

Sydney is being held to ransom

Paul Nicolaou



It's going to take a long time to restore trust with Sydney's rail commuters, even after the months of disruption in the guerrilla industrial campaign is over.

At least a week's free travel on the rail network would be a good way to start the process of rebuilding confidence.

Sadly, we still don't know when the industrial strife will be over to allow the free travel gesture to be implemented.

The combined rail unions' wages campaign has cost our city millions of dollars. The damage is both tangible and psychological. There couldn't be a worse way of sapping a city's morale.

Thousands of workers prevented from getting to their jobs and businesses fielding umpteen cancelled bookings.

Retailers who've experienced even more sales gloom on top of

a cost-of-living crisis.

At the height of its row with the NSW government, the union demanded free travel for commuters as a bargaining chip.

That was a cynical ploy designed to curry favour with Sydneysiders suffering the impact of the union disruption.

Business Sydney's call for at least a week's free travel is not cynical. We just think it's the minimum needed to restore trust.

We need people to come back to the CBD and to feel confident that they can get home again.

Businesses need foot traffic to return. This at a time when we were getting close to pre-pandemic levels of CBD employees returning to the office.

Fridays are still the "problem child" with the city still at 40 per cent of pre-pandemic levels. Work-from-home is still a major factor on Fridays.

We don't argue with umpires but it is such a pity that the Fair Work Commission ruled on Sunday that hundreds of rail workers calling in sick was not unlawful industrial action.

It might not be unlawful but it is certainly disruptive.

Having put up with shambolic rail services last Friday and on so many earlier days, it will be understandable if commuters just don't bother making the effort.

They've come to realise that the rail unions are ruthless opponents for Premier Chris Minns and his government and don't mind putting commuters in the middle of the fray.

At least the prospect of trust-rebuilding free travel once the rail row is over might help relieve the current pain.

Paul Nicolaou is executive director of Business Sydney