

# BUS INQUIRY SUBMISSION

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## General and Specific Responses to the Terms of Reference by the Regional Catholic Education Dioceses of Victoria

DIOCESE  
OF  
BALLARAT  
CATHOLIC  
EDUCATION  
LIMITED



Diocese of Sale  
Catholic Education Ltd



### 1. **An independent analysis of the transport disadvantages experienced by regional and rural Victorians, specifically youth, the elderly and low-income households.**

#### **General concerns**

- a) Some regional and rural students have no access to current School Bus services because of the eligibility requirements. This creates a level of injustice for students attending schools in the Catholic sector with some having access to the School Bus system and others not. For some of our schools, this results in private bussing arrangements being made at a cost to parents. In some instances, the cost is invoiced from the Bus Company to the School. The school then bills the families, some of whom are not able to pay.
- b) Some secondary school students don't have a direct route to school and have to change buses multiple times.
- c) In some regional and rural towns, students access the town bus service to travel to and from school. This is regarded as both unsatisfactory and at times unsafe. Students on public bus services continuously experience unsafe environments due to the fact that they are travelling with the public. In some situations, there is insufficient seating for children (these buses are designed to have people standing). Primary School aged children standing cannot reach the provided hand strap hangers. There are also no seat belts on these buses.
- d) A fare is still required to be paid by some students, which is a barrier for many families.

#### **Specific Concern: St Mary's Primary School, Inglewood (Submission #28)**

The lack of a bus service between Bridgewater and Inglewood creates serious issues for St Mary's Primary School. In recent years PTV has ceased the operation of local services that have not had sustainable numbers of eligible students. This has in turn denied St Mary's students a cost-effective means of accessing the School Bus system (via an extension of the service that concluded in Bridgewater). This is a very clear example of a need within a town

which would have kept this service viable if Catholic children were included as eligible students on School Buses.

As a result, St Mary's Primary School has had to lease a bus and employ a bus driver in order to get our rural students to school. The significant cost associated with this service is becoming untenable for the school, which is currently reviewing the service and its long-term viability. St Mary's supports the inquiry into the use of school buses in rural and regional Victoria and hopes that in the future the children of Inglewood will have greater access to public transportation.

### **Specific Concern: St Anne's College, Kialla (Submission #48)**

The lack of access to satisfactory town bus service support for one of the new F - 12 Catholic Colleges in the Greater Shepparton area. St Anne's College in Kialla (a southern suburb of Shepparton) has been operating since the beginning of the 2019 school year. The College now has close to 330 students and is projected to grow to a F-12 school of 1200 students in future years. Enrolment demand exceeds available spaces at the College by more than double each year now.

The issue is that the College has never been added to the town bus network. Students access the bus network which concludes at the Victorian Government Maguire College. For three years now, Dyson's bus service has offered to continue the service through to St Anne's College in a private arrangement between the bus company and College to safely deliver the students to the College.

Whilst the College and Catholic Education Sandhurst appreciate this very kind gesture we are aware with student numbers increasing by more than 100 students each year, this option will no longer be a suitable option for transporting students to the College. Failure to rectify this by adjusting the route of the town bus network to cater for the rapidly expanding population in Shepparton's south will result in the College losing enrolments because of lack of suitable transport options.

Catholic Education Sandhurst Limited and St Anne's College are also aware that a review of the Shepparton town bus network is being undertaken as part of the restructuring of public Secondary schooling and the introduction of the new Shepparton Super School.

It is our hope that this submission will lead to an improved bus network for all Shepparton residents.

### **Specific Concern: St Augustine's College, Kyabram (F-12)**

St Augustine's College has experienced numerous difficulties and disadvantage in relation to the students accessing adequate transport. Students undertaking VET studies required to access an RTO in larger regional areas such as Echuca or Shepparton cannot use public transport. The limited services provided are not at conventional working hours, and this also disadvantages those students wishing to do work experience outside of Kyabram. Presently the College supports its students at a considerable cost to the College.

Students are also disadvantaged by the lack of a school bus system that provides a safe passage to the school of their choice.

The problems encountered by students travelling on public buses to and from school include:

- overcrowding
- students being stood down when the bus is full
- child safe issues
- lack of supervision
- the expense for rural families
- delays for public/students because of the volume of students accessing the bus
- drivers' poor attitudes "this is not a school bus" they treat our students as a nuisance and not fare-paying travellers
- service is from a central point in each town and does not accommodate those families living in surrounding areas.

There are currently thirty-eight (38) St Augustine students and approximately forty (40) Kyabram P-12 students accessing a public bus morning and night. Estimates for 2022 indicate that the service's need will increase to forty-three (43) St Augustine's students and fifty (50) Kyabram P-12 students. Therefore, the College and Catholic Education Sandhurst Ltd do believe the current arrangements are sustainable.

### **Specific Concern: Catholic schools in the Horsham and Camperdown region**

Catholic students in these regions experience difficulties and disadvantage in the operation of the current bus system when DET schools have a student free day and declare that the bus service will not operate, with little notice causing parents to have to make alternative arrangements for their children to get to school on these days. This would occur at least twice per year.

### **Specific Concern: Mercy Regional College, Camperdown**

The current bus service which operates in the Timboon area will not extend its operations to pick up a family who attend Mercy Regional College, as they are the first family on the route and it has been deemed not eligible due to not attending a DET school. This has disadvantaged the family as they are required to make private arrangements for the transport of their children.

**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.**

**Opportunities:**

- a) Widening the use of the mainstream school bus system has perceived benefits for Secondary School aged students. It has potential benefits 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. It also provides 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.**

**Opportunities:**

- a) Swipe on/off technology should be a possibility to track users - with some ability to identify any concerns e.g. child safety re: any potential risk from the people using the system at the same time as students. After each bus stop the passenger list could also be updated and sent via sms to the central system for accuracy in case of emergency.

**General Concerns:**

- a) As regional education systems we wish to raise our significant concerns from a Child Safety point of view in relation to allowing the general public to share the school bus services. We are concerned that Child Safety would be seriously compromised if buses were opened to the wider community.
- b) In addition, we are also concerned about student behaviour and consequent student safety whilst travelling on buses. This is a widespread issue across multiple locations. The suggestion of the addition of a Bus Supervisor to support the bus driver in ensuring student safety for bus journeys is currently being explored between schools and bus service providers in one regional area. In some areas, behavioural issues continue to be an ongoing problem and many families choose not to use school buses because of this.

**4) Identifying any existing or potential barriers to allowing public access to the mainstream school bus network.**

**General Concerns:**

- a) The impact on child safety especially Ministerial Order 870 must be taken into consideration. There has been nothing presented to explain how the safety of our students or adherence to the Ministerial Order is going to be addressed if members of the public use the school bus service nor is there any mention of a mechanism for ensuring compliance with the standard.
- b) The issue of non-government school students being classed as ineligible travellers is also a major issue for students attending Catholic Schools. The view of each regional diocese and principals in our schools is that eligibility for our students should be equal to that of the government when travelling to the nearest denominational school. The eligibility of non-government school students has been consistently problematic. This inconsistency needs to be addressed before allowing wider public access to the school bus system.
- c) Non-government school students should also count equally in considerations such as the number of students required to extend or vary a bus route.
- d) With some services the demand for seats can exceed the carrying capacity of the bus. In these situations, the DET School Bus Program criteria for determining eligibility to the School Bus Program should be followed.
- e) Some students are on the bus for a lengthy time, the addition of paying customers would only increase this time.
- f) In some locations in regional and rural Victoria, bus stops are located in isolated settings. Allowing members of the general public access to the bus network therefore exposes students to potential risks.