

Submission to the parliamentary inquiry into the use of school buses in rural and regional Victoria

June 2021

cfecfw.asn.au
@CFECFW
03 9614 1577
Level 5/50 Market
Street, Melbourne, 3000

The Centre respectfully acknowledges that we work on the traditional land of the Kulin Nation, and we acknowledge the Wurundjeri people who are the traditional custodians of this land. We pay respect to Elders past, present and those of the future. We acknowledge that we work on stolen land that was never ceded.

We appreciate and celebrate diversity in all its forms. We believe diversity of all kinds makes our teams, services, and organisation stronger and more effective.

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (the Centre) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the parliamentary inquiry into the use of school buses in rural and regional Victoria.

The Centre is the peak body for child and family services in Victoria. For over 100 years we have advocated for the rights of children and young people to be heard, to be safe, to access education and to remain connected to family, community, and culture. We represent over 150 community service organisations, students and individuals throughout Victoria working across the continuum of child and family services.

Our members work directly with children, parents, carers, and families experiencing disadvantage and hardship in rural and regional areas. The provision of reliable and safe transport options for people within regional Victoria is an issue that needs to be seriously considered and addressed as it limits engagement with services, education, and employment.

The lack of reliable and safe transport options can contribute to the continuation of the cycles of disadvantage and negative impacts on social determinants. There is also feedback that families would find the additional transport access positive, especially those families who may not have a vehicle and or may be faced with vehicle repairs etc.

The Centre contacted various organisations in its membership to gather information to support this submission. Organisations in Colac, Ballarat, Geelong, Gippsland, and Mildura contributed.

The Centre's members who contributed to this submission agreed that to expand the use of school buses for rural and regional communities was a positive move. It would, however, be essential to ensure the safety of children and young people.

In our submission, we will focus on:

1. The main transport disadvantages and challenges experienced by young people in regional areas.
2. How mainstream school buses in regional areas can be made safer for children and young people.

Within regional Victoria there is a need for increased public transport services and options. School buses and minibuses could be utilised as additional public transport options during and after school hours.

Taxis are not a viable option in many country areas. For example, the cost of a bus from Daylesford to Ballarat is \$5 - \$7 and the cost of a taxi is \$75 - \$95. There is not the market force competition within regional areas or competition from ride share services such as Uber. An extended and expanded public bus service is the answer.

In Ballarat there needs to be more investment in connecting and aligning V-Line services with existing bus schedules and more frequent buses and for longer periods of service (buses in Ballarat can often stop operating after 6-7pm).

Utilising school buses has previously been a successful option. In Gippsland, the former Department of Transport and the Department of Planning and Community Development had developed a program where buses that were not used during the day were able to be utilised for community routes to assist all community members with transport options. This program is something that is required in regional and rural areas where there is a large geographical area being covered and distances between services is sparse.

1. The main transport disadvantages and challenges experienced by young people in regional areas.

The impact on education and employment

The issues raised by many of the Centre's members in rural and regional Victoria are similar. One important consideration because of the lack of public transport is the impact on education and employment for young people.

In rural and regional areas, the distance that is required to be travelled to attend secondary school (senior years) and employment, along with reliable transport options are the biggest transport issues which are being faced by young people and impacts educational attainment and participation in the workforce.

In Ballarat, buses from Daylesford to Ballarat and vice versa are only available once or twice a day. Many young people in Daylesford and other fringe towns rely on access to Ballarat for education, employment, and community connection.

There are two public bus services each morning if a young person wanted to work in Ballarat. One takes 57 minutes and the other takes 1 hr and 22 mins. There is only one bus returning to Daylesford in the afternoon and this takes 1 hr and 22 mins. (Appendix 1)

Daylesford has limited opportunities for employment for young people and usually only offers hospitality and retail opportunities. This means that there is quite limited social/financial mobility without travelling to other towns like Ballarat.

Ararat is a severely disadvantaged area and has a substantial issue with disengagement from education – there is a complete lack of services aimed at young people. Young people often have to move to Ballarat for employment, or they are left to manage with very limited support.

Another common issue is the infrequency of the bus services in rural and regional areas. There are infrequent transport (mainly bus) services with long waits in between buses across Ballarat and Central Highlands. Ararat and Daylesford are largely disconnected from other major towns, young people in Ararat must use a V-Line coach train to travel into Ballarat. There are also very limited employment opportunities (the main industry for employment is the Prison).

Geelong reported that the main disadvantage is the infrequency of the buses (particularly those expanding along the coast or country ones). There is only one bus service each morning that leaves from Apollo Bay at 5.51am and arrives in Geelong at 8.35am. The times of bus services are often inappropriate to support young people to access them. (Appendix 2)

By making school buses available for young people accessing employment in their closest town, this would ensure that there is a choice of bus service and more frequent buses.

Other challenges

Many regions have a large low socio-economic base and there is not always the opportunity for families to have more than one vehicle to assist the younger members of their families.

Another barrier that was identified in Geelong for families who need support from family services, is the cost of 'bus passes' to access a public bus to get to school. This can be prohibitive for some families. But for some families who live in country areas (southwest Victoria for example), there is no access to school buses at all for some young people who live further out. For those who do not attend the closest government school there are no buses available.

In Mildura, there is a large cohort of young people in out-of-home care with a lack in education in obtaining bus passes and timetables. Frequent placement changes mean that these young people require new travel arrangements, and this has an impact on their confidence in utilising public transport.

