

APRIL 2020

The Bus Industry Confederation (BIC) and the Bus Australia Network (BAN) have long presented the case for public transport services to be recognised as an essential service.

The continuation of public transport services under current industrial relations laws is not guaranteed as a result of industrial action such as strikes and withdrawal of labour. Unlike the Qantas case several years ago, public transport is not recognised as an essential service, and the Minister has no “step in rights” to cease industrial action.

The BIC has argued for many years that public transport should be recognised in the Fair Work Act as an essential service. It is the BIC’s contention that if public transport services including bus public transport services, (buses carry more passengers per day than any other mode) are stopped due to industrial actions for any prolonged period, it will lead to **significant economic and social dislocation**. It should be noted that public transport is recognised as an essential service in a number of western developed economies.

By Economic and Social Dislocation we mean:

Mass transit

Public Transport is a mass transit provider and despite Australia’s relatively low patronage/passenger trips taken by public transport, about 8% to 10% of trips, public transport is still a major contributor to keeping our cities and regions moving, and managing the impact of congestion and its productivity impacts on the economy. If public transport was stopped overnight, our cities which generate 80% of the value of Australia’s GDP would grind to a halt.

Social transit

Public Transport is a social transit provider and provides a vital link to people who are less well off, without a car, cannot afford a car, cannot drive or do not have a license. Public transport *moves people* to connect to services, employment, education, social and recreational activities that are important to an individual’s social well-being and their contribution to the economy and society. If public transport was stopped overnight a large part of the population would be socially isolated and the health impacts of this would overwhelm the economy and community.

The disruption of mass and social transit on a large scale as a result of industrial action or a health crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic demands that public transport is recognised as an essential service and the appropriate action be taken for public transport to continue to operate in these emergency circumstances.

Bus Australia Network



There can be no better example in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic of why public transport must be recognised formally, after this virus emergency has passed, as an essential service by the Federal, State and Territory governments.

This needs to be recognised by both the industrial action circumstance, and in this case, an emergency health circumstance.

Public transport must continue to operate even if services are dramatically cut because of patronage declines as a result of social distancing and isolation policies, as is currently occurring. Public Transport needs to continue to operate in some form for those who have no other way to get from A to B.

The BIC has been involved in a number of research and policy projects and reports over the years about the impact of social exclusion and its cost to the individual, the community and the economy. What the studies tell us is that the value of a “bum on a PT seat” for a person who has no other way to travel is very high and we need public transport to fill this gap. This includes the Covid-19 emergency whilst minimising the health risks for bus drivers and bus passengers.

The BIC has been in discussion with all levels of government on these issues over the last few weeks as well as the issues relating to the economic and business impacts of Covid-19 and what might be done to support bus operators and bus manufacturers and suppliers.

The BIC has set up a dedicated Covid-19 hub on the Ozebus website as a “One Stop Shop” for all of the industry and government information you might need.

The link is www.ozebus/covid19

Keep up the good work.

Bus Australia Network

