

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

10/10/2021

Dear Mrs O'Malley, Dr Honey, Ms Hammat, Ms Beazley, Mr Jones & Mr Rundle; Members of the Legislative Assembly,

Thank you for taking the time to review our regional school bus services. Please consider the following information for the inquiry.

There is growing concern in the community of Pingelly for both Primary & Secondary student bus services!

Currently my old & old attend Pingelly Primary School. Our home is 3.6km from the school, with at least 2.2km not pathed, on a narrow truck route, in a 90km/hr zone. Up until this year, School Bus Services very kindly accommodated us with complimentary transport to school as an existing service passed our driveway with ample seating available.

Unfortunately, 4 families (potentially 9 students) lost this service in Term 2 because School Bus Services deemed the furthest family 4.3km from the school. Allegedly, measurements are resourced from a mapping program used by SBS.

I understand that my family are ineligible under the current criteria for SBS, however arguably Google Maps & vehicle odometer readings measure the furthest family property at 4.6km. I firmly believe they should be entitled to a school bus service and I cannot comprehend how a common mapping program like Google Maps and odometer readings from the school bus itself not be considered enough evidence for a successful appeal.

Our bus contractors, drivers & school staff put a lot of effort into planning safe transport routes for our students and they have worked tirelessly to fight for solutions. Shamefully, any solution or suggestion seems to fall on deaf ears. SBS fails to acknowledge the lack of regional infrastructure (like footpaths/school crossings). Nor do we have the luxury of Taxi's, Public Transport, Out of School Care Services or a close family support network.

Now moving onto the lack of services for our local High School students.

There is MUCH ANGST for families of Pingelly Primary School Leavers! Families are stressed & at-risk youth are being pushed into a subpar District High School with limited capacity & resources. I don't think SBS realises that the District High School on offer to us consists of about 15 students. Years 7-10 are in one classroom and no extra curricula activities are available. The District High is dying.

Currently, Years 7-10 students are also denied transport to our nearest Senior High School. If we stick with SBS, I will soon have one child travelling 15km North to District High School & the other child heading 56km South to Narrogin SHS. It's a logistical nightmare for a working family!

Ideally, we would like to send our children to the **nearest Public Senior High School**. Shouldn't this be our nearest "APPROPRIATE" school anyway? I don't see it being an unreasonable request when a bus service already exists from Pingelly to Narrogin. There's just not enough seats and it has been an ONGOING ISSUE for years!!

If something doesn't change **I can see this leaving us financially vulnerable.** I may need to consider resigning my job for commuting purposes, pay a private charter to the SHS or send the kids to boarding. Not to mention we are also ineligible for any boarding assistance, as a different government department claims the Senior High School is too close for assistance. It is contradictive & little wonder as to why small communities are diminishing.

With all this in mind, I sincerely hope the committee can review the eligibility criteria for School Bus Services and make the necessary changes. The current "one size, fits all" approach is hurting our town.

I'm counting on you.

Regards,

Lisa Pitman