

PORTFOLIO REPORTS - STATE COUNCIL

Travel Report

Jane Cunningham – Portfolio Holder, March 2022

It was with much relief that student travel was less impacted by COVID-19 in 2021 than in 2020. Although our students were still restricted from travelling to and from educational facilities in states other than Western Australia, we did not have the same disruption with intrastate travel that we experienced previously.

Motion A15 was in relation to students being seen as essential workers and therefore having the same travel rights. A letter was written to the Hon. Paul Papalia and the Hon. Sue Ellery but unfortunately a response was not returned.

The Student Travel Subsidy Scheme (STSS) provides travel assistance to school and tertiary students who are geographically isolated. The two main types of travel support are:

- Subsidised fares for air, bus and train travel for eligible students who live within the defined remote area (DRA) of Western Australia (see map)
- A road travel subsidy for eligible students who live anywhere within Western Australia but who must be driven in a private vehicle more than 56 km from home to the nearest:
 - Appropriate government school with boarding facilities offering classes in the grade or level in which the student is enrolled, or
 - Regular passenger transport (bus stop, airport or train station - please visit the TransWA – Plan Your Journey website for regular passenger transport hubs and routes), or
 - A school bus service operating between the student's home and the school they are attending.

At the 2021 ICPA (WA) State Conference a number of travel motions were presented relating to aspects of the STSS.

Motions A9, A10, A11, A12, A13

A9 “That ICPA (WA) lobby the Department of Transport to accept and process requests for refunds for airfares under the Student Travel Subsidy Scheme (STSS) up until 31 December for the full school year when all travel has been undertaken as is the case for the Road Travel Subsidy (RTS).”

ICPA (WA) wrote to Minister Saffioti and Alina McGlenchy (On-Demand Transport) outlining the need for flexibility when claiming the STSS.

A10 “That ICPA (WA) lobby the Department of Transport to allow for special circumstances as to the location a student is flying to and/or from when applying for a refund or voucher for airfare under the Student Travel Subsidy Scheme (STSS).”

At present, when applying for a refund or travel voucher through STSS, a student is only eligible to submit a request for flights via the most direct route by air/bus/train between the principal family home or usual place of residence and where they are being educated. ICPA (WA) wrote to Minister

Saffioti outlining a need for flexibility as there are times where students may need to travel to an alternative town to meet their families if, for example, the family has been at a School of the Air camp.

A11 "That ICPA (WA) lobby the Department of Transport to review their policy regarding the Student Travel Subsidy Scheme (STSS)-Road Travel Subsidy to more appropriately fit rural travel situations and therefore change their criteria to enable our children to receive the education that is comparable to that of metropolitan students."

A12 "That ICPA (WA) lobby the On-demand Transport - Department of Transport service and the State Government for a review into the eligibility criteria of the Student Travel Subsidy Scheme - Road Travel Subsidy."

A13 "That ICPA (WA) requests that the On-demand Transport - Department of Transport (ODT) review the transport hub policy criteria for the Student Travel Subsidy Scheme (STSS)-Road Travel Subsidy. The criteria should state that the nearest transport hub should travel to the nearest appropriate government school."

At the ICPA (WA) State Conference A12 and A13 were deemed covered by A11. ICPA (WA) wrote to Minister Saffioti and Alina McGlenchy expressing the lack of understanding and support being offered to our rural and remote families by the STSS Road Travel Subsidy. Several cases were outlined including a case where travel claims had been rejected for children attending the closest high school and boarding facilities because a bus went through their hometown, even though it did not go anywhere near the school and boarding facility. ICPA (WA) has requested that the Minister of Transport and the Department of Transport On-Demand Transport review the transport hub policy criteria.

Unfortunately, the response from Bronwyn Grieve on behalf of Minister Saffioti was not positive or satisfactory in any way and we look forward to continuing discussions on these matters in 2022.

Motions A14, A16 and S4 were in relation to School Bus Services.

A14 was in relation to students at times being left in the rain and not being cared for to a suitable standard and parents not having an avenue where they could a complaint or grievance to School Bus Services (SBS).

ICPA (WA) wrote to John Bailly of School Bus Services and also had a successful meeting with him at the July face-to-face meeting. Mr Bailly explained the process on the website to follow to lodge a concern and speak with the Contact Officer responsible for the area.

A16 "That ICPA (WA) lobby School Bus Services (SBS) to ensure that four (4) bus service routes are provided for students in the Hyden District. These routes are to be flexible when student numbers and/or residential distribution of students change. Bus routes should not be dictated or decided by the bus contractor as they have a vested financial interest."

S4 "That ICPA (WA) lobby the Public Transport Authority for an annual review of all orange school bus service routes."

ICPA (WA) wrote to John Bailly of School Bus Services and also had a successful meeting with him at the July face-to-face meeting and explained that this is a common story coming out of many parts of

WA. In Mid 2021 there had been an ABC News article outlining the major impact that removing a bus route can have on our families and towns, citing Munglinup where there was the possibility that a route may close.

Unfortunately, the issue with the Hyden bus routes remains unresolved after a number of meetings. Recently the Nyabing P & C had been in touch with their Contact Officer and after consultation with community have a trial of an extra bus in place for Term 1, 2022.

Feedback from ICPA (WA) members who use the Orange School Buses suggests that there is a lot of confusion with the terms 'eligible' and 'complimentary' and this was also the feedback from Mr. Bailly. Members often feel that the rules that SBS are governed by do not fit with the complexities of distance, schools, education needs and families regional Western Australia.

In August 2021, ICPA (WA) welcomed the news that the Minister for Transport had referred the School Bus Services policy to a parliamentary committee for review. In October ICPA (WA) put in an extensive submission to the committee and have attended as witnesses at a public hearing to discuss matters raised in the submission including the operation of the Policy.