



Education
and Training

School Bus Program

Policy and Procedures

January 2016



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www.education.vic.gov.au/studenttransport.

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1. Introduction

While parents/guardians have primary responsibility for transporting their children to and from school, the School Bus Program (SBP) assists families in rural and regional Victoria by transporting students to school. The program services both government and non-government schools.

Students wishing to access a seat on a bus must complete an application form and parents/guardians must agree to the conditions of travel including, if applicable, the payment of a fare. Criteria of eligibility determine whether a student travels at no cost or travels upon the payment of a fare.

The Student Transport Unit (STU) of the Department of Education and Training (DET) sets the policy and provides general transport advice to DET regional offices, and schools.

The Regional Bus Team within Public Transport Victoria (PTV) administers the SBP as directed by this policy and procedures document and holds the contracts with bus operators.

The SBP is guided by the relevant parts of the Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007 and the *Bus Safety Act 2009*. These documents detail the specific obligations and duty of care for all parties involved in the provision and management of school bus services.

This policy is effective from January 2016 and replaces all previously published procedural guidelines for the SBP.

2. Criteria Determining Eligibility for the School Bus Program

This section explains the criteria used to determine if a student is eligible to access the School Bus Program (SBP). A student must meet all of the criteria detailed below to be eligible. Eligible students access SBP services at no cost.

Public transport

Students are expected to use public transport where a service is available within 1.6 km (measured by shortest practicable route) of their home or closer to their home than the nearest school bus service. This applies to both students applying to access the SBP at no cost and to fare paying passengers.

Where school and public transport services overlap, students should be allocated to public transport services prior to school bus services, as long as this ensures a safe and economically responsible outcome.

In making travel allocations DET and PTV consider:

- bus loadings and student safety
- student eligibility for transport assistance
- cost implications
- Individual cases on their merits.

Priority of access to services

With some services the demand for seats can exceed the carrying capacity of the bus. In these situations the following priority of access applies:

- first priority – eligible students with prior rights
- second priority – eligible government school students
- third priority – eligible non-government school students
- fourth priority – students with exemptions (both government and non-government school students)
- fifth priority - fare paying government and non-government students
- sixth priority – fare paying passengers non-students (see fare paying section for order of priority).

The coordinating principal should give preference to students with special needs or those travelling both morning and afternoon five days a week. If after applying these criteria there is more seating available, preference should be given to those who have the greatest distance to travel and to the youngest students.

Change of address

If a student changes residential address, a new application must be made to the coordinating school and re-assessed against all criteria.

Criteria 1 - Nearest appropriate school

Government schools

To be eligible for the School Bus Program, government school students must attend their nearest school/campus appropriate to their year level. 'Nearest' is measured by the shortest practicable route, driveable by car, from the student's residential driveway to the school administration gate.

Exemptions

Students not attending their nearest government school may be granted exemption in the circumstances listed below. Siblings will be considered on their own merit on a case by case basis.

Students granted exemption in the circumstances listed below cannot, on their own, form a case for additions, retentions or modifications of services.

School enrolment zones

Where regionally approved enrolment zones are in place, the Designated Neighbourhood School (DNS) is considered to be the nearest school/campus for the purposes of the SBP.

An enrolment zone must strictly limit entitlement to enrol in a school to only those students who reside in a defined geographical area. Evidence of regional approval of the zone must be provided to the coordinating school by the client school.

Lack of accommodation at the nearest government school

If entry to the nearest government school/campus is refused on the grounds the school is at capacity, students may travel to the next nearest government school and still be considered to be attending their nearest school for the purposes of this program.

Evidence of refused entry from all nearer schools is required to be submitted with the application to travel. This is usually in the form of a letter from the principal of each nearer school.

Subject choice for students in Years 11 and 12

Year 11 and 12 students may travel to a more distant school/campus if two or more of their chosen subjects are not available at their nearest school/campus. These students will be considered to be attending their nearest school/campus and eligible for the SBP.

Evidence that subjects are not provided at the nearer schools/campuses is required and must be submitted with the application to travel to the more distant school. This is usually in the form of a letter from the principal of each nearer school.

Single-sex government schools

Students attending their nearest appropriate single-sex government school/campus are considered to be attending their nearest school for the purposes of this program.

Attending a DET-recognised accelerated learning program

Students who are attending a DET-recognised Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) program are considered to be attending their nearest government school/campus. Students in this category are eligible to travel at no cost.

Progression through a split campus school

For continuity of education, a student progressing from a junior to senior campus of a government school is considered to be attending their nearest government school/campus irrespective of another government school of the same year levels being closer.

Moving from a junior school (P-6) to a senior school (7-12) is not considered to be progression through a split campus.

School amalgamation or opening

Students enrolled at a government school/campus that ceases to be their nearest due to an amalgamation or school opening are still considered to be attending their nearest government school/campus for the purposes of this program.

Non-government schools

To be eligible for the School Bus Program, non-government school students must attend their nearest appropriate school/campus appropriate to their year level.

'Nearest' is measured by the shortest practicable route, driveable by car, from the student's residential driveway to the school administration gate.

The nearest 'appropriate' school for students attending non-government schools is determined by the denomination of the school. The Education and Training Reform Regulations (ETR) 2007 provide scope for the Minister for Education to provide travel assistance to students attending their nearest 'appropriate' non-government school. The 2001 School Bus Review and the Regulatory Impact Statement for the Education and Training Reform Regulations stated that 'appropriate' was intended to be 'appropriate religious denomination'.

Non-government school students will be approved to travel subject to spare seating being available. Once eligible non-government students have been granted access to a service, they have ongoing travel rights that are equal to those of eligible government students until they either finish their schooling or change address.

Upon approval, eligible non-government school students will be allocated to an existing service where spare capacity exists. Students who cannot be seated on existing services may be wait-listed until space becomes available.

Non-government school students cannot, on their own, form a case for additions, retentions or modifications of services.

For the purposes of the SBP and this document, the term 'nearest school' means nearest 'appropriate' school in the non-government school context.

Exemptions

Students not attending their nearest appropriate non-government school may be granted exemption in the circumstances listed below. Siblings will be considered on their own merit on a case by case basis.

Students granted exemption in the circumstances listed below cannot, on their own, form a case for additions, retentions or modifications of services.

Lack of accommodation at the nearest appropriate non-government school

If entry to the nearest appropriate non-government school/campus is refused on the grounds the school is at capacity, students may travel to the next nearest non-government school of that denomination and still be considered to be attending their nearest school for the purposes of this program.

Evidence of refused entry from all nearer appropriate schools is required to be submitted with the application to travel. This is usually in the form of a letter from the principal of each nearer school.

Subject choice for students in Years 11 and 12

Year 11 and 12 students may travel to a more distant school/campus of the same denomination if two or more of their chosen subjects are not available at their nearest appropriate school/campus. These students will be considered to be attending their nearest appropriate school/campus and eligible for the SBP.

Evidence that subjects are not provided at the nearer appropriate schools/campuses is required and must be submitted with the application to travel to the more distant school. This is usually in the form of a letter from the principal of each nearer school.

Single-sex non-government schools

Students attending their nearest appropriate single-sex non-government school/campus are considered to be attending their nearest appropriate school for the purposes of this program.

Progression through a split campus school

For continuity of education, a student progressing from a junior to senior campus of a non-government school is considered to be attending their nearest appropriate school/campus for the purposes of this program, regardless of another non-government school of the same year levels and denomination being closer.

School amalgamation or opening

Students enrolled at a non-government school/campus that ceases to be their nearest due to an amalgamation or school opening of the same denomination are still considered to be attending their nearest appropriate school for the purposes of this program.

Criteria 2 – Reside 4.8 km or more from the school

To be eligible for the SBP, students must reside 4.8 km or more from the school/campus they attend. This distance is measured by the shortest practicable route, driveable by car, from the student's residential driveway to the school administration gate.

Criteria 3 – Be of school age and reside in Victoria

School is compulsory for all Victorian children aged between six and 17 years of age. For the purposes of the SBP, students are eligible for services if they are aged between five and 18 years of age at the time of their application, and reside in Victoria.

Students that have reached 18 years of age will be considered by the coordinating Principal on a case by case basis.

Access to more than one bus service

Students may only access one bus service unless exemption has been given by the coordinating principal.

Where feeder services or interchanges exist, a student may access more than one service but only utilise one route from their residential address to the school.

Students who reside at more than one address

Coordinating principals may approve students who reside at more than one address to access more than one service.

If a student is eligible from one of their two residential addresses, they may be permitted to access two bus services at no cost.

A student not meeting the eligibility criteria may still be able to access a service as an ineligible traveller. Either as a fare payer or as an exempted traveller based on the exemptions set out on pages 9-13.

Priority of access to each service must be allocated according to the student's eligibility status from each address. As students travelling under these arrangements will not be accessing either service full time, coordinating principals need to consider the priority of access to services advice on page 4 where spare capacity is limited.

An eligible student accessing more than one service only contributes to a case for the addition, modification or retention of the service from their primary address. In situations where there is an equal time spent at each address, the parents/guardians

must specify the primary address. Each student then only counts as one eligible student over the whole network.

Offsite training

A student may request permission to access more than one service to attend a registered training organisation or other DET-recognised training program that requires them to commute to an alternative location for some of the week.

Coordinating principals may approve students attending offsite training to access two bus services.

3. Ineligible Students Accessing the School Bus Program

Exemptions for ineligible students to access the bus at no cost

The coordinating principal may approve exemptions from the eligibility criteria for students who would otherwise be considered ineligible. The exemptions are limited and specific and detailed below.

Students accessing a bus service under an exemption are able to travel at no cost.

