



T A V E R N E R
Research
Company

**School Student Transport Scheme
Pass Usage Survey & Special Study
Appendix I - IV**

prepared for:

**Ministry of Transport
227 Elizabeth Street
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APPENDIX I:

CHRONOLOGY OF KEY REVIEW AND REFORM EVENTS

CHRONOLOGY OF KEY REVIEW AND REFORM EVENTS¹

1904 A student travel scheme was initiated to ensure that in country areas where there were insufficient numbers to justify the establishment of a school, students were not denied the benefit of an education. Therefore, access to education was guaranteed by subsidising transport by boat and vehicle for students who did not live in close proximity to their nearest school.

Students were granted SSTS rail travel to the nearest government school or the nearest private or denominational school. Thus the scheme was extended to non-government schools to ensure access to education, but SSTS travel was still limited to the nearest appropriate school.

The scheme was structured primarily to subsidise special school buses and private travel arrangements for students in country areas. However, students in metropolitan areas were able to obtain a 50% concession on the full fare on Government bus and rail services.

1950 The subsidy paid to special school bus services was raised from 75% to 100%. In this way, SSTS transport was introduced for all country children who resided more than 2 miles (3.2km) from the nearest appropriate public or non-departmental school.

1956 A parental contribution was introduced in country areas for children travelling on passenger bus services. Parents were required to meet the initial cost of the term ticket and were then reimbursed the amount in excess of £2 5s (\$4.50) per term.

1966 The 1956 provision was removed so that all country students were conveyed to school free of charge provided they lived more than 2 miles (3.2km) walking distance from the nearest appropriate school.

1967 The scheme was extended to eligible students in Sydney who were subsidised for costs in excess of \$2.50 per term.

1968 Sydney students were provided with SSTS travel if they lived more than 2 miles (3.2km) walking distance from the nearest appropriate school, thus gaining equity with country students.

1972 The distance criterion for country students was reduced from 3.2km to 1.6km, while at the same time the requirement that travel be to the nearest appropriate school was abolished.

1973 Distance eligibility requirement was similarly reduced for Sydney students.

During the early 1970s the Government began to phase out selective high schools and only seven selective high schools were retained in Sydney.

¹ (Taken from the *Report on the School Student Transport Scheme: Challenges and Reform Approaches*. The Allen Consulting Group. Sydney: March 2001. P86-89)

1977 Infant students (ie kindergarten to year two) were provided with SSTS travel on government transport and private bus and ferry services regardless of the distance from home to school (ie no distance criteria was applied). All other students who lived further than 1.6km measured radially from school they attended, were entitled to SSTS travel. Any student within the 1.6km radius who had to walk more than 2.3km or for health or safety reasons was entitled to SSTS travel.

1983 The Russell Inquiry into the School Pupil Conveyance Scheme was carried out for the Ministers for Transport and Education. The principal conclusions of the Inquiry were that:

- An independent fares tribunal should be established to assess costs, fares, charter rates and subsidies for the industry;
- Payment for school transport to operators should be based on its true cost;
- The education administration should have commercial freedom to arrange the most economic and efficient transport to convey pupils to and from school;
- A parent contribution or some equivalent market mechanism is essential to restrict pass issue to genuine and regular users and gain the co-operation of the BCA in introducing payment for usage; and

Direct subsidies should be provided to operators to maintain essential but uneconomic services, in lieu of cross subsidisation.

1986 The Wran Government transferred administration of the scheme from the Department of School Education to the then Department of Motor Transport who adopted the term the School Student Transport Scheme (SSTS). When the Department took over the scheme a number of reforms were introduced including the reduction of sample sizes used for auditing bus operator returns. Returns were previously subjected to 100% auditing. In the early 1990's random sampling was introduced whereby a sample of 100 students was randomly selected for verification. This resulted in significant savings in staff costs.

1988 Administration of the scheme was transferred to the Department of Transport. In the same year the Minister for Education in the newly elected Greiner Government announced that he would increase the number of selective high schools. The Government also announced the elimination of zoning restrictions for attendance at Government high schools, thus allowing students to attend schools outside of their local area.

1989 In January, the administration of the TAFE Student Travel Scheme was transferred from the Department of Technical and Further Education to the Transport portfolio, to be consolidated with the administration of the SSTS.

The SSTS travel scheme had been extended to certain TAFE students to provide them with the same assistance that they would have received had they remained at secondary school. Currently, to be eligible, students must be more than 3.2km walking distance from their TAFE College, and must be under 18 years of age on 1 January in the year of application.

1989-90 Inquiry by the Auditor-General. A number of administrative reforms were made based on recommendations made by the Auditor-General to improve the quality of service and eliminate loopholes in the SSTS administration.

1990 Returns from commercial bus and ferry operators were transferred from paper to electronic form and payments made electronically rather than manually.

Dedicated Countrylink school coaches were introduced to directly transport students attending boarding school at the beginning and end of term.

1991 Nicholls Report — In an independent review of the financial performance of the NSW Government 1988-91 undertaken by Don Nicholls, it was stated that the only way to achieve an improvement in the budget performance of SSTS, would be a change in policy to reduce the benefits to levels more in line with those offered in other states.

Government selective high schools had increased to 69 (from seven in the early 70s)

1993 The Parliamentary Accounts Committee undertook a review into SSTS and recommended a comprehensive range of reforms. In summary the main reforms recommended were:

- Clearly stating the objectives and intended outcomes and identifying the Department which has responsibility for the scheme;
- Renewal of contracts of existing operators to remain conditional upon satisfactory performance;
- Payments for services should be based on the rates determined by the Price Waterhouse Model;
- performance of existing operators should be monitored to ensure that contract rates reflect fare levels that would prevail in a competitive environment;
- A survey should be conducted to determine the actual pass usage rate and to base payments to operators on the revised rate;
- The private vehicle subsidy rate should be reassessed to reflect the actual cost of operation of vehicles;
- The Government Prices Tribunal (since renamed as IPART) should investigate the cost to the Government of the provision of public transport, and include the cost of private operators. The question of cross subsidisation in relation to school student fares should be considered by IPART. Cross subsidies should be transparent to ensure accountability;
- School bus safety should be referred to the Staysafe Committee;
- A formal consultation mechanism should be established between the Departments of School Education and Transport for the consideration of School Education decisions which have transport implications;
- Parental contributions should be introduced, except for those who receive a welfare supplement;
- Provision of transport to schools should also take into account wider community usage for those buses; and
- The Department of Transport should consult with the Bus and Coach

Association (BCA) to review existing services in rural areas and rationalise those service where possible.²

However, following the release of the Federal Budget, the former Premier announced in August 1993 that “while the Government has considered the Public Accounts Committee report into the SSTS school transport program, it has decided that the family must come first and as a result there could be no additional costs imposed on families in the current economic climate”. Recommendations that were implemented was that the rate of payment for the PVC was doubled, clear objectives were drafted and after conducting a survey of pass usage rates, the payment rate to operators was eventually reduced.

1996 Under recommendation from the Budget Committee, a number of changes were introduced to reduce the cost of the scheme, including:

- Revised Distance Criteria — From the beginning of the first term 1996, the distance criteria for secondary students were amended to a radial distance of 2km from the school attended (an increase of 400 metres from the previous 1.6km). Students walking a distance 2.9km were also eligible for SSTS travel. With the revised distance criteria, approximately 65,000 children were no longer eligible for SSTS travel. However, approximately 662,000 children were provided with SSTS travel to and from school. The actual savings realised through the application of the 2km radius for secondary students were estimated at \$11.36 million for 1996.
- Establishment of an appeals panel — An appeals panel was established to review requests from parents/guardians of students deemed ineligible by the criteria, where they genuinely consider the health or safety of their child would suffer by not being approved for SSTS travel.
- Revised Rates of Payment to Commercial Bus Operators — The payment rate was reduced from a 92 percent usage rate for both metropolitan and rural students to a 77 percent pass usage rate for metropolitan students and a 79 percent pass usage rate for country students. The fare calculation for high school students was increased from 50 percent to 60 percent of the adult fare students (based on the argument that some students are over 15 and therefore adults in terms of fares). The increase in the fare calculation somewhat negated the impact of the reforms as there was only minimal reductions in subsidies. In the 1996-97 financial year the cost of the scheme did decrease by \$3million. However, this represented only 1 percent of the overall costs and caused considerable consternation and anger from the community. In the following year (1997-98) the costs once again increased by \$21 million (6 percent).
- Revised Rates of Payments to Non Commercial Operators — A new payment schedule was introduced for non-commercial contracts from Term 3 of 1996 as a result of a review undertaken by Price Waterhouse for the Department, resulting in significant savings on non-commercial contract payments.

It was also proposed to introduce a \$450 subsidy cap for students in metropolitan areas from 1997. However, the cap was abandoned in response to community outcry.

² Public Accounts Committee, *Report on the School Student Transport Scheme*, Report No.68, Parliament of New South Wales, Sydney, 1993.

1998 Government selective schools (specialising in sport, arts, languages, technological and academic achievement) in NSW had increased to 83.

1999 The PVC subsidy was extended to provide assistance for full time geographically isolated distance education students (approximately 600 students) to attend mini schools, which operate at least once a term to provide face to face teaching.

Changes were also made to the administrative procedures for PVC applications by removing much of the manual processing previously required by staff by using computer scanning systems to process applications from parents.

2000-02 In the year 2000, the Public Accounts Committee of the NSW Parliament conducted hearings into its Inquiry into the School Student Transport Scheme. In summary, the Inquiry, which reported in February 2002, made 21 recommendations as follows:

- The current processes and accountabilities for SSTS applications be reviewed to clarify responsibilities and to improve accuracy.
- A single central database of student information be accessible by both the Department of Education and the Department of Transport.
- The application processing task be centralised and applications reviewed annually.
- The Department of Transport ensure it has systems in place to collect sufficient reliable information to help it analyse and manage the costs of SSTS.
- Bus contracts be made public in order to improve transparency and the accountability of both operators and the Department of Transport.
- The Department of Transport implement an effective Performance Assessment Regime (which has been under consideration for a number of years) without any substantial delay.
- The Department of Transport ensure contracts and contract returns are effectively monitored to ensure compliance with the requirements of the contracts and the accuracy of claims for reimbursement. In particular:
 - All contracts be audited annually and an operator risk profile be established and maintained. This will involve the use of a database detailing problems identified; and
 - The Department introduce fines and penalties for operators who consistently under-perform.
- In areas where bus transport services are provided under a commercial contract, transport operators receive SSTS payments on the basis of actual usage.
- Subsidies paid to transport operators be identified and the impact of subsidies on operators and communities be assessed.
- The current requirements to provide sufficient bus capacity to carry 92% of applicable bus pass holders be modified or dropped.
- The Department of Transport initiate consultations with operators to determine the rationalisation of services, where possible.

