

School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee

Submission

Date 02/09/11

I live on a street that has 2 public funded bus stops with shelter and seating provided at either end of the street however the children tend to flag down the bus where ever they choose to stand.

I have witnessed the bus at times stop at the T-Intersection to drop off primary school children which I consider extremely dangerous.

I believe the children should be made to catch the bus from the designated bus stop for a number of reasons.

1) First of all for the safety of the children, they are in one place and the bus only needs to stop once to pick them up

2) A designated bus stop allows car drivers to know exactly where the children are. In my street at times the bus can stop 4 times picking & dropping off kids along the street even though it is a short street.

3) God gave children legs and I think they are capable of walking a short distance to a designated bus stop.

4) A designated bus stop would stop children from harassing the neighbourhood, (for example some children have been throwing balls against a neighbours house whilst waiting for a bus and when she asked them not to they told her to “Get Fxxked you old bag”) There is a bus stop but they choose to stand in front of her house instead. They tried to use my house but I told them to move on.

5) If children are allowed to flag down busses willy nilly then there is bound to be accidents.

Thank you

Wendy Wildie

Dear Ms Walsh

Please hear the voices of parents requesting that the safety of our children is taken seriously. Seat belts need to be compulsory on all school buses, and need to be used at all times.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely  
Catherine Grey

I would like to support the urgent call for provision of seatbelts in school buses.

Living in regional NSW I see school buses transporting school students distances of 100kms plus on Princes Highway travelling at 100 kph. Why should the law be any different to that for travelling in a motor car. These lives are also precious.

VIEW Clubs of Australia raised a Resolution to this Affect in 2009.

Hello Carolyn

It is interesting that you should be conducting a review into school bus safety as I was about to email just about everyone I could think of to protest about the lack of safety in the school buses I find it amazing that a country such as Australia would let it's most valuable possession travel with absolutely no safety and or security.

My 12 yr old grand-daughter lives with me and catches a school bus every morning and afternoon – to do this trip to her school she must travel --- standing up --- as the bus is over-crowded and numerous children have to stand – I am told the Yr 10 – Yr 12 have priority for the seats!!

She leaves her home – travels through Grafton – across the Grafton bridge – notorious for its bends and having to give way to semi trailers etc at a moments notice so the brakes go on and the children concertina into each other – she then travels along the Pacific Highway – we all know how unsafe the Pacific Highway is – the Highway to hell it is affectionately known as far and wide. She then turns off the highway into MacAuley College. All this travel is done WITHOUT a seat and WITHOUT a seatbelt.

I am not permitted to drive my car on ANY road without a seatbelt plus I must ensure all my passengers are belted and all the little children under 7 yrs MUST have child seats and restraints as you must also. Yet it seems it is good enough for the 12 yr old to travel on the highway without any restraint at all – and not only my child this is happening all over the country and it MUST be stopped Surely more buses can be added to transport all children seated and in safety restraints. I cannot understand how this unsafe practice is allowed to continue – why is there a law for everyone else when travelling except our school children – it is to ridiculous to comprehend.

I trust you will take this submission to the committee and better still I trust something will be done to rectify this unsafe practice as soon as possible.

Kind regards

Mary Salter

To the committee

I have driven buses and coaches for 30 years mostly on the newell highway and still driving.

Schools: The most dangerous part of my day is the delivery and pick up of students at the schools, owing to the behaviour of parents who only have eyes for their children. It would be much better if the cars and buses were separated and adhered to, but in some schools the parents should be back at school they can't read signs. At the local high school Senior Campus the school has endorsed the "P" plate students using and parking in the bus zone. which is marked a bus zone 24/7, and used by buses the same 24/7. Which makes for a bad mix "P" plate drivers who don't care about anyone else but themselves.

Student Behaviour: The next problem is student discipline, why should us the drivers have to control unruly students. Today I had a student use spray deodorant on the bus these items are banned by the schools as I found out earlier today so why are they taking these to school??. I have put in a report on another student who has been told repeatedly over the past 2 weeks not to use the "F" word, on friday she use it with the "C" word, so I went the report. Another issue is the use of personal music player which are used to broadcast uncensored material through out the bus, isn't it fun to have technology used for the wrong application.

Bus Design: The fitment of seat belts is ridiculous, as who's going to enforce the use of them. we had the use of a coach from my employer over the last 2 weeks with seat belts. the students were told the coach is fitted with seat belts and must be used, I saw nearly every student in the aisle at one time or another during the journey. utter rubbish fitting seat belts this would increase the amount of buses on the road and this cost would be born by the tax payer for zero benefit.

Off Bus: The same student (year 12) who used the spray can on the bus also alights the bus and walks around the front of the bus, I have blasted him with the horn a couple of times and spoke to him repeatedly, but he ignores this and is still doing it.

Suggestions: There is only so much you can do and then the person has to be responsible for their own actions, if they continue walk in front of the bus and are hit by a car what can you do, they have been warned and until someone runs over their toes they won't get it!

Regards  
Doug Oldfield

Dear Carolyn

All mothers are worried about their own children safety: at home and on the road to school. Even parents or grandparents of children who have left school are still supporting seat belts on school buses. This has been a long debate jumping between financial budget constraints to bus companies freedom to take as many children as they can carry to real safety issues! This is not an issue in other states of Australia. why is NSW so different in terms of prioritising our children safety? what are we waiting for? for a tragedy and then to act?

Trusting you will act on this soon, or before a tragedy happens.

In the meantime, I am organising a private bus for my children to be driven to school with other children. Obviously we have to pay, but we have no option at this stage.

Best regards

My Holland

8<sup>th</sup> September, 2011

Dear Chair Carolyn Walsh,

Thank you for considering the following submission for the School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee.

My daughter experiences anxiety at having to travel in a school bus without seatbelts. Twice daily she travels 30 km on an Environment 3 rated route through the winding narrow roads of Conjola National Park and then onto the Princes Highway where there are white crosses and regular stories of crashes. Her Dad has sadly hit a kangaroo in the past and it was the seatbelt that saved him from serious injury and my daughter knows that. I worked for years in emergency services and I have repeatedly seen the force exerted on people and the effect of force in highway speed crashes. I have attended a bus crash where the bus did not require seat belts. The outcome of the single moment when the bus driver lost control of the vehicle included over 20 deaths and numerous critically and seriously injured persons. I can testify that **NOT ONE PERSON REMAINED IN THEIR SEAT due to the force of the crash. Many were thrown out of the bus and most were piled on top of each other in a carnage that could have been prevented.** I require my family to ride in a car with airbags and my daughter has a harness restraint to protect her. She tells me that she is jostled around and at times bumped off the seat in the school bus, which is in stark comparison to the requirement of our family when traveling in vehicles. This leaves her feeling unsafe.

N.S.W. has had the Grafton and Kempsey bus crashes, and the realization of injury to unrestrained passengers traveling at high speed prompted public safety initiatives. It has obviously been the intention of the government to stipulate bus safety requirements based on the risk to people. To hide behind a clause in a document that says seatbelts are not required on route bus services is a ruse. It is well proven that the government did not intend to have people travel in buses on high-speed roads without seatbelts. It is well proven by the government's own review of bus routes that there are significant hazards in the non-urban bus routes. It is well proven that seatbelts reduce injury to people in high speed crashes.

I think there are human rights issues for the children who are mandated to travel to school, and yet who are not provided with basic right to the standard for safety that is required for all other buses traveling in Australia on roads that permit high speed. Children today are intelligent and observant. They know they are being placed in harms way, which is unacceptable.

I urge you to advocate for our children, and recommend the changes necessary to provide them with the opportunity to be restrained by a seatbelt on all non-urban school bus routes.

Regards,  
Lisa Turner

Dear Carolyn

I would like to make the following submission to the Committee with regard to School Bus Safety: Whilst school bus travel is widely recognised in developed countries as one of the safest forms of travel on our roads, it does not mean that when something does go wrong the consequences are not dire. Many of the publications and papers I have read with regard to school bus safety are directed towards vehicles which travel regularly in metropolitan areas. Whilst this might provide an increased risk due to the amount of traffic available in this area the effect of kinetic energy in a crash is reduced by the travel speeds of the vehicles involved. In rural areas where buses often have children standing and/or sitting three to a bench seat the consequences of a collision with another vehicle travelling at 100km/ph do not bode well for any occupants of either vehicle. In rural areas, school buses often travel on 100km local roads which are single lane with narrow sealed shoulders. These roads are also often used by B double trucks and road trains. Whilst, we have been lucky enough in our area not to have had a school bus crash we are always mindful of safety on school bus routes and the risks to this user group in particular and have particular guidelines for the authorisation of routes and the installation of rural school bus stops. There is much debate about the installation of seatbelts in school buses and many groups do not advocate the installation of seatbelts including, but not limited to, organisations such as RACV University of N Carolina Highway Safety Research Centre. Here the grounds are on cost and also the limitation of use of two belts to a bench seat when three students often use them. Again, I would iterate that many of these buses are travelling in rural areas on 100km roads and the installation and use of seatbelts would no doubt assist in the reduction of trauma in a crash in these situations. Should a crash happen on one of our rural roads it is highly unlikely that our health services would be able to deal with an incident of this magnitude. The facilitation of dealing with forty or more seriously injured children would not be possible and the delays in getting care to the injured could result in an increased rate of fatalities. Much of the school bus fleet in rural areas is also 'second hand' coming from the metropolitan areas and so I understand that retrofitting may be expensive. Personally the cost of a seatbelt compared to the cost of the life of a child offers no comparison to me but I do understand that bus operators are there to make a business work so no doubt financial assistance would be required from a governmental source. Furthermore, in relation to bus crash testing, I am not aware of any 'moderate to high speed' testing for buses. As I have said much of the 'fleet' in rural areas is relatively old to that of metropolitan areas and as such probably offers significantly higher risk to occupants during a high speed impact. Apart from these points I would also like to see padding of bars and holding areas on these buses as quite often children standing or getting up to get off a bus will be forced onto these during a quick stop of the bus in emergencies or even during rapid deceleration. These impacts in themselves can cause serious injuries. Furthermore, the behaviour of parents at rural school bus stops requires some education as to correct procedures and harm minimisation. Often parents will park on the opposite side of poorly lit roads and call their children across without checking for traffic or waiting until the bus has departed which can expose the child to increased risk of involvement.

in a crash. As many of these rural roads have speed limits posted above 80km any crash involving a child and another vehicle travelling at this speed will almost certainly result in the child's death. Therefore, in summary I would like to propose the following:

- More consideration or separate consideration given to the implementation of safety measures for rural school buses where there is an increased risk of injury due to increased speeds of traffic
- Consideration of the costs of retrofitting seatbelts to school buses and possible funding sources for this
- The implementation of mandatory seatbelt fitting AND use in all new school buses
- A crashworthiness test, similar to ANCAP, as to the rating of school bus safety.
- The installation of padding to hard surfaces and bars in school buses
- Education of parents on the correct procedures and risk assessment for rural school bus stops

I thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important matter.

Sandra Robinson

I would like to support the submission for seatbelts on buses used for school transport, school excursions, and the general public, especially as we all have to travel on a major highway to town.

Ainslie Morris

Hi Carolyn,

We live in Narrabri, a rural town in north west New South Wales. We live 40 kilometres from Narrabri in the Yarrie Lake area. The school bus has to travel on unsealed roads, which can become slippery when it rains. We waited for about two years for the Narrabri Shire Council to put some gravel on parts of the road after they had to wait for funding from the RTA, but I think a school bus route should be sealed, if not completely covered with gravel to make it an all weather road. When we have had a lot of rain, I make plans to stay in Narrabri as I don't like driving on a slippery road not do I want my daughter travelling on the school bus on the road for fear of it slipping off the road. You would think in this day and age, school bus routes would be tarred. Thank you for the opportunity for a 'whinge'.

Mrs Robyn Collett

Dear Carolyn

I wish to make the following submissions in relation to country school buses:

1. That there be an ombudsman to investigate complaints against school bus companies and their handling of matters; and
2. That each school bus have a security guard appointed;
3. Provide allowances for parents who have no choice but to remove their kids off the bus and drive them to school.

The reason for this are as follows:

On Point 1

During 2009/10 my step son and my next door neighbours were subject to bullying on their local bus. In reacting to this a number of things happened:

- (a) They reacted and we prevented from taking the bus;
- (b) The bus driver reacted calling them "faggots"
- (c) Conditions set forth to prevent further bullying were not adhered to.

Following the incident, the boys had more and more allegations thrown at them - a retaliation for my actions in making a complaint. Old (alleged) matters were dusted off and cited as evidence of their pattern (yet we had never been told of them). They made little effort to investigate the complaints and shrugged them off. They did nothing to stop the bullying or to assist the boys to be separated from danger (ie they were supposed to sit behind the driver - but the driver didn't remove kids from that seat when they boarded the bus, hence they were sent to wherever).

Ultimately there was no outcome and we took the kids from the bus.

There was no accountability by the bus company. A complaint to the department yielded nothing

On Point 2

With respect to issue two, there were numerous defences thrown up by the bus company that it was not possible for the bus driver to manage behaviour on the bus and that he had to stop the bus to deal with issues. He was not there to referee or prevent bullying. As the bus company, like any school, holds a duty of care to protect students from bullying and other behaviours, it is clear by the bus company's own admission that there is a need to provide security guards on the buses to address the company's duty of care.

Students should not be at risk of issues on the bus, or injury if a driver is distracted and has an accident.

Times have changed and so have the rowdy behaviours of students - it is time to adjust accordingly.

On Point 3

With respect to the travel allowance, it was clear in our situation that we had to remove our son from the environment. He was turning up to school in a bad mood, having been bullied, and he was then acting out. This caused problems for him at school and he was further bullied and also committed bullying. To curb this reaction, we took him to school at our own cost. Surely monies saved from his travel on the bus could be redirected to parents to assist their costs of taking him to school when there is no other choice but to remove the child from the bus.

Kind regards

Geoffrey Hallmann

Good Morning,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on regional and rural school bus safety.

My husband and I operate a school bus service and have done for approximately 9 (nine) years. Our vehicle was updated a few years ago and we chose to purchase a bus with seat belts. The roads we travel on are narrow, windy, unsealed and poorly maintained by our local council. We have had numerous meetings and written many letters complaining about the road conditions, to no avail. (There are over 100 kilometres of unsealed, dangerous school bus routes in Cowra Shire alone). Perhaps all school bus routes, roads should be managed by the RTA ensuring consistency of road surfaces and maintenance.

It is proven that seatbelts do not reduce the risk of accidents but certainly reduce the risk of injury. One believes that the Department of Transport should encourage operators, when updating their fleets to purchase vehicles with seatbelts, by abolishing the 3 for 2 payment system. Our students are far better behaved and remain in their seats because our bus has seatbelts. Schools should insist on seat belted buses for extended school excursions.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any additional information.

Yours sincerely  
Joanne Cameron

Dear Carolyn

**RE: IT IS VITAL TO HAVE SEAT BELTS ON SCHOOL BUSES**

I am writing this submission because I am absolutely disgusted our government hasn't made seat belts on school buses compulsory! More than 100 of our local children ride on school buses which travel at high speeds along deadly highways (my stretch is Valla Beach to Coffs Harbour). These full buses speed along in rain, hail and floods. Sometimes children have to stand, they fall about, muck around, innocently unknowing, vulnerable to the experience (or lack of it) of the driver. It is carelessly dangerous and highly irresponsible of our government not to ensure all school buses have seat belts. They need to genuinely listen to the many families who are pleading, fighting to make the positive change ASAP. It is illegal for anyone to be in a car without a seatbelt and it should be the same on a bus, actually more so, because they are bigger and more flimsy.

Seat belts on buses will also produce other positive benefits, such as, children can be rowdy at the best of times, but confining them to their seats, will calm them down considerably and stop any obstructions to the driver. The driver can concentrate better. The Pacific Highway from Nambucca to Coffs Harbour is one very serious and dangerous stretch or road. I have sadly seen many fatalities and heard of way too many. People in my community have died on that dam highway. The scary stories I have heard from my kids about their bus having near misses or going too fast, made my spine shiver and my temper soar.

Enough is enough, OUR CHILDREN ARE PRECIOUS, they are important and valued by us all. Children are our future and we MUST look after them with everything we have. Teach them what is right, to stand up and be a voice and strength for JUSTICE , FAIRNESS and EQUALITY for all.

Would you let your child play "russian roulette" every day?

It's time the government valued all their citizens, especially the children. They better stop being 'hypertwits' and get their priorities right. The bus companies need incentives, regulations and serious pushing to comply.

Install seatbelts on all school buses NOW. This is a job worth doing pronto !

Thanks for your time

Yours sincerely

Karen Selbie

Dr. Mark Borsuk....I want to support the cause to acquire seat belts on buses and public transport....I hope this is my submission...If I can be of help in another manner, please let me know...cheers, mark

SUBMISSION TO THE NSW SCHOOL BUS SAFETY  
COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

By: Jenny Allan

Date: 13th September 2011

As a concerned parent of children that travel on buses along the Pacific Highway in the Mid North Coast of NSW to school, I wish to express my concern at the ongoing issue of seatbelts on school buses.

We all know the best way to protect ourselves while travelling on our roads is to belt up. We do it for ourselves and family when we jump in the car, why is it not compulsory on our school buses?

Dear Carolyn,

i read about the seat belts for children in the NRMA magazine.

This is an issue which i thought on for a while. I really think seat belts should be introduced for children on busses!

I there a way I can organise parents signatures or something to support that case?

Kind regard

Jadranka

Good afternoon,

We have a 7 year old daughter who attends Jindabyne Central School. Recently she attended the school skiing program, held in Thredbo Resort, for which students are transported by bus to and from the resort. I contacted the school, bus company and John Barilaro, our local political member, regarding the supply of buses with seatbelts. I have attached correspondence relating to the bus transport for your reference.

Our daughter doesn't currently travel to or from school on the buses supplied by Cooma Coaches as there is no guarantee that they will have seatbelts fitted (we live 10 minutes drive away from her school). She traveled by school bus to a friends place last week, 20 minutes out of town along roads with 100km speed limits, and the bus had no seatbelts. This is a ridiculously dangerous situation to allow school children of any age to travel in and hence, we won't be using this service again. We strongly believe all school buses should be fitted with seatbelts to ensure the safe transport of our children.

Your Sincerely,

Daisy Oayda

Dear Ms Walsh,

I am writing this email in response to a publication in my local Primary school's newsletter regarding school bus safety.

I have a seven year old (8 in April 2012) and a 5 year old (6 in Oct 2011) who currently attend Corowa Public School (west of Albury on the Murray River) and travel on the bus, provided by local bus company Cann's Buslines. Both of them are very impulsive (especially the elder one) and, I believe, far too young to be making their own way to school on those days that I am unable to walk with them. Indeed, for health reasons (post-cancer), walking with them of a morning is not always possible - even if I did not have other commitments. We live about 2.5km from the school, and they would have to cross six roads, two being major thoroughfares and a third providing access to the hospital, medical centre and high school. In contrast, the bus stop is just around the corner -they have a choice of two: one requires no roads to be crossed, and the other, only our own street and a cul-de-sac.

At present their travel is subsidised by the NSW government. As of next year, my older child will have to pay to catch the bus to school (I am not sure if this is because of his age or the fact that he will be going into Stage 2 at school). This is a concern of mine, as my husband is on a relatively low income (at least \$10,000 below the national average) and I do no paid work (I have a number of volunteer jobs). While we do not go without any basic needs, we do struggle to pay our way and our budget (once all bills are paid and some put aside for yearly costs) allows for each of us to have about \$20 each per week in spending money - it is out of this we pay for extra school costs and will have to pay for the bus trip to school.

I don't know how much the costs for the bus will be, however, even if it is low, there have been so many increasing costs for us over the last couple of years that each one added to the rest makes a substantial amount we have to find each week. I recently worked out that the Primary school asks for money for something every single week - most of it is general fundraising, although a very little part of it is for excursions. To add to that they have recently introduced a new uniform - the most expensive one in town! In general, we are finding that the costs of schooling our children in the public system is becoming too much of a burden, and to add to that burden we now have to produce bus fare.

I would like the committee to consider the impact of the withdrawal of subsidisation of bus fares on town families who might be unable to meet the extra costs - or at least struggle with them, and have to face the temptation of letting their young children walk to school unattended.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute.

Sharon Letchford

Dear Carolyn,

I am writing to you to outline my fears and concerns re the lack of seat belts on the buses going up the highway towards coffs harbour from Valla Beach. My husband and I moved here a year ago with our four year old daughter hoping to give her a wonderful country upbringing. We endeavour to send her to bishop druitt college but the lack of seat belts on the school buses will leave us with no choice than to move from our current location to one where seat belts are not a luxury but rather a safe mandatory law that can protect my child.

I find it mind-blowing that the state government thinks it is ok for my four year old child to travel 100km up the highway with no Safety restraints .It also strikes me as somewhat hypocritical that as an adult, if i travel up the same stretch of highway i could be stopped by a policeman and fined for not wearing the very same seat belt.

Surely our children are our future and must be protected at all costs?

I challenge anyone in state government to admit that they would be happy to send their own children up the highway at 100km per hour as my child is being asked to do.

I am offended that i have to ask for what i would deem a necessary precaution just to secure the safety of my child.

If I asked my four year old to get on the bus one of the first things she would say is where is my seat belt . I don't want to have a crash.To me if a four year old understands this why can't the grown ups in politics also understand it....

I am left hoping somebody can see how nonsensical this is and help me work towards our solution.

michelle gruber

Dear Carolyn Walsh

Submission to you and members of NSW School Bus Safety Committee (part 1)

As a person very involved in the Campaigns to obtain adequate Safety in rural Australian School Buses equal to the Safety in ADR68 New and imported Australian Buses intended for ALL Tourist, Charter and rural School Buses since 1995, and having started as an invited witness to a Federal Hansard Heavy Vehicle Parliamentary Committee public hearing in 1985 when NO Bus passenger safety including seat belts existed, I offer my first hand experience to assist you.

On 24th May 2011, I was notified by Joe Motha, General Manager of National Dept of Road Safety, that I was now recognised as a Stakeholder in these issues (normally only for organisations, Professors etc) and that my Submission to the 2011 Road Safety Strategy would be published on their web site on 15th June 2011.

The new 2011 Strategy includes various comments on the need for these seat belted Safety needs.

For privacy of quoted victims therein, some details were blacked out. (Full unedited copy attached).

On 20th March 2011, three days after I met Vic. Minister Mulder on referral from our Premier, ALL Australiian Transport Ministers adopted this Report. Your NSW Minister has proven her sincerity by appointing you.  
Our Vic Minister wrote to me, personally signed, last week ADVISING NO RISKS OR NEED FOR SEAT BELTED AND OTHER SAFETY IN VICTORIAN SCHOOL BUSES.

THIS IS ABSURD AS PER MY ATTACHED REPLY.

This is NOT an Ego trip, but to confirm my recognition on these issues as detailed on my attached involvement as in attached Resume summarised up to now.

The needs, results, as invited guest Speaker and Papers to 2005 National Road Safety Strategy Panel,  
2007 National Road Conference at Sydney Parliament House, 1985 Federal Hansard, Negotiations with all Australian Governments, and my Official Reply from then Federal Transport Minister 4th December 1992 detail the successes and deliberate refusal of all Governments until 2005 to comply for rural School Buses.

Since 2007, all our Goverrnments except NSW and Victoria are in process of complying.  
I do and will forward copies of some relevant documents which include the dangers and required remedies.  
From 2007 onwards I have been in close contact with Glenda Staniford and her Belt up for Safety Bus Group.

NSW per yourself are now very sincerely attempting to rectify the past contempt for Child safety in NSW School Buses.

From 1997, Victorian Governments agreed to my request, then on behalf of the Victorian Council of School Organisations, VICCSO, to NOT ALLOW STANDING PUPILS IN RURAL SCHOOL BUSES as far too dangerous in rural speed zones from 80kph up to 100kph or more.

As in the Victorian 1990-1 Govt appointed Bus Safety Report, including myself, such Standees would have very little hope of worthwhile survival in a crash or sudden braking.

It is beyond belief that NSW Govts admit they still require up to 28 such Pupils to stand in these School Buses, as well as 3for2 seating of younger Pupils, resulting in up to double the adult allowable seated load.

The attached Royal Australasian College of Surgeons letter to NTC, reconfirmed recently, predicts Australia's worst ever road disaster when such a School Bus crashes.

As before, I regard this as homicidal. Must I again give Safety Evidence Submissions to Bus Crash Inquests as I have done before including Kempsey and Grafton NSW 1989 ( 55 dead and 54 seriously injured), and more recently a V Line Bus at Heathmere near Portland Vic. where two adults, a two year old and an unborn child, were hurled to their deaths due available seat belts in a large modern bus NOT being worn,

Coroner Spooner requested Vic. Govt. in her Report on 30th March 2011 for compulsory availability and wearing of seat belts in ALL non urban Buses including School Buses, and provision of booster seats for younger Pupils as being trialled in WA and SA rural School Buses which are now ADR68 Seat Belted Standard, and have 3for2 seat belts. This middle belt has two shoulder straps for smaller pupils, and like in back seat of cars can be ignored for larger pupils with just one pupil per seat.

Their Pupils wear these belts, respect road rules, and the aisles are clear removing much driver distraction.

The rare non behaving Pupils and their Parents are warned Pupils can be refused later use of the School Buses.

Parents do NOT want, and do not have the time to drive long distances twice a day. Pupils behave.

Pupils must never be left roadside. We must avoid risk of further fatal disappearances as sadly in Queensland.

#### DEAD AND MUTILATED PUPILS DUE LACK OF SAFETY COMPULSORY FOR ADULTS MUST BE AVOIDED

The Victorian Govt is the only other State so far refusing seat belted rural School Buses, and is requiring 3for2 seating in non complying School Buses built to unspecified structural Standards allowed only for genuine urban route Buses due deadly low back seats, without required 20g. firmly backed seats, and structures not intended to withstand impact at or above 80kph. These

standards can be the same as those that disintergrated at Kempsey and Grafton NSW with EVERY SEAT in two of these buses dislodged on impact.

The European Union copied some of our 1995 world first Seat Belted ADR68 Standards, but stupidly only require lap only seat belts which have been proven unsafe and deadly. In speed crashes or sudden braking, passengers instantly double up like a peg gaining severe internal injuries, then rebound up gaining severe head, neck and spinal injuries including quadraplegic and stroke like damage.

Any variations of ADR68, even if good, are illegal in Australia unless all States and Federal Govt agree to update the ADR68. 16 years later NSW and Victoria refuse to accept the ADR68 Safety for School Buses, yet thankfully at least enforce it for ALL other Tourist and Charter Buses.

Requests to change the ADRs could result in a decade or more to obtain unanimous agreement.

The ADR68 was agreed to by ALL Australian Govts at the October 1992 ATC Transport Ministers Meeting, gazetted by Federal Govt in Oct 1992, and the attached Reply from Federal Minister 4th December 1992 was confirmed in mass media.

It applied to ALL Newly registered Tourist, Charter and rural School School Buses.

It was a world first, and required these Buses to be designed and constructed, and hence to apply from mid 1995.

Rural School Buses are not fare paying route Buses, they do not stop at regular Stops for anybody to get in.

Each is a Chartered Special only for Specified authorised Pupils

The use of School Buses lacking seat belt Safety until now in NSW and Victoria, is contrary to the United Nations Equal Rights to Life of the Child, and of some of our States, and contrary to Federal Govt adopted Report 1985, as per my then Hansard Submission.

In Victoria available bus seat belts must be worn by law if available by all aged 16years and over.

Of course, the ADR68 Standard is a minimum Standard, and any ADR68 Bus can have additional higher Safety Standards, such as improved Safety Glass, Air Conditioning, padded seats and vertical bars,, Emergency Communication, separate storage for School Bags, Music, laptop and sports equipment etc which otherwise become deadly high speed missiles in high speed crashes.

Slowing the School Buses can add to the dangers of impact with other high speed vehicles including heavy vehicles, and of passing head on and side swipe crashes

Last week in a New Zealand crash on 5th September, a School Bus was rear ended by a timber truck and forced well off the road. The driver avoided rollover or striking hard objects, and the timber truck has an empty load.

Like NSW and Victoria, the bus was of suburban standard and without seat belts, and as expected 35 young pupils were hurled from their seats and injured, six are still critical or severely injured.

Media reports usually don't mention the severe and often long lasting post traumatic stress injuries.

As a health Professional I am very aware of this impact on surviving crash victims, their rescuers and next of kin.

Victorian Govts admit having replaced over 1400 of 1600 rural School Buses since 1995 with NEW suburban standard buses which would need seats replaced, seat anchorages increased to 20g. if possible depending on floor structure etc and placement of fuel and mechanical items below Bus floors.

Two Victorian School Buses have been gutted within minutes in past year by mechanical or electrical fires.

Without a crash, Pupils just managed to evacuate their buses, which would be unlikely if a crash also resulted with dead and injured Pupils littered around the Bus and its aisles.

Improved flammability protection is another urgently needed improvement.

Can I assist you during your Inquiry, and as you hopefully obtain prompt remedial action.

NSW has not informed what Standards if any your rural School Buses comply with.

These urban route Buses are EXEMPTED from ADR68 Standards if for genuine urban route use only.

Many may be unretrofitable

The full seat belt Safety had a \$40million Federal Subsidy from both PMs Howard and Rudd of \$25,000 per Bus from 2007, but \$28million has been withdrawn as unused, and only up to \$6million remains subject to complying Buses being completed by 30th June next.

The Federal Opposition has agreed to an increased Subsidy of \$45,000 per Bus, and additional funding, if and when Federal Govt agrees. At present this would require agreement of Opposition, all Greens and Independents, or sudden Support from our Federal Govt to realise and support Howard and Rudd's intentions.

Over the years, I have made various requests to Federal Govts for such ongoing Subsidies prior and since the above subsidies, as has Glenda Staniford.

I have numerous previous documents to and from Govts if required.  
I will forward some of them as part of this Submission. Although some were to other Governments, the contents apply also to NSW School Buses up to now.

The extreme risks apply on ALL rural roads, and not just on selected roads and highways.

ALL Pupils are at risk and the aim as in WA and SA needs to be for all rural School Buses.

Nobody can predict on which road disaster will strike.

Whitney Welsh was hurled out of her School Bus in NSW in September 2007, and fatally speared by a tree branch., and died hours later. Others have died, and many injured elsewhere.

I am advised no Inquest ever occurred despite Whitney's rural Coroner obtaining Safety evidence from myself and then being overruled as her Coroner.

A 10 year old girl was severely injured in November 2009 in a Victorian School Bus crash at a T Intersection and thrown off her seat. She has 25% permanent brain damage and even now can only attend School part time.

The impact was at 70kph. Others were also hurt.

The Victorian Independent Chief Investigator confirmed that Contracts for Victorian School Buses

**DO NOT SPECIFY ANY MINIMUM PASSENGER SAFETY STANDARDS.**

Does the same apply in NSW which so far has refused to give me any details on Standards, Age, Safety etc of NSW rural School Buses?

