

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

Mr Michael Delaney

**Organisation Name:** St. Joseph's College, Echuca

**Your position or role:** Principal

### YOUR SUBMISSION

#### Submission:

I write in response to the call for submissions to the inquiry being undertaken by the Victorian Legislative Council's Economic and Infrastructure Committee that will consider extending school buses for use by the wider public to enhance the mobility of regional and rural Victorians.

My comments on behalf of our College community are included under each of the areas of focus:

- (1) an independent analysis of the transport disadvantages experienced by regional and rural Victorians, specifically youth, the elderly and low-income households;
- (2) investigating the potential social and community impacts of improving mobility options by widening the mainstream school bus system and an analysis of the examples and trials from other jurisdictions both locally and overseas;
  - a. A real benefit to those students who do not yet have a driver's license if they can use the school bus system to get to sports training, part-time jobs etc. after school on the school bus system and their parents can collect them after the parents finish work.
  - b. A real benefit to people with limited transport options e.g. apprentices getting to study venues, elderly etc.
- (3) investigating technology and systems that would be effective in ensuring child safety on mainstream school buses;
  - a. Surely the technology exists in this day and age for students/passengers to swipe on and off? After each bus stop the passenger list is updated and sent via sms to central system for accuracy in case of emergency. This would facilitate the bus passes system too. For example, NSW has a very efficient on-line system.
- (4) identifying any existing or potential barriers to allowing public access to the mainstream school bus network;
  - a. Eligibility of non-government school students should be equal to that of government when traveling to nearest denominational school. Should never be a question of 'if there is capacity' (see eligibility priorities below). I have worked as Deputy Principal or Principal in rural or regional Catholic secondary schools since 1996 and the eligibility of non-government school students has been consistently problematic. For example, students whose families have changed address to a different bus route have been told that as a non-government school student there is no capacity on the new bus route. Should they then change schools and enrol at a government school a seat on that new route somehow becomes available. This is detrimental to these students whose families have chosen Catholic education for their children.

There have even been cases where younger siblings have been unable to be transported to the Catholic school of choice due to lack of capacity. If however, they enrol at a government school a seat is made available on the same bus. Sometimes at the expense of an existing student of a non-government school.

Surely it is time this archaic inconsistency was addressed before allowing wider public access to the school bus system?

- b. Non government school students should also count equally in considerations such as the number of students required to extend or vary a bus route.
- c. Impact on child safety esp Ministerial Order 870. Does it increase risk to vulnerable students if members of the public (relatives/friends of a domestic violence perpetrator for example) can intimidate the student just

by their presence?

(5) identifying the spare capacity of existing assets in the school bus program and how that might be used to enhance public transport options in regional and rural Victoria; and

(6) investigating the costs of extending mainstream school buses to the general public and how a fare system would function.

Student priority of access to services

With some services the demand for seats can exceed the carrying capacity of the bus. In these situations the following priority of access applies:

first priority — eligible students (including those previously approved to travel)

second priority — eligible government school students

third priority — eligible non-government school students

fourth priority — students who are eligible because they fall within an exemptions to an eligibility criterion or are considered a special category traveler (both government and non-government school students)

fifth priority — fare paying travelers who are government and non-government students

sixth priority — fare paying travelers (non-students)

(see fare paying section for order of priority)

The coordinating principal should give preference to students with special needs or those travelling both morning and afternoon five days a week. If after applying these criteria there is more seating available, preference should be given to those who have the greatest distance to travel and to the youngest students.

(<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/school-bus-program/guidance/criteria-determining-eligibility-school-bus-program> accessed 23 March 2021)

## **FILE ATTACHMENTS**

**File1:**

**File2:**

**File3:**

**Signature:**

Michael Delaney