

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

*Sixth Report — Bus fair: The report of the inquiry into the student transport assistance policy framework —
Tabling*

MRS L.M. O'MALLEY (Bicton) [10.16 am]: I present for tabling the sixth report of the Public Accounts Committee titled *Bus fair: The report of the inquiry into the student transport assistance policy framework*. I also table the public submissions received by the inquiry.

[See papers [1346](#) and [1347](#).]

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: In tabling the sixth report of the Public Accounts Committee titled *Bus fair: The report of the inquiry into the student transport assistance policy framework*, I begin by commending the efforts and professionalism throughout the inquiry process of my committee colleagues: the deputy chair, the member for Cottesloe; the member for Darling Range; the member for Mirrabooka; the member for Victoria Park; and the member for Roe, who was co-opted to the committee for this inquiry. I express my sincere thanks on behalf of the committee to our principal research officer, Ms Alison Sharpe, and research officer, Ms Michele Chiasson.

The inquiry, which led to the report I now table, began on 18 August 2021 after the Minister for Transport asked the Legislative Assembly to refer the current student transport assistance policy framework to the committee for review. Parliamentary referrals to a standing committee are relatively rare, underlining the importance of this topic to the Parliament and the public interest. This is not the first inquiry or review into student transport assistance, which is more commonly known as school bus services, in Western Australia, but it is arguably the most comprehensive since the state government began providing the service in 1918.

Throughout the course of this inquiry, the committee received more than 200 submissions, undertook regional travel—prior to COVID-19 restrictions—to Dardanup, Dumbleyung, Narrogin and Wagin as well as Jarrahdale. I would like to take this opportunity to extend the committee's sincere thanks for the hospitality we experienced from those we met and their wonderful communities. The committee conducted 25 hearings, both virtual and in-person, and although conducted during a time of COVID-imposed interruption, the commitment and diligence applied by the committee, and the willingness, enthusiasm and forthrightness of witnesses and submitters, has led to a report that meets the objectives of the terms of reference laid out in the referral to inquire into the student transport assistance policy framework.

Those objectives are: the eligibility criteria for students to qualify for transport assistance; the types of transport assistance and entitlements to be provided to ensure students can undertake an appropriate education; the relevance of existing policies, practices and rules that are applied in delivering the transport assistance arrangements; the assessment process when evaluating the safety of bus stops and routes; the implication of the National Disability Insurance Scheme on the delivery of transport assistance for students attending education support facilities; the contractual arrangements with service providers, including the appropriateness of current school bus contracts, and payment arrangements, and previous contractual arrangements and the manner in which they were created; the resourcing of the School Bus Services division within the Public Transport Authority; and the appropriateness of the conveyance allowance as an alternative to transport assistance.

The subject matter was very personal and emotive for some of the submitters. On behalf of the committee, I would like to acknowledge and thank the many parents, carers, community members and advocacy groups for their participation. To the contractors and small business owners, government departments and agencies, your evidence was also crucial to the work of the committee. Thank you.

Our investigation of the *Student transport assistance policy and operational guidelines* for School Bus Services found it to be complex and at times contentious, but we also found it to be highly valued by those who access it. The following chapters will expand on STAP and its features. However, I think it is pertinent to look at two of its key features. Of equal importance, and foundational to STAP, is that it delivers a service that is highly valued by those who have access to it and that this service is delivered at a cost to government. Throughout this inquiry, we asked many questions based on the principles of service, access and value for money. These important questions needed asking and the answers evaluated, including: is it fair, is it accessible, is it equitable and is it delivering economic and social value for money? These questions and more were asked in relation to our inquiry terms of reference. There are good examples of where STAP is working well, but on balance, we found that some things need to change.

Before going forward to the findings and recommendations contained in this report, it is appropriate to take a brief look at the history of STAP and some previous inquiries and reviews across the 100 years of School Bus Services in Western Australia. Initially provided by the Department of Education, School Bus Services began in 1918, with 10 services in operation by 1938. The service grew as a result of the 1940s school consolidation policy, which was having fewer, larger schools in rural areas. In 1957, the first inquiry into School Bus Services was undertaken by a select committee of the Legislative Council. It found five key features of school consolidation, which drove the

state government's provision of school transport assistance. These features were: school consolidation provides better educational opportunities for students, and the policy should remain for both educational and economic reasons; both the government and parents have an obligation to get children to school; children should not be travelling undue distances to school; spur running, whereby a portion of the route is off the main route, should be avoided or minimised; and school bus contractors should make a living out of the contract as well as earn enough money to replace the bus when it comes to the end of its life.

