

PASSENGER TRANSPORT BRANCH

SCHOOL BUS SERVICE ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES

Context

The decision to procure new bus services, or vary existing bus services is governed by the *Passenger Transport Services Act 2011*. The Act requires that, in every case, a decision is subject to the Service Eligibility Guidelines.

State Growth complies with the Service Eligibility Guidelines when assessing whether requests to add new school bus services or vary existing services can be approved.

State Growth is currently undertaking a project to design a new public bus network across Tasmania. This project, known as the Bus Services Review project (formerly Project 2018), is the first comprehensive review of Tasmania's public transport system in ten years.

The Guidelines were approved by the Minister for Infrastructure for use by the Bus Services Review project. As the project's planned implementation date for new contracts has been delayed until 2020, any requests for new services or service variations will be considered as part of the broader service design and consultation process being undertaken by the project.

The Guidelines will be reviewed once the Bus Services Review is complete to ensure that they meet ongoing operational requirements.

Policy objective

The Government's overarching objective is to provide safe, affordable and equitable school bus services to students that meet reasonable transport needs efficiently and effectively within budget constraints.

Guiding principles for school bus services

1. A preference for active transport for short trips, taking into account infrastructure constraints.
2. School bus services are available to eligible students to attend their Nearest Appropriate School.
3. Eligible year 11 and 12 students will have access to school bus services so they may have choice in attending a specialist, city based college or continue their senior secondary education at the school where they undertook their secondary education utilising the same access to transport services they had at that school.
4. Eligible non-government school students will have access to Regular Passenger school bus Services.
5. Transport assistance provided to students will be applied in a cost effective and equitable manner.
6. School bus contractors must provide safe and high quality services to eligible students and have the certainty and confidence to invest appropriately in their fleets.
7. Application of a like services for like need approach, taking into account differences between urban and rural environments.

School Bus Service Eligibility Criteria (2019 Onwards)

I) Services only contracted to the Nearest Appropriate School

- a) Services and service extensions will only be contracted if the route:
 - i) Is to a state primary school, and is wholly within the local intake area of that primary school as defined by the Department of Education (DoE)¹; or
 - ii) Is to a local high school as defined by DoE², and is wholly within the local high schools feeder primary schools home areas; or
 - iii) To a specialist senior secondary college in Hobart, Launceston, Burnie or Devonport and is within the regional catchments for those schools determined by the Secretary of State Growth; or
 - iv) A combination of the above.
- b) These schools are collectively defined as the Nearest Appropriate Schools.
- c) With the exception of services to city based senior secondary colleges, services will not be contracted or extended if there is another suitable government funded Regular Passenger Service, to the requested school or another school, which can meet students' educational needs, and those existing services are, or can be, timetabled to drop off/pick up students within 30 minutes before or after school.
- d) Services and service extensions will also service nearby state, catholic and independent schools in the instances that:
 - i) They are within the same town, or if in an urban area, can be serviced without compromising the travel time and arrival/departure time of students to the core schools. These will be termed "clusters".
- e) Subject to specific exemptions approved by the Secretary of State Growth, services will not be contracted or further expanded in the instances that:
 - i) Students are being transported beyond their local area state primary, secondary or city senior secondary state school or school cluster to enable school of choice decisions.
- f) New bus services will not be introduced or extended:
 - i) In areas where there is an existing bus service, to a home area school, which meets the students' educational needs; or
 - ii) Where an existing Government funded Regular Passenger Service is already provided to the requested school or another school, which can meet students' educational needs; and
 - iii) Those existing services are (or can be) timetabled to drop off/pick up students 30 minutes before or after school.
- g) Exemptions to this section will be taken into consideration in the following specific circumstances:

¹ Refer to the Department of Education Secretary's Instruction No 2 for Enrolment from outside intake area for context and definitions of intake area and outside of intake area.

² *ibid*

- i) Where the Secretary of State Growth recommends to the Minister that an existing legacy service be contracted by exemption due to special circumstances, and the Minister agrees to the funding of this service as an exemption; or
- ii) Where the DoE Secretary, Catholic Education Office or a specific school requests a service to be continued, introduced or extended to cater for special circumstances and:
 - (1) the services meets the requirements of a Regular Passenger Service (RPS);
 - (2) the requesting party agrees to pay the additional cost of providing, continuing or extending this service; and
 - (3) there are no identified adverse consequences in providing this service.

2) Length of Route

- a) A regular passenger service will only be introduced in areas that are more than 5km from the school. This does not mean that a service will automatically be provided/extended if it is more than 5km from the school as all other criteria still need to be met.
- b) An extension to an existing route will only be provided to a point, which is greater than three kilometres from the schools being serviced or from an existing route and where it is more cost effective than the Department funding conveyance allowances for those eligible students on the extension.

