



## PORTFOLIO REPORTS - STATE COUNCIL

### TRAVEL REPORT

#### **Kym Ross – Portfolio Support, March 2024**

During 2023, the Travel Portfolio once again focused on the challenges encountered by our rural and remote students in accessing education. At the preceding State Conference five motions were presented addressing a range of issues.

The Midwest Branch and Lakes District Branch presented two motions advocating for an increase to the payment rate per kilometre for the Public Transport Authority (PTA) Conveyance Allowance to better reflect the costs associated with running a vehicle.

In a submission to the Minister for Transport regarding the Road Travel Subsidy in October 1988 ICPA (WA) recommended the Road Travel Subsidy rate be increased from 9 cents per kilometre to 20 cents per kilometre. The last review of the Conveyance Allowance rate occurred in June 2002 by the School Bus Task Force, which supported a rate of 16.08 cents per kilometre based on the RAC (WA) private running costs for a Ford Falcon 4 Lt GLI Auto Sedan. This rate was linked to the Transport CPI (Perth) index to allow for inflation. Interestingly, some 35 years later the current rate of Road Travel Subsidy is 25.24 cents per kilometre.

Correspondence to the Minister for Transport, Hon. Rita Saffioti MLA and the Public Transport Authority concerning an increase was once again brought up making reference to the Student Transport Assistance Policy Framework review and recommendations as outlined in the 'Bus Fair Report' by the Public Accounts Committee (18<sup>th</sup> August 2022). We were informed the PTA would explore alternate rate options, and it was emphasised that the allowance is only intended to assist in covering the running costs of a motor vehicle and not the costs of ownership. Any adjustments to the rate would apply to eligible families starting from the beginning of the 2024 school year.

Under the Student Transport Policy framework, eligible regional students generally have access to orange school buses contracted by the PTA. However, where it is not possible to provide a dedicated bus service, a conveyance allowance is provided to parents to help with the cost of driving their eligible children to and from school or, in some cases, to connect with a service.

State Council has long advocated for an increase in this allowance; the news of a raise in the Conveyance Allowance rate for school travel in regional areas to 55.6 cents per kilometre, effective Term 1, 2024, was a welcomed development, especially prior to Christmas.

During our October 2023 face-to-face meetings in Perth, a council delegation convened with Mr. John Baily, Manager of School Bus Services, to deliberate on additional motions presented in 2023, including:

- **Wearing of Seatbelts**

School Bus Services (SBS) confirmed the PTA Code of Conduct mandates that all passengers must remain seated and securely fasten their seatbelts. Non-compliance constitutes a Category 1 Offense under the Code, resulting in a record against the student's personal file. Repeated breaches may result in suspension from the bus service. Additional details regarding the Code of Conduct are outlined in the Behaviour Management Guidelines, accessible [here](#).

<https://www.schoolbuses.wa.gov.au/TransportAssistance/RelatedInformation/Behaviouronacontractschoolbus.aspx>

It is important to note that SBS lacks jurisdiction over buses that are hired.



- **Look Before You Lock**

The introduction of a safety program similar to that currently operating in Queensland was addressed in meetings with School Bus Services. The requirement for further safety programs was considered unnecessary, given the confidence placed in the current safety measures. Nonetheless, all stakeholders recognised the potential advantages of emphasising specific safety measures anew. It was agreed that contractors should be reminded about the significance of exercising due diligence and the repercussions of not adhering to safety standards.

### **ISSUES**

ICPA (WA) collaborated with two branches to address issues concerning members' access to suitable school bus services in their respective areas.

Members of the Esperance Branch advocated for the reinstatement of the Munglinup East bus route following its cancellation in 2022. With twenty-five children attending the Munglinup Munchkins playgroup, this shows a strong increase in the number of future students requiring this service. Despite concerted efforts from both our organisation and the community, regrettably, no review or adjustment to this service has been successfully accomplished.

We were also advised of the proposed amalgamation of the Tambellup Flat Rocks and Lake Toolbrunnup bus routes servicing the Tambellup Primary School. Correspondence was sent to Mr John Bailly, SBS in September 2023 and we have since been advised that this decision has now been revoked.

