

13 June 2003

Mr T Parry

Chairman  
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal  
Level 2 44 Market Street  
SYDNEY

## INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC TRANSPORT

### School Bus Pass Program

Dear Sir,

Please find enclosed a submission concerning the increasing cost of free travel by bus to school for students in New South Wales.

My submission is brief but I would be pleased to elaborate upon it at any time and at any location.

I have more than a casual interest in this field due to my employment within the Department of Education and Training for in excess of 37 years. I have recently retired after nearly eight years as principal of a large high school in rural New South Wales.

I have many concerns about the school student transport scheme. The main issue is what seems to me to be an inefficiency in terms of the cost of the scheme to the taxpayers of NSW. I have addressed this issue in the attached document – The Subsidised School Bus Travel Scheme.

Other issues relate to improved use of buses whilst being idle during school hours, the cost to students for school excursions and inefficiencies in the distances travelled by school buses and hence the cost incurred. I also believe there are inefficiencies which result from a multitude of bus proprietors who operate in their own "territory", resulting in a lack of coordination in the transport of students to school.

I have suggestions for the possible resolution of the concerns raised in the above paragraph, but this submission relates only to minimising the cost of bus travel by addressing the problem of "phantom riders".

Yours sincerely,

Jeff Mitchell

## THE SUBSIDISED SCHOOL BUS TRAVEL SCHEME

This plan is proposed as a replacement for free travel to school, by high school students only.

Under this proposal, high school age students would have their travel to school subsidised by the government.

### **PROBLEMS WITH THE PRESENT FREE SCHOOL BUS TRAVEL SCHEME WHICH WILL BE MINIMISED –**

Students/parents of high school age students will be less likely to state they need to travel to school by bus. Hence there will be a marked reduction in cost to the government.

\* Under the present arrangement all students who are eligible, state they are in need of free travel to school, even though bus travel is not their regular means of travel. (They nominate bus travel in case there are some days when it may be needed).

Under my proposal the cost to the government of bus travel to school will also be reduced very significantly since part of the cost of travel each term will be borne by the student/parent.

3. The cost to the government will vary, and presumably be reduced, each term as the number of students requiring transport by bus to school will be determined each term.

### **FEATURES OF THE SUBSIDISED SCHOOL BUS TRAVEL SCHEME FOR HIGH SCHOOL AGE STUDENTS**

High school age students/parents will be required to apply for a bus pass, by paying a fee, say \$30 per term.

2. The bus pass application fee will be collected by the bus proprietor.

3. The fee will cover part of the cost of transport of that student to school in that term.

4. The bus proprietor will provide the names of students who have applied and paid for a bus pass to the relevant government department. Records of payment will be kept by the bus proprietor for possible inspection by auditors.

5. The government will pay to the proprietor the balance of the cost of transporting those students to school in that term.

EXEMPTIONS include -

Students who have a diagnosed disability.

Students whose living circumstances are managed by DOCS

Students whose parents are receiving official social security support through Centrelink.

*THE ABOVE IS A VERY BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE SUBSIDY SCHEME.*

*I HAVE MORE DETAILED IDEAS FOR ITS IMPLEMENTATION.*

### **SHORT TERM IDEA TO ASSIST THE INTRODUCTION OF THE SUBSIDISED SCHOOL BUS TRAVEL SCHEME.**

Transfer the present cost (and administration) of free bus travel to the Department of Education and Training from the Department of Transport, stating that money saved in bus travel will be allocated to education.

### **LONG TERM STRATEGY FOR THE FURTHER IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUBSIDISED SCHOOL BUS TRAVEL SCHEME**

Progressively implement the scheme to primary school age students. Introduce a scale for the bus pass fee. This would mean that students who travel very large distances to other towns, often passing several schools, pay a greater subsidy fee.

### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

Free bus travel was originally introduced in the 1960s or thereabouts. Before that time parents were required to pay a set fee, with the government paying the balance of the transport cost, similar to my proposal above. (At one time the fee was two pounds five shillings per term).

2. There have been numerous societal changes since the introduction of the free travel scheme, including an increase in the age of high school students and cars being more readily available to students. As well, often both parents within a family are involved in work and hence able to provide travel to school for their children in conjunction with their own travel.