- Where appropriate, the number of non-commercial contracts be rationalised by combining multiple contracts with the same operator under one contract.
- The Department of Transport survey communities and review existing information to find a mechanism to increase the use of SSTS buses outside peak hours.
- Formal consultation arrangements be established between the Departments of Education and Transport to consider education initiatives which have transport implications. Consultations should include senior executives from both agencies.
- Treasury should be involved in any consultations between the Department of Transport and the Department of Education which affect the Budget.
- Formal liaison arrangements be established to ensure appropriate communication between bus operators, parents, students and schools.
- The SSTS policy be reviewed to consider methods of efficiently accommodating education innovations such as joint secondary school/TAFE programs and work experience programs.
- Those students who are currently eligible for travel between school and their place of residence be entitled to travel between school and childcare facilities.
- The pricing of commercial contract bus services continue to be referred to IPART and the methodology for determining price changes be reviewed to address concerns raised by IPART.
- The Department of Transport and Treasury consider options for competitively tendering bus transport services.

NSW Treasury, the Department of Transport and the Department of Education further explore the full costs and benefits of alternative models for the SSTS such as transferring the program to the Department of Education.

APPENDIX II:
QUESTIONNAIRE

SSTS PASS USAGE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE 2003/4 TRC 1083

INTRODUCTION: Good afternoon/evening. I'm.....from TAVERNER Research Company. Today, I'm conducting a survey about how children travel between home and school. The survey is totally anonymous and will take around 5 minutes to complete.

IF RESPONDENT ASK WHO THE SURVEY IS FOR SAY: The survey is on behalf of the NSW Government and will assist them in planning future transport service.

S.1 Are there any school children living in your home? **INTERVIEWER NOTE:** IF STUDENT AT BOARDING SCHOOL OR HOME SCHOOL THEY DO NOT QUALIFY – TERMINATE.

Yes.....1
No.....2 **Thank & Terminate**

S.2 **FOR 'PART STD' CODES ONLY:**
Do you reside in New South Wales
1. Yes
2. No **Thank & Terminate**

ASK TO SPEAK TO A PARENT OR SENIOR STUDENT (AGED 16 PLUS), IF NOT ALREADY. IF UNAVAILABLE, ARRANGE A SUITABLE CALL BACK.

S.3 How many children living in your household attend school? **IF NECESSARY CLARIFY:** That is year K to 12.

1. One
2. Two
3. Three
4. Four
5. Five
6. Six
7. Seven
8. Eight
9. Nine
10. Ten
11. Eleven
12. Twelve or more
13. DK/NS

I have some questions to ask for each school child.

S.4 (For more than one child) So that we can discuss each of them in turn, could you give me a first name or initial for each child in years k to 12 [starting with the youngest child]. **RECORD INITIAL(S) OR NAME (S) BELOW**

First Child Initial/Name:

Second Child Initial/Name:

Third Child Initial/Name: (up to twelve children)

**** AUTOMATICALLY FOR EACH CHILD****

Q1DATE DATE

Q1DAY DAY OF THE WEEK

1. Monday
2. Tuesday
3. Wednesday
4. Thursday
5. Friday
6. Saturday
7. Sunday

ASK Q1-Q9 for each Child

Q.1 Did (child x/you) attend classes at school today?

1. Yes
2. No – **Skip to Q.3a**
3. Don't Know - **SCHEDULE CALLBACK**

Q.2a How did (child x/you) travel to school this morning? **DO NOT PROMPT.**
PROBE FOR SERVICE TYPES

Q.2b How did (child x/you) travel from school this afternoon? **DO NOT PROMPT.**
PROBE FOR SERVICE TYPES

	Q.2a	Q.2b
Walked only.....	01	01
Passenger in vehicle.....	02	02
Drove car/motor bike.....	03	03
Rode a bicycle.....	04	04
Passenger on State Transit (Govt) bus.....	05	05 Specify bus company
Passenger on private bus.....	06	06 Specify bus company
Passenger on SRA train.....	07	07
Passenger on State Transit (Govt) Ferry.....	08	08
Passenger on private Ferry.....	09	09
Other (SPECIFY)	10	10
Don't Know.....	99	99 SCHEDULE CALLBACK

Q.3a (Does child x/do you) hold any Free School Travel Passes?

1. Yes - **GO TO Q4**
2. No - **GO TO Q3b**
3. Don't Know - **SCHEDULE CALLBACK**

Q.3b (Does child x/do you) travel free on a school bus?

1. Yes - **GO TO Q6**
2. No - **GO TO Q6**
3. Don't Know - **SCHEDULE CALLBACK**

- Q.4 Which of the following pass or passes (*does child x/do you*) hold...**READ OUT**
1. State Transit (government) bus - **Specify bus company**
 2. Private Bus - **Specify bus company**
 3. 2nd Private Bus - **Specify bus company**
 4. CityRail
 5. State Transit (government) Ferry
 6. Private Ferry
 7. Other pass unspecified
 8. Don't Know - **SCHEDULE CALLBACK**

IF NON METRO & CODE 1-3 IN Q4 ASK Q4a, ELSE GO TO Q5

- Q4a. On average how many minutes does (*child x's/ your*) bus trip to school take?
1. Specify Minutes _____
 2. Don't Know

**IF NOT CODE 5-9 IN Q2a SKIP TO Q5b
ASK Q.5 FOR EACH PASS HELD AT Q.4**

- Q.5 Did (*child x/you*) use (*their/your*)[*PASS TYPE*] pass to travel free **READ OUT**
- a. this morning?
 1. Yes
 2. No

IF NOT CODE 5-9 IN Q2b SKIP TO Q6

- b. this afternoon?
 1. Yes
 2. No

IF 'Don't Know', SCHEDULE CALLBACK

- Q1X³. What time did (*child x/your*) classes start this morning?
1. Before 7:00 am
 2. 7:00am to 7:29am
 3. 7:30am to 7:59am
 4. 8:00am to 8:29am
 5. 8:30am to 8:59am
 6. 9:00am to 9:29am
 7. 9:30am to 9:59am
 8. 10:00am to 10:29am
 9. 10:30am to 10:59am
 10. 11:00am to 11:29am
 11. 11:30am to 11:59am
 12. 12:00 noon or later
 13. Don't know

³ Note: Question numbers with an 'X' indicate questions asked for the Special Study in Term 4-2003 and Term 1-2003 only.

Q2X. What time did (*child x/your*) classes finish this afternoon?

1. Before 12:00 noon
2. 12:00noon to 12:29pm
3. 12:30pm to 12:59pm
4. 100pm to 1:29pm
5. 1:30pm to 1:59pm
6. 2:00pm to 2:29pm
7. 2:30pm to 2:59pm
8. 3:00pm to 3:29pm
9. 3:30pm to 3:59pm
10. 4:00pm to 4:29pm
11. 4:30pm to 4:59pm
12. 5:00pm or later
13. Don' know

Q3X. Are their starting and finishing times (READ OUT)?

1. The same every school day
2. Regularly different depending on their class schedule, or
3. Different today because of exams or another special event
4. Other- specify
5. Don't know

****DEMOGRAPHICS****

Q6. What year (*is child x/are you*) in?

1. Infant - Year 1
2. Year 2
3. Primary - Year 3
4. Year 4
5. Year 5
6. Year 6
7. High - Year 7
8. Year 8
9. Year 9
10. Year 10
11. Year 11
12. Year 12
13. Kindergarten

Q7. What age (*is child x/are you*)?

4. 4
5. 5
6. 6
- (to age 20)
21. Other (Specify)

Q8. What type of school (does *child x/do you* attend? s It (READ OUT)

1. A government school?
2. A Catholic school? or
3. An independent school?

4. Other (Specify) - RECORD SCHOOL NAME, SUBURB AND TYPE OF SCHOOL
IF CHILD HOLDS TRAVEL PASS ASK Q8A. ELSE SKIP TO Q9

Q8aX. Would (child x/you) have gone to the school they/you attend now if the free travel pass were NOT available? **INTERVIEWER NOTE: THIS REFERS TO THE SAME PARTICULAR SCHOOL NOT JUST THE SAME TYPE OF SCHOOL**

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

Q9. **IF KNOWN RECORD GENDER OR ASK:** Is (child x/you) a male or female?"

1. Male
2. Female

Q4X. Thinking about last school week that is last Monday to Friday, how many times, if any did [Q5EX]

- a. Attend formal or informal childcare before school – ASK K-9
- b. Attend formal or informal childcare after school – ASK K-9
- c. Travel someplace other than home (or childcare) after school for education related activities – ASK 3-12

INTERVIEWER NOTE: EDUCATION RELATED ACTIVITIES CAN INCLUDE SPORT, DANCE, MUSIC, LIBRARY STUDIES, YOUTH CLUBS, ETC.

- d. Attend school activities at the school before regular school hours such as sport, music or special classes – ASK 7-12

INTERVIEWER NOTE: SCHOOL ACTIVITIES ARE ANY SPORT, MUSIC, CLUBS, ETC THAT ARE HELD AT THE SCHOOL OR THE SCHOOL REQUIRES THE STUDENT TO ATTEND

- e. Attend school activities at the school after regular school hours such as sport, music or special classes – ASK 7-12
 - f. Attend VET classes at a different campus (TAFE) – ASK 10-12
 - g. Attend a work experience placement as part of studies – ASK 10-12
1. 1. One
 2. 2. Two
 3. 3. Three
 4. 4. Four
 5. 5. Five
 6. 6. None
 7. 7. Don't Know

For each 1-5 in Q4Xa-g. Ask Q5X-Q6X

Q5X. Are they able to use their school travel pass for (each 1-5 in Q4X)?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Sometimes/Not always
4. Don't Know

IF NO IN Q5X ASK Q6X ELSE SKIP TO Q7X

Q6X. Why is that (not able to use School Travel Pass)?

1. No bus / train available at that time
2. No bus / train available for that route/destination
3. Not allowed to travel after hours
4. Destination is on a different route than pass
5. Destination on same route but not allowed to get off there
6. Other specify _____
7. Don't know
8. School pass only valid between home and school
9. No need / short distance
10. Activity not covered by pass

IF ALL CODE 6 (NONE) IN Q4X SKIP Q7X AND Q7XA.

Q7X. Again, thinking about last Monday to Friday, how many times, if any did [child x/you] pay a transport fare for travel to or from a school related activity or some other educational activity because they could not use their pass to travel to or from that activity?

1. One
2. Two
3. Three
4. Four
5. Five
6. Six
7. Seven
8. Eight
9. Nine
10. Ten
11. More than ten
12. None
13. Don't Know

IF NECESSARY SAY: Educational activity means any regular or organised activity that has an educational or developmental benefit for a child, including physical activities such as dance or sports.

