

Give Rural Students a Fair Bus Run

P&C Federation's 2017 Annual General Meeting (AGM) unanimously endorsed the calling on the New South Wales Minister of Transport to consider student numbers, access to education and the impact on small schools and communities when assessing applications for rural bus runs.

Currently, when assessing applications for bus runs, the Department of Transport only considers the financial implications for the State Government. However, this means there are numerous times when rural schools will lose valuable bus runs due to the low number of students being serviced.

P&C Federation President Susie Boyd commented "We believe in equity in education regardless of geographic location, and part of that means allowing parents to get their children to school. We have heard unacceptable cases of bus runs being denied to rural school communities where parents live large distances from the school, because the small number of students was deemed poor value for money. This puts schools with small enrolment numbers, especially those servicing remote communities, at an obvious disadvantage."

A compensation for some parents is the Private Vehicle Conveyance (PVC) subsidy or the School Drive Subsidy, which provides funding to parents without access to public transport to cover the costs of driving. However, for many parents outside metropolitan areas, a key problem is not necessarily the costs of travel but the time it takes to travel.

"For parents in remoter areas, driving their children to school can take several hours each day", Ms Boyd said. "If they have farms or properties to manage, taking that time off every school day may not be an option, and subsidising the petrol costs would not cover the productivity they lose each occasion. Reliable public transport is critically important for parents in these circumstances."

P&C Federation therefore calls on the Minister of Transport to review its procedures for assessing applications for school bus runs. Rather than only considering the raw number of students who require a bus service, the Department should consider the portion of students in a given school. The Department should also consider the remoteness of a student's family, and the time it would take them to transport their child to school.

"The system puts an unnecessary and disproportionate strain on too many rural families", Ms Boyd stated. "We urge the Minister of Transport to take reasonable steps to ensure students and families in small and remote schools are not disadvantaged by where they live."

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