
Travel Report

Madam President, distinguished guests, members of ICPA, ladies and gentlemen. It is with great pleasure that I present the Travel Portfolio Report for 2024.

In June last year and we had meetings with,

Minister for Regional Transport and Roads
Shadow Minister Regional Transport and Roads
Transport for NSW
Bus NSW
Minister for Agriculture, Regional and Western NSW

The Preschool Drive Subsidy Pilot was conducted in 2022 and 2023. The two-year Pilot is being reviewed with the support of the Department of Education.

The Lord Howe Island flight booking trial has a few issues that sometimes causes late payments to parents due to either, (1) Insufficient supporting documentation at time of lodgement (team has-to follow up) or (2) Leave / illness in the team.

There are a range of products on the market which aim to prevent children being left on board a bus by requiring the bus driver to walk to the rear of the bus and press a button or enter a PIN number at the end of each shift (which forces them to check for passengers left on board). From 2023, rural and regional Category 1 & 2 school buses procured via the *NSW Government Motor Vehicle Pre-qualification Scheme* are required to have this technology fitted. BusNSW understands that new Category 4 school buses procured under TfNSW Bus Procurement Panel 4 (which is likely to be implemented in early 2024) will be required to have a child check alarm system fitted.

Below are the Travel Motions from last year's conference and the responses we received in August from TfNSW.

“That ICPA-NSW requests the Minister for Regional Transport and Roads, to continue the Regional Apprentice and University Student Travel Card trial program.”

The Regional Apprentice and University Student Travel Card is currently under review by the NSW Government. Further information will be available once the review has been completed.

“That ICPA-NSW requests the Department of Education, Transport for NSW, and Bus NSW to implement a state funding program that would help ensure that no young children are left on school, preschool 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.”

1. Is it expected that all regional and rural buses will be fitted with passenger-check alarms with general fleet replacement? Yes, all new buses procured through the next generation of Bus Procurement Panel (Panel 4) will have a passenger-check alarm system installed.
Context: A new bus procurement panel of manufacturers called Bus Procurement Panel 4 will be providing contracted bus operators across NSW with reliable, high-quality buses which

meet specifications set out by Transport for NSW (TfNSW). Specifications include a requirement to meet Australian Design Rules and other relevant Standards for technology and safety.

2. Are there any plans to introduce a retrofit program for existing fleet? If so, what arrangements are expected to be made with bus operators for financial assistance to retrofit? No, there is currently no plans to introduce a retrofit program for existing fleet.

3. Please provide any other relevant information. Minimum specifications for the passenger-check alarm system have been established and included in the new Bus Panel 4 requirements. Bus manufacturers must meet or exceed the minimum specifications. Two passenger-check alarm systems have been referenced in the Bus Panel 4 requirements as examples of acceptable systems with appropriate capabilities, they are: Doran Sleeping Child Check Monitor and Ashley Group Child Alarm. These requirements have also been applied to purchases of new smaller buses commonly used for school bus services in rural and regional NSW (e.g. Toyota Coaster and Fuso Rosa) purchased from NSW Government Motor Vehicle Prequalification Scheme (GMVPS).

“That ICPA-NSW requests the NSW Minister for Regional Transport and Roads and Transport for NSW to lower the number of students required to start a non-commercial bus run as a matter of urgency.”

TfNSW considers all applications, on a case-by-case basis, for the introduction of a new rural and regional bus service even where the current number of school aged children is less than 15. When considering requests for the introduction of new services, TfNSW considers among other things: • Whether the proposed bus service will travel by the most practical route to school. • The number of children that will use the bus each morning, afternoon, and week. • Expected future patronage numbers over the following five years. • The nature of the roadways travelled. • The safety of bus stops. Where it is not feasible to provide public transport, the School Drive Subsidy (SDS) is offered to parents of eligible School Student Transport Scheme students. This subsidy is intended to partly offset the cost of using a private vehicle to drive children directly or partially to school (or the nearest bus pick up location).

“That ICPA-NSW requests the Minister for Regional Transport and Roads to provide extra funding to Local Councils for school bus route roads to be maintained, repaired and upgraded.”

The NSW Government will invest in road repairs that are urgently needed across our regions via implementation of a two-year Regional Emergency Road Repair Fund - a \$670 million fund to ensure that the roads people rely on every single day across Regional NSW are up to scratch. This work will better connect regional and rural communities, including school bus routes in those areas. More than \$2.2 billion funding has been provided to Councils via a number of programs, including Fixing Local Roads (\$691 million), Fixing Country Bridges (\$500 million), Fixing Country Roads (\$543 million) and Regional and Local Roads Repair Program (RLRRP) (\$500 million)

“That ICPA-NSW continue to work with Transport for NSW to evaluate bus runs on a case-by-case basis rather than set numbers in remote areas.”

