

# Call for overhaul of ageing tram network

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The city's tram fleet is ageing and desperately needs an overhaul, Melbourne's tram operator has warned the Andrews government, while the push to ramp up services is making it difficult to properly maintain the network's 500 trams.

A confidential document released to *The Age* under freedom-of-information laws reveals deep concerns about the company's capacity to deliver increased tram services without a major injection of new, low-floor trams over the next decade. The document, "MR4 - Franchise Rolling Stock Strategic Plan", was prepared by Keilos Downer - the company that owns Melbourne's tram operator, Yarra Trams - as part of its bid for a seven-year contract to run Melbourne's tram network, estimated to cost \$2.7 billion.

It has been withheld by the government since late 2018, but has now been released after a review by the Office of the Victorian Commissioner, who found it should be made public. The document reveals that Keilos Downer warned in 2017 of "considerable" risks to safety and service delivery in continuing to operate the network's older trams.

By the end of Keilos' current contract with the government in 2024, all rolling stock more than 20 years old would have exceeded their use-by dates. In 2016, 40 per cent of the fleet had exceeded its design life.

While 100 new E-class trams have been purchased - 30 more than anti-

cipated by Keilos in 2017 - most of Melbourne's trams are still 40 to 50 years old, and most are not wheelchair-accessible.

About 60 per cent of Melbourne's low-floor tram fleet was built in the 1970s and '80s. Nearly 400 of the 510 trams in service - about 78 per cent - were built more than 20 years ago.

"The challenges and risks of continuing to operate the older trams of this fleet are considerable," Keilos warned in 2017. "These trams were not built to modern standards and cannot meet the more stringent modern performance requirements for safety, reliability, availability, and driver and passenger amenities levels."

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Keilos Downer in 2017

The sharp reduction in fleet size due to the retirement of Z1 and Z2-class trams during 2015-16 put a major strain on tram availability and this would not be sustainable, Keilos said.

The lack of available trams has made it difficult to keep up with the maintenance task, risking "increasing breakdowns and service disruptions", it warned.

The government set aside \$1.48 billion in last year's budget for the new 'Next Generation Trams', planned to roll out from 2025, which will enable retirement of older high-floor trams. The designs and detail about how and where the trams would be built have not been released.

Keilos warned in 2017 of a host of challenges facing the tram network over the next decade, including the risk to network disruptions caused by major public transport projects, industrial relation tensions and an upward trend in passenger falls.

The 89-page document - in which the company's expected maintenance and operational costs have been redacted - warned the network was struggling with long turn-around times for collision repairs, poor wash services and an inconsistent rollout of new rolling stock.

An ageing workforce posed major challenges, Keilos warned, with nearly 30 per cent of engineers and officers with specific knowledge about the tram network expected to retire over the next 10 years.

A Yarra Trams spokesman said since the 2017 rolling stock strategy was developed it had made significant improvements. "The A and Z-class life extension project is also under way, with an initial investment from the state government of \$26 million to make major upgrades to the longest serving trams."

A government spokeswoman said the government was making "Victoria's biggest ever investment in new tram rolling stock".

## AGE RANGE OF YARRA TRAMS' FLEET

