

To Whom It May Concern

Public Transport Authority's (PTA) Student Transport Assistance Policy Framework Review 2021

We, like many, appreciate that you are taking the time and resources to review the current bus services and systems providing transport to schools here in WA, primarily regionally. Whilst we are eternally grateful we have this service to provide transport to school for our children, we believe it is frightfully flawed, ruthlessly mechanical in its procedures and totally unrelatable to the needs of most families involved. Considering that education is pivotal in a prosperous life, we are disappointed that rural families can be dismissed so unsympathetically about receiving a fulfilling education for their children at the school they feel most comfortable at.

It is fact that most rural families are juggling a lot currently, and there has been no secret that most families have had some issues with the current SBS for a few years. This is unacceptable and unworkable for our future especially considering the latest changes to the already ruthless policy guidelines. Situations where families are being told by SBS which school their children are to attend from this day onwards because it is 'the closest as the crow flies'; to children being pulled out of public schools to get a seat to a private/Catholic school because of the difficulties with the SBS system, to inconsistent decisions on runs; to children entering the workforce too early due to difficulties getting to a school (of choice) - it is not acceptable!

PERSONAL CHALLENGES

For us, it has been an exhausting and frustrating journey thus far, only two years in as parents utilising their services. Our eldest was a complimentary passenger last year, as he was in kindergarten, therefore only attending school five days a fortnight however we were denied being picked up from the bus stop that existed from the 1970's to the 1990's. We accepted, though not without frustration, that we had to drive him to the designated bus stop on the bitumen 1.1km up the road. This proved difficult for our family because I had to take unpaid leave from my employment in Perth due to being only provided employment on days he was attending school. It was too difficult to get him to the bus each day because I would have the car earlier than bus collection, then later than the bus drop off, still making my way back from Perth. With a four-year-old student and a not quite two-year-old toddler, I was utterly embarrassed to think I was only leaving them with either an illegal drive in a farm vehicle on a shire gravel road to the sealed road or on foot with a pram on those days each week to and from the bus, let alone not enabling my husband to get farm work done successfully, with bus collections on the sealed road considered by SBS necessary.

Our biggest issue with this decision is that when I [REDACTED] was a passenger on this bus run, when I attended the local district high school (same school, same bus route) from 1986 to 1990, the bus drove to **our main driveway entrance**, therefore allowing my siblings and myself to get there on foot (100m) or on our bikes. This is the same driveway I would love to see my children ride down too and thought would be possible when I returned home to run the farm! We never considered that we would be denied this flexibility and in turned have had challenging days getting him safely to the bus.

There are less passengers on the bus nowadays. We believe is the due to a disillusionment with the public school system, the earlier progression to high school and the impact of lesser families on divisions of land in the regional areas. Last year (2020) there were thirteen passengers on our bus, this year (2021) started with eleven now ten passengers and next year (2022) there will be seven passengers, of which two will be from one stop and one family, being ours! When I attended school here, this area was covered by two buses full to the brim. I cannot fathom why a two-kilometre (in total) spur is such an issue when others are accommodated! Why can't small spurs be considered to help out families particularly within the small area covered for our serviced area?

We were over the moon to hear on New Year's Eve (2020/2021), that our spur application had been accepted by the SBS channels and the Works Division of the shire would be erecting school bus signage before the school year started. We were so relieved and happy! We bought our eldest a bike for his birthday in January. A week before school started, we were unapologetically emailed to let us know that the decision was reversed. The bike now has cobwebs. His need to learn to ride his bike became secondary and not an exciting, necessary stepping stone in his development. It also soured our relationship with the shire, the SBS and other systems in Western Australia's public sector. This flippant decision also put a lot of strain on our ability to accept employment, as we both have employment off farm in order to be financially sustainable.

Below are the emails from the local Administration Officer Technical regarding the flip decision on our bus stop once our eldest became a fulltime passenger.

25th January 2021 – “I have heard from PTA and unfortunately, PTA are leaving the designated bus stop at the intersection of North Wandering Rd & Walwalling Road. Enclosed is the link to there Policy & guidelines.”
[Student Transport Assistance Policy and Operational Guidelines](#)

29th January 2021- “It is the decision of the PTA to continue to use the current bus stop. There is nothing more the Shire can do about their decision.”