INTERVIEWER NOTE: IN Q7X. AND Q7Xa. NOT BEING ABLE TO USE THEIR TRAVEL PASS MAY BE DUE TO TRANSPORT NOT BEING AVAILABLE OR BECAUSE THE PASS IS NOT GOOD FOR TRAVEL AT THE TIME OR ROUTE REQUIRED.

Q7Xa. And how many times last week if any (was child x/were you) driven (or drive) to or from a school related activity or some other educational activity because they could not use their pass to travel to or from that activity?

1. One
2. Two
3. Three
4. Four
5. Five
6. Six

7. Seven
8. Eight
9. Nine
10. Ten
11. More than ten
12. None
13. Don't Know

LOOP BACK TO NEXT CHILD**FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE ASKED ONCE PER HOUSEHOLD**

Q16X. Thinking about your current bus and/or train operator, how satisfied are you with the transport service your child (ren) receives to go to or from school? Are you (READ OUT)

1. Very satisfied
2. Satisfied
3. Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
4. Dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied
6. (Don't Know)

IF DISSATISFIED (CODES 4 or 5) ASK

Q17X. What is the main reason you are dissatisfied?

1. Bus / train overcrowded
2. Not enough buses / trains
3. Bus company changes bus timetables/routes
4. Students can't sit down
5. Travel times are too long
6. Bus / train stops are unsafe
7. Insufficient services / long waiting times
8. Drivers rude to students
9. Drivers don't control students
10. Bus / train do not run to timetable
11. Bus company changes timetables or routes
12. Other (specify)

Q18X. Thinking about the Free School Travel Passes Scheme, how satisfied are you with how the free travel pass system currently operates? Are you (READ OUT)

1. Very satisfied
2. Satisfied
3. Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
4. Dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied
6. (Don't Know)

IF DISSATISFIED (CODES 4 or 5) ASK

Collect verbatim and confirm code frame after pilot

Q19X. What is the main reason you are dissatisfied?

1. Distance from school requirements are too far
2. All primary age students (K-6) should get a free pass
3. Public transport is not safe

4. Not enough buses/ trains
5. Replacement costs of (lost/stolen/damaged) passes
6. Bus / train do not run to timetable
7. Other (specify)
8. Don't know
9. Bus companies are paid for children who don't travel on service
10. Time restrictions
11. Restricted to travel from home and school / should cover other activities
12. Free travel for all school children (K-12)

IF ANY CHILD HOLDS A TRAVEL PASS ASK Q8X to Q23X – ELSE SKIP TO Q10.

Q8X. I am going to read a range of possible changes to the Free School Travel Pass Scheme. I'd like you to tell me how important each of these would be to you in YOUR CURRENT SITUATION. Would it be 1 -very important, 2 - important, 3- neither important or unimportant, 4 -unimportant or 5 -not at all important. First how important is it that (READ OUT, ROTATE ORDER)

- a. The pass could be used earlier in the morning?
- b. The pass could be used later in the afternoon or evening?
- c. The pass could be used on any bus or train service between school and home between the designated times
- d. The pass would not be restricted to the "home address" so the student could travel to other destinations if related to educational activities or childcare
- e. All students, kindergarten to year 6 could be eligible for a free travel pass to and from school
- f. All students, kindergarten to year 6 could travel to and from school free without carrying a pass
- g. Free travel to be given to parents or escorts to travel with young children
 1. Very important
 2. Important
 3. Neither important or unimportant
 4. Unimportant
 5. Not at all important
 6. (Don't know)

Q9X. Which of those changes would be the most important to you?

Q9Xa. And which would be the next most important to you?

- a. The pass could be used earlier in the morning?
- b. The pass could be used later in the afternoon or evening?
- c. The pass could be used on any bus or train service between school and home between the designated times
- d. The pass would not be restricted to the "home address" so the student could travel to other destinations if related to educational activities or childcare
- a. All students, kindergarten to year 6 could be eligible for a free travel pass to and from school
- b. All students, kindergarten to year 6 could travel to and from school free without carrying a pass
- e. Free travel to be given to parents or escorts to travel with young children
- f. None of the above

Q10X. Are there any other changes that would be more important to you?

1. No
2. Add codes from pilot coding (show those with over 5% in pilot)
3. **Julia check the Coded responses for more code**

IF CODE 1 OR 2 FOR ANY Q8XA-G OR CODE 1 FOR Q10X CONTINUE ELSE SKIP TO Q16X.

Q11X. Thinking about the possible changes we have just been talking about, how strongly would you support or oppose each of the following options to help the pay for the changes. (READ OUT)

- a. Limiting the maximum number of kilometres a student can travel using a free school pass
- b. Limit the use of free travel passes to schools in the local area or the same town only, that is not allow free travel to out-of-area schools **INTERVIEWER NOTE: IF ASKED TO EXPLAIN OUT-OF-AREA SAY: School that are considered out-of-area would depend on the situation. In metropolitan areas schools that are not in the same suburb or adjacent suburbs might be out-of-area and in rural and regional area schools in another village or town might be out-of-area.**
- c. Limit the use of free travel passes to the nearest appropriate school only, that is the near school of the type parents believe to be most suitable for their children **INTERVIEWER NOTE: IF ASKED SAY: For example if the parent want the child to go to a particular type of religious school the free pass would be limited to the nearest school of that religion**
- d. All parents paying a contribution toward their child's travel
- e. All parents except those on low incomes paying a contribution toward their child's travel **INTERVIEWER NOTE: IF ASKED TO DEFINE LOW INCOME SAY "Generally low income would be less than \$450 per week for couple households or \$200 per week for sole parent households before tax, but the number of school children in the household would be considered.**

Probe for strength of support or opposition: Would that be (READ OUT)"

1. Strongly support
2. Support
3. Neither support or oppose
4. Oppose
5. Strongly oppose
6. (Don't know)

If support contribution? (code 1 or 2 for Q11Xb)

Q13X. Do you think the contribution should be a flat fee for all students or be a proportion of the student's actual travel cost? **(SINGLE RESPONSE) (Asked Term 4-2003 only)**

1. Flat fee
2. Proportion
3. Don't know

IF flat fee (code 1 in Q13X.)

Q14X. What would be the maximum contribution that you would be willing to pay each **school** term? **AID IF NECESSARY (Asked Term 4-2003 only)**

1. \$1-\$20
2. \$21-\$40
3. \$41-\$60
4. \$61-\$80
5. \$81-\$100
6. Over \$100
7. \$0 / Wouldn't pay contribution
8. Other Specify
9. Don't Know

If proportion (code 2 in Q13X.)

Q15X. What would be the maximum percent of your student actual travel cost that you would be willing to pay? **AID IF NECESSARY (Asked Term 4-2003 only)**

1. 1%-10%
2. 11%-20%
3. 21%-30%
4. 31%-40%
5. 41%-50%
6. Over 50%
7. % / Wouldn't pay contribution
8. Other Specify
9. Don't Know

Q20X. Which of the following best describes your household:

1. A couple household where both partners are in the labour force
2. A couple household where one partner is in the labour force
3. A couple household where neither partner is in the labour force
4. A single parent household who is in the labour force
5. A single parent household who is not in the labour force

IF CODE 1 ASK:

Q21X. Is that full-time or part-time work for each partner? (Full-time is over 30 hours per week)

1. Both full-time
2. One full-time/one part-time
3. Both part-time

IF CODE 2 OR 4 ASK

Q22X. Is that full-time or part-time work? (Full-time is over 30 hours per week)

1. Full-time
2. Part-time

Q23X. Which of the following category best describes your annual household income before tax? **(READ OUT)**

1. Negative/Nil income
2. Under \$6,000
3. Between \$6,000 and \$25,000
4. Between \$25,000 and \$50,000
5. Between \$50,000 and \$100,000
6. Over \$100,000
7. Refused

Q10 POSTCODE

And lastly, can you tell me the postcode where you live? _____

IF POSTCODE UNKNOWN ASK Q11

Q11. Then can I ask the name of your suburb or town? _____

Thank you very much for taking part in this study. And just in case my supervisor needs to check anything about this survey, could I please have your first name. If you wish to check that my company is listed with the Market Research Society, you can call the Market Research Society Survey Line on _ 1300 36 4830 _. My company name is TAVERNER Research.

APPENDIX III:
Media Coverage

MEDIA COVERAGE – TERM 2-2003

On 10 June, The Sydney Morning Herald published an article referring to the Scheme and the survey on the front page with a follow-up editorial on 11 June (see Appendix II). There was also radio and television news coverage referring to the SMH article. It is unknown if this publicity had any effect on the survey results, however over the following week, interviewers reported only 1 mention of the news article during interviews.

There is some concern that publicity regarding the survey could bias responses in that parents might feel obligated to say that students used to pass to ensure the scheme is continued. While we do not totally discount this possibility we note the following:

- In the 4 days following the newspaper article, only 1 respondent mentioned the article to an interviewer.
- Respondents are asked the mode of transport used by the student to and from school on the day of the interview prior to being asked if they hold and used a travel pass. Therefore if respondents were going to 'exaggerate' their travel pass use they would need to anticipate the question regarding travel pass use or their answers would not be consistent.

While it is possible to analyse the data to determine if reported travel pass use changed following the media coverage we caution against placing too much emphasis on such analyses as other factors could also influence travel pass use. For example we note that one week during the May portion of the study was particularly rainy, which could logically result in more parents driving students to and from school.

MEDIA COVERAGE – TERM 3-2003

On 8 September, the Sydney Morning Herald published an article (see Appendix II) which outlined transport options from an interim report by Tom Parry, chairman of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal. One option quoted in the article was "a cap on the cost of subsidising school passes, or charging \$30 a year". The article also included a number other of transport initiatives including cutting country passenger rails services, increasing pensioner fares and changing ticketing structures. This report received wide-spread coverage on radio and television

A follow-up article was published on 15 September, reporting the results of a public opinion poll indicating support for limiting distance children can travel on SSTS passes and a \$30 annual fee for travel passes (see Appendix II).

TEACHER STRIKE – TERM 3-2003

Teachers in NSW public school took strike action on Wednesday, 17 September. As the strike action did not include private schools and many public schools provided supervision for students attending school, interviewing took place as usual.

MEDIA COVERAGE – TERM 4-2003

The Unsworth Review was released on 17 November. The Review supported an annual \$30 fee on school bus and rail passes. The review received considerable media attention (see Appendix II) and was referenced by some survey respondents although it appears to have had minimal impact on the responses.

On 9 December Transport Minister, Michael Costa announced that the government would not proceed with plans to introduce a \$30 fee for school travel passes. He also announced plans to speed introduction of a 'smart' pass to track actual pass usage. This was report in newspapers and radio but did not receive a lot of attention. Again the apparent impact on survey respondents was minimal, however in light of this announcement, we suggest review of the special questions introduced for Term 4 prior to the commencement of Term 1 interviews.

