

Inquiry into the Use of School Buses in Rural and Regional Victoria

Mr Michael Edwards

Organisation Name:
Your position or role:

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

As a rural school principal who is responsible for school bus coordination in my area I have identified potential difficulties with expanding school bus services to the general public . The concerns are as follows:

1. Child Safety

It would be very difficult to maintain the child safe standards (Ministerial Order 870) if members of the public were using the same bus service as unaccompanied children (as young as 5 years old - and having their homes identified to members of the public). Additionally, school buses - at least in rural areas - tend to begin/end routes on or directly adjacent to school grounds. There are potential difficulties with members of the public in these spaces.

2. Extra Workload

As a principal with an already heavy workload I fear that any extra administration or management of expanding school bus services will fall to bus coordinators who, in rural areas, are usually principals. There is an ever increasing mission creep in schools and this could potentially add to the problem.

3. Potential loss of flexibility in bus services.

There are times when school bus services may be altered slightly to allow schools to conduct activities off school sites (eg sports days). In bushfire at risk areas (BAR) some schools must relocate to other sites on extreme fire danger days - in our local context this means redirecting the bus away from a nearby school directly to ours.

4. Variations to timetables

With members of the public catching school buses the time school buses take to complete their routes will be longer. School buses arrive at schools in time to give children time to prepare for the day. Adding a random element to this time is a potentially disruptive imposition on students and schools. Similarly with children being dropped off. Many are met by family members at drop off points (eg end of driveways or country roads). The parents need to have a firm drop off time to coordinate the picking up of their children.

In conclusion, the use of school buses for public transport does initially seem like an efficient way of providing transport in rural areas, however there are some significant impacts on the compliance currently required for the bus services and schools. A final observation: we currently struggle to get any approval to alter the bus routes and timing even very slightly - even when it would significantly benefit families and the safety of children. I would encourage the relevant authorities to consider making this process easier before taking on such a major reform as public access to school buses.

FILE ATTACHMENTS

File1:
File2:
File3:

Signature:

Michael Edwards