

# School Bus Program

## Policy and Procedures

November 2013



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# 1 Introduction

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

Categories of eligibility determine whether a student travels at no cost or travels upon the payment of a fare. 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.

The School Bus Contracts Team of Public Transport Victoria (PTV) administers the School Bus Program as directed by this policy and procedures document and holds the contracts with bus operators. 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 School Bus Program 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 November 2013 and replaces all previously published procedural guidelines for the School Bus Program (previously called the School Contract Bus Program).

This policy is only applicable to the School Bus Program (services operating under school bus service contracts with PTV). The Conveyance Allowance Program (CAP) and the Students with Disabilities Transport Program (SDTP) have separate policies, which should be referred to.

## 2 Criteria determining eligibility to access the School Bus Program

This section explains the criteria used to determine a student's eligibility to access a bus in the School Bus Program. A student must meet all of the criteria detailed below to be eligible to travel at no cost.

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 closest school bus service. This applies to both students applying to access the School Bus Program at no cost and to fare paying passengers. Where school and public services overlap, DET and PTV allocate students to both types of services to ensure 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
- Cases on their merits.

### **Change of address**

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

### **Priority of passengers**

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

- First priority – eligible government school students
- Second priority – eligible non-government school students
- Third priority – students with exemptions (both government and non-government school students)
- Fourth priority – fare paying passengers (see fare paying section for order of priority).

### **Sibling entitlement**

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 family member granted an exemption are not automatically granted an exemption of their own. A separate application must be submitted to the coordinating school to seek an exemption for each family member.

### **Access to more than one bus service**

Students may only access one bus service unless permission 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 the primary residential address to the school.

Students who live in a shared custody situation are only eligible to travel at no cost to their closest school from their primary residential address. If students need to catch a different bus to school from their secondary residence, they may only catch that bus subject to approval from the coordinating principal and upon payment of the designated bus fare.

An example of where a student may seek an exemption to this requirement is if they are attending a registered training organisation or other DET-recognised training program that requires them to commute to an alternative location for some of the week.

## Criteria 1 - Closest appropriate school

### Government schools

To access a school bus at no cost, government primary and secondary school students must attend their closest school/campus by the shortest practicable route appropriate to their year level.

### School enrolment zones

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

An enrolment zone must be approved by the DET regional director and strictly limit entitlement to enrol in a school to only those students who reside in a defined geographical area. Any arrangement that allows students to enrol in a school from outside a zone is not recognised under this policy. Evidence of regional approval of the zone must be provided to the coordinating school by the client school.

### Refused entry to closest government school

If entry to the closest 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 closest school for the purposes of this program. Students in this category are therefore eligible to travel at no cost. Evidence of refused entry from all closer schools is required to be submitted with the application to travel. This is usually in the form of a letter from the principal of the closer school.

### Students in Years 11 and 12

If two or more subjects chosen for VCE are not available at their closest school/campus, Year 11 and 12 students may travel to a more distant school and are still considered to be attending their closest school for the purposes of this program. Students in this category are therefore eligible to travel at no cost. Evidence that subjects are not provided by closer schools is required to be submitted with the application to travel. This is usually in the form of a letter from the principal of the closer school.

### Single sex government schools

Students attending their closest appropriate single sex government school/campus are considered to be attending their closest school for the purposes of this program. Students in this category are therefore eligible to travel at no cost.

### Attending a DET-recognised accelerated learning program

Students attending a DET-recognised Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) program are considered to be attending their closest government school/campus.

A list of SEAL programs can be found at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/learningdev/Pages/seal.aspx>

Students in this category are therefore 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 closest government school/campus, regardless of another government school of the same year levels being closer. Students in this category are therefore eligible to travel at no cost.

#### School amalgamation or opening

Students enrolled at a government school/campus that ceases to be their closest due to an amalgamation or school opening are still considered to be attending their closest government school/campus for the purposes of this program. Students in this category are therefore eligible to travel at no cost.

#### Non-government schools

The closest 'appropriate' school for students attending non-government schools is determined by the denomination of the school. The Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007 provide scope for the Minister for Education to provide travel assistance to students attending their closest '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'.

For the purposes of the School Bus Program and this document, the term 'closest school' means closest 'appropriate' school in the non-government school context.

To access a school bus at no cost, non-government primary and secondary school students must attend their closest appropriate school/campus appropriate to their year level.

Non-government school students will be approved to travel subject to spare seating being available. Non-government school students cannot, on their own, form a case for the provision of an additional school bus service. Upon approval, in conjunction with government school students, 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.

