

21st September 2020

Free facemasks would restore confidence to public transport usage

The NSW Government has done a good job to manage the threat of COVID-19 in the post Ruby Princess period. The contact tracing has been the nation's best. The public warnings have been explained well and the limits on our liberty have been administered fairly.

The Government announced on Friday that NSW public servants are to head back to work and lead the charge to revitalise the Sydney and Parramatta CBDs.

Employers that normally fill the cities want to return safely to work – but safe public transport is holding them back.

Urban Taskforce calls on Government at all levels to encourage to use face masks on public transport and where safe social distancing cannot be assured by handing them out for free.

Why not increase capacity on public transport by making face masks mandatory?

Employers need the public transport working at full (or at least greater) capacity.

- Staying at home and getting tested if you show symptoms is the first step.
- Maintaining social distancing where ever possible is the second step.
- Wearing masks where safe social distancing is not possible is the third step.

This final step would be so much easier if government provided face masks for free.

Hand them out at train and metro stations; at bus stops and on light rail. Hand them out at the entrances to shopping centres, at hospitals, nursing homes, chemists, medical clinics, aged care facilities, at pubs, restaurants, factories etc etc etc. Why not?

The cost of COVID-19 to the State generally (and government revenue in particular) means we need to get over this “*what if we run out of masks*” obsession. Simply – if they work as seems to be generally accepted now– then get as many out there as possible – millions and millions of them!

All the stops were pulled early in the COVID-19 phenomenon to produce hand sanitiser – and it worked.

The same determination is needed now. A regular supply of fresh face masks will allow our workplaces to return to much closer to normal than we are now. It is a practical step towards recovery.

The NSW Government should buy as many face masks as it can and get them onto as many faces as they can, as fast as they can. A comprehensive supply of facemasks would allow closer to normal operation of public transport. This would drive the return of the economy – something the Urban Taskforce members, CBD employers and workers desperately need.

The above can be attributed to Tom Forrest, CEO, Urban Taskforce Australia

*The **Urban Taskforce Australia** is a property development industry group, representing Australia's most prominent property developers and equity financiers.*