

# Riding on the Same Bus – Policy Manifesto



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# Riding on the Same Bus – Policy Manifesto

## Our Motivation

*“Buses have never been more crucial to our economic and social stability and success. As an essential service, the recruitment, retention, and respect of our drivers are of utmost importance.*

*Today, our drivers often feel overlooked and undervalued, making it harder than ever to attract and retain them in our industry.”*

The first thing you read when reviewing the Policy Manifesto is:

***‘Let’s move forward together - Riding on the Same Bus.’***

The last thing you read when reviewing the Policy Manifesto is”

***‘Fearless – Riding on the Same Bus.’***

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## The Theme of the Manifesto

As explained in the Chairperson’s Forward

*“This manifesto’s theme is ‘Riding on the Same Bus’. It makes the case that improved public transport, better working conditions for employees, improved value for money and a better image for the industry can come from a tripartite approach to delivering public bus services – a meaningful tripartite partnership between Government, Trade Unions and Employer Representatives.”*

A second document titled **“Workplace Culture Toolkit and Operator Guidelines”** provides a raft of interventions that operators could implement to improve workplace culture and current recruitment and retention rates.



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## Why Recruitment and Retention?

The Industry is currently experiencing a shortage of bus and coach drivers and mechanics impacting upon the effective delivery of essential passenger transport services.

**Jobs and Skills Australia** reports that the current annual employment growth of bus drivers, across the country, is ‘minus 2,500’. The number of drivers has reduced over the last few years from 49,300 to 38,000.

Female participation is at an all-time low of 12% whilst the average age of the workforce is 58 years whilst the rest of Australia’s workforce is 39 years.

The permanent employment ratio is 62% with 38% casual employees. 90% Bus Operators operate services under a Government sponsored service contract.



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## The Research

Following the resolve of the APTIA Council in 2022 to undertake a recruitment and retention project and to impose a voluntary levy on its membership and the overwhelming vote of confidence of the members, including contributions from four new members and three Council members, Consultants, Navigate Work and the Hero Co were employed to undertake research from within the industry.

Over a six-eight-week period late last year, Nikki and James, every meeting, me, most and Bob and Dom some, met with drivers, mechanics, yards people, front line supervisors, employee representatives from every State. We met public and private bus operators and coach operators, large and small.

Meetings were also held with senior management from Translink, QLD and TfNSW, with Professors Hensher and Nelson from the ITLS, Sydney University, leading Union representatives from the TWU and the RTBU, International transport bodies, including BCANZ, APTA from the USA and SBS Transit Singapore, onsite.



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## What did the research find?

The investigations showed that the current recruitment and retention crisis, engulfing the bus industry, is a result of poor contract design, flawed procurement processes and inappropriate and inefficient contract management.

The investigations showed a need for better design of contracts, better wages and working conditions for employees, better outcomes for government to achieve value for money and consequently a better image for the industry.

The investigations showed the need for a new approach, led by Government, Unions and Operators, all moving in the same direction to a brighter future which paves the way for a new culture, new and improved working conditions and newfound community respect for every bus driver.

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## Key Insights – Tripartite Approach

The key recommendation of the project is that a tripartite framework should be implemented in all States and Territories between Government, Operators and the Workers representatives.

A tripartite approach allows all parties to freely discuss and address issues of economic and social concern impacting the industry and its customers. It requires compromise and creates an environment that ensures change, improvement and initiatives that can withstand changes of Government.

A tripartite approach will impact upon the management and design of transport services, ensure contract KPIs are realistic and not punitive, effectively address and mitigate psychosocial hazards impacting upon drivers and will address contract renewal and look to provide a reasonable level of remuneration for Operators and fair pay for drivers.



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## Key Insights – Tripartite Approach

The manifesto advocates a community campaign that addresses the negative sentiments towards bus drivers and the negative perception of bus driving which impacts upon attracting persons into the industry.

The manifesto seeks to address the very low job satisfaction of drivers by advocating greater tripartite commitment to reducing anti-social behaviour, to the development of micro credentialling for drivers, to a national commitment to improvement of drivers' wages, to improve facilities in the workplace and most importantly further research to address gender diversity.

A key insight from the manifesto is the current bus service procurement system. It finds that whilst privatisation and contract renewal by tender may have delivered significant savings to the taxpayer this has come at the cost to the stakeholders including the Operators and Drivers.



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## Key Insights – Contract Procurement

*“ Poorly developed contract arrangements, including the development of unrealistic Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and significant penalties for non-compliance create a negative environment for drivers.”*

The current bus procurement system, the development of these unrealistic KPIs, the creation of a master servant relationship between the regulator and operator and the competitive tensions of contract renewal has given rise to operators feeling helpless and rather than innovate to solve problems they become punitive towards drivers consistent to the way they are treated by the regulator.

The trade union argues that offering services at the lowest price to win a tender requires drivers to operate at unsafe staffing levels for unsafe periods in accordance with unreasonable timetables.



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## Key Insights – Psychosocial Hazards

*“Best practice would address the entire life cycle of the contract from design, initiation and negotiation, to execution, performance, renewal or termination.”*

Perverse outcomes from procurement models may be in breach of model work health and safety laws with respect to psychosocial hazards. In other words, contracts that punish operators for not meeting on time running requirements and which fail to address unmitigated psychosocial hazards and don't actively address workplace violence may in fact be against the law.