#### Refused entry to closest appropriate non-government school

If entry to the closest appropriate non-government school/campus is refused on the grounds the school is at capacity, students may travel to the next nearest school of that denomination and still be considered to be attending their closest school for the purposes of this program. Students in this category are therefore eligible to travel at no cost. Evidence of refused entry from all closer 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 the closer school.



#### Students in Years 11 and 12

If two or more subjects chosen for VCE are not available at their closest appropriate school/campus, Year 11 and 12 students may travel to a more distant school of that denomination and are still considered to be attending their closest school for the purposes of this program. Students in this category are therefore eligible to travel at no cost. Evidence that subjects are not provided by closer schools is required to be submitted with the application to travel. This is usually in the form of a letter from the principal of the closer school.

#### Single sex non-government schools

Students attending their closest appropriate single sex non-government school/campus are considered to be attending their closest appropriate school for the purposes of this program. Students in this category are therefore 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 non-government school is considered to be attending their closest appropriate school/campus for the purposes of this program, regardless of another non-government school of the same year levels and denomination being closer. Students in this category are therefore eligible to travel at no cost.

#### School amalgamation or opening

Students enrolled at a non-government school/campus that ceases to be their closest due to an amalgamation or school opening are still considered to be attending their closest appropriate school for the purposes of this program. Students in this category are therefore eligible to travel at no cost.

### Criteria 2 – Reside 4.8 km or more from the school

To access a school bus at no cost, students must reside 4.8 km or more from the school/campus they attend. This distance is measured as the shortest practicable route from the gate or driveway of a student's residence to the main school entrance. The shortest practicable route is measured using all-weather public roads drivable by car.

### 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 School Bus Program, students are eligible for assistance if they are aged between five and 18 years of age at the time of their application, and reside in Victoria.

## Exemptions from the eligibility criteria

The coordinating principal may approve exemptions from the eligibility criteria if the number of bus seats available exceeds the number of eligible students. These exemptions are described below. The coordinating principal determines which exempted students have priority. The coordinating principal should give preference to students with special needs or who have the greatest distance to travel. If after applying these criteria there is more available seating, preference should be given to the youngest students.

### Students reside less than 4.8 km from the closest school

A government or non-government school student attending the closest 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 students with prior rights 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 prior rights to travel 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 students with prior rights 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 prior rights to travel 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.
- Students aged 18 or over who are progressing from school directly to further education or training.
- Recent arrivals to Australia.
- Those aged over 18 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 12) for more information.

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

When an application is approved the student/apprentice will be issued with a bus pass. If a bus seat is not currently available, the student will be placed on a waiting list. 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 students with prior rights 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 prior rights 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 director of the pre-school attended 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 director 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. Students attending Victorian schools who reside interstate may be permitted to travel at no cost on school bus services. The coordinating principal may approve an application to travel subject to all of the following conditions:

- The student is attending their closest school.
- Seating is available on the service after all students with prior rights 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 prior rights to travel or a smaller vehicle is engaged for the service.

### **Ad-hoc student passengers**

A student requiring travel on a school bus 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) are eligible under the standard criteria.
- 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.

A student travelling less than three days per week may be considered an ad-hoc passenger.

### **Siblings of eligible bus users**

A student who wishes to attend a school other than their closest 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 granted are considered on a case-by-case basis. The coordinating principal may approve an application to travel 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.
- The younger sibling resides 4.8 km or more from any closer school.

### 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 students with prior rights 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.
- The teacher intends to use the bus daily.
- 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 prior rights to travel 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 the bus route to their closest 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. The coordinating principal may approve an application to travel subject to all of the following conditions:

- Seating is available on the service after all students with prior rights 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.

If a service to the closest school is expanded and becomes closer than the service used under this exemption, students bypassing their closest school are eligible to continue to do so until they have completed their time at the school. New applications are subject to standard eligibility criteria.

#### No service provision to closest school

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

- Seating is available on the service after all students with prior rights 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.

If the closest school gains a service, students bypassing the school are eligible to continue to do so 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 the next nearest government primary school.

The coordinating principal may approve an application subject to all of the following conditions:

- Seating is available on the service after all students with prior rights 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.

If the closest government primary school implements supervision arrangements, current students bypassing the school are eligible to continue to do so until they have completed their primary school education. New applications are subject to standard eligibility criteria.

#### Case studies

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

## Fare paying students

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 schools who then forward the fares to the STU on behalf of the school bus network. Current fare rates as determined by PTV can be found on the DET website:

**[www.education.vic.gov.au/studenttransport](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studenttransport)**

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

A fare paying student 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 a term-by-term basis.

