

TRAVEL REPORT

Arlene Sutherland – Portfolio Leader, March 2026

As the well-known tune goes, “The wheels on the bus go round and round”... but sometimes for rural and remote families they hit a few potholes along the way!

Throughout 2025 the Travel Portfolio once again focused on the challenges faced by geographically isolated families when accessing education. Reliable and practical transport remains one of the most significant factors influencing whether country children can attend their nearest appropriate school.

At the 2025 State Conference six motions relating to travel were presented by branches including Eastern Districts, Midwest and Lakes District. These motions highlighted several key issues for rural families including access to school bus services, communication processes, consultation with local communities and the need for fair and practical policy application.

One motion raised by the Eastern Districts Branch requested that School Bus Services ensure all rural children have a realistic option to access their local school by removing the “complimentary” passenger classification and ensuring that even small bus runs are serviced. For many regional families this classification can create uncertainty, as complimentary seats may be removed when eligible students require them. For families who rely heavily on these services to access education, this uncertainty can create considerable stress when trying to plan daily school travel.

Communication and consultation regarding school bus services also remained a strong theme in the motions raised at Conference. Several motions called for improved engagement between School Bus Services (SBS), School Bus Advisory Committees (SBAC), contractors, schools and families. These motions emphasised the importance of ensuring that consultation occurs with SBACs and other local stakeholders before changes are communicated to families, allowing the valuable knowledge of local communities to inform decision-making. ICPA (WA) have been encouraging school communities to make sure they have registered their School Bus Advisory Committees (SBAC) with School Bus Services, as we discovered at one of our meetings with Mr Anthony Cattai, Operations Manager of School Bus Services that there was not as many SBACs registered as what we thought.

Rural communities often have a strong understanding of local road conditions, distances and family logistics which can greatly assist in developing practical transport solutions. The formation and strengthening of School Bus Advisory Committees was therefore strongly supported, as these committees provide an important avenue for collaboration between parents, schools, contractors and School Bus Services.

ICPA (WA) wrote to the Minister for Transport, the Hon Rita Saffioti MLA, following these motions outlining the concerns raised by members regarding communication processes and resourcing within School Bus Services. In response, the Minister’s office advised that following recommendations from the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee “Bus Fair” report (2022), additional funding has been provided to the Public Transport Authority’s School Bus Services Branch to improve communication and consultation with stakeholders.

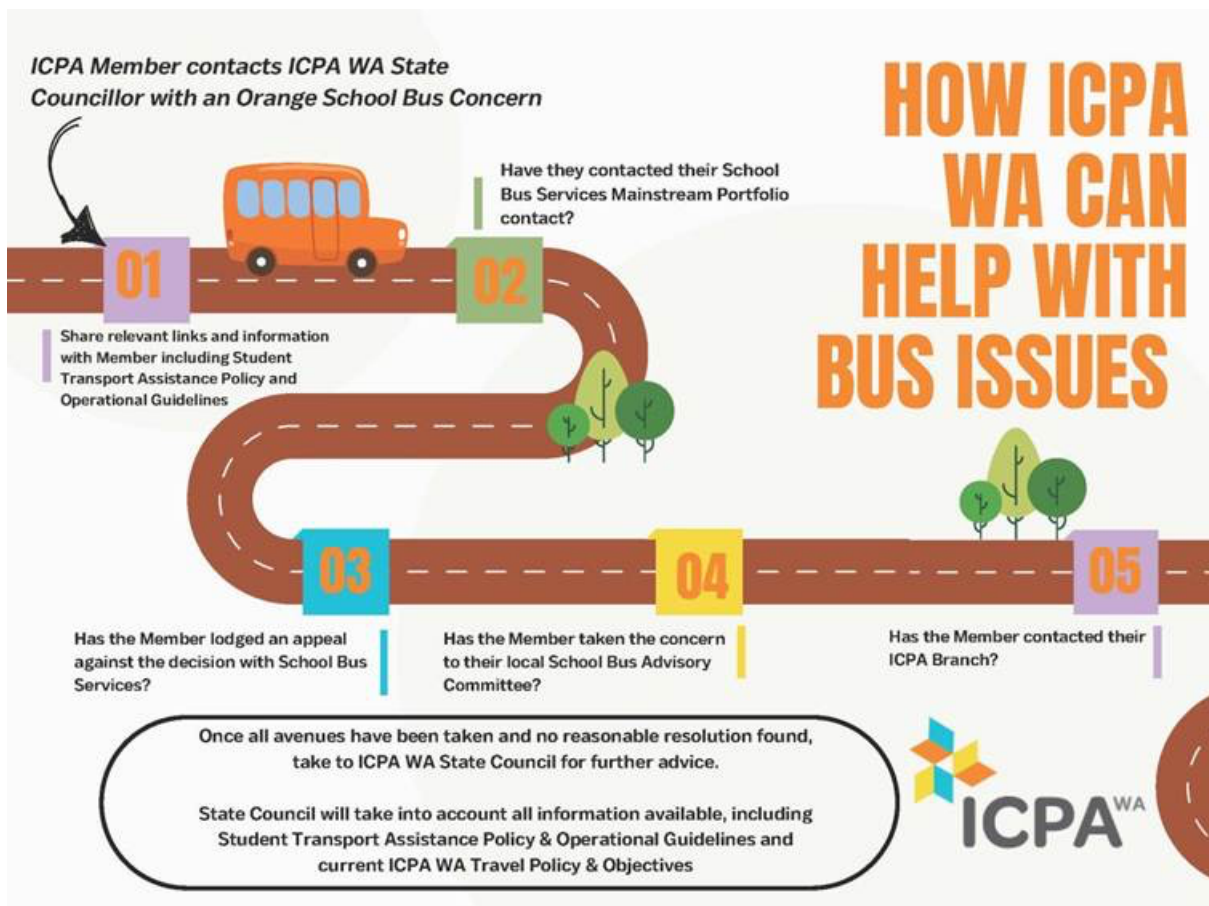
Several new positions were created in 2024 to support these improvements, with further roles expected to be permanently filled during 2025. These positions are intended to strengthen communication with contractors, schools and regional communities regarding school bus services. ICPA (WA) welcomes this commitment and will continue to monitor how these changes support rural families.