Other psychosocial hazards include the proliferation of split shifts in circumstances where a driver might live a long way from home and be unable to return home during the split shifts. The practice of drivers remaining at the depot and even at times in dark rooms to allow for rest are both unsafe and unsustainable and may breach fatigue regulations and be against the law.



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## Key Insights – Wages and Rosters

*“The current hourly rate for drivers, whilst varied across Australia is consistently too low compared to other sectors/ competitors for talent.”*

The lowly rate is compounded by the reliance on split shifts that interferes with time at home with families and/ or social community engagement. Urgent wage review is required to ensure comparable rates are paid across the country in recognition of the essential services undertaken.

An Example of Best practice:

*“The Employer is committed to providing an equitable rostering system. Future roster planning will focus on reducing the number of split shifts in the roster. Where split shifts are unavoidable the focus shall be on reducing the number of split shifts with breaks of more than four- and one-half hours. Split shifts shall apply only to permanent or permanent part-time employees.”*



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## **Recommendations – Procurement Process and Contract Types**

*“The franchising model for procurement across States and Territories should be underpinned by a tripartite framework with representatives from operators, workers and whole of Government to ensure that the design, implementation and management of contracts is not punitive and drives improved outcomes for all stakeholders.”*

Consideration needs to be given to an existing contractor, especially where significant infrastructure investment has been made to ensure that there is an appropriate and fair return on the investment.

Price must not be the sole determining factor with service quality, customer service and the workforce providing greater opportunities for meeting the public expectations.



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## Recommendations – Antisocial behaviour of passengers

Greater protection is needed for drivers, and this can be achieved by

- The introduction of network officers as undertaken in Queensland or for more transit police to be allocated to public transport.
- Technological solutions should also be considered to reduce the reliance upon drivers for fare evasion, or to limit the drivers' obligations with respect to seat belts.
- Live CCTV access to each bus should be considered to provide support for drivers who are engaging with difficult passengers.
- The Government should initiate a campaign to improve the image of bus drivers and to improve the public expectations for the drivers' safety.



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## Recommendations – Split Shifts and Route design

Route design should be a tripartite solution where the Regulator, representing the public, the employer representing management and the employee representing the drivers should provide input into the impact of any new route.

This would include the impact upon the changes to driver's shifts to complete the tasks. In this regard driver fatigue, on-time running obligations and the need for reduce the number of split shifts could be considered.

KPI's should be developed that support quality and reward attainment rather than be punitive or unrealistic. KPIs should be used in a reward system to ensure retention of staff and a workplace culture of achievement.



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## **Recommendations – Wages and Career Pathways**

A career in public transport which includes traineeships for younger persons should be promoted by highlighting the benefits of employment pathways.

Micro-credentialling of drivers, which identifies experience would be a useful recognition of service with encouragement for TAFE colleges to update their curriculum to promote careers in the bus industry.

The Federal Award should be amended to include a skill's matrix from which drivers would be encouraged to develop their skills and receive a higher financial rewards for meeting the skills level.

Employment agreements should reflect the need to improve gender diversity, provide greater incentives for pensioners to remain at work and encourage more full-time employees.



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## **Recommendations – Facilities and Safety**

Standards should be created through a tripartite approach to better facilities at bus depots, at bus stops and at interchanges.

Clear standards must be set for fit for purpose depots regarding cleanliness and a safe place to work, both private and public owned. The responsibility falls in this regard with both the Operator and the Regulator to ensure better facilities for employees.

Local Councils have an obligation to ensure bus stops are properly lit and are safe for drivers and passengers. Traffic committees must also be used to create adequate turning bays at schools and proper coach layovers.

Driver safety and the safety of passengers is a critical focus which can only be achieved by the development of safety protocols which clearly identifies the obligations of regulators, employers and employees with respect to safety issues.



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## Recommendations – Essential Service

“There should be a recognition of the essential nature of public transport and the value it creates for communities by way of a community awareness program. This campaign should be sponsored by Regulators and Operators in concert.

A constant narrative must replace the negative media stories and should highlight the public’s dependence on regular scheduled services and the many school services.

Programs should be encouraged and developed which seek to educate the public on the need for road safety and respect for bus drivers.

All State and Territory regulators should be encouraged to support a driver, mechanic and apprentice of the year.



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## And Finally...

*“When it comes to driving a positive future for bus drivers, passengers, and the community, we all need to be Riding on the Same Bus. The bus industry is heading down a one-way street. It’s on the path where we simply do not have enough drivers to keep the country moving and where the ones that we do have are overworked, under-appreciated and on track to depart the industry for good.”*

*“It’s time to change direction. We need to unite and commit to significant, lasting changes to culture, working conditions for bus drivers and engender community respect for our drivers.”*

*“But we know it can only happen when government, unions and operators are unified in a commitment to examine every part of our industry, reveal the truths and take actions outlined in this manifesto that are necessary to make a real difference.”*

## **THE CHALLENGE!**



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# FEARLESS