### **1. Students attending their next nearest government school**

A government school student who is eligible for transport assistance to the closest 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 term fare as determined by PTV is paid prior to travel commencing.
- Seating is available on the service after all students with prior rights have been accommodated.
- The student 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 prior rights to travel 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 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 term fare as determined by PTV is paid prior to travel commencing.
- Seating is available on the service after all students with prior rights have been accommodated.
- The student 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 prior rights to travel or a smaller vehicle is engaged for the service.



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

A student ineligible to access a service at no cost to their closest 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 term fare as determined by PTV is paid prior to travel commencing.
- Seating is available on the service after all students with prior rights have been accommodated.
- The student 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 prior rights to travel 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:

- They live further than 1.6 km from suitable public transport.
- Seating is available on the service after all students with prior rights have been accommodated.
- The applicant (and parent/guardian if under 18 years of age) accepts the conditions of travel and the authority of the coordinating principal.
- They pay the fare in advance as determined by PTV.
- 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 prior rights 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 term.

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

## Other exceptional circumstances or appeals or special cases

If a parent or guardian wishes to apply for special consideration or appeal a transport decision, they must make an application through their school. Government schools should forward the information to their regional office seeking their endorsement. Catholic and Independent schools must contact the STU by emailing [student.transport@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:student.transport@edumail.vic.gov.au).

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

Prior to the panel hearing, further advice may be sought by the STU from the DET regional director of where the application was lodged by a government school. If the arrangement is a result of a recommendation of a student support group, as defined by the student engagement guidelines, supporting documentation from this group can be provided. Individual education and/or behavioural plans must be provided to substantiate the process of considering flexible learning options has taken place and that the transfer to another school is the most appropriate course of action for the student.

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.

### 3 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 School Bus Contracts 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 School Bus Program 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 must be established in consultation with bus operators and endorsed by the DET regional office, PTV, Country Fire Authority (CFA), Police, VicRoads and other emergency services.

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 School Bus Program Emergency Management Operational Guidelines document is available at:  
**[www.education.vic.gov.au/studenttransport](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studenttransport)**

## Responsibilities of coordinating schools

### Travel approval

Coordinating principals are responsible for coordinating and approving 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 made 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.

### Data collection, procedures and standards of behaviour

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 passengers based on approved applications to travel
  - students' residential addresses
  - seat allocations
  - authorised bus stops
  - emergency contact information for each passenger
  - 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.



### Anticipated loadings

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. This information is used by PTV as a planning tool to ensure an appropriate and efficient school bus service provision throughout Victoria.

It is essential that this information is maintained and up-to-date. 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.

### Student behaviour and discipline on school buses

The coordinating principal is responsible for the discipline of students and the communication of acceptable standards of behaviour on school buses to students and families. Coordinating principals should meet with students to discuss issues as they arise, emphasise the need for safety on school buses and investigate complaints. The coordinating principal has the authority to take disciplinary measures for misbehaviour, including temporary or permanent suspension from bus travel.

If a coordinating principal is sufficiently concerned about a student's behaviour, the coordinating principal will issue a *Notice of concern – behaviour* to the relevant student or parent/guardian. The coordinating principal must maintain adequate and up-to-date documentation, such as reports surrounding incidents of misbehaviour, which may support decisions made in relation to discipline. 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 should be on duty to supervise students during the arrival and departure of school buses at school and at feeder interchanges beyond the school. Where practicable, bus loading areas should be 'out of bounds' to all non-bus users. Parents/guardians setting down or picking up their children at the school should be directed away from the bus loading area.

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.

### Collection of bus fares

Students not attending their closest school and members of the public may be required to pay a bus fare. Fare payment must be in advance of travel. Students/members of the public who fail to pay in advance will not be able to access school bus services.

It is the responsibility of each school to collect fares on behalf of their students. A coordinating school principal is responsible for collecting bus fares relating only to their students and members of the public. Client school principals must collect bus fares from their students and pass these on to their coordinating schools to forward to the STU.

### GST and tax invoices

As schools are collecting bus fares on behalf of DET, the management and accounting for GST is the responsibility of DET. Fares are GST inclusive.

While schools must invoice families for fare payment, a tax invoice does not need to be issued as each bus trip is treated as a separate taxable supply and falls below the threshold of where a tax invoice needs to be issued. DET is also not required to issue tax invoices to schools for the fares being collected on its behalf for the same reason.

### Recording of collected fares in CASES 21

All schools are to record collected fares in CASES 21 using general ledger code 74403 – Non Profit Trading Operation with GST type NS6.

