

Hon. Jackie Jarvis MLC

Member for South West Region

23 September 2021

Mrs. Lisa O'Malley MLA
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
Level 1, 11 Harvest Terrace
West Perth WA 6005
Sent via email: lapac@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Lisa,

SUBMISSION - STUDENT TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE POLICY FRAMEWORK INQUIRY

I have prepared this submission to the Student Transport Assistance Policy (STAP) framework inquiry following representations from constituents regarding their concerns for students' safety on TransRegional buses travelling from Dunsborough to Busselton.

I note that the Committee's Terms of Reference state that the inquiry "*will not consider transport and transport assistance provided to students residing in Public Transport Areas attending mainstream schools, as these students are not covered by the STAP framework*".

The STAP framework applies to WA State Government transport assistance made available to students living in rural areas who attend mainstream government and non-government schools.

Students from Dunsborough have limited schooling options in their town and use Public Transport Authority (PTA) provided "green" buses but are travelling along country roads in overcrowded buses and without seatbelts. This has caused concern to parents and school communities in this region for many years. I would urge the inquiry committee to consider this matter.

Dunsborough School Demographics and the need to travel.

ABS 2016 Census data¹ shows the Dunsborough population of people aged 0-19 years was 1,499. We are awaiting 2021 census data but based on the historic annual growth rate of 7 per cent per annum, the population of people aged 0-19 years living in Dunsborough by the 2022 school year is projected to be ~2,250.

There is no high school in the town of Dunsborough and all high school aged students must travel to Vasse or Busselton to access a high school.

There is one government and one Catholic K- 6 primary school in the town of Dunsborough,

¹ https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SSC50440

but both schools are at capacity. My School data ² shows there are currently 761 students enrolled Dunsborough Primary School and 312 students at the Catholic primary school in Dunsborough. Another non-government school (Cornerstone Christian College) opened a K-2 early learning centre in Dunsborough in 2016 and is adding single stream classes at higher years annually.

As the three primary schools in Dunsborough are at capacity, many parents choose to send primary school aged children to one of three K-12 non-government schools in Busselton, particularly where the family may have other children already attending high school at the same location.

Rural Catchment Areas in the Vasse – Busselton area

Both Government High Schools within the City of Busselton LGA have large rural catchment areas (figures 1 and 2) and most students from outside of the Busselton township are transported via the School Bus Service (orange buses). The School Bus Service is delivered by external contractors, who are required by law to have seat belts fitted under the terms of their State Government contract.



Figure 1 Cape Naturalist College Local Intake Area

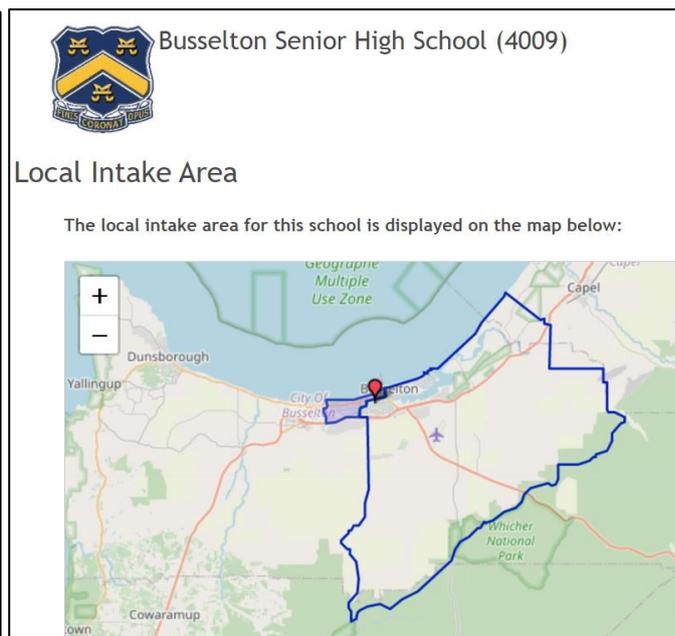


Figure 2 Busselton Snr High Local Intake Area

In Perth and larger regional centres, school bus services are provided by TransPerth or TransRegional buses (green buses), operated by the PTA.

The 14 towns that have TransRegional services, which all include school bus services, are: Albany, Broome, Bunbury, Busselton/Dunsborough, Carnarvon, Collie, Esperance, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Karratha/Roeboorne, Kununurra, Manjimup, Narrogin, Port Hedland.