The coordinating principal determines which exempted students have priority of access. The coordinating principal should give preference to students with special needs or those travelling both morning and afternoon five days a week. If after applying these criteria there is more seating available, preference should be given to those who have the greatest distance to travel and to the youngest students.

Exempt students cannot form part of a case for additions, retentions or modifications of services.

Students reside less than 4.8 km from the nearest school

A government or non-government school student attending the nearest appropriate school for which admission is available and who resides less than 4.8 km from that school may be able to travel at no cost on the school bus. The coordinating principal may approve an application to travel subject to all of the following conditions:

- the student lives at least 1.6 km from a public transport service that could provide convenient access to and from their school at appropriate times
- seating is available on the service after all eligible students have been accommodated
- the student and the student's parent/guardian accept the conditions of travel and the authority of the coordinating principal
- the student intends to use the bus service daily
- PTV incurs no additional cost
- a parent/guardian provides a written undertaking to the coordinating principal that other transport arrangements will be made if seating becomes insufficient due to an increase in the number of students with a higher priority of access or a smaller vehicle is engaged for the service.

Post-secondary students and apprentices

The following categories of post-secondary students and apprentices may be permitted to travel at no cost on a school bus service:

- students undertaking further education or training courses, such as university, TAFE or adult and community education
- apprentices who are required to attend school
- students enrolled in an accredited course of study or an approved course for the unemployed, who live 4.8 km or more from the education and training provider.

Travel will be permitted for post-secondary students and apprentices subject to all of the following conditions:

- the student lives at least 1.6 km from a public transport service that could provide convenient access to and from their school at appropriate times

- seating is available on the service after all eligible students have been accommodated
- the student/apprentice (and parent/guardian if under 18 years of age) accepts the conditions of travel and the authority of the coordinating principal
- PTV incurs no additional cost
- the student/apprentice (or parent/guardian if under 18 years of age) provides a written undertaking to the coordinating principal that other transport arrangements will be made if seating becomes insufficient due to an increase in the number of students with a higher priority of access or a smaller vehicle is engaged for the service.

Before approving an application to travel from a post-secondary student or apprentice, the coordinating principal must undertake a suitable reference check.

A verbal reference check (from the student's nominee) will normally be acceptable for:

- students or apprentices aged under 18 years of age
- students aged 18 or over who are progressing from school directly to further education or training
- recent arrivals to Australia
- those aged over 18 years of age who have not had a break in their education or training of two or more years of whom the coordinating principal considers not to be a risk to other students on the bus.

Those who have had a break of two or more years from attending school full time are considered members of the general public and must satisfy one of the checks that apply. Refer to the 'General public' section (page 15) for more information.

The coordinating principal must keep a written record of any reference check.

When an application is approved the student's/apprentice's name will be added to the bus roll. Prior to boarding the vehicle, the student/apprentice may be required to provide identification to the bus driver. If a bus seat is not currently available, the student will be placed on a waiting list. Post-secondary students and apprentices must reapply for bus seats each term.

Pre-school students

Pre-school students who have turned four years of age may be permitted to travel at no cost on a school bus service. The coordinating principal may approve an application to travel subject to all of the following conditions:

- seating is available on the service after all eligible students have been accommodated
- the student's parent/guardian accepts the conditions of travel and the authority of the coordinating principal
- PTV incurs no additional cost
- a parent/guardian provides a written undertaking to the coordinating principal that other transport arrangements will be made if seating becomes insufficient due to an increase in the number of students with a higher priority of access to travel or a smaller vehicle is engaged for the service
- a parent/guardian of the applicant provides written confirmation to the coordinating principal that the child is independently able to travel on a bus
- the pre-school teacher provides written confirmation to the coordinating principal that the child is independently able to travel on a bus and that an adult arranged by the pre-school teacher will escort the child between the bus stop and the pre-school in the morning and afternoon. Bus drivers are not permitted to escort students from the bus to the pre-school.

Once a pre-school student transitions to school they must submit a new application to travel.

Interstate students

Each Australian state is responsible for the school transport of students residing in that state.

Interstate students attending Victorian schools

Students who reside interstate but attend Victorian schools may be permitted to travel at no cost on Victorian school bus services. The coordinating principal may approve an application to travel subject to all of the following conditions:

- the student is attending their nearest appropriate school
- the student lives at least 1.6 km from a public transport service that could provide convenient access to and from their school at appropriate times
- seating is available on the service after all eligible students have been accommodated
- the student and the student's parent/guardian accept the conditions of travel and the authority of the coordinating principal
- a parent/guardian provides a written undertaking to the coordinating principal that other transport arrangements will be made if seating becomes insufficient due to an increase in the number of students with a higher priority of access or a smaller vehicle is engaged for the service
- parents/guardians understand that interstate students form no case for the extension, retention or variation to existing services
- PTV incurs no additional cost

Victorian students attending interstate schools

Students who reside in Victoria but attend schools that are interstate may access a Victorian school bus service travelling to interstate schools at no cost provided they are attending their nearest appropriate school (irrespective of it being interstate) and meet all other eligibility criteria. Victorian students who do not meet the eligibility criteria but wish to access a Victorian school bus travelling to an interstate school are required to pay a fare.

Students who reside interstate may access Victorian school bus services that are travelling to interstate schools at no cost. Access is at the discretion of the coordinating principal.

Ad-hoc student passengers

A student travelling on an ad-hoc basis may be permitted to access the school bus at no cost. The coordinating principal may approve an application to travel subject to all of the following conditions:

- student(s) will not disadvantage other passengers or result in an unacceptable bus loading
- the carriage of ad-hoc students does not result in the necessity for bus travellers to stand while the bus is travelling in a speed zone more than 80 kph
- the student accepts the conditions of travel and the authority of the coordinating principal
- PTV incurs no additional cost.

The coordinating principal is responsible for ensuring the daily bus rolls reflect any ad-hoc travellers. Ad-hoc travel is at the coordinating principal's discretion to approve or decline.

Siblings of eligible bus users

A student who wishes to attend a school other than their nearest may be granted permission by the coordinating principal to travel on a school bus where an older sibling is enrolled at the school they wish to attend. Exemption requests are considered on a case-by-case basis. The coordinating principal may approve an application for permission to access the bus subject to all of the following conditions:

- the older sibling is still attending the school at the time of application
- the older sibling had an entitlement to access the school bus without claiming an exemption or granted travel access by exception
- the younger sibling resides 4.8 km or more from any nearer school
- seating is available on the service after all eligible students have been accommodated
- the student lives at least 1.6 km from a public transport service that could provide convenient access to and from their school at appropriate times.

Teachers

Teachers may be permitted to travel on a school bus service. The coordinating principal may approve an application to travel subject to all of the following conditions:

- seating is available on the service after all eligible students have been accommodated
- the teacher agrees to meet and help implement the conditions of travel
- the teacher assists the driver and bus captains in supervising students on the bus
- PTV incurs no additional cost.
- the teacher provides a written undertaking to the coordinating principal that other transport arrangements will be made if seating becomes insufficient due to an increase in the number of students with a higher priority of access or a smaller vehicle is engaged for the service.

Exemptions applicable to government school students only

Students residing 4.8 km or more from a bus route

Students residing 4.8 km or more from a bus route to their nearest government school may be permitted to travel at no cost on a service with a bus stop closer to their residence travelling to an alternative school. The alternative service may take the student to the next nearest school or further if no service to the next nearest school is available. The nearer bus service may be within 4.8 km of the student's residence. The coordinating principal may approve an application to travel subject to all of the following conditions:

- seating is available on the service after all eligible students have been accommodated
- the student lives at least 1.6 km from a public transport service that could provide convenient access to and from their school at appropriate times
- the student and the student's parent/guardian accept the conditions of travel and the authority of the coordinating principal
- PTV incurs no additional cost.

If a service to the nearest school is expanded and becomes the closer service than the one used under this exemption, exempted students may continue to access the service until they have completed their time at the alternative school. New applications are subject to standard eligibility criteria.

No service provision to nearest school

Students residing in an area with no bus service running to their nearest school may be permitted to access a bus service running to an alternative school at no cost. The alternative service may take the student to the next nearest school or further if no service to the next nearest school is available. The coordinating principal may approve an application to travel subject to all of the following conditions:

- the student must reside 4.8 km or more from their nearest school
- seating is available on the service after all eligible students been accommodated
- the student lives at least 1.6 km from a public transport service that could provide convenient access to and from their school at appropriate times
- the student and the student's parent/guardian accept the conditions of travel and the authority of the coordinating principal
- PTV incurs no additional cost.

If the nearest school gains a service, students not attending their nearest school are eligible to continue to access the service to the next nearest school until they have completed their time at the school. New applications are subject to standard eligibility criteria.

Students travelling beyond their next nearest school can do so upon payment of a fare.

Unsupervised government primary schools

Some bus services may pass a government primary school before staff are in attendance. As no supervision is available at the time students would be dropped off, coordinating principals may approve an application to travel at no cost to an alternative school. The alternative service may take the student to the next nearest primary school or further if no supervision at the next nearest school is available. The coordinating principal may approve an application subject to all of the following conditions:

- seating is available on the service after all eligible students have been accommodated
- the student lives at least 1.6 km from a public transport service that could provide convenient access to and from their school at appropriate times
- the student and the student's parent/guardian accept the conditions of travel and the authority of the coordinating principal
- PTV incurs no additional cost.
- the unsupervised primary school has provided written confirmation to the coordinating school that they are not willing or able to provide supervision before a particular time.

If the nearest government primary school implements supervision arrangements, current students not attending their nearest school are eligible to continue to do so until they have completed their primary school education. New applications are subject to standard eligibility criteria.