### Payment of fare money to DET

When coordinating schools forward collected fares on behalf of their school bus network to DET accounts receivable, the transaction is to be recorded in CASES 21 using general ledger code 89102 – Non Profit Trading Operations with GST type NP6.

Coordinator schools are to submit a cheque each term to the STU (not regional offices). The cheque is to be made out to DET and clearly marked 'School Bus Fares' and addressed to Accounts Receivable, DET, GPO Box 4367, Melbourne 3001. For accountability purposes, a list of students from whom the fares have been received and the period to which they relate must accompany the cheque.

### Risk management and incident reporting

A duty of care is owed to students accessing PTV provided bus services, which requires proactive management of the risks associated with travelling to and from school.

School staff must continually monitor risks that may be associated with a bus service such as:

- The actual or potential for challenging behaviours during transit.
- The actual or potential for conflict between students.
- The ability of students to access and alight from the bus.
- Actual or potential hazards surrounding the location of a bus stopping point, taking into account:
  - the mobility needs of the child
  - the proximity of the stopping point to other hazards.

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 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. Consultation with stakeholders is a critical step for ensuring the best outcomes.

If there is an incident or near miss involving a bus service, schools should immediately contact the STU and PTV for advice on whether the incident is notifiable and what steps the school should take.

#### **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**

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 that 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. Where appropriate, the coordinating principal should provide the bus operator with further details of the medical condition. The parents/guardians will agree on a suitable medical management plan with the coordinating principal and the bus operator.

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 school 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 (except in a temporary emergency).
- An accident directly, indirectly or incidentally related to the operation of a School Bus Program 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 and endorse the claim for payment. Endorsement or non-endorsement should be provided within two days of the claim being submitted. The bus operator is then responsible for forwarding it to PTV for payment.

## Responsibilities of client schools

### Travel approval

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 made 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.

### 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 in October 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.

### Supervision

A member of staff should be on duty to supervise students during the arrival and departure of school buses at each client school. Where practicable, bus loading areas should be 'out of bounds' to all non-bus users. Parents/guardians setting down or picking up their children at the school should be directed away from the bus loading area.

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.

### Collection of bus fares

Students not attending their closest school and members of the public may be required to pay a bus fare. Fare payment must be in advance of travel. Students/members of the public who fail to pay in advance will not be able to access school bus services.

It is the responsibility of each school to collect fares on behalf of its students. Both government and non-government client school principals must collect bus fares from their students and pass these on to coordinating schools to forward to DET.

#### [GST and tax invoices](#)

As schools are collecting bus fares on behalf of DET the management and accounting for GST is the responsibility of DET. Fares are GST inclusive.

While schools must invoice families for fare payment, a tax invoice does not need to be issued as each bus trip is treated as a separate taxable supply and falls below the threshold of where a tax invoice needs to be issued. DET is also not required to issue tax invoices to schools for the fares being collected on its behalf for the same reason.

#### [Recording of collected fares in CASES 21 – government schools only](#)

All client schools are to record collected fares in CASES 21 using general ledger code 74403 – Non Profit Trading Operation with GST type NS6.

When client schools forward collected fares to their coordinator school the transaction is to be recorded in CASES 21 using general ledger code 89102 – Non Profit Trading Operations with GST type NP6.



## 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 service provider drivers while engaged in delivery of a service.
- Advise schools if any risk arises during the delivery of a service or bus stopping point.

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.
- 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.

### Payment of contracts

Bus operators must prepare a monthly 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 who is unauthorised for travel must be accepted on the bus and reported to the coordinating principal once the bus arrives at school.

### Contract variations

Any reduction in authorised dead, live or adverse running distance should be reported to PTV. Contracts incorporate remuneration for dead, live or adverse running 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. 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.

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 must be considered a measure of last resort. The bus driver should first speak with the coordinating principal or if that person is not contactable, the client school principal, before ejecting a student. Both coordinating and client school principals' phone numbers must be provided to the bus operator and driver for during and after school hours.

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

#### 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.
- Comply 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 Cases Consideration panel.
- Secondary role of the management of school bus services during an emergency, as per the School Bus Program Emergency Management Operational Guidelines.
- 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 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 School Bus Program Emergency Management Operational Guidelines.

## Responsibilities of PTV

PTV is responsible for:

- Planning service needs.
- Contracting and managing service provision.
- Funding the bus service contracts used to School Bus Program.
- Reviewing school and operator compliance with the School Bus Program policy.
- Working with the STU on the management and governance of the School Bus Program.
- Secondary role in managing school bus services during an emergency, as per the School Bus Program Emergency Management Operational Guidelines.

