



Michael Berkman MP
Greens State Member for Maiwar ▲

West side updates on COVID-19, public transport wins and Statewide issues

Dear Friend,

I hope you're keeping well under the circumstances. These are scary and uncertain times, so writing my regular "updates" email feels strange today, but I think it's important to stay connected.

Here you'll find some information on the unfolding **COVID-19** situation and how you can help, plus scroll further down for some **local news** including a public transport win, and updates on some **State-wide issues I'm working on** including NAPLAN, renters' rights and making coal companies pay their fair share.

COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

In these uncertain times, I've been comforted to see once again how our community comes together under pressure, with offers of support and empathy for our neighbours.

I know we will get through this together, and I hope I can help as your MP by keeping you as updated as possible, facilitating local intra-community support, and fighting for the broad-scale changes and programs we'll need during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The current situation

This morning the federal government made some new announcements including:

- A **ban on non-essential gatherings of more than 100 people**. This **excludes** airports, public transport, medical, disability, aged care and emergency service facilities, prisons, courts and tribunals, Parliaments, shops, workplaces, schools, childcare facilities, accommodation facilities, and public places like King George Square.
- Updated travel advice, meaning **Australians are urged not to travel overseas at all**, and those overseas are urged to return home.
- **Changes to visiting rules at aged care facilities**, restricting visits to two people at once with short visitation periods in residents' rooms rather than communal areas, plus a ban on visits by school groups and anyone who:

- has returned from overseas in the last 14 days;
- has been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the last 14 days;
- has fever or symptoms of acute respiratory infection, symptoms; or
- is not vaccinated against influenza (the regular flu shot) after May 1.

Yesterday I also had an opportunity to attend a briefing with the Queensland Health Minister where I asked about testing kits, future projections and the government's plans. You can [view my full video update on that here](#), but the highlights are:

- The Minister assured me that Queensland has enough **testing kits**(substantially more than other States)
- He is confident that community transmission (spreading between people in Queensland) isn't prevalent right now, and folks do not need to get tested unless they are symptomatic *and* have either had contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case or have been overseas within the last 14 days.
- He expects **community transmission** to pick up significantly next month, which is why physical distancing is so important right now

I'm continuing to seek more info from the government and I'll keep you posted as much as possible.

On Sunday, the [University of Queensland](#) announced it would pause all coursework teaching at the university for one week from Monday 16 March to Sunday 22 March, resuming on Monday 23 March once systems have been put in place including online lectures and tutorials, planning for physical distancing, and adjustments to the academic calendar. Campuses and facilities, including libraries, study spaces and eating areas, remain open and operating as normal.

At the time of writing, other west side **schools** remain open, but most all-school assemblies are cancelled. It's likely schools will close eventually, but it's not clear when yet - the Qld Health Minister has assured me that we are behind NSW in terms of infection rate, and are unlikely to close schools before they do.

More opportunities to vote early

The **Brisbane City Council election** is still going ahead on 28 March, but the Electoral Commission Queensland has extended **early voting** hours to space out voting as much as possible. You can vote at:

- 9am - 9pm today (Wednesday) and tomorrow (Thursday)
- 9am - 5pm Friday and Saturday
- 9am - 6pm next Monday and Tuesday
- 9am - 9pm next Wednesday and Thursday
- 9am - 6pm next Friday
- 8am - 6pm on Election Day

Older locals and people in more vulnerable groups are urged to vote at the start of the day (9am - 11am) when there will be extra staff to make sure you get through quickly.

Early voting on the west side is at Shop 4, 34 Coonan St Indooroopilly (the same complex as Spotlight and Subway), at Brisbane City Hall and across the city.

Your Greens candidates for the west side are Donna Burns for Paddington and Michaela Sargent for Walter Taylor. Both are running amazing grassroots campaigns and have a real shot at being elected this month. **Voting is compulsory, and I strongly encourage you to vote early to avoid the crowds on election day.**

Qld Health is urging everyone to practice social distancing, wash their hands and stay at home if they're feeling sick, have had contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case, or have returned from overseas travel in the past 14 days.

Please **check the Qld Health website** for the most up to date **information and advice**.

Want to help your neighbours?

If you're looking for a way to help your neighbours during these uncertain times, **I've started a Facebook group for west side locals to connect with each other, ask for support and connect with local organisations who need volunteers**. Please share this group with your neighbours and invite anyone on the west side to join.

Local groups like Meals on Wheels are also doing fantastic work to support the local community, and are inviting anyone who'd like to access the service, even just for a short period, to get in touch. I recently spent a few hours helping out with meal prep and delivery, and was reminded they do incredibly valuable work on a shoestring budget. If you'd like to lend them a hand, get in touch with their Business Manager, Alexi Paasonen, on 3870 1670 or emailadmin@stluciamow.com.au.

As your MP, I can help with printing cards like this to deliver to folks who are self-isolating, and with promoting offers or requests for help. Just get in touch with my office and I will see what I can do.