Sibling entitlement of students granted exemption

Exemptions only apply to the child in a family for whom the exemption was sought. Requests for exemptions from eligibility criteria are assessed by the coordinating principal on a case-by-case basis. Siblings of the exempted family member are not automatically granted an exemption of their own. Each family member seeking an exemption must submit a separate application to the coordinating school.

Case studies

Appendix 2 contains examples and diagrams to give a better understanding of how some of the exemptions work in practice.

Ineligible passengers required to pay a fare

Students who do not meet the eligibility criteria and/or do not qualify for an exemption may be able to access a school bus service upon payment of a fare. Fare paying students must pay the appropriate term fare in advance of travel to their school's bus coordinator or delegate.

Client schools must forward collected fares to their coordinating school who will then forward the collected fares, with the accompanying acquittal advice, to the STU on behalf of the school bus network.

From 2016, the historical distance based fare rates have been replaced with a standard flat fare; distance rates are no longer applied. The flat fare rate can be found on the DET website (appendix 3 – contact details).

The general public may also access the bus upon payment of a fare.

The order of priority to access the bus service (reversed for removal from the bus service if capacity is required for students with a higher priority of access) is as numbered below.

A fare paying passenger retains access to the bus service provided spare capacity is available, the appropriate fare is paid in advance and they continue to reside at the address listed in their application. Permission to travel and payment is on term by term basis.

Fare paying passengers cannot form part of a case for additions, retentions or modifications of services.

1. Students attending their next nearest government school

A government school student who is eligible for transport assistance to their nearest government school (resides 4.8 km or more from that school) may be able to access a bus service to their next nearest government school upon payment of a fare. The coordinating principal may approve an application to travel subject to all of the following conditions:

- the flat rate term fare is paid prior to commencing travel
- seating is available on the service after all students with a higher priority of access to services have been accommodated
- the student and the student's parent/guardian accept the conditions of travel and the authority of the coordinating principal
- PTV incurs no additional cost
- a parent/guardian provides a written undertaking to the coordinating principal that other transport arrangements will be made if seating becomes insufficient due to an increase in the number of students with a higher priority of access or a smaller vehicle is engaged for the service.

2. Students attending their next nearest non-government school

A non-government student may be able to access a bus service to next nearest appropriate school upon payment of a fare. The coordinating principal may approve travel subject to all of the following conditions:

- the flat rate term fare is paid prior to commencing travel

- seating is available on the service after all students with a higher priority of access to services have been accommodated
- the student and the student's parent/guardian accept the conditions of travel and the authority of the coordinating principal
- PTV incurs no additional cost.
- a parent/guardian provides a written undertaking to the coordinating principal that other transport arrangements will be made if seating becomes insufficient due to an increase in the number of students with a higher priority of access or a smaller vehicle is engaged for the service.

3. Students who live less than 4.8 km from the nearest school and attend an alternate school

A student ineligible to access a service at no cost to their nearest school (resides less than 4.8 km from that school) may be able to access a bus service to an alternative school upon payment of a fare. The coordinating principal may approve an application to travel subject to all of the following conditions:

- the flat rate term fare is paid prior to commencing travel
- seating is available on the service after all students with a higher priority of access to services have been accommodated
- the student and the student's parent/guardian accept the conditions of travel and the authority of the coordinating principal
- PTV incurs no additional cost
- a parent/guardian provides a written undertaking to the coordinating principal that other transport arrangements will be made if seating becomes insufficient due to an increase in the number of students with a higher priority of access or a smaller vehicle is engaged for the service.

4. General public

The general public may be permitted to travel on a school bus service upon payment of a fare. An application to travel must be forwarded to the coordinating principal who may approve it subject to the following conditions:

- the person lives at least 1.6 km from suitable public transport
- seating is available on the service after all students with a higher priority of access to services have been accommodated
- the applicant (and the parent/guardian if under 18 years of age) accepts the conditions of travel and the authority of the coordinating principal
- the fare as determined by PTV is paid in advance of travel.
- PTV incurs no additional cost.
- the applicant (or parent/guardian if under 18 years of age) provides a written undertaking to the coordinating principal that other transport arrangements will be made if seating becomes insufficient due to an increase in the number of students with a higher priority of access to travel or a smaller vehicle is engaged for the service
- no ad-hoc or occasional travel is to be provided.

To protect the safety of all travelling students, a non-school passenger is required to provide to the coordinating principal one of the following:

- a Working with Children check
- a criminal matters check

- in special circumstances approved by the coordinating principal, two written references that attest the person would not be a risk to the safety of students (neither of which may be from the coordinating principal).

Special circumstances are to be the exception and coordinating principals should err on the side of caution when considering whether the circumstances are special.

Circumstances that might be considered special are:

- if the person is well-known to the coordinating principal and being of no known risk to children. To be well-known requires the coordinating principal to have known the person for a substantial period (e.g. five years or more), and to have had substantial contact with the person during that period
- If one or both of the two references, and other facts that come to the coordinating principal's attention, result in the coordinating principal being of the opinion the person is not a risk to the safety of students.

Circumstances that are not considered special include if the person lacks money or time to do a check. The traveller must meet the cost of any or all of the above.

If the coordinating principal approves special circumstances, he/she must keep a written record of the circumstances he/she considered amounted to special circumstances.

Insufficient seating capacity

If there is no longer sufficient bus seating capacity to accommodate fare paying passengers, the coordinating principal must advise the principals of all schools with students using the bus service and any members of the public using the bus service. The client school principal must advise a student's parent/guardian in writing prior to the completion of the current year.

The bus operator will make the final determination on the safe carrying capacity of the bus.

Other exceptional circumstances or appeals or special cases

Parent/guardians wishing to apply for special consideration or appeal a transport decision must make an application through their school. Government schools must have the application endorsed by their regional office prior to submitting it to the STU at student.transport@edumail.vic.gov.au

Catholic and independent school's applications do not require regional endorsement and can be submitted directly to the STU to the email address listed above.

Special case applications will be considered by the STU if the application falls into one of the following categories:

- the student has commenced the final year of the school they attend and changes residential address
- students who are the subject of specific court orders that stipulate the student must continue their education at a particular location (copy of court order is required with the application)
- In circumstances where a student has moved school for reasons of:
 - genuine concern for personal safety or for the safety of other students (documentation from the original school of enrolment and the student welfare coordinator will be required to support the exemption; information will be also accepted from external welfare agencies)
 - consistent with the staged approach recommended in the student engagement policy guidelines, the school has developed flexible learning options for the student, which may include transfer of a student to another school setting (this does not include intercampus movements). This recommendation must be supported by DET's regional director and the two principals of the schools involved in the student transfer.

Requests for special case approval that are complex in nature may be reviewed by an independent panel known as the Transport Special Cases Consideration Panel, and is convened by the DET's chief finance officer. Representation on the panel includes members from the Student Transport and Family Allowances Branch, practising principals and when required, a representative from the DET's Disability and Inclusion Branch and PTV.

The panel meets monthly in term one and once per term thereafter. Prior to the panel hearing, the STU may seek further advice from the lodging government school's regional director. The student's application must include applicable supporting documentation such as recommendations from the school's student support group (as defined by the student engagement guidelines), and any individual education and/or behavioural plans.

Transport assistance will not be available to a student until such time as the panel meets and considers their application.

All recommendations of the panel will be forwarded to the DET Deputy Secretary, Infrastructure and Finance Services Group, for approval.

The following applies to special case approval:

- special case approval is limited to the student and transport service involved in the application. Sibling rights do not apply
- special case approval will cease if the student moves residential address, changes school or transport mode

- special case approval is not automatic. Each case will be considered on merit with reference to the transport infrastructure in the area and precedents established.

4. Administration of the School Bus Program

Delivery of the School Bus Program involves government and non-government schools, bus operators, DET STU and regional offices and the Regional Bus Team of PTV.

The table below shows the roles and responsibilities of each group at a high level.

Responsibility	DET STU	Schools	PTV	Bus Operators	DET regional offices
Policy	✓		✓		
Communication (with students & families)		✓			
Eligibility determination		✓			
Fare collection		✓			
Planning service needs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Contracting, delivering & managing service provision			✓	✓	
Funding program	✓		✓		
Reviewing compliance	✓		✓		
Emergency management	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Transport Special Cases Consideration Panel	✓	✓	✓		✓

It is important to note that all groups in the provision and management of the SBP have responsibility and obligations under the *Road Safety Act 2007* and *Bus Safety Act 2009*. It is each Party's responsibility to know and act on their obligations regarding duty of care and taking steps to eliminate risks to health and safety arising from the provision of school bus services.

Emergency management

Each school must develop an emergency management plan that includes emergency procedures in the event of a breakdown, accident, bushfire and other emergency situations. All emergency management plans must be consistent with the plans of bus operators providing services in a local network.

Emergency procedures for student transport must be established in consultation with bus operators and client schools. If required, DET Regional offices, PTV, Country Fire Authority (CFA), Victoria Police, VicRoads and other emergency services may also be involved in establishing and emergency procedures.

In addition, DET Emergency Management Division (EMD), the STU and PTV have developed specific emergency management procedures to be used for the School Bus Program. It is important that all groups involved in the administration of the School Bus Program familiarise themselves with these procedures and follow them in the event of an emergency. The Student Transport Emergency Management Procedures document is available at: www.education.vic.gov.au/studenttransport

Responsibilities of coordinating schools

Travel approval

All schools accessing the SBP are responsible for distributing eligibility information and application forms to their students. All application forms and eligibility guides are available on the website at: www.education.vic.gov.au/studenttransport.