## 4 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.

As indicated under the coordinating principal's responsibilities, they are required to complete their annual anticipated loading data to PTV each October. This information forms the basis for PTV's service planning for the following year. The completed data is required to be submitted to PTV by 31 October of 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.

Common permanent solutions to loading issues may include:

- A larger bus.
- Running an existing service for a second trip.
- Introducing a new bus service.
- Permanently changing the route.

PTV carry out 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>**

### 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. Applications for modifications to school bus services can be found on the DET website:

**[www.education.vic.gov.au/studenttransport](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studenttransport)**

And submitted by email to:

**[student.transport@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:student.transport@edumail.vic.gov.au)**



Ineligible/fare paying students cannot form part of a case for service modification.

### 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, political 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.

### Extension and variations to an existing service

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

- At least five eligible government school students (three in isolated areas) who all live at least 2.4 km from the nearest service 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 five eligible government school students (three in an isolated area) 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 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 do this by submitting a report detailing the reasons for the replacement vehicle to the STU. A report and details of the reason for replacement should be forwarded to PTV, including 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 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 must approve all bus stops before they are put in use.

### 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.

### 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 and approved by PTV.

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 prior rights 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.

## **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.

## **Closest appropriate school**

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

The closest ‘appropriate’ school for students attending non-government schools is determined by the denomination of the school. The closest ‘appropriate’ school for non-government school students is the closest 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.

## **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 Training.

## **Designated Neighbourhood School (DNS)**

The Designated Neighbourhood School is generally the closest 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 closest 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 that is not eligible but fulfils one of the exempt categories and is therefore eligible to travel at no cost.

**Fare paying student**

A student who is not eligible or exempt to travel at no cost. The student travels upon payment of a fare.

**Ineligible student**

A student who is not eligible or exempt to travel at no cost.

**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.

**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.

**SEAL program**

Select Entry Accelerated Learning Program is a program for gifted students capable of working at a faster pace and in greater depth than students of the same age. There are numerous programs working within mainstream schools across the state. A list of all DET recognised programs can be found at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/learningdev/Pages/seal.aspx>

**Shortest practicable route**

The shortest practicable route between the student's residence to 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.

**STU**

The Student Transport Unit within DET.

## Appendix 2 – Exemption case studies

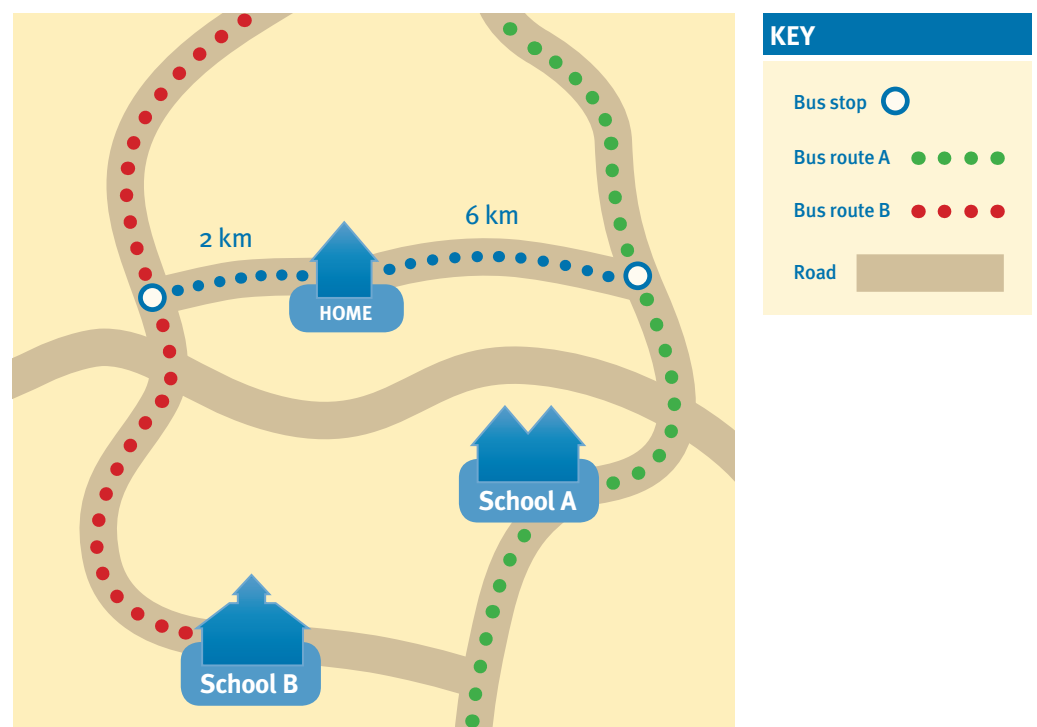
Below are illustrated examples to assist in the understanding of several situations where students may be eligible for an exemption.

