



WESTONIA COMMUNITY COOPERATIVE LTD

Wolfram Street Westonia WA 6423

25th October 2021

The Public Accounts Committee,
Legislative Assembly Western Australia,
Parliament House,
4 Harvest Terrace,
WEST PERTH WA 6005.

SUBMISSION TO THE STUDENT TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE POLICY FRAMEWORK INQUIRY

The Westonia Community Cooperative inc. is a community owned business that operates an Evergreen Contract school bus run referred to as the Merredin/Elabbin Route located in the North Eastern Wheatbelt Region.

We provide the following comments to the Policy Framework Enquiry to Student Transport Assistance.

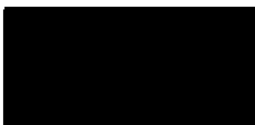
1. *Greater Security to Evergreen Contracts* – The existing Evergreen Contracts require a clearer definition in the framework and currently does not provide sufficient security to the operator for future planning, investment in new capital such as bus's and/or the goodwill value of the contract to be on-sold.
2. *Bus Class* – that the minimum bus class should be based on the Toyota Coaster size vehicle (20 seats), which is a much safer (rear wheel drive, weight) and more reliable vehicle on gravel routes, which are on some occasions unsatisfactory. The Coaster can allow for growth in student numbers for smaller student number runs and Toyota have a large regional network of dealers and reliable back up service. Currently the Westonia Community Cooperative bus term has expired and due to current smaller student numbers we are being forced to purchase a Type D Bus being a Mercedes Benz Sprinter, which is totally inappropriate in our case with dealerships only being Perth based, lack of reliability for gravel running and service back-up and likely poor trade-in value at the end of the contract.
3. *Student Eligibility* -Currently there is considerable confusion on what is the classification of an eligible or a complimentary student. We believe that all students be considered as an eligible student.
4. *Spurs* – 'Bus spurs' or 'spur routes' should be automatically supported if they can be accommodated within the maximum ninety (90) minute time constraint for bus routes.

5. *Safety at All costs* – Safety should be the first consideration in determining bus routes, bus sizes, turnarounds, drop-offs, spurs etc and that operators should not have to compromise on this consideration when dealing with SBS. There needs to be more communication and trust given to the contractor in the decision-making process on these issues.
6. *Localised Providers* – There needs to be greater consideration for the most geographically existing localised contractor to provide the bus service to their local community. Currently there is too much cross-boundary 'absorption' of students by larger neighbouring bus's to the detriment of the more localised service. The orange school bus contractor and drivers are an integral part of the community and are often familiar with the students utilising the service.
7. *Increase in Gravel Running Costs* – There needs to be an increase in gravel running costs payment to be more commensurate for the increased amount of wear and tear experienced by vehicles on and in some cases unsatisfactory and rough gravel roads i.e. tyres, wheel alignments, air-conditioners, dust issues from back doors and seals etc.
8. *Simplified TVD Reporting* – Currently the TVD's requirements and reporting are both convoluted and confusing to operators with constant revisions and changes implemented by SBS. This system needs to be simplified with consideration to revert back to agreed kilometres at beginning of school terms.
9. *Appropriate Staffing SBS* – There needs to be a requirement for SBS to have appropriately trained staff that have an understanding of the industry that can build better relationships and provide a more consistent and less combative service to the community and contractors.
10. *Penny Pinching* – The government needs to consider orange school bus services as a critical investment in the education of our future generations rather than having a clawing back dollar (\$) mentality that ultimately compromises on student safety and the future of the industry.

We thank the standing committee for the opportunity to provide feedback and comment and we look forward to some favourable outcomes in the future policy framework.

If you have any further enquiries, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned

Regards



Bill Price
Director (School Bus)