Coordinating principals are responsible for coordinating and assessing all applications to travel on school bus services in their network. This includes students attending government and non-government schools. Based on the policy laid out in this document, coordinating principals determine whether students are eligible to travel at no cost or upon payment of a fare.

Both coordinating and client school principals must collect applications to travel from students at their school. Applications must be on DET-issued forms. It is the responsibility of the client school principal to forward all applications to the coordinating principal by the end of Term 3 in the year prior to attendance. Late applications may be accepted at the discretion of the coordinating principal. Students requiring bus transport less than five days a week must specify their travel arrangements in their application. Approval of all applications is at the discretion of the coordinating principal.

Parents/guardians must be advised in writing of the outcome of their application at the earliest possible convenience. Notification of unsuccessful applications should be prioritised to provide maximum time to review the choice of school or to make alternative arrangements.

Bus fares

Students who do not meet the eligibility criteria and/or do not qualify for an exemption may be able to access a school bus service upon payment of a fare. Fare paying students must pay the appropriate term fare in advance of travel to their school's bus coordinator or delegate.

Fares for members of the public can be obtained from PTV. Fares must not be pro-rated to reflect the number of days the service is used.

Anticipated loadings

The coordinating principal must submit their annual anticipated loading data for their bus network to PTV by 30 October each year. This report details the number of students expected to travel on each service in the coming year. It is essential that this information is maintained and up-to-date.

Schools that fail to provide their anticipated loading data will be subject to a DET Policy Compliance Review in the coming year.

Loading issues, including changes in bus patronage, must be reported to PTV by the coordinating principal as they arise. In reporting any loading issues, coordinating principals are requested to suggest solutions to resolve the issue.

PTV will work with the STU and the bus operator where services may be affected.

Data collection and procedures

Coordinating principals must collate and maintain the following up-to-date information on behalf of the STU and PTV and distribute to all bus operators:

- route and passenger details
 - a roll/database of approved passengers based on approved applications to travel (including any ad-hoc passengers)
 - students' residential addresses
 - seat allocations
 - authorised bus stops
 - emergency contact information for each passenger

- medical information for each passenger – as required
- name of the bus captain(s).
- Route maps
A map of the approved route(s) showing a list of the authorised bus stops for each service and the overnight bus garage location.
- timetable
A bus timetable with scheduled departure and arrival times for the school(s) and all authorised bus stops on the route.
- Emergency procedures
The procedures to be adopted in the event of a breakdown, accident, bushfire, or other emergency.
- Standards of behaviour
Expectations of passengers and bus captains.

Risk management and incident reporting

A duty of care is owed to students accessing PTV provided bus services. All staff must continually assess, mitigate, treat and monitor risks that may be associated with bus travel such as:

- the actual or potential for challenging behaviours during transit
- the actual or potential for conflict between students
- the ability of students to board and alight from the bus
- the actual or potential hazards surrounding the location of the bus stop.

Coordinating schools must treat any risk raised by the bus operator or any other party seriously. Where a risk is identified, principals should apply the DET Risk Management Framework and document their actions and follow up. The framework, located at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/governance/Pages/risk.aspx> will assist with the process of identification, assessment, monitoring and treatment to eliminate risks to health and safety.

The bus operator should be invited to participate in the risk management process and may be a source of expert advice.

If there is an incident or near miss involving a bus service, schools should immediately refer to their emergency management plan on whether the incident is notifiable and what steps the school should take.

Student behaviour on school buses

The coordinating principal is responsible for the communication of acceptable standards of behaviour on school buses to students and families and has the authority to take disciplinary measures for misbehaviour, including temporary or permanent suspension from bus travel.

Coordinating principals are also responsible for investigating complaints and may issue a *Notice of concern – behaviour* to a student or parent/guardian if they are sufficiently concerned about a student's behaviour.

Adequate and up-to-date documentation, such as reports surrounding incidents of misbehaviour, which may support decisions made in relation to discipline, must be maintained. Any subsequent and formal advice of a suspension from bus travel must be provided to the:

- student and his/her parents/guardians
- school or registered training organisation the student attends
- bus operator and the driver of the bus service.

During a period of suspension, a student's transport is the responsibility of their parent/guardian.

If, in the judgement of the coordinating principal, an incident of suspension from bus travel is particularly serious, a report must be forwarded to the STU and the student's principal. All parties involved in the transport of students are encouraged to consider their duty of care and be proactive in a responsible way to resolve behaviour issues before the situation escalates.

Supervision

A member of staff must be on duty to supervise students during the arrival and departure of school buses at school and at interchanges beyond the school. At feeder interchanges beyond the school, buses should be scheduled so that they arrive and depart the interchange at the same time. Buses should remain stationary at all times while students are transferring between services.

To ensure students are supervised, principals should consider staffing interchanges beyond the school during the arrival and departure of school buses.

Parents/guardians are responsible for transporting their children to and from designated bus stops and for their safety at the bus stop while waiting for the bus.

Unauthorised student passengers

Bus drivers are obligated to accept any unauthorised student passengers who present at a bus stop. Bus drivers must report the unauthorised passenger to the coordinating principal once the bus arrives at school.

Coordinating principals are required to contact the unauthorised passenger's parents/guardians and inform them that their child will not be permitted on the afternoon bus service and they have responsibility for organising their child's transport home.

If the unauthorised passenger is from a client school, the coordinating principal must contact the client school principal and advise the unauthorised passenger will not be permitted on the afternoon service. The client school principal must inform the unauthorised passenger's parents/guardians that their child is not permitted on the afternoon service and they have responsibility for organising their child's transport home.

If the unauthorised passenger presents at the bus, bus operators are not obligated to carry unauthorised passengers from the school in the afternoon and are only required to liaise with coordinating schools.

Continued unauthorised student passengers are to be reported by the bus operator to the coordinating principal, PTV and STU for investigation and prompt resolution.

Communication with client schools

The coordinating principal must provide the following information to the principal of each client school:

- bus rolls
- route maps
- timetables
- relevant procedures
- conditions of travel (included in the application to travel)
- emergency contact details for the school's students who travel on a school bus.

The coordinating principal must inform client schools of contract variations, temporary service variations, early closure times (e.g. end of term) and pupil free days where bus services will be affected within a reasonable time period.

Communication with parents/guardians

Schools are responsible for communicating the travel options that exist in the area to parents at enrolment. Schools must familiarise themselves with the policy in order to respond to general enquiries made by parents about the program.

The coordinating principal must keep parents/guardians informed about school bus service arrangements, school bus safety education and the obligations of parents/guardians.

Coordinating principals must provide advice to parents/guardians of when bus services will not be running within a reasonable time period.

When a student is new to a school bus service, parents/guardians must be provided with the following documents:

- conditions of travel (included in the application to travel)
- a bus timetable with scheduled departure times for all stops on the route
- procedures to be adopted in the event of a breakdown, accident, bushfire, or any other emergency.

Parents/guardians must be notified of any misbehaviour and advised the travel arrangements for a student suspended or permanently removed from a service will become their responsibility.

Principals must emphasise that it is the responsibility of parents/guardians to list their child's medical conditions on the application to travel. The parents/guardians will agree on a suitable medical management plan with the coordinating principal. Where appropriate, the coordinating principal should provide the bus operator with details of the medical condition. Parents/guardians must be informed that bus drivers are not medically trained and are not expected to perform any medical intervention.

Parents/guardian must ensure the school has access to their most recent contact numbers to be used in the event of emergency.

Communication with PTV and DET

The coordinating principal may raise operational issues directly with PTV however the STU must be advised of any major issue that may affect students or the provision of a bus service.

Requests for new services, service variations, safety-related issues and continuity of service matters should be forwarded to the STU for consideration and endorsement prior to submission to PTV. Refer to *Section 3 – Provision of Services* for more information.

Reporting bus operator and driver conduct

The coordinating principal must report the following to PTV:

- failure of a bus operator to provide a service on a particular day(s)
- regular lack of punctuality according to the timetable (taking into consideration that punctuality is dependent upon the timely dismissal of students in the afternoons)
- concerns about the suitability of a driver
- an offence allegedly committed by a bus operator or a driver and any subsequent police or court action
- an unauthorised substitution of a vehicle
- an accident directly, indirectly or incidentally related to the operation of a SBP vehicle
- a bus operator who does not keep the interior of the vehicle(s) clean

- use of an unsuitable or unsafe vehicle, or a vehicle that repeatedly suffers mechanical difficulties
- the death of a bus operator.

Temporary service variations

The coordinating principal must report any temporary service variations, including any variation to kilometres travelled or vehicle used, to the STU, PTV and each school whose students travel on the affected service.

Temporary service variations often relate to route or vehicle alterations in unforeseen circumstances. A temporary service variation to a route may be needed in response to flooding, bridge closure, road maintenance, or bushfire. A revised route should be determined in consultation with the bus operator, PTV and VicRoads/local council. A temporary service variation to a vehicle may be needed when a vehicle is undergoing maintenance or has a breakdown, or is being used in alternative charter arrangements.

Maintaining a bus service

Coordinating principals must report to the STU and PTV any instances where students on a lightly loaded service can be transferred and safely accommodated on alternative services, or where there are or will be less than eight eligible students using a service.

Communication with bus operators

The following information must be provided in writing to the bus operator by the coordinating principal:

- a full and current bus roll of students approved to travel on a service
- the name of any students suspended from using the school bus service and the length of the suspension
- any approved changes to bus routes and/or timetables
- the names of ineligible students and members of the public approved to travel on the service
- any alterations to the bus roll
- changes in bus captains
- any seat allocations
- changes to school timetables (including early closure times and pupil free days) within a reasonable time period
- emergency procedures and contact details.