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

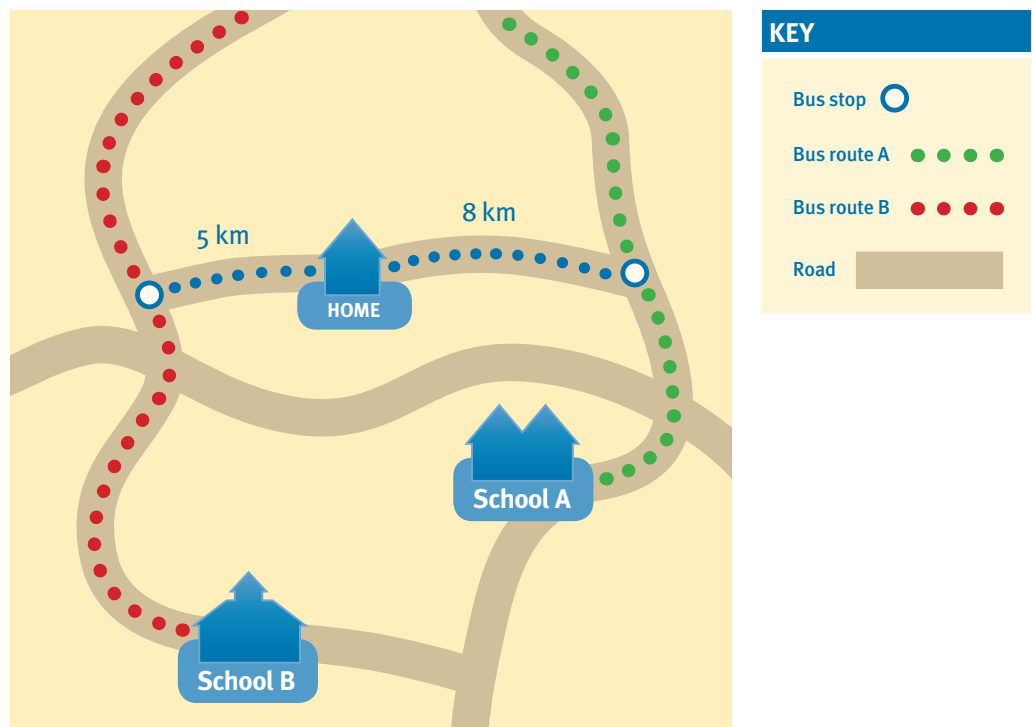
### Case 1 – Students residing 4.8 km or more from a bus route to closest government school

Students residing 4.8 km or more from a bus route to their closest government school may be permitted to travel at no cost on a service where a bus stop is closer to their residence and 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 closest government school.**



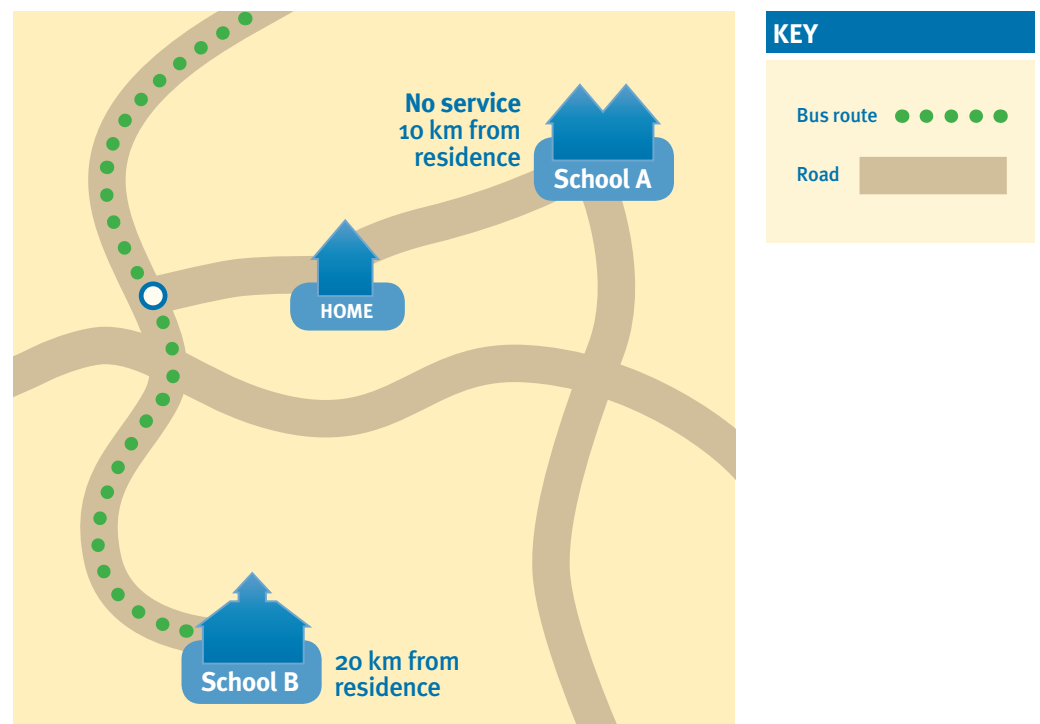
**Case 1b – Next nearest bus route is 4.8 km or more from a student’s residence but closer than a route to the closest government school.**





