

Trams may join trains in huge strike action

Timna Jacks

Melbourne's tram network could be brought to a halt later this month at the same time as the city's train workers are threatening to strike, with Yarra Trams employees joining the fight for better pay.

More than 1500 Yarra Trams drivers, authorised officers and customer service staff could join their Metro counterparts in walking off the job by late July, *The Age* can reveal.

The Rail, Tram and Bus Union has lodged an application with the Fair Work Commission to take the proposed strike action to a vote.

If the action is approved, it could coincide with a strike being planned by train drivers and station staff.

The Rail, Tram and Bus Union is in negotiations with public transport operators over its next enterprise bargaining agreement, and is pushing for a 6 per cent annual pay rise over three years.

The tram and bus division has been bargaining since March with KDR Victoria, which trades as Yarra Trams, but claims that the operator owned by international company Keolis Downer has rejected the bulk of the union's 107 claims.

The industrial action could involve up to 24-hour stoppages and a range of other bans on wearing uniforms, making announcements and doing overtime.

The division's secretary, Tarik Koc, accused the company of using



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Luba Grigorovitch (above)

"uncompromising and heavy-handed tactics" during their negotiations and said the operator had only agreed to "one substantive claim and a handful of parts of other claims".

He said Yarra Trams was trying to remove a minimum requirement that part-time workers do seven hours a week.

He said the company wants to bring in more external part-time workers to work fewer hours.

The company also wants to raise a 4 per cent cap on part-time work to 22 per cent across the company, Mr Koc said.

"Yarra Trams unambiguously wants the ability to create a mass part-time workforce," he said.

"Its plans will destroy job security and devastate the culture of the industry."

Part-time employees would be put on "short shifts to reduce the costs of allowances and penalties", he said.

In May this year, Yarra Trams put out a proposed agreement for a 3 per cent annual wage increase over four years, which was rejected by a large number of workers.

The new deal is supposed to be signed by the end of this month.

The union's branch secretary, Luba Grigorovitch, said it was "outrageous" that a deal with Yarra Trams and Metro Trains still hadn't been struck.

"The RTBU believes that our members deserve a fair outcome but evidently both multinational companies aren't willing to play fair.

"I urge Yarra Trams to get serious about negotiations and quickly."

In 2015, tram and train drivers walked off the job twice between 10am and 2pm during negotiations over their wage deal.

Tram drivers earn about \$1391 a week gross while an average customer service employee receives about \$1234 a week gross.

A Yarra Trams spokesman said the company agreed to limit the number of part-time drivers employed and guarantee job security to all current full-time drivers.

"We will continue to work towards achieving a positive outcome for our staff and passengers."