The bus operator is responsible for providing this information to drivers.

Authorising bus operator payments

Bus operators must submit a quarterly contractor payment claim form to the coordinating principal. The coordinating principal must check all details including student numbers, days operated, vehicle and driver details. If these details are correct, the coordinating principal can endorse the claim for payment. Endorsement or rejection should be provided within two days of receipt of the invoice. The bus operator is then responsible for forwarding it to PTV for payment.

Responsibilities of client schools

Travel approval

All schools accessing the SBP are responsible for distributing eligibility information and application forms to their students. All application forms and eligibility guides are available on the website at: www.education.vic.gov.au/studenttransport

Client school principals must collect applications to travel from students at their school. Applications are then to be forwarded to the coordinating principal for assessment.

Applications must be sent to the coordinating principal by the end of Term 3 in the year prior to attendance. Applications must be on DET issued forms. Late applications may be accepted at the discretion of the coordinating principal. Students requiring bus transport less than five days a week must specify their travel arrangements in their application. Approval of all applications is at the discretion of the coordinating principal.

Parents/guardians must be advised in writing of the outcome of their application at the earliest possible convenience. Notification of unsuccessful applications should be prioritised to provide maximum time to review the choice of school or to make alternative arrangements.

Bus fares

Students who do not meet the eligibility criteria and/or do not qualify for an exemption may be able to access a school bus service upon payment of a fare. Fare paying students must pay the appropriate term fare in advance of travel to their school's bus coordinator or delegate.

Fares for members of the public can be obtained from PTV. Fares must not be prorated to reflect the number of days the service is used.

Anticipated loadings

Client school principals must submit their annual anticipated loading data to their coordinating school in time for them to submit the information to PTV by 30 November each year. This information details the number of students expected to travel on each service in the coming year. This information is used by PTV as a planning tool to ensure appropriate and efficient school bus provision throughout Victoria.

It is essential that this information is maintained and up-to-date. The client school principal must report loading issues, including changes in bus patronage, to the coordinating school as they arise.

School bus networks (coordinating and client schools) that fail to provide their anticipated loading data will automatically be placed on the PTV school bus network review list for the coming year.

Supervision

A member of staff must be on duty to supervise students during the arrival and departure of school buses at school and at interchanges beyond the school. At feeder interchanges beyond the school, buses should be scheduled so that they arrive and depart the interchange at the same time. Buses should remain stationary at all times while students are transferring between services.

To ensure students are supervised, principals should consider staffing interchanges beyond the school during the arrival and departure of school buses.

Parents/guardians are responsible for transporting their children to and from designated bus stops and for their safety at the bus stop while waiting for the bus.

Unauthorised student passengers

Bus drivers are obligated to accept any unauthorised student passengers who present at a bus stop. Bus drivers must report the unauthorised passenger to the coordinating principal once the bus arrives at school.

If the unauthorised passenger is from a client school, the coordinating principal will contact the client school principal and inform them that the unauthorised passenger is not permitted on the afternoon bus service. The client school principal must inform the unauthorised passenger's parents/guardians that their child is not permitted on the afternoon service and that they have responsibility for organising their child's transport home.

If the unauthorised passenger presents at the bus, bus operators are not obligated to liaise with client schools or carry unauthorised passengers from the school in the afternoon.

Continued unauthorised student passengers are to be reported by the bus operator to the coordinating principal, PTV and STU for investigation and prompt resolution.

Communication with parents/guardians

Schools are responsible for communicating the travel options that exist in the area to parents at enrolment. Schools must familiarise themselves with the policy in order to respond to general enquiries made by parents about the program.

Responsibilities of bus operators

Under the *Bus Safety Act 2009* (the Act), operators of buses or vehicles with more than 12 seats (including that of the driver) must be accredited by Transport Safety Victoria (TSV). Operators must display the number plates showing the appropriate accredited service category and their accreditation number.

The Act requires bus operators to take steps to eliminate the risks to health and safety arising from the provision of bus services. Obligations under the Act have been incorporated into the contracts between the bus operators and PTV (contract holders for the School Bus Program services). Operators are required to:

- ensure that drivers are licensed in line with the Act and VicRoads requirements
- have a zero alcohol and drug policy for bus drivers while engaged in delivery of a service
- advise schools if any risk arises during the delivery of a service or at a bus stop.

The Bus Safety Regulations 2010 also provide additional specific obligations for notification of incidents and near misses.

Bus operators are required to provide services in line with appropriate legislation, the contract and these guidelines.

Under the provisions of the *Public Administration Act 2004*, a government school teacher is not permitted to hold, or have an interest in, a school bus contract without written permission of DET.

Reporting

Bus operators and drivers are required to report the following matters to the coordinating principal:

- all instances of student misbehaviour; any action taken in response to the misbehaviour; as well as recommendations for changes to seating allocations as a disciplinary measure by completing the Notice of concern - behaviour as soon as possible
- loading issues – overloading or reduced loading
- detours or delays due to exceptional circumstances – where possible, delays should be reported immediately by telephone
- any issues that may affect ongoing operation
- any accident that has a direct, indirect or incidental relationship to a school bus service.
- Unauthorised passengers

Payment of contracts

Bus operators must prepare a quarterly contractor payment claim form and submit it to the coordinating principal for checking and endorsement. Coordinating principals should return the claim promptly to the bus operator. Operators must submit the claim to PTV, which uses the information to review loadings, vehicles in use, and to determine an operator's monthly payment. Contact PTV for the most up-to-date contractor payment claim forms.

Bus operations

The following expectations apply to all services:

- operators must transport all passengers who have been approved by the coordinating principal

- operators must operate the contracted vehicle over the approved route in accordance with the timetable set down by the coordinating principal
- neither operators nor drivers have any authority to determine eligibility to travel or to refuse to pick up any approved passenger(s)
- operators are not permitted to carry goods or other passengers while the bus is servicing the approved timetable, except with prior written approval from the coordinating principal
- a bus should not arrive at or leave the school earlier or later than the time stated in the timetable unless directed by the coordinating principal
- a bus route may not be varied, except in an emergency, without the approval of PTV
- all buses should avoid travelling in reverse gear where possible, particularly in pick-up and set-down areas
- school bus lights and signage compliant with VicRoads requirements must be displayed while students are travelling on the bus. Flashing lights must be operating while the bus is stopped
- any student that presents at a bus stop for a morning bus service and is unauthorised for travel must be accepted on the bus and reported to the coordinating principal once the bus arrives at school
- bus operators are not obligated to carry unauthorised student passengers in the afternoon. Unauthorised student passengers should be reported to the schools on duty supervisor/teacher for removal from the bus service prior to the bus departing the school interchange.

Contract variations

Any reduction in authorised dead and/or live distances should be reported to PTV. Contracts incorporate remuneration for dead and/or live distance, regardless of whether it is travelled by car, bus or both. A change of driver, garaging or the type of vehicle used to travel any of these distances could alter the contract rate of payment.

Vehicles

To operate a school bus service, an operator must:

- provide the specified vehicle in a satisfactory condition in accordance with the terms of the contract with PTV
- have the vehicle inspected as prescribed by regulations and legislation by and authorised vehicle safety inspector
- when instructed, repair or replace the vehicle.

If a vehicle is deemed unsafe, a written report from a licensed bus examiner recommending its replacement must be issued to PTV. The operator must then provide a suitable replacement vehicle approved by PTV.

Voluntary replacement

If an operator elects to voluntarily replace a bus, they must do so in accordance with the requirements in the school bus service contract.

Temporary replacement

The operator must provide a suitable replacement vehicle if the contract vehicle is being repaired. This vehicle must be approved by PTV. A school bus operator must not stop operating the vehicle specified in the contract without prior permission from PTV.

Drivers

Drivers must have a 'Driver's Accreditation' issued by the Taxi Services Commission (TSC). Generally, a certificate is not issued to an applicant under the age of 21 years.

Under the provisions of the *Public Administration Act 2004*, a government school teacher is not permitted to be employed as a school bus driver without written permission from the DET regional director.

Drivers have a role in the safety and supervision of students while on board school buses. Bus drivers are not medically trained and are not expected to perform any medical intervention. The coordinating principal should liaise with bus drivers to ensure the conduct and behaviour of all passengers is satisfactory and does not jeopardise safe travel.

Drivers on the completion of the bus service should inspect the vehicle interior to ensure that all students have departed the vehicle. The vehicle inspection is a critical task and should be completed prior to departing the school after the am service and prior to garaging the vehicle after the last stop on the pm service. Drivers should refer to training and instruction from bus operators on the method for completing this inspection.

Driver punctuality is vital for an efficient school bus service office. Coordinating principals will report consistently late running to PTV.

Circumstances that may indicate the unsuitability of a driver include:

- an inability to control students
- poor driving procedure
- any allegation of an offence that results in police or court prosecution.

Student behaviour on school buses

In the event students do not comply with the conditions of travel, bus drivers are advised to follow the procedures below:

- the driver will stop the bus
- the offender's name and full details of the breach will be recorded
- the offender will be transported to school or to their normal drop-off
- the breach will be reported to the coordinating principal
- the coordinating principal will take disciplinary measures in accordance with the guidelines below.

Additionally, under Transport (Passenger Vehicles) Regulations 2005, bus drivers have the authority to eject passengers they reasonably believe are:

- a threat to the safety of passengers in the vehicle
- Behaving in a violent, noisy or offensive manner
- intoxicated to the point of being offensive.

Ejecting a student from a bus service

Ejecting a student must be considered a measure of last resort. Before ejecting a student passenger, the bus driver must speak with the coordinating principal and the principal of the school the student passenger attends.

