

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

Mrs Sue Ryder

**Organisation Name:** Tawonga & District Community Association

**Your position or role:** Secretary

### **YOUR SUBMISSION**

**Submission:**

I have uploaded the Tawonga & District Community Association submission.

### **FILE ATTACHMENTS**

**File1:** [60d503370321a-school bus inquiry submission 24-06-2021.docx](#)

**File2:**

**File3:**

**Signature:**

Sue Ryder

SUBMISSION BY THE TAWONGA & DISTRICT COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION  
to the  
PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA SCHOOL BUS INQUIRY

## INTRODUCTION

The Tawonga & District Community Association (TDCA) represents the residents of Tawonga and surrounding rural districts.

The rural areas to the east of the Kiewa River support 80 residences with the numbers of school children using the first school bus service varying over the decades.

School children living in Tawonga, along the Kiewa Valley Hwy and to the north of Tawonga to Running Creek, are serviced by a further two buses heading south to Mt. Beauty and a fourth bus (school and commercial use) heading north to Albury-Wodonga 5 days a week.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

The population of Tawonga is skewed towards the 'empty nesters' with 55% being in the 50years and over category.

In general, this would be the group that would consider accessing the school bus service on a commercial basis if available.

## BUS ROUTES

School buses terminate at a school, usually in a town or city that may or may not, have services required by the 'vulnerable' (disabled, elderly and low-income persons).

If a bus route terminates in a larger town or city where medical specialist services are available, there is a likelihood of a need for subsidized transport.

In small rural communities, specialist services do not occur and accessing the school bus will have little or no benefit.

The school bus-commercial bus to Albury/Wodonga leaves Mt. Beauty at 6.45am, arriving at Tawonga at 7am then collecting passengers (school children/adults) along the route to reach Wodonga at 8.45am and Albury at 9am.

The return journey leaves Albury at 3.35pm and arrives in Tawonga at 5pm and Mt Beauty 5.15pm – a very long day for a short time to access services in the provincial cities.

And a journey which arrives and terminates at a school, not a hospital, medical offices or shopping centre.

## BUS CAPACITY

The costs involved in maintaining a school bus, whilst subsidized by the government, still ensures bus operators must maintain a high level of seat occupancy for school children.

The availability of spare seats on a school bus may vary from year to year but in the main, relying on a school bus to maintain a number of seats for paying passengers is an unrealistic imposition on bus operators.

It should be noted that the Mt. Beauty to Albury-Wodonga is a specialist bus with a side opening lift to accommodate a single wheelchair bound student.

The cost of alterations to all school buses to accommodate the possibility of a disabled person in a wheel chair wishing to use the service (over and above any existing wheelchair bound student) would be an expensive exercise especially if the wheel chair service is not used on a daily basis.

## VULNERABLE PERSONS

School buses are not 'physically disabled' person friendly unless the bus is equipped with specialist equipment.

The same applies to the elderly if they have to step up/down and climb the steps in/out without some form of assistance, and it should not be seen as the duty of the bus driver to leave his/her seat to provide that service (apart from the legal issues of leaving the driver's seat whilst the engine is running).

Whilst youth and low-income household residents are likely to be able to enter/exit a bus their ability to pay the fare may well be a cost imposition that cannot be met.

There is no doubt that there are examples of persons capable of accessing a school bus with sufficient funds to pay the fare, but those persons are also likely to have access to personal transport (family/friends), 'community cars' or taxi's.

## SCHOOL STUDENTS

School bus drivers are required to have a 'working with children' police check as well as other licences but are potential passengers on a school bus fit to travel with children?

A paying passenger may be of dubious character or an inappropriate person to be travelling with school children, and it should not be a requirement for the bus driver to determine a person's status especially if that person presents with enough funds to pay the fare.

If a paying passenger is, or becomes a hazard or hinderance on the school bus, how can the driver attempt to drive the bus and maintain a safe environment on the school bus for his first priority - the school children?

## CONCLUSION

The TDCA believes there is merit in using extra capacity on a school bus to provide transport to fee paying persons when it can be determined that there is no other option available to the general public.

However, the school bus route should not be compromised by route changes to accommodate a perceived usage of fee-paying passengers, nor should a school bus with variable occupancy rates be seen as a general transport service.

The greater use of the 'community car' service or an extension of the 'taxi card' system should be examined in order to offer an alternative service more attuned to the needs of elderly, disabled or disadvantaged persons.