

SCHOOL BUS ROUTES — SERVICE REVIEWS

236. Hon NIGEL HALLETT to the Minister for Transport:

Given the uncertain times that our school bus operators have recently endured as a result of the review of school bus routes, will the minister give a reassurance that there will be no further erosion of the incumbent conditions?

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question.

There are more than 800 orange school bus contracts operating around the state. Some will occasionally be subject to changes and review. The review that the member raised pertains to a small number of contracts in the rural area surrounding Bunbury. The Public Transport Authority administers the school bus contracts for the rural orange school bus network and aims to do so in the most efficient and effective manner to provide the best service for students balanced against good value for money for taxpayers. Service reviews are conducted to ensure, where possible, that students have access to orange school buses by resolving capacity issues and maintaining travelling times to below 90 minutes on any one-way journey. Reviews of school bus services are required on an ongoing basis as students finish their school lives, new children of school age emerge or families move, requiring changes to bus routes. Where savings to the taxpayer can be made by reducing or combining services to accommodate changes in student numbers or pick-up locations, such improvements should be and are pursued by the Public Transport Authority.

The previous government implemented the current remuneration package under the orange school bus composite rate model—CRM—contract. It is effectively divided into two distinct elements—that is, covering fixed and variable costs. The fixed cost elements include administration, garaging, depreciation, vehicle registration, and profit. They are paid over the calendar year and do not change. The variable cost elements are calculated at a rate per kilometre and therefore will increase and decrease as the number of kilometres operated by an orange school bus contractor changes. The intention was that there should be no erosion of income as a result of a review to service routes under a CRM school bus contract.

I assure all members that this government is committed to working with the orange school bus industry through the transport forum in addressing their concerns about the CRM contracts. I am therefore pleased to announce that my parliamentary secretary, Bill Marmion, will head a group of government members —

Hon Sue Ellery: Are you making a ministerial statement? Is that what you are doing?

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: No.

Hon Sue Ellery: It sounds like it.

Hon Norman Moore: He's answering a question.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I am answering a question.

Hon Sue Ellery: He said "I'm pleased to announce".

The PRESIDENT: The Minister for Transport has the floor. Members should realise by now that if I am of the view that answers tend to be a bit long, I tend to allow more questions to be asked, because, somehow or other, irrespective of who the Leader of the House is, I sometimes forget to see the Leader of the House, inadvertently.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I would digress just long enough —

The PRESIDENT: Do not digress, please.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: — to indicate this is not intended to be a ministerial statement. I am trying to give a full answer about a matter that concerns the member and the question was not solicited in any way. However, I will take the opportunity to say that I am pleased to announce that my parliamentary secretary, Bill Marmion, will head a group of government members that will consult widely with the school bus industry in the very near future. The group will include my colleagues in this place Hon Nigel Hallett and Hon Brian Ellis, along with Murray Cowper MLA. I have convened a meeting of this group for tomorrow to discuss these matters and the ways in which they will be able to make recommendations to me about possible improvements to this vital service.