On 6th September recently the Victorian Transport Minister who had met me both as a Shadow Minister, and on 17th May 2011 as Transport Minister, following much correspondence,

**REFUSED AND DENIED THE NEED FOR SAFER SCHOOL BUSES**, and repeated in a signed letter to me the nonsense excuses of previous Governments.

Yet as above he had supported the 2011 National Road Safety Strategy last March which emphasised the needed seat belts and other Safety.

I attach copy of my reply this week to Victorian Premier who so far is silent and is yet to agree with his Minister or overrule him.

I am just a phone call away, if my assistance is requested.

Your sincerely

Leon Hain

Dear Ms Walsh,

I write with regard to the issue of seatbelts on school buses.

It is appalling that our children are allowed to travel on school buses that are not equipped with seatbelts.

The majority of students at Bishop Druitt College travel to school by bus. All of those spend some time on the Pacific Highway, and many of that number hurtle down the highway at high speed unrestrained. Worse, some stand on buses that are travelling 80kph or more.

It is essential that the government mandates a change to this situation. Buses must be fitted with seatbelts.

I cannot imagine the horror of a bus crash on the highway involving unrestrained children. The potential for death and maiming were such an accident to occur, is all the motivation the government needs to take decisive action. I do not want my community, nor my school to be scarred by the tragedy that would unfold in the case of a serious bus accident.

I am astounded that government/s are taking so long to make a decision that is palpably obvious. If I must wear a seatbelt when I drive my car, why is it acceptable for my son to travel on a school bus without that mandated safety measure being applied to him?

We should not be told it is too expensive, or too difficult. Our children's safety must be the government's highest priority.

I trust your committee is able to come to a rapid decision that acts to protect the school children of rural NSW.

Yours sincerely,

Alan Ball

Dear M/s Walsh,

I find it very difficult to understand why as a community we have tolerated so glaring a double standard for so long.

Seatbelts in cars and other vehicles (including coaches) have been in use for many decades. Time and again they have been proven to save lives and reduce injuries. A measure of their success is that their use has been made compulsory for many years now and substantial penalties are imposed for failure to wear them.

Yet until now we have been content to allow children to travel on school buses twice a day, five days a week during term, without seatbelts or any other restraint in the event of accident or a sudden stop. In the Mid North Coast area many school buses travel along the Pacific Highway for distances of over 50 km. per trip and at speeds up to 100 kph, sharing the road with B-Double trucks and other heavy vehicles.

The risks are obvious, even if there were not two disastrous precedents on this section of road to remind us.

Why are we content to expose our children to this obvious danger when as a matter of law we are compelled to protect ourselves from the very same danger? Surely the lives and wellbeing of our children are worth more than this.

Win Howard

G'day Carolyn,

I am writing to you in relation to the safety of our children.

Our children currently travel by bus to their school, I feel that they should be in a seat belt by law.

It appears that the bus company's have no interest in safety, they seem to be driven by profit.

We should not pretend to think that the driver can ensure that all passengers (children) have their belt on and the company can not be expected to provide a monitor to ensure that the passengers(children) have their belts on.

The control of passengers(children) is a very complex thing to facilitate but we must put in place whatever it takes to ensure the safety of children.

A child is usually safe in the school environment but the passage to and from school is such a worrying time for parents given our children are in the hands of people who work for profit only.

My wife and I do ask that Carolyn makes it her personal endeavour to see that the journeys our children take to and from school are given every possible funding that is required to see that they are not only required to wear seat belts also have authorities in place to enforce these laws are followed in transit, the driver can not enforce these laws and control the vehicle.

Thank you.

Michael & Joanne Burke.

TO MS WALSH,

As a very concerned parent of a young eight year old child, I would like to bring to your attention my concerns re bus travel in my local area from Valla Beach to Urunga. My child along with all others are expected to travel on an extremely dangerous highway without seat belts, and sit on old seats that are not safe. At times they are even expected to stand, if highschool students take up the seats.

This is ridiculous considering the laws around car travel in this state and the repercussions for drivers who do not follow these rules, as there should be. So, why is it, our students are expected to travel in such unsafe conditions and why is the government not acting on this. How many more accidents/deaths will it take for them to listen.

Yours Sincerely  
Rainee Herron

Ms Carolyn Walsh,

Please assist to keep our children safe on school buses by:

- \* Improving the standards of all rural school buses that travel on high speed or dangerous roads so that they have the same standards that are required for coaches.
- \* Making it mandatory for school buses to have seat belts for high speed travel and high risk routes
- \* Not allowing standing on school buses that travel over 80kph

Compulsory wearing of seat belts would not only be safer for students if an accident occurs but also would reduce the amount of rowdy behaviour and allow the driver to concentrate and see traffic behind more clearly, thus making for safer travel each day.

We do not want another Grafton or Kempsey Bus disaster!

Please keep our kids safe,

Nerida Black

Submission:- NSW School Bus Safety Community Advisory  
Committee

To the Chair,

As a rural parent I have been perplexed/angered and worried that there have been no seatbelts provided for school children travelling by bus at high speed on our rural roads.

The lack of seatbelts is blatant discrimination against the young. We are fined for not securing our children in cars .Why the difference?

Putting your child onto the school bus without belts amounts to negligence and yet we must.

A bus holding potentially 100 unsecured children travelling at 80 – 100 km/hr amongst other high speed traffic (trucks),is a disaster waiting to happen.

Would you allow your child to travel daily unrestrained, long distance, at high speed for 12 school years?

It is a big risk over a long period.

From – Robyn Russell

Submission to the NSW School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee

September 2011

From: Jane Lynch

The requirement of seat belts on school busses is long overdue. I implore you to save the children. Why is it necessary to buckle up in the family car and yet not in the school bus? A ludicrous omission.

Attention Carolyn Walsh  
18/9/11

Dear Carolyn

As a parent, I am extremely concerned about the safety of our children when travelling by bus to and from school or on school excursions.

Since 1995, the Australian Design Rule 68/00 has made it mandatory for everyone travelling on coaches in Australia to be wearing a seatbelt. Bus companies have had 16 years to voluntarily comply with the ADR68 but most haven't, even where buses share the road with ever increasing numbers of heavy vehicles. In our local area, buses are old, have metal bars on backs of seats and do not have seatbelts. Yet these buses travel along the Pacific Highway and narrow rural roads, both of which have been places of serious road accidents involving buses, ferrying young Australians.

The NSW Government sadly allows an exemption to school bus services so they do not have to comply with these Standards. It even contracts with bus companies allowing standing so that more children can be transported than there are seats on the bus. This increases their risk of death or injury if there is an accident, as they can be thrown around the bus or through the windscreen.

None of us would ever think to transport our own children in cars without a seatbelt. Why would it be acceptable in a bus which has less safety features than most cars?

The NRMA has stated that "the seat belt remains the invention that has saved more lives than any other". How can our Government continue to ignore this fact?

Teachers are constantly being directed to teach programs about Road Safety, Sun Safety, Water Safety, Dog Safety, etc to protect our children, yet the Government unfortunately ignores a solution that they could support that would protect and save so many children's lives.

Yours faithfully,  
Helen Trist

Dear Ms Walsh,

I write with regard to the issue of seatbelts on school buses.

It is appalling that our children are allowed to travel on school buses that are not equipped with seatbelts.

The majority of students at Bishop Druitt College travel to school by bus. All of those spend some time on the Pacific Highway, and many of that number hurtle down the highway at high speed unrestrained. Worse, some stand on buses that are travelling 80kph or more.

It is essential that the government mandates a change to this situation. Buses must be fitted with seatbelts.

I cannot imagine the horror of a bus crash on the highway involving unrestrained children. The potential for death and maiming were such an accident to occur, is all the motivation the government needs to take decisive action. I do not want my community, nor my school to be scarred by the tragedy that would unfold in the case of a serious bus accident.

I am astounded that government/s are taking so long to make a decision that is palpably obvious. If I must wear a seatbelt when I drive my car, why is it acceptable for my son to travel on a school bus without that mandated safety measure being applied to him?

We should not be told it is too expensive, or too difficult. Our children's safety must be the government's highest priority.

I trust your committee is able to come to a rapid decision that acts to protect the school children of rural NSW.

Yours sincerely,

Alan Ball

Hi

I am asking why we still have no seatbelts in our school buses the coalition promised we would have them .

All the information and experts say they would make our children safer ,we are a rich state we can afford them and they could only be installed on country buses which have to travel on highways with high speed limits and many heavy trucks etc.

my son travels on the valla beach to urunga school bus on a highway where the bus and oncoming trucks travel at 90klm on a section of highway that is recognised as one of the most dangerous in the state with no seatbelts and children standing in the bus aisles,

Do you really think that is acceptable in 2011 ?.

Would you be happy with your 9 year old child or nephew /niece travelling to school like this ?

please hasten the installation of seatbelts in our school buses and why not put airbags in as well as we have the technology available  
thanks B Coyne

Dear Carolyn,

I gather that a School Bus Safety Committee was established recently by the NSW Government to look at ways to make school bus travel as safe as possible. As a parent of three primary school aged children who travel by school bus (Busways) to and from school each day I am very concerned about the conditions they travel in. They travel on a dangerous section of the Pacific Highway for much of their journey in buses not fitted with seatbelts using the same single carriageway as B-double semi-trailers.

I would like to see this committee consider three important issues and hopefully recommend the prompt redress of them:

- no seatbelts,
- children sometimes standing up,
- low, hard backed seats with steel bars across the top.

Thank you Carolyn,

Simon Correy

Dear Ms Walsh,

I am writing to you regarding the issue of seat belts on school buses.

For some time now, parents and the wider community have been calling for governments to look at this particular issue to ensure the safety of our children. It is disturbing and incomprehensible that our children travel on school buses that are not equipped with seatbelts. Every other person who travels on the road is legally obliged to wear seatbelts yet, governments still refuse to mandate the same for our young people. We have over 1050 students at John Paul College and of that number over 900 travel by bus. Of course the distances these children travel vary but all use the Pacific Highway at some point. We have students who travel more than 50kms to get to school and all of that on the Pacific Highway. I am concerned that these students are on these buses for a significant period of time, often travelling at high speeds. You are no doubt aware of the state of the Pacific Highway especially in our region. It is only a matter of time unfortunately before something terrible involving school buses occurs and I am asking that the government see this as a priority.

It is my sincere hope that the committee finally recommends this initiative and the government acts accordingly as a way of looking after all our young people.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Carniato

Carolyn,

\*The fact that country buses are unsupervised with only bus driver to keep control, I find an unrealistic responsibility for the driver--with the distraction of up to 50 children interacting,fighting,yelling and standing up etc., --school buses need supervisors to keep control--so as the driver can fully concentrate

\*No seatbelts

\*Children sometimes stand and low hardbacked seats, with steel bars across the top

All these present potential danger to our children travelling on buses--and needs to be addressed.

Hi,

I am appalled to hear that seat belts for children on school buses is not compulsory. We have all be forced to wear seat belts for more than 20 years as everyone know they save lives. Our children are our future and it is our responsibility to protect them. Please help to make seat belts for children compulsory on all school bus routes.

Thanks,

Mark Falzon

Dear Carolyn,

This is just a short email to voice my concerns regarding the safety of school students on our roads and highways. I am deeply concerned to see that our children are travelling on school buses at high speeds with:

\*

no seat belts

\*

low hard backed seats with steel bars across the top

\*

children sometimes having to stand up.

I am also concerned with the lack of appropriate supervision on overcrowded buses leading to students displaying unsafe behaviour on the buses. Drivers can not be expected to concentrate on the road and deal with inappropriate behaviour at the same time.

Thanking You

Cathy Korn

Students travelling and standing on overcrowded buses is unbelievcable in this day and age let along travlling on the highway with no seat belts.

Students should receive free travel to their local public school with parents picking up any costs associated with travel past this point.

Jim Walsh

Hello Carolyn

I am writing with regards to getting seat belts on school buses.

In our area of Coffs Harbour, LOTS of children catch buses that travel on the highway.

I can't believe that the busses don't have seat belts.

I am often travelling behind the buses from BDC in the Nth Boambee valley and the children are standing in the isles of the bus.

The seats are hard and unforgiving and to make matters worse there are school bags everywhere in the isles.

This has to be seen as unsafe travel. How can we and our government let our children spend so much time in harms way?

I hope this email helps support the School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee

Regards  
Ann Nojin

Dear Carolyn,

I am a teacher and am concerned about students travelling on buses on the Pacific Highway, past the scene of the worst bus crash in Australia's history. Why are our students allowed in buses where they are not restrained, doing 100 kph?

Jenny Clark

Attention:  
Carolyn Walsh  
Independent Chair  
School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee

Dear Ms Walsh,

**Seat Belts must become mandatory on School Buses**

Our four year old and six year old daughters catch a bus for almost an hour along country roads; roads their bus shares with semis, tractors, trucks, animals and speeding drivers avoiding the police by using the back roads. Some of these roads have white lines down the middle, some do not, many have been damaged by the recent floods. Their bus travels at up to 100kms per hour.

Two years ago a gravel truck ran me off this road, I was lucky but the car was a write off. Last year, our eldest and my husband were the first on the scene at a fatal on the same road.

On our daughter's first day at school she bought home a bag of information from the RTA all about the importance of seat belts and child seats for children under seven - yet there are no seat belts on the school buses - let alone child seats! Each night I drive home and the sign across the Hume Highway says "Seatbelts Save Truckies Too". What about the lives of our children??

Our children are our future, I know mine are the most precious thing to me in the entire world, yet the number one safety message in this country doesn't seem to apply to our kids on school buses. It is just insane that this situation exists. A fully grown truck driver must wear a seat belt while driving his semi, I must drive mine while pottering around town, yet my 4 and 6 year old daughters do not have to and in fact can't wear one when they travel to school. I understand that after the Kempsey and Grafton bus crashes, ADR 68 introduced mandatory seat belts on coaches, yet excluded school buses because of the expense. Please don't wait until a school bus accident to fix this fundamental anomaly in our system.

This appears again to be a situation where country kids are forgotten. It doesn't appear to be as big an issue in the city - my guess is for a few reasons. Most primary school kids in the city don't catch buses to school, most secondary school kids catch public transport, the buses travel much more slowly and many metro buses have seat belts anyway. Just because this isn't a metro issue, it is no less important. Please don't forget our little country kids....they are just as precious....

Please, please make seat belts mandatory - not just the installation of them, but the wearing of them. This situation worries me so much that were it logically possible, I would drive my kids to and from school each day.

Unfortunately, the drought and then floods have required I work in town, 70 kms away from the farm and in the opposite direction to girl's school - I can't keep my job and drive my kids to and from school.

Please let me know if there is anything i can do to help.

Kind Regards  
Melissa

Melissa Sweetland

Carolyn,

I am deeply concerned that it is not compulsory for buses transporting children to be fitted with seat belts. It is putting the lives of our children at risk! It is a safety concern for the families who have members that commute on buses, the bus drivers who need to be able to carry out their duties safely and for the wider community who share the roads with the buses.

Natalie Mealing

## **SUBMISSION TO THE NSW SCHOOL BUS SAFETY COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**BY: Monica Ortiger**

**Date: 19/09/11**

### **Introduction**

I am an individual who lives in the Muswellbrook Council area. My children attend Scone Grammar School in Scone. The trip that my children (Primary and Secondary children) undertake daily involves two buses each way and approximately 1 hour of travel time.

### **Safety Issues**

Daily my children travel from home to the railway station on one bus. They then swap to another bus to continue up the highway to Scone. We reside in a rural/residential area less than 10k from town.

My children walk approximately 300m each way from our home to the bus stop which I have no problems with however other children in our estate must walk approx 1km to access a bus stop. Whilst I acknowledge that this is not tremendously far, it is for a young child in early primary with a big day of school and travel ahead of (or behind) them.

In addition our estate is rapidly growing. Currently the bus seats are all full after our stop (at which approx 15 students hop on the bus). I have little faith that the bus company will respond in a timely fashion to the growth in numbers on this bus. My concern with this is that after the bus leaves our estate it has to travel down a road busy with large coal trucks before turning right onto the highway (100km/h) and up a steep hill. These are impossible conditions for a young child to be required to stand on the bus. Additionally there is always the question of no seat belts whilst the bus is travelling on highways at such speeds.

My major concern is the second bus that my children travel on. It travels from Muswellbrook railway station to Scone (26km). This bus is very full. It always has 3 primary students per seat 2 secondary students per seat and numerous students standing. We as parents are continually told by the bus company that it is not too full; however it certainly appears to be. The bus is not air-conditioned, and we live in an area of 40+ degree days in summer. Between the bus overcrowding, the heat and the standing, this alone is a recipe for disaster in summer.

In addition this heavily loaded bus with standing students and no seat belts travels at 100km/h along a stretch of highway that has caused numerous deaths over the last few years. According to my children the bus driver told the students at the beginning of the year that he could only travel at 80km due to the sheer number of students on his bus however this means that the students are perpetually 10-15 min late for school. How can this be acceptable?

Earlier in term 3 the bus had a car crash into the side of it (as the car came out of a side street) obviously this resulted in children being thrown forward (due to no seat belts), young children falling off their seats (which they had a tenuous hold on in the

first place with 3 sharing) and standing children stumbling and falling over. This situation could have ended badly however luckily it didn't; do we need to push our luck like this by so blatantly disregarding our children's safety?

The school is very aware of the overcrowding and ensures that the younger children have a seat insisting that the older ones stand but is this good enough. It is a 35-40 min bus trip along a highway... Also other schools load children onto the already full bus after it leaves our school.... what about these children?

### **Recommendations**

I would recommend the following

- Buses need to have seat belts.
- Only allow sitting the number of students that seat belts can accommodate i.e. not allow three students to a seat.
- Students should not be permitted to stand on buses travelling on Highways.
- Students should not be permitted to stand on buses where the travel time is above a defined limit (e.g. 15km or 30min).
- Buses should be air-conditioned in hot areas.
- There should be strict limits on the number of students permitted on buses that travel on highways.
- Bus companies should adjust bus sizes in a timely fashion based on student numbers.
- Bus routes should be modified in a timely manner to respond to growth of subdivisions so that children need not walk long distances to bus stops.

I understand that not allowing students to stand on buses and providing seat belts would significantly increase costs and be unmanageable in city areas, however for country kids travelling much larger distances over accident prone streets and at high speeds there surely needs to be consideration of their safety over considerations of cost.

Monica Ortiger

Dear Carolyn Walsh

I am a parent of children aged 6, 6 and 9. My children catch the school bus in the mornings and afternoons, travelling along the Pacific Hwy between Valla Beach and Urunga.

The speed limit has been recently reduced along this route, however the school bus still travels at 90km per hour in parts.

It has been my observation that there are often very old Busway buses used on this school bus route. As there are no seatbelts fitted on the buses, the children do not sit in their seats during travel. This seems dangerous and would be very distracting for the drivers. I am concerned that if the school bus is involved in an accident, the children would be injured or killed.

It is my understanding that it is illegal for people to travel without a seat belt on, in cars and coaches, due to safety issues. So why are seatbelts not compulsory in school buses?

I would like to see safer buses with safer seats and seatbelts installed, to be used on bus routes which run along high speed highways, particularly in rural areas.

Yours sincerely

Melissa Hilson

Submission to the

# **NSW School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee**

September 2011

## **Introduction**

As a concerned member of the public I thank you for the opportunity to present the following submission for consideration of the Community Advisory Committee.

I first became aware of, and concerned about school bus travel, in February 2001, following a school bus accident on the south coast of NSW, in which a 15 year old boy was killed and 34 children were injured – many seriously, with health problems still being treated today.

After extensive research on the topic of bus safety I have come to the conclusion that in buses travelling at high speeds in rural areas in particular, it is necessary to:

1. Prohibit the practice of allowing children to stand on buses
2. Provide ADR 68/00 compliant buses on all non urban high speed and high risk bus routes – particularly school bus routes.

In Australia at present there is an ad hoc system of occupant protection for bus and coach passengers. While there are national standards for passenger coaches which mandate seatbelts, this is not the case for buses.

While some states and territories have begun installing seat belts on school bus routes – often as a result of major accidents - other states are doing nothing. New South Wales is the only state with no restriction on standing on school buses travelling in rural areas, and has strongly resisted demands to change this practice.

In November 2005 members of the Australian Transport Council [ATC] endorsed the ***National Guidelines for Risk Assessment of School Bus Routes***. Due to the voluntary nature of these guidelines the safety of NSW students has not increased at all. The dangers and risks have been identified & acknowledged; now students need seat belt protection. The Government, as the providers of school transport, has a duty of care to improve student safety.

**I ask the members of the Community Advisory Committee to recognise:**

- 1)** The extreme danger to unseated students in non-urban areas and ask that standing be made illegal on rural school buses throughout New South Wales.
- 2)** That students have a higher risk because of the frequency of journeys each year (400 trips + excursions, for up to 13 years), plus the added danger of heavy school bags as projectiles.
- 3)** The high number of minor injuries not reported (ie cuts, bruises, missing teeth, trauma to victim, family and friends). Children vividly remember minor incidents and many carry scars forever

## Evidence and Risk

There is a plethora of evidence to support the safety benefits of seat belts on buses in non urban areas.

- In January 1995 the Federal Office of Road Safety [FORS] issued a final report "Cost Benefit Analysis of Retrofitting Occupant Protection Measures to Existing Buses – Analysis of Bus Crashes 1987 – 1994 and Estimates of Injury Reduction." this report examined 19 bus accidents in rural areas over 7 years (1987 – 1994) and concluded that 109 deaths would have reduced to 60 deaths, and 438 injuries reduced to approximately 90 if the bus passengers had been wearing a lap/sash seat belt. This is conclusive evidence of the safety benefits of seat belts on buses in non urban areas.
- The NSW Roads and Traffic Authority 'NO BELT, NO BRAINS" brochure states: "*Even in minor accidents, not wearing a seat belt can have a major impact.*"
- ADR 68/00 [gazetted November 1992] specifies requirements "*for seat belts, seat strength and anchorages to seats, seatbelts and child restraints together with provisions for protecting occupants from impact with the back of the seats*". Occupants on buses also need protection from impact with the back of seats. Excerpts from the March 1992 Regulatory Impact Statement by Federal Office of Road Safety states: "*The proposed regulation is to provide improved occupant protection in buses and coaches other than city route buses by the fitting of three point seat belts to all passenger seats.*" "*The objective of this proposal is to reduce the number of deaths and the severity of injuries resulting from bus crashes.*" "*The proposed regulation is designed to provide occupant protection benefits equivalent to those given by seat belts in passenger cars. Complying systems will withstand the forces generated in bus crashes at highway speeds.*" "*...road safety experts, the medical profession and considerable representations from the general public are supportive of the proposals.*"
- Consequently since 1995 it has been mandatory for all coach passengers to be provided with a seat belt. Children travel on the same roads and highways, so should be treated as equal citizens with regard to safety requirements for rural school buses. Every road user, except a bus passenger, is required to wear a seat belt. Students need protection in the event of an accident, also.
- Extensive research and analysis of coach and bus accidents over the last 25 years has revealed three main factors which cause the greatest degree of death and injury to passengers. These are:

A] High speed travel

B] Impact with an object of equal or greater mass than the bus/coach

C] Rollover

- Non urban roads generally have speed limits of 80 – 110 kph, with most roads undivided, and with the added danger of trees along the roadside and unpredictable wildlife.
- Not one seat belted coach passenger has been killed since seat belts were introduced over 16 years ago. Unfortunately this enviable safety record does not and cannot apply to school bus travel.
- As there is enough evidence to support seat belts for coach passengers, then there must also be enough evidence to justify seat belts for students on rural school buses, as they both travel on the same roads and highways. Some students travel on dirt roads and narrow minor roads – a much more dangerous situation than for coach passengers.
- Bus drivers have perhaps the highest risk of death in a bus accident. Many reports have stated the benefits of having children restrained on a school bus – they are less rowdy, unable to lean over the back of the seat to talk, no swapping seats in transit and improved behaviour. This enables the driver to focus on driving the bus, which is desirable and highly beneficial for all road users.

## Expert Opinion

**Professor Danny Cass, Paediatric Surgeon and Director of the Trauma Centre at The Children's Hospital, Westmead, NSW and National President of Kidsafe**

Professor Cass's main concern relates to the lack of medical resources in rural areas in the case of

accidents. Retrieval is very difficult due to distance and communication problems, while mass arrival of trauma cases puts a strain on any emergency department, even in the city.

In the long term the ongoing cost associated with physical and psychological consequences of

*“catastrophic non-fatal injuries” is a large problem. “A fatal injury is not costly to the system at all. One life saved is cost effective, as a spinal injury can cost between \$5 million and \$10 million.”*

He said there is always strong community support for any initiatives to improve safety where children are concerned. Parents have been vocal about the need for seat belts, as they fear the worst when they are made to put their children on a school bus without them. Driving children to school is the only alternative - which isn't often feasible in country areas and increases the congestion around schools.

**Rob Davis, Barrister at Law** - B.Soc.Sc., LL.M., LL.M (Corp & Com). Board member and past president of APLA, Member of Editorial Board of The Product Liability Reporter, Joint Author and Joint General Editor of 'Product Liability in Australia', Joint Author of Personal Injury Law & Practice in Queensland', Member of the Council of The Queensland Law Society. *“Legally a government is morally accountable for the transport they provide to students, although in the case of an excursion the school may be liable.”*

In 1998 Rob was awarded the APLA National Civil Justice Award in recognition of his contribution towards improving public awareness about the need for seat belts on school buses, better design of school buses, and the need to eliminate the dangerous practice of allowing children to stand in aisles while buses were travelling at high speeds.

**Professor P. N. Joubert, Mechanical Engineer OAM, B.E., M.E., FIE Aust., FSAE, MSNAME, FTSE** — “*Whatever the statistical measure, the results of a bus accident at high speed are most likely to be horrific”...and children “forced to stand while the bus is travelling at high speed, is a much more risky situation than travelling in a car with a seatbelt*”.

**Federal Office of Road Safety** – “*Lap/sash seat belts reduce death and injury, if involved in an accident with a vehicle of equal or greater mass than the bus.”*

**Austroads** – May 2000 – Australian Transport Council (ATC) – School Bus Safety in Australia – Executive Summary. “..about 9 children are seriously injured each month”, “*The key objective of the National School Bus Safety Action Plan is to ...reduce the total annual number of child fatalities associated with school bus travel to zero by the year 2005.”*

**Coroner Mr Kevin M Waller stated re. tragic 1989 Kempsey bus accident:**

*“It is regrettably true that it often takes a major catastrophe to precipitate Government and Government authorities into action. Matters of cost and inconvenience have been allowed to take precedence over matters of personal safety. Promising suggestions are deflected for investigation elsewhere and largely forgotten” (P.17)*

**December 1993 Henderson and Paine Report: School Bus Seat Belts – Their fitment, effectiveness and cost** (Report No 622 Prepared for the Bus and Coach Safety Standing Committee, NSW Department of Transport):

*“New Australian Design Rules for lap/sash seat belts...are based not so much on statistics as they are on careful crash investigations that have demonstrated the benefits to be gained.” “improved student behaviour”, “reduce injury, disbenefits are trivial”, “cost to convert buses small, against high value of child safety”, “cost is very much a secondary consideration”, “value of child’s life incalculable – grief and suffering extends beyond family”, “it is imperative that children are encouraged to use seat belts at all times”, “need for consistency”.*

**The NTC document [2.2]** states that: “*Similarly, while serious bus crashes are rare events, a severe crash involving an at capacity bus could result in multiple deaths. A crash involving a full school bus would invoke a considerable public reaction. Even if a crash involves no injuries, as public transport carriers, bus crashes are far more likely to capture the attention of the media, and be under public scrutiny, than the more common car crashes.”*

## **Conclusion**

The likelihood of a tragic school bus accident increases each year because of the substantial increase in heavy vehicles on our country roads - to date we've just been lucky. Children should not have to rely on luck for their safety, when safety devices such as seat belts are affordable and readily available. The dangers and risk of death or serious injury will only continue to increase, because of more road congestion and increased use of B-double and B-triple trucks.

Therefore it is imperative that when these accidents do occur, as they inevitably will, any measures to ensure the least possible number of injuries and fatalities should be implemented. Clearly this can only be achieved if all bus passengers are wearing lap/sash seatbelts. It is essential that school students be given the same level of safety presently given to coach passengers, as they both travel on the same high speed roads.

Safety is paramount in all aspects of everyone's life, yet the safety of our youth on rural or non-urban school buses has to date been ignored mainly because the necessary safety improvements (lap/sash seat belts) will result in an increased cost to state and territory governments. This cost will not reduce with time and the longer it takes to implement these necessary changes the more it will cost.

I therefore submit that school buses with improved safety features (ADR 68/00 with lap/sash seat belts) be phased in for use on school bus routes, beginning with those with the highest risk – buses travelling on roads and highways where the speed limit is 80 kph or greater. Until the phase-in period is completed standing in the aisles must be prohibited on all buses travelling in rural high risk and high speed (80kph or greater) zones.

Yours sincerely

Janice Shalhoub

Dear Ms Walsh

We are parents of two loveable boys aged fifteen and twelve years who live near Macksville.

We considered sending them to Bishop Druitt College in Coffs Harbour for many years before they were

enrolled purely because of the bus travel and no seatbelts.

Now, everyday as I wave them goodbye I pray that they will remain safe until we meet again that afternoon.

This is a huge concern not only for children travelling long distances on the highway daily but also

for the local children getting on any bus from their home to school and perhaps only travelling one

kilometre across the highway and up the street.

We know that the introduction of seatbelts on school buses will not only be expensive but also limit

the number of children that will be allowed to travel on each bus.

However, when the school bus accident happens, and unfortunately it is only a matter of time, before

a major accident occurs injuring, or even killing, tens of children on a single bus let's hope that it is not

our child/children or even in our area.

Please consider and push for the introduction of seatbelts for all school bus

travel to keep our young

people and the future workers, carers and leaders of Australia, SAFE!

Yours faithfully,

Dorothy and Stewart Ison

Hi Carolyn

As a mother of 2 young children on the Mid North Coast. I'm horrified to know that they already have to travel for excursion's and to think that in future years when they attend High School that they will be forced to catch a bus everyday, On such a dangerous highway, At high speeds without any safety belts. I'm urging all peoples involved to fight for the safety of so many children. And push to have belts fitted in all buses.

Thank-youAsha Ovenden

Dear Carolyn,

I am an INDIVIDUAL with an interest in School Bus Safety - "Off Bus" issues: students moving around buses, involving alighting to or from a bus.

I live on the corner of Coachwood Drive & Laurina Street Medowie NSW 2318. Laurina Street is exactly 500 meters long (and very narrow) and has FIVE (5) signed bus stops. There is also a signed bus stop approximately 200 meters west of the corner of Laurina Street on Coachwood Drive.

