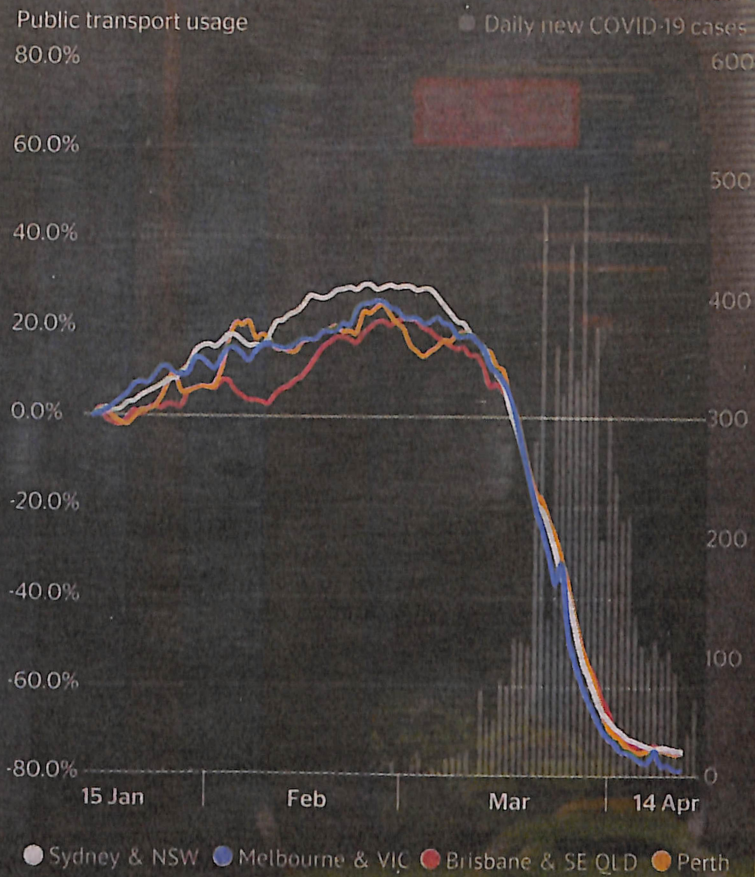


CHANGE IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT USAGE IN AUSTRALIA



SOURCE: WSP

Three-step plan

TRANSPORT Timna Jacks

Public transport services should be run half empty and no standing room allowed to enable commuters to observe a safe distance as they return to the network when COVID-19 restrictions start to ease.

A report by consultancy firm WSP Australia warns commuters could permanently "switch" from public transport to their cars if they felt unsafe on trains, trams or buses.

At present, with commuter numbers reduced by lockdown measures, passenger numbers are not restricted. However, as those measures are eased, a more formal approach might be needed to maintain social distancing.

The report argues a staged transition would be key to safety and

boosting confidence in public transport. WSP Australia recommended a three-step approach moving from "strict" distancing via "moderate" to "relaxed".

Trains, trams and buses would run half empty under a "strict" scenario, as commuters maintain 1.5-metre distancing and avoid standing.

Under "moderate" distancing, no commuter would sit directly next to, behind, or diagonally across from another, with at least one-metre distancing.

Under a "relaxed" distancing scenario, passengers would observe a gap between each other on a row of seats and at least one metre between people facing one another.

These scenarios would drastically lower the capacity of the network to at most, 30 to 50 per cent, the report

STORES OPEN



The report argues a staged transition would be key to safety and boosting confidence in public transport. Photo: Luis Ascui

Photo: Luis Ascui

for safe public transport

warns. Capacity on Melbourne's trams could especially suffer, the report says, with a "strict" approach leaving services with 13 per cent ca-

'People will feel tentative about going into any crowded places.'

Alana Newbrook, WSP

capacity. But WSP's general manager, Alana Newbrook, said the staged approach would allow people to get back on the network safely.

"We recognise that people will feel tentative about going into any crowded places and what we don't want is people to feel the need to get

back into their cars because that's where they feel safe," she said.

Transport services may need to be boosted to meet demand and timetables adjusted to allow for longer loading and unloading times.

Businesses should be encouraged to adopt a gradual approach to returning to work to ease demand and spread out peak periods, the report recommends. WSP also called for more road space to be allocated to cyclists and pedestrians. This could help get people out of their cars and ensure there is capacity on public transport for those living further afield, the paper advises.

More than 200,000 trips are taken on the public transport network every day during COVID-19, compared with 2 million before the virus hit. Nearly 70 per cent of commuters are travelling to work and

study and the rest are picking up groceries or other supplies.

The Transport Department is overseeing working groups with transport operators on how to prepare the network for a spike in commuter demand as restrictions ease. The number of people using the network dropped more than 90 per cent during the lockdown.

The biggest challenge will be running peak-hour services and ensuring social distancing on carriages does not cause a build-up of crowds at stations.

The Transport Department's head of transport services Jeroen Weimar said as restrictions change over coming months, the government would follow the advice of the Chief Health Officer and the Department of Health. Passenger behaviour would be closely monitored.