In deciding whether to eject a student passenger, drivers should take into consideration the potential danger presented by the road conditions, the age and ability of the student passenger, and the distance to be travelled.

It is the responsibility of the principal of the school the student passenger attends to inform the parents/guardians of their child's ejection from the bus and where their child can be picked up. The principal may choose to pick-up the student from where they have been ejected and return them back to school or home.

If an injury or accident occurs to a student who has been ejected from a bus, drivers may need to justify that the circumstances warranted the action taken.

Both coordinating and client school principals' phone numbers must be provided to the bus operator and driver for during and after school hours.

Vandalism

In all cases of vandalism by students, the coordinating principal and parents/guardians of those responsible must be informed. The students or their parent/guardian will be required to meet the cost of repairs.

Responsibilities of students

Behaviour on school buses

Those travelling on school buses must comply with the conditions of travel included in the application to travel.

Students must:

- be on time to their bus stop each morning and at the bus loading area each afternoon. Students must be at the bus stop 10 minutes prior to the scheduled departure time
- board, alight and travel on buses in a quiet, orderly manner
- sit in an allocated seat if required
- after getting off the bus, remain on the side of the road until the bus has resumed its journey.

Bus captains

Bus captains should be appointed by the coordinating principal to assist drivers with supervision. They have full authority under the direction of the coordinating principal and should be instructed in the importance of their position and expectations of them in the event of a breakdown or other emergency.

The bus captain is to report all instances of misbehaviour to the coordinating principal. Regular meetings should be scheduled between the coordinating principal and bus captains.

Bus rolls must be checked daily by bus captains and any student not on the bus roll and without prior permission is not permitted on board and must be reported to the coordinating principal.

Bus captains should know that the following rules are to be rigidly enforced:

- students must wait at the bus stop in an orderly fashion, refrain from playing on the roadway, and not attempt to approach the bus until it has stopped
- no student is to board or leave a bus while it is in motion
- students must board or leave the bus in a quiet orderly fashion
- students allocated a seat must remain seated for the whole of the journey. No pupil should, under any circumstances, have any part of his/her body protruding from a bus or throw any object within or from a bus
- boisterous conduct or any action which may distract the driver is not allowed
- students should converse in a normal tone of voice at all times and refrain from calling out to others on board the bus or to passing traffic
- no food or drink is to be consumed on school buses
- smoking by any person is not permitted on a school bus
- students must not talk to the driver while the bus is in motion
- compliance with the school's code of conduct while undertaking bus travel.

Responsibilities of the STU

The STU is responsible for:

- developing and communicating the School Bus Program policy and procedures
- providing advice and support to regional offices on transport-related matters
- providing advice and support to schools on transport-related matters
- considering applications for exemption outside the standard policy
- administering the Transport Special Case Consideration panel
- conducting School Bus Program policy and procedures compliance audits at coordinating and client schools
- secondary role of the management of school bus services during an emergency, as per the Student Transport Emergency Management Procedures document
- working with PTV on the administration of the School Bus Program.

Responsibilities of DET regional offices

Regional offices are responsible for:

- providing advice and support to schools on transport-related matters including the endorsement of applications for special case consideration
- assisting schools with applications for a new service or an alteration to existing service
- providing advice on transport-related matters to parents/guardians
- escalating transport-related issues that cannot be resolved at a local level to the STU
- providing local knowledge to the STU
- liaising with the STU on determinations from exemptions
- primary role in managing school bus services during an emergency, as per the Student Transport Emergency Management Procedures document.

Responsibilities of PTV

PTV is responsible for:

- planning service needs
- contracting and managing service provision
- funding the bus service contracts used to deliver the School Bus Program
- reviewing school and operator compliance within the School Bus Program policy
- working with the STU on the management and administration of the School Bus Program
- secondary role in managing school bus services during an emergency, as per the Student Transport Emergency Management Procedures document.

5. Provision of Bus Services

As many students as possible should be seated on a school bus. Students may be permitted to stand on a school bus if:

- no student is required to stand for more than 10 km
- the vehicle has a seating capacity of at least 25 adults
- the vehicle legal weight limit is not exceeded.

PTV must be notified by the coordinating principal where students regularly must stand in a speed zone above 80 kph.

A student is only permitted to travel between the approved bus stop nearest to their home and school. Requests to access alternative bus stops on the same route can be considered by the coordinating principal.

As indicated under the coordinating principal's responsibilities, they are required to complete their annual anticipated loading data to PTV each by 30 October each year. PTV will contact the coordinating school about this process in each year.

If school bus loadings are unacceptably high, it may be necessary to reassess the availability of the bus service to those other than eligible students. Temporary arrangements may be implemented until all available options have been considered.

Temporary arrangements may include:

- extending other services to accommodate students
- Adding interchange vehicles between services
- Providing extra seating
- running an existing service for a second trip.

Long term solutions may be identified by a review of the network. PTV conducts periodic reviews of school bus networks to ensure efficiency and compliance with this policy. PTV reviews can lead to modifications and additions to services in the bus network. Further information can be found at:

<http://ptv.vic.gov.au/projects/buses/school-bus-projects/school-bus-centre-review-program>.

Common permanent solutions to overloading issues may include:

- a larger bus
- running an existing service for a second trip
- introducing a new bus service
- permanently changing the route.

Modification of services

Schools in bus networks can apply for variations to bus services via an application to the STU. The STU will seek advice, if appropriate, from DET regional offices and other schools that might be affected before forwarding recommendations for modifications of services to PTV.

Proposals for modifications will be considered jointly by PTV and the STU. Application forms for modifications to school bus services can be found on the DET website:

www.education.vic.gov.au/studenttransport

And submitted by email to: student.transport@edumail.vic.gov.au.

Ineligible students cannot form part of a case for additions, retentions or modifications of services.

New services

A proposal for a new school bus service will be considered if:

- at least 15 eligible students live on or near the proposed route
- at least 11 of the 15 eligible students are enrolled in a government school
- the students do not have access to an existing school bus service or a public transport service that could meet their school transport requirements
- there is anticipated future demand from government school students.

The introduction of a new school bus service can be proposed by a coordinating principal by submitting an *Application for a New School Bus Service or Feeder Service*. Guidelines on what to include in the application can be found along with the application form on the DET website.

If a new service is approved, PTV is responsible for the final design of the route and contracting a bus operator to provide the service. Eligible non-government school students who live on or near the newly established route can be considered when determining the appropriate vehicle capacity for the service; however it will primarily be designed around eligible government school student demand.

New feeder services

A feeder service is used to deliver students to a major school bus service and may be provided in isolated areas where students cannot be serviced by existing routes.

Isolated areas are defined as locations that are geographically, professionally and personally isolating with limited logistic support, limited access to peers, in extreme climatic or cross-cultural environments. Feeder services usually transport relatively small groups of students who would otherwise be severely disadvantaged.

A proposal for a new feeder school bus service will be considered if:

- at least eight (six in isolated areas) eligible government school students would use the service
- the students do not have access to a current school bus service or a public transport service that could meet their school transport requirements
- there is anticipated future demand from government school students.

The introduction of a new feeder service can be proposed by a coordinating principal by submitting an *Application for a New School Bus Service or Feeder Service*. Guidelines on what to include in the application can be found along with the application form on the DET website.

Extensions and variations to existing services

A proposal to extend an existing service will be considered if:

- at least three eligible government school students who all live at least 2.4 km from a service to their nearest eligible school will benefit from the extension
- there is anticipated future demand from government school students
- it will not significantly increase the 'dead running' time.

Issues that will be considered are the length of the current route and its proposed extension; the effect on current users and the possibility of the extended route encroaching upon a route that services another school. School bus services are not normally re-routed where a majority of government school students would be disadvantaged by the route alteration.

An extension to an existing service can be proposed by a coordinating principal by submitting an *Application for Extension of an Existing Route*. Guidelines on what to include in the application can be found along with the application form on the DET website.

Reductions to existing services

In some instances, the number of students living on a route or a spur extension may decrease. If students live on the line of the bus route, the rules of maintaining a bus service (below) apply – eight eligible government and non-government school students must remain for the bus to continue. If the number of students living on a spur extension decrease, the same policy as extending an existing route applies to maintain the spur extension (see above) – there must be three eligible government school students who live at least 2.4 km from the nearest alternative service.

Maintaining a bus service

Over time students on a bus service may decrease. A bus service will continue to be offered for as long as the number of eligible government and non-government school students who cannot be accommodated on another bus service remains at eight or more. If the number of students falls below eight the bus service will be removed.

Exceptions to the total number of students required to maintain a service will be rare but may occur in isolated areas. Cases are considered on their merits by the STU and PTV.

Altered seating capacity

It may be necessary for an existing vehicle to be replaced due to changed patronage levels. A coordinating principal can submit a report to PTV detailing the reasons for the replacement vehicle. The report should include the bus roll (student names, addresses and year levels).

Dead running

A student is not permitted to access a bus during dead running time. If a student lives close to a bus service's 'dead running' route, the coordinating principal can put forward a case to PTV for the route to be varied or extended to allow for student access. These are assessed on a case by case basis.

Bus Routes

Bus stops

Bus stops must be at least 800 metres apart and established in safe locations where all activities at the stop are conspicuous and visible to road users. There should be sufficient space for parents/guardians to wait for or with their children without impeding the safe arrival or departure of the bus and where students can board and alight safely. As far as is practicable, buses should be able to stop clear of passing traffic.

Suitable bus stops can be suggested by the coordinating principal in consultation with the bus operator and PTV. Where required, a site assessment will be sought from the relevant road authority (VicRoads or the local council).

PTV is to be notified of all final bus stopping locations.