Another motion raised by the Midwest Branch addressed eligibility criteria for students living shorter distances from a school bus route. While the existing policy outlines distance requirements, this motion highlighted situations where available seats may exist on a bus service but cannot be utilised due to policy constraints. These situations can place additional logistical pressure on families and in some cases may impact enrolment numbers at small rural schools.

During 2025 the Travel Portfolio also worked on developing a *School Bus enquiry flow chart* to assist members when navigating school transport issues. The aim of this resource is to provide families with a clear step-by-step pathway outlining who to contact and the processes involved when concerns arise regarding bus eligibility, route changes or transport decisions.

ICPA (WA) met with Mr Anthony Cattai, Operations Manager of School Bus Services to discuss school bus matters and present the draft flow chart. At our next meeting with Mr Cattai he reviewed the document and provided helpful suggestions to ensure the information accurately reflected the processes within School Bus Services. This resource will assist members in understanding the steps available to them when navigating school bus matters. ICPA (WA) have a good and productive relationship with School Bus Services and we are always able to have meetings with Mr Anthony Cattai, Operations Manager of School Bus Services. We appreciate the time that Mr Cattai and his department are able to give us, and yes sometimes the outcome is not to suit everyone but we at ICPA (WA) are still able to be a voice for our rural school communities.

The following is the School Bus enquiry flow chart and the breakdown of the chart that is on the ICPA (WA) website:



For families in rural and remote Western Australia, access to reliable school transport is a critical part of educational equity. When issues arise with Orange School Bus services, it can be challenging to know where to turn or how to resolve the concern effectively. The Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association of Western Australia (ICPA WA) offers a clear, step-by-step guide to help members navigate these challenges and find a resolution.

Step-by-Step Support for Bus Issues

Step 1: Share Relevant Information

The first step when a member contacts an ICPA WA State Councillor with a bus issue is to ensure they are informed. Councillors will share key documents and guidelines, including the Student Transport Assistance Policy and the Operational Guidelines. These resources provide a framework for understanding rights, responsibilities, and eligibility criteria.

Step 2: Contact the Mainstream Portfolio Officer

Before escalating the issue, it is essential to determine whether the member has contacted their School Bus Services Mainstream Portfolio contact. This initial communication often helps clarify misunderstandings or minor issues.

Step 3: Appeal the Decision

If concerns persist, the next step is to lodge a formal appeal against the decision with School Bus Services. This official process ensures the matter is reviewed within established protocols.