MEDIA COVERAGE – TERM 1-2004

The final report of the Unsworth Review as released on 17 March, 2004. Coinciding with the release of the report the Ministry of Transport announced that 'smartcards' would be trialled with school children from July and August and if successful be rolled out to all schoolchildren in 2005 and then to the general public by the end of 2006. (see Appendix II)

The Sydney Morning Herald

Sydney, NSW Tuesday, June 10, 2003

Phantom riders spark new look at free trips to school

Joseph Kerr
Transport Reporter

The funding of school bus and rail passes is being examined as part of an extensive review of public transport costs ordered by the State Government.

An advisory group has told the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal the \$427 million free travel program should be put on hold over concerns about rebates paid to transport operators.

The Transport Services Minister, Michael Costa, has ruled out immediate funding cuts but wants to know how many students use public transport to ensure that Treasury is not paying for "phantom riders".

Mr Costa said his ministerial inquiry into public transport, run by the tribunal's head, Tom Parry, would produce an interim report by August 31.

"There is a bus industry group within the Ministry of Transport which is looking at options (for the bus pass program)," Mr Costa said. "This will be picked up by the Parry inquiry."

Last year a parliamentary committee found a string of problems with the scheme. It said it was likely that bus operators were be-

ing paid for carrying students who found some other way to school.

The cost of the scheme - which allows primary and secondary students to travel free to school as long as they live a certain distance away - has nearly doubled from \$204 million in the early 1990s.

Primary students are allowed a pass if they live 1.6 kilometres from school in a straight line or 2.3 kilometres by the most direct walking route. For secondary students the distances are two kilometres and 2.9 kilometres.

The committee considered the rising costs were to do with fare increases and policies such as closing of public schools, which led to students travelling further.

But Mr Costa said the Government would not support a call, as a Public Transport Advisory Council submission to a separate review into fares, for the program's funding to be suspended pending reform.

"A knee-jerk decision like that would leave school students stranded," he said.

In the submission, obtained by the Herald, the council's chairman, Alex Tomcher, called for the suspension of travel pass payments to operators until an audit could uncover the real number

of students using services.

Bus companies are paid for carrying an estimated number of students, but Mr Sanchez feared that with more and more people relying on cars the buses might not be carrying as many children as the operators were paid for.

The executive director of the Bus and Coach Association of NSW, Darryl Mellish, said the industry supported calls for reform, but said suspending the payments could hit the private bus industry hard, leaving operators to cut unprofitable services.

A government survey is under way to look at how students use their passes, which may also uncover any circumstances where students are using services they should not be. The results are due by the end of the year.

State governments have been trying for years to reform the scheme, which also pays publicly owned transport operators such as State Rail and State Transit for the students they carry.

Last year the Vinson inquiry into public education suggested a scheme where students could travel to any school within a limited radius of their home, with a form of means test for those wanting to travel further.

The Sydney Morning Herald

Wednesday, June 11, 2003 smh.com.au

Bus subsidies bogged in mire

The Transport Services Minister, Michael Costa, shows a sense in rejecting an advisory body's recommendation to put on hold the \$427 million a-year public subsidy of school transport while the scheme is disorganised. A halt on payments is too blunt a public policy instrument because it would trap the deserving as well as the undeserving. That the Public Transport Advisory Council should even have considered such a startling point, however, is a measure of just what a mess the scheme has become.

The School Student Transport Scheme has grown in cost at nearly 6 per cent a year. But the authorities know little about its operations. The Parliament's public accounts committee last year found the Transport Department had not sufficiently monitored the scheme and basic information was unavailable or unreliable, leaving authorities unable to identify the key causes of rising costs (the inquiry attributed them more to automatic fare rises than the despatching of government schools).

Authorities don't know how many of the 670,000 students issued with passes actually use them. Payments to bus operators are predicated on the assumption they carry 77 per cent of metropolitan pass holders and 79 per cent elsewhere. This certainly overstates the contribution of buses and trains in getting children to school. The parliamentary inquiry concluded the carrying rate "could be as low as 50 per cent, delivering millions of dollars to bus companies for phantom riders".

But does this mean bus operators are being paid over the top by taxpayers for work they don't do? The answer is neither a straightforward yes or no. The scheme, in part, cross-subsidises publicly owned transport and private bus routes that otherwise would be uneconomic. When the true viability of some of the private bus routes is revealed the Government may find itself under pressure to unwind the service contracts which appear to entrench performers in perpetuity. But this is far from a satisfactory justification. If the public must pay to prop up services, it should know precisely whether the money is directed at its needs, not those of private operators. Concealment of a subsidy through a notionally unrelated scheme is no way to enhance competitiveness and accountability.

An examination of the school scheme is in the hands of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal, which should do a better job than transport authorities of getting to the bottom of the scheme's mysteries.

E-tolls spread, fares jump in transport shift - National - smh.com.au

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E-tolls spread, fares jump in transport shift

By Joseph King, Transport Reporter
September 9, 2003

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Most country passenger rail services could be axed, pensioner fares increased and parents slugged \$30 a year for school bus passes under a plan that envisages the biggest shake-up to NSW transport in decades.

Any rail services that can be more cheaply and effectively replaced by buses - such as those to Armidale and Murrumbidgee - could be scrapped under the radical options paper to be released by the Carr Government today.

In Sydney, the costly Marty JetCat could be replaced by ferries, weekly and Traveler tickets might be scrapped, a \$2.20 toll put on the M5 East, and senior card-holders could lose their \$1.10 excursion ticket.

Electronic tolls could be used across Sydney, charging drivers according to the time of day, their route and the congestion. A new tax on employers for bringing workers into the CBD could be imposed as the Government tries to staunch the blow-out in transport costs and find new sources of funding the network.

The notions are floated in an interim report by Tom Pary, chairman of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal, based on 289 community submissions.

Dr Pary is believed to have found that the main agencies - State Rail and State Transport, including Sydney Buses and Sydney Ferries - have immense and growing revenue shortfalls.

Together, they are expected to have a shortfall of \$220 million a year from 2011, even without any of the \$30 billion expansion that the former rail boss,

<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/09/07/1082901943581.html>

03/09/2003

E-tolls spread, fares jump in transport shift - National - smh.com.au

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Mr Christie, identified in 2001 as essential to avoid strangulation of the network.

"One thing is clear," the Transport Services Minister Michael Costa, told the Herald. "The way we're funding our public transport is not sustainable in the long term. We need to make sure the public transport system is efficient and effective."

Mr Costa ordered the inquiry in May and it is believed the Parry vision presents a bleak future for CountryLink and Sydney Ferries, in particular, and suggests radical possible changes.

In the case of the heavily subsidised CountryLink - where one of two passengers typically pays half fare or less - it could involve scrapping the least profitable routes in favour of more buses.




Other ideas include increasing the CountryLink pensioner excursion fare to \$5, and a possible levy on vehicles or households across the state to pay for transport improvements.

The \$1.10 excursion ticket for pensioners could be raised to \$2.50, and then extended to private buses. But it would be taken away from seniors not on a pension.

Dr Parry believes savings are needed to allow more spending on transport for the aged, disabled and economically or geographically disadvantaged. Other options are a cap on the cost of subsidising school passes, or charging \$30 a year.

Dr Parry believes the present tax and excise systems do not show motorists the true cost of providing the road network, and he is believed to have suggested options for new road charges, including electronic tolls across Sydney.

He will take further submissions with a view to making recommendations in December.

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Print Article: Voters reject fare rises, wider tolls

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Voters reject fare rises, wider tolls

By Joseph Kerr, Transport Reporter
September 15, 2003

NSW voters are increasingly unhappy with the Carr Government's handling of public transport and are baulking at paying for proposed changes, a new survey shows.

Polling for the *Herald* found that up to two-thirds of voters were opposed to increased fares, more road tolls and cuts to country train services - options in a report by the chairman of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal, Tom Parry.

The AG Nielsen poll, conducted last week, found that two thirds would not pay an extra 50 cents on existing motorway tolls, while 62 per cent rejected a similar levy on fares and 54 per cent objected to paying \$5 to enter the CBD.

Suggested changes to the \$427 million school student subsidy - either a \$30 fee or limiting the distance children can travel using the bus or rail passes - was the only user-pays option to win more acceptance than disapproval.

Overall, 52 per cent of voters thought the Government was doing a poor or very poor job on public transport, compared with 22 per cent who said it was doing well.

This a big turnaround from the March election campaign, when 39 per cent saw the Government's handling of the sector as good or very good, compared with 38 per cent who thought it poor or very poor.

The latest poll also follows the row over the safety of the Menangle rail bridge and the continuing Millennium train debacle.

The Transport Services Minister, Michael Costa, has made it clear he believes that more money has to be found to keep trains, buses and ferries running. But Dr Parry has questioned whether too much is already spent on public transport compared with other sectors.

Mr Costa last week released the interim Parry report, which called for a streamlining of rail, bus and ferry operations to minimise the impact of growing transport revenue shortfalls.

Dr Parry found that the public transport sector will have a shortfall of \$229 million a year from 2011 unless there is a further injection of cash. His options included cutting CountryLink trains in favour of more economical bus services, replacing periodical tickets with off-peak discounts, putting a new toll on the M5 East freeway, and taking seniors off the \$1.10 pensioner excursion ticket.

In Sydney, the costly Manly JetCat could be replaced by ferries and electronic tolls widened. A new tax on employers for bringing workers into the CBD was also considered.

In the poll, resistance to limiting the distance children can travel on their passes - a controversial issue because of the drift to private schools, often further away than the local public school - was highest among those aged 18 to 24 - at 58 per cent.

But most over-40s agreed with this option, while 56 per cent of those aged 25 to 39 supported a \$30 fee. Most of those surveyed supported putting a levy on developers who build in new growth areas, with 69 per cent in favour and 27 per cent against.

<http://www.smh.com.au/cgi-bin/common/popupPrintArticle.pl?path=/e...> 15/09/2003

Print Article: Voters reject fare rises, wider tolls

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Cutting CountryLink trains was strongly resisted by older voters - 63 per cent of the 55-plus group were opposed

Dr Parry is taking further submissions and will make specific recommendations in December.

The Government is yet to announce its official position on any of the options but Mr Costa said last night: "Funding public transport with an ever-increasing taxpayer subsidy is not sustainable. Those who use the system will have to make a fair contribution. Tough decisions will have to be made."

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/09/14/1083478069229.html>

<http://www.smh.com.au/cgi-bin/common/popupPrintArticle.pl?path=ta...> 15/09/2003

smh.com.au

Fares to soar in buses shake-up

By Joseph Kerr, Transport Reporter
November 17, 2003 (smh.com.au)

Commuters would pay significantly more for bus tickets and walk further to stops under a radical proposal to transform public transport.

The Unsworth review of NSW bus services, to be released today, also supports a \$30 annual fee on school bus and rail passes and an increase in the seniors' excursion ticket from \$1.10 to \$2.50 - and limiting it to pensioners.