Supporting everyone during the crisis

The COVID-19 crisis could last a long time - six months or more. **I've** previously called for paid sick leave for everyone, including casuals.

Today in **Parliament I asked the government to make sure no one becomes homeless because of this crisis**, calling for a moratorium on evictions and freeze on rent in public housing until the economic pressure eases up. I also support a broader moratorium on mortgages and rents if things get even worse economically.

New Kelvin Grove State College Bus

On a much more local level, we had a great win recently: we secured a new direct bus to Kelvin Grove State College!

Win! Together we secured a direct bus to Kelvin Grove State College.



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Heaps of families living in Bardon, Auchenflower, Rosalie and Paddington who attend KGSC as their local catchment school have been pushing for this, and over the last six months I've lobbied the State government and Council, helped parents get coverage in the local paper, asked questions in Parliament and boosted their petition to try to make it happen.

So I was thrilled to see the news that we'd won, and Translink has added a new "S775" school route which links those suburbs with KGSC! It's for school students only, who can use their normal Go card to ride.

This new route is really important, especially for younger kids or those with heavy bags and musical instruments to carry.

Unfortunately the current route is quite winding and runs just once per day in each direction, leaving Bardon at 7:15am to arrive at KGSC at 8:20am, and leaving the school at 3:10pm to arrive in Bardon at 4:05pm. **If you have feedback about the route you can email the State Transport Minister** on transportandmainroads@ministerial.qld.gov.au. Please also CC my office on maiwar@parliament.qld.gov.au so we can keep track of locals' views!

In the meantime, I'm also supporting parents at the **Queensland Academy for Science, Mathematics & Technology** who are trying to improve public transport access and cut the

number of parents who are forced to drive for school drop off. I'm also pushing for more frequent buses in Fig Tree Pocket, and a Bardon-Toowong bus link. Stay tuned!

The major parties' links with fossil fuels

In the news last week we learnt that the LNP and Labor, who both take big donations from fracking companies, haven't regulated the industry properly. After 25 years and after approving thousands of fracking wells, the Qld government doesn't have a single database of audits of fracking companies.

Meanwhile, I also learned that the State Labor government has failed to collect any public funds from coal companies under their "voluntary" tax framework announced last year. I asked the Treasurer about this in Parliament, and last week I finally got an answer: almost a year in, they haven't received anything.

As the only Member of Qld Parliament who has outright refused all donations from fossil fuel corporations, I'll keep pushing for them to pay their fair share.

Renters' rights

In the past few weeks a lot of folks have got in touch with me about renters' rights in Queensland. Our current laws leave renters vulnerable to financial stress and housing insecurity, and prevent increasing numbers of families from putting down roots in their home.

The government promised reforms this year, but they're running out of time. **So yesterday I wrote to the Housing Minister requesting an update**. I'm concerned that a well-resourced scare campaign by the real estate lobby is discouraging Labor from taking action, so I'll be doing everything I can to keep the pressure on for urgent, fair rental reforms.

In turbulent times such as these, more than ever, we need representatives with the courage to act in the interest of the many, not the few, and take responsibility for basic human rights like housing. [Sign up here to get updates from me on renters' rights](#).

Time to scrap NAPLAN

Since I was elected I've been sceptical of NAPLAN. Back in 2018 I hosted a community discussion where we heard from teachers, parents and university education experts about concerns with mass standardised testing, skewed results, and unnecessary stress on students.

Now, with growing evidence that NAPLAN style assessment doesn't work and may actually do more harm than good, **the Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) is balloting its members about whether to totally boycott NAPLAN in 2020**.

I'm keen to hear from locals with their thoughts on this - if you have feelings about NAPLAN and the proposed boycott, please shoot me an email.

Clean Up Australia Day

Thank you to everyone who came along to help out at the Clean Up Australia Day event I co-hosted with Taringa Community Garden. With your help, we filled 11 big bags of rubbish, including a lot from along Toowong Creek in Perrin Park.

Good news for UQ Athletics Club

Late last year I was really pleased to support the UQ Athletic Club's successful funding application under the Access and Inclusion Community Partnership Program. I recently paid them a visit to see the fleet of RaceRunner bikes they've purchased with the funds. These bikes enable people living with significant mobility and balance limitations to run - they'll ensure that local residents are able to realise their fundamental right to be fully included in local running events.

Newsletters

Locals will notice my "Maiwar Matters" newsletter are hitting your mailboxes this week! This might be my favourite edition of our biannual newsletter yet, and I really hope you enjoy it. The newsletter has some personal updates from me, a few "how-to" guides for folks looking to get more active in their community, and a beautiful fold-out map of our electorate with past, present and future projects.

It's worth noting that we put this newsletter together before COVID-19 began escalating, so unfortunately some of the events advertised on the back may not be able to go ahead. But rest assured that I'll be endeavouring to replace them as soon as it's safe and practical!

Things are changing very rapidly at the moment, so please don't forget to follow me on Facebook and Twitter if you're not already - I post more regular updates there.

Yours in hope,

Michael

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