3) Numbers of Students

- a) A new service must carry at least fifteen (15) students on a regular basis, including at least ten (10) students travelling to their Nearest Appropriate School.
- b) A bus service carrying less than ten (10) students on a regular basis including at least eight (8) students travelling to their nearest appropriate school for two consecutive years will be withdrawn subject to notice being given to the serviced schools prior to the end of the first year;
- c) Only students who would board the bus at least 3kms (by the most reasonable and efficient road or walking route) from the school will be counted as part of the required minimum.

4) Start points and Spurs

- a) The starting point for a service will be where six (6) students, including at least four (4) students travelling to their Nearest Appropriate School, would catch the service on a regular basis. The Secretary may waive this rule where:
 - i) The nearest safe turning point is further up the road; or
 - ii) The bus will continue further along the route anyway (e.g. to get to an overnight depot or because the route is driven in a circuit); or
 - iii) There is at least one additional student picked up for each additional kilometre driven and some form of hardship or travel challenge for at least some of those students exists; or
 - iv) When considering shortening a service, the students at the bus stop are in their last years of using the bus, in which case the bus will continue for that period to provide continuity of service; or
 - v) The shortening of the service will result in a greater cost in conveyance allowance than is saved in shortening the route; or

vi) the service is the only remaining regular passenger service to a rural school.

5) Active Transport

- a) As long as there are pedestrian facilities, students residing near their school should be encouraged to walk or ride to school where possible, particularly where:
 - i) The journey is less than 1.5km (approx. 15-20 minute walk or a 5-10 minute ride) to/from school; and
 - ii) There are safe road crossings to/from school.
- b) Students may be required to walk from a bus stop to the school they attend as long as there are safe and sufficient pedestrian facilities to enable this to occur and it is no longer than 1.5km. This does not mean that a service will automatically be provided/extended if a student has to walk longer than 1.5km, as all other criteria still need to be met.

6) Travel Times

- a) As far as possible, services will be scheduled for students to be dropped off/picked up at their nearest appropriate school which the service has been established to serve, no more than 30 minutes and no less than 5 minutes from start and finish times, unless this has resulted from a change in school start or finish times after a service has been established.
- b) Services will be scheduled for the same start and finish times every day of the school term and will not be altered for individual days.
- c) As far as possible, bus routes should be designed so that 90 percent of school students are home within an hour of school closure time.

7) Route Modifications

- a) Unless agreed by the majority of affected users of a service, extensions and modifications to services (particularly for school of choice/non-appropriate school) must not result in an increase to journey time of more than 5 minutes (across all extensions since the commencement of these guidelines), as this would disadvantage students traveling to their nearest appropriate school.
- b) In some cases, this may require the extension to be provided at the end of the journey.

8) Transfer Points/Interchanges

- a) Services may include a requirement for interchange (or multiple interchanges) with other Government-funded RPSs if the total waiting time across all interchanges is no longer than 30 minutes.
- b) Waiting time at interchanges does not include any waiting time at the originating bus stop (including the school for afternoon services).
- c) Transfer Points and Interchanges must be appropriate and safe to use.

Glossary

The purpose of this glossary is to assist users in understanding the key terms that have been used throughout this document.

TERM	DEFINITION
Active Transport	This is mainly walking or cycling as a form of transport.
Conveyance Allowance	A contribution towards the costs incurred by parents/carers who transport their children to school by private vehicle. Conveyance allowance is not designed to reimburse a family for the full cost of owning and operating their vehicle.
DoE	Department of Education.
Intake Area	As defined in the <i>Education Act 2016</i>
Eligible Student	A student who falls within the eligibility criteria in this document.
Minister	The Minister to whom the administration of the <i>Passenger Transport Services Act 2011</i> (Tas) has been admitted by the Governor of the State of Tasmania.
Public Transport Areas	The areas surrounding major metropolitan centres (such as those around Hobart, Launceston, Devonport and Burnie) in which the Government has established, operates, controls and subsidises a developed public transport system.
Regular Basis	Means three or more return trips per student per week.
Regular Passenger Service (RPS)	As defined in the <i>Passenger Transport Services Act 2011</i> .
Residence	A student's permanent residence or home whilst attending school full time. Note, where a student has separate/dual residences due to custodial arrangements, eligibility will be determined on a case by case basis.
Rural Student	A student who lives outside designated public transport areas – i.e. regional Tasmania.
School Bus Contractor	A bus company or sole trader who is contracted by the Department of State Growth to operate a school bus service along a specified route.
School	An education facility as designed and approved by DoE.
Spur	A section of an approved bus route that branches off from a main route and returns back the way it came to continue on the line of the route.
Eligible Student	A person who is a school student for the purposes of the Department of State Growth's Fare Structure