State Transit commuters face average fare jumps of at least 24 per cent, while discounts on weekly and multi-trip tickets could be cut by up to two-thirds.

In the second part of a four-stage shake-up, the review calls for centralised planning of Sydney's patchwork of private and public bus services, possibly reducing them to a handful of companies with much larger territories.

A network of high-speed and high-frequency bus corridors is planned to link major suburbs. Existing routes would be redesigned to feed passengers into these corridors, instead of each local company planning its own runs, as happens now.

But commuters are likely to have to walk further to bus stops because the plan involves scrapping the requirement for operators to put major routes within 400 metres of 95 per cent of an area's residents. The Government would take a greater role in designing routes to make them efficient, which could mean axing some stops.

Barrie Unsworth, the former premier and transport minister who headed the inquiry, says more money should be poured into making buses run faster. This would include more bus lanes and bus signals at traffic lights, to avoid clogged traffic.

Plans for light rail through the CBD take a battering, with Mr Unsworth suggesting that it could add to congestion and limit access for buses.

But he calls for a close look at putting free buses into the Parramatta, Newcastle and Wollongong CBDs to link major attractions.

Uniform fares are promoted for public and private buses in the hope of ending the decades-old inequity for commuters in western Sydney and the city's fringes who have relied on more expensive private services.

Mr Unsworth supports ending free travel for school children, an idea first put forward by the Parry inquiry into public transport. Both inquiries were ordered by the Transport Services Minister, Michael Costa.

The \$30 annual school travel fee would help to pay for the \$427 million scheme.

Mr Unsworth also supports Dr Tom Parry's recommendation for changes to the much-criticised \$1.10 seniors' excursion ticket. This would more than double its price to \$2.50, give it only to pensioners, and ban its use in morning peak hour.

But it would be extended to all metropolitan transport, public or private. At present, it gives all-day travel to pensioners on government services, which hits elderly western Sydney residents hard.

The head of the Bus and Coach Association, Darryl Mellish, said the system needed changes but the state's private bus industry was already the most efficient in the country. He stressed that appropriate arrangements must be made for any bus companies squeezed out by the new system.

Mr Unsworth will take further submissions until December 19, before producing a final report in February. Dr Parry is due to hand down his final report next month.

smh.com.au

Co-payment for school travel unpopular, but still the lesser of two evils

By Kelly Burke, Education Reporter
November 17, 2003 (smh.com.au)

The proposed introduction of a \$30 annual fee to rein in the spiralling cost of free student transport has met with a mixed response from parents' groups.

But the co-payment scheme suggested in Barrie Unsworth's review of the state's bus services was generally greeted as the lesser of two evils previously flagged in the Parry Inquiry Interim Report, which included the option of setting a distance limit on free travel for students.

Duncan McInnes, executive officer of the NSW Parents Council, which represents the non-government school sector, said the \$30 co-payment was fairer than the 10-kilometre cap on free travel alternative, which would have clearly discriminated against students attending non-government schools.

"But we can't agree with the rationale that the introduction of a co-payment would supposedly reduce the problem of phantom riding," he said

"A \$10 a term [fee] is no disincentive to reduce the number of phantom riders, particularly in the afternoon."

A major contribution to the cost blowout has been the number of students who hold free bus passes but regularly take alternative transport to and from school. Transport operators receive a calculated payment based on how many students hold passes, not on how many students actually ride the buses each day.

The Council of Catholic School Parents' executive officer, Roger O'Sullivan, said he would be pushing for a "one fee per family" system if the \$30 co-payment was introduced. Under the Unsworth plan, the \$30 levy would include "safety net" exemptions for low-income families.

The Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations' spokesman, David Giblin, said his organisation remained opposed to the Government picking up any travelling costs incurred by those who chose to send their children beyond their local government school, with the exception of students at selective government schools.

At Baulkham Hills High School, 24 private buses roll up to the gates to collect almost all of the 1144 students from 63 suburbs. The Westbus and Harris Park bus companies' contracts are collectively estimated to be worth about \$100,000 a year for the selective government school.

Year 11 student Alex Morrison takes 1 hours to reach his Riverstone home by bus and train.

His parents would be "pretty annoyed" if they had to face his \$10-a-day transport costs, he said. The \$30 levy a year appeared to be a fairer option, but he admitted in an average week he probably hitched a ride on two afternoons with friends' parents instead of using his bus pass, so he could participate in after-school activities.

smh.com.au

Fares up, but no tinkering with country links

By Darren Goodsir
December 9, 2003

Commuters face a big initial fare rise under the Carr Government's overhaul of public transport, but plans to scrap country train services and impose a fee for student bus travel have been dumped.

The one-off fare increase, to be followed by minor annual rises over five years, is aimed at helping rail, bus and ferry operators improve service standards.

Inflation-linked rises will be allowed during that period but no further increases unless there are significant improvements such as new lines or services. The rises must also be justified before a special pricing tribunal.

The scrapping of several rural train services and plans for a new \$30 fee for student bus travel - the most contentious proposals in the interim transport report by Tom Parry - are dropped, with the Transport Minister, Michael Costa, instead giving CountryLink a 12-month reprieve.

Country train managers will review job allocation, ticketing and timetables, and administration.

taken, two-thirds of them related to the replacement of country trains with buses.

Dr Parry stuck to his strong criticism of cultural and managerial laxity in some sectors, especially rail.

He said big improvements in cost and efficiency were desperately needed, and that management and workplace practices and culture needed to be "radically overhauled".

"There is no doubt that the majority of people working in CityRail take pride in their work [but] there is an overwhelming sense that CityRail does not promote a real commitment to quality, customer focus and a service culture."

Dr Parry's concern about train reliability - caused largely by the confusion of lines - has been upheld.

By separating the lines into discrete sectors, punctuality can be improved. However, cuts to some services, and other changes, will be needed.

A new timetable to support these changes would need to be investigated.

The last timetable review was abandoned 18 months ago by Mr Costa's predecessor, Carl Scully, because of a perceived shortage of drivers and guards to work the required shifts.

To avert a threatened parent backlash on the school buses plan, Mr Costa has decided to trial an electronic smartcard for students in the hope it can map travel patterns and eliminate \$112 million in annual "phantom" rides.

An integrated ticketing system is planned to be available by 2005. Its aim is for commuters to enjoy seamless travel on all forms of transport.

One big change is an increase in the \$1.10 pensioner excursion ticket to \$2.50, the only rise since 1988. The concession will also be expanded to areas where government transport does not operate - a boon for residents in Sydney's west and south.

As well, the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, Craig Knowles, will lead an investigation into tolls on motorists for entering certain areas.

Consideration will also be given to a levy on developers and employers to help pay for network improvements.

Mr Costa said last night that the report had "placed fairly on the agenda the issues we need to address to provide sustainable public transport in the future. It makes clear the need for greater equity in fares and concessions - and it shows how taxpayers can get better value for their public transport dollar."

The report, which received 300 public submissions, canvassed funding proposals and investigated pitfalls in future spending plans.

In the two months since the initial findings were released, 900 further submissions were

Print Article: School bus ticket trial on the cards

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School bus ticket trial on the cards

By Joseph Kerr, Transport Reporter
March 17, 2004

Sydney schoolchildren are expected to be the first passengers to try the new "smartcard" that may one day replace all bus, train, ferry and light rail tickets.

From July or August students using Shorelink buses - which operate on the North Shore and into the city - will carry the new smartcard as part of the first local trial of the technology, said a spokeswoman for Transdev, which owns Shorelink.

They would carry them alongside their existing bus passes during the trial, a spokesman for the Ministry of Transport said.

Schoolchildren who use private buses around Liverpool, Bankstown and Penrith may also be involved in the trial.

According to the Unsworth inquiry into the bus industry - whose final report is expected to be released by the NSW Government today - the smartcard pilot project could allow accurate data to be collected on students' travel for the first time.

The school travel scheme, which allows free travel for children who live more than two kilometres from their school, has long been criticised as an opaque system that costs taxpayers \$427 million a year despite a profound lack of information about how many children actually travel.

The technology will allow people to store credit in their smartcard, which can then be used to pay as they board trains, buses, ferries or trams.

The report - written by former NSW premier and transport minister Barrie Unsworth at the behest of Transport Services Minister Michael Costa - seeks to establish 43 bus corridors, which would use measures such as traffic light priority and bus lanes to improve travel times.

If the trial is successful, smartcards will be rolled out to all schoolchildren in 2005 and then to the general public by the end of 2006.

This story was found at:

<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/03/16/1079199227723.html>

<http://www.smh.com.au/cgi-bin/common/popupPrintArticle.pl?p...> 17/03/2004

APPENDIX IV:
Special Study – Focus Group Report



T A V E R N E R
Research
Company

**School Student
Transport Scheme Usage Research
Special Study – Focus Group Report**

**A report on focus groups
with SSTS Travel Pass Holders or their Parents**

prepared for:

**Ministry of Transport
227 Elizabeth Street
Sydney NSW 2000**

TRC – 1096 - CJ

August, 2003

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Appendix: Discussion Guide & Self-Completion Questionnaire

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises the results of 16 focus groups and 10 mini groups conducted across NSW to provide knowledge of the motivational factors affecting students' travel pass usage and explore attitudes of students and their parents to the scope and purpose of the School Student Transport Scheme (SSTS). Focus groups were held with parents of infant, primary and junior secondary students and mini groups consisted of senior secondary students and their parents in separate groups.

The main findings of the focus groups are briefly outlined below in order of perceived importance to parents and students.

- 1) Student **safety** was the dominant concern for parents of all groups. The major concerns include:
 - Overcrowding and lack of seats for all students
 - Pedestrian crossings and having to cope with traffic and cross busy roads
 - Lack of seatbelts on buses, especially in regional areas
 - Safe bus interchanges and bus stops
 - Personal safety in terms of bullying, robberies and students being unsupervised.

- 2) There is considerable call for **all Year K to 6 students to be eligible for a free travel pass**. This is closely related to concerns about safety issues with parents feeling children in this age group should not be walking to school by themselves. They are concerned about traffic and having to cross busy roads and about their children's personal safety in general when unsupervised. Other reasons for wanting all year K to 6 students to be eligible for a school pass include:
 - Younger students would not have to carry and present a pass which is often lost or misplaced
 - Students are required to carry heavy back packs and cannot walk very far with the heavy loads.

- 3) **Flexibility of travel routes and modes**, particularly to destinations after school, was also a frequent request, to allow for:
 - Travel to relatives, friends, separated parents or parent's work places for occasional or everyday care before or after school
 - Travel to school related activities such as sport, music and library study
 - Travel to off campus courses and work experience

- 4) **Extended hours of travel**, both during the school day and later in the evening to allow for:
 - Travel during exams, especially for senior students
 - Travel at irregular hours for early classes and on early dismissal days
 - Travel to off campus courses and work experience
 - Travel for before and after school activities.