By 1957, 17 500 students were being bussed to school on 468 contract routes and 92 subsidised services. Since then, the service has grown and evolved but the five key features of school consolidation, foundational to the School Bus Services policy in the 1950s, continue to influence the policy and how it is administered to this day.

In the mid-1990s, an internal review by the Department of Education determined School Bus Services was not a core function for the department and responsibility was shifted to the Department of Transport. Today, School Bus Services is delivered by the Public Transport Authority, with the School Bus Services team of 32 FTEs responsible for managing and administering the student transport assistance program, while the service is delivered by school bus contractors.

During the 2020–21 financial year, SBS provided transport assistance to 25 878 students, managed 869 school bus contracts delivering 967 separate services—807 to mainstream schools and 160 to education support facilities—and administered conveyance allowance payments for 2 010 students. During that period, 10.2 million student trips were made, covering 32.8 million kilometres. The total cost of delivering the service for one year was \$127 million, comprising \$120.8 million in school bus contractor payments, \$1.7 million in conveyance payments, and \$4.1 million in staff and administration costs. This equates to a subsidy of \$4 216 per rural student attending a mainstream school and \$9 429 per education support student. It is essential that the committee has knowledge and understanding of this information in relation to both our primary function as the Public Accounts Committee as well as in relation to the terms of reference of this inquiry.

Attempts to balance the fiscal constraints of providing an efficient bus service over a significant geographical area, with the importance of getting children to school safely, along with the expectations of families, communities and contractors, have inevitably ended up with some stakeholders being dissatisfied with the school bus service. Although some parents believe the government is responsible for transporting their children to school, the government's intention is "to provide a reasonable level of transport assistance", equitably and efficiently. It could be that these competing priorities have contributed towards the number of reviews and inquiries into student bus services over the years. It is noteworthy that many of the issues brought to our attention during this inquiry have been raised time and again, without finding a resolution that totally satisfies everyone. This is looked at in more detail within this report.

However, I will make specific comment on the issue of contracting arrangements, which was found to be a particularly contentious issue. This became a dominant feature of this inquiry, with a significant focus of the committee's time and energy spent on this area. Such was the commitment of committee members to ensure that we had taken into account all possible aspects, views and evidence of this critical element in our deliberations that additional scrutiny was prioritised throughout. The substantive view of the committee is that a single form of tendered contract that is competitive, open, transparent and accessible and prioritises local regional content can provide better economic and social value for money for the state government and regional communities.

Finally, much has changed in the 100 years since the commencement of School Bus Services in Western Australia. Technology, community expectations, cultural and environmental factors and many other things have altered the way in which we farm and the towns and communities that rely on agriculture as a way of life. They have had to adapt to survive and in many cases are thriving despite the challenges. This inquiry has allowed me, as it has for other members of the committee, to reflect fondly on our experiences of catching the bus from farms and small towns during our school years. I also reflect that when I return to my small home town, I see that the numerous surrounding small dairy farms, which were home to an average of five kids apiece, have been replaced by big broadacre crop mega farms or dairy businesses, with smaller and fewer families. We heard similar stories during this inquiry. What has not changed though is the importance and value placed on School Bus Services by those who access or seek to access it. The committee believes that the report we have tabled in this place today and the recommendations within it can provide a pathway to improving this vital service for all stakeholders.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party) [10.29 am]: When the Public Accounts Committee first looked at this topic, I had some idea about it, being a child who grew up in the bush, but the complexity of the issues that communities face and the enormous not just passion but emotion around this subject was all too apparent when we spoke with the various people who came before the committee.

