

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

Organisation Name: Transitioning Well

Your position or role: Organisational Psychologist

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

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INQUIRY INTO THE USE OF SCHOOL BUSES IN RURAL AND REGIONAL VICTORIA:

Transitioning Well is a boutique psychology consultancy that supports organisations and leaders to address employee wellbeing in systematic and evidence-based ways. Our expertise and interventions are inclusive of the lifespan, with members of our team being experts in ageing workforce. The scope of our work has included specific impacts on older workers employed by bus companies, and our research has provided us with insights which we would like to share with the inquiry.

In summary, we believe that while a worthy endeavour, the expanded use of school buses should consider the impact on drivers as well as benefits for the community. Currently, drivers of school bus routes are often employed casually in an arrangement that offers a healthy transition to retirement. Our concern is that by expanding the use of the network these casual jobs would be replaced by full-time jobs, thereby removing this option to 'ramp down' to retirement. As such, we encourage any changes to the school bus network in rural and regional Victoria to be made with older workers in mind, and to provide flexible work options that continue to support a gradual transition to retirement.

BENEFITS OF FLEXIBLE WORK/RAMP DOWN TO RETIREMENT

Retirement is changing from what was once a simple transition from full-time work to full and permanent retirement, to a more varied and often gradual process occurring in stages over a number of years. Moreover, people are making the decision to remain in the workforce for longer for both personal and financial reasons.

Flexible working practices for older worker smooths the transition from working full time into retirement. Studies have shown that this 'ramping down' improves health outcomes, particularly in relation to improved mental health and wellbeing.¹ Moreover, a planned, voluntary, and phased manner of exiting work produces better retirement adjustment.^{2,3}

BENEFITS OF CURRENT SCHOOL BUS ROSTERS

The bus industry is known to attract older workers and Transitioning Well understands that many older workers like driving the school bus route. The structure of the work allows them to get out of the house for a few hours, earn some income, and still have time at home during the day to relax or invest in other interests. During the school holidays they are also able to take a break to travel or spend time with family. This sentiment aligns with broader research advocating the benefits of a gradual transition to retirement.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EXTENDING THE USE OF SCHOOL BUSES

We appreciate that utilising spare capacity of existing assets in the school bus network may enhance public transport options in regional and rural Victoria, but careful consideration should also be given to how the changes are implemented if the arrangements are to continue to benefit older drivers.

Transitioning Well is concerned that extending the use of buses between school bus routes may result in a significant number of jobs being converted to full time shifts. This would remove the option for many drivers to engage in an effective and healthy transition to retirement. We believe it is important that flexibility is maintained through the provision of casual positions for older workers. We suggest that if the network is extended, working arrangements are not automatically converted into full-time roles, but that a concerted effort is made to ensure flexible work opportunities are realised with older workers in mind.

REFERENCES

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