Every school morning and afternoon I have several school buses stopping across my driveway in Laurina Street very close to the corner of Coachwood Drive and children alighting or boarding, one bus also stops at the front of the house on Coachwood Drive, also very close to the corner.

In the past I have contracted and complained to the Police, Port Stephens Council and the Bus company involved - all to no avail. An inspector was also sent out but strangely enough no buses stopped here on the day he sat in his vehicle to observe!

I have backed out of my garage and almost hit children who were alighting from, boarding the bus or just waiting for the bus on my driveway. My husband & I also witnessed a little girl about five who walked along the curbing as the bus was rounding the corner - she lost her balance and was so close to going under the wheel of the bus we both gasped. We were in our car waiting to turn into Laurina Street and into our driveway, but because the bus was dropping children off we had to stop on Coachwood Drive and wait for the bus to leave. We were too upset to go across the street to where the parents were waiting in their vehicle, to advise them of what had happened. (It was the Anniversary of the death of our son in a road accident!)

We are extremely concerned about the safety of these children and wonder does someone have to be hurt for this very dangerous practice to stop.

We are also perplexed as to why so many buses are routed along such a narrow street when they could accommodate the children by having the buses directed along Coachwood Drive & Kindlebark Drive - both these streets are much wider and would be much safer.

**WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE BUSES RE ROUTED ALONG  
COACHWOOD DRIVE AND/OR KINDLEBARK DRIVE OR AT LEAST STOP  
AT THE SIGNED BUS STOPS AND NOT ON THIS VERY BUSY CORNER  
OR WHEREVER THEY CHOOSE TO PULL UP.**

Please take my submission into consideration.

Thank You.

Leonie White

Dear Carolyn

This is a subject very close to my heart. Each member of my family travels on this busy highway every day. My daughter travels in an old bus from Urunga to Bonville. That old bus has no seatbelts and travels at 100km per hour. I pass other buses which travel from Macksville to Coffs Harbour every day when I am travelling to work and think of the safety of those children each and every day. Is the government just waiting for an unthinkable tragedy to occur? We need to do something now - how can I help?

Maureen Bird

**SUBMISSION TO THE NSW SCHOOL BUS SAFETY COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**BY: KYOGLE COUNCIL**

**DATE: September 20, 2011.**

**Introduction:**

This submission is from Kyogle Council.

Council is responsible for a road network of 1213km including 818km unsealed road. In addition, there are 130km of State roads within the Council area. School bus routes cover approximately 300km of the sealed roads and 320km of the unsealed roads and 113km of the State roads.

Safety issues involving school bus routes often come to Council's attention through the Local Traffic Committee and the Transport Working Group.

**Safety Issues**

Issues which Council wishes to address in this submission are roads infrastructure and Education and awareness.

Roads Infrastructure.

There is limited funding available to Council for road maintenance and many roads, particularly unsealed roads require more funding than Council is able to allocate each year. School bus routes are often significant routes for the whole community and provision of specific funding by the State Government for upgrading school bus routes to an acceptable minimum standard would benefit the whole community as well as improving safety and reliability for the school bus transport network in a region.

Problems on school bus routes which need to be addressed include:

- Slippery surface and potholes which could be addressed by gravel resheeting and more frequent grading.
- Local hazards including narrow cuttings, excessive vegetation on bends, damaged causeways brought to Council's attention by school bus operators. These issues require specific works at each location.
- Provision of pull off areas at school bus stops: Most Council local roads do not have sufficient width on the formed road to allow a school bus to pick up or set down passengers without blocking at least one lane of traffic. Funds are required to enable pull off areas to be constructed and maintained.

- Provision of Safe parking and turning areas for school buses at Schools. Schools in rural areas often do not have adequate provision for manoeuvring school buses at the school, creating additional traffic hazards due to turning, reversing loading and unloading buses in general traffic areas and conflict between school buses and private vehicles transporting children
- Provision of school bus shelters. Bus shelters are required to protect children from sun and weather while waiting for buses or waiting to be collected at stops by parents / carers.

### Education and Awareness

Many of the safety hazards associated with school buses are due to poor road safety awareness by children and parents at school bus stops. Although there is ample safety information available, parents continue to park in dangerous locations at schools or at bus stops to drop off or pick up children and children continue to cross roads without looking for approaching traffic when not supervised.

### **Recommendations:**

1. That funding be made available to Local Government specifically for safety works on school bus routes, including:
  - Upgrading of school bus routes where required to meet a minimum agreed standard of construction.
  - Maintenance of roads used as bus routes
  - Attention to specific safety hazards on school bus routes.
  - Construction of school bus stop pull off areas on school bus routes
  - Construction of facilities for school bus operation at schools
  - Provision of bus shelters.
2. That regular education be provided to school students and parents and guardians on road safety precautions to be taken at school bus stops.
3. That the provision of physical barriers at bus stops at schools and local roads be investigated to reduce the occurrence of unpredictable behaviour and conflict between road users and children at these high risk locations.

Submission prepared by:  
F. R Winter

Tuesday  
20 September 2011

Carolyn Walsh  
Independent Chair  
School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee  
C/- Department of Transport  
PO Box K659  
HAYMARKET NSW 1240

Dear Ms Walsh

I am responding to an invitation from Mr Greg Aplin, the Member for Albury to provide some feedback on regional and rural school bus safety. Earlier this year I wrote to the Department to express concern about the transport arrangements for a number of students who attend my school, Trinity Anglican College, Albury-Wodonga from Holbrook and the villages along the Hume Highway. Many students travel on the bus service provided by Kane's Bus Service, and have no other option but to use this service.

Parents have regularly voiced their concerns to me regarding the overcrowding and therefore the associated safety issues relating to this particular service. My understanding is that up until recently, there were regularly up to 72 students on the bus with students seated three and four to a double seat and students either standing or sitting in the aisle.

The Hume Highway is one of Australia's major national highways and continuing with this arrangement, I believe, puts at risk the safety and wellbeing of those who are travelling on the bus. Reducing the bus speed to 80 km/hour, once the number of students on the bus exceeds the Department's threshold, is not a safety measure in my opinion, but more so it makes the bus a hazard on a dual carriageway with a speed limit of 110 km/hour. Recently Kane's have been able to run a second, 22 seat bus to accommodate for the overflow of students on this service. Whilst this is an improvement, parents and staff at my school still share concerns about the safety of this service.

My school currently has 20 students who regularly use this bus service and I am aware of another five or six students whose parents will not allow them to use the bus service due to their safety concerns.

This bus service also serves a number of other schools in Albury and I am aware, through conversations with my Principal colleagues, that they too share similar concerns. More families from the Holbrook region would like to send their children to my school or other schools in Albury but are reluctant to do so with the current transport arrangement.

I hope that this feedback is relevant to your committee.

Yours faithfully

Steven J O'Connor

Although we do not have children using the school buses and excursion buses, as grandparents we are concerned for the safety of school children riding in buses without the protection of seat belts. So we are 100% behind all the concerned parents who would like to see seat belts fitted to all school buses. As there are strict guidelines about seat belts for children in our own vehicles, why do school buses not have them.

Regards from  
Jock and Margaret Cumming.

Seems ridiculous that if a parent picks up a child from school in her own car, and doesn't have the child securely belted in, then she is breaking the law.. yet if a school bus picks up the child, and the child is not belted in, the driver is not liable.. or are they? shouldn't the bus drivers union DEMAND that school buses be equipped with seat belts?.. Warren Brisley

**SUBMISSION TO THE NSW SCHOOL BUS SAFETY COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**BY: Darren Williams**

**Date: 21<sup>st</sup> September 2011-09-21**

**Introduction**

This submission is from Sawtell Coaches who provide school bus services in and around the Sawtell, Toormina, Boambee East, Nana Glen, Korora and Glenreagh areas.

**Issues/Concerns**

1. Non-compliance – From my experience (driving the first seat belted coach in Coffs Harbour from 1999 to 2003), kids unless hounded will not wear seat belts.
2. The extra weight of the seat belts will further reduce the capacity of the bus.
3. Possible loss of standing passengers will further reduce capacity.
4. When/if a seat beat or latch is damaged is the bus un-road worthy? Paper etc can be stuffed in the latch. If on route and a latch becomes inoperative, can you still use that seat or do you need to close that seat off, further reducing capacity?
5. If you have a group of kids going to a friend's house which forces you over your reduced capacity, who do you leave behind?
6. With SSTS expenses increasing due to seat belts, could this result in expended boundaries for walking distance? This inturn could result in more children being placed at risk as they choose less safe options to travel to school.

Darren Williams

## Trans-Consult

September 21, 2011

Ms. Carolyn Walsh  
Independent Chair  
School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee,  
C/- Department of Transport  
PO Box K659  
Haymarket, NSW 1240

Dear Ms. Walsh,

I read your news story on September, 19 2011 indicating that you are looking for ideas to provide greater safety for the students who ride school buses. Trans-Consult is an American based company specializing in school bus operations. The president Mr. Richard Fischer has over 55-years active experience in all aspects of the pupil transportation industry. His assistant, Mr. Peter Lawrence, is the Transportation Director at a school district with over 120 school buses serving over 7,000 students daily to over 60 different schools. He has over 23-years passenger transportation experience. Mr. Bruce Gibbs, a Certified Insurance Professional of The Australian and New Zealand Institute of Insurance and Finance with more than 30 years experience in Commercial Motor Vehicle insurance and Risk Management is our local contact and can be reached at: SoLogical Information Management Pty Limited, PO Box 206, Oatley 2223 Tel: 0403 971 201

We can offer your committee resources on the following services:

- Driver qualifications and background checks
- Driver training manual for new drivers
- 80 hour driver training program.
- Train-the-Trainer program to teach drivers and supervisors how to effectively teach classroom & behind-the-wheel training with a full trainer manual
- Documentation
- Collision investigation and prevention
- Annual road testing program & re-training program
- Help conducting monthly 30 minute safety meetings
- Provide training information on school bus stop sign warning devices so other drivers know the bus is stopping.
- Bullying

## Trans-Consult

### Suggestions

- Larger school bus signs on the buses (front and rear)
- Different color for school buses (yellow or high visibility lime green) unique to school buses only
- Specify bigger red lights on school buses
- Operations should make their own school bus safety videos using local high school students and elementary students.

### Topics could include:

- Safe loading & unloading of the bus
- When and where to stop the bus (and not stop the bus) when loading or unloading students
- How to ride the bus safely, etc.

We can provide you with other services that can make your school busing program safer for the students you serve.

Cordially,

Richard Fischer  
Trans-Consult

21 September 2011

Carolyn Walsh  
Department of Transport  
PO Box K659  
HAYMARKET NSW 1240  
Email: [carolynwalshnsw@gmail.com](mailto:carolynwalshnsw@gmail.com)

Dear Ms Walsh

As a parent of students attending Urunga Public School and Bellingen High School, I am writing with regard to the issue of school bus safety in regional and rural NSW.

Some of the buses used in our area are old and not infrequently suffer breakdowns, indicative of their aged state. More importantly, none of them are fitted with seatbelts.

Considering that most of these routes will take our children along the infamous Pacific Highway to their destinations, it seems more than reasonable that our children have the right to travel on modern buses, fitted with seatbelts. Why is it against the law not to buckle up in a car but the NSW Government sees fit to allow our most precious cargo - our children - to travel on some of the most dangerous roads in our country with no seatbelt? We have seen the devastation more than once following a bus or coach collision and we don't want to see it again.

Sadly, NSW is one of only two other states in our country that allows suburban buses on regional roads, without the provision of a seat belt, even though it is a National Rule - **SEAT BELTS SAVE LIVES!** Furthermore, tourist buses and coaches travelling on the same roads as our school buses ARE fitted with seatbelts. We as parents do everything within our power to ensure the safety of our children but the NSW Government upholding the National Rule and making it NSW law can only resolve this issue.

Yours faithfully  
Tracie Penhall

Dear Carolyn, I have just received this request today to write a submission.  
So I apologise for the brevity of the comments. .

- All buses should be equipped with functional seat belts .
- Some buses refuse to take intermittent travellers - TSSA Boarders to Holbrook – as they only travel occasionally even though they have a bus pass.
- bus arrival and departure times restrict the start and finish times of schools. We would like to start earlier and finish later but cannot because of the bus times..
- Mostly there are no concerns about behaviour on the Albury services and they are consistently on time.
- Some routes are convoluted and long ... there should be a maximum time for student travel. So maybe more buses provided for the routes?.
- I cannot comment on driver training, however, it is very expensive for schools to train their own drivers-
- I am happy with the safety measures and the school procedures that are in place in regard to the use of our school bus stops.

Regards

Mr. Scott Young

As a grandparent I find it hard to believe that when travelling on "Bus Holidays" I am obliged to wear a seatbelt and yet my grand children travel the Pacific Highway on a school bus and are not required to have a seat belt - one law should apply to all bus travel

Robyn Vignes

Submission to the  
**NSW School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee**  
September 2011

From: Holly Staniford

My name is Holly Staniford and I currently attend the University of Wollongong. I am writing this submission as an individual who is very interested in the safety of school children travelling to and from school due to personal experience of travelling on rural school busses.

Prior to moving to Wollongong, I lived in a rural area where the only transport to and from school was a 30 minute bus trip on a 100km/h highway without seat belts. Being one of the last stops before school, my brother and I would sometimes have to stand for the entire 30 minute journey. In the 8 years I travelled on the bus to school there were many near miss accidents where the bus had to swerve violently or slam the breaks on. I distinctly remember one boy hitting his head on the seat in front when the bus had to break suddenly before falling out into the aisle. Instances like this could have been avoided and it is obvious how – provide these children with seat belts. I find it appalling that children are not provided with basic safety features that everyone else uses and expects when travelling in cars or coaches.

The most effective way of providing the safest means of bus travel for school children is the introduction of seat belts and the abolishment of standing on school busses, and this is the recommendation I submit to the NSW School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee.

My mother, Glenda Staniford (BUS Action Group) has been fighting for this cause since before I can remember, and it's about time the government stood up and solved this issue. Over the years my mother has fought a battle against the various governments in power, and each government has procrastinated and made excuses as to why they shouldn't put seat belts on school busses. During this time school children have died in bus crashes, while others have been severely injured and psychologically damaged. These deaths and injuries could have been avoided if seat belts had have been available to these children. It is time for the NSW government to stop ignoring this issue and help keep children safe when travelling by introducing seat belts and abolishing standing on school busses.

Time and time again, seat belts have been proven to save lives and time and time again the RTA use their slogan "seat belts save lives" to promote the use of seat belts when travelling on roads. In fact, I doubt anyone would object to the notion that seat belts are a basic, but highly

effective safety feature. So why are school children deprived of this basic necessity that everyone else uses and expects when travelling on roads. Are school children less important than other road users? Of course not, and they should therefore have access to the basic safety features that all other road users have access to.

The NSW state claims to be a leading state in Australia but they have stood back and watched several other states implement seat belts on school busses without doing anything themselves. These policies have been successful, and NSW needs to follow suit.

The NSW government needs to stop wasting time and lives by playing politics about this issue and give children access to a seat fitted with seat belts when travelling to and from school. Seat belts save lives in cars, trucks and coaches, so why not save children's lives on school busses as well.

Submitted by Holly Staniford

Carolyn Walsh  
Independent Chair  
School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee  
Department of Transport

carolynwalshnsw@gmail.com

Dear Ms Walsh,

Re: Submission on School Bus Safety in Regional and Rural NSW

This submission represents concerns of parents and citizens in the small rural community of Elands, NSW. Our village is located 38km northwest of the town of Wingham, in the mountainous hinterland widely-known for being the designated Tourist Drive 8 between Taree and Port Macquarie, with Ellenborough Falls at Elands being the main attraction.

Elands Public School is a small primary school where enrolment numbers have varied between 11 and 26 in the past decade. There is also a group of older students who attend Wingham High School. All these students typically ride school buses every school day, operated by Forster Coaches in Wingham which recently took over the service from Wisely's Coaches.

Road conditions.

It is in the nature of the local topography that the bus routes are winding and undulating-to-steep. However, they are also unsealed, too narrow in many places, chronically under-maintained, over-grown with vegetation and prone to erosion problems from poor drainage. These are all matters for our local Greater Taree City Council, which does not have the financial capacity to properly service these roads. Despite much of the bus route also being a tourist route of State significance, it does not receive any State funding assistance.

Bus safety design.

The second issue concerns the fit-out of buses generally. There are generally no safety belts installed in the school buses to restrain the children in case of collision or the bus rolling over the edge of the mountain roads, and the seat backs are not high enough to provide head support to prevent whiplash injuries.

Recommendations.

1. Provide funding for road widening, safety barriers, vegetation removal, drainage works and ongoing maintenance.
2. Provide funding to retrofit buses with safety belts and head supports.

We have no issues at all with our bus drivers who are highly experienced and responsible under difficult conditions, and the bus company who has shown

great concern for student safety by recently reducing the size of the bus using the mountain road.

We hope some positive results will arise from the work of this advisory committee.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

Sandra Kwa

## **SUBMISSION TO THE NSW SCHOOL BUS SAFETY COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**BY:** Lyndee Thomas

**Date:** 21/9/11

### **Introduction**

My name is Lyndee Thomas; I live in Urunga and have three school age children. Currently two of them attend Bellingen High School and the youngest will be there in 3 years time.

### **Safety Issues**

I am concerned that because of the history of accidents on the Pacific Highway in our area that there will eventually be an accident and due to the lack of seat belts on buses injury or death will result. The buses our children travel on have no seat belts and it worries me each day our children board the bus to school that there may be an accident.

### **Recommendations**

I would like to see all buses modernised and fitted with seat belts so that if, in the event of an accident, our children have more chance of survival and injury will be minimised.

### **Regards**

Lyndee Thomas

**SUBMISSION TO THE NSW SCHOOL BUS SAFETY COMMUNITY  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
BY: Melissa Brander  
DATE: 21/09/2011**

- This submission is from Melissa Brander of “Back Woodlands” Narromine NSW 2821
- I am extremely interested in School Bus Safety as I have 3 children aged 9, 14 and 16 who have always and are currently travelling on a country school bus.
- The 3 children currently travel approximately 36km from their bus stop into their schools in Dubbo NSW with Ogdens Coaches. There are two Ogden buses that travel from Narromine to Dubbo schools.

**Safety Issues**

- The current school bus route is Narromine to Dubbo via the Mitchell Highway. The speed limit on this highway is 110km. It is also a Road Train rated road that permits long heavy haulage semi's and road train trucks which travel at 100km/hr. This highway is also the main route from Sydney to Broken Hill/Adelaide/Perth so as well as being a main tourist route it also is a truck freight route. This highway also has a high volume of traffic between 7am and 9am for the people who travel to Dubbo and Narromine for work.
- The bus from Narromine currently travels during these peak times. There is only one overtaking lane on this highway between Dubbo and Narromine, therefore there are often long banks of traffic following the school bus and then overtaking the school bus when it pulls over to pick up students.
- Ogdens do not have seat belts on their school buses travelling this busy highway.
- Often the bus is overcrowded and there are 3 children per seat as well as their school bags lining the aisle. This bus carries children from the ages of Kindergarten to Yr 12. My children often report of kids who have fallen off their “3 seater” and others who have to sit in the aisle.
- As we are one of the last stops on the trip into school, by the time the bus is at our stop it appears very crowded. I have often seen the bus pull away with my children and 3 others from our stop standing in the aisle. The bus will travel on and pick up another 5 students. From my bus stop, the kids are then standing (if they can't squish into a seat) for approximately 40 minutes plus on a busy major highway. I have followed the bus on occasion and it travels along this highway at 100km/hr.
- There are times when I have driven my children the distance to school when I've felt the overcrowding is out of hand. The second Ogdens bus appears not to be overcrowded with spare seating, however Ogdens state that they cannot alter their route of their second bus to cater for the overcrowding of the first bus.
- I have spoken to Ogdens on occasions regarding the overcrowding of this particular bus but they state that they follow a ‘formulae’ which allows them to have 3 children per seat and children standing in the aisle.

- I feel that it should be mandatory that a school bus travelling between Narromine and Dubbo on a major highway (where vehicles and trucks are travelling between 100-110km per hour) has seatbelts and a proper seat for every student on the bus.
- The school bus also pulls over to drop off or pick up students from the side of the road or farm driveways. There are no designated school bus-stop areas or any signs along the highway indicating that children are getting on or off school buses.

### **Recommendations**

- Every student on a rural school bus gets a seat
- Seat belts on rural school buses/buses that travel on highways or roads in excess of 60km per hour.
- School bus operators to cater for the overcrowding of their school buses by allocating extra school buses/flexibility with their school routes.
- More awareness/signs for drivers that it is a school bus route.
- Mitchell Highway between Dubbo and Narromine to have more overtaking lanes.
- School bus stops to have a wider area made for the school bus to get off the highway to enable the safe pick-up and drop-off of students.
- School buses to have bigger and brighter signage/flashing lights to make drivers aware that it is a school bus and is constantly pulling off and onto a highway.

Thanking you for accepting my submission.

Yours faithfully

Melissa Brander

20<sup>th</sup> September 2011

**Attention:** NSW SCHOOL BUS SAFETY COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**Parent Submission:**

Maria Cameron and Megan Richards reside on the Liverpool Range north-west of Merriwa in the Upper Hunter and have between them had five children travelling on school buses into local Merriwa schools over the past 14years.

**School Bus Information:**

Merriwa's school buses deliver children to and from Merriwa Central School (K-12) and St Joseph's Primary at Merriwa every week day. For example, the "Idaville Bus" travels north-west approximately 40km, heading 10km west from town on the Golden Highway and then turning north along the Idaville and Hampshire Roads for 26km. 10km of the road is narrow unfenced gravel road with cattle, sheep, kangaroos, wombats and feral pigs, common obstacles. The road traverses a river and three creeks with narrow cement causeways with flood markers; four one-lane cattle grids; two one-lane bridges; and even the tar sealed road is narrow and uneven. Two feedlots and numerous properties along the road ensure a traffic flow of semi-trailers and B-double trucks carting grain and livestock. The current bus is a 14seater.

**Safety Issues:**

**1. Lack of Communication Equipment in Buses**

Our mobile phone network is very patchy around Merriwa and our school buses do not carry any communication equipment for medical, flood or fire emergencies and breakdowns. The Idaville Bus run has no mobile service for 26km and does not pass a residence for 10km. Reasons this lack of communication is a major problem:

- The river and 3 creek crossings that the Idaville bus passes through are low level causeways as pictured in Image 1, 2, 3 & 4. As can be seen by the flood markers, up to 2metres of water can cover these roads. All creeks flash flood due to the proximity of the Great Dividing Range, only 5km to the north. In the past 15yrs, walls of water have travelled down these creeks on at least 7 occasions, washing a quad bike rider off a causeway and killing over 50 head of cattle, 100s of sheep and horses. Vehicles have been swept off causeways by drivers attempting to get through. Roads have been cut many times for all traffic. Currently, parents must phone bus drivers at home before 6.15am or 2.30pm during wet weather to advise creek levels. Lack of communication with buses has proved a problem on many occasions with creeks rising quickly and the whereabouts of the bus unknown.



**Image 1 – Half Moon Ck crossing**



**Image 2 – Stoney Creek crossing**



**Image 3 – Krui River crossing**



**Image 4 – Bow Creek crossing**

- The “Mountain Station” bus travels on 10km of unsealed roads and crosses many deep creeks with no flood level markers. Black soil sections of the road are very slippery in wet weather (Image 9) and the bus has been damaged sliding into contour banks. Like the “Idaville” run, each creek is fed by a different catchment and flood levels can vary greatly and rise quickly.
- Children that travel on our buses include asthmatics and anaphylaxis sufferers so communication is essential in the event there is a medical problem.
- Fires are a common occurrence during summer particularly from lightning strikes and buses have had to be cancelled or diverted in the past.
- Flat tyres and breakdowns have occurred, inconveniencing drivers without communication and panicking parents with no idea where bus was and why it was late.
- Children have missed school when buses have run early or arrived late and no communication has been possible with drivers.
- The risk of accidents is high with livestock, native and feral animals all along the unfenced road; heavy vehicle traffic and narrow uneven road surfaces; narrow bridges, causeways and grids (see Images 4, 5, 6 & 8). Drivers need to be able to contact emergency services without delay. There has been a head on accident on a blind crest and numerous rollovers along this road due to road conditions and animal interference.



Image 5 – Narrow grids on Hampshire Rd

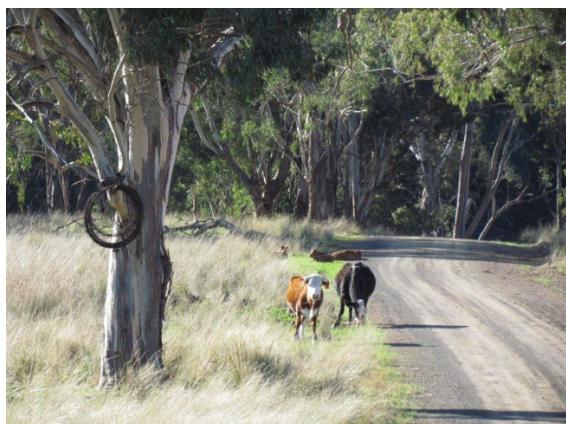


Image 6 – Stock along road

## 2. Lack of Turning Lane on Golden Highway / Idaville Road intersection

The “Idaville Bus” travels west from Merriwa and turns right across the Golden Highway up the Idaville Road as shown in Image 7 where the bus is about to take the turn. There is no turning lane at this point and the full bus often has to stop in the middle of the highway waiting to take the turn. Traffic including large fully laden grain and fertiliser trucks often approaches the bus at high speed from behind each afternoon. Large trucks and cars attempt to overtake the bus on the outside squeezing between the bus and the guard rail OR overtake the bus, regardless of the fact it is turning or that there is a solid line on the road. This corner has been a black spot for many years and numerous near misses and a major accident have occurred recently. Parents do not want to wait for a roadside memorial before this corner is fixed. In about 2004, a car towing a trailer at high speed attempted to overtake a 4WD and horse float on this very corner. The car travelling at 145km/hr clipped the horse float and spun out of control. Two cars and a float were destroyed and eight people were lucky to be alive. The at fault driver’s excuse was it thought the horse float was a slow moving vehicle – much like a school bus. Numerous residents report indicating to turn up this same road, only to have drivers sandwich them on both sides assuming they were indicating for them to overtake. A concrete bridge across Bow Creek only 100m past the intersection makes this practice even more dangerous as there is nowhere for the turning vehicle to escape.



Image 7 – Golden Hwy / Idaville Rd

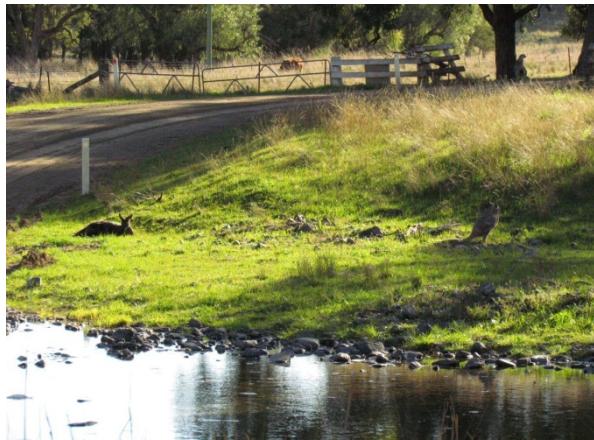
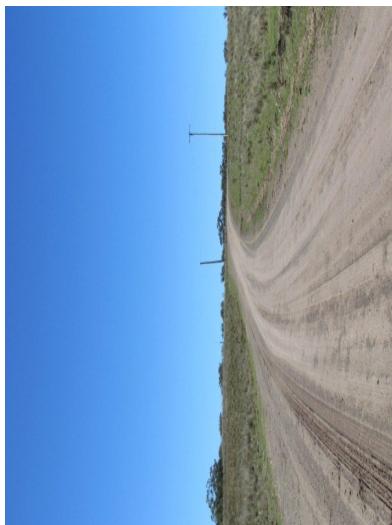


Image 8 – Kangaroos and stock by rd

### **Recommendations:**

1. All buses should carry appropriate communication equipment such as UHF radios or satellite phones to improve safety on buses for children and drivers. Buses could then be contacted for flood and fire warnings and drivers could contact rescue services, ambulances or mechanical help. Communication is essential for flash flood warnings which are very localised in nature but also potentially deadly. In the Merriwa District, a UHF radio could access the local UHF repeater. These are readily available for purchase ranging in cost from \$100 to \$400 for handheld and wired models.
2. A turning lane should be provided on all major “black-spot” intersections particularly where school buses transport children every day. One such example is the intersection of the Golden Highway and Idaville Road where there has already been one accident and many near misses.
3. All creeks need to have maintained accurate flood markers clearly displaying the correct flood depth and bus drivers need to be aware of safe depths to cross for various size buses. The cost for this would be minimal compared to the benefit and life-saving nature of a simple device.
4. Black soil roads need to be maintained with gravel/road base to ensure all weather access for buses which are not 4WD vehicles. Parents are currently transporting children at their own expense across poorly maintained roads to meet buses in wet weather. This roads are also dangerous with no traction for buses in danger of rolling over or sliding into banks, trees and grids.

(Images 9 and 10)



**Image 9 - Black soil sections of Idaville road – just graded, then heavy rain, now pot holes and ridges from bus and vehicles**

Maria Cameron,

**SUBMISSION TO THE NSW SCHOOL BUS SAFETY COMMUNITY  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**BY: PARENTS AND CITIZENS ASSOCIATION,  
URUNGA PUBLIC SCHOOL**

**Date: 20 September 2011**

**Introduction**

This submission made by the Parents and Citizens Association, Urunga Public School, Bonville Street, Urunga NSW 2455 ("Urunga PS P&C Assoc"). The Urunga P&C Association represents the parents and community members associated with the 245 primary school aged children who attend Urunga Public School.

The school is located 20 km south of Coffs Harbour on the mid north coast of NSW. Approximately 105 children have bus passes and five buses currently operate to and from the school. These school buses are provided by Busways, which has a total fleet of around 600 buses. Children travel to and from Urunga and surrounding villages, including Newry Island, Valla and Yellow Rock.

School bus travel is, by far, the major form of public transport available in the mid north coast region. Goal 8 in the NSW Government's *NSW 2021 Plan*<sup>1</sup> is to "grow patronage on public transport by making it a more attractive choice, as it reduces traffic congestion and provides significant environment benefits." Goal 10 is to "improve road safety" by reducing fatalities and includes as one of its priority actions:

- "Work with the Commonwealth and vehicle manufacturers to improve vehicle safety".

**Safety Issues**

We are concerned about a number of safety issues concerning school bus travel to and from Urunga Public School and believe that all issues raised in this submission fall within the School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee's terms of reference. This submission is separated into two parts:

**Part 1**, which covers general issues related to travel on school buses to and from Urunga Public School for consideration by the Committee, and

**Part 2**, which covers local route issues concerning two bus routes which operate to and from Urunga Public School, which may be best dealt with by the Department of Transport.

