

Transport Chaos set to continue

# More of the same as rail, trams go into meltdown

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Melbourne's public transport system could face another day of chaos with temperatures forecast to hit 44 degrees on Friday.

Metro urged commuters to leave work early as the temperature soared into the mid-40s on Thursday with many train and tram services cancelled or delayed because of the extreme temperatures.

Metro spokesman Daniel Hoare said there was no precedent for the heat Melbourne was experiencing.

"We understand the heat is already making life difficult for all Melburnians and we thank you for your ongoing patience."



Yarra Trams echoed the warning, urging passengers to leave early due to the need to take trams out of service for maintenance.

Route 82 from Footscray to Moonee Ponds was suspended until Saturday so those trams could be allocated to other routes. Replacement buses were operating.

Meanwhile, a leading climate researcher predicted hundreds of Victorians would die from this week's heatwave.

Professor Neville Nicholls from Monash University said the state's mortality rate was likely to jump by at least 50 per cent as the mercury shot past 40 degrees for three days running this week.

"There will be a substantial increase in people passing away, particularly among vulnerable groups who tend to be the elderly and those whose health is largely compromised by other illnesses or the drugs they take," he said.

Professor Nicholls said the spike in the mortality rate would not merely represent deaths that may have happened in the short-term, regardless of the weather.

"There isn't very much evidence that the heat causes just a short-term advancement of mortality," he said. "The bulk of people who pass away or who end up in hospital, it's a real increase in the total numbers."

In 2009, Professor Nicholls correctly foretold that the heatwave that preceded the Black Saturday bushfires was responsible for hundreds of deaths. Victoria's health authorities later estimated that the heatwave might have contributed to up to 374 deaths.

In Frankston, thousands of residents were without power as a nearby bushfire caused disruptions to roads, trains and shopping centres. About 19,000 customers of United Energy were cut off from power during the afternoon before it was restored at 5pm.

The Country Fire Authority was working to control the blaze at Kananook, between Frankston and Seaford. The fire caused VicRoads to close the Frankston Freeway southbound between EastLink and Frankston-Dandenong Road.

Extra firefighters will be rostered in Melbourne for the duration of the heatwave after a meeting with the industrial umpire resolved a standoff between the union and management.

The Metropolitan Fire Brigade on Wednesday night sought an injunction against the United Firefighters Union after the union blocked a last-minute request to approve extra staff to help battle the heat, particularly the expected increase in emergency medical calls.

MFB firefighters are trained in emergency medical response, including the use of defibrillation machines, resuscitation and oxygen treatment. Nine extra trucks and up to 36 extra staff were to be rostered on for the day shifts on Thursday and Friday.

As reported by Fairfax Media, the MFB on Monday made a request to the union for approval to roster on extra staff to help with the increased spike of emergency medical calls. At a conference hearing of the Fair Work Commission the union and MFB came to an agreement to roster extra staff for Thursday and Friday.

Melbourne's water storages also fell by 0.6 per cent of capacity. The weekly result represented a net decrease of 10.7 billion litres.

Meanwhile, Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School was mourning the death of a gardener who collapsed and died at the school on Wednesday. Martin Troy, 76, collapsed as he was walking between buildings. The school reported he had been inside during the hours immediately before his death and had been told to stay home from work to avoid the heat - which he was planning to do before he died. "He had an amazing work ethic," the school's public relations manager, Anna Aughterson said.

With Alana Schetzer