

system under strain

Commuters angry as trains, trams struggle to meet targets

OVERCROWDED trains and trams have created havoc for Melbourne commuters as late and cancelled services surge across the city.

Major shutdowns, union disputes and increased passenger numbers contributed to poor results for Metro Trains and Yarra Trams in 2019.

Cranbourne, Pakenham, Frankston and Craigieburn were the worst performing lines, while route 70, 86 and 48 trams had the highest percentage of late services.

It comes as figures obtained by the Herald Sun show overcrowding is to blame for timetable frustration across the city's southeast.

Tough new contracts introduced in 2017 were touted as a

KIERAN ROONEY

major step towards more reliable services for commuters.

But the city's train operator failed its punctuality target for every month of 2019 as 70,060 services ran late and 10,149 were cancelled, meaning the company missed \$13.56 million in payments from January to November.

More than 785,000 Yarra Trams services ran late, costing it \$487,888 over the same period.

New data shows delays caused by passenger congestion last year soared by 30 per

cent on the Frankston line and 10 per cent on the Cranbourne and Pakenham lines. This was partly due to a major shutdown for Metro Tunnel works, which funnelled commuters onto other lines already at capacity.

Metro chief executive Raymond O'Flaherty said extreme weather, trespassers and movements around platforms also played a role.

"With Melbourne's population booming and more people choosing to catch the train, we are experiencing unprecedented demand on our network," he said.

"We're operating the network of today, while the Victorian government builds the network of tomorrow."

Authorities are yet to reveal a new timetable that was to be released last year.

Cranbourne line commuter Jon Diplaris, 24, said the late services affected his business.

"You don't account for it," he said. "It comes at a cost, especially when you are running a company."

Melbourne's worst performing tram lines were on routes that shared the road with motorists, with traffic jams slowing trams.

A Yarra Trams spokesman said services were changed in real-time so passengers got "maximum service levels".

Sonia Kumar, 27, takes route 70 trams to work and said she regularly faced the "difficulty" of late trams.

"Most of the time I have to face this difficulty," she said.

"You just keep on standing at a tram stop, just waiting for your tram. It takes me 57 minutes from my place ... but I always plan (an extra) half an hour in case a tram never comes or is running late."

A Department of Transport spokesman said the Melbourne Metro Tunnel and level crossing removals would help improve reliability.

"Every day we work with our public transport operators to ensure they deliver improved results, meet targets and provide a service that our passengers need and deserve."

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DEPUTY PM WON'T BE MOVED

ELLEN WHINNETT

MICHAEL McCormack has declared he will lead the Nationals to the next election, as he seeks to draw a line under two weeks of factional infighting.

The Deputy Prime Minister has been fighting an insurgency from Barnaby Joyce, who quit after a string of scandals in 2018 but has never given up his leadership aspirations.

Asked on ABC yesterday if he had any intention of standing down, Mr McCormack replied: "No, I do not. I will lead the National Party to the next election."

"I've now put myself to the party room as a leader three times in less than two years."

"And three times in less than two years, I've been endorsed as the party's leader. That should be enough to draw a line under that discussion."

But at the same time he was speaking, one of the rebel Nationals, Senator Matt Canavan, was reiterating on Sky his determination to cross the floor on issues such as energy policy.

"I have crossed the floor before, I don't do it lightly though," he said, but argued he would "forcefully" fight against policies which would harm Queensland's coal industry.

Mr McCormack said a potential move to net zero carbon emissions would "send factories and industries offshore".

Man found hurt on road

A MAN was found with life-threatening injuries at the side of the road in mysterious circumstances in Horsham yesterday morning.

Major collision investigation unit detectives are trying to confirm whether the 24-year-old man, of Warracknabeal, was hit by a vehicle.

Emergency services were called to Dooen Rd where the injured man was found about 5.50am.

He was taken to hospital for treatment.

Detectives are keen to speak to anyone that may have been driving through Horsham or on Dooen Rd between 4am and 6am yesterday.



Sonia Kumar takes the route 70 tram (above) to work and has to allow extra time, while Jon Diplaris (top left) says late trains on the Cranbourne line cost him money. Pictures: JAY TOWN, MARK STEWART

Guard sues over fire injury

A SECURITY guard is suing the state's director of housing after he suffered horrific burns in a fire at a block of flats.

The guard was engulfed by flames during the blaze at the Fitzroy housing commission flat on Napier St on March 29, 2017. He was responding to a tenant's complaint when he was surrounded by flames after getting out of a lift on the sixth floor.

He was left in a critical con-

DAVID HURLEY

dition and suffered serious burns to most of his body, and damage to his throat and lungs.

His lawyer, Maria Cvisic of Arnold Thomas & Becker, believes the lack of fire safety measures employed by the government department ultimately led to her client's severe injuries.

"The incident has had a

very big impact on my life," the guard, who asked not be named, told the Herald Sun.

"I rely on a tracheotomy which causes me to cough constantly. I feel embarrassed when I go out in public as people stare at me due to my coughing. I cannot control it."

"The rubbish in the building had been piling up in front of apartments for years."

"The Department did not do anything about it."



The Duchess of Cambridge

DUCHESS ADMITS MUM GUILT

THE Duchess of Cambridge has laid bare her "mummy guilt" during a landmark podcast, recorded as part of her efforts to bring about a "generational change" in early-years childcare.

The duchess told the Happy Mum, Happy Baby podcast she suffered anxiety about her performance as a mother "all the time".

"Anyone who doesn't as a mother is actually lying," the mother of three said.

"Questioning your own decisions, and your own judgments, and things like that."

"I think that starts from the moment you have a baby. I totally underestimated the impact and the change it had on our lives."

Asked if she felt "mummy guilt", the duchess — mother to George, 6, Charlotte, 4, and Louis, 20 months — responded "yes, absolutely".