² <https://www.myschool.edu.au/school-search?FormPosted=True&SchoolSearchQuery=dunsborough&SchoolSector=&SchoolType=&State=>

In the City of Busselton, the TransRegional service provides school bus services from Dunsborough to schools in Vasse and Busselton.

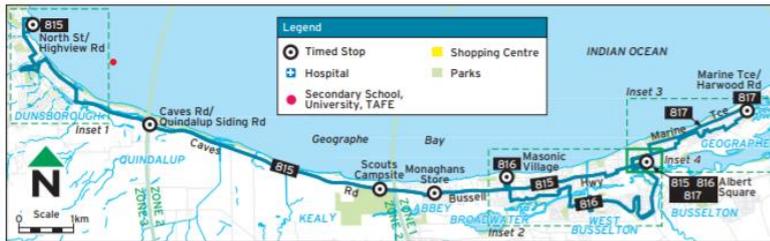


Figure 3 TransRegional Busselton - Dunsborough Route

Safety Concerns and Inequities

TransRegional buses do not have seatbelts.

In the past, Dunsborough parents have been advised that this is because TransRegional buses usually travel at lower speeds in 'built up' urban areas of regional cities and towns.

However, the Dunsborough-Busselton bus routes (see Figure 3.) travel along Caves Road and portions of Bussell Highway, which have speed limits between 90 and 110 km/h, along what is essentially a country road.

All other students travelling to Busselton to attend school from outlying towns and rural areas do so on contractor operated School Bus Services (orange buses), which do have seat belts.

School Bus Services, with seatbelts, are also provided to students from Margaret River who wish to attend non-government schools in Busselton. This has created a feeling of inequity amongst Dunsborough families, who have been raising the lack of seatbelts as a safety issue for well over five years.

The issue is exacerbated by the continued increase of student numbers on the local TransRegional buses year after year. One local School Board Chair expressed to me his frustration that every year parents need to lobby the PTA for months to get extra buses put on the Dunsborough-Busselton routes, as the local TransRegional operators fail to consider the annual school population growth. He has suggested TransRegional operators simply contact local schools to confirm enrolment numbers of students from Dunsborough each year and put an adequate number of buses on the route at the start of each school year.

My constituents are concerned if an accident was to happen on Caves Road at a speed of 90+ km/h the result would be devastating. Their concerns are intensified by the fact many students are travelling from Dunsborough to Busselton without seat, leaving them to stand or sit in the aisle. Many of the students travelling are of primary school age and are unable to reach the safety straps provided.

To date, there has not been a major incident on this route, but parents have reported injuries to their children from minor braking incidents.

My constituents are aware TransPerth buses are used in the metropolitan area for transporting students and these buses travel along the Freeway, where the speed limit is 100km/h. Their feeling is this situation is not comparable to the Dunsborough-Busselton route due to the Freeway having dedicated bus lanes and other safety measures in place such as fencing and fauna underpasses.

Cost of TransRegional Services vs. Free School Bus Services

While no parent has expressed concern about the relatively small cost of a student bus fare from Dunsborough to Busselton, it should be noted that students travelling from other outlying towns to non-government schools in Busselton do not have to pay.

As an example, families within the Margaret River High School Local Intake Area, who choose to use a non-government school in Busselton instead of the local high school, do not pay to have their children transported to the school of their choice, as they are provided with free School Bus Services.

Dunsborough families however, who have no local high school, are required to pay a, albeit small, bus fare to access to the closest government high school, 20 kilometres away.

There are currently around six School Bus Services operating between Margaret River and Busselton, taking students to non-government schools for free and with seatbelts.

Request for a Regional Hearing

Families and the wider school communities in the Dunsborough-Busselton area have been raising these concerns with various Members of Parliament for many, many years. There seems to be a lack of understanding from a departmental level about the difference between TransPerth or TransRegional services that operate in a built-up urban area, and the reality of some students travelling along country roads without access to seat belts.

The scores of students who travel for free, with seat belts into Busselton from as far away as Augusta adds to the sense of inequity and frustration for Dunsborough families.

Whilst I appreciate the inquiry was not looking to consider transport for students residing in Public Transport Areas, it would seem impossible for the committee to fully understand the issues facing rural students without considering the Dunsborough situation.

I would urge the Committee to hold a hearing in the Dunsborough area to meet with impacted families and schools.

Yours sincerely,



JACKIE JARVIS MLC
Member for the South West Region