Round routes

Round routes are bus routes that operate in a loop and finish where the service started. Vehicles on round routes must follow the same direction in the morning and the afternoon. The direction may be reversed at monthly intervals if it is considered appropriate by the coordinating principal in consultation with client schools (where necessary).

Road suitability

PTV and bus operators are responsible for ensuring roads used by school buses are suitable for use in all weather conditions. Any long-term interim, alternative route must be approved by VicRoads or the local council as suitable for school bus traffic in all weather conditions.

A road or bridge in need of repair should be reported to VicRoads or the local council for urgent attention. If doubt exists as to whether a road has become unsuitable for school bus traffic, the advice of the local council or VicRoads must be obtained by the coordinating school or bus operator as soon as possible and provided to PTV.

A bus service should not be withdrawn from a section of a route except:

- in cases of emergency
- when the appropriate road authority is unable to certify that the route is suitable for school bus traffic in all weather conditions.

Pupil-free days

School bus services may not operate when a coordinating government school has a pupil-free day. In circumstances where 50 per cent of government school students who access the bus network still require transport, the coordinating school can agree to operate the bus network. If the coordinating school is closed in this situation, an agreement needs to be made with a client school to act in the coordinating role for that day. PTV and the STU should be notified of this agreement. If a coordinating school determines that school buses will not operate, schools with students requiring transport may wish to contact PTV directly to explore alternatives for transport.

Coordinating schools must provide advice within a reasonable time period to client schools, bus operators and families as to when the bus services will not be running.

The monthly *Contractor Payment Claim* must be checked by the coordinating principal to ensure that such days are not included.

Orientation days

Students may be permitted to travel on a school bus to attend a school orientation day if there is space after all students with a higher priority of access have been accommodated. There must be no additional cost incurred by PTV.

Approval must be granted prior to travel to an orientation day. An application to travel must be completed and submitted to the coordinating principal.

Excursions and delays

It is expected that students absent from school on excursions or sports activities will be returned to school prior to the scheduled bus departure times. Should unforeseen circumstances delay a number of students in returning from an excursion, the coordinating principal must decide if the bus service will operate as scheduled.

Factors that will influence the decision are:

- the number of students from other schools requiring the service
- the number of students delayed on the excursion
- the likely length of the delay.

The principals of client schools using the service should be advised if the delay is likely to be significant. Buses should not be unduly delayed for the convenience of a few. Where excursions are planned to return after the scheduled departure time of buses, it is the school's responsibility to ensure provision is made for those students who rely upon the school bus service.

PTV will not incur any additional expense for the carriage of students unable to use their normal homeward bus service due to returning late from an excursion.

Appendix 1 – Glossary

This glossary is intended to assist the users of this document in understanding the terms that have been used throughout this document.

Ad-hoc travel

A student that requires occasional travel may be considered as ad-hoc. Ad-hoc travel can be used for, not limited to; sports training, part time work, social travel to fellow students residence etc.

Ad-hoc travel is at the coordinating principal's discretion to approve or decline.

Bus operator

A bus operator is a company or sole trader operating a bus service. For the purposes of the School Bus Program, a bus operator is a company or sole trader who is contracted by PTV to operate a school bus service along a specified route. Bus operators must be accredited with Transport Safety Victoria (TSV) and meet safety obligations under the *Bus Safety Act 2009*.

Client school

A client school is a school whose students use school buses provided under the School Bus Program but the school does not manage the bus service (this is the responsibility of the coordinating school).

Client school principal

The principal of a client school.

Contract vehicle

The contract vehicle is the vehicle specified in the contract between the bus operator and PTV for a particular bus route.

Coordinating principal

The principal of a coordinating school. The responsibilities of a coordinating principal are often delegated to a school bus coordinator.

Coordinating school

A school which is responsible for the management of the local bus network in the School Bus Program.

Dead running

The distance that PTV pays the operator for the vehicle to travel between the overnight garage and the first authorised pick-up point each morning, and the reverse in the afternoon.

DET

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Designated Neighbourhood School (DNS)

The Designated Neighbourhood School is generally the nearest school to a residential address. Some areas have regionally approved enrolment zones in which case DNS is defined by the school that a student at a particular residential address is zoned to. For the purposes of the School Bus Program, DET recognises the DNS to be the nearest school by shortest practicable route unless a regionally approved enrolment zone is in place.

Eligible student

A student who meets the eligibility criteria and is able to travel at no cost (meets criteria 1-3 in Section 2 of this document).

Exempt student

A student who is ineligible but fulfils one of the exempt categories and is therefore eligible to travel at no cost.

Fare paying student

A student who is ineligible and does not fulfil one of the exempt categories to travel at no cost. The student travels upon payment of a fare.

Ineligible student

A student who is not eligible and falls into either the exempt or fare paying categories.

Isolated area

Isolated areas are defined as locations that are geographically, professionally and personally isolating with limited logistic support, limited access to peers, in extreme climatic or cross-cultural environments.

Loadings

The number of students accessing a bus service. The coordinating principal must submit their annual anticipated loading data for their bus network to PTV by 31 October each year. This report details the number of students expected to travel on each service in the coming year.

Nearest appropriate school

The nearest 'appropriate' school for government school students is the nearest government school to a student's primary residence that is suitable at their year level, measured by the shortest practicable route.

The nearest 'appropriate' school for students attending non-government schools is determined by the denomination of the school. The nearest 'appropriate' school for non-government school students is the nearest non-government school to a student's primary residence of their chosen denomination that is suitable at their year level, measured by the shortest practicable route.

PTV

Public Transport Victoria.

School bus network

A school bus network is made up of all the services coordinated by a particular school. The network has one coordinating school and, where applicable, numerous client schools.

Shortest practicable route

The shortest practicable route between the student's residence to the main entrance of the school/campus they attend is measured using all-weather public roads drivable by car.

Spur extension

A spur extension is a section of a bus route where the bus moves off the line of the route and returns back the way it came to continue on the line of the route.

Student Transport and Family Allowances Branch

The Student Transport and Family Allowances Branch is made up of two units; the Conveyance Allowance Unit (CAU) and the Student Transport Unit (STU).

STU

The Student Transport Unit within DET.

Victorian Student Pass (VSP)

The VSP is a public transport concession ticket which entitles the student to unlimited travel on regional bus services, V/Line train and coach services (except for special or chartered services), and metropolitan trains, trams, and buses, operating wholly within Victoria.

Appendix 2 – Exemption Case Studies

Below are illustrated examples to assist in the understanding of several situations where students may be eligible for an exemption.

In these illustrations, School A is the nearest school and School B is the further school.

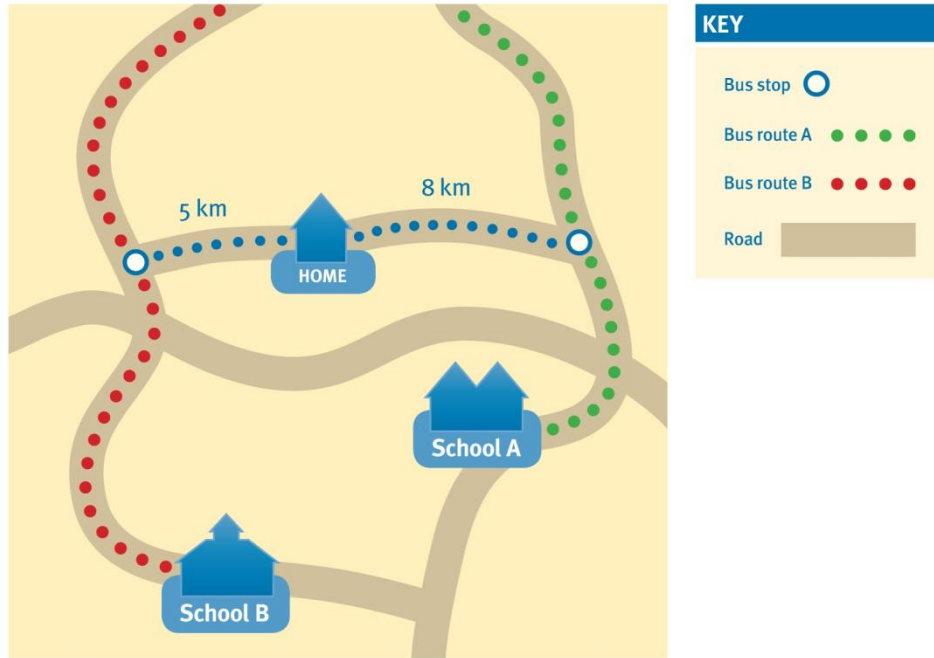
Case 1 – Government students residing 4.8 km or more from a bus route to nearest government school

Students residing 4.8 km or more from a bus route to their nearest government school may be permitted to travel at no cost on a service with a bus stop closer to their residence travelling to an alternative school. The alternative service may take the student to the next nearest school or further if no service to the next nearest school is available. The closer bus service may be within 4.8 km of the student's residence.

Case 1a – The bus route to the next nearest school is less than 4.8 km from a student's residence but closer than a route to the nearest government school.