TfNSW considers all applications, on a case-by-case basis, for the introduction of a new rural and regional bus service even where the current number of school aged children is less

than 15. When considering requests for the introduction of new services, TfNSW considers among other things: • Whether the proposed bus service will travel by the most practical route to school. • The number of children that will use the bus each morning, afternoon, and week. • Expected future patronage numbers over the following five years. • The nature of the roadways travelled. • The safety of bus stops. Where it is not feasible to provide public transport, the School Drive Subsidy (SDS) is offered to parents of eligible School Student Transport Scheme students. This subsidy is intended to partly offset the cost of using a private vehicle to drive children directly or partially to school (or the nearest bus pick up location). TfNSW has a contractual obligation to monitor the performance of all rural and regional bus services, including the number of passengers using the services. In cases where passenger numbers fall below eight, TfNSW will place the service under review for a two-year period (ahead of any final determination about the service). However, the review of a service does not mean that the service will be withdrawn if numbers do not increase. During the review period, TfNSW works closely with the service provider and the school community to ensure that every opportunity to maintain the service is investigated.

“That ICPA-NSW request Transport for NSW to increase the number of trips for South Australian Term Boarders to accurately reflect the compulsory number of trips they are required to travel home.”

“That ICPA-NSW ask Transport for NSW to review the current School Drive Subsidy classification for boarders to include more options to meet current needs.”

“That ICPA-NSW lobbies Transport for NSW to increase their allowable trips for Term boarders.”

The School Student Transport Scheme and the School Drive Subsidy are designed to deliver transport as it applies to the standard published NSW school calendar. If changes are to be made to the offerings under these schemes, this would require a policy review involving consultation and consideration of impacts arising from any proposed changes. At this time, a review of the SSTS and SDS policy is not being considered.

“That ICPA-NSW urges Transport NSW improve their School Drive Subsidy Program by providing a direct telephone help line between liaison officers, schools, and families”.

The Customer Operations team covers a broad range of concessional products, schemes and services and needs to ensure that any dependency on individuals is removed. We have nominated two staff as specialists for School Drive Subsidy to improve the response to rural and regional customers. We have also implemented changes to the feedback forms to ensure School Drive Subsidy queries are sent directly to these staff.

“That ICPA-NSW request Transport for NSW to add a “Rural & Remote” option to their School Drive Subsidy feedback form”.

This has been implemented, TfNSW notes that the ICPA indicated this has been well received by their members.

“That ICPA- NSW urges Transport NSW to improve their School Drive Subsidy program parent portal for rural and remote families.”

Work is continuing the Transport Concessions platform with the ongoing migration of a range of concession products, schemes, and services. In the interim the team continues to review feedback provided to look at opportunities to improve the existing portal.

“That ICPA NSW request Transport for NSW to extend the Preschool Drive Subsidy following the Pilot Program and provide greater transparency for families to navigate the eligibility and the application process.”

Transport for NSW continues to work with the Department of Education on the evaluation of the Preschool Drive Subsidy. Any decision on the future of the Preschool Drive Subsidy will be based on the findings of the evaluation and subject to Ministerial approval.

“That ICPA-NSW requests the NSW Minister for Transport to allow preschool children to travel on rural and remote bus runs in the year prior to commencing school enabling them to be included in the Preschool Drive Subsidy and the School Students Transport Scheme for that year.”

The Preschool Drive Subsidy evaluation is ongoing. It is premature to comment on how the Preschool Drive Subsidy could be used to support additional travel to or from preschools. In relation to the School Student Transport Scheme, under the current policy settings preschool children are not eligible for free travel under this scheme. At this time, the SSTS policy is not being reviewed. There are further safety issues that also require consideration as in some cases these children might be as young as 3 years and 6 months.

Subsidies and free travel available to students.

The School Drive Subsidy (SDS) is administered by TfNSW and is available to NSW residents. The subsidy is for driving school students to school or to the nearest transport pick up point and is only intended to partly offset the cost of using a private vehicle.

Students from Kindergarten-Year 6 are eligible if:

- they are a resident of NSW, or an overseas student eligible for free government education.
- aged 4 Years 6 months, or older.
- from their home address:
 - The distance to school exceeds 1.6 km (straight line distance) or is at least 2.3 km walking distance, **and** the distance to the nearest transport pick up point (where available) exceeds 1.6 km (straight line distance) or is at least 2.3 km walking distance.

