

Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Student Transport Assistance Policy Framework.

Please find the following response to the defined terms of this inquiry.

My name is Matthew Bell. I am 28 Years of age and live with my wife Kelly and our son [REDACTED], we reside together full time on property owned by my family farming business at [REDACTED] Munglinup. We are also expecting our second child in February 2022.

I have particular interest in this inquiry as its finding will have direct and consequential impact on my family. We live 32km from our nearest and preferred primary school at Munglinup, and 38km from our alternate school option at Jerdacuttup.

Our son [REDACTED] is due to start Kindy in [REDACTED], at this time we will become reliant on the school bus service that Munglinup primary school currently enjoys.

Kelly is a registered Nurse and has casual work at the [REDACTED].

We are fortunate that Esperance is the centre in which we choose to use as our primary service centre, therefore we are travelling past Munglinup regularly making it the most convenient option for us. However, if we chose to use Ravensthorpe we would be transiting past Jerdacuttup more frequently making it the better choice. I feel that the current policy does not allow for understanding of the dynamics of regional living. There is a 6km difference in distances to our nearest schools and when living in regional areas this is insignificant. If Jerdacuttup was the more convenient school for us that would be our overwhelming preference.

The small size of Munglinup Primary means that under the current school bus service eligibility criteria it is constantly under scrutiny as to the feasibility of a school bus service. I feel as though there is an urgent growing need for more flexibility in the process for allocating school bus services. There is an undeniable trend across regional areas that there are less children in small schools and they live further apart. To allow families in these areas to have fair and equitable access to schooling, we have reached a point where school bus services need to be more accommodating to students living in these areas. Primarily this can be achieved by allowing for lower numbers on each bus service and noting the up and coming students that intend on using the services. The current system where school bus services are scrutinised by a centralised office 100's of kilometres away from the school is its primary flaw. I believe this process needs to be decentralised and allocated to regional education departments and school principals to determine.

If we were to lose access to the school bus service, we would be forced to choose one of three options. I could drive the 64km round trip twice daily to school when Kelly has work, resulting in me having to reduce working hours; Kelly could drive him forcing her to have her working availability reduced to weekends and school holidays; or our family could choose a more drastic course of action and break up our family to move [REDACTED] to Esperance for schooling where before and after school care is available. Any of these choices would result in Economic, emotional and mental health stresses being imposed on all members of our family. We understand that there can be some financial assistance offered to parents to drive their children to school when an appropriate bus service is not available but this is

only applicable when attending your nearest school regardless of family preference or practicality. Additionally this still leaves parents with the considerable undertaking of driving children to and from school each day. For us, this means 32km or 20minuites each way twice a day, this quickly multiplies to 64km and 40 mins a day, 320km a week and over 3 hours a week, or 12800km and 33 hours a year. We feel as though this alternative to a school bus service, while achieving the task of getting students to school is a far inferior option that leaves families worse off.

In conclusion the reality of our current satiation is that when [REDACTED] reaches school age we have no guarantee that Munglinup will be serviced by a school bus. This will leave us with the unenviable position of having to choose between driving him to and from school each day or uprooting him and our family a leaving our community to move town. It is our sincere hope that the current school bus services system can be modified to allow for small schools to still thrive. After all the cost to run a bus service for a small school pails away in insignificance compared to the heavily subsidised public transport network that our metropolitan cousins enjoy.

Matthew Bell

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]