At the outset, I commend the chair, the member for Bicton, for the outstanding job that she has done in this whole exercise. I also want to take a moment to reflect on the value of this committee process. In this committee, we had

the member for Darling Range, who lives in the peri-urban area and has experience of not only the bus service provided to school students, but also the traditional public bus service available to the general community and the interaction between those. The member for Mirrabooka's forensic skills of analysis, clearly coming from her past, were an invaluable addition to our committee. The member for Victoria Park's knowledge of children with special needs and her passion for that subject was a great contribution to the committee. I particularly want to acknowledge the member for Roe, who brought a considerable breadth of knowledge. It was apparent when we visited areas of his community, how well regarded he is and quite clearly how he represents the people in the area.

Committees provide an opportunity for us to come together and share our experiences, and we do it in a collegiate way. As the chair indicated, there might have been some minor discussion about one area around contracting, but in the end, I think this an excellent report. It is a credit to the chair and the committee, and I think it offers some valuable solutions. Education is key for children. I might say that when I was a child growing up in the bush, there was a general view that children in the bush would go back onto farms anyway, so it did not really matter about education. Of course, now we do not have the same number of careers for children going back onto farms, but families have an expectation—I think it is a fair expectation—that their children will receive the best-quality education. The bus service, or the travel allowance that is offered when a bus service is not available, is part of that.

One of the issues that was considered by the committee was the issue of district versus senior high schools because a child has a right to have a guaranteed bus seat, if a bus service is available, to the nearest appropriate school, but that means that children may end up going to their local primary school, typically from year 1 to 6, then going to a district high school from year 7 to 10 and then having to relocate to a senior high school for year 11 and 12. We received a lot of evidence from parents that that is extremely disruptive. The issue of smaller schools was also raised. In smaller schools there may be only one or two children in a year. For some children, that may not be an issue, but it was put to us by a number of parents that their child being only one of a couple of kids in a class was a critical issue in terms of their social development. The committee has sensibly, I think, recommended that children should have the right to continue in a school for their high school education. That means that they should have the right to travel to a senior high school from years 7 to 12. That is a contentious issue.

As many members would appreciate, in small communities the district high school can be an important part of that community; it is part of the lifeblood of that community. Students bypassing the district high school and going to the senior high school could have an impact on that community, but I think on balance we have to look at the outcome for children. I reflect on my own childhood. My parents were faced with the choice of whether I would go to what was then a senior high school at Mt Barker. In those times it did not offer the course choices that it does now; today, Mt Barker has an outstanding high school. My parents were forced to send me to Perth so that I could board here. That was a considerable stress on them because they were not wealthy at all. As I said, the report has come to a sensible conclusion on that matter.

In relation to the contracting issue, ultimately we must have a mind to what is the best value for government. In doing that, we need to take account of other factors. I think one of the factors that came out in the evidence that was given to the committee was how much a school bus driver can be an integral part of the community and how important a school bus driver's knowledge of the students and their family situations can be in the way that they go about their job. They are not just carrying out some mechanistic activity; they interact with the families and have to deal with the issues in different families. I think whatever contracting situation we have, we must have that local content. Of course, in small communities, one wage can have an enormous impact on the financial viability of that community. I think it is imperative that whilst we have a mind to what is best for the government purse—we all have to have a mind to that—we also need to make sure that we are maintaining that link to the local communities and that local knowledge, because, at the end of the day, this is an intimate service. Children as young as five or six years old through to obviously the high school ages travel on the bus.

As I already said, I have great respect for the ability and experience of my committee members. I found that very valuable and that educated me in this process. As always, I think we all know that the parliamentary staff are the ones who help make us all look a bit better than perhaps we would. That is no more the case than with the staff who assisted us with this committee; the principal research officer, Alison Sharpe, and research officer, Michele Chiasson, provided excellent service to our committee.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe) [10.36 am]: Firstly, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Minister for Transport for giving me the opportunity to be part of this inquiry by seconding me onto the Public Accounts Committee for its inquiry into the student transport assistance policy framework. Similar to me, I think the minister recognised that it was time for a more comprehensive review of the *Student transport assistance policy and operational guidelines* and when I asked the minister a question on this over 12 months ago, I was pleased that the minister said the review would be a possibility.