Secondary school students from Years 7-12 are eligible if:

- they are a resident of NSW or an overseas student who is eligible for free government education.
- from their home address:
 - The distance to school exceeds 2 km (straight line distance) or 2.9 km walking distance, **and**
 - The distance to the nearest transport pick up point (where available) exceeds 2 km (straight line distance) or is at least 2.9 km walking distance.

Boarding school students and weekday boarders attending day school:

Students who board away from home to attend school may be eligible for the SDS.

If no public transport is available, boarding school students are eligible for subsidised travel between the family home and school at weekends and school holidays.

- Students that are weekly boarders are entitled up to 22 trips per semester.
- Students that are term boarders are entitled up to 9 trips per year.

Students who board in town and attend a day school during term may also be eligible for subsidised travel between the family home and the place of boarding at weekends and school holidays.

There is no subsidy cap on the distance travelled.

At present, university students they may be eligible for Fares Allowance which covers the cost of the least expensive and most available form of public transport in Australia between your permanent home and your place of tertiary study. Where it is not practical to use public transport, you can travel by private transport if you need to move belongings that exceed strict luggage limits or are difficult to move around. To get Fares Allowance you must be a tertiary student living away from home to study and you must also receive one of these payments:

- Youth Allowance as a full-time student,
- Austudy as a full time or part time student or
- Pensioner Education Supplement as a full time or part time student and you must also be one of these:
 - dependent and get a higher rate of Youth Allowance when living away from home,
 - independent and living away from your partner to study,
 - a parent living away from your dependent children to study,
 - were dependent and living away from home in the last study year and you are now independent due to:
 - turning 22 or
 - supporting yourself through work, or
- are studying a distance or online course and need to do compulsory travel to your institution.

Distance Education students attending mini schools.

The NSW Department of Education (DoE) operates a number of face to face mini-schools to compliment the distance education program. Distance Education students who are full-time and geographically isolated are eligible for the SDS. To be considered for the SDS, students are required to be enrolled in accordance with section 2.2 of the Distance Education Enrolment Procedures set out by the NSW DoE. There is no limit to the number of trips that can be claimed to attend mini schools during term time (subject to school attendance records being checked).

The School Student Transport Scheme (SSTS) provides eligible school students with free or subsidised travel from home to school.

The scheme includes:

- Free travel to and from home and school on approved train, bus, ferry, and light rail services during school term.
- Discounted travel on buses between home and school with a School Term Bus Pass.
- Free travel on NSW Train Link Regional services and long-distance coach services for boarding school students

Students from Kindergarten-Year 2 are eligible if:

- They are a resident of NSW, or an overseas student eligible for free government education.
- Aged 4 Years 6 months, or older.

No minimum walking distance criteria applies to these students.

Primary school students from Years 3-6 are eligible if:

- They are a resident of NSW, or an overseas student eligible for free government education.
- The straight-line distance from their home address to school is more than 1.6 km.
- The walking distance from home to school is 2.3 km or further.

Primary school students who live too close to the school to be eligible for free travel may qualify for a School Term Bus Pass which provides bus travel at a discounted price for the whole school term.

Secondary school students from Years 7-12 are eligible if:

- They are a resident of NSW or an overseas student who is eligible for free government education,
- The straight-line distance from their home address to school is more than 2 km, or
- The walking distance from home to school is 2.9 km or further.

Secondary school students who live too close to the school to be eligible for free travel may qualify for a School Term Bus Pass which provides bus travel at a discounted price for the whole school term.

TAFE students are eligible if:

- They are a resident of NSW or an overseas student eligible for free government education.
- They are under 18 years of age at 1 January of the year of application.
- They are enrolled in a full-time TAFE course for a minimum of 16 hours per week.
- They are not employed.
- The walking distance from home to TAFE is 3.2 km or further.
- They attend the closest TAFE where enrolment is available.

Tertiary students studying at TAFE may be eligible for concession travel on public transport.

Boarding school students:

Eligible boarding school students can apply for a free school travel pass for either:

- daily travel to and from school if they reside away from home but do not reside at the school, or
- weekend/vacation travel on NSW Train Link train and coach services.

Students are not able to apply for both.

The Department of Education Assisted School Travel Program:

This program provides specialised transport assistance for eligible students with disability to travel to and from school. The Program provides travel support services primarily between a student's permanent place of residence and school. The program is targeted towards supporting eligible students who are unable to travel independently and need transport assistance to attend school.

Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS):

This is a NSW Government initiative providing financial assistance towards travel and accommodation cost when a patient needs to travel long distances to specialised allied health clinics. Speech Pathology is an example.

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