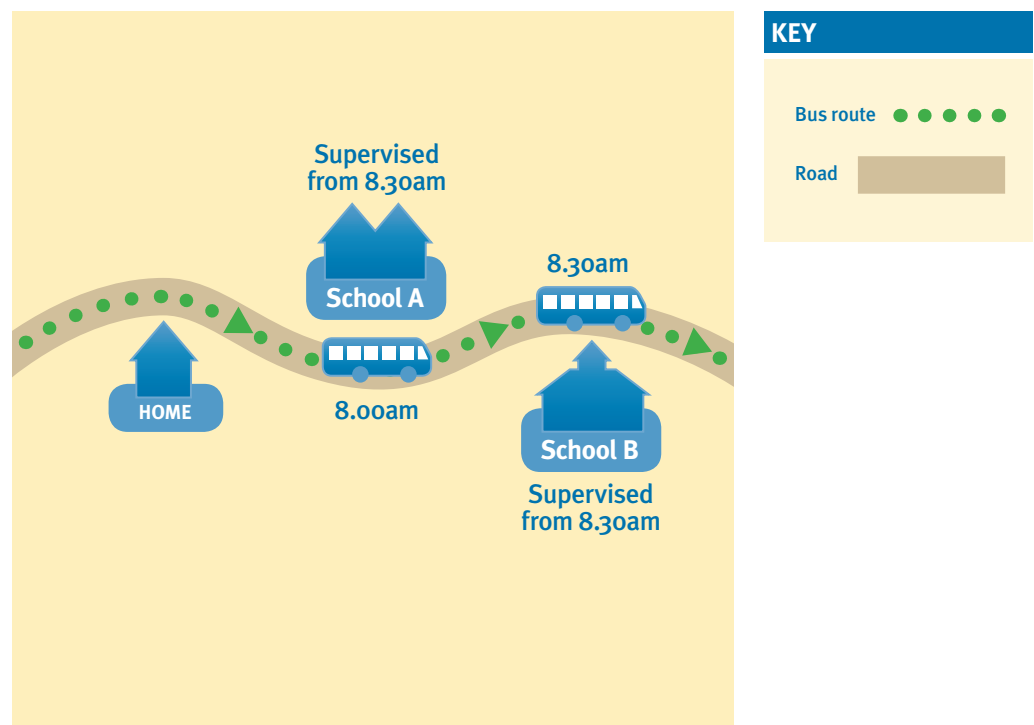
## Case 2 – No service to closest school

Students residing in an area with no bus service running to their closest school may be permitted to access a bus service running to their next nearest school at no cost.