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<sup>1</sup> *NSW 2021. A Plan to Make NSW Number One*, NSW Government, September 2011.

## **Part 1: General issues**

*Roads infrastructure and school routes:*

- Most children who travel by bus to Urunga Public School must travel on the Pacific Highway from as far south as Nambucca, 20km south of Urunga. This stretch of the Highway is an old, undivided section with a speed limit of up to 100 km/hr. We believe that all travel on the Pacific Highway above 60km/hr, particularly on undivided sections, is high risk. Risk is a function of likelihood and consequences, and both are discussed below.
- This stretch of the Highway has a high collision rate. For example, in November 2010 three separate collisions occurred within a five day period 5 km south of Urunga. Two people died and several people suffered major injuries. This prompted a safety review by the RTA and some work has been done to improve the intersections and clear the vegetation along this stretch of the Highway. It is still, however, a single lane, undivided, winding and undulating stretch of road. It is earmarked for upgrade to dual carriageway but this is unlikely to be completed before 2016 due to funding and logistical constraints.
- The two major bus crashes that occurred in 1989 at Clybucca and Cowper which saw 55 people killed and 54 injured both occurred on similar stretches of the Highway to that travelled by many of the children who attend Urunga Public School. There are large volumes of traffic on this road, including freight trucks, logging trucks and large vehicles carrying earthmoving equipment.
- Our traffic rates are increasing, as is the number of freight vehicles. See: *Traffic Volume Data for Hunter and Northern Regions 2004*, Roads and Traffic Authority 2005, at pp. 19-20, which shows that approximately 15,000 to 20,000 vehicles travel on the Pacific Highway each day at points 20km south (Nambucca) to 10 km north (Raleigh) of Urunga, both within the School's catchment. This document also shows that traffic volumes more than doubled – at some points tripled – at these points on the Pacific Highway between 1982 and 2004. More recent data is not available on the RTA website, however this trend has continued, as both the local population and freight vehicles using the Highway continue to increase.
- The consequences of a major crash occurring near Urunga is that emergency and medical services will struggle to cope, as there are limited emergency personnel and vehicles and the nearest hospitals are more than 20km away at Coffs Harbour and Macksville. Neither hospital is staffed nor equipped to cope with a large number of injured children. Most would require airlifting to Sydney for specialist treatment.
- Despite the frequency of crashes and increasing numbers of vehicles on this section of the Pacific Highway, combined with the consequences of a crash occurring in this location, none of the school routes operating to and

from Urunga Public School have been classified as environment 3 routes in the list published by the NSW Government in April 2011. We believe that all these bus routes should be classed as environment 3 routes because of the high risk on roads with 90-100 k/hr speed limits, especially with high traffic volumes, particularly heavy vehicles and the proximity to major hospitals.

- Valla Beach parents lobbied Busways in late 2010 to change bus routes to minimise travel on the Pacific Highway, following the spate of accidents that occurred on the Pacific Highway south of Urunga in November 2010. This led to route changes but there are unresolved issues, which are described in Part 2 of this submission.

#### *Bus design and standing*

- Busways provides large buses (mainly category 4) for school routes. These buses are an appropriate size for the conditions, due to their mass. None of these buses, however, have seatbelts. A 15 year old school girl, Whitney Welsh, died in September 2007 from horrific injuries when she was thrown from a Busways bus on a rural, high speed road in Urunga. This bus was not fitted with seatbelts.
- Western Australia has implemented seatbelts on all school buses and all other states and territories apart from NSW and Victoria have begun to replace old school buses with more modern buses, including buses with seatbelts.
- Many Busways' buses operating on the Highway have low hard seats and inadequate padding which do not provide compartmentalisation, the minimum standard applied to school buses in the United States. One bus which regularly provides services from Nambucca to the school (registration no. 6561 MO) is clearly not designed for high speed rural roads. It has low, hard seats with steel bars across top of the seats. Buses operated by Busways continue to be decommissioned from metropolitan routes and replaced with buses that comply with National and State disability access legislation and policy, which exempts school buses.
  - <http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/abouttrans/access-trans-faq.html>
- In 2012 the percentage of buses required to meet these requirements will rise to 55%. These buses are designed for low speed conditions (e.g. have seats without padding or high backs) and an increasing number have been "phased out of service" by being put onto school bus routes in the mid north coast region. A Busways representative recently stated that more of these buses will be decommissioned to the mid north coast to meet the 2012 disability access target in metropolitan areas. These buses are not suited to this region's high speed and other high risk conditions and should be confined to lower speed urban areas. Buses travelling in high risk/speed conditions need the same rollover, braking, seat anchorage and other features which all coaches have been required to have in Australia

since 1995 when Australian Design Rule 68 was fully implemented. We believe that a company operating around 600 buses should be able to move urban designed buses to routes confined to urban (60km/hr or lower speed zone) areas.

- Primary aged children often sit three abreast. Bus companies and government cite this as an economic barrier to having seatbelts, but a bus seat manufactured in Australia allows the '3 for 2 rule' to remain. When seat belts are installed the capacity of the bus need only be reduced by the number of children currently allowed to stand. See Educator 2/3 seat with centre harness: <http://www.mcconnellsseats.com.au/cgi>. The seatbelts operate flexibly so they can secure either 2 or 3 children safely.
- Many Australian school buses now have these seats and they were part of the strategy to fit seatbelts in all (approximately 800) Western Australian school buses between 2005 and 2010 at a total cost of \$22 million. See: <http://www.southernthunderer.com.au/2010/02/seatbelts-fitted-in-all-wa-school-buses/> and <http://www.schoolbuses.wa.gov.au/Portals/0/SBS/PDF/opm.pdf> at p. 67.
- Many parents drive their children to and from Urunga Public School because they perceive the risks associated with travelling without a seatbelt and standing to be greater than the risk of travelling seated in a car wearing a seatbelt. This adds to the already high volume of traffic on the roads before and after school, particularly on the Highway, increasing the risk of a school bus collision occurring.
- We submit that all children on buses that travel above 80km/hr should be seated on buses designed for high speed travel with high backs with lap/sash seatbelts.

*Bus operations:*

Urunga Public School has adopted a policy of providing buses for excursions that are fitted with lap/sash seatbelts for travel on roads above 70km/hr, in recognition of the risks associated with this travel. All children are provided with a seat on these buses.

*Driver distraction including student behaviour on buses*

- Driver distraction is inevitable when children are not seated on buses, and is very dangerous for other road users when travelling on high speed (above 80km/hr) and other high risk routes, including all travel on the Pacific Highway and other environment 3 routes. The photograph **attached** was taken on the Pacific Highway approximately 7 km south of Urunga on route 61, while travelling south at 80-90km/hr. It shows children moving about in the aisle of the bus. This is not a one off event. Children are regularly observed standing on the bus on the highway. A Busways representative claimed that there is a seat available for all children when this bus reaches the Highway. This may be true; however

ensuring compliance is difficult for a driver travelling at high speed in peak hour traffic on the Pacific Highway. If seatbelts were installed and a compliance strategy for their use was implemented, rowdy behaviour would be reduced.

#### *Driver training and performance*

- Busways' drivers are competent and appear to have been properly trained. Their ability to drive the bus safely is compromised by not having children seated and properly restrained from moving about while the bus is in motion. There are limited opportunities along the Pacific Highway for buses to pull over and for drivers to enforce seating requirements.

#### *Education and awareness (for parents, students and bus operators)*

- A compliance strategy is required to ensure that reforms are implemented. This will need to include a range of strategies aimed at educating children, parents, teachers who supervise children getting on and off buses and bus drivers about the importance of children being seated and wearing seatbelts while the bus is moving between stops. It will also require penalties for repeated non-compliance, eg banning children for several days from bus travel.

### **Recommendations**

We **recommend** implementation of the following changes as soon as possible with respect to all school buses travelling on the Pacific Highway and any other rural road classified as environment 3 routes or where any part of the journey involves speeds above 80km/hr:

1. Provision of buses that comply with Australian Design Rule 68, including lap/sash seatbelts,
2. Abolition of children standing,
3. Abolition of buses with low, hard backed seats especially those with steel bars across the top and inadequate padding, and
4. Compliance strategies for ensuring that reforms are properly implemented.

Banning standing on high speed and high risk routes can be achieved via an immediate variation to contract between the Department of Transport and Busways, with a net loss adjustment (compensation). This will remove the barrier/disincentive to apply for Federal "Seatbelts for Kids" funding of \$25,000 per bus for seatbelts. This funding is due to expire on 30 June 2012, which points to the need for urgent action to minimize the cost to the NSW Government for seatbelts.

### **Part 2: Local school route issues**

- Issues relating to the Valla Beach to and from Urunga Public School bus routes 64 (a.m.) and 61 (p.m.) and the bus route that travels to the School

via Yellow Rock are set out in the **attached** email correspondence between Valla Beach parent Jan Gill, Busways' representative David Collins and NSW Department of Transport representative Lynette Foot.

- Last week Busways distributed notices to parents of children who travel on these routes, which describe further proposed route changes and calling for comments on these proposed changes by 23 September. The changes proposed by Busways, however, are not clear from the notice and no maps are included. In May requests were made to Busways staff (both local and head office) to attend a meeting with maps to describe the safety and logistical matters that underpin their decisions, but these requests were declined.
- We request a process facilitated by the Department of Transport for resolving issues regarding bus routes with Busways, the School's principal and parents of affected children.

**Recommendation:**

We **recommend** that a meeting be held at the School as soon as possible and that this meeting is chaired by a Department of Transport representative. We believe this is the quickest and most cost-effective way for routes and proposed route changes to be understood and for parents' safety concerns to be considered and, where possible, addressed.

Lorraine Goolmeeze

I would like to make a short submission with regard to the above:

The school bus safety in regional and rural NSW is often touted (in fact written on the back of buses) as safer than private transport, rail etc. This is because thankfully the number of accidents have been small but the risks remain high.

The problem I have is that the bus my children travel on does not have seatbelts. They are on this bus for approximately 100 mins per day travels in various 100km/hr zones and also for a short distance on the Pacific Highway (near Raymond Terrace). If the bus got nudged at that speed there would be likely to be no survivors. The risk is high.

I can understand that there is no seat belt laws for buses simply because it is envisaged that the bus is stopping and starting at low speeds in a residential setting. However, this is not the case in much of rural Australia.

I would recommend that seat belts are used and implemented if the bus is going to be operating in speed zones over 60km/hr.

Regards,

Elizabeth Akerman

To: Carolyn Walsh  
Independent Chair  
School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee  
C/- Department of Transport  
[carolynwalshnsw@gmail.com](mailto:carolynwalshnsw@gmail.com)

Dear Carolyn

I wish to submit to the School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee my concerns about a key and urgent issue regarding the safety of school buses in NSW.

This is the matter of seatbelts on school buses.

Every day school buses in NSW are on the road in rural and semi-rural areas travelling at speeds of up to 80km per hour with children on board who are not restrained by seatbelts and even in some cases, children are standing in the aisles of the buses.

Considering that since the introduction of Australian Design Rule 68/00 in 1995 seatbelts have been mandatory for everyone travelling on coaches in Australia - and in cars since 1972 - it seems inconceivable that seatbelts are not yet made available to NSW school children travelling on rural and semi-rural bus routes.

These are bus routes with a high or extremely high risk – steep, winding, narrow roads, mostly single lane & undivided, carrying large numbers of heavy vehicles. Speed on these routes, both of the school buses and other vehicles, is also clearly one of the highest risk factors.

Standing in the aisles and being seated without seatbelts increases the risk of children suffering injuries and death if there is an accident, as they can be thrown around the bus or through the windscreen.

Having children in seatbelts on school buses reduces rowdy behaviour and allows the bus driver to concentrate on driving. Having them all seated also means the driver's rear vision view isn't blocked.

NSW and Victoria are the only states where seat belts are not required on country school buses. Every other state and territory is phasing them in, except Western Australia which finished fitting seatbelts to all school buses in January 2010.

I ask that the School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee address as a priority the urgent matter of ensuring that buses that meet the safety standards required for high speed travel, including seatbelts, be mandatory on routes where there is any travel above 80km per hour and on other high risk routes.

Furthermore standing should be abolished immediately on all school buses on these routes.

I give permission for my submission to be published as part of the Committee's enquiry, however I do ask that my email address be kept confidential.

Yours sincerely

Jane Kevan

SUBMISSION TO THE NSW SCHOOL BUS SAFETY COMMUNITY  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE

BY: Monica Robinson - individual, concerned parent of school children. Date:  
.....22 Sept 2011.....

Safety Issues

- Bus design (including fitment of seat belts)

ABC radio advises all states other than NSW & Vic have seatbelt programmes in place (complete or partially). We need seatbelts on our school buses!

Monica Robinson

Dear Carolyn Walsh,

I am writing to express my concern for the safety of children travelling on school buses, especially those on high-risk and highway-speed routes. As an example, my son's schoolbus to Willawarren in rural NSW, travels on sections of Armidale Road which have a 100km/ph limit, the dangers of passing trucks, kangaroos and wallabies, and various bumpy dirt roads. It even carries preschool children - yet has no seat belts. Some children travel standing up, endangering their lives, distracting the driver, and possibly hindering his vision. I hope it will not take another fatal tradgedy for the government to take action. Lap/sash seat belts should be compulsory on such bus routes, with all children seated. The low hard backed seats with steel bars across the top do not seem safe either. If an unrestrained child smashed their head on one of those bars it would be dreadful.

Regulations should be updated to reflect an increased understanding of what happens in vehicular crashes, faster speeds and more traffic including more trucks. A seven-year-old child must now use a booster seat with their seat belt for a two-minute car drive, yet does not need a seat belt or even a seat on a thirty-five minute bus trip. It really does not make sense.

Yours Sincerely,  
Yvonne Nolan

Dear Carolyn, PLEASE We need set belts on our school buses. KIDS DIE..  
Imagine if that was your 17 year old daughter that DIED a few years ago in  
Northern NSW, on her way home from school...She had the same surname  
as YOU...A seat belt would have SAVED HER LIFE...Imagine how her Mother  
feels.....PLEASE KEEP OUR KIDS SAFE NOW..Jen Tredinnick

To Carolyn Walsh,  
Independent Chair,  
School Bus Safety Committee

Thankyou for the opportunity to submit re school bus safety.

But like many, many people in the community I am a bit transport-challenged. I join a School bus to connect me with the railhead in Muswellbrook to get the 10.13 train south, quite often.

When I moved to the country I planned to join as many of the long distance school buses as I could, to see the country without the distraction of driving a car. I have not yet completed that ambition, but the Muswellbrook link is vital. I could see that others would occasionally use the School service casually in the way that I do, if they thought about it, or if it were in any way openly encouraged with the proviso that the bus is primarily for school students and in all cases their interests come first. Eg, if the bus is full, clearly students precede any other users. Invading groups of people are not what I have in mind. I have found that the public use of school buses is so rare that the drivers have to get out their reference material to give me the price of the fare.

My point is, that when I am on the bus, there are two adults aboard. Generally also, plenty of space, no competition and no hassles. The children have always looked with just a little curiosity at the unknown adult.

Perhaps if more adults occasionally used school services, and the availability of this was made clear, with the rules, then more services could be sure of one or more extra adults on more of the school bus runs, in a random kind of way. Any planned hooliganism becomes far less likely from a rumbustious minority,

and the Driver has backup and another eye on the crowd.

The kids have a Strange Adult to address politely, to deal with, it is another element on their journey, and not a negative one, but a tiny introduction of surveillance and discipline. It is another eye watching for kids dashing across the road to/from the bus as well, with a responsible tendency to alert the Driver.

I can see no reason why the fuller community use of School Buses should not be regarded as a positive win-win for the otherwise stranded non-drivers, for the School Bus company revenues, and for child safety in bus travel, as well as for the Drivers.

Thanks,  
Bev Atkinson

C.Walsh

Dear Carolyn,

I would like to add my voice to the many others I'm sure you have heard from on the safety issue of seatbelts on schoolbuses.

This year I have a son , next year it will be two sons, travelling between Valla Beach and Urunga primary school on a bus that has no seatbelts and where some children actually have to stand.

There is no way that I would take my children out on the Pacific highway in my car without having them safely belted in ( not to mention the fact that it would be illegal) but my son is out there twice each day on his schoolbus. There is ample research on the benefits of seatbelts for increasing safety in a crash. I'm sure if there was a crash steps would be taken to make things safer. I would hope we could be proactive and do something without needing a tragedy as impetus.

Yours Sincerely

Cath Walsh

To whom it may concern.our son catches the valla beach bus to urunga school via the pacific highway, and we are very worried about him catching are bus that has no seat belts on that dangerous stretch of highway,when we travel with our children in the car they have seat belts and we teach our kids why they need them so it's only rite they have seat belts on busses for there saftey .i wasn't planning to put my son on the bus on that highway but i had to have are shoulder opperation and can't drive him to school no more .so the bus is how he gets to school now please help us to get seat belts for our kids ,save us poor parents worrying so much about our kids saftey .thank you

Submission to the  
**NSW School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee**  
September 2011

From: VIEW Clubs of Australia

VIEW Clubs of Australia have advocated for seatbelts in school buses since 1999 while also calling for the removal of laws which allow children to stand on school buses

**Background:**

Schools build security fences, practise lockdowns, and promote anti-bullying campaigns, drug education and stranger danger. Yet 300,000 children in NSW travel twice a day on buses with no seat belts, a vast proportion in rural areas at speeds in excess of 80 km per hour with students standing in the aisle.

Overcrowding is common and the buses range from recent to quite aged vehicles, in various states of maintenance and condition; children are allowed, by law, to stand in the aisles of school buses.

None of the children travelling on school buses are protected by any form of safety restraint. These same children, if riding in a car, are required by law to wear a seat belt, for safety reasons. The same children, if riding aboard an interstate bus, would also be legally required to wear a seatbelt.

The fitting of seatbelts in automobiles has been compulsory since 1972, and compulsory in all interstate buses built since 1994.

However, school bus safety measures have been neglected and children's lives are put at risk on a daily basis.

This is an appalling double standard.

Administrators maintain a vigilant campaign on seat belt safety in cars and tourist buses while at the same time pretending that school buses are somehow different.

This double standard is recognised by institutions such as the NRMA and the AMA. Significantly, the AMA has continually attempted to draw attention to the prevalence of unreported minor injuries that don't arise from actual bus accidents but from sudden or even routine braking incidents.

These minor injuries include lost teeth, facial lacerations and severe bruising. It was estimated, in 2009, that 9 such injuries a week were sustained by NSW school

students, injuries that are completely preventable if children were properly restrained.

The installation and wearing of seat belts in school buses must be made mandatory. Only when it becomes law will something be done.

Heather Isemonger

## Submission to NSW School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee

By BusNSW (Darryl Mellish) 22/9/2011

BusNSW understands that school buses are the safest form of school student transport (Minister's Media Release 29/4/2011).

BusNSW is pleased to be part of the Community Advisory Committee. In response to the request for submissions BusNSW asks the Committee to consider:

1. The existing student travel safety record on and off the bus between home and school.
2. The initiatives that are in place or underway for improving school bus safety.
3. The various options available to mitigate school student travel risks. These include education and training.
4. The full impact (economic, social, environmental) of any proposed changes to improve school bus safety. This includes the costs/benefits and possible need for additional employees, depots and buses and recurring costs.
5. The operational requirements needed to implement and enforce any changes and what impact these will have on bus service quality.
6. The need for clear allocation of responsibility for introducing and complying with any proposed changes. This should include a communications strategy.
7. A clear articulation on any liabilities operators or drivers may face as a result of changes.
8. Any impact from the Independent Transport Safety Regulator (ITSR) taking over bus safety regulations.
9. What impact a new Transport for New South Wales (TfNSW) contract audit (under development) regime may have on school bus safety.

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Bus and Coach Industrial Association (NSW)

10. What impact the proposed changes to the Passenger Transport Act (PTA) will have on student safety.
11. What bus system contract variations may be needed to introduce the committee's recommendations.
12. The position papers previously released by the Bus Industry on seat belts in school buses (BusNSW and BIC).
13. Relevant research and best practice material that may be relevant to NSW.
14. Obtaining reviews and cooperation from various stakeholders (councils, education bodies etc.) needed to implement any improvements eg. bus stop and road infrastructure, travel safety education programs in schools.
15. Obtaining information previously collected and analysed by DoT/RTA on school bus safety.
16. Supporting BusNSW expansion of its training and education services aimed at improving safety and performance.
17. Improving the School Student Code of Conduct and guidelines for managing school student behaviour. This would include incident reporting and analysis and use of the student misbehaviour database.
18. New technology including improvements to seats and bus design, and guidelines on retrofitting seat belts.

BusNSW has experience and an interest in all of these items and looks forward to continuing to contribute to meeting the Terms of Reference established.

BusNSW does not require this submission to remain confidential.

Darryl J Mellish  
Executive Director

Dear Carolyn

I wish to submit to the School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee my concerns about a key and urgent issue regarding the safety of school buses in NSW.

This is the matter of seatbelts on school buses.

I ask that the School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee address as a priority the urgent matter of ensuring that buses that meet the safety standards required for high speed travel, including seatbelts, be mandatory on routes where there is any travel above 80km per hour and on other high risk routes. Furthermore standing should be abolished immediately on all school buses on these routes.

I give permission for my submission to be published as part of the Committee's enquiry, however I do ask that my email address be kept confidential.

Yours sincerely  
Simone Hayes

We are two concerned parents whose children use the school bus from Hungry Head to Urunga Public School.

This section of road on the Pacific Highway is extremely dangerous and has claimed many lives over the last few years.

We desperately need the NSW State Government to introduce a law to have seat belts fitted on all school buses in NSW before a tragic accident occurs such as the Clybucca bus crash over 30 years ago.

We look forward to this happening well before the next NSW state election.

Val and Jacqui Kononow.

Dear Ms Walsh

I wish to express to the School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee my concerns about the safety of school buses in NSW.

In Valla Beach where I live there is no school. Every school-aged child must travel on the Pacific Highway to school and there are more than 100 school-aged children in this village. We have recently worked with the local council to achieve a safer path along the road leading to the bus stop to make it safer for children who walk to the bus stop. We have also tried to have bus route changes made to minimise travel on the Highway. Every day our school buses are on the Highway and in rural and semi-rural areas travelling at speeds of up to 100km per hour with children on board who are not restrained by seatbelts and even in some cases, children are standing in the aisles of the buses.

Considering that since the introduction of Australian Design Rule 68/00 in 1995 seatbelts have been mandatory for everyone travelling on coaches in Australia - and in cars since 1972 - it seems inconceivable that seatbelts are not yet made available to NSW school children travelling on rural and semi-rural bus routes, especially on the Pacific Highway.

These are bus routes with a high or extremely high risk – winding, narrow sections of the Highway, mostly single lane and undivided, carrying large numbers of heavy vehicles. Speed on these routes, both of the school buses and other vehicles, is also clearly one of the highest risk factors.

Standing in the aisles and being seated without seatbelts increases the risk of children suffering injuries and death if there is an accident, as they can be thrown around the bus or through the windscreen.

Having children in seatbelts on school buses reduces rowdy behaviour and allows the bus driver to concentrate on driving. Having them all seated also means the driver's rear vision view isn't blocked.

NSW and Victoria are the only states where seat belts are not either required or being phased in for country school buses.

I ask that the School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee address as a priority the urgent matter of ensuring that buses that meet the safety standards required for high speed travel, including seatbelts, be mandatory on routes where there is any travel above 80km per hour and on other high risk routes.

Further, standing should be abolished immediately on all school buses on these routes. I give permission for my submission to be published as part of the Committee's enquiry, however I do ask that my email address be kept confidential.

Yours sincerely  
Theo Chang

**Submission to the NSW School Bus Safety Advisory Committee**  
**by Jan Gill, Valla Beach**

**22 September 2011**

I am the mother of a 9 year old school child who travels to and from school by bus provided by Busways on the mid north coast of NSW. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present the following submission for consideration by the Community Advisory Committee:

*Roads infrastructure and school routes:*

- My child travels each day from Valla Beach to Urunga on the mid north coast along an old, undivided section of the Pacific Highway that has a high collision rate. Many of these collisions involve fatigue, as this is the midpoint between Sydney and Brisbane. The collisions are often head on, resulting in high death and serious injury rates. This section of the Highway will be upgraded to dual carriageway but not before 2016.
- The population in this area is rapidly increasing, as is the volume of cars and freight vehicles that travel on the Highway.
- The NSW risk assessment published in April 2011 doesn't include most of the routes operating at high speed on notorious sections of the Pacific Highway such as the stretch from Nambucca to Urunga - including the route my child travels - and is therefore incomplete.

*Appropriate bus design*

- Because of the risk factors on the Highway and the fact that it will take at least five years for a dual carriageway to be completed we urgently need buses designed for the conditions.
- Since the introduction of Australian Design Rule 68/00 in 1995 seatbelts have been mandatory for everyone travelling on coaches in Australia - and in cars since 1972 - yet are not available to NSW school children travelling on high risk country bus routes, such as routes that travel on old sections of the Pacific Highway.
- Bus companies have had 16 years to voluntarily comply with ADR 68 but most haven't, even where buses share the road with ever increasing numbers of traffic including increasing numbers of heavy vehicles, such as in this region.
- Many buses still operating at high speed in this region are old and dangerous. They were never designed for high speed travel and have the same fatal flaws (such as plywood floors, low hard backed seats and no seatbelts) as the buses that crashed on the Pacific Highway near Kempsey and Grafton in 1989 – killing 55 and seriously injuring 54 people.
- I have **attached** a photo of the bus my child regularly travels to school on which has these features. I took this photo in February 2011 while the bus was travelling at more than 80km/hr on the section of the Pacific Highway south of Urunga that saw three major collisions in one week last November. These collisions resulted in three deaths and several others suffered major injuries. The high collision, death and injury rate on this road coupled with old buses with unrestrained children is frightening for all parents whose children travel on this stretch road.

- Buses that continue to be decommissioned from city roads and replaced with buses that comply with National and State disability access legislation and policy are a major concern. <http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/abouttrans/access-trans-faq.html>

This legislation has an exemption for school buses and states:

*"Dedicated school services that have specific buses allocated to service those routes are not required to comply with the Standards. However, all new buses must comply with the Standards. Thus, non-compliant buses will eventually be phased out of service."*

In 2012 the percentage of buses required to meet these requirements will rise to 55%. These buses are designed for low speed conditions (e.g. have seats without padding or high backs) and an increasing number will be "phased out of service" by being put onto school bus routes.

- Busways representative, Mr David Collins has told me that the company will not apply for the \$25,000 per bus Commonwealth subsidy available under the "Seatbelts for Kids" funding program because they are not legally obliged to have seatbelts under the terms and conditions of their contracts with the NSW Department of Transport. In mid 2009 their website stated that 70 new buses had been purchased, but Mr Collins advised me that all of these buses would be put onto metropolitan roads and that none had seatbelts. This was a missed opportunity and a practice that should not continue.
- This month marks the anniversary of the death of Whitney Welsh in 2007. She was killed when she was thrown from a Busways bus at Urunga. It did not have seatbelts.
- The Commonwealth has committed just \$14 million up to mid 2012. Action is urgently required to vary contracts with bus companies to require all children to be seated on high speed or other high risk routes. This will enable this funding to be spent on school bus seatbelts for these routes before this funding program expires.
- NSW and Victoria are lagging behind other Australian states and territories, by not introducing seat belts on country school buses. Every other state and territory is phasing them in, except Western Australia which finished fitting seatbelts to all school buses in January 2010: <http://www.perthnow.com.au/news/western-australia/last-school-buses-fitted-with-seatbelts/story-e6frg13u-1225829224245>

#### *Children standing*

- NSW Government contracts allow children to stand on buses, which increases the risk of death or injury if there is an accident, as they can be thrown around the bus or through the windscreens.
- As the attached photo shows, the bus my child travels on in the afternoon requires some children to stand. A Busway representative told me that there is a seat available for all children once the bus reaches the 90 km/hr section of the Pacific Highway; however without seatbelts the children seem to feel free to roam in the aisle.

#### *Driver distraction including student behaviour on buses*

- Having children in seatbelts on school buses reduces rowdy behaviour and allows the bus driver to concentrate on driving. Having them all seated also means the driver's rear vision view isn't blocked. The day I travelled on the bus and took the attached photo I was shocked by the degree of driver distraction caused by children standing, walking and climbing in the aisle.

*. Education and awareness (for parents, students and bus operators)*

- A compliance strategy is required to ensure that reforms are implemented. This will need to include a range of strategies aimed at educating children, parents, teachers who supervise children getting on and off buses and bus drivers about the importance of children being seated and wearing seatbelts while the bus is moving between stops. It should also include penalties for repeated non-compliance, eg banning children for several days from bus travel.

## **Recommendations**

I request implementation of the following changes as soon as possible with respect to all school buses travelling on the Pacific Highway and any other rural road classified as environment 3 routes or where any part of the journey involves speeds above 80km/hr:

1. Provision of buses that comply with Australian Design Rule 68, including lap/sash seatbelts,
2. Abolition of children standing,
3. Abolition of buses with low, hard backed seats especially those with steel bars across the top and replacement with buses with padded seats,
4. Compliance strategies for ensuring that reforms are properly implemented.

Banning standing on high speed and high risk routes can be achieved via an immediate variation to contract between the Department of Transport and Busways, with a net loss adjustment (compensation). This will remove the barrier/disincentive to apply for Federal "Seatbelts for Kids" funding of \$25,000 per bus for seatbelts. This funding is due to expire on 30 June 2012, which points to the need for urgent action to minimize the cost to the NSW Government to implement seatbelts.

We do not want to see another child killed while travelling on a school bus before action is taken.

Jan Gill

Dear Ms Walsh

I am a parent concerned about school bus safety issues in NSW, particularly on the mid north coast of NSW where my child travels to and from school. I provided a submission to you yesterday detailing my concerns. I understand the final date for receipt of submissions is today.

I have just learnt that Busways, which I believe operates around 30 buses on the mid north coast, has recently been reviewing its school bus routes. I am told that it has sent a form to parents of affected children requesting submissions on variations proposed to a number of bus routes, presumably in accordance with the requirements of its contract with the Department of Transport. See form attached which is available on the Department of Transport website and includes the following statement:

"N.B. Written comment is required from the parents of those students currently travelling, who will be affected by the variation (ie. earlier pick up or later set down time, extra distance to travel). Please attach documents from parents and/or school confirming support or objections."

The closing date for these submissions to Busways is today, i.e. 23 September.

I am concerned that parents may have confused this call for comments from Busways with the call for submissions to the School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee. I am aware of at least one submission sent to Busways that expresses concern over children being required to stand and the lack of seatbelts on the buses provided by this company for school travel.

The time allowed for submissions to the Community Advisory Committee has been short compared with the timeframes given for public comment on other issues - for example the 42 day statutory requirement for commenting on water sharing plans (which apply to only parts of NSW) under the NSW Water Management Act 2000 and the public consultation period of at least 20 weeks proposed by the Murray Darling Basin Authority in relation to its Draft Murray Darling Basin Plan. See:  
<http://www.mdba.gov.au/communities/having-your-say>.

