



8 September 2021

National Cabinet

Chair: Prime Minister Hon Scott Morrison MP

By email: Scott.Morrison.MP@aph.gov.au

cc: National Cabinet

Dear Prime Minister,

The Transport Workers' Union and Australian Road Transport Industrial Organisation represent transport workers and operators which have all been significantly impacted by the pandemic. **We write to urge National Cabinet to establish a *COVID-Safe National Transport Roadmap*** as a vital component of the plan to reopen the country and safeguard the economy.

The implementation of such a roadmap as outlined below would shield the essential transport industry from future covid shocks and build public confidence, particularly in passenger travel.

This plan has been endorsed by leading epidemiologist and former World Health Organisation consultant Professor Adrian Esterman from the University of South Australia, who said: "the proposed roadmap is a major step forward, and if implemented, would greatly reduce the risk of interstate transmission of the virus."

The Transport Roadmap must include:

- Vaccination and rapid antigen testing hubs suitable for transport workers' shift patterns;
- Paid leave provisions for transport worker vaccinations and recovery from side effects;
- Uniform rules for borders, testing and vaccine requirements, guided by industry; and
- A national plan for aviation including AviationKeeper and rapid pre-flight testing.

No Australian state is untouched by covid outbreaks from transmission through transport work, with thousands of people nationwide forced into isolation from exposure linked to the industry.

Transport has been critically overlooked and disproportionately devastated by the pandemic. Transport workers in trucking and aviation have been subjected to laborious testing regimes, border chaos and crippling stand downs. Further, the Federal Government's failure to prioritise transport workers for vaccination left them particularly vulnerable to the *Delta* variant.

Australia last week reportedly had the lowest level of flying anywhere in the world. The beleaguered aviation industry has suffered more blows than most and patchy government support has left gaping holes in the system. Many workers are ineligible for any support, while others are struggling on minimal hours or reduced disaster payments if in receipt of other Centrelink subsidies.

Aviation will be crucial in supporting our businesses, regions and economy to recover. To do so, it must retain skilled workers through AviationKeeper support for those stood down, with conditions to protect jobs and cap CEO salaries. Public confidence in flying as we open up will also rely on rapid pre-flight testing to minimise the risk of exposure and prevent further aviation shutdowns.



As National Cabinet debates the safe reopening of the country once vaccination targets are reached, it is incumbent on the national and state leaders to implement a suite of measures to insulate critical industries like transport. Any move to reopen the country without shoring up our health defences risks further debilitating lockdowns, restrictions and economic disruption.

While the TWU supports vaccination as the leading solution to reduce the risk of contracting and transmitting the virus, evidence shows the risk is not entirely eliminated. Government-funded rapid antigen testing is a necessary tool to plug this gap, secure the economy and save lives.

Several rapid tests are already approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration with the Australian Medical Association and Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt also indicating self-administered home tests could soon be approved for use. Transport workers largely support the use of rapid testing to keep their workplaces and the public safe. In a recent survey, three-in-four cabin crew and pilots supported rapid pre-flight testing, while bus drivers in NSW this week held a safety stoppage calling for the tests.

The last 18 months has shown the devastating impact disruptions to transport can have on hundreds of thousands of workers, Australian communities and the economy as a whole. Without implementing these measures, we risk the possibility of future outbreaks of variants bringing transport again to its knees.

The TWU and ARTIO invite National Cabinet to meet and discuss this proposal. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Kaine".

Michael Kaine
National Secretary, TWU

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Anderson".

Peter Anderson
National Secretary, ARTIO