

TRAVEL PORTFOLIO CONFERENCE REPORT – June 2021

Whether you have travelled by car, bus, train or plane everyone at conference has made use of transport to come to this landmark conference to celebrate and commemorate fifty years of advocacy for our students, their families and for equity in education regardless of the mode or location.

Travel is an essential part of our lives, as it is for many of our students. While the modes and time taken may have changed, accessible and affordable travel is as vital now as it was fifty years ago. As Leader of the Travel Portfolio, it is my pleasure to present this year's report.

REVIEW OF SUBSIDISED TRAVEL ROUTES

ICPA Travel Portfolio members have had verbal and written communications with representatives from Translink's Commercial Partnerships department who are reviewing current contracts, undertaking consultation with current and possible future service providers, end users, communities and invested stakeholder groups such as ICPA in order to develop new generation contracts for subsidised air and long-distance bus travel routes.

We raised the cost of travel to access compulsory education for students and their families and while we acknowledged the welcome contribution made by LAFHAS we explained how it, in many circumstances, did not meet the realistic cost of travel. As raised at previous conferences, we also discussed long distance bus travel, the concerns parents/caregivers have around the vulnerability of young travellers and the benefits of subsidised chaperone fares to provide oversight for those young travellers' safety and wellbeing as well as assisting bus companies to comply with duty of care obligations and policies. Discussions were held around the difficulties in accessing seats at peak times (beginning/end of term) even when booking a year in advance as well as costs for students who travel on non-subsidised routes (as raised in the Federal Government's recent inquiry into regional airfares).

In consultation with Commercial Partnerships as to content and data required, ICPA put out a survey to members to gather further information to support our contribution and requests in the development of the new generation contracts. We thank all those who responded.

ICPA welcomed the opportunity to contribute and thanks Commercial Partnership representatives for their interest and willingness to engage and consider the imposts facing students who travel significant distances to access educational opportunity suitable for their needs and circumstances.

ELIGIBILITY OF KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS FOR CONVEYANCE ALLOWANCE

Conveyance allowance is only payable when students are driven to and from school or a transport point not for travel on buses, as was requested in last year's motion. TransLink continues to reiterate that while Kindergarten remains a non-compulsory year they will not be eligible for consideration for the payment of conveyance allowance. However, Translink would like to also reiterate that despite ineligibility, kindergarten student numbers ARE counted when reviewing the viability of bus services.

SEPARATE CATEGORY FOR RURAL AND REMOTE BUS SERVICES

ICPA (Qld) has been asked to provide further information to Translink to explain why a separate category would be beneficial for rural and remote bus runs. To assist us with this, we have asked the Branch to provide case studies and information that showcases why the existing bus classifications are not providing a sufficient level of service and meeting the evolving nature of the school and student community. We would ask other Branches to also provide us with information to support our lobbying.

ELIGIBILITY FOR DROUGHT SUBSIDY FOR THOSE IN RECEIPT OF CATEGORY I CONVEYANCE ALLOWANCE

Class I conveyance allowance is calculated by taking into account vehicle running costs and aims to assist with the cost of the journey to and from school. Class I only applies in isolated areas and is paid on a per family basis rather than per vehicle. This provides flexibility for families to share the transport task through car-pooling arrangements, while each family continues to qualify for the allowance. Class I conveyance allowance is paid on a sliding scale based on distance travelled at a significantly higher rate than other conveyance allowances, with families receiving a lump sum payment four times per year. In comparison, Class A and C conveyance allowance recipients are paid per vehicle not family and are paid twice yearly.

Drought assistance is only available to families in receipt of Class A or C conveyance allowance and who reside on a primary producing property that is situated in a drought declared shire or classified as an individually droughted property by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. This additional conveyance allowance payment is in recognition of the significant hardship experienced in these areas.

To ensure applicants receive the maximum level of available assistance, TransLink Regional Operations staff are instructed to assess conveyance allowance applications considering Class I eligibility criteria. To assist, staff apply a 'ready reckoner' to determine whether Class I or Class A/C plus drought assistance would provide the highest benefit for an applicant. This ready reckoner is updated each year with the new conveyance allowance rates.

Based on the above, there are no plans to extend drought assistance to recipients of Class I conveyance allowance.

CALCULATION OF CONVEYANCE ALLOWANCE FROM HOME GARAGE, RATHER THAN PROPERTY BOUNDARY TO EITHER SCHOOL OR TRANSPORT SERVICE

This issue has also been raised at many conferences and remains of concern to members. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that there are families who either receive no allowance due to the bus stop being within their property boundary or receive an allowance that does not reflect the true cost of travel due to the bus stop being relatively close to their property boundary but a much longer distance in reality from the home garage.

Translink has requested ICPA to supply further details and evidence of families adversely affected by the calculation of the allowance from the property boundary rather than the home garage. Consideration of any change to the STAS policy must consider equitable application across the state with detailed cost analysis to inform a decision. We will be circulating a survey to members, and asking members to further circulate, to gather the robust and comprehensive data we will need to progress this matter further. Please complete and circulate further, as without this, progress will be problematic, and the Department will not have sufficient data to instigate further investigation of options.

ICPA thanks Translink for its ongoing willingness to engage with us and provide detailed information in response to our communications. We look forward to ongoing cooperation and collaboration with them and other relevant stakeholders to ensure our students and their families can readily access and afford appropriate travel options throughout their schooling years.

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