Despite the short period for commenting on school bus safety issues, I am not requesting an extension of the closing date as I am keen to see very overdue reform regarding school bus safety expedited. I do, however, request that you accept any submissions received in the next few days, as I am aware that some parents who have expressed their concerns to me about bus safety issues in this region only became aware of your call for public submissions in recent days and have not yet had time to provide a submission to you.

Can you please advise if you will accept submissions received within the next few days and consider them in the same manner as submissions received by today?

Thank you for considering this issue.

Yours sincerely

Jan Gill

Hi Carolyn

My wife Moira and I would like to make a submission in support of seatbelts on school buses in regional areas. We have 2 kids - one at primary school and one at high school who both catch the same bus between South Durras and Batemans Bay and return which is run by Priors Bus Service. This takes about 30-40 mins and some of this travel is on 100km per hour sections of the Princes Highway north of Batemans Bay.

We believe it is inconsistent and ridiculous that we are required by law to have our kids wear seatbelts in our car but when they travel on the same roads in a private school bus on government contract that they do not have seatbelts available for them to wear. Also sometimes when the bus is crowded the small kids are required to ride 3 to one bench seat. This is putting our kids at high risk of injury or death if the bus has an accident. Also why is it required that the bus driver wears a seatbelt but not the kids he transports?

The State Government should require all school buses that use roads which are 80km per hour or higher to have seatbelts fitted for the kids if they are serious about the safety of school children. More action and less talk on this issue.

Thanks

Trevor Daly and Moira Christie

Dear Carolyn

I wish to submit to the School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee my concerns about the safety of NSW school buses, in particular old buses without not only seatbelts but other safety features.

Every day school buses in NSW are on the road in rural and semi-rural areas travelling at speeds of up to 80km per hour with children standing in the aisles of the buses while surrounding traffic travels at 100kph. On the mid north coast these buses may be old, with bench seats, metal cross bars and most of the risks of the vehicles which featured in the Kempsey and Grafton bus crashes. While bus companies are allowed to average the age of their bus assets across their total school bus fleet, they will remain tempted to put their oldest, and least safe, assets into less profitable regions in particular rural and regional districts. This practice of retiring out dated urban buses to country bus routes should not be allowed under their contract with the state government.

Standing in the aisles and being seated without seatbelts increases the risk of children suffering injuries and death if there is an accident, as they can be thrown around the bus or through the windscreen.

Apart from being able to be fitted with seatbelts, modern buses have other safety features such as compartmentalisation which also reduce the risk of death in a serious accident.

I ask that the School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee address as a priority the urgent matter of ensuring that school buses meet modern safety standards for high speed travel on routes where there is any travel above 80km per hour.

Furthermore standing should be abolished immediately on all school buses on these routes.

I give permission for my submission to be published as part of the Committee's enquiry, however I do ask that my email address be kept confidential.

Yours sincerely

Christabel Wright

**SUBMISSION TO THE  
NSW SCHOOL BUS SAFETY COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

September 2011

My name is Max Staniford and I am making this submission as an individual. I have been interested in improving rural school bus safety since 1995 when our family moved to Termeil, a rural area on the Princes Highway on the NSW south coast. My children travelled 20 km to school in Ulladulla by school bus, sometimes as standing passengers, until they finished high school a few years ago.

**The safety issue I wish to explore is Bus Design and Standing Passengers on rural school bus routes.**

I note that the purpose of the community advisory committee is to make recommendations to the Transport Minister on how rural school bus travel can be made "as safe as possible". This aim cannot be achieved without ensuring that all rural school buses travelling on roads with speed limits of 80 kph or greater comply with ADR 68/00 and that standing of passengers is prohibited.

**Why ADR 68/00 compliance is essential:**

1. Prior to ADR 68/00 being gazetted in 1992, there was little difference in design or safety features of coaches and buses, irrespective of where they operated, apart from coaches having high backed seats and standing passengers not being allowed.
2. In 1989 the two worst bus accidents in Australia occurred in a two month period near Kempsey and Grafton on the NSW north coast. 55 people died and 54 were seriously injured. The buses involved were clearly not designed to protect occupants in this type of high speed crash, with bus seats being torn off the floor, and seats and passengers thrown around the wreckage.
3. The Federal Office of Road Safety (January 1995 Federal Office of Road Safety [FORS] report "Cost Benefit Analysis of Retrofitting Occupant Protection Measures to Existing Buses") examined all serious bus crashes in Australia between 1987 and 1994 and estimated likely injury and fatality reduction, if these buses had adequate seat anchorages and passengers had been wearing lap/sash sat belts.

This report concluded that fatalities would have been reduced from 109 to 60 and serious injuries reduced from 438 to 90, in 17 bus accidents.

4. Following the NSW inquest into the Kempsey and Grafton accidents, ADR 68/00 was introduced. The regulatory impact statement for ADR 68/00 states "*The proposed regulation is to provide improved occupant protection in buses and coaches other than city route buses by the fitting of three point seat belts to all passenger seats.*" and "*The objective of this proposal is to reduce the number of deaths and the severity of injuries resulting from bus crashes. Complying systems will withstand the forces generated in bus crashes at highway speeds.*"

5. ADR 68/00 specifies stronger seats and seat anchorages (able to withstand 20g forces), lap/sash seat belts for each passenger and improved bus strength and rollover protection. These design features substantially improve the chances of passenger survival in a rollover accident or high speed collision, especially with a vehicle of equal or greater mass.

6. Clearly, buses designed for low speed urban routes are not designed to withstand the forces generated in a high speed non urban collision or rollover accident. The accepted Australian safety standard for non urban bus travel is ADR/68 and this should apply to all non urban bus travel.

### **The Current Situation with Rural School Buses:**

1. Despite the lessons from the Kempsey and Grafton bus accidents and the intention of ADR 68/00 to improve bus design and passenger safety for all buses and coaches operating outside metropolitan areas, there is no requirement in NSW rural school bus contracts for buses to meet any minimum safety standards. Previous NSW governments have exploited a loophole in ADR 68/00, which exempts route service buses and buses with a reference seat height of less than one metre from complying with ADR 68/00.
2. The current contracted school bus fleet is a mixture of vehicles ranging from old buses similar to the design of those involved in the Kempsey and Grafton accidents, to more modern buses designed for metropolitan use with 5g or 10g seat anchorages and rollover protection, to some ADR 68/00 compliant buses.

3. This situation was justified by the previous NSW government (and other state governments) by quoting from statistical studies commissioned by them and bus industry organisations, which concluded that "*school bus travel is the safest form of transport*". These studies look at school bus travel overall, so the results are dominated by outcomes of low speed metropolitan school bus travel, where the majority of student journeys take place. As stated in point 2, the school bus fleet is a mixture of buses of different ages, complying with different ADR's, which make the bus safety conclusions irrelevant. A statistical analysis showing overall low death and injury rates, does not make a bus designed for low speed urban travel safe on a high speed rural road. The outcome if that bus collided with a heavy vehicle would be at least as bad as Kempsey and Grafton, or possibly worse due to the „3 for 2 rule“ and standing passengers allowable on rural school buses, which increase the carrying capacity.

4. The current lack of bus safety specifications in rural school bus contracts actually results in the least safe categories of buses being used on the most dangerous school bus routes in NSW. To utilize the exemption in ADR 68/00, buses must be fitted with low back seats, eliminating possible compartmentalization safety benefits. Old metropolitan buses can also be purchased cheaply for use on rural school bus runs, and companies with metropolitan and rural services are modernizing their urban fleets and moving their oldest urban buses to rural school bus runs. This maximizes their profit margins at the expense of student safety.

5. Rural school bus contracts also allow students to stand. This would not be allowed in ADR 68/00 compliant buses and has never been allowed in coaches. How can any reasonable person, let alone a genuine safety consultant or expert, conclude that standing in the aisle of a school bus travelling at 80 kph on a rural road or highway, with oncoming traffic approaching at 100 kph is safe! It is obviously only safe until the bus is involved in an accident. Professor Rod Troubeck, head of the School of Engineering at Queensland University (quote from Sunday Mail 2000) confirmed the unacceptable risk to standing passengers when he said " "*Students, clinging to bars and straps could not survive an accident in which, for example, a bus hits a bridge pylon. Passengers would be thrown around with a force equivalent to 12Gs (Twelve times the force of gravity). An F-16 jet fighter pilot can withstand up to 9 Gs. A passenger holding onto a strap who did not die as a result of his or her velocity would be killed by impact with another “straphanger” from further down the aisle.*"

It is only luck that a school bus in NSW, fully loaded with passengers and standing students has not been involved in a major head-on collision.

6. Previous governments have overstated the cost of eliminating standing and introducing ADR 68/00 compliant buses by including replacing low speed metropolitan buses and the cost of eliminating the „3 for 2 rule“. This is not necessary, as suitable seats e.g. McConnell's Educator 2/3 are available, which comply with ADR 68/00 and provide 3 seatbelts per seat.

### **Legal and Moral Responsibility of Government**

1. As the provider of the rural school transport scheme the NSW government has a duty of care to the students who use the service and a legal and moral obligation to provide a safe service.
2. As the accepted standard for safe bus design for non urban use has been ADR 68/00 and since it was introduced in 1992 the government would be legally liable for deaths and injuries resulting from the use of buses not designed for non urban use.
3. Surely school students are entitled to the same safety protection as coach passengers who travel on the same high speed roads and highways.

### **My recommendations are therefore that:**

1. Standing passengers are prohibited on all rural school bus services where the bus travels on dirt roads - or on roads and highways with speed limits of 80 kph or greater.
2. ADR 68/00 compliant buses are used on all rural school bus services where the bus travels on dirt roads – or on roads and/or highways with a speed limit of 80 kph or greater.
3. It is essential that recommendations 1 and 2 apply to all rural bus services. It is not possible to predict where a serious rollover or head-on bus accident will occur. The Kempsey and Grafton tragedies occurred on straight sections of road. This would mean that if the National Guidelines for Risk Assessment is used to classify NSW bus routes, ADR 68/00 buses would be required for all environment 2 and 3 services.

Max Staniford

22<sup>nd</sup> September 2011

Carolyn Walsh  
Independent Chair  
School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee

Dear Carolyn

**RE: MANDATORY SEATBELTS ON BUSES**

Bowraville Central School P&C was asked to support a campaign to lobby local politicians in passing laws to make wearing seatbelts mandatory on all school buses. At our general meeting on Wednesday, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2011 we unanimously agreed to support this campaign.

History shows that back in 1972 seatbelts were recognised as a protective barrier against serious injuries due to car accidents, therefore becoming mandatory in all vehicles. In 1995 people travelling in coaches were required by law to buckle up. Why then, 40 years later, are we still risking the lives of our most precious treasures (our children) by overcrowding school buses and not making it mandatory to provide seatbelts?

Whatever the reasons, be it financial or bureaucratic, the Governments role is to authorise legislation that protects its people, especially those who are more vulnerable in our community – our children.

As you are aware children in rural and regional areas can travel significant distances each day to school, often on highways. Children as young as four years old in this region travel on one of the worst sections of highway in Australia, not only without seatbelts, but sometimes without a seat. In our own local vicinity around Bowraville the school buses drive on routes where roads are usually made of dirt making them treacherously slippery when it rains, are quite damaged and are extremely narrow and winding. These are tragedies waiting to happen.

We implore you to not only act to bring NSW in line with most other Australian States and Territories, by making seatbelts on school buses mandatory, but to show leadership in this area by ensuring that every school child is seated safely by abolishing the practice of children standing in buses.

We urge you to continue to address this situation until our children enjoy the same level of safety as other road users.

Yours sincerely

Hal Usher  
President  
BOWRAVILLE CENTRAL SCHOOL P&C ASSOCIATION

# NSW School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee

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Submission from  
Andrea Finch and Jenny Caughey,  
Rural School Bus Drivers

18<sup>th</sup> September 2011

## **Introduction:**

As school bus drivers operating in rural areas we would like to present a submission to the NSW School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee.

Safety of the school students travelling to and from school and school initiated activities is always uppermost in our minds when performing our duties as school bus drivers. The very thought of an accident or incident involving the buses we drive, with children being injured or killed, is our very worst nightmare. As drivers of school buses we go beyond the call of duty to ensure the safety of the children we transport. Most of the children we have on our school buses we have known since they were born and we have both had our own children on the buses we drive. We have over 40 years of driving school buses between us.

During our time as bus drivers there have been many changes to the NSW School Transport system, many focussed on safety issues, however the biggest anomaly with children travelling on a school bus, rather than in a private vehicle, is the lack of restraints. This has further been exacerbated since the introduction of child safety seats and restraints until the age of 7 years. It is the law that children now have to be restrained in safety seats and restraints from birth. After 5 years of being restrained in private vehicles they begin school, or in some cases pre-school, and are suddenly placed into a school bus and told they no longer need to wear a seat belt to keep them safe. After years of travelling to and from school unrestrained it is no wonder that, in many accidents, a teenage driver or passenger is killed or seriously injured because they weren't wearing a seat belt.

As drivers of school buses we are obliged by law to wear seat belts; however we carry school children every day who are not provided the same protection. To us it is very much a double standard. Unfortunately it seems that safety actions are only taken following a disastrous event such as the Kempsey/Grafton coach accident in 1989. In this terrible accident 20 people were killed and 15 injured. This tragedy was the catalyst for the installation of seat belts on all passenger coaches from July 1994.

**As drivers of school buses we advocate and support government legislation for the installation of seat belts in all rural school buses travelling at or in excess of 80 k/h in NSW, one seat per passenger and the abolition of standing passengers.**

## Roads Infrastructure/school routes

The roads that we drive school buses on ranges from local and regional roads to state highways. The conditions of the roads vary according to maintenance and weather events and are sometimes unable to be driven on if there has been a lot of rain. The following conditions exist on the roads:

- Wet, slippery and boggy
- Heavy dust
- Corrugations and potholes
- Narrow bitumen with broken edges
- Unmarked bitumen (no white lines)

The traffic using these roads at speeds up to 110 k/h ranges from:

- Passenger vehicles
- Small commercial vehicles
- Cars and Caravans
- Heavy vehicles including B doubles and road trains

## Bus Design and Seating Capacity

Although the buses are licensed to seat a specific number of passengers according to the size of the bus, 3 primary aged children are able to occupy a seat designed for 2. Larger buses that carry both primary and secondary students are able to have 3 primary students to a seat as well as standing passengers. Considering the traffic that is sharing the roads with these school buses, as well as the speed limits of the roads, in the event of an accident the possible carnage is almost unimaginable. In the buses we have driven there are only seat belts provided for the driver and the passenger in the very front seat opposite the driver.

Another safety issue is the windows being able to be fully opened allowing a passenger to protrude from the vehicle.

## Recommendations:

- Eliminate standing on all buses travelling at or in excess of 80 k/hr
- Eliminate 3 passengers to a seat designed for 2. One seat one passenger
- Provide lap/sash seat belts for every passenger
- Have the windows blocked so they can only be opened a safe distance (*not enough for a child to get their head out*)

## Driver Training and Notification of Incidents

We feel that driver training is adequate and contract requirements for licensing, obtaining a public passenger driver authority and medical fitness for drivers is appropriate.

Contract requirements for handling and reporting incidents is extensive and well documented if drivers fulfil their obligations.

## Driver Distraction

As drivers we feel the most important part of our job is to provide safe transport for children to and from school and school based excursions. If a student causes distraction to the bus driver, through disruptive and/or dangerous behaviour, they need to be removed from the bus until their behaviour is considered acceptable and safe.

## Off Bus Issues

### Safety issues experienced when children are getting on and off the bus.

#### Children's safety is often at risk:

- If safe school bus zones are not available for pick up and dropping off students
- if children have to get on or off the bus on the opposite side of the road to where their parents drop/meet them i.e. *excited children running across the road to parents without looking for traffic.*
- If there isn't a safe place for a bus to pull off the side of a road to let children on and off the bus. *In rural areas the RTA and local councils disagree on the government body that is responsible for providing safe "pull off" areas and so it becomes a "buck passing" situation and isn't done. This problem has been known to exist for the entire school life of a child.*
- If other traffic on the road disregards the 40 k/h speed limit when passing a bus stopped to pick up or drop off passengers.
- If children can operate the bus door they will sometimes try and open it before a bus is stationary.
- Children being caught in the door when the bus moves off.

#### Recommendations:

### Children getting on and off buses need to be able to do so in safe, well marked designated areas.

- School bus zones around schools need to be available and kept clear of other traffic at school bus times.
- Parents need to pick up and drop off children on the side of the road the bus has to pull up (*this especially applies to infants and primary aged children*)
- There needs to be designated "pull off" (lay bys) areas available at bus stops for the bus to safely get off the road. (*This needs to be done as soon as a bus stop becomes active i.e. when children from a property begin travelling on a school bus to school. RTA and Local Government bodies need to decide, or be instructed, which organisation is responsible*).
- Other traffic needs to slow down when buses are picking up and dropping off children at bus stops.

# NSW School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee

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- The bus driver needs to have control of the door from the driver's seat to allow children to get on and off a bus.
- Accelerator becomes disabled if the bus door isn't completely closed.

## **Conclusion:**

Since most buses in rural areas transporting school students are designated school buses we believe that everything we have recommended is achievable and affordable if school bus operators are given a phase in period to have their vehicles comply with these recommendations.

A school bus driver's job would be more enjoyable, easier, safer and less stressful if every child had their own seat and was given the same protection they receive in their family vehicle by being restrained in a lap/sash seat belt.

**No child should ever be allowed to stand on a moving vehicle, let alone on a vehicle travelling at 80 k/h with heavy vehicle traffic on roads that are less than perfect.**

*Thank you for the opportunity to submit to the NSW School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee. We look forward to favourable outcomes and improved safety for the rural school children of NSW.*

*Andrea Finch  
Selby*

*Jenny Caughey  
Lachlan Downs*

Dear Carolyn

St Joseph's Regional College, Port Macquarie wish to submit the following issues in relation to Bus Safety. These issues have been ongoing since the relocation of our College to College Drive, Port Macquarie in 2009.

1. Students still on site at 4.15pm, one hour after school has ended at 3.15pm
2. Students living at Telegraph Point, or that area, have to catch the bus to Port Macquarie and change buses at a transit area at Westport High School before continuing back out to the College rather than the bus going directly to the College and adding an additional hour per day to children's travel. A smaller bus could alleviate this issue.
3. Bus 9 is over-crowded, students are standing whilst the bus is travelling on the Pacific Highway. While the bus company tell us this is legal we are told when taking students on excursions on the highway every child must be seated AND wearing a seat belt. There appears to be a contradiction of safety laws here.
4. Bus 66 is over-crowded and unsafe with so many standing students
5. Bus 66 – Transit Zone Security Measures – what security measures does Busways employ at the transit zone to ensure the safety of students.
6. Bus 66 – Lateness – this bus arrives right on the bell, students have no time to go to lockers and are late for Pastoral Care (Roll call). They are also late home in the afternoon (4.30pm).
7. Bus 5 – every day the bus is packed with all seats full and the aisle full as well.
8. Bus 81 – arrives at 8.02am and leaves in the afternoon at 4.10pm.
9. Bus 75 – arrives at 8.06am and leaves at 4.06pm and yet these students live within 3km of the school.
10. Bus 6 – arrives at 8.04am and departs at 4.13pm

Regards

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Cath Eichmann

**Submission to the NSW School Bus Safety Community  
Advisory Committee**

**By: NORTH COAST PARENTS BUS SAFETY ACTION GROUP**

**Date: 22 September 2011**

### **Introduction**

This submission made by the North Coast Parents Bus Safety Action Group, which represents parents and other community members concerned about school bus travel on the north coast of NSW.

Hundreds of children travel to and from school each day on the north coast. School bus travel is, by far, the major form of public transport available in this region.

### **Safety Issues**

We are concerned about a number of safety issues concerning school bus travelling to and from schools on rural roads, including the Pacific Highway, on the north coast of NSW. All issues raised in this submission fall within the School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee's terms of reference.

#### *Roads infrastructure and school routes:*

- Many school children travelling by bus in this region travel on rural roads at high speed. Many travel on the Pacific Highway, including old undivided sections at speeds of up to 100 km/hr. We believe that all children travelling outside low speed urban areas require safe buses to offset the risks associated with these roads. This is consistent with requirements for all coaches and cars. The NRMA has stated that "the seat belt remains the invention that has saved more lives than any other": See NRMA "Open Road", Sep/Oct 2003.
- There is a high collision rate on the north coast on the Pacific Highway, particularly on sections that are not yet dual carriageway. Two major bus crashes occurred in 1989 near Kempsey and Grafton on undivided sections of the Highway. These disasters prompted dual carriageway upgrades, but these have not yet been achieved for more than half of the Highway between Hexham and the Qld border. It will be several years before the Highway is dual carriageway for this entire length.
- There are large volumes of traffic on this Highway, including freight trucks, trucks carrying up to 7 cars, logging trucks and large vehicles carrying earth moving equipment. Traffic rates are increasing, as is the number of freight vehicles as both the local population and freight vehicles using the Highway continue to increase.

- The consequences of a major school bus crash occurring on the Highway or any other rural area on the north coast is that emergency and medical services will struggle to cope, as there are limited emergency personnel and vehicles and the nearest hospital may be some distance from crash sites. Most children would require airlifting to Sydney for specialist treatment, stretching services beyond capacity.
- Due to the likelihood of a collision and the consequences, we submit that all school bus routes travelling on the Pacific Highway at or above 80km/hr should be classed as environment 3 routes.
  - *Appropriate bus design and no standing*
- A 15 year old school girl, Whitney Welsh, died in September 2007 from horrific injuries when she was thrown from a Busways bus on a rural road in Urunga. This bus was not fitted with seatbelts. In contrast, no passenger wearing a seatbelt on a coach has died in a collision since 1995 in Australia.
- Western Australia has introduced seatbelts on all school buses and all other states and territories apart from NSW and Victoria have begun to replace old school buses with more modern buses, including buses with seatbelts.
- Many buses operating on the Highway and other rural roads in this region have low hard seats with steel bars across top of the seats. These seats are not appropriate for high speed travel.
- Buses are being decommissioned from metropolitan routes and replaced with buses that comply with National and State disability access legislation and policy requirements – see:  
<http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/abouttrans/access-trans-faq.html>. In 2012 the percentage of buses required to meet these requirements will rise to 55%. These buses are designed for low speed conditions (e.g. have seats without padding or high backs) and an increasing number have been “phased out of service” by being put onto school bus routes in the mid north coast region. More of these buses will be decommissioned to the north coast to meet this 2012 disability access target in metropolitan areas.
- These buses are not suited to high speed and other high risk conditions and should be confined to lower speed urban areas. Buses travelling in high risk/speed conditions need the same rollover, braking, seat anchorage and other features which all coaches have been required to have in Australia since 1995 when Australian Design Rule 68 was fully implemented. We believe that buses without the features required by coaches should be confined to routes operating in 70km/hr or lower speed zones and that decommissioning buses without these features to country areas is an unintended consequence of the requirements to meet disability access legislation. This practice should be banned.

- Primary aged children often sit three abreast. Bus companies and government cite this as an economic barrier to having seatbelts, but a bus seat manufactured in Australia allows the '3 for 2 rule' to remain. When seat belts are installed, the capacity of the bus need only be reduced by the number of children currently allowed to stand. See Educator 2/3 seat with centre harness: <http://www.mcconnellsseats.com.au/cgi>. The seatbelts operate flexibly so they can secure either 2 or 3 children safely.
- Many Australian school buses now have these seats and they were part of the strategy to fit seatbelts in all (approximately 800) Western Australian school buses between 2005 and 2010 at a total cost of \$22 million. See: <http://www.southernthunderer.com.au/2010/02/seatbelts-fitted-in-all-wa-school-buses/> and <http://www.schoolbuses.wa.gov.au/Portals/0/SBS/PDF/opm.pdf> at p. 67.
- Many parents drive their children to and from school because they perceive the risk of travelling without a seatbelt and while standing to be greater than the risk of travel in a car wearing seatbelts. This adds to the volume of traffic on the roads before and after school, increasing the risk of a school bus collision occurring.
- We submit that to encourage bus use for travel to and from school, all children on buses that travel at or above 80km/hr should be seated on buses designed for high speed travel with high backs or with lap/sash seatbelts.

*Driver distraction including student behaviour on buses*

- Driver distraction occurs when children are not seated on buses travelling on high speed and other high risk routes, including all travel on the Pacific Highway and other environment 3 routes. The photograph which is **attached** was taken on the Pacific Highway approximately 7 km south of Urunga on route 61, while travelling at 80-90km/hr. It shows children moving about in the aisle of the bus. If seatbelts were installed and a compliance strategy for their use was implemented, rowdy behaviour would be reduced.

*Education and awareness (for parents, students and bus operators)*

- A compliance strategy is required to ensure that reforms are implemented. This will need to include a range of strategies aimed at educating children, parents, teachers who supervise children getting on and off buses and bus drivers about the importance of children being seated and wearing seatbelts while the bus is moving between stops. It should also include penalties for repeated non-compliance, eg banning children for several days from bus travel.

## **Recommendations**

We **recommend** implementation of the following changes as soon as possible with respect to all school buses travelling on the Pacific Highway and any other rural road classified as environment 3 routes or where any part of the journey involves speeds above 80km/hr:

1. Provision of buses that comply with Australian Design Rule 68, including lap/sash seatbelts,
2. Abolition of children standing,
3. Abolition of buses with low, hard backed seats especially those with steel bars across the top and replacement with Australian Design Rule 68 compliant buses,
4. Compliance strategies for ensuring that reforms are properly implemented.

Banning standing on high speed and high risk routes can be achieved via an immediate variation to contract between the Department of Transport and Busways, with a net loss adjustment (compensation). This will remove the barrier/disincentive to apply for Federal "Seatbelts for Kids" funding of \$25,000 per bus for seatbelts. This funding is due to expire on 30 June 2012, which points to the need for urgent action to minimize the cost to the NSW Government to implement seatbelts.

Diana McCarthy,

Submission to the  
**NSW School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee**  
September 2011

From:

Di Cartmill

As an Occupational Therapist I worked with children in schools for many years. The lack of provision of safe transport in school buses has been a long standing concern.

The force of impact in a vehicle, even at low speed, puts unrestrained occupants at significant risk of injury. The introduction of legislation to make the wearing of seat belts in cars mandatory resulted in a significant reduction in injuries.

With this knowledge children travelling in school buses should be afforded the same level of safety, with the requirement that all passengers be restrained in a system appropriate for their needs (with regard to height, weight etc).

The cost involved in modification of buses to comply with this requirement should not be a determining factor when evaluated in the light of potential social and emotional impact of injuries following a bus accident and the likely future rehabilitation required.

The number of buses transporting unrestrained school children on a daily basis puts us in the unenviable situation of “an accident waiting to happen”. We need to be proactive in implementing this change without further delay.

Dear Ms Walsh

Thank you for an opportunity to make a submission re school bus safety.

My daughter travels approximately two hours per day from Rocky Plain to Cooma NSW to attend St Patrick's Parish School. Approximately half of this travel is on sealed single laned roads (no road markings) on popular tourist routes which are utilised by skiers in winter and fisherpeople throughout the year. In addition to tourist traffic who are not familiar with the road conditions or speed requirements, there is also the added implications from wildlife (particularly kangaroos and wombats) and varying road conditions including snow and ice. On the journey home from school in the afternoon, in sections of the bus route, there is the added risk of the west setting sun not allowing the driver to see clearly the approaching traffic .

The bus she travels in is a small bus with approximately 30 seats, none of which are fitted with seatbelts. At this stage the bus company, Cooma Coaches has no plans to fit this bus with seatbelts. As a mother of two small children who diligently secures her children in appropriately sized and correctly fitting child seats in the car, I find it unacceptable and a double standard that similar legal requirements are not expected of school buses.

Yours sincerely

Pip Daley

**Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations  
of New South Wales**

**Submission to the NSW School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee  
September 2011**

Prepared by: Kelly MacDonald

Approved by: Helen Walton

## **Preamble<sup>1</sup>**

The Federation of Parents and Citizens' Association of New South Wales (P&C Federation) is committed to a free public education system which is open to all people, irrespective of culture, gender, academic ability and socio-economic class and empowers students to control their own lives and be contributing members of society.

This commitment is based on the belief that:

- All students have the capacity to learn;
- The Government has prime responsibility to provide an education system open to all, which is free and secular;
- Schools should be structured to meet the needs of individual students and should respect the knowledge those students bring to school and build on that knowledge to foster their understanding about the world.

Parents as partners in the education process, have a right and a responsibility to play an active role in the education of their children.

P&C Federation and its representatives share a responsibility of ensuring representative decision making for the benefit of all students.

## **Introduction**

The Federation of Parents and Citizens' Association of New South Wales (P&C Federation) welcomes the opportunity to submit our contributions to the NSW school bus safety community advisory committee. The P&C Federation supports the position of the NSW school bus safety community advisory committee in ensuring that all students have access to safe and accessible transportation systems.

The P&C Federation has a strong interest in the safety of public school students and believes that a provision for the safe carriage of students to places of education should be a very high priority.

While there is some data that can be gathered regarding school bus safety, incidents and the like, there is limited differentiation between metropolitan and regional area data. The data that is accessible focuses on incidents and injuries sustained from the incidences and, is in most cases out-dated. There is no way to compare or make assimilations between bus safety needs in regional versus metropolitan areas. The variables are such that there is no way to be able to bundle the risks of either area into one collection of data.

There is strong need for collection of data regarding regional areas and the incidences that occur on or because of bus safety issues present. While one aspect of the data can be accessed and collated from traffic incident reports there are any number of incidences that occur that are not necessarily reported to any one specific point or authority. In the past there has been much interest and investigation into bus safety in particular, seat belt installation and use on buses. This data, again, has not separated the differing needs for bus safety in regional versus metropolitan areas.

The P&C Federation has been part of many campaigns to lobby for increased school bus safety and has been proactive in raising awareness through its affiliates. Motions have been brought to P&C Federations' Annual Conference on many occasions addressing not only bus safety, but school bus safety in rural and regional areas.

Safety issues that have been explored by our affiliates, regional councils and state council include:

- School bus routes, where students are expected to travel along dirt roads and often through high speed areas for extended periods of time to reach their schools.
- Some concern has been raised about bus routes not being extended to accommodate a child attending a local school but instead the child is expected to travel almost twice the distance to attend another school that allows the bus route to pass by a pick-up point closer to the child's place of residence. This is in a regional area where there are limited bus services.
- Pick up and drop off points, particularly on roads where speed limits are greater than 80 kilometres per hour. There are limited or no points where safely parking a car off road to enable parents to pick up or drop off their children is possible. This includes dropping children off to catch the local bus service and include the safety of 'side of road' pick up points and safety for those standing or waiting on the side of the road for the bus, especially when the road zone is 80km per hour or above.
- Seatbelts being underused or not used due to unavailability (not installed in buses) specifically on longer trips, high speed roads, roads with uneven, narrow or partially sealed surface, and dirt roads. There has been a repeated response that it would prove too costly to make seatbelts mandatory in all existing buses but enough evidence exists to ensure that any new bus must be fitted with seatbelts.
- Capacity limits in regards to student travel times, safety and bus maximum capacity limits.

