

Transport Minister Ben Carroll with Premier Daniel Andrews at Alstom's Dandenong facility yesterday. Photo: David Crosling



## Andrews defends higher

## cost of new trams

**Marta Pascual Juanola**

The Victorian government has signed a \$1.85 billion deal with French rolling stock manufacturer Alstom to build 100 accessible trams in Melbourne's south-east.

The announcement comes after the state government allocated \$1.48 billion towards the project in last year's state budget and constitutes an increase of \$370 million since those initial projections were made.

Premier Daniel Andrews defended the contract and said the state government was getting "better value today than we've ever got".

"We do our very best to estimate what things will cost, we make our provisions accordingly, and then we get on and provide the most compet-

itive environment," he said.

"We get better value today than we've ever got because the rolling stock industry is strong and healthy."

The Andrews government announced the project's new cost of \$1.85 billion in August last year.

The trams, to be known as the G class, will be made with 65 per cent locally manufactured components and are expected to join the network in 2025.

They will replace some of Melbourne's A, B and Z models, which have high floors and are less accessible for people with disabilities.

The government anticipates the project will create about 1900 jobs including in manufacturing and the construction of a depot and maintenance facility in Maidstone.

"[Manufacturers] need orders not just for boom and bust, but a solid order book that gives them the ability to hire, to train, to invest, and to deliver a fantastic product," Andrews said. "This is the biggest ever investment in trams and one of the most significant investments in rolling stock."

He said production would begin at Alstom's Dandenong facility next year.

The new models will be fitted with on-board power battery systems, making them less reliant on the grid and reducing the need to upgrade substations and the power supply.

Public Transport Minister Ben Carroll said the trams will be fitted for deployment to any part of the state's network.

"It is a real steep change in terms

of accessibility and energy efficiency," he said.

Carroll said the trams will provide space for wheelchairs and mobility aids, and be significantly quieter.

The design will be refined in consultation with accessibility advocates, passengers, and tram divers following a tender process.

More than 1700 Melbourne tram stops must be wheelchair-accessible by December and the entire tram fleet must have low floors by the end of 2032, under the federal Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002.

Asked yesterday whether stops would comply with the standards by December, Andrews said it was "very difficult to know", blaming local councils for blocking upgrades.

"We've had some local governments that have said: 'oh well no, we don't want these new tram stops' and that's been very, very challenging," he said.

Opposition transport public spokeswoman Steph Ryan accused the Andrews government of "sitting on its hands for years" as commuters endured dating trams.

She said almost 400 of Melbourne's 510 trams were built more than two decades ago, with some trams up to 50 years old.

"Labor can't manage major projects and today's window dressing - which appears to be hundreds of millions of dollars over budget already - is cold comfort for the Victorians who are forced to travel on the ageing rolling stock that's no longer fit-for-purpose," she said.