I would like to say thanks to all the committee members who took the issue to heart, put in a lot of effort and got an understanding of the issues from all sides of the spectrum. The member for Bicton did an excellent job as chair

and was always fair and consistent. I acknowledge the member for Cottesloe, the member for Darling Range, the member for Mirrabooka and the member for Victoria Park. I echo the comments of the member for Cottesloe that everyone had a certain knowledge and everyone put in effort. That was much appreciated. My thanks especially go to our principal research officer, Alison Sharpe, and research officer, Michele Chiasson. They did a great job of understanding all the elements of the framework, which has taken me five and a half years. They certainly came to grips with it in a very short time. It was a fantastic effort from them.

Over the past five and a half years, in my role as member for Roe, I have certainly had many parents, contractors, schools and communities contact me about school buses and the seemingly unfair processes that they have come across in relation to access to the nearest appropriate school, school bus routes, complimentary status and contracts, and the list goes on. Without doubt, school bus issues are consistently the biggest ones brought into my electorate office. I have seen the grief that decisions, lack of decisions and unexpected changes can cause. My electorate team of Sally, Nat, Jill and Dorothy regularly deal with issues from Narrogin in the north to Salmon Gums in the south east. No doubt the orange school bus network is vital to our regions and our regional families, and I am sure that some of the changes that we have recommended will help families in their quest for fair and equitable transport to their school of choice. I have always said schooling should be a family decision, not a decision of the Public Transport Authority.

I would like to thank the many families, parents, contractors, community members and school staff, as well as School Bus Services, for their willingness to share their stories. This gave all committee members a good chance to realise how important the orange school bus service is to our regions. As our chair pointed out, we received more than 200 submissions and spoke to many people and communities. I particularly recall the communities and families of Darkan and Dumbleyung, who demonstrated not only their passion about several issues, but also their ability to work together to articulate the issues for their communities. It also led to one of our recommendations relating to the suggestion that local advisory groups can be a valuable source of information on proposed bus routes and future student numbers.

In the time I have, I would like to focus on some elements of the report that I think will be of interest to my constituents and regional families in general, and where the committee has made some progress. Chapter 2 deals with eligibility criteria for rural students, which needed to be updated. The committee recommended that nearest appropriate school criteria take into account social, economic, community and financial factors when a family resides a similar distance from two or more schools, as this would enable families to at least put forward a case. The committee also recommended a potential appeals process that would be independent of the original decision-maker in SBS. Even though the committee has not recommended changes to the complimentary passenger arrangements, the nearest appropriate school recommendations would allow for some flexibility and the ability to state the case for complimentary passengers and their families. Another recommendation in chapter 2 is that students be given the opportunity to have more continuity of education when they leave year 6 by having the potential to attend either their local district high school or their nearest senior high school for years 7 to 12, and that the Public Transport Authority investigate this recommendation for commencement in the 2024 school year.

An important element of the review is that the committee discussed communication channels with School Bus Services and the importance of open and transparent communications with parents, families and communities. I am pleased the committee emphasised the need for those involved in working through the issues to work constructively for the best outcome. In recommendation 15, the committee has recommended that a formal appeals process be established to enable parents and carers to appeal a decision made by School Bus Services in administering the guidelines, that the PTA should ensure that the appeals process is transparent and independent of the original decision-maker and that, when appropriate, representatives of the Department of Education should be consulted.

Although the final report covered many issues well, I felt the need to issue a minority report to express my concerns about the contract system for bus owners and operators. The overwhelming majority of contracts in WA come under the evergreen contract model, of which there are currently 673 contracts. The McGowan government's favoured model is the tendered contract model, which was introduced following the 2017 election. The difference between the two models is that the TCM version is a tender process, meaning that value for money is a key feature, while the ECM version is one that encourages perpetuity, security of tenure and, therefore, investment in the operation of the service. I felt the need to write the minority report because although the committee was largely aware of the nuances of running a bus service in regional areas and recommended that the PTA have better regard to social, economic and environmental factors when awarding school bus contracts, the committee preferred the TCM model. I have made some observations in my minority report, which is at the back of the committee's report. As I said, I think security of tenure is really important for these small business owners in regional centres and towns. I am concerned that the tendered contract model does not give as much business security to our local regional contractors. I have listed some of the issues. An ECM contract can be given just three months' notice to have the contract removed. I have concerns about the Procurement Act 2020, and I noted in the minority report —

... there is a requirement to reduce barriers to small and medium business participation. The Buy Local Policy 2022 should guide the recommendation in this inquiry relating to any tender process.