- Driver training, where there is an expectation that if a driver is transporting students along a route, there are minimum requirements or qualifications to be able to deal with situations if and when they arise. There have been instances where an incident has occurred and medical attention has been required, other students travelling on the bus have had to aid injured students while the bus driver continued on the bus route. Whilst there is not an expectation that a driver administers medical assistance there is an expectation that if there is a serious enough incident that occurs the driver will take appropriate action, call for medical assistance, tend to the passenger and keep other passengers or students calm whilst waiting for assistance.
- Safety when alighting or disembarking from school transport, including bus safety awareness for children moving on/ off and around buses and through school bus zones.

The first step in moving forward to make adequate changes to school bus safety in rural areas would be to survey these areas to collect relevant and correct data, to then review and analyse. Recommendations can then be made to address inequities that are present within the current bus safety schemes. The P&C Federation believes that all public school students should have a safe and inclusive education, encompassing travel to and from the school locations, travel to or from excursions or extracurricular activities as well as within school locations.

The P&C Federation feels strongly that the safety and wellbeing of students and children attending Public Schools is of utmost importance. The P&C Federation has a strong interest in the safety of public school students and believes that a provision for the safe carriage of students to places of education should be a very high priority.

P&C Federation acknowledges the review and hopes that the School Bus Safety community Advisory committee takes into account many of the key areas that concern parents, students and school communities. We hope the comments made in this document are of assistance with discussions around this subject.

P&C Federation would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to comment on the review. We look forward to seeing the results and welcome any further discussion this may evoke.

**SUBMISSION TO THE NSW SCHOOL BUS SAFETY COMMUNITY  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**BY: David Metz**  
**Date: 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2011**

**Introduction**

This submission is from myself as a private individual. I am a bus driver and am employed to predominately drive School Bus routes. *My interest in school bus safety is quite straight forward – to deliver the children to school and home SAFELY.*

**Safety Issues**

I believe that current bus design is quite adequate and that the question of seat belts is a smokescreen at this time. The lobby calling for seat belts in school buses need to consider the following.

- Cost – a new expanded fleet to cater for any such decision.
- Who will ensure that students are wearing the seat belts and that they are fitted correctly? – Not the drivers I assure you, they cannot even ‘touch’ a child.
- Seat belts in school buses could possibly lead to more misbehaviour and even injury particularly for primary school children. Causing further distraction for drivers.

The biggest single factor compromising safety is caused by student behaviours or more correctly misbehaviours.

- Students constantly stand and move around buses.
- Students prevent other students from taking a seat thus leading to standing students when not necessary.
- Students sit or stand in stair wells (rear).
- Many other behaviours including feet on seats, eating, throwing objects, making objectionable levels of noise, swearing etc.

The above are just some highlights of student behaviour which occur each and every day despite constant requests and reminders from the driver.

All of the above issues causing varying levels of distraction to the driver and thus I am of the firm opinion that student behaviour needs to be the primary issue to be addressed by the advisory committee.

**Loading of buses at schools Afternoon.**

Another area of concern is that some schools could not care less what occurs at the bus lines of an afternoon. You will have the full scope of –The school that always has full supervision until last student has departed, through those that have some supervision, to those with none. All schools need to ensure that they have their own house in order before calling for “solution” to their concerns.

## **Parent/Carer behaviour.**

A final area of major concern is the absolute disregard that a high percentage of adults who drop off and pick up children have for any child or adult in the school vicinity.

- Parking and dropping off in school bus zones at school.
- Walking children between parked buses at school zones.
- Calling children across roads in front of the bus after drop off in afternoon.
- Parking in known and customary drop off zones in afternoon endangering the safe pulling in and dropping off.

## **Recommendations**

That the committee look at getting the basics right before giving credence to those who will want the exotic nirvana like facilities that are not practical.

David Metz

Dear Carolyn,

This letter is in regard to the safety of buses in rural regions. I am a concerned parent with children traveling daily on buses to and from school.

My children are very young 7 & 5 and unable to handle themselves in a bouncing bus. My daughter has often got off the bus saying she is scared because she felt she would fall off the seat over the bumpy roads.

Please consider favourably the requests made from NSW School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee for the safety of our children.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Barthe

Dear Ms Walsh

I am pleased to hear that there is now some movement forward for providing our school children with basic safety while they travel to and from school.

I fail to understand how the law allows children to be carried, at high speed, daily on school buses without seatbelts, often 3 to seat and even standing or walking around the bus. NSW Law states that we must travel in cars with seatbelts, we even have to restrain our animals, but not our most precious school age children, who still ride in carseats up to the age of 7 in the family car. Children as young as 4 travel on school buses daily, unrestrained.

I also fail to understand why coach passengers are required by law to wear seat belts, sitting two to a seat on the very same route travelled by our children.

The stretch of highway that my children travel on daily has now been ranked the most dangerous in NSW. Our Government and those dragging their feet on not insisting that the buses on high speed bus routes will have blood on their hands if there is any kind of accident involving school children on high speed bus routes.

I look forward to some sensible changes to the current situation and will be very disappointed if seatbelted busses are not rolled out in the very near future.

I also feel that it would sensible to include in the proposed legislation that an assistant to the bus driver be employed to supervise children on the bus and act as a back-up / witness of the bus driver. Our patient and kind bus drivers tend to children who are sick, upset or misbehaving, all while getting the kids to school on time and in a good frame of mind. They carry so much responsibility each and everyday and do all this while driving a noisy bus at 100km per hour.

Please confirm receipt of my email.

Kind regards

Nina Rogan

## **SUBMISSION TO THE NSW SCHOOL BUS SAFETY COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Eungai Public School Parents & Citizens Association welcomes the opportunity to lodge this submission to the NSW School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee.

The community of Eungai, located on the Pacific Highway between Kempsey and Coffs Harbour is home to nearly 200 school age children. Currently 71 children are enrolled at Eungai Public School with 41 utilising the school bus service. Approximately a further 90 primary and secondary aged children catch buses to attend schools in Macksville, Kempsey and Coffs Harbour.

Children travel on these buses, often for long distances, without a seatbelt and sometimes without a seat or the compartmentalisation standard on passenger coaches.

Parent groups from Bellingen, Valla, Stuarts Point and Eungai along with Doctors For a Safe Pacific Highway, and State Local members from Coffs Harbour and Oxley Electorates have consistently called for the abolition of children standing on buses, and the introduction of seatbelts onto buses used on school bus routes, to no avail.

Our children travel along one of the deadliest stretches of highway in Australia; RTA crash data indicate 18 collisions since January 1 2008, with 20 people killed and 22 seriously injured along the section between Kempsey and Coffs harbour, a distance of approximately 100km. Much of this section of highway is windy, single-laned, and undivided with planned upgrades still only in their very early planning stages.

The Kempsey bus crash which occurred at Clybucca on the Pacific Highway, between Eungai and Kempsey, demonstrates the devastation that occurs in a bus crash. Following this crash, changes to improve passenger safety were legislated, including the introduction of seatbelts and compartmentalisation.

The issue of passenger safety on school buses has been examined regularly since the Kempsey bus crash; the 1994 Bus Safety Advisory Committee and the 2001 School Bus Safety in Australia – Summary Report, both recommend the abolition of children standing on school buses. Furthermore, while they found that the cost of retrofitting seatbelts on existing school buses would not be a cost effective measure, adoption of Australian Design Rules 68/00 in new buses may be feasible recommending further investigation.

Eungai Public School Parents & Citizens Association implore the Committee to build on the work of previous committees and research to ensure that children travelling on school buses enjoy the same level of safety as passengers travelling in tourist coaches, before we witness another bus tragedy.

We thank you for the opportunity to contribute and eagerly await your findings.

Yours sincerely

Eungai Public School Parents and Citizens.

To Whom it may concern,  
My six year old son catches the valla beach to urunga p.s school bus. I am deeply concerned that there is no seatbelts on school buses as such young children catch the bus to school everyday.  
It is illegal to ride in a car that has no seatbelt and strict child car seats laws so why is there no seatbelts on a bus that children catch twice everyday?  
Especially when travelling on a highway at high speeds. The route my child has to take on the highway is a deadly stretch of road and I worry everytime he has to catch the bus but due to circumstances he has to catch the bus to get to and from school. I would really like to see something done about this situation. Thankyou

# Submission On Regional and Rural School Bus Safety

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*Prepared For:*      *School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee*

*Prepared By:*      *Shelagh Merlin*

*Date:*                  *23 September, 2011*

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## **Introduction**

School bus safety in rural and regional areas is not only about safety for passengers on the bus but also about safety in the environment in which the bus travels. In preparing this submission I have used the Safe Systems approach, which looks at addressing road safety by focusing on safe roads, safe vehicles, safe people and safe speeds.

Safe Roads refers to the roads on which school buses travel in regional and rural areas as well as school bus stops and bus interchanges. Safe Vehicles refers specifically to school buses. Safe People refers to school children while they are travelling on school buses and while they are at the school bus stop. Safe Speed refers to both the speed at which the school bus travels and the speed of other vehicles travelling around school buses and school bus stops.

### **1 Safe Roads**

#### **Bus routes**

Bus routes in rural and regional areas may include highways, state and local roads, both sealed and unsealed.

Issues to consider include:

#### **The Road Surface.**

Poor quality road surfaces impact on the safety of all road users and where school buses are travelling on poorly maintained roads, the safety of their passengers may be impacted.

Maintenance of rural and regional roads is a constant challenge to local government due to the changing nature of vehicles travelling on them. Roads that were originally built with the farm ute in mind are now carrying large semi trailers and B-doubles.

At present many rural roads are starting to break up badly as a result of flooding in late 2010 and early 2011 as well as the steady increase in the number and size of heavy vehicles using rural and regional roads. This problem is likely to be exacerbated in the next few months when the grain harvest gets under way.

While local councils endeavour to maintain roads in the best possible condition, there is a constant challenge to find sufficient funding, sufficient staff and sufficient equipment to ensure that every road is maintained in an acceptable condition at all times.

Measures to address this problem include:

- Providing additional funding to local government for the maintenance of local roads, particularly where those local roads are school bus routes.

- Involve local councils in the selection and review of local roads used as school bus routes including an annual review of all bus routes in each local government area to ensure that the roads on those routes suitable for school buses to travel on.

### **School bus stops and bus interchanges.**

Bus stops and interchanges in rural and regional areas are frequently little more than the driveway entrance to a property. This may be sealed or unsealed and may incorporate a “hard stand” on one side of the property entrance.

The safety of school students may be impacted where either the property or the hardstand is in a poor state of repair (soft and rutted, surface broken up, long grass adjacent the bus stop area posing a potential snake hazard at some times of the year).

Safety may also be impacted by poor driver behaviour at and around bus stops and interchanges, and through insufficient safe pull-off areas for private vehicles waiting for the bus.

Issues to consider include:

- The need to ensure sufficient funding is provided to ensure bus stops and interchanges to ensure they are maintained to a safe standard.

This funding should be provided based on the size and number of buses using each site. To facilitate this, an annual review of bus stops and interchanges should be undertaken to ensure that each facility is still needed. Consideration should also be given to the impact on the road pavement adjacent to the bus stop which may suffer due to the volume of buses and cars turning to access and depart from the bus stop.

It is unfair to expect property owners to pay for the maintenance of driveway entrances if they are being used as bus stops or interchanges when in many cases children using the bus stop/interchange are from surrounding properties.

- It is important to ensure that where a bus stop is installed, there is also sufficient space to provide for both the school bus and private vehicles to pull off the road to allow students to safely move between the bus and the car.

## **2. Safe Vehicles**

### **School Buses**

One of the key issues of concern around school buses is the use of seatbelts for children travelling on school buses.

While seatbelts are an important safety feature and while the NSW Government requires children travelling in private vehicles to be appropriately restrained according to their height, weight and age, careful consideration needs to be given to the impact of introducing mandatory wearing of seatbelts on school buses.

Issues to consider include:

- The rules around how many children are to sit on each bus seat. Currently bus operators are required to seat primary children three to a two seater seat. It is illegal for children to share seatbelts therefore if each child on a school bus is required to wear a seatbelt, there may be a need for additional school buses to be provided. Who will bear that cost?
- The rules around school children standing on buses. If each student on the bus is to be seated and appropriately restrained additional buses may be required. Who will bear that cost?
- The safety concerns around seating a child in a seatbelt that is designed for an adult passenger. According to the RTA, placing a child under seven in an adult seatbelt is unsafe because a child's bone structure is not sufficiently developed to keep the seat belt in the proper place during a crash ([www.rta.nsw.gov.au/roadsafety/children/childrestraints/childrestraintlaws\\_faqs.html](http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au/roadsafety/children/childrestraints/childrestraintlaws_faqs.html)). Who will bear the cost of providing appropriate restraints for each child travelling on the school bus and who will bear the responsibility of ensuring the restraint is appropriate for that child and is appropriately fitted?
- The suitability of the school bus to have seatbelts fitted. Not all buses have suitable structures to provide for the installation of seat belts of any type. Who will bear the cost of replacing existing buses that are unsuitable to have seat belts fitted with new buses that either already have seatbelts fitted or are suitable to retro fit seat belts?

### **3. Safe People**

School bus safety relates to the safety of school children while they are travelling on the school bus and also while they are at the bus stop either waiting to be collected by the bus or a parent/carer or moving between the bus and another vehicle.

Issues to consider include:

- The need to educate parents and carers about how to behave appropriately at rural school bus stops. Current safety literature provided by the RTA (School Bus Safety How Parents Can Help) assumes that parents and carers will be walking their children to and from the bus stop. This is not the case in rural areas where larger distances are involved.  
Parents and carers need to be educated about where and how to pull off and wait safely at the bus stop, and about the need to watch out for other children when pulling into or departing rural bus stops.
- The need to educate all road users about the rules around travelling in the vicinity of school buses when their lights are flashing. Bus operators regularly report that motorists on rural roads continue to travel past the bus at 100 km/h despite the fact that the bus lights are flashing.

### **4. Safe Speeds**

Consideration needs to be given to developing an education campaign that reminds the general community about the need to drive at 40 km/h around school buses which have their lights flashing, and to slow down and watch for school children waiting for the bus.

This is particularly important when the school bus stop is on a rural road which is likely to have a speed limit of 100 km/h. Children are just as unpredictable on rural roads as they are in urban areas.



## NSW PARENTS' COUNCIL

### SUBMISSION TO THE NSW SCHOOL BUS SAFETY COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

23 September 2011

#### Introduction

The NSW Parents' Council is the peak body representing parents of children who are educated in non-government schools in NSW. The Council was founded in 1962 and has, for almost half a century, represented the concerns of parents to State and Federal Ministers of Education and participated in numerous reference committees relating to curriculum development, student wellbeing and transport safety.

Our supporting principles are:

- Children are entitled to an education which will enable them to attain their full potential.
- Parents have the primary responsibility to educate their children. They are the first and foremost educators of their children, and the family is the first educative 'school' or 'community' to which children belong.
- "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children" (The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, clause 3, article 26).
- As a result of the importance of the school in a child's education, parents have the right and duty to choose schools which they consider best suit their children's schooling requirements.
- Parents are entitled to exercise their right of choice of schooling for their children without financial or other disability being imposed on them or on their children by any Government.
- Schools exist to help parents discharge their educational responsibilities, and there should be harmony between the philosophy and values of the home and those of the school.
- Governments, as protectors of the rights of citizens, should assist and encourage, not restrict, parents' exercise of their right to choose schools which they consider best suit their children's needs.
- As a result of their fundamental obligation to protect and promote the rights of all citizens, Governments have responsibilities in relation to schooling for all children, not just for those attending government schools.
- The child, not the school, should be the focus for the allocation of public funds for schooling.
- A Basic Funding Entitlement, calculated as a percentage of the total per capita recurrent cost of schooling in government schools, is a real implementation of the parents' right of choice of school and the right of every child to an equitable share of public funds for schooling.
- For students who are experiencing specified educational disadvantages, their schooling costs should be assessed and more public funds made available, in addition to their Basic Funding Entitlement.
- Governments should acknowledge and support the valuable role of the family in society, and parents in the learning partnerships with schools.

The NSW Parents' Council (Council) has long been an advocate for bus safety with the Council being involved in a joint parent action in 1994 and again in late 2002 in the run up to the NSW Elections. The Council participated in the School Bus Safety Working Group during 2004. More recently, the Council has, in conjunction with the NSW Federation of P&C, the Council of Catholic

NSW Parents' Council INC PO Box 1152 North Sydney NSW 2059 Phone: (02) 9955 8276

Web [www.parents.council.nsw.edu.au](http://www.parents.council.nsw.edu.au) Email [office@parentscouncil.nsw.edu.au](mailto:office@parentscouncil.nsw.edu.au)

ABN 38 945 707 542

School Parents (CCSP) and the Isolated Children's Parent Association (ICPA) as participants in the NSW Joint Parent Forum, formulated a joint parent position on bus safety.

The Council would like to congratulate the Premier, the Minister for Transport and the Minister for Roads and Ports for this important initiative and look forward to the positive outcome of this review/inquiry.

The Council has long held grave concerns at the lack of safety for our students whilst travelling on buses, waiting for buses and alighting from buses in their school day, particularly in rural and remote regions.

The following is feedback from our parents in rural and remote areas:

### **Safety Issues**

- Several parents raised their concerns at the poor quality of various rural bus routes in terms of the quality of road surfaces and safety of bus routes.
- Parents stated that they had concerns that the 'wrongly designed' buses were being used on inappropriate bus routes.
- Seat belts should be introduced in all buses in rural and remote areas, not just limited to school buses.
- Concerns at the number of students 'standing' whilst travelling at 'high speeds' due to overcrowding.
- Bus timetables are often out of sync with other modes of transport and need to be reviewed as children often utilise two or more buses or alternate modes of transport i.e. trains.
- That many schools have early start times and extra co-curricular activities after school and the bus services are not always scheduled to meet these students' needs.
- Many parents reported their children having to wait at 'change over' for up to 40 minutes without supervision or shelter, due to the poor bus timetables.
- Lack of signage and safety barriers at rural and remote bus stops.
- When travelling on remote roads, buses that are the appropriate make and design to meet the Australian Bus safety and design regulations are not being used.
- That all bus drivers need to be suitably trained to handle the various road conditions they will face.
- Not all 'incidents' are being recorded appropriately.
- Children need to sign a code of conduct with appropriate consequences for dangerous behaviour such as 'bus surfing', placing various body parts out of bus windows and distracting the bus driver.
- That all bus stops have appropriate 'parking space' to ensure students can alight safely.
- That appropriate parking is not provided at bus stops and many students have to travel and park to get to their nearest bus stop.
- Suitable bus categories are not being used when travelling on hazardous road surfaces – need to regrade all bus routes to make them suitable for bus services – roads need to be upgraded.

### **Recommendations**

- That seat belts be placed in all buses, and not be limited to school buses.
- That all students be seated whilst travelling in a bus at all times.
- That buses be designed with the appropriate level of safety for the routes they travel on including safe seating, seat anchoring, impact zones, etc.
- That bus/transport timetabling is reviewed to ensure limited wait time for students.
- That bus timetables be reviewed where children are utilising two or more buses or modes of transport i.e. trains.
- That appropriate safety barriers, lighting and signage be erected at all bus stops no matter how remote or rural they are.
- That all bus stops have suitable shelter and are appropriately located a safe distance from the road-side.
- That all bus stops have suitable bus 'parking space' to ensure students can embark and alight the bus safely.

- That appropriate parking is provided at bus stops for students and parents who have to travel and park to get to the nearest bus stop.
- That all bus drivers are suitably trained to handle adverse road conditions, notification and handling of safety incidents.
- That all 'incidents' be recorded for continuous improvement procedures.
- That safety campaigns be run for all students on how to safely alight and enter a bus and stress the importance safe behaviour at the bus stop and when crossing the road.
- That safety campaigns be run for members of the public on safe driving around buses, targeting truck drivers, motorists, motorbike riders and cyclists.
- All bus drivers and students must sign a meaningful 'code of conduct' with enforceable consequences.

## **Contact**

Anne Crabb  
 Executive Officer  
 NSW Parents' Council Inc.  
 PO Box 1152  
 North Sydney  
[eo@parentscouncil.nsw.edu.au](mailto:eo@parentscouncil.nsw.edu.au)  
 02 9955 8276  
 0438 558 276

The NSW Parents' Council looks forward to presenting at the NSW School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee hearing.

Dorothy Creek  
 Country Vice President  
 Team Leader, Rural Issues Team  
 NSW Parents' Council

Matthew & Belinda Gilbert

23 September 2011

Ms Carolyn Walsh  
Independent Chair  
School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee  
PO Box K659  
HAYMARKET NSW 1240

Dear Madam

We are writing in response to the Public Submissions in relation to School Bus Safety.

We live on Mareeba Road Parkville NSW 2337 and we travel to the ONE bus stop situated on New England Highway in Parkville twice a day. On Mareeba Road we currently have 16 children who have to make their way to the highway from Mareeba Road onto the New England Highway bus stop. There is at least another 6 children who will be eligible to catch this bus who are living on Mareeba Road also.

Not only is the current bus stop on the highway which is unsafe for the children both going to school and coming home from school the children living on Mareeba Road need to cross the highway aswell as cross the railway crossing also.

With so many children using the bus stop on the highway it is only a matter of time before someone is hurt.

It is requested that a bus stop be positioned on Mareeba Road with so many children to utilise this bus stop which in turn will make it safer for all users of the road.

Also to make the current bus stop in a safer position off the highway it is requested it be moved into Albert Street where the bus can do a complete loop and will not interfere with the bus movements.

**SUBMISSION TO THE NSW SCHOOL BUS SAFETY COMMUNITY  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**BY: Graeme Feeney**

**Date: 23.09.11**

**Introduction:**

I am making this submission as the Head of Primary and Deputy Principal in a rural / regional independent school.

My interest is the safety of students who travel daily to our school by bus and who also travel regularly over long distances to participate in various inter-school and extra-curricular school activities.

**School Bus Safety Data and Information**

We are a K-12 school, with 530 students.

There are 311 K-6 students.

85% of all our students travel to and from School by bus.

83% of all K-6 students travel by bus.

87% of all 7-12 students travel by bus.

Students travel for up to an hour on average from all directions to attend the school.

Students travel from:

Willow Tree:	58 km one way
Merriwa:	70km
Denman:	53km
Singleton:	74km
Muswellbrook:	26km
Rouchel:	24km
Ellerston:	69km

Our School conducts a safety session with new Kindergarten children and implements a programme initiated by the local NRMA Office.

Road safety (pedestrian, bike, car and bus safety) is incorporated into the K-6 PDHPE Curriculum.

We endeavour to encourage senior students to take leadership on buses and to report when there are behavioural or other concerns occurring.

**Safety Issues**

Most of our students who travel on buses, travel along major highways or arterial roads, with the majority of the trip conducted at speeds of 80-100km/hour.

Only one local school bus, used on one of the shortest local routes, has seat belts fitted.

Students are often without a seat on the Muswellbrook to Scone route, the busiest route, and/or often seated 3 to a seat.

As an educator, in a school where we constantly teach and reinforce with children to wear bike helmets, hold hands with an adult when crossing roads, 'Click-Clack Front and Back', I simply cannot understand the logic or inconsistency in the different attitude to school bus travel and safety.

Legislation doesn't allow drivers or passengers in cars to travel without seat belts, or children to travel in cars without being seated in an appropriate seat, yet we allow large numbers of unsupervised school students to do that on major roads, in heavy traffic, at high speeds, twice a day, 5 days a week for forty weeks of every year.

Many of these country roads have problems with wildlife (kangaroos etc) which further adds to the risk, particularly in winter when days are shorter and light is often poor.

There is a major bus interchange at Muswellbrook where large numbers of local students from various schools change buses to other services.

This area is unsupervised and involves students crossing the roadway to link with connecting buses, negotiating their way through other buses and cars coming and going as they use the interchange.

Bus drivers have little if any training re working with children and behaviour management. We deal often with complaints from students and parents about the lack of discipline, the movement of students around the bus during a trip, the language, the noise level, the bullying etc, together with inconsistency of driver responses to discipline issues.

When these matters are raised with local operators, at times there is an 'old school' or a 'she'll be right mate - we live in the country' approach suggested as a response. For schools where duty of care is always taken seriously, this is not appropriate or acceptable.

There is often inconsistency regarding how discipline matters are handled and who should be responsible: School, Home, Bus Company?

We take bus safety seriously and have teachers on duty as students arrive and depart on all buses every day.

We teach diligently using material provided by the RTA on road and bus safety.

We inform and seek constantly to educate parents and urge their support from home.

Short of rostering staff onto the buses to travel with the students, we are doing all we can.

As a separate issue to safety, our school timetable is locked into bus timetables and despite efforts over 15 years to see more flexibility with these, there has been no change or willingness to consider change. The opportunity to have students arrive earlier or more importantly, leave later, would add considerable flexibility to our timetable and also allow for bus numbers to be spread more equitably across the various routes.

### **Recommendations**

- Mandatory working seat belts on all school buses.
- Limited bus numbers on all routes to ensure all students are seated, 1 to a seat, with a seat belt.
- Driver training to ensure consistent skill levels for dealing with students and their behaviour.
- Establish local School Bus Committees, with school reps from all local schools using buses, bus operator reps & parent reps.
- Consistent standardised discipline procedural protocols
- Enforced flexibility for bus operators to fit bus timetables into suitable school timetable contexts

### **Contact**

Please provide the contact details of an individual who we could contact should we require and clarification about your submission.

Graeme Feeney

## SUBMISSION TO THE NSW SCHOOL BUS SAFETY COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

### Introduction

This submission is from the Collarenebri – Mungindi Branch of the Isolated Children’s’ Parent’s Association Inc, and other interested parties such as the local school bus drivers, and schools.

By way of being a branch of the isolated children’s’ parent’s association we have a huge vested interest in school bus safety. Many of our children travel long distances, unrestrained, on very unsafe roads to gain an education.

### Safety Data and Information

It is fair to say that no road can be safe enough when you have a bus load of school children, but in rural and regional areas where less money is spent on roads, the roads are very unsafe, and a very real fact that we face every day we put our children on a bus to travel to school. Imagine the devastation to a family and community if you lost all your children in a school bus accident.

For one of our local buses, approximately half its travel is on an unsealed. When roads are unsealed two problems present. One being dust especially at times when the bus is competing with the movement of local rural produce such as grain, cotton and livestock. Therefore most of the time at least one of these commodities are being transported along the roads in question. In this case the dust factor is **enormous and extremely dangerous**. Our bus has already had one accident due to the dust factor.

On our roads there is no indication that these roads are school bus routes. **Our road infrastructure is appalling.** Rural Road infrastructure has to be a responsibility of both the State and Federal Governments.

Once it rains unsealed roads are untrafficable, but rural business in some cases has to continue, so four wheel drives will get along the road creating a further hazard. At times workers need to travel to their job. About five years ago our bus could get down the Curragundi Road with up to 25 millimetres of rain, but due to the deterioration of our road only 10 millimetres precludes the bus from travelling.

A further problem is that these children are missing significant amounts of schooling during wet weather because of an impassable road.

Our roads also do not have designated areas for buses to pull off the road so that the children can board safely.

Rural and regional roads lack maintenance, so after wet periods it can be weeks before the bus returns to its normal route, whilst we wait for the local Council to repair and maintain the road.

In 2010 my two daughters missed 30 days of schooling due to a wet and impassable road. In this day and age that statistic is nothing to be proud of. These two girls are also in upper primary years. Why should our children miss so much school when their city cousins don’t and we pay huge rates to the local shire? Our Shire is a very productive shire, producing food and fibre for the nation.

Our buses don't have seatbelts which makes the trip unsafe for all the children on board. At the moment there are some grants around to assist local bus owners fit seatbelts, but a grant of \$25 000 is ineffective and way short of the cost to be incurred. Some children because of their behaviour need to be restrained, but every child travelling on a bus needs to be restrained and hopefully this safety committee will demonstrate the need for this.

#### Recommendations

Every bus travelling on regional and rural roads needs every child restrained in a seatbelt. It would be prudent for the government to assist every local bus driver with the necessary resources to ensure this happens immediately. Every parent and bus driver would feel much happier if they had every child restrained. **Therefore the immediate introduction of a beneficial grant for local bus drivers to ensure buses which are currently not equipped with seatbelts are.**

**Every road where a school bus travels needs to have signage erected indicating that it is a school bus route.** This is an educational process to everyone driving on the road. For warning people that a school bus could be travelling and that school children could be boarding or getting off the bus must be a safety advantage. **These signs need to be different colours to the ordinary road signs so that they stand out and are highly visible.**

**Every school child pick up point along routes needs to be clearly identified by signage, as well as access areas both sides of the road where the bus can pull off the road to pick up or drop the child or children off.** Again this signage needs to different to general road signs so that they are highlighting a fact.

Unfortunately due to our rail infrastructure being very ineffective most produce is moved by road, therefore this is just a living time bomb for further road accidents, and you would hate to think that school children would be involved, but it is an absolute fact. The Government should be ensuring as much heavy loads as possible should be moved by rail in preference to road. There is no doubt that this would make our roads much safer.

**Governments need to be allocating more funds to rural and regional roads to ensure our children are as safe as possible and can get to school as regularly as possible.** I have previously written to Mr Gay Minister for Roads regarding the need for effective funding for the Curragundi Road.

I am aware that the costs involved in carryout these recommendations are huge, but we need to be doing everything possible to protect our future generation, and the safety of our children.

Thank you for reading and considering our submission.

Libby McPhee  
"Koree"  
Shire Council  
ICPA Secretary/Treasurer  
Collarenebri-Mungindi Branch

Mungindi Central School

Sue Price  
Deputy Mayor Moree Plains

I make a submission on behalf of the Wollondilly Local Traffic Committee.

The Wollondilly Local traffic Committee discussed the subject of your enquiry and made the following recommendation:

1. A submission on Rural School Bus Safety be made highlighting the following concerns:

- a. Potential for conflict at the Picton Road/Hume Highway interchange.
- b. Intersection Argyle Street and Menangle Street, Picton.

Regards,

Ian Berthon



# Council of Catholic School Parents

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23 September 2011

Carolyn Walsh  
Independent Chair  
School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee

[carolynwalshnsw@gmail.com](mailto:carolynwalshnsw@gmail.com)  
cc: craig.dunn@transport.nsw.gov.au

Dear Ms Walsh

We are writing in response to the NSW School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee's invitation to make a submission on school bus safety in regional and rural NSW.