ICPA (WA) received a request for assistance from members of the Lakes District Branch who were advised of the termination of the South Gairdner Chillinup service due to steadily declining student numbers. The service operated for two complimentary passengers (without registered eligible student passengers) and was therefore deemed unsustainable given the low student numbers and any possible future students in the area are expected to be supported by the remaining surrounding network. At the conclusion of the 2023 school year this service was terminated and alternative arrangements with another bus contractor were introduced for 2024.

Members from this same branch were also affected by alterations to services on the Gairdner South Bus route that were to be introduced at the commencement of Term 4, 2023. Correspondence and appeals were submitted to School Bus Services regarding these changes. Families were notified by their contractor late Friday afternoon, just before school was due to commence the following Monday, about the cancellation of the spur and termination of bus stops. Particularly for one family, this proposal seemed illogical as they were required to drive their child 7.7km down the road to catch the bus, only for the bus to pass by their gate with a designated safe pull-off approved bus stop. Fortunately, common sense prevailed and the decisions affecting families using this service were reversed.

### **ROAD TRAVEL**

#### **Improvements to be Implemented for Regional School Bus Eligibility**

Among the forty recommendations tabled in the 'Bus Fair Report', the Minister for Transport has approved several amendments to the School Bus eligibility criteria in November 2023, these include:

- **Secondary School Election Rule**

From 2024, where a student completes Year 6 at a primary school (not part of a school offering secondary year levels) they shall be eligible for transport assistance to either their nearest appropriate senior high school or the nearest appropriate district high school for Year 7 rather than just their closest school.



- **School Local-Intake Areas**

Eligibility rules have been amended to remove the disconnect between Nearest Appropriate School and a student's requirement to enrol at a school with a 'local-intake area'.

- **Regional Town Transport Boundaries**

Where an application for student transport assistance is approved to a school located within a Regional City or Town where there is a designated Public Transport Area (e.g. Bunbury, Albany), eligibility will now be extended to where there are multiple schools of the same denomination within the transport boundary.

Eligibility will be determined by distance to the requested school being greater than 4.5km from the student's residence.

- **Social, Economic, Financial and Community Factors**

In rural and regional areas, a nearest appropriate school for transport assistance purposes might not be the same town or centre where a family has well established social, working, health care and community recreational networks, where this town also has a school. More flexibility for social and community factors to be considered in an application for transport assistance.

When determining the nearest appropriate school, where a family resides a similar distance (up to 5 km) from two or more schools, consideration will be given to social, economic, financial and community factors.

All transport solutions will be bound by the defining principle of no adverse impacts on the broader cohort of travelling students in the region attending their nearest appropriate school.

The Department of Education advised the rollout of the new eligibility allowing students to choose either their closest district or senior high school will be rolled out in 12 months' time for a small number of select schools. The 12-month deferral for these schools will provide the Department of Education time to assess the long-term impacts of the change on those particular schools.

The 5 district high schools where implementation will be delayed for one year are:

- Boddington District High School
- Carnamah District High School
- Gingin District High School
- Lake Grace District High School
- Wongan Hills District High School

This also applies to the primary schools that feed into them. Students are still able to apply for a complimentary seat on a bus to a senior high school should eligibility criteria be met. The primary schools are:

- Coorow Primary School
- Bindoon Primary School
- Lancelin Primary School
- Kukerin Primary School
- Calingiri Primary School
- Yerecoin Primary School
- Wandering Primary School

Further information on eligibility criteria can be found in the [STAP and Operational Guidelines](https://www.schoolbuses.wa.gov.au/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=4Oly1kngmwk%3d&portalid=2).  
<https://www.schoolbuses.wa.gov.au/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=4Oly1kngmwk%3d&portalid=2>

### **Free Public Transport for School Students and Sundays**



The Labor Government announced in January 2024 its latest cost-of-living relief measure, with free public transport to be provided for school student travel and the entire community every Sunday. The announcement follows the success of the Summer of Free Public Transport, which began on 24<sup>th</sup> December 2023 and concluded 28<sup>th</sup> January 2024. The new initiative provides ongoing cost-of-living relief to Western Australian families.

