

PUBLIC TRANSPORT AUTHORITY BILL 2003

Second Reading

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

HON BARRY HOUSE (South West) [12.10 pm]: I intend to make only a few brief comments. The issue of the regulation of and costs involved with school buses looms large with this piece of legislation and with the authority that will be created by the Bill, because that will be its responsibility. Into the mix I will throw another situation that must be looked at urgently. If that is the role of this authority, it needs to take up this matter urgently. However, I hope that it can be sorted out before it gets to that stage.

I have mentioned this matter previously in the House. It involves accessibility to country school bus services for students at some high schools in my electorate in the south west. The best way I can describe it is by example. Students who live in Augusta, Karridale or points to the south or north and who catch a bus to Margaret River High School have a problem when they need to access some school courses outside normal school hours. There is no problem if they catch the orange school bus at standard times in the morning and afternoon. However, if students at Margaret River High School are involved in music programs and need to attend band practice, or sporting activities or other activities involving dance or another aspect of their education that requires them to attend a school activity early in the morning or late at night, they lose access to the orange school bus. The only other option available to them is a private bus service run by South West Coach Lines. That is the only other form of public transport available to the students. The crunch is that they get no concession if they are forced to travel on the service provided by the private operator, South West Coach Lines. This is inequitable because it can be very costly for the parents of students in Augusta, who must fork out something like \$8 a day to pay full fares for their kids. The inequity is evident in that if they lived in the city and accessed these sorts of activities at city schools, they could catch public transport at concessional rates at different times of the day. Westrail also is an intermittent supplier of a bus service to some of those parts of the State; however, in the main it is not. The only option students have is a private operator. It is grossly unfair that these students do not have the same access to concessional fares as do their counterparts in the city.

There are quite a few examples of this inequity throughout the south west. I am sure that students who attend Bunbury Senior High School and live in Donnybrook have the same problem. Students who attend Albany Senior High School and live in Redmond or somewhere like that probably have the same problem. It is an issue that is felt acutely in the pockets of the parents of these students. It is felt acutely in the schools in which the situation arises, because they see it as grossly unfair and inequitable. These people then draw the conclusion that they are treated like this because they live in the country. If a service is provided for students, it should be provided equally regardless of whether they live in the city or in the country.

I know that some of the points about the costs and regulation of school buses have been raised in this debate. This will certainly come under the responsibility of the new authority that has been proposed. The matter should be considered very urgently to make it equitable across the State.

Debate adjourned, on motion by Hon Graham Giffard (Parliamentary Secretary).