The Council of Catholic School Parents [CCSP] is the peak body representing the interests of parents with children in Catholic schools in NSW. It represents the interests of the parents of over 240 000 students, making it the largest non-government school parent advocacy body in Australia.

The CCSP has been involved in bus safety issues in NSW for many years and was an active participant in previous bus safety advisory committees and reviews.

In relation to this Committee's focus, the CCSP has the expectation that it will investigate:

- a range of current and best practice initiatives that focus on improvements to school bus design, including, but not limited to, seatbelts;
- improvements to roads and road-side environments, for example bus stops on blind corners, inadequate verges etc;
- the establishment of a database or reporting system pertaining to school bus accidents and incidents involving pedestrians (students) in and around school buses. The availability of this information will assist better targeting of bus safety initiatives and programs;
- School-based education and training programs for students;
- a public awareness campaign for motorists and the broader community (in particular parents of school-age children);
- the adequacy of training for bus drivers in relation to first-aid and emergency procedures in the event of an accident or an injured child;
- the adequacy of training for bus drivers in relation to variable driving conditions (for example, fog, flood, black ice and black soil conditions common in regional and rural areas);
- the adequacy of bus driver training and support in student behaviour management

A long held view of parents (across the three educational jurisdictions) has been that students should not be expected to stand at any stage of their journey as a result of there not being enough seats. Any consideration of this issue should also take into account current policies and guidelines around school student transport for example, the *School Student Behaviour on Buses* code of conduct document.

Yours Sincerely

Catherine Ible  
Chairperson  
CCSP NSW/ACT

Submission to the  
**NSW School Bus Safety**  
**Community Advisory Committee**  
September 2011

Prepared by  
Glenda Staniford, President

*On behalf of members of*

**Belt Up for Safety (B.U.S.) Action Group**

Princes Highway, Termeil NSW 2539

Phone (02) 4457-1124

## ***NSW Government's Objective as per Minister Berejiklian's Terms of Reference:***

***"Recommend the most effective ways to make school bus travel as safe as possible."***

We commend the newly elected NSW Liberal and National Party Coalition Government for establishing the School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee (SBSCAC), to seek recommendations for the introduction of safety improvements for rural and regional bus travel.

In acknowledging the higher risk and potential danger to students travelling on buses on high speed and dangerous roads and highways, seat belt safety reform when implemented, will substantially reduce the number of unnecessary student casualties and deaths, benefiting not just students, but the whole community.

These reforms will confirm the NSW Government's commitment to safety, as signatories of the National Road Safety Strategy Action Plan for 2011 – 2020, jointly signed by transport ministers in May this year.

### **1. Belt Up for Safety Action Group (BUAG) Background**

After the death of a 15 year old boy on his school bus in 2001, the Belt Up for Safety Action Group (BUSAG) was formed on the south coast of NSW. Our aim is to seek changes to government policies and amend Australian Design Rule legislation, to prevent more unnecessary deaths and injuries due to the lack of safe, modern buses used to transport students – especially when travelling on dangerous unsealed country roads, or high speed roads and highways.

After each bus accident or “minor” incident (e.g. when the bus wheel came off near Bendalong/Manyana this year) our membership numbers increase. Professional safety organisations, legal and medical bodies and many other organisations, as well as parents, support our cause and fully understand the current plight of bus passengers and the need for safety improvements.

Our fight for children’s bus safety continues 10 years on, due to a series of stalling tactics and blatant disregard for student safety by the NSW Labor Government between 1995 and 2011. During this time, thousands of children and adolescents have been injured or maimed, with their families and friends suffering trauma and grief along with the victims. After a spate of fatal accidents on the north coast of NSW last year, our membership almost doubled.

Our campaign for coach safety to apply to rural bus travel will hopefully be addressed, after the community advisory committee’s recommendations become government policy.

### **2. ADR 68**

**A priority must be to replace old buses not meeting ADR 68\* safety standards, as the safety standards within this ADR will prevent thousands of injuries and many deaths over the life of the bus.**

\* ‘ADR 68’ refers to **Australian Design Rule 68/00** which has the most up to date safety requirements - including lap/sash seat belts, and was intended to apply to **all** non city buses and coaches in Australia ([see Appendix 1](#)). ADR 68 was developed after the tragic 1989 bus accidents at Kempsey and Grafton (55 killed) and was gazetted in December 1992 with full compliance by 1<sup>st</sup> July 1995 – just two and a half years.

### **3. BUSAG Safety Recommendations**

We believe the following list should be included in the recommendations of the final report delivered to Gladys Berejiklian MP, NSW Minister for Transport “*to make school bus travel as safe as possible*” in accordance with the Minister’s terms of reference for this committee.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Ban passengers standing on all school buses that travel:-
  - a) on any sealed road or highway with a speed limit of 80 km/hr or higher, and
  - b) on any unsealed road, and
  - c) on any Environment 2 or Environment 3 non-urban bus trip - as defined in the *National Guidelines for Risk Assessment of School Bus Routes* (18/11/2005).
2. All buses used on non-urban school trips, which travel on roads or highways as specified in 1(a) to 1(c) above,  
MUST be built to meet or retrofitted to meet the Australian Design Rule (ADR) 68/00 specifications, which currently apply to all coaches.
3. All school excursions must use buses which meet ADR 68/00 specifications when travelling on roads or highways as specified in 1(a) to 1(c) above.
4. All the above safety reforms must be implemented within the NRMA’s March 2011\* policy timeframes at the latest and where possible, in the interests of child safety, much earlier.
5. An implementation program must include strategies for education, monitoring and compliance adherence to the outcomes listed in 1 to 4 above.

\* [http://www.mynrma.com.au/images/About-PDF/NRMA-Seeing\\_Red\\_on\\_Roads-Roadmap\\_for\\_the\\_next\\_NSW\\_Govt-March\\_2011.pdf](http://www.mynrma.com.au/images/About-PDF/NRMA-Seeing_Red_on_Roads-Roadmap_for_the_next_NSW_Govt-March_2011.pdf) Page 25

### **4. Current Status – Bus Age and Design and Why Safer Buses are Needed**

ADR 68 has all the safety features required for high speed bus and coach travel, and was intended to apply to both. In NSW the government has used the low backed seat exemption to allow buses designed for urban use, to be used on non urban school bus contracts. As buses in rural NSW travel on the same roads and highways as coaches, passengers must need equal safety protection, and we ask the NSW Government to recognise the need for these same safety features to protect bus passengers, who are mostly students on school buses.

NSW currently contract a fleet of unsafe buses to transport students in rural NSW, with many buses manufactured prior to ADR 59 rollover standards introduced in 1992. **Current policy is inadequate and we ask that buses which are too old to be retrofitted with seat belts be taken off the road as a matter of urgency.**

**We ask the NSW Government to issue a contract variation, allowing a reduction in capacity for buses used in rural areas, so that bus operators can apply for federal seat belt funding available until 2012.**

If a bus is able to be retrofitted with seat belts and comply with ADR 68, or a new bus purchased meeting these standards, then bus operators can apply for up to \$25,000 Commonwealth 'Seatbelts for Kids' subsidy funding – to increase the number of seat belted buses on rural and regional roads. This simple contract variation will cost the NSW Government little and benefit many.

State Transit Authority metropolitan buses now require ADR 68 compliance and we ask the NSW Government to update rural and regional buses to this same high standard. ADR 68 buses were designed to withstand 20g forces common for high speed accidents, yet many buses transporting children on high speed rural roads today, are built to meet 5g forces for low speed accidents.

**Urban buses are not designed to withstand high speed accidents, therefore buses which are not ADR 68 compliant should be banned for use in non urban or rural areas – as a matter of urgency.**

The high death rate of the Kempsey and Grafton bus tragedies in 1989, are directly attributed to the poor safety standards and flimsy seat mountings of these buses. They should never have been travelling at high speed, yet buses of this era are still travelling at high speed, mostly carrying students on rural roads, which is alarming.

Current disability legislation being phased in, excludes school buses, therefore city buses, most of which are not built for non urban travel, but simply have low backed seats and no seat belts, are sold off or become rural school buses. A 55% target is expected in 2012 and the government must stop the flow of unsuitable buses onto rural school bus routes as a matter of priority.

## 5. Risk

The few students who are killed in bus accidents - which includes a 17 year old girl from the north coast of NSW in 2007 - are regarded as unlucky, and statistics for bus travel as a whole have been used to justify inaction. It is wrong to perceive that students don't need seat belts until we have a massive bus accident with multiple fatalities, just because we rarely have fatal bus accidents.

Were the victims of the tragic Kempsey and Grafton bus accidents in 1989 - where 55 people were killed and 54 severely injured - also unlucky, because we rarely have tragic bus accidents? The truth is, a tragic bus accident cannot be predicted. They can occur anywhere, any time, which is why seat belts are needed on all buses travelling outside metropolitan areas. The Kempsey and Grafton bus accidents galvanised the government to quickly introduce coach safety reforms, which included fitting seat belts.

The National Transport Commission states: "Similarly, while serious bus crashes are rare events, a severe crash involving an at capacity bus could result in multiple deaths. A crash involving a full school bus would invoke a considerable public reaction." Government should care more about safety than public condemnation.

*Excerpt from 1992 ADR 68 R.I.S. "**Consideration of these statistics has to be tempered by recognition of the high level of potential loss of life in individual bus crashes.**" [BUSAG highlight]*

A risk based approach was used when mandating ADR 68 safety requirements for all coach travel in Australia. The risks were identified and seat belts became mandatory for all coach travel in Australia. Rural school buses travel on the same high risk non urban roads and highways as coaches (and were included in the Regulatory Impact Statement for ADR 68, but later exempted by transport ministers), therefore students and bus charter passengers need and deserve the same safety protection provided to coach passengers – by mandating ADR 68 safety for *all* non-urban bus travel, regardless of the size of the bus.

As the risk of an accident is present every day, for any bus, buses must be safe and built to modern standards. The most modern bus standard was developed over 20 years ago (ADR 68), after evaluating the risks, but the risk has increased in line with increases in heavy vehicle traffic. As the population of regional NSW has increased markedly in the past 20 years and the government have policies to decentralise some of their departments, the risk is higher than ever before. Most rural areas have no rail access, relying on semi-trailers to transport everything.

The fact that most school buses carry dozens more passengers than a coaches (because passengers are allowed to stand and the '3 for 2 rule') and children do not have seat belts, creates an increased possibility of a greater tragedy than any coach accident. Some buses in New South Wales carry in excess of 100 students, including up to 32 standing in the aisle.

The frequency of student bus travel greatly increases the risk, as students travel over 400 times on their school bus each year. Experienced bus drivers cannot be expected to avoid every crash and every high speed bus trip is high risk – whether a school bus or charter hire bus.

BUSAG ask if bus drivers are properly trained to deal with a tragic bus accident. As many bus accidents are head-on and the driver is likely to be injured or killed, having students unhurt to help others is another factor in favour of seat belt protection. Fewer students hurt, requires less stress for the bus driver and students able to provide assistance. Delays in receiving medical assistance can increase the risk of death, therefore remoteness and often the number of casualties, prevent urgent hospital treatment.

## 6. Risk of Standing on a Bus

**Professor J N Joubert OAM, B.E., M.E., FIE Aust., FSAE, MSNAME, FTSE – mechanical engineer stated:**  
*"It is my firm opinion that carrying standees in buses on freeways at high speeds is a situation to be avoided."*

As standing on buses in rural areas has been banned in all states except NSW, it must be accepted as being a dangerous practice, therefore NSW should immediately ban it also. The precedent has been set and the NSW government expose themselves to litigation in the event of a bus accident involving passengers made to stand.

**Professor Rod Troutbeck - Queensland's top safety expert - Head of School of Civil Engineering at Queensland University of Technology, stated** (*The Sunday Mail*, "2000): "Students, clinging to bars and straps could not survive an accident in which, for example, a bus hits a bridge pylon. Passengers would be thrown around with a force equivalent to 12Gs (Twelve times the force of gravity). An F-16 jet fighter pilot can withstand up to 9 Gs. A passenger holding onto a strap who did not die as a result of his or her velocity would be killed by impact with another "straphanger" from further down the aisle."

Students do not even have a hand strap to keep them upright and some may be too small to hold the metal handrail effectively, therefore they are exposed to being thrown around by any movement of the bus or extreme forces in an accident. A child could easily be killed in a sudden braking incident – hitting either the floor or seats with metal handrails, a school bag in the aisle or the windscreen. Standing on a bus on a high speed road is obviously dangerous.

## 7. Evidence to Support Seat Belt Safety Reform

There is so much evidence for fitting lap/sash seat belts to buses, with the only opposition to this safety measure coming from government and bus industry reports - governments who are trying to resist any increase in their annual budget and bus industries trying to reduce costs for bus operators. The reports we have read since seat belts became mandatory for coach travel, are funded by government and the bus industry, often using statistics skewed to exaggerate the cost and under estimate the benefits.

Of particular note is the 1993 report "*School Bus Seat Belts – Their fitment, effectiveness and cost*" by Michael Henderson & Michael Paine (1993), which investigated installation of LAP belts. This report is constantly referred to as evidence for not fitting lap/sash seat belts, but clearly supports early fitment of them, giving evidence and citing overseas investigations also in favour (see APPENDIX 2). In part:

**"New Australian Design Rules for lap/sash seat belts for long distance coaches are based not so much on statistics as they are on careful crash investigations that have demonstrated the benefits to be gained."**

*"Injuries do occur to students riding in school buses, at the average rate of about once a fortnight in New South Wales. Cost is very much a secondary consideration. While regulators and administrators may see the cost of an injury or death to a child as a matter that requires balancing against other demands on the public purse, at the individual level the "value" of a child's life is incalculable. An injury to a child has costs in grief and suffering that extend well beyond the immediate family, impinging as they do on all concerned with the school and the local community."*

*"Bus interiors are not sufficiently safe, in comparison with the interiors of passenger cars. Bus seats are insufficiently strongly mounted, and incorporate features such as steel bars that threaten injury even in minor accidents."*

The above quote relates to buses manufactured prior to 1993 and sadly describes many school buses still used today – almost 20 years later.

The 2001 Austroads report states: "48% of bus accidents occur in NSW."

Visual evidence is more powerful – see 5 second rollover video filmed inside the bus:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcJb64plqkA&feature=related>

## **Senior Sergeant Ruler – Senior Traffic Accident Investigator States after the Tamborine Mountain Bus Crash, Queensland - 11 killed, 42 injured:**

*"Each day I see heavily laden buses carrying both commuters as well as school children traveling our roads. Knowing what can occur to unrestrained occupants, seated as well as standing, it frightens me and yet at the same time angers me. It angers me because I know that this situation need not exist.*

*I have heard comments to the effect that to be injured in a bus is so many times less than a car or a motorcycle. I have heard comments that there has yet to be sufficient justification for the fitment of seat belts. I have heard comments that it would be too expensive to fit seat belts. I have heard numerous other comments as to why seat belts should not be fitted or only a limited number of seat belts provided.*

*In answer to these comments I can only say that had these persons seen what I, and those who took part in the rescue operation, had seen that day, there would be little doubt left as to the need for seat belts for all those who travel on buses. This does not refer to those buses of the future but to all buses now operating on our roads."*

### **8. Cost**

As already stated, costs have been greatly exaggerated by 'experts' who include metropolitan buses and statistics using "passenger miles", which obviously 'clouds' the real picture and provides ministers with an inflated quote, ensuring no bus safety reform is ever considered. The large number of metropolitan buses is significant, and cannot be included when calculating the cost to upgrade rural school buses – if wanting a true cost.

Although fitting seat belts will require that no passenger can stand, therefore reducing bus capacity, not all rural school buses have students standing.

NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal figures suggest that the cost of running an extra bus, for large buses, is around \$100,000 (2010). A rough estimate to eliminate standing on Environment 3 - to replace 50 buses - is only \$5 million.

BUSAG estimate, using government data, that approximately \$10 million p.a. is all that's required to eliminate rural students having to stand on buses in Environment 2 and 3. This is calculated by not including buses used in urban rural areas – large towns such as Albury, Tamworth, Dubbo etc, where students only travel by bus on roads with a speed limit below 80 kph – those living near town. Although \$10 million is a lot of money to most people, it's very small in comparison to the total NSW budget, but will provide safety benefits and be offset by reduced bus accident claim payouts.

**We have not seen the cost (to fit lap/sash seat belts) compared to bus passenger accident claims, which in 14 years (to 2009, in NSW) was approx. \$140 million.**

Another cost saving is to fit buses with specific seating for primary aged students. McConnell Seats (and no doubt other companies too) manufacture a bus seat (in Australia) allowing the current '3 for 2 rule' to remain, because their 'Educator 2/3' seat provides seat belts for all 3 primary aged children.

ADR 68 Regulatory Impact Statement says:

***"Any benefits from a belt-equipped bus fleet will accrue over the working life of the fleet..."***

Bus safety must be given a higher priority and cost cannot be legitimately used as an excuse. Unlike cars, buses are used for decades, with the initial cost insignificant over time.

## **9. Lack of Safety Culture**

The McConnell Seats brochure was supplied to all members present at the August 2011 School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee meeting. This seat has been widely used around Australia since 2002, with great satisfaction by bus owners, yet its existence is constantly ignored by the bus industry – even in 2011. The bus industry has shown they are not actively advocating safety reform and bus passengers suffer because of this apathy. This is a strange situation, as bus operators will benefit by fitting seat belts in the following ways:

- Extra bus contracts increasing revenue
- Happier bus drivers (employees) due to a quieter bus – proven once students are seat belted.
- Improved ability to concentrate on driving the bus – of huge benefit to occupants of cars (which have less mass and fare worse in any accident with a bus)
- Safer passengers
- Ability to buy and sell buses from or to other states and territories (except Victoria)
- Ability to use school buses for coach trips in school holidays and for charter hire

A safety culture must exist to save lives. Just as Workcover laws penalise employees with fines or gaol sentences for safety breaches or negligence, bus operators should be liable for not providing the highest level of acceptable safety for their passengers. In the chain of responsibility, the Department of Transport and the government are also liable, as they provide school bus transport.

Australian Design Rules are provided federally, but the NSW government allows bus operators to choose which ADR compliant bus they purchase, as school bus contracts do not specify minimum ADR safety compliance. If certain road conditions or terrain require particular safety features for a bus, then the applicable bus should be purchased – regardless of RTA or NSW Centre for Road Safety authority requirements, although these government departments should also support high levels of safety for bus registrations and enforce appropriate ADR's.

Bus organisations raise issues such as vandalising seat belts and why spend the money when the kids won't wear them, but evidence from bus companies and bus drivers once seat belts are installed, don't support these views. In the U.S. they found 100% of students wore their seat belt and similar high rates of usage will be common in NSW, when seat belt educated infants become school leavers.

No doubt the cost of vandalism would be a minor problem, if bus operators were paid a higher price for their school bus contract when providing a modern seat belted school bus, which BUSAG believe would be a good incentive to reward bus operators who have a moral conscience and have already funded seat belted buses themselves.

## **10. International Seat Belt Rollout**

Seat belts are required for school buses in the United Kingdom and in many U.S. states, with additional U.S. states recognising the need after tragic accidents and coroner report recommendations. California has had seat belts since the early 1980's.

In March 2011 the U.S. Congress concluded that lap/sash seat belts provide better safety than compartmentalisation (which provides heavily padded, high backed seats). In Australia, buses have neither of these safety features – we promote the use of low backed seats with little padding and hard metal handrails on the back of each seat down the aisle, with both these features increasing the danger to bus passengers.

## 11. National Funding

Minister Albanese has slashed \$20 million from the Howard governments \$40 million Federal ‘Seatbelts for Kids’ subsidy program this year due to “lack of demand”. It was introduced to provide 1600 extra seat belted buses, but less than 400 are on the road. NSW bus operators are restricted from applying due to bus capacity issues within their contracts, once seat belts are fitted.

Minister Albanese acknowledges that “*Road trauma is one of the major public health problems facing this country*”, yet we currently have no uniform safety standards for non urban bus travel. Even worse, imported buses with seat belts, have the seat belts removed before carrying students on school bus routes with many not complying with the highest ADR 68/00 standards, which are applicable for coaches.

## 12. National Bus Safety Implementation

Contrary to some data presented by the NSW Department of Transport in August 2011, the following applies in other states of Australia:

**Queensland** began fitting seat belts to high risk school bus routes in **February 2005**, after a truly independent inquiry recommendation. Since 2002, \$60 million has been invested under the School Bus Upgrade Scheme to provide rollover compliant buses and other safety features. In 2010 a further \$35 million was allocated over 4 years to accelerate this scheme.

**Western Australia** announced they would fit seat belts to all their rural school bus routes in **November 2005** after a horrific school bus accident caused a huge public outcry. This task was completed in 2010.

**South Australia** announced that all government school buses purchased after **August 2006** would have seat belts, rollover protection and other safety features. All school buses must be fitted with seat belts by 2015.

**Tasmania** in **December 2007** provided funding for 100 replacement small buses equipped with lap/sash seat belts.

**Northern Territory** is phasing in seat belts and the first buses were ready for the **2008 school year**.

**Victoria** remain unconvinced and claim that “*seat belts would not contribute materially to a reduction in the national road toll*” – a statement proven to be false, as no seat belted coach passenger has died since 1995, when seat belts became mandatory. Seat belted coaches have saved hundreds of passengers from death and injury. Victoria banned standing on roads with an 80 kph or greater speed limit from 1997, which is commendable. The introduction of this policy will reduce their task when they eventually decide to fit seat belts, as bus capacity won’t be reduced.

Safety improvements and seat belts have been phased in around Australia during the past 6 years, mostly after “evidence” seen first hand as a result of nasty school bus accidents. NSW students need safety too. BUSAG want the NSW Government to follow other jurisdictions (except Victoria) and phase in bus seat belts.

### 13. Bus Seat Belt Advocates

BUSAG work closely with safety organisations, school parent organisations, hospital and medical professionals and other advocates of safety – we all have the same aim - to ensure students can travel by bus with seat belt protection.

Supporters for fitting seat belts on buses used on non urban roads and highways in Australia are:

- NRMA
- Australasian College of Road Safety Inc.
- Safety Institute of Australia Inc.
- Australian Medical Assoc.
- Royal Australasian College of Surgeons
- Kidsafe
- Australian Plaintiff Lawyers Assoc. Inc
- Australian Lawyers Alliance
- Country Mayors Association
- Council of Catholic School Parents ACT/NSW
- Federation of Parents & Citizens' Association of NSW
- NSW Parents Council Inc.
- Isolated Children's Parents' Assoc.
- VIEW Australia
- Country Women's Assoc.
- Association of Catholic School Principals
- Coroner, Mr. Kevin Waller
- Professor P N Joubert OAM, B.E., M.E., FIE Aust., FSAE, MSNAME, FTSE

The only resistance to fitting bus seat belts in Australia, in non-urban areas, is from:

- Government - who should advocate reducing the road toll, and the
- Bus industry - who should advocate passenger safety.

Parents form the majority of bus safety advocates because they, in their role as carers, have a duty to protect their children. They worry because they know their children are unsafe on the school bus. See Appendix 3.

<b>14. Myths &amp; Beliefs</b> (shaded blue)
BIGGEST MYTH - " <b>bus travel is the safest form of transport</b> " – as stated by Government and bus organisations in their quest to allay the fears of parents who worry about children's safety on buses.
<b>Fact</b> – below each myth
Fact - Professor P N Joubert – Victorian Engineer from his 2004 paper: "When committees such as yours are confronted with statistics they may be blinded from alternative

views. Pak Poy was a well-known Victorian Engineer involved in road safety. He looked at bus accident statistics (see my 1973 report), by considering the number of buses which shows a much higher involvement for buses compared to cars. This is the opposite of what is told to us about bus accident involvement, because these are usually worked out on the basis of accidents per passenger mile. Because of the large numbers of passengers per bus compared to cars, the result is a low involvement of buses compared to that of cars."

BUSAG know that school bus travel will become the worst form of transport if a tragic bus accident on the scale of Kempsey or Grafton occurs, as school buses can carry in excess of 100 students on some trips.

**Myth - A risk based approach according to the road environment, is the best way to phase in seat belts.**  
e.g. The Queensland Government fund seat belted school buses in the highest risk category (Environment 3) i.e. steep and mountainous terrain, first.

**Fact -** The Grafton bus accident in 1989 - where 20 people were killed - occurred on a high speed straight road, proving that terrain and environment does not determine where bus passengers are safer or where a bus disaster will occur.

**BUSAG say, at least Qld have begun fitting seat belts, but NSW can introduce a fairer, evidence based policy allowing improved safety on all rural school bus routes – Environments 2 and 3.**

**Belief -** According to the 2005 'National Guidelines for Risk Assessment of School Bus Routes'  
**"first address school bus routes facing extreme conditions (Environment 3)" –**

**Facts -** Environment 3 does doesn't specify any speed zones, yet evidence from the Federal Office of Road Safety 1994 accident report (see attached PDF document) depicts the severity of bus accidents depending on speed and vehicle mass. e.g. the severity of an accident increases markedly the faster vehicles travel and if a bus collides with a bus or semi trailer - a vehicle of equal or greater mass.

**Bus travel in Environment 2 and 3 both require seat belt safety phased in simultaneously.**

**Myth -** Standing on a bus when travelling on a high speed road or highway is acceptable policy.

**Fact -** Professor P N Joubert – Victorian Engineer from his 2004 paper:

*"With a high-speed crash the standing passengers have no chance whatever of maintaining their equilibrium and move forward with the pre-impact velocity of the bus while the bus structure has come forcibly to rest. If there are a number of standing passengers then the forces on the first passenger on impact with the front of the bus, are increased by the number of passengers standing behind him.*

*So if there are say, 6 passengers standing together in a row down the aisle of the bus, then the impact force on the first standee is,*

$$F1 = (m1+m2+m3+m4+m5+m6) \times \text{deceleration}$$

*Where m is the persons' mass.*

*The impact force on the second person is,*

$$F2 = (m2+m3+m4+m5+m6) \times \text{deceleration} \text{ and so on.}$$

*It is only the last person, number 6, who receives the lowest force, F6 = m6 \times deceleration*

*Dr. Henderson's concept that "the risk per standee in a crash will be lower if there are a large number of standees on the bus", is not only misleading it is incorrect. It should be noted that his training is medical and not that of an engineer or applied mathematician."*

**BUSAG agree with Prof. Joubert and the Victorian government who outlawed this practice in 1997. Any sensible thinking person would consider the risk of standing on high speed roads and reject an idea from anyone proposing that bus passengers should be allowed to stand – especially for children.**

Myth - Fitting seat belts to school buses will increase the cost to government because of the '3 for 2 rule' policy, which allows 3 primary aged children to sit on a bus seat designed for 2 people.
Fact - A bus seat with 3 seat belts is manufactured in Australia, which allows the '3 for 2 rule' to remain, with no reduction in bus capacity due to this policy.
Myth - Students will be left by the roadside if bus seating capacity exceeded on seat belted buses.
Fact - W.A. school bus manual states: " <i>Other than in extraordinary circumstances, no student should be standing on a contract school bus whilst the vehicle is in motion.</i> "
<b>BUSAG ask what happens now if the bus capacity is exceeded – no doubt students are not left behind.</b>

## 15. Coroner Mr. Kevin M. Waller said:

In 1990 Coroner Mr Kevin M Waller stated, regarding the Kempsey bus accident: *"It is obvious from the literature that surveys on this and other subjects have been made and rejected. It is regrettably true that it often takes a major catastrophe to precipitate Government and Government authorities into action. Matters of cost and inconvenience have been allowed to take precedence over matters of personal safety. Promising suggestions are deflected for investigation elsewhere and largely forgotten"* (P.17)

**Why not act now before a school bus tragedy in NSW?**

## 16. Environments 2 and 3 – both high risk

The 2005 'National Risk Guidelines for School Bus Routes' were used to classify rural and regional school bus routes in NSW and determined approximately 300 routes in Environment 3 should have seat belts phased in.

As speed often determines the severity of any accident or sudden braking incident, all buses travelling on high speed roads in Environment 2 should be included with dangerous routes, such as steep and mountainous terrain in Environment 3.

A risk based approach was used when mandating ADR 68 safety requirements for all coach travel in Australia. The risks were identified and seat belts became mandatory for all coach travel in Australia. Rural school buses travel on the same high risk routes as coaches, therefore students and bus charter passengers need and deserve the same safety protection provided to coach passengers – by mandating ADR 68 for *all* non-urban high speed and/or unsealed road bus travel.

## 17. School Excursions and Rural Charter Bus Travel

Data for most school excursions is not captured by the RTA because it is often outside 'school hours' - 7.30 to 9.30 am and 2.30 to 5.30 pm. On average in Australia, a bus accident occurs every day, therefore children on excursions require the same safety features as coach passengers enjoy, when travelling on non urban roads and highways.

Although not within the terms of reference, a not so obvious safety flaw exists with 'coach' travel today. It is legal for a bus operator to use an 'urban route service bus' or school bus [with no seat belts and low backed seats] for a coach trip. This doesn't generally occur for timetabled coach trips because of competition, but small country operators often use a school bus for charter hire outside 'school hours' (see above) for school excursions, sporting and pensioner groups. Again, safety consistency is needed to protect these passengers. It was a pensioner group on a fun day

out, when tragedy struck in 1989. Coach travel became safer after two 1989 bus crashes and we must learn from past mistakes and make bus travel safer also.

## **18. Heavy Vehicle Traffic**

Buses share the roads with an ever increasing number of heavy vehicles - including log trucks, semi trailers, B-doubles and B-triples - travelling at 100 kph. As heavy vehicles pose a greater risk in any collision with a bus, the highest level of safety should be mandatory, as in ADR 68 compliance.

## **19. Rural Road Hazards**

Unpredictable wildlife in rural areas is a hazard not included in the '*National Risk Guidelines for School Bus Routes*', but kangaroos, wombats, emus and straying livestock pose a high risk of causing a bus tragedy. The appendix in this document outlines only one example of how an accident can have a long term effect on passengers and their families.

## **20. Children and Parents Safety Culture**

Please remember these children travel without full knowledge of the dangers (as you don't want to alarm them), relying on their parents who constantly remind them of dangers and how to prevent them. Parents in turn rely on the government who supply school bus transport, to provide safe buses, but this is not happening. Parents have been writing to the NSW Department of Transport for decades on this issue – they fear they'll lose their precious children just because basic safety is denied to their children. Young children start school fearing harm in a bus accident, as seat belt safety education has been so successful.

Once seat belts become mandatory for school bus travel, education will be easily implemented through the RTA's excellent 'Safer Routes to School' program. When starting school, children already know how to fit a seat belt – it's not a foreign device - so will wear it because they're used to it. The benefits will flow on as young students become teenagers. Education is not an issue, as currently we have excellent programs which can be extended to include requirements for mandatory seat belt usage.

Seat belt usage could become part of the Student Code of Conduct, with free School Student Transport Scheme bus passes revoked for a short period of time for non compliance.

