

STUDENT TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE POLICY — REGIONS

Statement by Minister for Transport

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport) [9.02 am]: I will address the wide audience in front of me! I rise to update the house on the government's progress to provide more support for regional students travelling to and from school. For more than 100 years the state government has played an important role in assisting children living in remote and rural areas to travel to and from school safely. As members may recall, in 2022 I asked the Public Accounts Committee to conduct a review into the policy settings and operations of School Bus Services administered by the Public Transport Authority. At that time, there had not been a review of school bus services in over 20 years. Today I announce that, as promised, a number of recommendations from the report *Bus fair: The report of the inquiry into the student transport assistance policy* will come into effect for the commencement of the school year in 2024. These changes will broaden the eligibility of families able to receive transport assistance, giving families more flexibility in planning their children's schooling.

Key changes to the eligibility requirements include allowing students to attend either their nearest district or senior high school, rather than just their closest school; more flexibility for social and community factors to be considered in an application for transport assistance; and allowing eligible students to receive transport assistance to travel to a regional town to attend their selected school. These changes follow extensive consultation with communities to make sure we struck the right balance between providing support and security to district high schools while also providing families with greater choice in how they plan their child's schooling. At the request of the Department of Education, the implementation of some of these changes will be deferred by 12 months at five schools—Boddington District High School, Carnamah District High School, Gingin District High School, Lake Grace District High School and Wongan Hills District High School. This will give the Department of Education more time to engage and consult on these changes with local school communities. I am very proud to be part of a government that is committed to supporting regional communities, and I know these changes will be welcomed by many families across the state.