2. How mainstream school buses in regional areas can be made safer for children and young people.

Children's safety must be a consideration. There are multiple safety considerations with having school buses available to the public during the school run. Whilst it would be a positive opportunity for community members to be able to catch a school bus regionally, it would pose issues around potential safety concerns. There are safety considerations in regional areas in particular the smaller towns.

Other safety considerations:































- Children, youth, and vulnerable members of the community having long waits for the school bus in isolated locations.
- The consideration of time would also be a factor and issues of the buses arriving late to school if there are additional stops along the way.
- The impact on children and families if bus times change. This could mean that families and children may need to leave home earlier, have longer days etc.
- There could be additional responsibility placed on bus drivers to support the regulation of children and young people who may not be attending school when they are meant to be.
- People who may present under the influence accessing school busses.
- The additional responsibility of regulating any behaviours that may be inappropriate.
- The appropriate size of buses and the amount of seating required to ensure the buses are meeting the community need.
- Supervision and/or support at bus stops for school students.
- Social conflicts may cause issues while waiting for buses and many public bus routes stop within high traffic areas placing young people in areas of concern or where they are not comfortable.
- Adults meeting and interacting with school students with limited supervision. This could lead to grooming and/ or other forms of child abuse, or exposure to inappropriate adult behaviour.

Possible solutions:

- Seating areas for children and young people separate from adults.
- Ensuring buses are equipped with accessible facilities.
- For younger cohorts (primary school), on designated school busses, a safe adult person to be last person off in case there is an issue or something that needs following up.
- Contact details of parents for children who use the bus provided to the bus driver.
- Booster seats for small children.
- Closer and effective 'policing' of seatbelt requirements.
- In main bus ports, increased safety and supervision whilst mixing with the general public.
- All bus drivers and other staff be given robust and comprehensive child safe training, and that they are aware of their child safe roles and responsibilities.
- Parents, students, and the adult users of the school bus to be given child safety information (including information sessions), child safe policies and procedures including reporting processes.

Appendix 1





Public bus timetable Daylesford to Ballarat.

Daylesford, VIC, Australia	↔	Ballarat, VIC, Australia
<p><small>Schedules may be impacted due to COVID-19. For available services, please check directly with operators. Information & travel advice.</small></p>		
 4:45 PM → 6:07 PM	 > 	1h 22m
WED, 23 JUN		
 7:15 AM → 8:12 AM		57m
 7:25 AM → 9:17 AM	 > 	1h 52m
 4:45 PM → 6:07 PM	 > 	1h 22m
THU, 24 JUN		
 7:15 AM → 8:12 AM		57m
  7:25 AM → 8:50 AM	 > 	1h 25m
 4:45 PM → 6:07 PM	 > 	1h 22m
FRI, 25 JUN		
  6:15 AM → 10:09 PM <i>Arrives +2 days</i>	 > 	2 days 15h
 7:15 AM → 8:12 AM		57m
  7:25 AM → 8:50 AM	 > 	1h 25m

Appendix 2

McHarry's Bus lines Geelong

Public bus timetable Apollo Bay to Geelong

				
	AM	AM	PM	PM
Apollo Bay 2	5:51	9:41	....	2:38
Apollo Bay 1	5:53	9:43	....	2:40
Skenes Creek	5:56	9:46	....	2:43
Kennett River	6:16	10:06	....	3:03
Wye River	6:21	10:11	....	3:08
Lorne Hotel Inbound	6:41	10:31	1:25	3:28
Lorne Main Street Inbound	6:51	10:46	1:32	3:43
Eastern View	7:06	11:03	1:49	4:00
Fairhaven	7:09	11:06	1:52	4:03
Aireys Inlet 2 Inbound	7:12	11:09	1:55	4:06
Aireys Inlet 1 Inbound	7:14	11:11	1:57	4:08
Pt Roadknight Inbound	7:20	11:18	2:04	4:15
Anglesea 2 Inbound	7:23	11:21	2:07	4:18
Anglesea 2 Inbound	7:23	11:21	2:07	4:18
Anglesea Shops Camp Rd	7:26	11:26	2:11	4:23
Bellbrae 3 Jarosite Road Inbound	7:34	11:34	2:19	4:31
Bellbrae 2 Addiscott Road	7:36	11:36	2:21	4:33
Bellbrae 1 School Road Inbound	7:38	11:38	2:23	4:35
Bells Beach T/O	7:39	11:39	2:24	4:36
Jan Juc Duffields & Ocean Rds Inbound	7:41	11:41	2:25	4:38
Torquay Hol Park Inbound	7:44	11:44	2:28	4:41
Grossmans & Torquay Rds Inbound	7:46	11:46	2:30	4:43
Surf Coast Hwy & Merrijig Drive	7:48	11:48	2:32	4:45
Mt Duneed Rd Surf Coast Hwy	7:52	11:52	2:36	4:49
Pioneer Rd at Surf Coast Hwy	7:57	11:58	2:42	4:55
Waurm Ponds SC east bound	8:03	12:03	2:47	5:00
Belmont Coles near Strand Arcade	8:10	12:10	2:54	5:10
Geelong City Malop Street	8:25	12:27	3:07	5:26
Geelong Station	8:35	12:35	3:15	5:32