

OBikes off street for repair

IAN ROYALL

FEWER OBikes are on the streets of Melbourne because many have been removed for repair.

Reports of dumped or vandalised bikes have dropped in the past month, while the operator repairs damaged bikes.

The news comes as the city council continues to talk to three operators about starting up in central Melbourne.

The head of oBike Australia, CP Lim, confirmed the recall of the share bikes.

"We retrieved some of our bikes back for repairs and maintenance works, and will redeploy them back to the CBD as soon as possible," Mr Lim said.

The Singapore-based oBike company has had the Melbourne market to itself since starting up seven months ago.

oBike signed an agreement with three councils — Melbourne, Port Phillip and Yarra

— in October to better manage the bikes and ensure they did not obstruct walkways and roads. Melbourne city council has impounded 45 OBikes, with the company paying \$2250 in release fees.

Rival companies, Ofo, Mobike and Reddy Go, which have set up in other Australian cities, are in talks with councils hoping to set up in Melbourne this year. Riders use a smartphone app to find and then unlock the bikes, at a cost of about \$2 for 30 minutes.

HOLOCAUST REMEMBERED

ELDERLY survivors gathered at the former Auschwitz death camp and leaders warned the Nazi genocide must continue to serve as a warning as the world marked International Holocaust Remembrance Day on Saturday.

In Warsaw, Poland, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson paid his respects in a solemn ceremony at a memorial to the Jews who died in the doomed Warsaw Ghetto uprising of 1943.



Bus driver Rogert Bennett ferries passengers (main) from the Merrifield development at Mickleham (below). Picture: JAY TOWN

Bus just the ticket

Developer offers public transport as state lags behind

NATHAN MAWBY

A DEVELOPER of a housing estate in Melbourne's north has created its own public transport service until the government can provide one.

The city's infrastructure development notoriously lags behind the growth of its booming housing estates, and the move, believed to be a first in Victoria, offers a novel solution to one of the resultant problems.

From tomorrow, a bus service will link Mickleham's Merrifield estate, being developed by MAB and Gibson Property Corporation, with local schools, shops, and the Craigieburn railway station.

Project director Matt Planner said the buses would connect with trains at Craigieburn,



and had permission to use existing bus stops where possible.

"It's really about providing the stepping stones to the services that will come in the fullness of time, but allowing the community and residents to benefit from them in the short term," Mr Planner said.

The 25-seater bus will run in the morning and afternoon peak travel periods. The service costs locals \$20 a year.

Merrifield is expected to house more than 30,000 people once it is completed.

Mr Planner said more than 50 people had already paid for

the bus service, the capacity of which would be reassessed based on demand.

"We expect the patronage will help provide a reason for the government to create more permanent services in the long run," Mr Planner said.

He urged other developers, and even community groups, to consider setting up their own public transport systems. The service is expected to encourage residents to use public transport rather than drive.

"Behaviour patterns can be established early on, so having the service, that typically doesn't exist in these growing communities, should give people choice," Mr Planner said.

Merrifield resident Mandy Glassey said she was looking forward to taking the bus and

the train, in preference to driving three hours a day to work in South Melbourne.

"Getting a train will mean I can get some time back," Ms Glassey said. "I would have survived without it, but it might have meant I looked for other work."

A Transport for Victoria spokesman said: "The government is investing in new and better bus networks across metropolitan and regional areas as the population and demand for public transport services grows."

But the government also supported residents who offered solutions to local transport challenges, the spokesman said.

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