I worry about whether those policies are taken into account as much as they should be under the tendered contract model.

The committee reached the conclusion that a bus contractor who knows the region in which they are working, knows the roads, knows the drivers and knows the schools, parents and, most importantly, the children, will always provide a better and safer service to our families. That, to me, was a real issue. Country roads are unpredictable. Local knowledge of road conditions cannot be dismissed. We need to ensure that our bus contractors are local, well remunerated and able to apply this local knowledge to the contract. From my perspective, the features of the evergreen contract model include security of tenure, local drivers and owners, locally manufactured vehicles, wage clarity and equity, and relocation options. I note that the committee agreed about relocation. I support the local building of rolling stock for our rail system that this government is undertaking, and I support our local bus businesses. I think the evergreen contract model lends itself to local businesses and local bus manufacturing. I have appreciated being part of this inquiry and I think the committee has done an excellent job, but I would certainly like the minister to look at my minority report. I thank members for the opportunity.

MS M.J. HAMMAT (Mirrabooka) [10.46 am]: I also wish to make a few comments about the report the Public Accounts Committee has tabled today, *Bus fair: The report of the inquiry into the student transport assistance policy framework*. Firstly, I feel I should put on the record that as a girl who grew up on a farm, the orange school bus service was a regular feature of my schooling, from my earliest years at Broomehill Primary School until I finished year 10 at Kojonup District High School. As others have said before me, many of us reflected on our many fond memories of catching school buses during our school days. I also reflected many times during the inquiry that like many families who made submissions, my family also had a story about some of its frustration in trying to get the bus to stop at a convenient location close to my parents' farm. Over the years, the bus stop moved closer and closer, but it was not until I had finished school and university that, because of changes in who caught that bus, the bus started going immediately straight past my parents' front door—something it had never done when I was catching it to get to school! Like many people who made submissions to us, I often reflected on the close relationship that my family and I had with my very first bus driver, John Fenwick, who not only took me to school on my very first day, but also remained a close family friend. He came to my wedding and met my children. In fact, when he passed away not long ago, my dad delivered the eulogy at his funeral. The concept of having bus drivers who are integrated in the community resounded very strongly with me.

What I also learnt during this inquiry was that many families in Western Australia have stories that were perhaps similar to mine—stories about how they wanted the school bus to take a different, more convenient route and how they very much valued their school bus services and school bus drivers as part of the community at large. I also learnt a lot about the enormous task undertaken by School Bus Services within the Public Transport Authority in providing this essential transport service to students in regional Western Australia. As the member for Bicton outlined—I think it is important to repeat—during 2021–22, the PTA provided transport assistance to 25 878 students around Western Australia and managed 869 school bus contracts, delivering 967 separate services. It is an enormous and very complex task. Although the committee overwhelmingly heard submissions from people who wanted to discuss changes to their school bus service, I think it is important to acknowledge that the vast majority of the more than 25 000 students who catch a school bus every day are very happy with the service that is provided to them, as it efficiently and effectively takes them from home to school and then back again. In my comments today I also want to acknowledge the staff at School Bus Services for their work in enabling the majority of students who rely on the orange school bus service to get to school every day.

The report refers to how we can improve the collection of students and their access to services. I do not want in my comments today to spend time talking about that. I want to make a few comments about the contracting arrangements that are dealt with in chapter 7 of the report. As other members who have spoken before me have said, that was a significant part of our considerations. It was also a contentious and difficult issue. The report outlines the considerable history of the contracting arrangements and the different iterations of school bus service contracts over many years. There have been many inquiries and opportunities to make recommendations about what form those contracts should take. We heard often in our inquiry about the benefit of school bus contracts being held by local small business operators who are embedded in and connected to their local community. It was generally put to us that these operators could provide a superior service because they know the local road conditions and the local families and are able to exercise their judgement about what to do in unusual or unpredictable circumstances.