The Ride to School Free Program will be specifically for travel to and from school Monday to Friday and will be available to those who hold a valid Student SmartRider card. The Ride to School Free Program will commence on Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2024, while the Fare Free Sundays will begin on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

Families who have two children travelling to and from school daily on public transport could see savings of up to \$560 across the school year as a result of the change. The Ride to School Free Program will benefit every student who rides the bus or train to school – with around 300,000 students currently holding Student SmartRiders.

### **School Bus Services**

Did you know?

- The contract school bus network services around 530 schools across the State.
- The contract SBS network comprises of 962 buses.
- On average 26,400 regional and special education students use contract school buses each day.
- The total SBS network travels per year is estimated at 33.0 million kilometres.
- They have been transporting students for over one hundred years.
- Services extend from Esperance to Wyndham.

### **Smoking and Vaping on School Buses**

There has been an increase in complaints and reports relating to the use of electronic cigarettes (or e-cigarettes – also known as 'vapes') on school buses.

Smoking or the use of vapes on the school bus is unacceptable and considered a serious breach of the Code of Conduct and will be managed in accordance with the Behaviour Management Guidelines as a Category 3: Dangerous and Offensive Behaviour.

Penalties for this category include:

- First Offence – Suspension up to 1 Week
- Second Offence – Suspension 2 to 4 weeks
- Subsequent Offence – Suspension 5+ weeks and permanent suspension from the service may also be considered.

### **AIR TRAVEL**

#### **Capped Airfares Prove Popular in the First Year**

- 151,181 capped airfares flown in the first 12 months of the Regional Airfare Zone Cap (RAZC) scheme.
- 42,519 airfares were flown in the fourth quarter of the scheme.
- The initiative is making flying significantly cheaper for regional residents.
- The scheme will be in place until June 2025.

The popularity of the State Government's successful Regional Airfare Zone Cap (RAZC) scheme continues to surge with more than 150,000 airfares flown in the first year of the scheme.



The latest quarter results show more than 42,500 capped airfares were used by regional residents between April and June 2023. This is a five per cent increase on the third quarter results and brings the total amount of fares used during the first year of the scheme to 151,181.

Karratha-Perth remained the most popular route during the June 2023 quarter, with the highest uptake of 11,253 capped airfares. Kalgoorlie had the quarter's second-highest results of 5,967 fares flown, followed by Port Hedland with 5,926 and Broome with 4,371.

Geraldton, Broome, and Exmouth experienced significant growth in demand in the June 2023 quarter, with quarterly increases of 30 per cent, 27 per cent and 23 per cent respectively.

The RAZC scheme launched in July 2022 and is an Australian-first initiative, delivered in partnership with six participating airlines to provide regional residents with access to capped airfares to Perth of either \$199 or \$299 one-way, when booked as a return fare for personal travel.

Route	Zone Cap / RAZC Fares Flown				
	Q4: Apr- Jun '23	Q3: Jan- Mar '23	Q2: Oct- Dec '22	Q1: Jul- Sep '22	Grand Total (12 months)
Karratha	11,253	10,581	9,840	6,404	38,078
Kalgoorlie	5,967	5,949	5,371	3,317	20,604
Port Hedland	5,926	5,951	5,200	3,013	20,090
Broome	4,371	3,201	5,103	4,052	16,727
Esperance	2,929	3,391	3,558	2,980	12,858
Paraburdoo	2,841	2,901	2,595	2,017	10,354
Albany	2,320	2,148	2,173	1,699	8,340
Carnarvon	1,334	1,619	1,742	1,459	6,154
Exmouth	1,730	1,328	974	964	4,996
Newman	1,262	1,233	1,077	933	4,505
Geraldton	1,384	968	886	710	3,948
Kununurra	736	813	720	529	2,798
Monkey Mia	243	229	212	159	843
Leonora	79	64	69	85	297
Meekatharra	76	85	78	58	297
Laverton	47	36	63	40	186
Wiluna	19	28	29	19	95
Mount Magnet	2	6	2	1	11
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>42,519</b>	<b>40,531</b>	<b>39,692</b>	<b>28,439</b>	<b>151,181</b>

The State Government has committed to running the scheme over three years to June 2025.

#### Airlines Appointed to Service Fully Regulated Regional Air Routes

- Rex and Skippers Aviation to provide fully regulated regional air services following a tender process.
- New deeds will ensure continued air services for key routes in regional WA.
- New service commitments apply from October 2023 until July 2028.