It is again frustrating to read that it would be preferred that students embarked and disembark the bus on the left-hand side of the bus for obvious reasons. This year, because our bus route became significantly shorter, our son has had to disembark onto the bitumen road side in the afternoons, **every day**. A left-hand side drop is possible at our driveway morning and afternoon!

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5.1.6. Approved School Bus Stops When a parent/carer applies for transport assistance the Authority will allocate an approved bus stop which is the designated pick up or drop off point for the student to access the school bus, as part of the approval process. No other location should be used without the specific approval of the authority. **Bus stops, where possible, will be off the road on the left hand side.** Requests for a child to be dropped off along any road that is not an approved bus stop will not be approved. The approved bus stop will usually be a: • Farm gate of the rural property for rural students • Residential address for Education Support students Transport Assistance Policy • A pre-determined school bus stop where a number of families will access the bus, or • The side of the road at the end of a spur.

Again, reviewing the guidelines, a historical terminus can be reinstated, yet we have never been provided this information about how to apply for this change even though we have written emails to this effect. Considering the bus route is significantly shorter than ever before, and our spur will ultimately add only few minutes to a very short bus route, why be so difficult?

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9.2.5. Reinstatement of Relocated Terminus (Historical Terminus) **In certain circumstances, SBS may give approval to reinstate a previous terminus point.** The reinstatement of a previously used terminus (Historical Terminus) that exceeds the distance described above under Terminus Extensions may only occur under the conditions outlined below: • On application for transport assistance by an eligible family is received; Transport Assistance Policy • The pickup and set down point requested is the same as the terminus point (Historical Terminus) prior to moving to the current terminus; • The previous terminus was an authorised terminus used by an Eligible Student/s; and • The application is lodged within 2 years of the terminus being relocated. Any decision to reinstate the terminus would take into account whether: • The bus route had varied significantly since the terminus ceased to be used; • The reinstatement would cause the bus service to run over 90 minutes; and • The new student met the eligibility criteria for transport assistance. Note: SBS may consider a pickup / set down point along the previous route leading to the Historical Terminus, with a distance greater than allowed under Terminus Extension but less than the Historical Terminus distance, on a case by case basis.

We have noticed very inconsistent decisions in our area about policy procedures and we are very confused as to why we have been unjustly treated. For example, on our bus run we are the **only** family that has to travel on the shire's gravel roads to meet the bus. We have been told that this is because our driveway is 1.1km from the bus route, therefore we are ineligible for a bus spur, yet on the same bus run there are two other bus spurs to stops that are considerably less than 2km from the sealed bus route without any other stops on those spurs. We would just like to see that we are all provided a little consideration.

How can the decision be so different from one family to another considering that the same, ridiculously rigid rulings should apply to all apparently? Some are approved, others applications aren't, it seems! We are disappointed that SBS employees can make an assessment of the 'nearest appropriate school' from Google Maps (we live 10km from where Google deems we live!) and are unforgiving toward family pleas for a little support in their children's best interests.

On a recent drive around a near but different SBS area, I noticed that school bus signage was 200m down a gravel road for a single bus stop for that road no farther than 50m from the actual house. This equates to a 250m bus spur from the bitumen road. How can we not see this as unjust?

Our 'designated' bus stop is on a very dangerous blind hill top (see images attached). We are just waiting for a close collision to be horrendously more especially during the hectic harvest approaching and as mentioned, afternoon drop offs are very close to the curving road on this hill. This week I noticed a service vehicle stopped just off the seal at the entrance of the old road (now a narrow strip fenced into our neighbour's paddock) for a toilet stop in the morning. Our bus had to get around it blindly on the other side of the road on the curved road heading up a hill. This is not a safe stop for vehicles, but it is regularly used unfortunately. I believe this area was not scrutinised for dangers appropriately once the road changes had been made, particularly due to the signage issues below.

There is a black on yellow sign 'CAUTION CONCEALED ROAD AT CREST VEHICLES TURNING 300M AHEAD' with an '80KM' sign underneath. These signs have not been moved to at an adequate distance from the T-junction (as suggested by the signs) since our gravel road was realigned to apparently make it 'safer' nearly 20 years ago. This confuses drivers coming up toward the T-junction heading west. These signs stating a road is 300m away are in actual fact only 50-80m from the road junction. Furthermore, the black and yellow '80km' signs on either side of the bus stop suggests that this is a dangerous zone, however the Department of Transport explained to us via email that this is just a **suggestion** and not legally binding. How safe do we feel for our children as sitting ducks twice a day?

