



Fire Connex, transport expert says

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RAIL operator Connex should be sacked and management of Melbourne's suburban trains brought back into public hands, prominent transport academic says.

Melbourne University transport planner Nick Low says Connex has performed dismally.

Professor will tell a transport conference today the State Government should not renew Connex's contract for the rail network. The contract expires next year.

"I'm absolutely convinced that Connex has made a complete mess of it," Professor Low told *The Age*.

In a speech today to the Municipal Association of Victoria's strategic transport planning conference, Professor Low will argue that the Government must bring the rail system back under public control.

Connex has failed to manage the system to the benefit of rail travellers, Professor Low argues, by not doing everything possible to run more services and reduce waiting times.

"The Government would be wise to not reappoint Connex to run the suburban railways, and wiser still to

bring the whole operation back into public hands," he says.

Connex's corporate affairs manager Mark Paterson said Professor Low was wrong, and the operation of Melbourne's trains should stay in private hands.

"The facts are well known that franchised public transport has delivered good value for money and will continue to do so," he said.

The Government will soon announce a shortlist of potential bidders for the \$600-million-a-year contract to run Melbourne's trains for the next 15 years.

Three companies are likely to be shortlisted — Connex, British railways operator Serco and MTR, which runs Hong Kong's underground trains.

A fourth company, French operator Keolis, may be considered.

In his speech, Professor Low attacks a proposal by Sir Rod Eddington to build a \$9 billion road tunnel from Footscray to Clifton Hill.

The road tunnel proposal will only encourage more people to drive into the city instead of taking public transport, he will say today.

If the road tunnel were to be built, it would encourage future freeways through inner parts of Melbourne, to

relieve the traffic pressure it would create.

Professor Low also analyses calls from RMIT academic Paul Mees to abandon Sir Rod's proposed \$7 billion rail tunnel from Footscray to Caulfield.

Dr Mees argues the rail tunnel would be a waste of money because the problem of overcrowding on Melbourne's rail network was due to poor operational practices and too few trains.

Money should instead be spent on suburban rail extensions and doubling the size of Melbourne's train fleet, Dr Mees says, along with several simpler short-term solutions.

Professor Low agrees the short-term solutions are necessary, but says the rail tunnel will still need to be built because passenger numbers are likely to grow by up to 400% in the next 20 years.

KEY POINTS

- Train operator's performance dismal, says Professor Nick Low.
- Railways must be in public hands, Low argues.
- Connex responds by saying Low is wrong.