Rex and Skippers Aviation were awarded exclusive rights to operate air services on select regional Western Australian routes, that are fully regulated by the State Government following an open, competitive tender process.



Rex was awarded the rights to operate services between Perth and Albany, Esperance, Carnarvon/Monkey Mia; and Skippers Aviation was awarded the rights to operate the air routes of Perth-Laverton-Leonora and Perth-Wiluna-Meekatharra-Mount Magnet, collectively known as the Northern Goldfields.

Rex and Skippers Aviation are the current service providers on the routes for which they successfully tendered. New agreements between the State Government and both airlines will come into effect in October 2023, lasting until July 2028.

As part of its successful bid, Rex has committed to 24 minimum weekly return services on the Albany-Perth route, 22 minimum return services on the Esperance-Perth route and 12 return services on the Carnarvon route (seven connecting to Monkey Mia).

Skippers Aviation will continue to operate three weekly return services in line with current schedules to Laverton, Leonora, Meekatharra, Mount Magnet and Wiluna, with potential for additional services dependent on demand.

Both airlines will also offer regional residents access to capped airfares for personal travel to and from Perth as part of the State Government's successful Regional Airfare Zone Cap scheme.

### **Nexus - Western Australia's Newest Airline**

- Nexus Airlines commences services on the Inter-Regional Flight Network (IRFN).
- Expanded and improved IRFN supported by State Government investment of \$4 million.
- The inaugural route to include the first direct flight service between Karratha and Geraldton.
- Zone Cap fares are available on Nexus Airlines Geraldton to Perth return service.

Western Australia's newest airline took to the skies on 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2023 for its first commercial flight on the expanded Inter-Regional Flight Network (IRFN).

Nexus Airlines departed from Geraldton on the newly expanded IRFN route, which operates between Geraldton-Karratha-Port Hedland-Broome and return. The route serves the needs of regional residents by allowing them to fly direct between regional centres, instead of having to travel through Perth.

A State Government investment of \$4.05 million over four years is supporting the new link between Geraldton and Karratha and has allowed the airline to invest in higher-capacity 76-seater aircraft to reduce airfares and increase passenger comfort.

Nexus Airlines has exclusive rights to operate the IRFN until June 2027 under a four-year deed of agreement with the State Government. The agreement outlines the requirements to operate on the route, including providing appropriate service levels and fares.

The State Government's expansion of the IRFN and the improved services offered by Nexus Airlines are expected to create significant new business and tourism opportunities for the Mid-West, Pilbara and Kimberley regions.

Nexus Airlines' Geraldton-Perth flights began on 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2023, with Geraldton residents able to access capped airfares on the route through the State Government's Regional Airfare Zone Cap scheme.

## **FEDERAL**

### **Survey**

Federal Council Travel Portfolio Leader Jen Ruska emailed members on 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2023 with a questionnaire regarding flight routes and how members actively access the Qantas residents' fare program. This is in response to motions from the Federal Conference over the past few years regarding the need for



concessional airfares for rural and remote students to access educational institutions. Federal councillors continue to have talks with Qantas senior staff.

### **Briefing Paper**

Federal Council has published the 2023-24 School Travel Portfolio Briefing Paper. Key areas for this report in summary are:

1. The inclusion of a Fares Allowance in the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme similar to that of ABSTUDY and Youth Allowance.
2. Airfares and other travel concessions and dispensations are available for geographically isolated students.
  - Student concessions for airfares and other nationwide travel need to be made available for necessary boarding school travel and specific education appointments not covered by Patient Assisted Travel Schemes or the State equivalent available for medical specialist appointments.
  - Geographically isolated students who receive the Assistance for Isolated Children Allowance should be able to access corporate travel airfare program discounts, similar to recipients of other government allowances.
3. Implementation of a national funding program that would guarantee no young geographically isolated children are left on school or childcare buses by installing sensor devices that sense sound and movement, to detect and alert drivers if young children have been left in the vehicle.
4. Improvements are required to federally funded regional and remote road networks to ensure safe all-weather access standards for families who require these road networks in order for their children to access educational opportunities and support. Currently there are roads that have deteriorated and are in appalling condition and therefore not safe.

<https://icpa.com.au/au/federal-school-travel-briefing-paper>