

**PUBLIC TRANSPORT** Union demands

# Final bid to avert train, tram strikes

**Timna Jacks**  
Transport reporter

Metro Trains has pleaded with the public transport union to fast-track negotiations over the latest wage deal to avert a possible 48-hour strike on the city's network.

Yarra Trams' drivers and customer service staff have joined rail workers in a bitter fight for a 6 per cent pay rise, as 1500 Rail, Tram and Bus Union members voted to take industrial action that could include strikes of up to 48 hours.

It comes days after the union announced it would launch rolling industrial action on the train network starting on Monday, in which thousands of drivers and station staff will refuse to check Myki tickets, keep ticket barriers shut, wear uniforms and do overtime.

The ban on checking tickets on trains is scheduled for Monday, August 12, and the following Monday, August 19.

But Metro Trains' chief executive Raymond O'Flaherty has warned commuters that managers would staff myki barriers at city stations on Monday, meaning commuters may not get a free ride.

"We believe we can resolve all of our issues at the bargaining table and we're asking the RTBU now to step up the pace and the intensity of these negotiations and get a new workplace agreement quickly."

Metro has also told commuters to brace for hour-long delays next week, as train drivers refuse to make last-minute changes to services such as skipping the City Loop between Monday and Sunday, August 18.

If negotiations are not resolved in coming weeks, the network could be hit with simultaneous strike actions on both the tram and train networks this month.

"We're going to be smart about this," the Rail, Tram and Bus Uni-

on's Victorian branch secretary, Luba Grigorovitch said.

"We don't want to cause much grief at all to the commuters of Melbourne, we want to try to get through this process as soon as possible, I do however want to remind the companies that it is my members' legal right to take protected industrial action."

Like their colleagues at Metro, Yarra Tram staff will refuse to check Myki tickets, wear uniforms or do overtime, with the union's tram and bus division secretary Tarik Koc describing strike action as the "last resort", given that negotiations were ongoing.

The RTBU is demanding a 6 per cent annual wage rise at both companies, while Metro Trains is understood to have offered 2 per cent and Yarra Trams has offered 3 per cent.

If an agreement is not reached soon on the three-year pay deal, the Andrews government will face pressure to intervene before it causes commuter chaos.

Premier Daniel Andrews, who gave Metro a seven-year to run the city's in late 2017, has urged the parties to "sit down in a spirit of goodwill" to negotiate an outcome.

It comes as the Premier faces his own internal pay dispute as ministerial staff refuse to work before 9am and after 5pm.

Public servants are also demanding a 3.5 per cent pay rise and an extra week's annual leave as part of their enterprise bargaining negotiations.

*The Age* has revealed the union has separately launched an unprecedented federal court case against Yarra Trams over claims that proper annual leave has been denied.

The case will test for the first time whether workers who take leave due to a workplace injury are entitled to accrue annual leave during their absence.