



Review of School Bus Services

Submission by
Bus Association Victoria.
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Bus Association Victoria



- Represents the collective interests of Victorian bus operators
- Provides opportunities for members to
 - improve safety, reliability, efficiency and effectiveness of their services
 - maintain high ethical standards
 - retain community service values in the delivery of road passenger operations
- By so doing, will help to enhance the quality of bus services to the Victorian community



Criteria for School Bus Services

- Assistance should be available to all students who travel further than a reasonable walking distance
- Assistance should recognise the local availability of appropriate educational opportunities
- Services should be at least as safe as private transport



Criteria (cont)

- Services should reflect modern expectations about service quality.
- Services should be provided cost-effectively.
- Service providers have a right to expect reasonable security in rights to service provision.

Some eligibility issues - minimum distances



School	Vic	NSW	Qld	SA	Tas
Primary	4.8k	2.3k	3.2k	5k	5k
Sec.	4.8k	2.9k	4.8k	5k	5k

Eligibility issues (cont) - minimum distances



- Victoria is at the long end of distance band
- Victoria's regional/metro fringe roads are ageing
 - expenditure growth falling behind traffic growth
 - freight traffic growth very strong - does most road damage
 - Commonwealth road funding shares to Victoria are low and falling
- Many regional roads not designed for safe walking
- Result = increasingly dangerous for student travel

Eligibility issues (cont) - minimum distances



- Buses are the safest student travel mode
- Shorter eligible distances for buses = greater student safety
- VicRoads has argued that younger students are more at risk
- Suggests a shorter eligibility distance for younger students
- NSW and Qld have already adopted this approach

Eligibility issues - distance limits

- NSW has the most open assistance arrangements
 - no restriction on distance travelled
- Some schools have, in effect, used student transport assistance to cross-subsidise a school relocation to a cheaper site
- Suggests the need for upper limits on eligibility distances



Eligibility issues - inequities

- BAV sees two major anomalies
- First, only some non-government students are permitted to travel on free buses
 - and conveyance allowances are not sufficient to compensate some of those who miss out
- Second, all metropolitan students have access to subsidised MET services



Eligibility issues - income as factor in school choice

- It is sometimes argued that those who choose non-government schools have higher incomes and should meet their own costs
- BAV's assessment suggests only a very weak link between regional Catholic secondary enrolments and regional weekly income levels
- The link is slightly stronger between other private secondary enrolments and weekly regional income levels but this is not statistically significant

Eligibility issues - income as factor in school choice (cont)



- Other factors influence choice of a non-government school
 - eg Weston's work highlights religion in choice of Catholic schooling
- Limiting school transport assistance to non-government school students on grounds of income would be inequitable
- But assistance should not be without limit in relation to school choice
 - the concept of an appropriate school is relevant

Conclusions on Eligibility Criteria - 1



- Current arrangements favour
 - regional government school students over regional non-government students
 - metro students over most regional non-government school students
- Improved equity most demands improved arrangements be made for regional students in non-government schools

Conclusions on Eligibility Criteria - 2



- Free school bus travel should be available on a non-discriminatory basis to all students in regional Victoria and designated parts of the MET area
 - provided they attend the nearest “appropriate” school
- The Review should provide a clear definition of what is an “appropriate” school



Conclusions on Eligibility Criteria - 3

- The minimum eligibility distance should be reduced to 3kms for secondary students and 2kms for primary students (on safety grounds)
- Students meeting distance criteria but living within the same distance bands from a route service should get free travel on the route service, with a periodical ticket
- Additional route service capacity is required in some parts of the metro fringe to cater for student travel demands

Conclusions on Eligibility Criteria - 4



- Arrangements need to be made between DOI and possible operators to meet the school travel needs of those without current access to free school bus services or route services (eg travelling allowance)
- Implementing BAV's proposed approach will
 - remove discrimination against non-government students in the current system
 - improve the safety of the system
 - increase the service costs to government

System efficiency issues - benchmarks



- The Victorian contracted bus system costs an average \$1470 per student per year
- NSW costs \$1210 but has access to service economies from shorter eligibility distances
- The NSW contract funding formula produces slightly higher payments to operators than the Victorian contract system
- Victoria is a slightly lower cost service

System efficiency issues - service duplication



- Services must be provided in the most cost-effective manner
- Duplication must be avoided
- Bus services (school and route) need to be managed in an integrated manner to maximise cost-effectiveness
- Non-government schools should become part of an integrated government-contracted service
 - to access BAV's proposed improved arrangements