- 5) **Availability and reliability of public transport** is an issue regardless of whether it is available free of charge, this includes:
- Buses and trains running to timetable (neither early, late or not running)
 - Availability of services outside of the morning and afternoon school service, particularly in non-metropolitan areas
 - Routes and schedules that accommodate student needs and minimise travel time.
- 7) **Availability of information regarding:**
- School transport routes, timetables and bus stops
 - SSTS rules, regulations and requirements.
- 6) **Other issues** that were raised by parents and students include:
- Introduction of 'pay for use' passes to make transport companies more accountable and control the cost of the scheme
 - Ensuring drivers have suitable disposition and attitude to work with children and are trained in appropriate procedures and discipline
 - Passes should be more durable and harder to lose, suggestions included scan cards or fobs.

Further details regarding the attitudes and experiences of parents and students can be found in Section 3.

2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the Special Study was to:

- provide knowledge of the motivational factors affecting students travel pass usage; and
- explore attitudes of students and their parents to the scope and purpose of the School Student Transport Scheme (SSTS).

The Special Study includes:

- Conducting focus groups with parents and students in NSW (August 2003);
- Providing a methodological report and a report of focus group/workshop outcomes (Sept 2003);
- Developing attitudinal questions to be appended to the Part 1 questionnaire (Sept 2003);
- Including these questions in interviews of approx 3,800 households with pass holders (Oct 2003 to April 2004);
- Analysis and reporting of the data obtained from the additional questions qualitative component of the study (May 2004).

We conducted 16 focus groups and 10 mini groups across the State of NSW, spread across metropolitan and non-metropolitan locations.

Sampling Issues to Consider

When considering the most appropriate sampling plan for this research project, we considered the following participant characteristics or variables.

Parents

We anticipated that there may be one parent (in two parent households) who took a more active role in the travel considerations of their school-aged children. When recruiting group participants, we, therefore, sought the parent with the most active role in getting their child/children to and from school.

Family Situation

A recent ABS study identified the family situation as a key determinate in the participation in leisure activities. In particular, a higher proportion of children from families with both parents employed (96%) participated in organised sport than did children with one parent employed (53%), with lower participation again for families where neither parent was employed (41%). A similar pattern occurred for children from one-parent families, with greater participation where the parent was employed (61%) than if the parent was not employed (41%). Group participants were screened so that students and parents from various family situations were included in discussions.

Age of student

We anticipated that the attitudes, needs and concerns of parents with regard to school travel will differ depending on the age of their child. We, therefore, conducted groups for parents with infants, primary and secondary school students separately.

Gender of student

Travel needs and concerns of parents may differ depending on the gender of their child. We attempted to have an equal mix of parents with male and female school children in each group to ensure that any differing views are obtained.

Metropolitan versus Non-metropolitan

The consultancy brief stipulated that in addition to stratifying by metropolitan and non-metropolitan locations, that consideration should be given to obtaining the views of those in inland and coastal non-metropolitan areas. We also note that the Sydney Metropolitan and Newcastle areas are divided into areas served primarily by State Transit Buses and those serviced by Private Bus Companies. Additionally some areas of Western Sydney have better rail service and connections than others. Accordingly the experiences of families in various areas of Sydney Metropolitan areas may be quite different and we selected discussion venues and participants within Sydney to reflect the availability of services in various areas.

School Type

There may be some differences in the needs, attitudes and travel behaviours of students from different socio-economic groups. While we did not necessarily stratify groups by school type (due to the prohibitive cost), we recruited group participants to represent parents from each of the school sectors (Public, Catholic and Independent) in order that the views of all sectors were obtained.

Travel Pass Type

There may also be some differences in the needs, attitudes and travel behaviours of students with different types of travel passes, being State and private buses, rail and ferry. Again we did not recommend stratifying groups by travel pass or mode, however group participants were recruited to represent the travel pass types in the community.

Special Situations

Other situations that may influence travel decisions are:

- use of before or after school child care
- spending nights at another address (eg another parent or grandparent)
- participation in before or after school activities (eg sports, music, etc)
- attendance of classes at multiple campuses (eg TAFE)
- attendance at specialist public high schools (eg performing arts, technical, etc).

Group participants were asked about the above situations during the screening process to encourage their inclusion in the groups. In the case of class attendance at multiple campuses, post codes surrounding TAFE with these classes were targeted during recruitment.

The discussion guide and self-completion questionnaires are included in the appendix of this report.

The group structure and schedule are shown below:

Metropolitan – Sydney		Location
1	Parents of Infants students	Hurstville
2	Parents of Primary students	Sydney
3	Parents of junior secondary students	Sydney
4m	Senior student mini group	Killara
5m	Parents of senior student mini group	Killara
Metropolitan – Western Sydney		
6	Parents of Infants students	Harris Park
7	Parents of Primary students	Glenmore Park
8	Parents of secondary students	Glenmore Park
9	Parents of junior secondary students	Harris Park
10m	Senior student mini group	Liverpool
11m	Parents of senior student mini group	Liverpool
Metropolitan – (Newcastle or Illawarra or Central Coast)		
13	Parents of Infant students	Wollongong
14	Parents of Primary students	Charlestown
15	Parents of junior secondary students	Charlestown
16m	Senior student mini group	Corrimal
17m	Parents of senior student mini group	Corrimal
Non metropolitan – Inland & Coastal		
18	Parents of Infants students	Nowra/Bomaderry
19	Parents of Primary students	Tamworth
20	Parents of junior secondary students	Nowra/Bomaderry
21m	Senior student mini group	Wagga Wagga
22m	Parents of senior student mini group	Wagga Wagga
23	Parents of Infants students	Wagga Wagga
24	Parents of Primary students	Ballina
25	Parents of junior secondary students	Tamworth
26m	Senior student mini group	Ballina
27m	Parents of senior student mini group	Ballina

3. DETAILED FINDINGS

3.1. STUDENT TRAVEL PATTERNS

Students generally have well established travel routines. Reasons for not using their travel pass include:

- Parents (or someone) drop them off or pick them up – it is common for students to be dropped off in the morning and take public transport in the afternoon
- Early school activities – either public transport is not available or they would have to leave impractically early to arrive on time
- After school activities – again public transport may not be available when activities are over or it is too late to use the travel pass. In the winter it is sometimes after dark and parents prefer to pick up students
- Early dismissal days – senior students have regular early finish days and travel passes are not valid at the time they are released. In this case students either have to wait until 2:30, or until the usual bus comes (3:30) or pay for travel, if there are services available
- Off campus education related activities – this includes a range of activities such as TAFE, VET, HSC courses, work experience, Young Achievers and Library studies. As these activities are not at school they are not covered by the Travel Pass. If they are on the student's designated bus route student are sometimes able to use the Travel Pass to get to activities after school but are seldom able to get back on the bus to get home.
- Bad weather – parents are more likely to drop off or pick up students when it is raining or very cold or very hot
- Forgotten or lost pass – students sometimes have to pay for transport if they have forgotten or lost their pass, however drivers and train guards are inconsistent in enforcing this and students can often travel free without their pass while other drivers are extremely strict and can leave even small children stranded by not allowing them on the bus without a pass
- Missing the bus or train – while missing transport is sometimes the students' fault, they also have to make other arrangements if buses or trains are not running to timetable (either leave early, at late or are cancelled). Additionally, for students using multiple buses or buses and trains, if one service is late or cancelled they miss the next connection and have to make other arrangements.
- Transport schedule is inconvenient or impractical – in some situations students may be required to leave home at 7:30 or 7:45 to get to school by 9:00 even though they are only travelling a few kilometres. In other situations students arrive at school in the morning too early or too late or the bus leaves school too early or late in the afternoon.

3.2. INFANT AND PRIMARY STUDENTS

In terms of SSTS Travel Passes, some parents of younger students would like to have “**dual destination**” passes, particularly on the way home from school. This would allow students to go to another family member’s home, childcare or to a parents’ workplace after school. Parents appreciated that there needs to be some controls on this system, but felt they should be able to designate a couple of locations for students to go to on their pass and be able to write a note or call the school if children are supposed to go to another destination.

In discussing eligibility, it was suggested in several groups that **all year K to 6 students should have a free travel pass**. Parents justified this by saying that children in year 6 or younger should not be crossing busy streets on their own and they should always be supervised. Additionally, students are required to carry so much in their back pack now, that nearly any amount of walking is unreasonable. There was acknowledgement that this would increase cost, but they suggested that they should have to apply for and justify the pass each year. They also suggested a pay for use system would reduce costs. Parents also noted that there are safety considerations that may not have existed when they originally made the 1.5 km limit. Walking this distance is considered too far and unsafe by many parents of primary age children.

Parents of younger students tend to be happy with the School Student Transport Scheme itself and are happy just to have basic free transport to and from school for their children. These parents are more anxious about the **safety issues** concerned with younger students taking public transport. It was common for parents to say something like, “Your child leaves home in the morning and you don’t know until afternoon if they got to school”. The safety issues raised by parents of infant and primary students include:

- Children crossing busy streets or roads, either on their way to and from bus stops or because they do not meet the distance eligibility requirements. One group pointed out that there is a “Wait-Watch-Walk” campaign currently in the schools that tells parents and students that children under 10 years old are not developmentally ready to cross roads on their own and should always hold onto an adult’s hand. Therefore, parents could not understand why year 3 students are expected to walk to school and the route they have to follow is not considered in the eligibility requirements.
- Overcrowding on the bus was a concern for both older and younger students. However it is more of a concern with younger students as they are not able to stand as easily when the bus is moving. Additionally, parents report that older students do not let the younger students sit down and in some cases sit one to a seat with their back packs while younger students stand in the aisle. Parents want 1 seat per student and drivers to require students be seated before the bus moves and to stay seated until it stops. They also do not think it is realistic to expect 3 children to a seat, particularly with their back packs. Another concern regarding overcrowding is younger children not being able to get off at their stop because they can’t get through the students standing in the aisle. Also some private buses do not have any system to tell drivers when to

stop at a bus stop, so if the child has not come up to the front door the driver goes past the stop. Another concern with overcrowding is that buses do not stop for students when they are already full and in areas with limited services, students do not have an alternate means of getting to school.

