

## STUDENT TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE POLICY REVIEW

### A) The eligibility criteria for students to qualify for transport assistance,

**Nearest appropriate school** – Definition of nearest school needs to account for local roads, weather conditions (school bus services sends buses down some sub condition roads for the sake of saving dollars) without consulting contractors, and routes that align with students locations. School bus services should be more aligned with the Education Department.

**Access to Spurs** – Current definition refers to distance, not time taken. Suggest there should be no limit on Spurs as long as they fit within the current 90 minute time frame.

**Inclusion of social, community, economic, financial factors** – Common sense approach to provide flexibility, Eg treatment of complimentary students where most appropriate school is not necessarily the closest to home (place of parents work, school attended by siblings) Siblings at the same school. High school able to be completed at the one school.

**What are the current eligibility criteria** – Enrolled at the nearest appropriate school, in compulsory education, regularly use school bus (60%) live more than 4.5 km from school, reside outside of designated Public Transport Area.

**Are eligibility criteria too restrictive, or can they have unintentional outcomes?** Yes. Consider safety of students and take a common sense approach where the 4.5 km rule results in unintended Potentially dangerous outcomes. By dropping the 4.5km rule from a school it would allow students safer travel, currently there are situations where students ride bikes to school down busy highways where grain trucks travel at high speed, in a lot of cases the local school bus passes there front gate and could easly pick up the students at no extra cost to school bus services. The current rule is a stupid one.

**Are DOE school intake areas consistant with “nearest appropriate school” eligibility requirements?** There is no consistency with the education department

**How might eligiblity criteria be improved?** Flexible, common sense approach.

### B) Types of transport assistance and entitlements to be provided to ensure students can undertake an appropriate education.

**What are the current transport assistance and entitlements provided to students under the STAP framework** – See STAP document

**Are current types of transport assistance and entitlements satisfactory?** Students can be classed as eligible or complimentary, **all students should be classed as eligible** as school bus services uses the **complimentary numbers to elimiate Evergreen bus contracts** and denie students to there school of choice. School bus services then offer the students parents a conveyance allowance of 0.27 cents a km to take the student to there school, this allowance and time taken by parents to travel is not appropriate in most cases.

**How are types of transport assistance offered affected by changing area demographics?**

School closures, Amalgamations, New schools. All these situations affect school bus contractors, with the shift in population to other areas for work and schooling. Current school bus services practice of offering a **conveyance allowance for students is unacceptable** and all students should

be **made eligible for transport** to their selected school of choice.

**Are there additional types of transport assistance or variations to existing types that could be provided? - NO**

**C) Relevance of existing policies, practices and rules that are applied in delivering transport assistance arrangements.**

**What other policies, practices and rules support or sit behind the STAP and Operational Guidelines** – Current school bus services policies disadvantage students and parents in a lot of locations around Western Australia. SBS and the current Labour Government appear to be on a mission to reduce the amount of Evergreen Contracts around Western Australia through continuing to make **students complementary instead of an eligible** students through school of their choice. Currently SBS and the Labour Government are more concerned with saving transport costs than providing safe school transport to students through their choice of school. This move takes the student away from the school they attend which in some cases can only provide a student with a special program.

**Do these additional policies, practices and rules lead to unfair, inefficient or unintended consequences?**

**All students should be eligible for transport** to their school of choice. SBS is **making too many students complementary** as a way to reduce Evergreen Contracts around Western Australia and put the burden of student transport back onto the parent.

**How might policies, practices and rules be improved?**

Common sense, **make all students eligible for transport, give security to contractors.**

**B) Assessment process when evaluating the safety of bus stops and routes -**

**What is the assessment process?** SBS says it recognises the importance of frequently updated route mapping and uses a variety of data sources and mapping systems to obtain an accurate and flexible mapping tool which allows for adjustments to routes to be made relatively easily and quickly and that a number of factors are relevant to route and stop design.

**SBS fail to communicate with contractors over the safety and condition of routes due to their mapping tools. Their mapnet mapping only picks up the route and not the conditions of the road routes, when contractors ask for a variation of route due to the condition of the roads they are forced down the mapped route which can be unsafe. SBS never go out and check a route after complaints, it's their decision that is correct, not the contractors, hence putting the safety of the students at risk.**

**What considerations are taken into account in the assessment process?** SBS should schedule a review program, each year including survey forms, changes to student demands and condition of the routes. Students on Special ED buses do not have their health details updated by SBS annually, in some cases SBS have not updated for up to 7 years.

