

15th November 2021

The Public Accounts Committee

Via Email: lapac@parliament.wa.gov.au

School Bus Review 2021 Submission

In relation to the “Orange” School Bus Service which has been in operation for around 120 years in Western Australia we make the following comments for the review of the committee. We currently have three Evergreen Contracts and one TRM Contract. We had a second TRM contract but never received an invitation to re tender and it was awarded to another party.

We believe it is a highly valued service that operates in rural WA and outer Metro areas. The Orange school bus service is the best in the world due to its service and safety record complimented by the modern fleet of buses servicing the industry. This service operated by many different size operators from family to corporate companies needs to be secured with a sound, fair and mutually beneficial contract document with the Evergreen Contract Model (ECM) being endorsed as the prime Contract with Short Term Contracts being implemented when there is a new area of need identified. Once the Short-Term Contract has tested the student numbers it should be converted to an ECM contract model. This would streamline the system and drastically reduce the administration/staffing levels required in SBS.

We recently had a situation with the Esperance Pink Lake contract that we had serviced for many years where we were not sent an invitation to tender or not advised that the tender for the contract was out. We had placed a request to be informed of release of the tender but never received it. As a result of not being aware of the tender we did not make a submission and ultimately lost the work. We should have been made aware that the tender had been released.

School Bus Services “Orange & Green”

The encroachment of RPT Green buses throughout regional towns should be ceased and the 4.5km rule maintained in all areas. The fare box recovery for the RPT Green buses is minimal on all regional services and when compared to the build price and safety aspects of an Orange School bus, the green buses fall well short of parent expectations and financial returns. The Orange buses are safer and more a more viable services for student transfers.

The PTA should not ignore the financial investment a Contractor has in their ECM contract. The ECM has evolved over time from the Standard Rate Model School Bus Contract that operated from the inception of the student transfer service over 120 years ago.

SBS need to “trust” local knowledge with regard to the mapping/narratives of rural runs. SBS staff are too busy to go into the field and discover that Google/Satellite maps etc, may show a road, however it is a dry weather road only or a Shire gazetted road that is yet to be built. In some areas there is room for a bus to turn around on a farming property, saving time and Km’s, however this permission to use the farm turn around is not granted, even though the farmer has given permission.

Spurs and pick up points should be based on the safest, most common-sense locations in consultation with the Contractor/Parents/SBS. Spurs should be allowed if the travel time fits within the 90 minutes travel time for morning and afternoon runs.

All students currently on the orange school bus service are either Eligible or Complimentary. Complimentary travelling on the bus if seats are available. All Complimentary students should be classed as Eligible and the guidelines for eligibility reviewed to reflect this.

There have been several occasions where Complimentary students have been removed from ECM contracts and placed on Short Term contracts which then convert to a tendered model contract thus threatening the existing ECM contracts.

To create a secure, safe & efficient Orange School Bus service into the future the existing TCM & TRM Contracts should be offered to the marketplace as ECM contracts. This can be done by going out to the marketplace for the conversion to the ECM Contract model. Management of all aspects of the contracts for the SBS division will be significantly improved without the cost of the Tendering process and the administration of 4 different types of Contracts, (ECM, TRM, TCM, Short Term). Efficiencies will flow from this change.

Many families' business's along with larger companies have invested large sums of money, pride, and emotional support for their communities over the 120 years of service to the safe daily student transfers to and from schools throughout WA. The Orange school bus system stands alone with its safety record.

It is important to note that SBS does not run over budget according to the Parliamentary Budget papers, all SBS administration and Contractor services are met and funded within the budget allocated.

A good positive working culture between the SBS Team and Contractors with security in Contracts will see the service continue to provide the best, safest student transfer system in the world

Yours Sincerely,

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