- There is also a call for seatbelts on school buses. This is particularly a concern in country areas presumed because they travel at higher speeds between towns than Sydney buses. Parents don't understand why long distance coaches are required to have seat belts but school buses are not. One parent made the point that you can not take your baby home from the hospital without a nurse making sure they are securely in a capsule, but 5 years later you are expected to put them on a bus without seatbelts. This is seen as a huge double standard in terms of the message the government is giving to the public. They also think if students were required to have seatbelts there would be less 'bullying' as students would be restrained.
- Bullying and robbery are also a concern, although parents feel the bus is safer than the train in this regard because the driver is present. However not all drivers have control of the students. Parents had stories of both really good drivers and drivers that do not attempt to control or discipline students. Parents want better supervision on the bus, but they acknowledge this is probably not economically feasible. One suggestion was to allow volunteer parents to ride free of charge on buses that are having problems. Also better communication between bus companies, schools and parents was recommended.
- Many parents expressed concerns about how some bus drivers treat children. Parents feel drivers have "a duty of care" while children are on the bus. However some drivers "terrorise" children about having their bus pass, don't insist that children stay seated and do not watch after children to make sure they are on the correct bus or get off at the right stop. However, we heard several heart warming stories of excellent drivers going out of their way to make sure children reached home safely and drivers that effectively control students.
- Safe bus interchange and bus stops were also a concern of parents in some areas. Parents in Nowra reported that buses pick up at school then met other buses on the side of a busy road so students can change to the bus that takes them home. Some parents pick up their children at the interchange so the road becomes very congested with students and cars everywhere. Parents are also concerned about little ones getting onto the right bus. Parents also want more or better bus shelters so students don't have to stand in the rain or sun. Some parents were also concerned about the safety of their children at bus stops. A parent in Newcastle said the school bus stopped at a park that was frequented by drug users. She had asked STA to change to route but without success. Another parent would not leave his daughter at their school bus stop (even though she was in junior high school) because it was isolated and there had been problems with attempted attacks on girls.

3.3. JUNIOR AND SENIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS

Older students and their parents tend to be more concerned with the logistics of managing their busy schedules. Older students have more activities and varying school schedules. They are more likely to be travelling further to school and it may also be the case that parents of older students are more likely to both be working making transport arrangements more critical. However, parents of older students generally want their children to be able to travel independently on safe public transport, and generally trust the student to do the right thing.

Some of the special situations that affect the travel of Secondary Students include:

- **'Early dismissal' days** are common for high school students, These occurs regularly (ie every Monday) particularly for year 11 and 12 students on flexi schedules. In some areas, there is no transport available other than the regular morning and afternoon buses so students either have to wait for the regular bus or find their own way home. In areas with alternative transport, student travel passes are not allowed until after 2:30 and often students are restricted to particular routes or transport mode. Therefore, if transport is available, students have to pay for transport.
- **Early classes or activities** are also common. Some high schools have "flexi" schedules, so students are required to be at school as early as 7:30, and either students would have to catch public transport very early or no transport is available that would get them to school on time.
- **After school sport or educational activities** are common reasons for not using travel passes. Where public transport is available, the time restrictions often come into effect, particularly for students with long commutes. In the cases where students use multiple transport modes (e.g. bus – train – bus), they may be able to get part way home but not complete the journey in time. Getting to sport or educational activities from school is also a problem for older students. They would like the flexibility of using alternate routes or travel modes. In some cases, just being able to leave the bus or train at an earlier stop.
- **Exam time** is a particularly stressful time for senior students and their parents. Transport becomes an issue in terms of reliability and timing. In areas where transport is not always on time, students are concerned they will be late or miss trial tests and exams. Additionally travel passes are not allowed between 9:30 and 2:30 although students need to travel during these times to get to and from exams. Some schools in country areas have arranged "exam passes" with the bus companies allowing unlimited travel for HSC students during exam weeks and there were suggestions for exam passes to be issued to all HSC students.
- **Off campus** courses and work experience also create transport problems for parents and senior students. In many cases, having public transport available is more of an issue than paying for the transport. For example, Tamworth public high schools combine to offer some courses (i.e. students from two or

three high schools go to one school for a special class), however students are expected to get to a school across town at times when buses are not running. Where public transport is available, there is some call for free or discounted passes for travel related to educational purposes.

- **Child care** was still an important issue for parents of junior high school students. Parents felt that children of 12 and 13 were not old enough to be left alone every morning to get themselves to school or to be at home alone every evening. Some children are regularly dropped off at grandparents early in the morning and return there after school. Parents wanted to be able to have a pass that could be used from any place of child care. Students also often needed to go to their parent's place of work on the way home and wanted to be able to use their pass to these places.

Some parents felt that any student should be able to travel free as long as they are in a **school uniform**. Their justification was that if they are in a school uniform they are travelling for school or educational purposes. It was even suggested that giving free travel to all would be cheaper than administering the pass scheme.

3.4. BUS TRAVEL

Bus travel is generally considered safer than train travel because the driver provides adult supervision, however as mentioned previously, parents have several **road safety issues** concerning bus travel. Other concerns, specific to students travelling by bus include:

- Getting **reliable information about bus timetables and bus stop locations** can be a problem in all areas. In State Transit areas there are no published timetables for 'school buses' and schools do not have this information readily available. In areas of Sydney serviced by private bus companies, school bus stops are not marked and timetable information is difficult to obtain. In rural areas, local people tend to know where buses stop and drivers tend to be flexible and obliging, stopping at individual student's front gate or the house on the street with the most students.
- **Reliability of buses** is also an issue in some areas with buses running late, not turning up at all or running early and not waiting. Parents feel they have to wait at the bus stop for the bus to show up or risk not knowing if their children get to school. Where there are alternate bus routes or numbers that students can take to the same destination, parents want them to be able to use various buses and not be restricted to a particular bus number. Parents also report that buses do not always stop at bus stops either because the bus is already full or the driver just doesn't want to pick up students.
- Parents also complain that **buses sometimes leave the school too soon after classes finish** and in some cases before classes actually finish. This means that students are rushed and sometimes miss the bus. Also there is not time for them to go to the toilet before getting onto the bus for journeys which can take over an hour.

- **Bus interchanges and bus stop locations** can also be a concern to parents. As mentioned previously some interchanges are on main roads and traffic can be a problem. When interchanges are not at schools, parents are concerned about students not being supervised as they wait for another bus. Where students are riding public route buses, the stop may be some way from the school and they have to cross busy streets to get to school. Bus stops usually had no shelter, no seats and no timetable information. This is particularly a problem for students who are changing buses and often have long waits between services.
- **Overcrowding and having students standing** on buses is a major concern in terms of safety and students being uncomfortable. Parents reported overcrowding to the point that both school and route buses go past bus stops making students late for school.
- Having students of **mixed ages on one bus** was also raised as an issue. Older students did not like having younger students on the bus because they are noisy and rowdy. Younger children are intimidated by older students and older students sometimes bully younger children. Some drivers insist younger students sit in front and older students sit in the back of the bus. However drivers have no authority to enforce this rule and keep age groups separated.
- **Driver suitability, attitude and training** are a concern. Parents recognise that drivers have a difficult job and need to concentrate on driving rather than student discipline. However, parents don't think it is necessary or reasonable for drivers to scold children for not having their pass, particularly when the child rides the same bus every day. Also parents expect drivers to put childrens' safety first, insisting they are seated at all times, controlling bullies and making sure a recognised adult meets the bus where required. Some parents wanted to know what authority bus drivers have to discipline children, with passes being suspended common in some areas but unheard of in others.
- **Locations and suitability of bus stops** is an issue in some areas. Parents want buses to stop in front of the school where students do not have to cross busy roads. Parents also do not want students dropped at remote or unsafe areas. Bus stops are considered the most unsafe part of the bus journey, with students and parents reporting robberies and bullying while waiting for the bus.

3.5. TRAIN TRAVEL

A number of train users were included in the focus groups, with most being senior students. Travel distances varied but some travelled long distances including Helensburgh to Cronulla, Liverpool to Central and Wangi (Lake Macquarie) to Broadmeadow. Concerns specific to train travel include:

- For students travelling on the train for long distances having the **train run to timetable** is critical to getting to school on time. These students often connect with bus transport at one or both ends of their train journey. The student travelling from Helensburgh to Cronulla had only 2 minutes according to the timetable to change trains at Sutherland. If the student misses the train to Cronulla they also miss the bus to school and have to walk to school making them even later to school.
- The other concern with train travel is personal safety. Train travellers were most likely to tell stories of **robberies and vandalism** by other students. Students felt that students in private school uniforms are targeted by gangs of youths who demand they give them mobile phones and money both on the train and the station platform. Older students also reported witnessing vandalism (blaming younger, year 8 or 9 students) including damaging seats and breaking windows. Parents were concerned that telephones on stations did not work and that some stations were not manned in the evening. Parents are more concerned about students travel on the train than the bus because of their children's personal safety.

3.6. SCHOOL SELECTION

It was generally agreed that schools are selected on the basis of suitability for the student or the courses offered. After the school is selected or narrowed down to a short list then the availability of transport is considered. In some cases, parents looked into transport available before moving or moved house to be closer to the selected school. Parents say the child's education comes first and they assume transport will be available. However, some students had turned down places at selective schools or OC class because parents considered the journey too long or unsafe.

3.7. APPLICATION PROCESS

There were few complaints about the actual **application form** with the only concern about the form being that the question asking where the student is travelling to and from is ambiguous. Parents were not sure if this referred to the home address or the bus stop or station address. The wording of this question also caused some confusion.

Parents did complain about having problems **getting the travel information** they needed to fill in the form. As mentioned previously, school bus and train timetables are not published and getting information is often a matter of talking to the right person at the bus company. Also when families move to a new area or students are changing schools, it is sometimes difficult to know which is the best route or what transport route or mode the students' friends will use. Parents suggested that there be a 'trial period' before final passes are issued.

Parents and students generally reported having to **complete an application before years 3 and 7** with passes being issued automatically each year after that if the student has not moved. However some parents expressed concern that private bus companies had passes for students that had moved and one older student reported that kids would collect these passes from the driver "for their friends". Parents expressed concern that bus companies were getting paid for these passes. Parents also complained that it **takes 2 to 3 weeks to get the pass** at the beginning of each term even though students are given a 'grace period' before they have to produce a pass. Some parents in Newcastle reported that it took several months to get a pass and that children often were hassled badly by drivers and train inspectors if they didn't have the pass.

3.8. TRAVEL PASS RULES AND CONFUSION

There appears to be a lot of confusion regarding the rules and restrictions which apply to travel passes. This may be because rules are inconsistently applied across the various transport providers. These include:

The **times** students are allowed to use their travel pass seemed to vary considerably across the State. In country areas this is due to the lack of public transport other than school buses, therefore passes were only good on the scheduled school bus. However, in areas where other transport is available or students are travelling on non-school buses or trains, the times student's reported being able to travel varied, particularly the times student's cannot use passes during the day (before 2:00pm – 3:00pm) and how late they can travel (from 4:30 to 6:30).

Students are generally required to **carry and present their pass**, however drivers are inconsistent in requiring students to show their pass and some will allow travel without the pass while others will be very strict with even very young children if they don't have their pass. Some bus companies will allow students to not have a pass for 3 days, taking names, while others will not allow the student on the bus even if they can pay. Parents feel it is unreasonable for drivers to 'terrorise' young children about

having a pass – this was one argument for having free travel for all K-6 students and doing away with the paper pass altogether.

