

TRAVEL PORTFOLIO CONFERENCE REPORT – June 2023

Blackall 2022 saw several travel motions come to conference. Travel continues to be an important and relevant issue for many of our members with many of the current issues carried forward. To succeed with our advocacy in this portfolio we require considerable support and input of information from our members as many of the issues require data to progress. This is, at times, a challenge equal to the issue at hand and members need to take ownership and responsibility for provision of the required data if they want to see tangible change.

CONVEYANCE ALLOWANCE

This issue has been at the fore of travel motions since 2019. However, little progress has been made or can be made until ICPA Qld supplies the information that Translink requires. Translink has been quite clear that they will not enter into any further discussions or undertake any investigation into policy change unless we provide them with a breadth and depth of information from members that clearly shows the disadvantage currently being experienced. Feedback has been provided to the two branches, Nebo and Tambo, who presented motions on this topic at Blackall regarding the current situation. Members, I would urge you, if you feel you are detrimentally affected by the Conveyance Allowance rulings, or know someone who is, to contact State Council to find out about the information required.

KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS ON BUSES

Through some State Council member's involvement on the Premier's Regional Community Forums, we have been able to bring this matter to the attention to the DG of Translink, Sally Stannard. Sally gave a commitment to a trial and indeed on two bus routes identified as having potential Kindergarten student passengers and following discussions with the service provider and school, solutions have been reached to ensure Kindy students are travelling into those schools are able to reliably and readily access State Delivered Kindergarten. She further advised that they are working with a range of stakeholders including DoE, bus service providers, school principals to look at the challenges, impediments and issues that arise from having such young children on buses and transitioning to/from the bus and school.

Also, through the PRCF, we have been approached by a Qld Plan Ambassador, who has been discussing this with the Asst Treasurer and seeking further information. Translink has requested to be advised of any other bus services/schools where access to SDK is made more difficult due to current rules around bus travel. So, members please advise the Travel Portfolio if you become aware of any as an expansion of the trial can be considered.

Motion feedback has been provided to Nebo Branch who had a successful motion on this issue at last year's conference. While we have not kicked the winning goal yet, it is heartening to see that progress, albeit slowly, is being made and that minds and actions are open to change and seeking solutions. Watch this space!

POLICY FOR UNSEATBELTED BUSES AND YOUNG STUDENTS

In response to correspondence from ICPA Qld, the Director of Passenger Transport Policy confirmed, that where spare capacity exists on either kilometric or fare-based services, students may be carried who do not qualify for School Transport Assistance Scheme benefits (STAS) as a fare paying passenger. In relation to the requirements for seatbelts, regardless of whether or not the bus is fitted with seatbelts, there is no obligation for passengers under 16 to wear a seatbelt or be fitted to a child restraint under the Transport Obligations (Road Use Management – Road Rules) Regulation of 2009. Whilst section 264A of the Regulation places an obligation on the driver of a vehicle to ensure passengers under the age of 16 are suitably restrained, under section 276A bus drivers are exempted. If parents do wish to have their children, aged under 4, fitted to a child restraint or to wear a seatbelt, the Department advises that they arrange this through a conversation with the school transport service provider.

CLARITY REGARDING BUS DRIVER REMUNERATION

In response to our correspondence post conference, ICPA Qld was advised that TMR works closely with service providers to navigate disruptions caused by a myriad of challenges to ensure continued service throughout the State. In situations where an event, such as a natural disaster/accident/road closure/pandemic, impacts the school transport

services beyond the reasonable control of service providers, then special payment arrangements may apply. Eligibility for special payments is considered on a case-by-case basis and discussed in collaboration with affected service providers. Of particular relevance to our members, such payments were provided during the pandemic and flooding events of 2022, to ensure services remained viable and available. The remuneration of school bus drivers is a commercial arrangement between drivers and service providers.

BUS TIMETABLING

Following conference, a letter was written to Commercial Partnerships seeking Department dialogue with service provider, using case study given at conference, to affect change in timetabling. Requests were also made for consideration of this issue in future contract development and seeking advice if it was possible to effect change to current timetables through alteration of current contracts. It has been raised at recent Travel Forums convened by Translink and/or subsidized service providers. ICPA Qld is following up an official response to our correspondence.

RESIDENT FARES, ESPECIALLY ONE WAY, ON SUBSIDISED AIR ROUTES

A letter was written to Commercial Partnerships in Translink seeking support for this and asking for dialogue between themselves and service providers to facilitate the reinstatement of this practice and to also allow local booking agents to again do this. It has been raised at recent Travel Forums convened by Translink and/or subsidized service providers. Unfortunately, we met with little success in relation to this motion.

TMR regulates the air services to Longreach, Blackall and Barcaldine and an air service contract between the Department and the service provider sets requirements for minimum service frequency, maximum airfare prices, minimum aircraft size and on-time performance standards to ensure an appropriate level of service is provided for the communities.

While TMR encourages the operator to offer resident fare discounts, the range, availability, and conditions attached to the discounted fares on the route are at the commercial discretion of the operator and are not mandated by TMR. As a result of our letter and advocacy at public meetings, Qantas undertook a review of their fare policy for residents and has advised that the ability to book one-way resident fares was removed due to various non-compliance issues. To assist with the impact of this change, Qantas simultaneously removed any 'change fees' from the program to add additional flexibility and to overcome issues associated with residents not knowing when they want to return. Given the school term dates are set months in advance, Qantas encourages customers to book early to obtain the most competitive fares available. After this further consideration Qantas reiterates that it does not have any plans to reinstate one-way resident fares and that return travel from regional ports will remain one of the key program requirements.

We have been advised that Rex Airlines Bush to Boarding Program continues. Discussions have been had with Qld State Manager and they are happy for us to share that information with members within certain parameters. State Council is currently seeking approval from Rex for the flyer we have designed as well as seeking clarification as to how we can share that information.

RURAL BUS SERVICE SUPPORT

ICPA Qld State Council continues to provide letters of support and provide information, when requested, to regional Translink offices, in order to support the retention of rural bus routes/services.

In conclusion, there is still much work to be done in the Travel Portfolio space but, with collaboration and cooperation, we will progress even though our progression transportation method may be via turtle, not hare.

Kylie Camp

Travel Portfolio Leader

councillor6@icpaqld.com.au