Step 4: Engage the School Bus Advisory Committee

Members are also encouraged to take their concerns to their local School Bus Advisory Committee. These committees offer community-level insight and may be able to provide direct advocacy or support for specific issues.

Step 5: Connect with Their ICPA Branch

Local ICPA branches are invaluable sources of peer support and local knowledge. Members are encouraged to discuss their concerns with their branch before further escalation.

When All Avenues Have Been Explored

If all the above steps have been taken and no satisfactory resolution is found, the issue can then be brought to the ICPA WA State Council for further consideration. The Council will review the matter using all available information, including the official transport policy documents and ICPA WA's own travel policy and objectives.

A Trusted Voice for Rural Families

ICPA WA continues to play a vital role in supporting equitable access to education for rural and remote families. This structured approach ensures that all appropriate steps are taken to resolve transport issues fairly and in line with policy, while also empowering members to advocate confidently for their children's education needs.

Another important and ongoing issue raised at the 2025 State Conference by the Meekatharra Air and the Goldfields Eyre branch highlighted the lack of financial assistance available for families of Distance Education and School of the Air (SOTA) students who must travel long distances to attend compulsory face-to-face learning programs.

These “in-school” learning sessions are a vital part of the educational delivery for geographically isolated students. During these sessions teachers deliver curriculum content aligned with the Western Australian Curriculum, including assessments and learning activities that cannot be completed through online lessons alone. Despite this, families are currently required to cover all travel costs associated with attending these programs, which can involve travelling hundreds of kilometres several times each year.

ICPA (WA) wrote to the Minister for Transport advocating for the introduction of a conveyance allowance to support families attending these essential educational programs. In response, the Minister’s office advised that under the Student Transport Assistance Policy (STAP) conveyance allowances are currently only available where students are travelling to their nearest appropriate school and no school bus service exists.

While there is currently no transport assistance available for travel to Distance Education or School of the Air camps, the Department advised that the Road Travel Subsidy and other student travel subsidies will be subject to a major review during 2025–26, and that the matters raised by ICPA (WA) will be considered as part of this review. It was welcoming from Minister Saffioti’s office when they encouraged ICPA (WA) to continue the dialogue with Department of Transport and Major Infrastructure (DTMI).

We also had a meeting with Minister for Education the Hon Sabine Winton and explained the issue that these families are facing and the Department of Education have taken it on board, they have

asked for further information and so ICPA (WA) are in process of following up on the requested information.

ICPA (WA) welcomes the opportunity for this issue to be considered during the upcoming review and will continue to advocate for equitable travel assistance for geographically isolated families whose children must travel significant distances to access these important face-to-face learning opportunities.

ICPA (WA) will continue to work constructively with government agencies, School Bus Services and local communities to ensure the practical realities faced by rural families are considered when transport policies are reviewed and implemented. Ensuring fair and workable transport arrangements remains an essential part of supporting strong rural schools and vibrant regional communities.

While policies and frameworks are important, the reality for many of our families is that accessing education in regional and remote Western Australia often involves significant distances, careful daily planning and a good deal of determination. What may seem like a small transport decision on paper can have a very real impact on a family's ability to ensure their children attend school each day.

ICPA (WA) appreciates the ongoing dialogue with School Bus Services and the Department of Transport and recently we were pleased to receive some important updates from School Bus Services, and in the words of School Bus Services "our updates are designed to make it easier, faster, and simpler for schools, contractors, and families to connect with us in 2026!" So firstly School Bus Services have had a name change and now are officially called SCHOOLBUSES! A modern name that reflects a modern, family focused service...who would have thought.

There is also a new contact centre in 2026, supported by an enhanced Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system. These improvements are designed to make it easier, faster, and more reliable for families to get in touch with School buses. Seamless Regional Support, if your usual direct contact isn't available, another team member within your region will be able to assist. School buses goal is to make sure they are available to families, contractors & schools when needed. In the coming weeks a new contact centre number will be made available and to make it even easier School buses will provide you with detail and a regional mapping guide to identify your region so when calling through you know what numbers to press to navigate the new IVR system. All in all these changes brings all School buses together under one clear name and one reliable point of contact.

With these new changes ICPA(WA) looks forward to continuing to work collaboratively to improve outcomes for rural and remote students as school transport is not simply a convenience it is a critical link that makes education possible— ensuring that, for country kids, *the wheels on the bus really do keep going round and round.*