The cost of **replacement passes** was brought up in nearly every group. This seemed to vary from between \$10 to \$15. One parent pointed out that this could be as high as \$30 if the student lost their wallet and hence both their bus and train pass. Some parents could not understand why they have to pay for a replacement pass when the pass was free. They also complained the replacement could take 2 to 3 weeks, and they had to pay for transport during that time.

3.9. SSTS COST CONCERNS

Parents in areas served by private buses were more likely to bring up the cost of the SSTS and the fact that bus companies are paid by the government to provide transport. Concerns regarding the cost were somewhat varied:

- Parents who were unhappy with overcrowding and scheduling issues felt that bus companies were abusing the system and the taxpayers were not getting what they paid for. They were also angry when buses did not pick up students (because they were full, drivers didn't want to stop or students didn't have their pass), saying the company is getting paid to transport the student and **companies have a responsibility to get students to and from school.**
- Parents suggested there should be a **'pay for use' system** where passes are scanned and companies are reimbursed for actual trips taken. A durable electronic key or fob was suggested to make the bus companies more accountable and passes more difficult to lose or damage. It was suggested that giving the private companies a pay for use system would be cheaper than paying for passes that are not used.
- Some parents felt the Scheme should **remain as it is**. They did not mind paying for, or providing alternate, transport when required as long as basic to and from school transport was provided free of charge.
- Other parents felt the Scheme is over generous in providing transport to any school the student wants to attend. Even parents who currently take advantage of this by sending students to schools further from home said that the Scheme **should only cover transport to the closest public school** and parents should be responsible for the cost beyond that point.
- On the other hand a parent of a child attending a selective school in Newcastle and who travelled a long distance said that they could not afford to send their daughter to this school if it was not for the free travel. He believed that if there isn't free travel to selective schools there is no point having them as they are designed to serve the needs of talented children from a large catchment area.

3.10. LOCAL CONCERNS

- There were two focus groups in **Tamworth** with parents of primary students and parents of secondary students. The area is served by 3 private bus companies. The parents of primary students expressed concern about the length of time students were on the bus and that children had to change buses. Additionally the bus company has cut one bus from the schedule (we hear this was part of a State-wide initiative of cut backs by the bus company). In cutting one bus, travel times for students were increased and school starting and finishing times were rearranged. Parents were concerned that the bus companies were dictating school times and in some cases students had to leave class 10 to 20 minutes early to catch their bus each afternoon.
- Several of these families live several kilometres from town and students are on the bus for over an hour. Parents were unhappy that young students were not allowed to eat or drink on the bus and that there are no toilets for students. Bus schedules are so tight that there is not time for students to get a drink or go to the toilet before getting on the bus. It is understandable that parents are concerned about children becoming dehydrated on hot days or being embarrassed about wetting themselves on the bus.
- In the **Ballina** area, many children are picked up along main country roads. On some roads the bus stops are marked with yellow warning signs, however this is not always the case and parents would like to see better signage warning other drivers that school buses may be stopping in the area, particularly on hilly and winding roads. It may be the case that RTA control roads are marked and Council maintained roads are not.
- One parent in **Norwa**, was also working at a Suspension Unit at the local school. As she explained it is a pilot unit for students that have been suspended for 5 to 20 days from eight area schools. As these students are changing their travel requirements for that time, they are not able to use their pass and as the time period is so short they are unable to make changes to their current pass. She felt it was important that the Suspension Unit had some ability to assist these children with travel arrangements for the program to be successful.
- Although in **Newcastle** there are both private and public buses, there is still a limited choice of services for both types of bus users. The concern for parents was that if the children missed the school bus, or were not able to catch the school bus because of other activities, there were no other services for them, they had to be driven to school or picked up. Unreliability of services was a significant problem either because the bus arrived at irregular times or, in some cases, the bus frequently broke down. Overcrowding on STA buses was seen as a problem. There was a belief that this had become worse after the timetable changes following the recent “Bus Review”.
- In areas north of **Wollongong** parents felt they had to send students north to school (ie Helensburgh to Engadine) because there is a direct bus service even though they would prefer they go to south into Wollongong.

- In **Wagga Wagga** parents disagreed with private bus company restrictions on how far they could travel on the bus and restrictions placed on attending certain schools because the bus company will not allow the students to travel beyond a certain distance from home.

3.11. METRO VS. NON-METRO CONCERNS

- Student safety is a concern in metro and non-metro areas, both in terms of personal safety (ie. robbery, assault, bullying, etc.) and road safety (standing on the bus, seatbelts, etc).
- Because **metro** students have more transport options, parents were more likely to raise **issues of SSTS flexibility**, such as breaking journey, using various travel modes or routes and extending travel times.
- In most **non-metro** areas, the only transport available is one or two morning or afternoon buses. Therefore flexibility of the pass is not an issue because there are **no public transport options available**. These parents would like a better service, but generally understand that this is not economically feasible. They are fairly accepting of the situation and grateful for the service they do receive.

3.12. SUGGESTED CHANGES TO THE SCHOOL STUDENT TRANSPORT SCHEME

When asked how they would like to make the SSTS more flexible or how they would like to change the Scheme suggestions included:

- All K-6 year students eligible for a free travel pass
- All students in uniform eligible for free travel at any time
- Free travel for any education related travel
- Free travel for child care related travel
- One pass for all travel modes
- Be able to use a bus pass on different routes
- Not to have to choose a bus or a train pass when these are alternative choices
- Escort passes for carers
- Exam passes during trial and test periods for HSC students
- Free travel to zoned schools or the nearest public school only with paid transport available for students travelling further
- Multiple destination passes so students can travel to designated locations such as child care, relatives or parent's work
- Pay for use pass so companies are reimbursed for actual travel only
- Extend travel hours (7:30pm to 8:00pm)
- Allow students to break journey on same route
- Allow day time travel for school related activities (TAFE, VET, exams, etc)
- Allow flexible routes of travel
- Free travel for Saturday sport (school related).

3.13. ISSUES RAISED IN RELATION TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN GENERAL

- **Lack of services:** This a particular concern in private bus operator areas and even in the STA areas in Newcastle. In some cases there are no services other than the school bus. This is a particular problem for teenagers who are not yet old enough to drive as they are totally dependent on their parents to take them places. It is not surprising that they try and get a drivers licence, and if possible a car, as soon as possible. Older students are often also rely on getting lifts from friends who have a drivers licence, raising the issue of groups of young people riding with inexperience drivers.
- **Personal safety:** parents are concerned about their teenagers using public transport at night especially on the trains and around stations. This is made worse when stations are not manned and telephones on the stations don't work. Although buses are considered safer than trains, there is concern about safety around the bus stops and bullying on the bus.
- **Road safety:** Issues of overcrowding, students having to stand or not staying seated and lack of seatbelts were raised in most groups. One parent even reported their child suffering a broken nose when another child pushed into them when the bus slowed for a give way sign (both children were standing in the aisle). Having children cross busy roads is also a concern among parents.
- **The attitude of bus drivers towards children:** One mother emphasized the need for bus drivers to be helpful and supportive, especially with the small children, as they can become very distressed if they are hassled about losing their pass or forget where to get off. It is important that the bus is seen as a supportive environment as that it encourages them to use public transport more.
- **Lack of information:** Many parents and students reported difficulties in getting information about services around schools. This was particularly important when students were starting at a new school.
- **Bus stops:** Especially in private bus areas are often not even marked. There is rarely any shelter, a seat or timetable information. Young people, especially if changing buses or traveling at night, feel very unsafe waiting in places where there are no facilities and no information about services.

APPENDIX:

DISCUSSION GUIDE
&
SELF-COMPLETION QUESTIONNAIRE



TAVERNER
Research
Company

Introduction

- Introduce self and Taverner Research
- Research Confidentiality
- Request permission for audio taping (moderator and reporting purposes only)
- Relax and enjoy the session
- Remember there are no right or wrong answers and we are not trying to come to a consensus or agreement on any issue – everyone's opinion is valuable and we want input from everyone
- Tonight we are going to talk about how you / your children get to and from school and the School Student Transport Scheme and how you / your child uses their pass.
- Ask participants to introduce themselves to the group by telling us about themselves,
 - Number and ages of children
 - Single or two parent household, if 1 or 2 parents work
 - Type of travel passes that children hold
 - What school they go to and how far they travel to school.

Student Travel Dynamics

Thinking about getting your children to and from school – tell me about your daily routine.

When and why do you change your routine?

If not mentioned:

- What happens when they have before or after school activities?
- How about when it is raining?

How often do your children use their travel pass?

If never/not often – why did you apply for a free travel pass? Why don't they use it? On what occasions do they use it?

If more often – when do they not use their travel pass?

What problems or difficulties do you or your friends have getting your children to or from school?

How do/did you handle travel to and from child care?

What do you do when your children have after school activities?

Do you have any concerns with your children using public transport?

How is the application process handled at your school? Any problems?

Changes in Travel

Have you or do you know people who have made decisions about schools or childcare because of transport arrangements? Explain.

Have you encountered any situations that are not currently covered by the School Student Transport Scheme that you think should be?

Are there any changes you would like to see to the School Student Transport Scheme?
(note: not discussing eligibility of students requirements in this group)

If not mentioned:

- What about using the travel pass for transport to or from childcare?
- What about for older students to attend education related activities away from their main school campus?

If the school student transport scheme were more flexible how would your child's travel behaviour change.

Changes to the Scheme

Would you like the scheme to be more flexible?

In what ways would you like the scheme to be more flexible? Record on Flipchart.

Topics for discussion if needed:

- Flexibility
- All education related travel
- Child care related (formal and informal)
- Social factors – lifestyle arrangements
- All travel on school days 6am – 6pm
- All travel modes
- Flexible mode use
- Eligibility of various family members
- Breaking journey
- Multi campus
- Escort pass for career or grandparent.

Considering the cost of the scheme to the taxpayer, how would you prioritise these changes?

Would you be willing to give up (insert here) if you get the flexibility to (insert here)?

Summary Worksheet

School Student Travel Pass Scheme Focus Group Summary

Q1. What year is your oldest student currently in?

K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Q2. What types of travel pass do they hold?

1. State Transit bus
2. Private Company bus
3. 2nd Private company bus
4. Rail
5. State Transit Ferry
6. Private Ferry
7. Other – specify _____

Q3. How long is their trip to and from school?

_____ km each way _____ minutes each way

Q4. In the average week, how many times do they use their travel pass:

a) In the morning 0 1 2 3 4 5

b) In the afternoon 0 1 2 3 4 5



Please Turn Over

Q5. What are the reasons they DON'T use their travel pass, when they don't?

1.

2.

3.

Q6. What are the reasons they USE their travel pass, when they do?

1.

2.

3.

Q7. I think the School Student Travel Pass Scheme should ...

1.

2.

3.

Thank you for participating



Group: _____