**How consultative is the assessment process?** SBS says the process of reviewing routes or areas is conducted in an open and transparent way and that it engages with School Bus Advisory Committees, contractors and Schools. **What SBS says about the process is not correct, I have been a contractor for 18 years and have yet to be consulted, you receive your student numbers and route each January and it is what SBS decide and you are expected to conform to their instructions. Most contractors are afraid to speak up as SBS have the power to take student**

**numbers off your buses AND REDUCE YOUR INCOME, also making you marginal for a contract review and taking your contract off you under section 18.2 part A and B of the Evergreen contract with 90 days notice. This section of the contract should be reviewed for the security of the contractors.**

**How could the assessment process be improved?** SBS needs to consult with contractors who know the routes, families and conditions. **SBS need to listen to the feedback of the contractors and not just force their influence of fear on the contractors.**

**E) Implications of the NDIS on the delivery of transport assistance for students attending ED Support facilities?**

**How does the NDIS interact with the delivery of transport assistance for students attending ED facilities** – Research shows that routine is a key factor contributing to the well-being of many children with disabilities. The children love routine, because they get the same driver, bus aide and the same seat every day, they know what to expect. And the schools like it, it works.

**The NDIS demand-responsive model would not have this routine.**

Community transport and car pooling would not operate rigorous, regulated, safety regimes which have clear chains of responsibility obligations in place.

**An NDIS price based race-to-the-bottom model would undermine the current emphasis on safety.**

Most children with disabilities participating in school transport programmes travel by bus.

**Special buses are the most cost effective way of transporting** significant numbers of children on a per capita basis and ensuring that service, quality and safety needs are met.

**Is this interaction between the NDIS and delivery of transport assistance likely to change in the near future? If so how?** - “Uberising” the transport of children with disabilities would destroy proven, well-established, cost effective, safe services to the detriment of those children because bus operators need long term contracts and minimum numbers to make the investments which need to be made to sustain their businesses.

Such a possibility for children with a disability having their current special education buses removed and replaced with the “**UBERISING**” model would shock and anger the community generally, and **reinforce the perception that politicians are “out-of-touch”**

Implementing the NDIA's agenda would do the opposite. The Federal Government should cease trying to “uberise” the transporting of school children with a disability and leave in place a system which is **not broken and does not need fixing.**

**Are there any gaps in eligibility between students eligible for NDIS and those eligible for transport assistance under the STAP framework?** - Yes, students that want to go to the school of choice are refused transport through education department and SBS boundaries which are very **rigid with no flexibility.** Parents that move house from one area to another are not aware that SBS will refuse transport due to their internal boundaries causing a lot of pain and grief. All students should be able to be transported to the school of choice.

**How could any gaps in eligibility be filled?** - Common sense, allow children to go to school of choice, SBS show no flexibility to parents of students when it comes to school of choice. All students should be eligible for transport.

**F) Contract arrangements with service providers, including appropriateness of current school bus contracts, and payment arrangements, and previous contractual arrangements and the manner in which they were created:**

**What type of contractual arrangements exist for the provision of school bus services under the STAP framework? - Evergreen v TRM model.**

**Are there any issues with the current contractual arrangements? - Yes**

Contract is weighted all towards SBS, **THEY CAN TERMINATE A CONTRACTORS BUSINESS WITH 3 MONTHS NOTICE. UNDER SECTION 18.2 (a) (b) SBS HAS ABSOLUTE DISCRETION.**

SBS are currently at the direction of The Minister of Transport letting TRM contracts at the lowest possible price quoted with the view of replacing the Evergreen Contract for a cheaper price. **SBS do not operate as per there contract.** The previous Liberal Governement allowed for a contract to be re-located to another area if student numbers reduced at any school, but not the Labour Governement of today. **They show no respect to the years of good service to the community and the investment in buses and social frabic that some of these contractors have given.**

Page 1 of the Evergreen Contract (2) GOOD FAITH states, The Parties agree to act reasonably and in good faith in respect of all negotiations, consultations and discussions with each other under this contract. **THEY DO NOT.**

**Clause 18 (2a)** Deals with the Termination of the ECM Contract. It should be amended to reflect the opportunity to have the ECM Contract relocated (as is the case in the past, with outer Metro contracts) to an area of need when an ECM Contract service is no longer required due to the lack of student numbers for the original contract.

PTA cannot ignore the financial investment a Contractor has in their ECM contract. The ECM has evolved over time from the Standard Rate Model School Bus Contract that operated from the inception of the student transfer service over 120 years ago, the SRM contracts were awarded to Contractors for a fee paid to the Government.

When a contract is assigned, the Bus can attract Stamp Duty payable to the State Government.

**The current TRM rate model does not have any penalties attached to the contract,** there are no demerit points to be lost in running the contract, where unlike the Evergreen contract the contractor can only loose 30 demerit points over 5 years and then have the contract terminated. SBS do not opporate on a level playing field.

