to the goddamn hilt. It's an institution that the company just won't f*** with—because they can't."

Laurence's band Sordid Ordeal launched their debut album "When I Left Town" on 16 February 2024. Visit linktr.ee/sordidordeal to stream or buy the album and find out more.



BREAKING NEWS

CLASS ACTION LAUNCHED FOR TRANSPORT WORKERS' UNPAID SUPER



Gordon Legal and the RTBU have announced a class action against one of Australia's largest super funds.

Victoria-based Emergency and State Services Super (ESSSuper) is under fire for unpaid superannuation to transport employees, which could exceed more than \$40 million in unpaid entitlements.

ESSSuper is responsible for managing the superannuation of more than 127,000 members, holding over \$36 billion in assets. The super fund has been accused of breaching its obligation to some of its members by failing to include shift penalty allowances when calculating the super owed to some Transport Superannuation Fund (Transport Fund) members.

The class action will represent a mix of transport workers who are still actively working and those who have already retired and are eligible to join the legal action.

Gordon Legal Partner James Naughton, one of the lawyers leading the class action, says there is no time to

waste in seeking fair payments for the affected transport workers.

"Time is of the essence; we are seeing workers who are delaying their retirement after fighting for years to ensure they receive the fair superannuation entitlements that they deserve," said Mr Naughton.

"ESSSuper has failed to act and have left these workers with no other option, this is the last straw."

In some cases, ESSSuper has been miscalculating superannuation entitlements by as much as \$300,000. "These variances can have a drastic impact on the ability of the transport workers to retire and have the quality of retirement they deserve," said Mr Naughton.

RTBU Member Elwyn Gonsalvez, a lead applicant in the class action said "my experience with ESSSuper has resulted in the exclusion of upwards of \$90,000 from my superannuation fund after they failed to include my allowances under the Defined Benefit Scheme. I worked for over 45 years and to now be forced into legal action so I can retire is devastating."

Victoria Branch Secretary Vik Sharma says that the union will keep working hard to ensure members who had

worked hard for their retirement got what they were entitled to.

"Superannuation is the most important aspect of financial planning for retirement in Australia and it is a basic expectation of workers that superannuation is paid correctly," Vik said.

Anyone who has been a member of the ESSSuper Transport Fund is able to contact Gordon Legal to understand their legal rights and eligibility to join the class action. Please note this could also affect deceased members who were part of the Transport Fund.

For more information please visit: gordonlegal.com.au/services/class-actions/ESSSuper-class-action/

**Gordon
Legal**
IT'S PERSONAL



RTBU Sisters

We want to hear from you!



The National Women's Campaign Committee would like to hear from you!

There are over 5,000 RTBU women across Australia and we want you to be involved. We want to know what issues affect you in the workplace, hear about your views on becoming active and participating in a National Campaign and overall, let's engage the power of the collective!

What you need to do

- Click or scan the QR code below
- Complete a short survey with only six questions!



What we are doing with the results

- Be used to guide the NWCC for what you want from your union
- Will shape our future campaigns

We can't wait to hear from you!

Survey closes: 20 April 2024

YOUR RTBU

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RTBU