

PORTFOLIO: TRANSPORT PORTFOLIO

**ISSUE: INQUIRY INTO THE STUDENT TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE
POLICY FRAMEWORK - ADDENDUM**

BACKGROUND

Student Transport Assistance Policy Framework

Bus Routes and Bus Stop Process

The PTA will plan bus routes based on the shortest geographical distance utilising GIS mapping software from residence to nearest appropriate school. As part of the route narrative provided to the school bus operator, they are required to drive the approved route distance to establish their timetable so families can be advised on the approximate time the bus will arrive, but will also allow the contractor to provide feedback about the conditions of the road or time choke points.

For example, a large bus might find it difficult to navigate a narrow road, or due to the traffic light timing points resulting in a bus having to sit through three light changes to turn right, the contractor (with local knowledge) may suggest an alternative, safer or quicker route.

Bus routes are constrained by the 90 minute travel rule. For example, it may be practical for a large group of students who reside within a 2.5km radius to catch the school bus from a common bus stop.

The biggest issue facing the PTA in finalising bus routes for families is at the start of the new school year. Due to the number of applications being dealt with by a small team, complaints into the suitability of a particular route will take time to be addressed as priority is to get eligible students onto buses. Depending on work loads it could potentially take up to eight weeks into the school year for the matter to be addressed.

Ultimately bus routes are not locked in stone and PTA will give due consideration to factors affecting safety.

Bus stops are usually provided outside an individual residence, at a common location for multiple families, and at the end of a spur (if timing issues prevent a gate pick up). The provision of bus pull areas (in most cases for rural families this is the bus stop), or where appropriate a bus shelter, and grading of unsealed roads is the province of shires and councils as the PTA has no funding allocation for this function. The lack of funding by shires occasionally leads to families having to be paid a conveyance allowance to drive to an already existing bus stop.

As mentioned above a "rural school bus stop" is a bus pull area near a student's residence where possible, they:

- Are accessible and useable at all times of year (presuming normal weather conditions);
- Are located on quiet sections of road (in terms of predictable traffic use);
- Preferably allow space for all wheels of the bus normally used on the service to be off the road, and at least allow space for 3/4 of the width of the bus normally used on the service to be off the road, or, in the case of roads that do not have a delimited edge, are located so that other vehicles can safely pass the parked bus;

- Are not located on roads used regularly by heavy vehicles, unless there is space for all wheels of the bus normally used on the service to be off the road or mitigation strategies are in place to reduce the risk associated with the presence of heavy vehicles;
- Allow for clear visibility of traffic in both directions (ideally, 200m), taking into account the speed of traffic using the road;
- Preferably are located on straight stretches of road, and only located at the bottom of hills, half-way up hills or near bends if there is clear visibility of traffic in both directions;
- Preferably are not located directly opposite another stopping location;
- Are located on a type of surface (eg gravel, sealed) appropriate to the bus normally used on the service and normal weather conditions; and
- Are not located on highly cambered shoulders; and If signage is used to indicate the presence of the stopping location, it should be in accordance with shire/local council standards, and should use Main Roads WA approved or standard international symbols

The PTA will liaise with shires and councils to ensure they have some input into the appropriateness of the proposed bus stop location. PTA uses a "School Bus Stop/Route Approval Request Form" to have shire/councils sign off on the process.

Therefore, while the policy framework allows either a 5 kilometre or 7.5 kilometre spur, for safety reasons (eg blind spots), a bus stop can potentially be moved some additional kilometres if required.