



19 October 2020

School Bus Program Inquiry
Committee Secretariat
Legislative Assembly, Economy and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament of Victoria
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

By E-mail Only: eic.assembly@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretariat

SUBMISSION TO SCHOOL BUS PROGRAM INQUIRY

Greater Shepparton City Council was invited by Rod Barton MLC – Member for Eastern Metropolitan Melbourne to provide a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry on Victoria's School Bus Program.

Greater Shepparton is the fourth largest regional municipality in Victoria with the population of 68,900 in 2020, which is forecast to grow to 83,234 by 2036. I believe that a lack of public transport options across Greater Shepparton is compounding social disadvantage and car dependency.

Within Greater Shepparton, 5% of school leavers are not in the labour force or undergoing formal training or education, with 17% of children living in jobless families and 7% of people receiving long term unemployment benefits; figures that are significantly higher than the state average. Greater Shepparton's public transport network currently inhibits the socially vulnerable from participating in society and accessing employment opportunities.

Council has been advocating to the State Government to undertake a town bus network review in Shepparton and Mooroopna. The existing network has remained unchanged since 2009. Services are infrequent; running only hourly between 8am and 6pm on weekdays, with limited service on Saturdays, and no services on Sundays or public holidays. None of Shepparton or Mooroopna's bus routes coordinate with rail services at the Shepparton Railway Station, and do not serve many of Shepparton and Mooroopna's new growth areas and major tourist destinations. There is also no direct bus link between Shepparton and Tatura, despite the township being the third largest in the municipality and situated in close proximity to Shepparton. As a result, the bus network is unsuitable and inadequate, failing to serve the needs of workers, students, tourists, rail commuters and particularly disadvantaged people with high social needs.

Council officers have queried Public Transport Victoria (PTV) about opportunities to use school buses to improve public transport within the municipality. PTV indicated that it would be very difficult to use traditional (out-of-town) school buses as public transport as this service is funded by the Department of Education and Training whereas the provision of public transport is funded by the Department of Transport. School buses tend to be coaches that do not meet the requirements of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) needed for public transport services. These buses may also do other school or charter roles throughout the day.

Shepparton and Mooroopna has a network of School Town Special buses, funded by the Department of Transport, which are designed to transport students to and from campus during school times. PTV indicated that it is theoretically possible to use these buses to improve public transport services as they come from the same department for funding and that these services tend to use DDA compliant low-floor buses.

Council officers believe that there may be an opportunity to use resources allocated to the School Town Special buses to improve the town bus network in Shepparton and Mooroopna. This could be done through the use of rostering buses used for the School Town Special for the existing town bus network to operate extra trips and provide more frequent services. Another option is to reform the School Town Special and the town bus network simultaneously, which may see resources redistributed into providing additional town bus services. This will ensure that there are bus services available for all members of the community to use, not just students.

If you have any queries in relation to the above, please do not hesitate to contact me via telephone on [REDACTED] or via email at [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

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Geraldine Christou
ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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cc *Ms Suzanna Sheed MP – Independent Member for Shepparton*
Rod Barton MLC – Member for Eastern Metropolitan Melbourne
Mr Mark Gepp – Member for Northern Victoria
The Hon Wendy Lovell MLC – Member for Northern Victoria