**How can the contractual arragements for the provision of school bus services under the STAP framework be improved? - Relationships are at a all time low, lack of confidence in communications with staff at SBS for fear of retribution.**

Some staff bully contractors into positions that are not safe while carrying out there contract (big stick approach) do as I say or you will loose students from your contract, there is one [REDACTED] who threatings contractors on a regular basis, management are unable to control this person and contractors are always in fear of retribution. There are some Contract Officers who are directed by there team leaders to make unrealist demands on contractors. Some contract officers do not understand the contracts that they

are dealing with, and when questioned are unable to explain how they arrived at their answer. Contractors are told that the Evergreen Contract is **an average price contract**, but when it comes to submitting TDV's (travel distance variations) they **apply the formula to the closest decemil point**. The time that SBS staff take to make contractors comply with this section of the contract must outweigh the claw backs km's. SBS are unable to come up with a formula to administer the TDV's, they are currently up to version 7 of their spreadsheet.

The ECM is an average cost model contract with all servicing being costed this way. The introduction of the Temporary Distance Variation system has seen the administration from both the SBS and Contractor greatly increase. It would be better to base the average cost model for payment on the 195 days of school and not go through the process of Student Free Days being paid to the contractor. This would eliminate the need for the TDV system with the "overs & unders" for Contractor's travel being recorded and administered by SBS. There is much debate about the accuracy of the system of measurement used by SBS in measuring the Km's of each run.

It is interesting to note that the RPT Green bus school services run every day regardless of Student Free & Public Holidays, when they know there are no students to transfer.

### **ECM Contracts for the Future**

The precedent has been set for the ECM contracts going forward with a sample of 5 being "sold" to the market through a Bid System. It was very successful and provided a return to Government for each contract. On 11th November 2016 Transport Minister Bill Marmion got the go ahead for the rest of the TCM contracts to convert through the Bid system and go out to the market. Prior to the full implementation of the Bid System the State Government changed and the Bid System was shelved by the incoming Government.

To create a secure, safe & efficient Orange School Bus service into the future the existing TCM & TRM Contracts should be offered to the market place as ECM contracts.

This can be done two ways, firstly by offering the existing TRM & TCM contract holder the option to purchase the contract or by going out to the market place for the conversion to the ECM Contract model. Current values range between 1 to 1.7 times Contract value based on ECM rates. The smaller buses in

outlying rural areas attract around the 1 times, while in bigger centres the ECM Contract will bring around 1.7 times contract value.

Management of all aspects of the contracts for the SBS division will be significantly improved without the cost of the Tendering process and the administration of 4 different types of Contracts, (ECM, TRM, TCM, Short Term). Efficiencies will flow from this change.

Many families' business's along with larger companies have invested large sums of money, pride and emotional support for their communities over the 120 years of service to the safe daily student transfers to and from schools throughout WA. The Orange school bus system stands alone with its safety record.

The ECM contract as have been all past contracts is an Average cost model, in certain areas of Contract administration SBS have departed and been selective in its application as demonstrated by the introduction of the TDV's, whereas the simple removal of payment for the student free days would have kept the integrity of the average cost model intact and avoided excess administration and the toxic culture that is derived from the methods of calculating the TVD's.

It is important to note that SBS does not run over budget according to the Parliamentary Budget papers, all SBS administration and Contractor services are met and funded within the budget allocated.

A good positive working culture between the SBS Team and Contractors with security in Contracts will see the service continue to provide the best, safest student transfer system in the world

#### **G) Resourcing of School Bus Services division with the PTA:**

**Is the SBS division sufficiently resourced to appropriately manage the STAP? - NO**

SBS has **become process driven and bogged down** with minor issues.

SBS contract officers currently attend to around 60 contractors each, 10 years ago they managed 120 contractors each. Contract Officers are **inward focused** and most would not have been out and visited a contractor, they administer the Evergreen Contract and would have **no idea as to what happens in the day to day operation of a school bus contract.**

Another area that SBS fail in is the Tendering of outstanding contracts, since the Labour Governemnet has been in power SBS has failed to address the outstanding contracts. Five years ago there were around 120 contracts to be tendered, I believe that there are still 100 odd to go to tender. I dought that by the expiry of the current Labour Governement's term in office they will get around to tendering fewer that 30 contracts going on past experence.

**Has there been any change to the resourcing of SBS division in the last 10-15 years?**

Yes, additional staff resources have been provided, but delivery of sevicees has not improved.

#### **H) The appropriateness of the conveyance allowance as an alternative to transport assistance:**

**The conveyance allowance should be scrapped, and all students should be made eligible for transport.**

Currently conveyance is paid at a rate well under other industries.