

ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



2021 FEDERAL CONFERENCE RURAL SCHOOLS/SCHOOL TRAVEL PORTFOLIO MOTIONS

A37. Richmond Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for a Fares Allowance component to be added to the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme (AIC) similar to what is available under Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY programs.”

Explanation:

We thank Federal Council for the work done so far forwarding this issue. Both Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY programs offer eligible students a Fares Allowance for travelling between home and their place of study if they need to live away from home in order to access this study. Likewise, geographically isolated students who receive the Assistance for Isolated Students Boarding Allowance and Second Home Allowance to access *compulsory schooling* also must live away from home. These students should have a Fares Allowance comparable to the other Commonwealth Programs available to them. While some states do offer travel assistance to students from rural and remote areas, others offer no assistance at all and there is great variance between states. Having a Fares Allowance available under the AIC Scheme would ensure that all eligible geographically isolated students would have assistance available to them to help offset the cost of travelling to *compulsory schooling*.

A38. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the relevant ministers for a national initiative and introduction of a ‘Student Concessional Fare’ that is protected from peak or inflated ticket costs, for students attending educational institutions within Australia who need to travel between their home residence and the educational establishment they attend.”

Explanation:

Geographically Isolated students who use public transport (bus, train or plane) to travel to their educational facility, would like to access a set ticket price that remains the same, even if the child needs to change their travel arrangements at the last minute. ‘Student Concession Fare’ For example: If a standard airfare can be purchased for \$365 between Alice Springs and Sydney, then we would like to see that this standard fare be offered to students who travel on public transport to access their school all year round, even if booking at the last minute.

There are many instances that families have had to change travel arrangements for their children and some families are not in the position to afford booking all fares for their children a term / year in advance.

Families whose Children rely on air travel to access schooling are worried about the recent announcement of the closure of Virgin Airlines and what impact that will have on domestic travel in and out of regional centres and Alice Springs is a great example. Many of these families rely on domestic air travel to take their children to school.

When multiple factors, out of families direct control, are impacting fare prices, rural and remote families feel the full force. We don't have the luxury of comparing airfares as there may only be one airline providing a service between regional hubs and major centres such as Brisbane.

While our urban cousins are able to catch the school bus to the local high school at no charge, students in rural and remote Australia have a huge out of pocket expense to access their school, often paying for Bus, Train and Air travel and for many GI students this is not subsidised.

There are actually examples of how such a policy mechanism can work through allowances such as ABSTUDY and it is really important for ICPA to work with our relevant ministers at a state and federal level to talk about how a 'Student Concession Fare' rate could be rolled out for all GI students in rural and remote Australia.

It is critical that there is a national approach in regards to fair student travel costs and we should be setting some guidelines and putting policy in place to ensure students accessing public transport to and from their educational institution, are able to secure a student rate that has not been increased due to:

- a monopoly on available carriers
- increase in fares due to peak holiday times
- increase in fares due to seasonal or tourism events.

Essentially this would ensure students are not subject to airfare price hikes at peak travel times, they would be able to access the standard economy rate at any time during the year when travelling to and from their school.

The real impact of ticket price hikes at peak travel times and the problems with increase in airfares will only worsen if the residents of Alice Springs are left with one operational domestic carrier. Members whose children board away from home are often in the predicament of paying well above the standard ticket price when selecting airfares. While it is easy for airfare providers to tell families to book children's flights twelve months ahead because they know the school term dates, this is often not a reality and can end up costing families more in the long run when they need to change flight details / dates.

Airfares to and from Northern Territory airports are typically expensive, more so because students travel during school holiday fare periods, when the fares are almost always more expensive again. Student Travel Concessions are a State Government responsibility, but in the case of airfares, travel is across jurisdictions, meaning State Government concessions don't apply. The Northern Territory is not unique in this respect. A National Student Concessional Fare would help all geographically isolated students who travel across jurisdiction for education purposes.

So, we are asking that when booking tickets for students travelling to and from school, they are exempt from the huge increases to tickets when purchased close to the time of travel. Having access to the standard ticket prices if you booked in advance for the 12-month calendar, would be a huge financial relief for many rural and remote families who rely on these services each year.

A39. Lightning Ridge/Goodooga Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) requests the Minister for Transport and the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, to supply adequate funding for local councils in rural and remote areas, to prioritise and maintain unsealed roads that are travelled on by families accessing schools and school bus routes."

Explanation:

Children in the Lightning Ridge and Goodooga region are often required to travel long distances along unsealed roads to access schools and school bus routes. It is recognised by local families that there are risks associated with these trips and it is important that these trips are as safe as possible. While members are aware of the importance of driving to the conditions, they believe improving the maintenance programs conducted on these access roads will greatly decrease the risks associated with the frequent trips. Without giving priority to roads that families travel on to access schools and school buses, accessing face to face education becomes difficult and dangerous. While distance education is a valuable alternative, many families do not have the time to commit to providing the necessary school room supervision or be in a financial situation to employ a suitable supervisor. For these families, travelling on poorly maintained unsealed roads becomes an exhausting daily task for students and parents, impacting on school attendance and classroom performance.

S9. Bollon Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) work with regional air service providers like Qantas to provide affordable airfares to students who need to travel from their home to attend to their education.”

Explanation:

Geographically isolated students often need to travel to fulfil their educational requirements. For example, many students based in rural Australia attend boarding school and University many kilometres away from their home. Whilst there have been and still are some very generous programs offered to support our students there are some areas that still face cost challenges. The Maranoa region is one area where a once affordable scheme was in place but was recently replaced by a less supportive one. Good communication between ICPA (Aust) and Regional Air Service providers can highlight the unique challenges faced by our rural and remote students and help bring about support.