We also had many submissions that went to the relative merits of the evergreen contract model versus the tendered contract model. The member for Roe in his comments this morning outlined some of the issues that lie at the heart of the consideration of these two different contracting forms. In our report we also considered closely the government's current approach to procurement and its decision to transition from the evergreen contract model to a tendered contract model. I also want to talk a bit about procurement and the levers that are available to the government. The

procurement rules provide that value for money must be at the heart of procurement policies and decisions. It is very important to reiterate that value for money should not include just the lowest price. It should also include consideration of the government's social, economic and environmental priorities, alongside cost factors and non-cost factors. The McGowan Labor government is already undertaking considerable work to ensure that government procurement provides genuine value for money, and that social, economic and environmental factors, alongside cost, are at the heart of decisions about contracting and purchasing more broadly. To that end, this government has introduced not only the Procurement Act 2020, but also the Buy Local policy, which is designed to ensure that local small businesses are given opportunities to win government contracts.

More broadly, since the introduction of the McGowan government's Aboriginal procurement policy in July 2018, the proportion of state government contracts awarded to Aboriginal businesses has grown for the third year in a row. In the 2020–21 financial year, the McGowan government awarded 6.5 per cent of its contracts to Aboriginal businesses. That was more than double the three per cent target for the year. Under that policy, 697 contracts have been awarded to 209 Aboriginal businesses, with a combined value of \$476 million.

In June, the McGowan government announced that it would use its purchasing power to promote gender equality through a groundbreaking procurement program called Gender Equality in Procurement—WA Public Sector Pilot. This pilot will introduce a gender equality clause into public sector procurement processes to support suppliers of goods and services to implement gender equality policies and practices.

This government is committed to ensuring that we use our purchasing power to not just drive economic outcomes, but also invest in our regions in Western Australia to create strong local businesses. This is part of a suite of initiatives taken by the McGowan Labor government. That includes the recent decision to bring Main Roads maintenance contracts back in-house, which again will support employment in our regional areas.

This policy framework can, and should, also be used to ensure that we achieve beneficial outcomes for regional communities in school bus contracting, supporting local communities and small businesses, and also, when possible, the local manufacture of school buses. One of the other key features of the WA procurement rules is that procurement should be competitive, open and transparent. For these reasons, the majority of the committee supports the transition from the evergreen contract model to a tendered contract model.

In the time left to me, I would like to thank the chair of the committee, the member for Bicton, and the other committee members for their hard work. I particularly thank our principal research officer, Alison Sharpe, and our research officer, Michele Chiasson, for their work. The large number of submissions, the complexity of the issues and the uncertainty of COVID-19 made it a challenging endeavour at times. I would also like to thank the many, many people who made submissions and took the time to explain their circumstances to us. Some of those circumstances are very personal and some of the submissions from both families and bus contractors were very heartfelt.

As outlined in the report, many of the issues that were the basis of our inquiry and discussions were also raised in 1957 when a select committee of the Legislative Council conducted the first inquiry into school bus services. I hope we have done our duty to make some recommendations and findings that will assist in mapping a route to a service that will efficiently and effectively meet the needs of the many, many Western Australian students who rely on school buses to get to and from school each day.

MR H.T. JONES (Darling Range) [10.55 am]: I rise to make a contribution to the tabling of the sixth report of the Public Accounts Committee, *Bus fair: The report of the inquiry into the student transport assistance policy framework*, or STAP. This is the first report of the first parliamentary committee of which I have been a member, and I thoroughly enjoyed the process and have learnt a great deal.

I first want to acknowledge the professional and tireless efforts of the committee staff, the principal research officer, Alison Sharpe, and the research officer, Michele Chiasson. They both performed their duties with good humour, and I dare say they had to bite their tongues on more than one occasion. I also want to acknowledge the staff in the background who were involved in setting up and recording the hearings and performing other functions that were invisible to me and that resulted in this comprehensive report. I also want to thank the chair of the committee, the member for Bicton, Lisa O'Malley, MLA, for leading the committee and sharing her experience to ensure that we used our time wisely and avoided going down any rabbit holes. I also acknowledge the other members of the committee for their collegial approach to the inquiry, especially the member for Roe, Mr Peter Rundle, MLA, for recommending the location of the hearings, which illustrated some of the complexities of accessing and administering student transport assistance in rural areas. I also want to thank the other members of the committee, the member for Cottesloe and the member for Mirrabooka.

