

operations for trauma patients such as people in car accidents or with

vice" that was time sensitive and that many patients were vulnerable

weeks to clear some patients from waiting lists before they had to can-

not make a "drastic" difference.

"The public just have to under-

see people could be deployed outside of their area of expertise.

Is last train out of Melbourne almost gone?

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Timna Jacks

Long-distance train and bus services could be halted to curb the spread of the coronavirus if the government follows the advice of the nation's top health officials.

However, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee – an emergency group made up of the states' chief health officers and Chief Medical Officer Brendan Murphy – also advised the nation's new coronavirus cabinet that the overall number of trains, trams and bus services may need to go up to thin out commuter crowds.

Public transport is considered an "essential service" and is exempt from the rules that ban indoor gatherings of more than 100 people across the country.

Metro, V/Line and Yarra Trams have ramped up their cleaning regimes to limit the spread of the virus – a move Premier Daniel Andrews said would come at a "very considerable cost".

But Victoria's trains, trams and buses have become increasingly empty over the past fortnight and city train stations that usually brim with commuters at peak hour are now chillingly vacant, with many people following the official



Health officials advised to put the brakes on the state's public transport services. Photo: Daniel Pockett

advice to stay home if they can.

The network could soon become even more deserted after the national health committee called for a rethink on longer public transport journeys.

"Long-distance bus or train services pose a higher risk and should be reconsidered if not essential," the committee's advice stated.

The committee also advised "in-

"There may be a need for changes to public transport services."

Transport Department spokesman

creasing the frequency of transport options to reduce passenger density". Victoria's Transport Department is working with the transport operators to review these measures but increasing services on the network is unlikely in the wake of a dramatic drop in patronage.

Half as many people used Southern Cross on Tuesday compared

with a typical day. Transport planners expect services could eventually be wound back to follow a weekend timetable. Services may be cancelled if drivers or network controllers fall ill with the virus or are in isolation.

"As part of our planning for possible scenarios, there may be a need for changes to public transport services," a department spokesman said. "This will only be done following expert medical advice and we'll communicate with passengers and staff ahead of time should that be required."

The Australian Medical Association's state president Julian Rait said employers should stagger work times to avoid overcrowding. He advised commuters to maintain a healthy distance from other people and use hand sanitiser regularly before they get on the train and after they get off.

Transport operators activated a new suite of cleaning measures on Tuesday where all trains, trams and buses undergo a full sanitisation and clean at the end of the line each night. "There is a whole regime that has been put in place that was agreed to," Premier Andrews said on Wednesday. "It comes at a very considerable cost but it's exactly what we have to do.."