System efficiency issues - rationalisations and route efficiencies

- Operators have been encouraged to seek service improvements or cost economies at current service levels
 - about 36 proposals lodged but few approved
- The search for improved/cheaper ways of providing service need to continue
- Agreed guidelines are required to facilitate this
 - recognising rights of school communities to be involved in consultation about issues/outcomes

Conclusions on System Efficiency - 1



- Victorian free school buses are cost-competitive with those in NSW
- The school bus system needs to be managed in an integrated manner with route services.
- Availability of free school bus services should be expanded to serve non-government schools
 - the latter need to allow existing private bus contracts to expire
 - schools own services should not be assisted

Conclusions on System Efficiency - 2

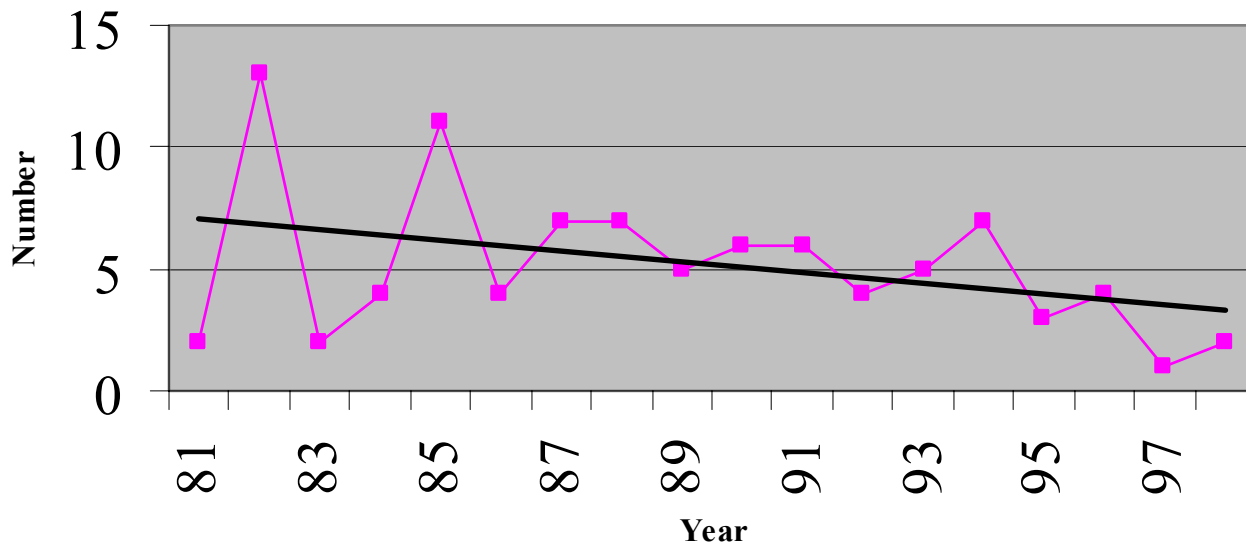


- Schools providing their own services need to meet identical operator accreditation and driver licensing/certification requirements as professional operators/drivers for the same task
- In the special school service areas, ten year contracts should be instituted.
- Service rationalisations will always be needed and guidelines should be agreed to facilitate this process

Safety issues - a safe bus system



Fig. 1: Fatal crashes involving buses: Victoria 1981-98.



System safety issues - operator accreditation



- The Victorian bus system is very safe
- BAV places high importance on safety and has actively supported bus operator accreditation
- Any operator (including schools) seeking to provide student transport should meet identical operator accreditation requirements and drivers should have identical licensing/certification
- Accreditation should depend on transport function, not on institution.



System safety issues - DEET special school services

- DEET special school services raise particular issues in terms of meeting students health needs
- A Code of Conduct covering medical type procedures on such services should be developed between DEET, the BAV (representing operators) and representatives of relevant school communities

Safety



- The Code of Conduct for school bus travel should be formally adopted and widely distributed
- this has already been the subject of extensive discussion during its development

Concluding comments



- Victorian bus operators have a demonstrated record of high quality, safe community service in student transport
- Our operators are integral parts of their school communities - many have been so for decades
- Our proposals are intended to improve the service quality and safety of the student transport system
- BAV thanks the Review for the opportunity to put its views