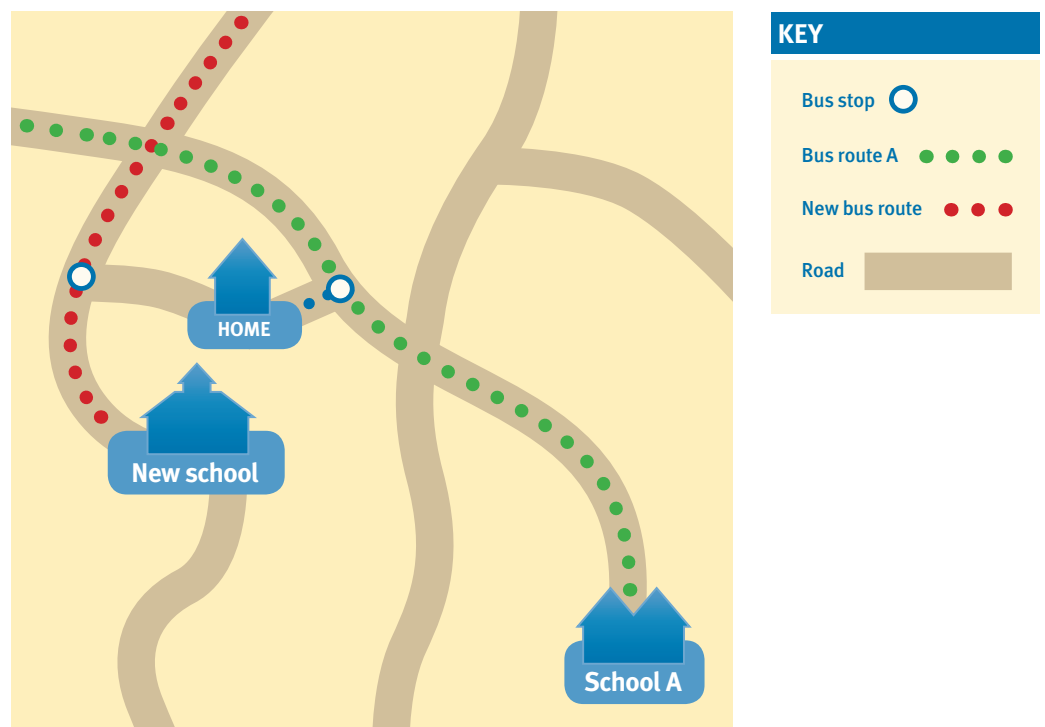
### Case 3 – Unsupervised government primary school

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.



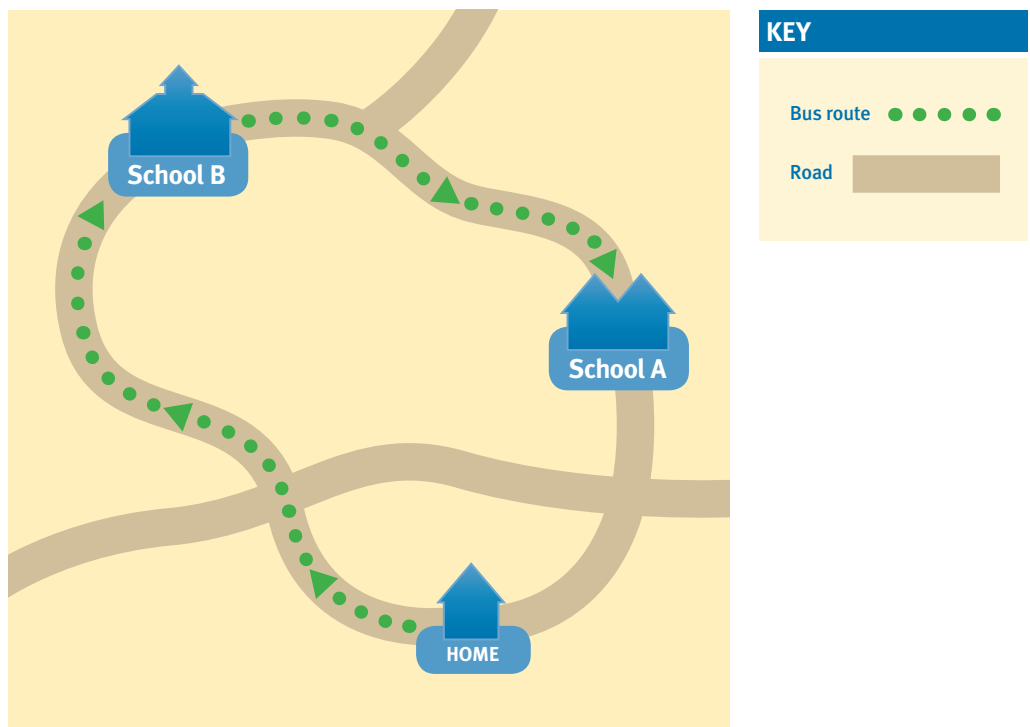
### Case 4 – New school opens closer to student’s residence

Students enrolled at a school that ceases to be their closest 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 closet 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 closest school to travel at no cost.



## Appendix 3 – Contact details

### Department of Education and 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.

Phone: **(03) 9637 2200**

Email: **[student.transport@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:student.transport@edumail.vic.gov.au)**

School website: **[www.education.vic.gov.au/studenttransport](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studenttransport)**

Parent website: **[www.education.vic.gov.au/travellingtoschool](http://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](mailto: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](http://www.ptv.vic.gov.au)**

## Appendix 4 – Privacy information

The release of any personal information concerning students, including their names or addresses, must be done in accordance with the *Information Privacy Act 2000*.

Parents'/guardians' consent for the release of information to PTV must be obtained during the school's enrolment processes and when completing the application to travel form.