The member for Mirrabooka related a story about her childhood. On Monday morning, I was walking the dog on Briggs Road in Byford and a lady came out of her property and yelled at me, and I thought: who is this? She said, "Do you remember me?", and I said I think so, and she said, "I used to drive your son to school." That must have been 15 years ago. She remembered doing drawings with him and all the other peculiar things she had to do to prevent

my son from having a bit of a meltdown on the bus. It was a good experience. The member for Victoria Park also has a son with a disability, so she can relate to some of the issues involved in the school bus service in the urban area.

In early to mid-June 2021, three months after I was elected as the member for Darling Range, I began to be contacted by members of the Jarrahdale community who had been advised by letter that due to the expansion of the public transport area to incorporate Jarrahdale, their school bus service would be cancelled on 19 July at the start of term 3, which was less than two months away. As the new member for Darling Range, I was unaware of the background of this decision, because I had not had a handover from the previous member for Darling Range. When I leave as the member for Darling Range, I will brief the next member on significant issues. I acknowledge that she may not have known about the issue. The decision seemed to me to be out of the blue and unreasonable. The groundswell of opposition to the decision to remove the school bus service meant that any of the benefits of the planned expansion of the public transport area to Jarrahdale were lost. That points to some of the communication issues that we uncovered during our inquiry. As a consequence, I engaged with the Minister for Transport and she agreed that the notice period was too short and immediately delayed the implementation of that decision until term 1 of 2022 to at least avoid the disruption of students having to change services during the school year. Any parent, especially those who are working or who have other commitments, knows that any change to the care arrangements for their children are extremely disruptive.

I made further approaches to the Minister for Transport about the Jarrahdale school bus service. Along with the issues raised by the member for Roe, the committee was asked to inquire into the student transport assistance policy. For the families of Jarrahdale, this had the further consequence of another delay to the implementation of the change, awaiting the completion of the inquiry.

The committee's terms of reference did not directly relate to public transport areas being expanded, most commonly in peri-urban environments; however, I was able to have the committee consider the impact these decisions have on families, and we agreed that any transition should be communicated well in advance to ensure that the replacement public transport bus service solution was appropriate.

Finding 17 of the report states —

The Public Transport Authority could improve its consultation and communication with affected families and other stakeholders in areas which may become part of a Public Transport Area.

Our recommendation—recommendation 8—in relation to that finding was —

The Minister for Transport should ensure the Public Transport Authority provide families and bus contractors who may be affected by the termination of a school bus service due to the expansion of a Public Transport Area with at least one year's notice of the proposed expansion of the Public Transport Area, and at least six months' notice of a decision to expand a Public Transport Area that will result in the termination of bus services. Changes should only take effect at the start of a school year.

Therefore, if the minister decides to accept and implement the recommendation, any expansion to a public transport area being considered by the PTA—which is a good thing, I must add—will come with no less than 12 months' notice and will not occur during the school year, impacting children and families.

The report notes —

The PTA understands that families that use the school bus service may see the expansion of the Public Transport Area, and subsequent cancellation of school bus services, as a backwards step. However, it argued that, overall, a community gets a better outcome with the provision of public transport services available to the whole community, rather than just the school bus services which is only available for Eligible Students.

I agree with that statement. There are many people in Jarrahdale who would benefit from more regular public transport services, and I spoke to a few of those people when doorknocking before the election and subsequently. Such improvements would be beneficial, especially if they were to marry up with the Byford rail extension. I expect that any future plans for the expansion of public transport areas in Jarrahdale, or any other area of WA that finds itself on the edge of the urban sprawl, will be well communicated to the community, with plenty of notice, and will result in a great benefit to the wider community.

I want to thank the contributors to the inquiry, especially those of Jarrahdale, for their time and effort in contacting me and attending the hearings in Jarrahdale and for their written contributions. Finally, I want to thank the Minister for Transport for hearing the concerns of the people of Jarrahdale and taking action to delay any changes, and for the significant investment the McGowan government has made in transport infrastructure in Darling Range.