

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

Mrs Kimberley Tempest

**Organisation Name:** Cobram Secondary College

**Your position or role:** Principal

### **YOUR SUBMISSION**

**Submission:**

I have uploaded the submission from the five schools in Cobram, and Katunga South Primary school.

### **FILE ATTACHMENTS**

**File1:** [60c94a849a1e2-160621 Joint Submission Bus Inquiry.pdf](#)

**File2:**

**File3:**

**Signature:**

Kimberley Tempest

16<sup>th</sup> June 2021

## Inquiry into the use of school buses in rural and regional Victoria

**Joint Submission from the Principals of Cobram Secondary College, Cobram Primary School, Cobram and District Specialist School, St. Joseph's Primary School, Katunga South Primary School, Cobram Anglican Grammar School.**

While we acknowledge the significant disadvantage for rural Victorians who rely on non-existent public transport, **we are totally opposed to opening up bus routes to members of the public.**

Our concerns are as follows:

### **Child Safety (ministerial order 870)**

All Victorian schools must comply with Ministerial Order 870 which outlines how Child Safe Standards apply in schools. This includes screening, supervision and training in relation to human resources and explicit strategies and procedures that must be followed. Schools who do not comply are at risk of not being registered by the VRQA. Allowing other adults onto school buses goes against arrangements in place to protect the safety and wellbeing of our students and raises a number of questions. Integral to protecting students it is the schools responsibility to ensure that children in our schools are taught by staff who hold VIT registration and that all support staff & visiting maintenance workers, bus drivers & visiting professionals hold working with children's checks. There has been nothing presented to explain how the safety of our students or adherence the Ministerial Order is going to be addressed if members of the public use the school bus service and who will have the responsibility for ensuring compliance.

### **Location of bus stops**

Our bus stops can be very isolated. School buses collect students from their driveway or in isolated & unmonitored roadsides, frequently with little phone reception. Having adults on buses therefore exposes students to potential risks. There is no monitoring or accountability of who, where or when the members of the public access the bus. There would be nothing to stop an adult from getting off at the same isolated bus stop. Furthermore, adults would know the addresses of all students in rural and isolated locations.

### **Potential for incidences**

Adding members of the public to the school bus route increases the risk of incidences, particularly from adults to children. If an incident was to take place on the bus – there is no one to intervene immediately – placing children in a vulnerable situation.

### **School community feedback**

We sought feedback from our school community in relation to allowing members of the public to access school buses. There were 164 respondents. Forty percent were students, fifty percent were parents and 10 percent were staff. The overwhelming feedback was that they were not in favour of allowing members of the public to access the school bus network.

Some respondents acknowledge that public transport is an issue for Cobram and surrounds, but most don't see allowing public on the bus is a suitable solution.

Furthermore, our respondents are worried about the safety of their students and have more questions about child safety, if rules are in place for staff and drivers, what rules would be in place for the general public. As the proposal stands the feeling was that it would open a Pandora's Box of issues in relation to child safety.

This feedback was collated from St Joseph's Primary School, Cobram Secondary College, Cobram and District Specialist School and Cobram Primary School.

### **Role of coordinator or coordinating school**

Allowing members of the public to use the school buses is problematic in the education system in relation to emergency management. It will be difficult to ascertain who is travelling and therefore instigate the processes that are required as part of schools emergency management procedures. It is also unclear how the system would operate when there are limited seats on a bus – so if the bus becomes full due to members of the public travelling before completing the school bus run what happens to the students who cannot catch the bus. There is not the option as in city areas of another bus coming in 30 minutes. Administrative issues also arise in relation to processing payments, who manages the payment and how or what does payment look like, what happens over the school holiday periods, who is responsible for dealing with complaints or incidents? The introduction of members of the public creates an extra work load and responsibility on schools who already implement the complexities of the existing School Bus Program.

### **Role of Bus Company**

When feedback was sought from the bus company they raised concerns. Some of these concerns centred on the type of service offered. They did not see that it would be viable if additional stops were added or if it operated as a 'hail and ride' service. They had concerns in relation to the safety of the students and how and who would be responsible for the management of the students. If a booking system was offered who would manage this and be accountable for it. They also expressed concern for the role of the driver – would they be expected to check for public suitability (working with children's checks for example)

Whilst we acknowledge advantages of allowing members of public to use the school bus service such as increasing the access for rural residents to travel especially if they are apprentices, trainees or workers who are under 18, or the elderly with medical appointments or shopping, low income, or one car households we see that the disadvantages outweigh the advantages. Some of the disadvantages include things such as we have currently have a fixed route. This means there are limited times available, established stops and days of travel. There may be a potential reduction of students travelling due to safety concerns and student/parent confidence in having a safe travel environment. In remote areas, if incident occurs, eg unruly/violent/substance affected traveller, assistance could take some time to respond.

The intent of the School Bus Program was to assist families in rural and regional Victoria by transporting students to school. To make this program a 'public' transport system

compromises the safety and wellbeing of students, has significant impacts on the existing infrastructure of the School bus program and moves the core purpose of the program from an educational focus to a transport without providing any support for schools whose core business is education.

Kind regards

Kimberley Tempest	Principal,	Cobram Secondary College
Claye Runnalls	Acting Principal	Cobram Primary School
Sarah Iddles	Acting Principal	St Joseph's Primary
Leah Willis	Principal	Cobram & District Specialist School
Liz Oudeman	Principal	Katunga South Primary School
Keith Willett	Principal	Cobram Anglican Grammar School