Email 2nd February 2021- I can confirm all signs with a yellow background are warning series signage. These signs are provided to advise motorists of various hazards on the network. Any speed shown on these signs is only provided as a "recommendation".

Regards, [REDACTED] (Speed Zoning) Traffic Management Services

HIGH SCHOOL CHALLENGES

We would like you to imagine you are your 12-year-old self about to embark on your high school schooling. You have been nervously excited about leaving the nurturing environment of your primary school, but at the same time, ready to grow wings and fly. You are going to meet new friends, have different teachers for different subjects, learn different skills and be away from the caring yet judgemental eyes of all the community you have been a part of since your schooling started. You are following your elder siblings' footsteps. They have blossomed at 'your' new school and are really settled into study and meeting heaps of new friends from neighbouring places! They are excited you'll be joining them and then.... Your parents came in with blood shot eyes and announce, 'Darling, you have to go to the district high school in the opposite direction to your siblings because the School Bus Services has deemed the other school is more appropriate.' How are you feeling? How can the system be so ruthless?

It is also disappointing to hear how other families are currently been affected by the rigid, inhospitable guidelines we have to adhere to in order to get our children a seat on a bus to a public school. This impacts our families and our community greatly. From children being tossed off the SBS bus for other children, even though the bus is not full and creating angst between these families for not fault of their own. From reviews that are inconsistent, to traditional bus stops considered unacceptable for further use with no just reasoning, to deciding that children should travel to a closer school in a different direction to a different community even if the students are a year from leaving primary schooling. And most concerning, the repercussions of requiring students to move from primary school to district high schools in a different shire. Then if they 'decide' to continue to Year 11 and 12, move again in another direction to a senior high school. This sends chills up our spines! Not only would these students need to be taken to the closest bus stop on route (generally in town) to get to the new school, their education and emotional/mental health seem irrelevant to these paper-shufflers that make these decisions! Education is a First World expectation and, what's more, compulsory from Pre-Primary to Year 10*, how has this system become so barbaric?

According to the latest Census (2016), it is disappointing to see that education is highly undervalued and such an unutilised commodity relative to the Western Australian and the Australian standards within my shire, and I directly fault the current public school system and consequently the SBS for making secondary education so unachievable and difficult for too many regional families. I [REDACTED] struggle to comprehend that I am one of the 3.9% of the population here (compared to 20.5% of West Australians and 22% of Australians), that have a degree or higher qualification and wonder if this **alarms** any parliamentarians within Australia? Regional people have been quickly demoted to secondary citizens of Australia, and this is abhorrent due to poor and unworkable education and transport systems.

Furthermore, these statistics are from several years ago, when 'the powers that be' didn't expect students to complete Years 7-10 schooling at Brookton District High School. They were instead permitted to be bussed to

Narrogin Senior High School for all their secondary education years or the Narrogin Agricultural College. They had the 'choice' and connectedness to NSHS from their early, formative secondary schooling years when friendships form and when they are trying to work out where they sit in this crazy world. They are able to find their niche, within a comfortable timeline, and have a better chance of working out which career path to lead, instead of being coerced to leave school too early because they have to move schools again. We say 'choice', because there is not much of a choice going on right now, nor an acceptable education! We are lead to believe students have been compulsorily forced to attend BDHS from this year onwards. Whilst a great primary school, this school has limited learning areas, therefore limited resources, and the Year 7-10 cohort are being taught by one teacher in one classroom together. How can this not only devastate their educational ambitions and future career choices, how can they develop strong and healthy self-belief and not feel an educational failure? I have been these student's teacher, so much potential reduce to total disappointment within this public system. And if you are asking, our children will not be prey of the public system after primary schooling, if not before, due to the undervalued resources they will be in WA's future.

Whilst politicians state that education is crucial to future success of our children; this statement seems only intended for those in city areas with apt schooling. Our children are reduced to fearing ambition and not wanting to get higher secondary and tertiary qualifications due to the difficult path set by 'the powers that be'. How can educational be so undervalued in country areas?

Why has the education of regional Australia been fully controlled by a system that has no heart?

Yours graciously

[REDACTED]

28th October 2021



limited sight of oncoming traffic.

The signs, 50-80m before the said road junction and



corner.

At the signage. Notice the lack of sight around the



manoeuvring around the parked vehicle on the bend.

Bus moving back onto left side of the road after