

BELRIDGE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL — SCHOOL BUS SERVICE

Grievance

MR A.P. O'GORMAN (Joondalup) [9.12 am]: My grievance is to the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Transport on the withdrawal of a school bus service to Belridge Senior High School. I have received a number of complaints from constituents about the withdrawal of the bus service without any consultation and with very little notice given to the students who use that bus. The complaint initially came from Sue Christie of Joondalup, who rang my office on Friday, 30 July. Her daughter got a lift home on the previous Wednesday, 28 July and so did not know of the changes until the next day at school. Sue said that it now takes her daughter longer to get to school by bus. She now leaves home at least 10 minutes earlier and has a further 10-minute walk to a bus stop. Similarly, after school it takes her an extra 10 minutes to walk home. The bus stop for pick-ups in the morning and drop-offs in the afternoon is now in Candlewood Boulevard outside Joondalup Primary School. The bus is used only by high school students, not primary school students. The bus used to travel along Blue Mountain Drive both in the morning and afternoon, and the streets where students live feed onto Blue Mountain Drive. Now some students have to change buses at Joondalup train station. Sue's daughter says that one of her friends, who lives in Currambine, now has to catch a public bus to school or ask her parents to drop her off. She used to catch the student bus all the time. This girl leaves Belridge Senior High School at 3.20 pm and gets home at 4.40 pm. It takes her over an hour to get home by public transport, yet the distance between the school and her home is less than a 10-minute drive. Can the parliamentary secretary not hear me?

Mr M.J. Cowper: There is a bit of noise in here and it is hard to hear you.

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: I will try to shout a bit louder.

The SPEAKER: Members! Thank you.

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: I contacted Path Transit about this issue. The company admitted that the students were not informed well ahead of time. The notice went out on the Wednesday and the bus service was terminated the following Monday morning. Path Transit advised me that students living near Blue Mountain Drive should catch the route 473 bus at 7.41 am and alight at Joondalup train station at approximately 8.03 am. They then need to catch the 780 school bus that is timed to depart from stand 8 at Joondalup train station at 8.13 am, which will take them to Belridge Senior High School. In the afternoon, students need to catch either school bus 1 or 4, which arrives at Joondalup train station at 3.28 pm and 3.30 pm respectively, or the 463 bus service, which arrives at Belridge Senior High School at 3.19 pm and arrives at Joondalup train station at 3.37 pm. They then need to board the 473 bus, which is timed to depart from stand 4 at Joondalup station at 3.43 pm. The gentleman from Path Transit said in his email to me —

We realise that this information has not been passed onto students so we will have staff handing out the attached flyer tomorrow morning to students waiting in Blue Mtn Dr, the bus stop at Joondalup Primary and also the school.

This change has saved Path Transit a driver and a bus, which it is now using on other routes.

Stephanie Williamson of Joondalup is another parent who rang my office about the changes to the bus services to Belridge Senior High School. Both ladies agreed that I could use their names, so I am not breaking any confidences. Her son now catches the bus from Candlewood Boulevard to Belridge Senior High School. It used to take him about 20 minutes to get to school but it now takes between 40 and 45 minutes; that is an additional 20 minutes to get both to and from school. Furthermore, the bus arrives just five minutes before school starts, so students do not have time to get to their lockers to check their books, go to the bathroom if necessary or catch up with a teacher if they need to. Stephanie said that the bus service now goes through Mater Dei College and it takes a full 10 minutes for the bus to turn around in the car park. She has queried why the bus does not stop down the road to drop off students to save the 10 minutes it currently takes to turn around. She asked why kids going to a public school in their own school area are being penalised to allow kids at a private school to better access their area.

Nick Jakowyna, the principal of Belridge Senior High School, was also told late in the piece that Transperth was changing the route because of a lack of patronage. The information I received from the parents who contacted me is that the school bus service is well patronised. In fact, they said it was relatively full all the time. I am not sure about that, but they query why a service that has run for many, many years has been changed without any consultation with parents and very little notification to students. The students have not had much time to make alternative arrangements for travelling to school. A very flimsy document was handed out late in the piece to advise them of the change. Parents and students want the service to be reinstated, at least until there has been some discussion with parents so that they can understand the reasons for this change and get their heads around how they will get their kids to school.

Belridge Senior High School is the only state school in my electorate of Joondalup. Most kids in Joondalup, Connolly and Currambine attend this school. There should be a school bus service to get them there. The more difficult it is for students to get to school, the more students and parents will consider whether it is the school that they will go to. Belridge Senior High School is a really good school. It caters very well to students in the northern suburbs. To place travel restrictions on its students by withdrawing this bus service will be detrimental to not only the students and their parents, but also the school. I hope the parliamentary secretary has had a chance to get some information on this matter and that he can give us some hope.

Mr M.J. Cowper: I have a question: was the service that has been cancelled an orange school bus service?

Mr A.P. O’GORMAN: No.

Mr M.J. Cowper: So it is a Transperth service.

Mr A.P. O’GORMAN: Orange school bus services operate outside the metropolitan area.

MR M.J. COWPER (Murray–Wellington — Parliamentary Secretary) [9.18 am]: I acknowledge the great work the member for Joondalup is doing on behalf of his constituency. In my experience, there is nothing more frustrating than dealing with school bus services. These matters are always fraught with problems, given that the demography of schools change, there are changes in the number of students travelling to and from school and new schools are coming on stream, particularly in very urban areas like that of the member for Joondalup. There are always problems. I have spent many hours dealing with school bus services and issues surrounding students getting to and from school.

For the interest of all members, the government will soon be releasing a paper that will give members, schools and parents a chance to examine what the government is looking at doing. The paper is based on the fact that a host of different school contracts and arrangements are used to get students to and from school. In this particular instance, I am concerned—if what the member for Joondalup has said is true—that the students and their parents were not given very much notice. If that is the case, there is cause for both the member for Joondalup and I to ask the Public Transport Authority to review such a substandard situation. Having said that, as the member would appreciate, with all the varying schools coming on stream and with some parents wishing to bypass schools to get to other schools, it is problematic for the service to arrange students’ transport to and from school. I note that the member said that in this particular instance it is taking an extra 40 minutes each day—20 minutes each way—to get to and from school. Although that is somewhat unusual in the metropolitan area, in regional and peri-urban areas the school bus service has a limit of one hour. In my electorate some students who live in Waroona travel on buses for an hour to attend private schools in Mandurah. That is also the case with some students from Harvey and Bunbury. The member is talking about a metropolitan service and students having to use what I understand are Transperth buses. In some cases, they are required to rely on the connection of another bus from different areas.

I have a heap of notes that I am happy to provide to the member, but I am not sure whether they will provide any comfort to him or his constituents. I give an undertaking to review the circumstances described by the member’s constituents to see whether, if possible, things can be done better. I give an undertaking that we will consider the member’s concerns. I note that the member wrote to the Minister for Transport last week. I am not sure whether the issue has progressed, because I have only just become aware of the situation this morning. I will follow up this issue on behalf of the member for Joondalup and his constituents.