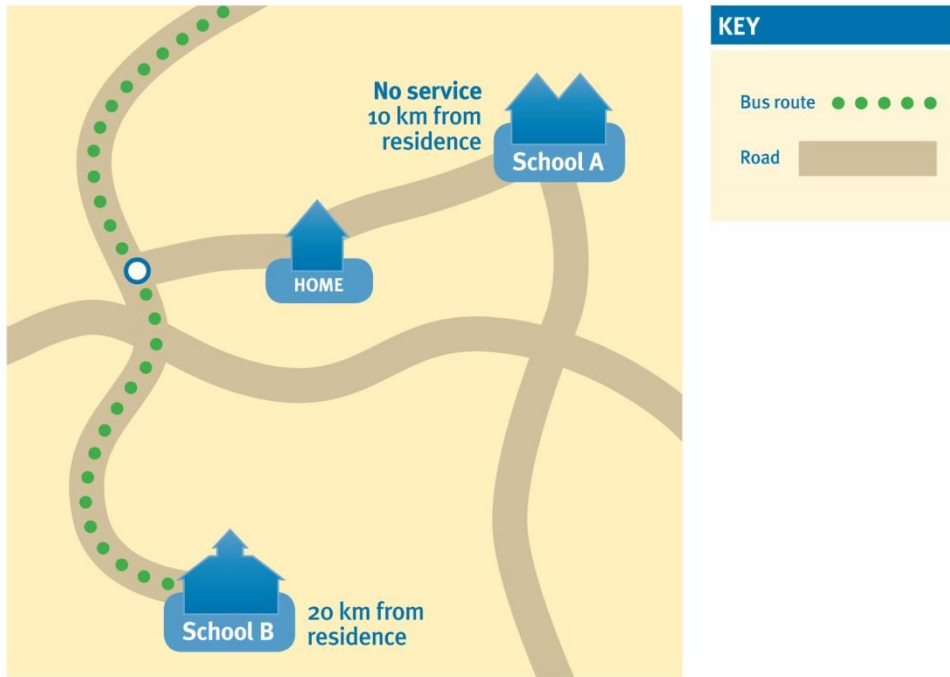


Case 1b – Next nearest bus route is 4.8 km or more from a student’s residence but closer than a route to the nearest government school.



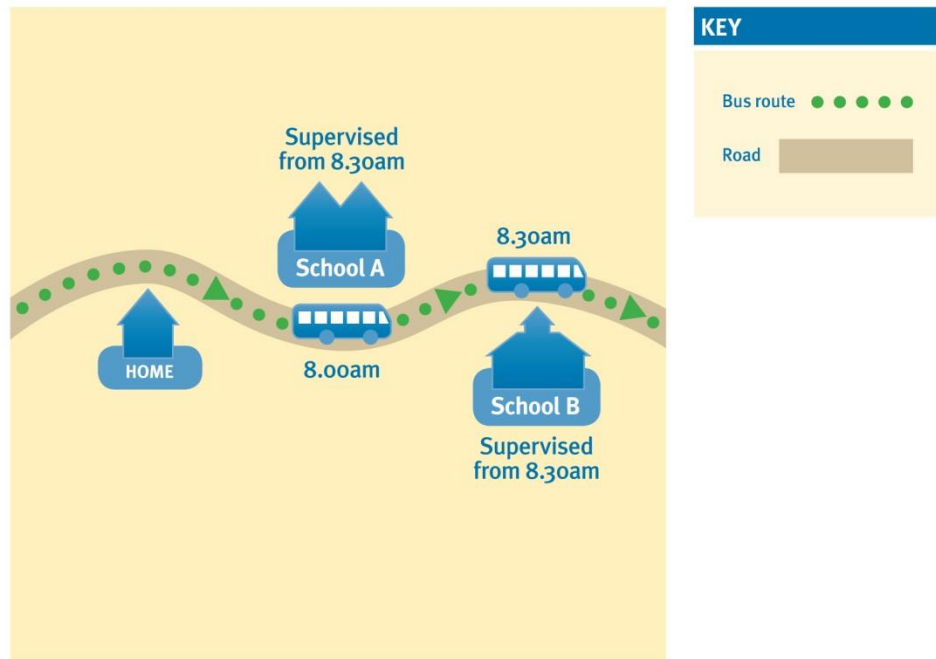
Case 2 - No service to nearest government school

Students residing in an area with no bus service running to their nearest school may be permitted to access a bus service running to their next nearest school at no cost. Note: this case study does not apply for non-government schools.



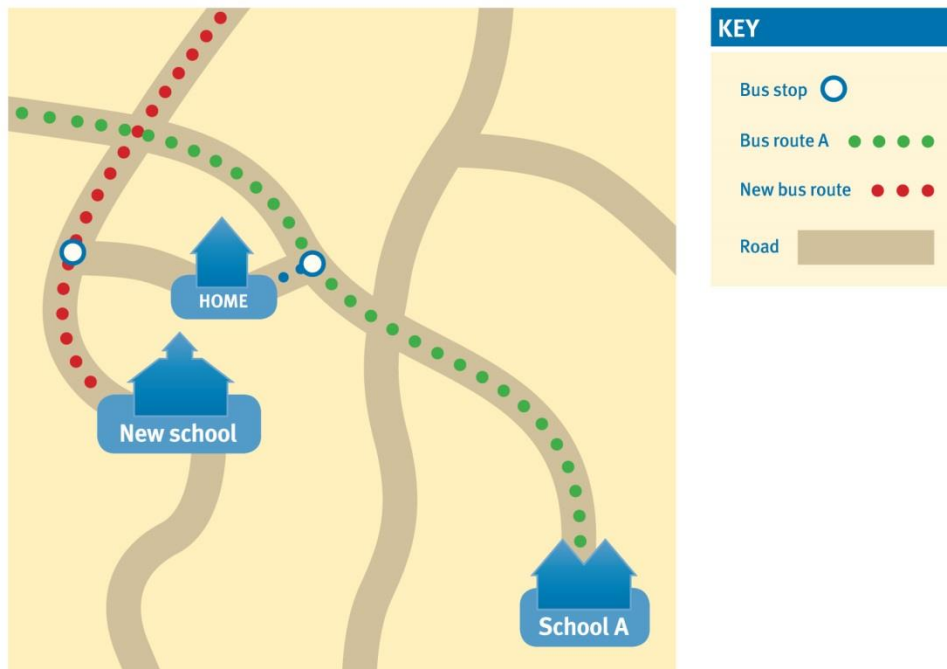
Case 3 - Unsupervised government primary school

Some bus services may pass a government primary school before staff are in attendance. As there is no supervision available at the school at the time students would be dropped-off students may be permitted to travel to their next nearest government primary school.



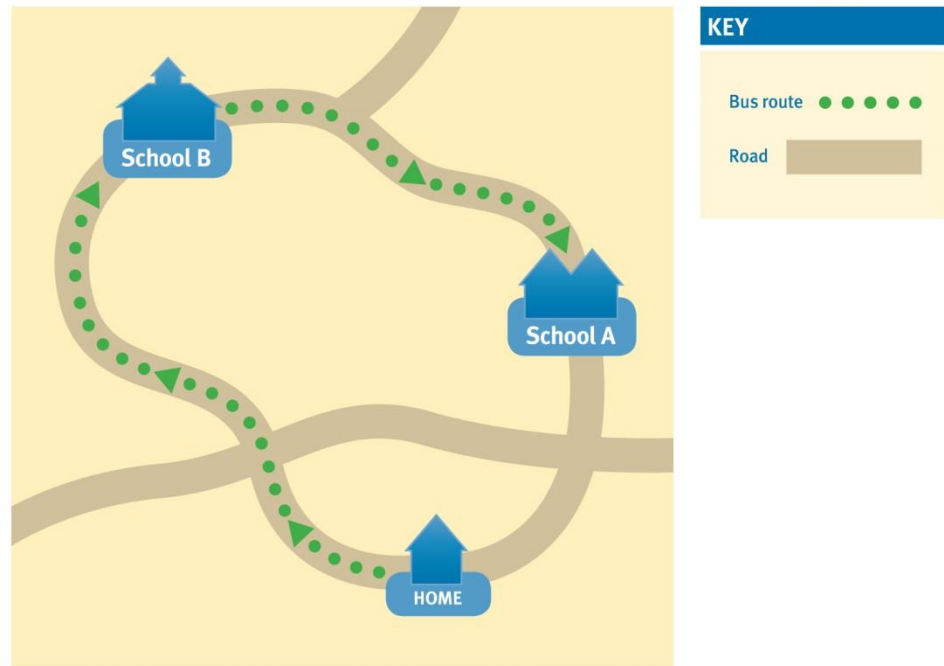
Case 4 - New government or non-government school opens closer to student's residence

Students enrolled at a school that ceases to be their nearest due to new school opening are still eligible to access a bus service to their current school at no cost.



Case 5- Round bus route

In certain areas, bus routes may operate in a loop. In these circumstances a student may pass their next nearest school before the bus stops at their nearest school. In this situation the eligibility is still determined by the shortest practicable route, despite the route taken by the bus and a student must attend their nearest school to travel at no cost.



Appendix 3 – Contact Details

Department of Education Training (DET)

The Student Transport Unit sits within the Student Transport and Family Allowances Branch (STFAB), and is located at 2 Treasury Place, East Melbourne 3002.

GPO Box 4367, Melbourne 3001

Phone: (03) 9637 2200

Email: student.transport@edumail.vic.gov.au

School website: www.education.vic.gov.au/studenttransport

Parent website: www.education.vic.gov.au/travellingtoschool

Public Transport Victoria (PTV)

Public Transport Victoria (PTV) and is located at 750 Collins Street, Docklands 3008

Phone: 1800 800 007

Email: schoolbus@ptv.vic.gov.au

Journey planner advice on the public transport options available for students can be found on the PTV website: www.ptv.vic.gov.au

Appendix 4 – Privacy Information

The release of any personal information concerning students, including their names or addresses, must be in accordance with the *Health Records Act 2001* and the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* and the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

Parents'/guardians' consent for the release of information to PTV must be obtained during the school's enrolment processes and when completing the *Application for Permission to Travel* form. This information is used for the planning and operating of transport services.

Schools must only use personal information for the purpose detailed above or when required by law.