

'Cheap as chips' Kew tram's horrid history

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The tram that derailed in Kew on Sunday, injuring a number of people on board, has come off the track at least twice before – on one occasion smashing through a sleeping man's bedroom.

The Age can reveal that in May 2016 the tram in Sunday's incident – number 3011 – smashed through a home in High Street, Kew, knocking the home's occupant, Paul Wilson, out of bed and stopping about a metre short of crushing him.

Three years earlier, in July 2013, number 3011 derailed on the 109 route at Bridge Street, near Port Melbourne.

Yarra Trams has confirmed it was the same tram involved in each incident, all of which were caused by a collision with a car.

Rail, Tram and Bus Union spokesman Phil Altieri said it was not a case of bad luck but rather the poor design of the "cheap as chips" Citadis C-class model, which he said had also been responsible for more than 25 WorkCover claims since they were introduced in the early 2000s.

Mr Altieri, the union's tram and bus assistant national secretary, repeated calls for the model to be taken off the roads. "We've called for that on a number of occasions, not just because of serious incidents, but because they've injured our drivers in the past," he said.



"Those trams should all be off the road, but that one in particular."

Mr Altieri said the model's principal design flaw was that the bogies, the rotating housing for the trams' wheels, were not positioned close enough to the front.

He said this meant the model was unstable and prone to derailment in a collision, while the vibration and shaking caused slow-burn neck and shoulder injuries to drivers.

A 2012 WorkSafe investigation found the trams were so poorly designed they posed an unacceptable risk to public safety.

Yarra Trams commissioned an independent assessment from ergonomist and engineer Mark Dohrmann the same year.

The report found severe lateral swaying of the driver's seat, which was likely to have contributed to workplace injuries.

It also found that the trams snaked at the rear, potentially putting passengers at risk.

"At virtually all speeds above 25km/h, the rear section of the tram snaked continuously, the problem worsening on the in-bound route along the Port Melbourne line," Mr Dohrmann wrote in his report. "We consider the problem serious, both from a health and an operational point of view."

Witnesses to Sunday's incident, shortly after 11.30am on Cotham Road, said the tram derailed when the driver of a car failed in an attempt to squeeze in between the front end and another vehicle.

The collision caused the tram to jump its track and crash through a fence, coming to rest in the front garden of a block of units.

The derailment caused passengers, including a baby, to fall on top of each other. Paramedics assessed two occupants of the car and 19 shocked passengers.

One elderly lady was taken to hospital with serious head injuries.

A Yarra Trams spokeswoman said the tram underwent assessments after both previous incidents and would again. She said this would include a review of the tram's history and maintenance records.

Yarra Trams is yet to respond to the union's calls for the 36 trams in the Citadis C-class fleet to be taken off the roads.

Asked by reporters if the fleet was more prone to derailments, Transport Infrastructure Minister Jacinta Allan said she did "not have that advice".



The tram on Sunday crashed into a car then ran through a fence. Photo: Nine News