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School Bus Review 2021 Submission

Background

I am currently and have been for the past 26 years a Special Education bus contractor operating in the metropolitan area transporting students with special needs and challenging disabilities.

The “Orange” School Bus Service has been in operation for around 120 years in Western Australia. It is a highly valued service that operates in rural WA and outer Metro areas, including inner Metro areas for students attending Special Education Facilities.

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 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 and identified 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. `

School Bus Services Eligibility Criteria for Transport Assistance

Transport is approved to a school that is determined by Education Department boundaries and often is not the closest appropriate school. This in effect can deny the parent sending their child to the nearest Education Special school that would also assist the parent taking their mainstream students to a nearby school. Parents of students with special needs are challenged more than most and need better support in relation to choose an appropriate school close to their home.

Transport for a new student can be denied if travel time would exceed 90 mins for any student on the service. I feel this time limit needs to be more flexible especially on a service that caters for several wheelchair bound students.

Clause 18 (2a) Deals with the Termination of the ECM Contract. It should be amended to reflect the opportunity to have the ECM Contract relocated (as is the case in the past, with outer Metro contracts) to an area of need when an ECM Contract service is no longer required due to the lack of student numbers for the original contract.

PTA cannot 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, the SRM contracts were awarded to Contractors for a fee paid to the Government.

When a contract is assigned, the contract and the Bus attract Stamp Duty payable to the State Government.

Due to the ECM contract having strong penalties for any breaches of the contract services the industry would seek a period of 30 days for a Contractor to find a suitable person/organization to assign the contract too. The service could be run on a short-term basis by another contractor during that 30-day period. This would avoid total financial devastation to the original contractor.

PTA Culture – Working Relationship

The Culture that pervades the industry is one of distrust, fear and a “Master Servant Relationship”. To simplify the Contract Document removing punitive and the over policing clauses may go some way toward restoring the confidence contractors had in their industry.

Many Contractors are suspicious of the way PTA is handling the tendering process for the new TRM contracts. This has the potential to take over ECM contracts by stealth and in the process offering no compensation if the ECM contract is terminated. There is no doubt the PTA would like to see 3-4 major Contractors controlling the school bus industry, instead of the current situation where many families operate in the industry and are an integral part of the community.

The industry has a proud, safe 120-year record, unless there are many significant changes the relationship, the existing industry will continue to be systematically dismantled by the authority.

TDV's

The ECM is an average cost model contract with all servicing being costed this way. The introduction of the Temporary Distance Variation system has seen the administration from both the SBS and Contractor greatly increase. It would be better to base the average cost model for payment on the 195 gazetted school days and not go through the process of Pupil Free Days being clawed back from contractor payments. These five to seven Pupil Free days or Professional Development days as they are now labelled are decreed by the Education Department and have a profound effect on contractor payments. The removal of this clawback would eliminate the need for the TDV system with the “overs & unders” for Contractor’s travel being recorded and administered by SBS. There is much debate about the accuracy of the system of measurement used by SBS in measuring the Km’s of each run. It is worthy to note that SBS has now introduced a GPS tracing App that records the exact daily route, timing and stops as well as four speedo odometer readings. Contractor must input whole kilometres only but route measurement by SBS mapping is calculated on increments of 10 meters. This whole process demonstrates SBS preoccupation with clawing back payments from contractors. The cost of implementing this whole burdensome TDV system, SBS staff involvement and contractor website input requirements outweigh any clawback benefit SBS is preoccupied with.

Student Eligibility – (Plus Complimentary)

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.

The difference between a Tendered Contract and an ECM contract pricing comes down to imported buses v's locally manufactured bodied buses, less maintenance, lower driver wages, all of which put student safety at risk. The saving on bus price is around \$200k.

All RPT Green buses are manufactured in WA, creating local jobs with guaranteed maintenance availability. This could easily apply to school buses with Volvo, Mercedes, Scania, MAN chassis fixed to locally made bodies (Volgren & Omnibus Body Builders are building many ECM bus bodies now

ECM Contracts for the Future

The precedent has been set for the ECM contracts going forward with a sample of 5 being "sold" to the market through a Bid System. It was very successful and provided a return to Government for each contract. On 11th November 2016 Transport Minister Bill Marmion gave the go ahead for the rest of the TCM contracts to convert through the Bid system and go out to the market. Prior to the full implementation of the Bid System the State Government changed and the Bid System was shelved by the incoming Government.

To create a secure, safe & efficient Orange School Bus service into the future the existing TCM & TRM Contracts should be offered to the market place as ECM contracts.

This can be done two ways, firstly by offering the existing TRM & TCM contract holder the option to purchase the contract or by going out to the market place for the conversion to the ECM Contract model. Current values range between 1 to 1.7 times Contract value based on ECM rates. The smaller buses in outlying rural areas attract around the 1 times, while in bigger centres they ECM Contract will bring around 1.7 times contract value.

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.

The ECM contracts have all been an Average cost model, in certain areas of Contract administration SBS have departed and been selective in its application as demonstrated by the introduction of the TDV's, whereas the simple removal of payment for the student free days would have kept the integrity of the average cost model intact and avoided excess administration and the petty meanspirited culture that is derived from the methods of calculating the TVD's.

National Disability Insurance Scheme Students attending Educational Support Facilities

Currently we have six buses delivering approximately 100 students to Malibu Educational Support school. It would be absolute pandemonium if 100 students many who are in wheelchairs are delivered to school by individuals contracted under NDIS. A greater chaos would occur at end of school day making sure each student goes to the authorised individual.

There would be grave safety concerns with this amount of movement, many of our special students have extreme behaviours and are upset by changes to routine and personnel. Bus staff have comprehensive Safety Management Plans and individual Student Care Plans.

It is a contractual requirement that all bus staff must have Working With Children Check, Applied First Aide, in addition Drivers require National Police Clearance and certification on their Drivers Licence as being a Passenger Transport Driver issued by the Dept of Transport. Regular scheduled health checks are mandatory as part of the certification.

All Education Support bus services must have in addition to the driver a fully trained Bus Aide to assist with the pastoral care of on students on the bus.

It is imperative to note that children on Special Education bus services often are not able to communicate effectively if at all. Outside the school bus transport system, they may be vulnerable to physical, verbal, or sexual abuse. It is statistically proven that these children are a **high-risk group**. It is unlikely that parents would entrust their child to a one person NDIS transport arrangement with potentially constant staff changes and without a second person present acting as an oversight as well as providing pastoral care.

School Bus Services Budget

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

Ivo Grubelich

Special Education School Bus Contractor