



Rail, Tram & Bus Union

Tram and Bus Division NSW Branch

3 August 2021

Hon. Andrew Constance MP
Minister for Transport and Roads
52 Martin Place
Sydney NSW 2000

By email:

Dear Minister,

Covid-19 Vaccine Priority for Bus Operators

I write on behalf of over 3000 bus drivers employed by the State Government and Private Operators in NSW requesting that bus drivers be identified as a priority employment category for vaccination and workplace rapid testing.

Due to the working environment of operating a bus, drivers are uniquely at risk of being infected and being agents of transmission. The closed environment, coupled with the ability of the virus to spread via aerosol sized particles, multiplied by the number of passengers boarding and leaving the vehicle, clearly lends itself to potential widespread transmission. The time spent working in this space can also be significant, making it likely that the driver, the one person guaranteed to be in close contact with all passengers, is most at risk.

It is impractical to rely solely on administrative or mechanical solutions to mitigate transmission as we have no way of knowing the concentration of passengers on services. For example, a recent reduction in services to reduce mobility across the Greater Sydney Area resulted in consistent overcrowding of services. Decisions about reducing services as a response to the pandemic are necessarily flexible but can have unintended consequences.

The best way to ensure the driver, the common denominator for all passengers on a bus, is not an agent of transmission is to prioritise the vaccination of these frontline and essential workers.

Additionally, the deployment of rapid turnaround testing for bus drivers compliments vaccine prioritisation and would pick up expected increases in low and asymptomatic transmission ranges occurring as community vaccination and mobility increase.

Australian Rail, Tram & Bus Industry Union *Tram and Bus Division*

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ORGANISING WORKERS IN THE TRANSPORT INDUSTRY
PROTECTING AND BUILDING RIGHTS AT WORK

Buses create a unique environment for the potential spread of COVID 19, with the amount of bus stops and passengers potentially involved in a transmission event rapidly increasing the pathways for further infections. This is particularly the case when days are required for contact tracing and infected people are active in the community for some time before identification. Rapid testing would allow for the swift quarantine of drivers and significantly reduce the time in which the virus can embed itself in the community.

While I certainly acknowledge that there are cases to be made for the prioritisation of many work classifications, the nature of the work performed by bus drivers puts them at unique risk themselves and of unknowingly causing harm.

Both now and in the future, certain efforts at mitigation will have best effect if they are pre-emptive. We must neutralise critical vulnerabilities in exposure chains that have the potential to magnify transmission events. By being pre-emptive in our approach we can ensure we don't have the experience of a bus driver unknowingly spreading the virus in the community.

I implore you to urgently consider including bus operators as a priority employment category for vaccination and workplace rapid testing.

We await your response to the above.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Daniel Jagers', with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Daniel Jagers
Divisional President
Tram and Bus Division (NSW Branch)