## **21. Transport Safety Consistency**

Babies and children travel on our roads with seat belt protection, except during the many years on their school bus. Before school age, toddlers and young children learn good habits from their parents and understand the dangers of not 'buckling up'. Then as students, for up to 13 years of their learning years on the school bus, they learn that seat belts aren't that important.

NRMA statistics say that 26% of 17 – 25 year olds, who are killed in car accidents, weren't wearing their seat belt. The death rate of teenagers and young adults could be reduced if given a consistent seat belt message during the first 17 years of their lives, instead of a mixed message.

Bus seat belts have many advantages – obviously bus passengers will benefit, but also occupants of cars hit by a bus, as the bus driver isn't constantly looking in the rear view mirror trying to manage student behaviour – they can concentrate on the road instead and have a clear rear view without students in the aisle.

## 22. Legal Perspective

Litigation is common and the public today are aware of their rights. As other states in Australia and advanced nations have set a precedent that bus seat belt safety is needed and funding is being supplied for their implementation, the NSW government could become liable for expensive class action in the event of a bus accident.

**Quote from Rob Davis, Lawyer B.Soc.Sc., LL.M., LL.M (Corp & Com)**

*"ADR 68/00 does not prevent accidents occurring. What it does do is dramatically improve the chances of survival, and reduce the risk of injury to occupants when an accident occurs. Accidents are not confined to interstate and long haul buses. There is nothing about that category of bus that makes them more likely to have an accident than any ordinary school bus on a highway."*

## 23. Coach Statistic

Not one seat belted coach passenger has died since 1995, the ADR 68/00 legislation compliance date 16 years ago. This is an enviable safety record and one Government should be aiming towards for bus travel. Mandating seat belts for all non-urban bus travel – not just school bus travel, would ensure a decline in the road death toll.

Extract from May, 2001 Austroads Report „School Bus Safety in Australia” – Executive Summary quote:

*“..about 9 children are seriously injured each month”,* and the recommendation from the document was:

**(i) Formulating a National School Bus Safety Action Plan which complements National Road Safety Strategy 2001 - 2010**

To ensure that school bus safety is recognised as a road safety priority nationally, it is proposed that a National School Bus Safety Action Plan be agreed to complement the National Road Safety Strategy 2001 - 2010.

*The key objective of the National School Bus Safety Action Plan would be to build on the gains made by jurisdictions across Australia and reduce the total annual number of child fatalities associated with school bus travel to zero by the year 2005. This will be achieved through the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a number of integrated safety initiatives to reduce the number of fatalities and injuries to children and young people when travelling on or moving around school buses.*

Components of the School Bus Safety Action Plan comprise of a range of “best practice” initiatives that focus on:

- improving the behaviours of children, parents, teachers, child carers, bus drivers and operators, and the general community;
- improvements to school buses and their design;

This Austroads technical report had no reference to either Kempsey or Grafton bus accidents (amazingly) but expects the “key objective” to be achieved without recommending seat belts for buses, which clearly would never have happened without ADR 68 standards for school bus travel.

## **24. Minor Injuries**

Government data does not include the tally of injuries for those treated at the accident scene - either by a local doctor or dentist, or children cut and bruised who went home to their parents – just those hospitalised overnight.

RTA data from August 2011 concedes that minor injuries are under represented in data, but confirms that of the 4 fatalities since 2001 in NSW, 3 were in rural areas and 2 of these were seated inside the bus.

## **25. Safety Expert Evidence and Quotes:**

There is a plethora of evidence to show the safety benefits of seat belts on buses used on non urban roads and that installing them on all new and replacement buses would be a significant gain to bus safety.

1. A January 1995 Federal Office of Road Safety [FORS] report “Cost Benefit Analysis of Retrofitting Occupant Protection Measures to Existing Buses” examined 19 bus accidents in rural areas over 7 years (1987 – 1994) and concluded that 109 deaths would have reduced to 60 deaths, and 438 injuries reduced to approximately 90 if the bus passengers had been wearing a lap/sash seat belt. This is conclusive evidence of the safety benefits of seat belts on buses. (see the report attached)
2. The NSW Roads and Traffic Authority ‘NO BELT, NO BRAINS” brochure states: “*Even in minor accidents, not wearing a seat belt can have a major impact....*”
3. ADR 68 specifies requirements “*for seat belts, seat strength and anchorages to seats, seatbelts and child restraints together with provisions for protecting occupants from impact with the back of the seats*”. Occupants on buses also need protection from impact with the back of seats.

Excerpts from the March 1992 Regulatory Impact Statement by Federal Office of Road Safety Re: “*Proposed ADR SBASS To Introduce The Fitting Of Three Point Seat Belts To All Passenger Seats In Coaches*” (now ADR 68/00) [our highlights and underling]

- . “*The objective of this proposal is to reduce the number of deaths and the severity of injuries resulting from bus crashes.*”
- . “*The proposed regulation is designed to provide occupant protection benefits equivalent to those given by seat belts in passenger cars. Complying systems will withstand the forces generated in bus crashes at highway speeds.*”
- . “*...road safety experts, the medical profession and considerable representations from the general public are supportive of the proposals.*”
- . “*Consequently other factors will be relevant such as the potential for a high level of road trauma in individual bus crashes due to the high passenger numbers in each vehicle (of the order of 50-60).*”

- . “**Minor Injuries** – injuries requiring medical treatment but not hospitalisation form a significant part of the total cost to society of road crashes.”
- . “...estimates as high as 50% reduction in trauma cost, could be considered broadly plausible...”
- . “Non-fatal injuries account for almost two-thirds of total road trauma costs and substantial economic savings can be expected from reductions in injury severity.”.

All these arguments apply to non-urban bus travel and ignoring them is unconscionable.

This report also states that “*Most school-aged children (5 to 16 years) fatally injured or hospitalised in bus crashes were bus passengers.*”

The above points demonstrate compelling evidence to show that bus seat belts would contribute to making significant gains in bus safety – particularly for travel on non urban high speed roads, which is why ADR 68 safety standards became law – to ensure these standards would be met. Unfortunately buses with low backed seat were exempted, sadly allowing urban buses to be used on non urban roads, to the detriment of bus safety.

There have been numerous Government reports on bus seat belt installation since the 1995 coach legislation compliance date and it is time to stop debating the issue and get on with installing them – the safety solution. Once a strategy is in place, the safety benefits will follow.

## **26. Compliance**

We agree with the Bus Industry Confederation to upgrade buses to a modern standard, but also see the need for reasonable compliance dates for implementation of any safety improvements. Currently buses travel non urban roads without 1992 ADR 59 rollover protection or 1992 ADR 68 seat and seat belt installation. Clearly, compliance with these 2 important ADR's is necessary.

NSW school buses used in rural or non urban areas must have seat belt compliance dates when implemented, to ensure children's safety is a priority and they benefit within a reasonable time frame.

## **27. Perceived Safety by Statistics**

The NTC states: “*A shortcoming of looking at reported statistics is that this only captures a part of the whole picture on safety. In most states and territories police are only called to crashes that result in a death or serious injury...*”

Many bus passengers have ‘minor’ injuries which are not reported, and therefore unrepresented in the safety ‘snapshot’ i.e. lost teeth, stitches to the face, lacerations and bruising. These ‘minor’ injuries are *major* to the victim and their families. Trauma lasts longer than the ‘minor’ injury and will be remembered throughout the victim’s life. Those uninjured as well as police and emergency workers suffer trauma – students are deeply distressed seeing their friends killed or taken to hospital. This fact is often overlooked, with the focus being on people with visible injuries.

Reported statistics do not include those not hospitalised overnight – this statistic is significant.

## **28. Establishing a Safety Culture**

To improve bus safety, the NSW Government must provide safer policies, to raise the bar in terms of minimum standards. The Waterfall rail disaster found there was no safety culture within the NSW rail authority, and this is also the case currently for bus travel.

Although the bus industry have identified that seat belts will improve bus passenger safety and that many old buses need replacing, they are not proactively recommending seat belt installation.

The resistance within the bus industry for bus safety reform is of great concern, especially when regulatory best practice is sought by professionals throughout the world.

## **29. Further comments by Professionals and BUSAG:**

1. Professor Danny Cass Paediatric Surgeon and Director of the Trauma Centre at Westmead Children's Hospital, NSW and National President of Kidsafe

Professor Cass's main concern relates to the lack of medical resources in rural areas in the case of accidents. Retrieval is very difficult due to distance and communication problems, while mass arrival of trauma cases puts a strain on any emergency department, even in the city.

In the long term the ongoing cost associated with physical and psychological consequences of "catastrophic non-fatal injuries" is a large problem. "*A fatal injury is not costly to the system at all. One life saved is cost effective, as a spinal injury can cost between \$5 million and \$10 million.*"

A teacher, who was one of the few survivors in a tragic school excursion bus accident in 1975, likened the scene to a "war zone". This teacher has not worked since this accident occurred, and still suffers severe trauma. Lap/sash seat belts would have saved the lives of many of the children killed in this accident and the pleas for change from this teacher were ignored. This letter is very sad and disturbing – the contents haunt the reader.

## **30. Conclusion**

The evidence is overwhelming and the safety benefits of seat belted travel are undisputed. As bus accidents occur, the need becomes evident – as found by other states of Australia now fitting seat belts. NSW need to be proactive, not reactive. Members of BUSAG seek government approval of all the recommendations on page 3, to provide basic safety, as coach passengers and other road users presently have access to.

The NSW road toll will reduce in line with the aims of the Road Safety Strategy Action Plan 2011-2020, just as coach travel has benefited from the introduction of lap/sash seat belts since 1995 – no death of a seat belted passenger.

Thank you for allowing our input in forming recommendations for the NSW Government.

**APPENDIX 1 referred to on Page 4 (highlight by BUSAG)**

**PROPOSED AUSTRALIAN DESIGN RULE SBASS TO INTRODUCE THE FITTING OF  
THREE POINT SEAT BELTS TO ALL PASSENGER SEATS IN COACHES**

**REGULATORY IMPACT STATEMENT**

**Prepared by the Federal Office of Road Safety**

**1 DESCRIPTION**

**1.1 Outline of the Proposal**

The proposed regulation is to provide improved occupant protection in buses and coaches other than city route buses by the fitting of three point seat belts to all passenger seats.

Planned introduction date has yet to be decided. The options proposed are 1/7/93 or 1/7/94.

The proposed Australian Design Rule SBASS would replace existing Australian Design Rule 66/00 "Seat Strength, Seat Anchorage Strength and Padding".

**1.2 Statutory Framework and Background**

Safety standards applying to vehicles when they begin to be used in transport in Australia are made under Section 7 of the Motor Vehicle Standards Act 1989. These National Standards, known as Australian Design Rules (ADRs) are made as Determinations by the Federal Minister for Land Transport.

Heavy bus and coach manufacture in Australia is characterised by a large number of small firms. Virtually all vehicles are built in Australia on imported chassis, mainly from Europe and Japan. Lighter buses are generally imported mass produced vehicles built in Japan (Toyota, Mazda, Nissan, Hino) or in Korea.

Improved levels of occupant protection in buses and coaches are due for introduction 1 July 1992 for heavy buses and 1 January 1993 for all buses other than route service buses and those with less than 16 passengers. These requirements are contained in ADR 66/00 "Seat Strength, Seat Anchorage Strength and Padding" and provide for improved seat and seat anchorage strength together with energy absorbing padding on the seat back to reduce injury to the person in the seat behind in the event of a crash. This ADR is based on the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Regulation 80 (ECE R80).

23/3/92

**APPENDIX 2** referred to on Page 6 (bold print and highlights by BUSAG)

**COMMENTS ON**

**School Bus Seat Belts – Their fitment, effectiveness and cost**  
by Michael Henderson & Michael Paine (1993)

**BY BELT UP FOR SAFETY [BUS] ACTION GROUP**

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*This report addressed installation of **lap** seat belts, but contains many facts supporting the installation of **lap/sash** seat belts in 80 km/hr and over speed zones.*

1. Accident analysis of 37 accidents from 1989 to 1992, in which 121 children were injured and one was killed. “The commonest injuries were to the face, head and neck, and these most commonly occurred in frontal collisions, probably as a result of contact with the seat in front of the occupant and “97.5% of the reported injuries were „minor”, including shock and trivial bruises.”

*We have yet to see a definition of “minor” injuries, but perhaps a split lip, stitches to the face, tooth knocked out, could be added to “shock and trivial bruising”. The effect of these injuries is regarded as „major” to the victim, their family and friends, and should be avoided if at all possible. Lap/sash seat belts may have prevented 121 injuries and one death, in just 4 years - a highly beneficial outcome.*

2. “As might be expected, the crashes at the highest estimated speeds were nearly all in **non-urban** areas, with other crash speeds fairly evenly distributed throughout categories.”

*A strong argument for high levels of protection in high speed, non-urban areas – as presently afforded to coach passengers. Our group continues to advocate for lap/sash seat belts in 80 kph and over speed zones in non-urban areas.*

3. “Seat belts are designed in such a way that controlled restraint loadings are applied to the strongest parts of the body. Seat belts also control the movement of the body during all types of collision including roll-overs, reduce the risk of occupants colliding with each other, and reduce the risk of harmful impact against injurious parts of the vehicle’s interior.”

**“New Australian Design Rules for lap/sash seat belts for long distance coaches are based not so much on statistics as they are on careful crash investigations that have demonstrated the benefits to be gained.”**

“Following years of development and study, seat belts are now required, or soon will be, for buses in which their fitment can be justified by crash data and travel patterns. Generally, these are long-distance coaches that travel at high speed over long distances.”

*Children travelling on school buses, on roads and highways in non-urban areas, face exactly the same risks as coach passengers and therefore should be afforded the same level of protection as coach passengers. This anomaly discriminates against school children in non-urban areas and should be rectified based on the same “careful crash investigations”.*

*Some school children travel further than the trip from Sydney to Melbourne in one week. These children travel “long distances at high speed”, as do coach passengers.*

*School children have the added risk if involved in an accident, of being struck by projectile school bags. Coach passengers have their luggage stored underneath the bus.*

4. Injuries caused by seat belts – “...as originally identified by Huelke in 1977, an increase in minor neck injuries is associated with a decrease in severe and fatal head injuries when lap/sash belts are used. The rarity of serious neck injury (in the absence of head contact) among wearers of lap/sash belts has recently been confirmed....”.

*Decreasing severe and fatal head injuries should be high priority and would certainly outweigh any argument that seat belts may injure a person’s neck – which is a “rarity”. This was originally identified in 1977 and confirmed prior to 1993, yet children remain unprotected by a seat belt on their school bus.*

5. “Injuries do occur to students riding in school buses, at the average rate of about once a fortnight in New South Wales. **Cost is very much a secondary consideration.** While regulators and administrators may see the cost of an injury or death to a child as a matter that requires balancing against other demands on the public purse, at the individual level the “value” of a child’s life is incalculable. An injury to a child has costs in grief and suffering that extend well beyond the immediate family, impinging as they do on all concerned with the school and the local community.”

“Bus interiors are not sufficiently safe, in comparison with the interiors of passenger cars. Bus seats are insufficiently strongly mounted, and incorporate features such as steel bars that threaten injury even in minor accidents.”

“Comparison of severe crashes in the United States, in some of which seat belts were worn in buses and in some of which they were not, have shown that seat belts can prevent injury in severe crashes. There have been no reported problems with children being trapped, even in one crash that included partial submersion in water. No injuries have occurred as students release the belts while the bus was lying on its side. Belt-induced injuries in school buses have not been reported in the United States.”

*Motor Accident Authority data 1996/97 – 2000/01 stated that 1,944 accidents occurred in NSW in those 5 years – an average of **more than one accident and injury, and at an average cost of \$43,277 per day.** (2,194 claims, at a cost of \$78,980,923 - as at 30/3/02 as some claims not finalised as yet). These figures show the increase in accidents from December 1993 to June 2001.*

6. “In summary, seat belts can provide benefits in injury reduction for students in school buses, and any **disbenefits are trivial.** The cost of conversion of new buses would be a small component of the total cost of the vehicle, and would be weighed against the extremely high value placed by society, let alone the family on the safety of children.”

*The NRMA „Open Road” (Sept/Oct 2003) state “While significant legislation such as the introduction of blood alcohol limits for driving has played a major role in reducing road crash injuries and deaths, the seat belt remains the invention that has saved more lives than any other”. Cost should not inhibit seat belt legislation for school buses.*

7. “A telling argument for fitting and using seat belts in school buses is that habits of belt wearing should be consistent, from vehicle to vehicle. To indicate to children that seat belts in buses are not necessary, or even harmful, may reinforce doubts about the value of seat belts in passenger cars. Already the use rate of seat belt in rear seats of cars, where children mostly ride, is lower than it is for front seats. For the overall good, it is imperative that children are encouraged to use seat belts at all times.”

*Statistics show that 17 – 25 year olds have the highest death rate in road accidents. The NRMA „Open Road” (Nov/Dec. 2002) states that “In 2001, 219 drivers and 133 passengers were killed on NSW roads. Of these fatalities, 56 (26%) drivers and 33 passengers (25%) were not wearing seatbelts.” Children receive a negative message during over 400 trips per year in their school bus (multiplied by the number of school years travelling by bus), then are expected to wear one when they become drivers themselves. The Government contributes to this high injury and death rate by not providing lap/sash seat belts in school buses – especially in 80 kph and over speed zones, as it is a well known fact that seat belts do save lives.*

8. “Seat belts have other benefits for school students. The American experience is that being restrained in their seats, the general standard of student behaviour is higher. Compliance with seat-belt wearing regulations would be high in the New South Wales situation, as even in the United States compliance can be 100% with proper supervision.”

*“Student behaviour and misbehaviour are important factors, and thus directly related to occupant safety.”*

*Having bus drivers concentrate on the road rather than watching the occupants of the bus, is another excellent reason for introducing seat belts – benefiting other road users as well. Apart from a reduced risk of causing an accident through inattention, bus drivers have a very high risk of death or serious injury in the event of an accident because of their position at the front of the bus.*

9. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport Safety in its 1977 report *Heavy Vehicle Safety* stated:

*“Overall, the committee considered that the accident rate among bus passengers was insufficient in urban or school buses to warrant provision of seat belts at that stage. The committee did express the belief, however, that seat belts should be compulsorily fitted in newly built inter-urban coaches, in conjunction with well-padded and high-backed seats.”*

*Children travelling on buses along the same roads and highways as coaches, should be governed by the same safety standards. We have made no progress to increase safety standards for rural or non-urban bus travel in 30 years.*

### APPENDIX 3 [referred to on Page 11]

Jada and Lindsay Burns are rightly concerned parents, who fight daily to keep their family together after this school bus accident in 2007. They have moved into town so their children don't have to catch the school bus. Their daughter had her head wedged under a seat in this bus crash and suffers also. When speaking to Jada, the strain of worrying about her children is overwhelming – they are no longer a happy family.

### Mum's plea for seatbelts on buses. | Local New

## The Gympie Times

### Mum's plea for seatbelts on buses.

Jannette Parke | 17th September 2009



Craig Warhurst

THE suffering goes on long after the crash scene has been cleaned up.

The carnage that is so exposed in the graphic images of mangled wrecks is neatly swept away and the survivors become invisible victims that somehow have to pick up the shattered pieces of life and get on with it. It's two years this Saturday since Jada and Lindsay Burns' children Sam and Millie were among 11 school kids involved in what can only be described as every parent's nightmare. An 80-tonne semi-trailer rammed the rear of their school bus as it turned through the gates of Two-Mile State School on the Bruce Highway.

The impact launched the bus into a paddock. It took out a street light, slammed through a fence and rolled over, injuring 10 out of the 11 children and driver Warren Polley.

Emergency services personnel at the scene said it was a miracle that nobody was killed.

The crash happened the very day the Federal Government announced a \$40 million plan to put seatbelts in country school buses.

Two years later Gympie kids are still rattling around in buses with no seatbelts, as the vehicles hurtle along the region's highway and the narrow regional roads.

The school bus crash in Sydney last week brought it all back to Jada. The mother of five is determined not to let this issue fade away.

"It's not going to go away and I'm not going to let it go away," she told *The Gympie Times* yesterday.

"We need to make seatbelts on school buses compulsory."

Jada says her family is living with the consequences of the crash and she doesn't want any other family going through the stress and pain her family continues to deal with every day. "It's not just my children I'm concerned about," she said.

Sam, now nearly 14, was flung from the bus and left with a hip injury that was not correctly diagnosed for some nine months. He endured months of painful physiotherapy thinking that it was helping in his recovery - it was not, in fact it was just aggravating the joint. The late Dr June Canavan, the Sunshine Coast sports physician killed in the recent plane crash in New Guinea, was the first doctor to pinpoint the injury - the ball of his hip joint had crushed up into the socket - extremely painful but hard to detect.

Dr Canavan's operation gave him some relief, but he has ongoing problems. Sam, who was sports captain at Victory College and an avid young sportsman, is unable to ride his bike for more than a short period of time before he is in considerable pain.

He has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and expelled from two schools because of his inability to control his anger and frustration. His mother says it's unlikely he would pass "the physical" to enter the army, his career ambition before the bus crash.

Jada is convinced that if her son had been wearing a seatbelt, his injuries would likely have been minor.

"I really believe if they had been wearing seatbelts there would have been fewer injuries and Sam's injuries wouldn't have been so severe."

"I want to make something positive out of this," she said, adding that the push for seatbelts on buses seemed to have fizzled out in the mind of the government.

The trauma has certainly not faded from her mind.

"I'll often have a flash and see my kids tumbling through the air," she said.

Jada admits she has been affected adversely by the accident.

"We had just spent \$40,000 on a new car with all the latest safety features to protect our family, and then we put them on a bus with no seatbelts and they were involved in an accident."

Like Jada, Liz Keating is almost paralysed with fear when it comes to putting her five-year old daughter on the school bus. A head-on crash when she was just 22 left the 37-year-old Lower Wonga mum with head injuries and a subsequent disability.

She knows how easily a life can be shattered in a traffic smash.

The crash, which was not her fault, has left an indelible mark on her life. She has ongoing health problems and is on a disability pension and is desperate to protect her daughter.

"I really don't understand why it's not law for school buses to have seatbelts," Liz says.

"It's stupid that people pay all this money for airbags in cars but school buses don't have seatbelts."

"I'm so worried about it, I don't want Jasmine going to school on the bus and I can't afford to drive her."

Liz is considering sending Jasmine to another school.

"I might change her to Kilkivan because they have a small 12-seater bus with seatbelts."

As for Jada, she's well aware of how much money enforcing seatbelts would cost.

"How many lives need to be lost or turned upside down before something is done?

"Yes, it will be expensive, but tell me this, how much is the lives of our children worth? It really is simple; the law was brought in for cars, so why can't we do it for buses."

It is estimated that some one million Australian children travel to and from school in buses that do not have seatbelts fitted.

Jada is starting a petition for seatbelts to be mandatory on all school buses.

Submission to the

**School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee**

from the

**Isolated Children's Parents' Association  
of NSW Inc**



September 2011

Prepared by  
**Michael Davis**  
on behalf of the NSW Council  
of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association

**Meg Merrylees**  
Secretary ICPA – NSW

**David Cameron**  
President ICPA – NSW

## **Introduction**

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of New South Wales (ICPA-NSW) thanks the New South Wales Government for the opportunity to provide a representative for the School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee and for the opportunity to make this submission.

ICPA-NSW is very aware of the issues regarding bus safety as our organisation provided a representative for the School Bus Safety Working Group in 2004 and it has been an ongoing concern for our members who have children travelling long distances by bus to schools on rural roads.

ICPA-NSW is a volunteer parent group that lobbies for access to education for all geographically isolated students. School bus travel is a large part of rural and remote students' school life. Members still have the same concerns as expressed in the School Bus Safety Working Group Report of 2004: the lack of seat belts on buses; students standing on buses; buses that do not satisfy the Australian Design Rule (ADR) 59 relating to bus rollover strength and ADR 68 relating to seat, seat belt and bus frame strength; and buses travelling at 100km/hr alongside heavy vehicles with masses greater than sixty tonnes.

ICPA-NSW member families reside in the area of NSW that has bus routes with roads designated as being Environment 2 and Environment 3 (Appendix 1) in the National Guidelines for Risk Assessment of School Bus Safety Road Conditions. This report will make recommendations for buses traversing roads classified as Environment 2 or Environment 3.

## School Bus Safety Data and Information

ICPA-NSW deems it vital to have clear and concise information distributed to all members on the School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee. One of the main reasons for this committee is to assess the status of school bus safety in regional and rural NSW. To attain meaningful assessments the committee needs a comparison of bus statistics between urban NSW and regional and rural NSW on a per capita basis.

ICPA-NSW attended a meeting of the NSW School Bus Safety Advisory Community Advisory Committee held on 18/8/2011. At this meeting two graphs were presented by the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA). The first was a graph called External Environment of Buses – No. of Casualties v's Urbanization - a comparison between number of casualties and level of urbanization. The second graph was called Incidents by Urbanization and was a graph showing the number of incidents versus the level of urbanization. Both of these graphs need per capita comparisons to be relevant to the issue of bus safety on rural roads. This gap in information needs to be addressed by the RTA and Ministry of Transport (MoT).

The following is a list of information that is required to ascertain if there are any major deficiencies in bus safety in regional and rural NSW:

- The size and number of buses on Environment 2 and Environment 3 roads that satisfy the Certification Process as outlined on page 10 of the Draft National Code of Practice for Retrofitting Passenger Restraints to Buses June 2005 (Appendix 2)
- The size and number of buses on Environment 1 roads that satisfy the Certification Process as outlined on page 10 of the Draft National Code of Practice for Retrofitting Passenger Restraints to Buses June 2005
- The approximate cost per kilometre of running all classes of School Bus from MD1 to the largest ME bus
- The number and identification of Bus Routes on Environment 2 and Environment 3 roads that do not have mobile phone coverage along their entire length
- Why the number of students to start a bus run is 15, which requires a MD2 bus, when an MD1 bus has a maximum seating for 12 passengers. This implies that once the student number drops to 12 the bus contractor is left operating a bus bigger than needed and the MoT is carrying a MD2 contract.

## Safety Issues

The following is a list of major safety issues affecting ICPA-NSW family members.

- Light omnibuses, with a Gross Vehicle Mass (GVM) of less than five tonnes (MD1, 2, 3 and 4), share 100km/hr roads (Environment 2 and Environment 3) with heavy transport vehicles (GVM greater than 60 tonnes).
- Although MD1 and MD2 omnibuses (less than 3.5 tonnes) are required to have seatbelts, they do not have to comply with ADR 59 relating to roll over strength.
- That school students have to stand while on buses travelling at 80km/hr or greater on Environment 2 and Environment 3 bus routes.
- Limited or no mobile coverage on many Environment 2 and Environment 3 bus routes.
- That ADR 68 does not apply to all buses on Environment 2 and Environment 3 bus routes. ADR 68 applies to MD3, MD4 and ME buses governing the seat strength, seat anchorages, seat belt anchorages, seatbelts, child restraint anchorages and provision for protecting occupants from impact with seat backs and accessories on seats and armrests. It does not apply to the following buses; Route service buses; buses with less than 17 seats; buses in which all passengers' have a seat "Reference Height" of less than 1.0 metre.
- That ADR 59 does not apply to all buses on Environment 2 and Environment 3 bus routes. This rule relating to "roll over strength" applies to single-deck, rigid or articulated vehicles constructed for the carriage of more than 16 passengers, whether seated or standing, in addition to the driver and crew. ADR59 does not apply if the following percentages of the area of the upper surface of the floor measured between its 'Axles', is not more than 550 mm above the ground;

For a wheel base:	6.5 metres and over 75%
	Less than 6.5 metres 70%
	Less than 6.0 metres 65%
	Less than 5.5 metres 60%
	Less than 5.0 metres 55%
	Less than 4.5 metres 50%

The floor height of 550 mm is measured at the 'Suspension Height' corresponding to the 'Unladen Mass' of the vehicle.

## **Recommendations**

- That all light omnibuses (travelling on Environment 2 and Environment 3 roads) with the vehicle category MD1, MD2, MD3 and MD4 (GVM less than 5 tonnes) have to attain Level 6 Gold bus upgrade as outlined on page 10 of the Draft National Code of Practice for Retrofitting Passenger Restraints to Buses June 2005, ie comply with ADR 68 and ADR 59.
- All heavy omnibus category ME (GVM over 5 tonnes) travelling on Environment 2 and Environment 3 roads be upgraded to satisfy ADR68 and ADR59.
- All heavy omnibus ME (GVM over 5 tonnes) travelling on roads with speed limits 80km/hr or greater have lap sash seat belts fitted.
- Buses travelling on Environment 2 and Environment 3 roads, not covered by mobile phone coverage, are required to fit an Ultra High Frequency (UHF) radio.
- That all seat belts fitted to School Buses be lap sash or equivalent. It is shown that a lap seat belt compared to no seat belts provides no significant improvement in protection for children.
- That McConnell Educator 2/3 or seating of similar specifications to be fitted as deemed necessary by bus companies.
- That all black spot bus stops are identified and action taken to make such bus stops as safe as is physically possible.
- That the Ministry of Transport be willing to use financial inducements to activate any changes to Bus Safety as a result of any recommendations from the School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee.
- Upgrading of buses to satisfy ADR 68 and ADR 59 should be achieved through natural attrition (12 years for small buses and 30 years for large buses). If a local safety concern is highlighted then compliance should be as soon as possible.
- That the student numbers required to start a “Bus Run” be dropped from 15 to 12, so that it is in line with the capacity seating of an MD1 bus.

## **Conclusion**

ICPA-NSW welcomes the opportunity to have input into the School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee. It is positive that the NSW State Government has been proactive in forming this Committee. The better-informed committee members are, the greater benefit the Committee's advice can be. Accurate and relevant information for the Committee is the responsibility of the Ministry of Transport and the Roads and Traffic Authority; ICPA-NSW requests that these NSW State Authorities deliver any information requested by the Advisory Committee.

The Australian Design Rules remain the responsibility of the Federal Government. The New South Wales Government has set up the advisory committee so any recommendations will only apply to NSW and that problems relating to the coverage of laws relating to ADR 68 and ADR 59 will remain. This gap in regulatory coverage is of major concern to ICPA-NSW in resolving the recommendations listed in this submission.

ICPA-NSW is aware that its role on the School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee is to request enhanced bus safety in regional and rural NSW and it aims to ensure that regional and rural NSW does not have additional bus incidents per capita than urban areas of NSW as a result of policy inaction. If the statistical risk of bus incidents per capita in regional and rural areas is higher than urban areas, the NSW State Government must act to rectify the situation.

## Appendix 1

### National Guidelines for the Risk Assessment of School Bus Routes

<b><i>Environment 1</i></b>
Urban
High population density
Generally lower speed limits and vehicle speeds
Shorter journeys
<b><i>Consistent</i></b> road and road environment conditions (predominantly sealed roads)
<b><i>Consistent</i></b> traffic conditions (traffic is generally highly regulated and there are identifiable peak periods of slow, dense traffic)

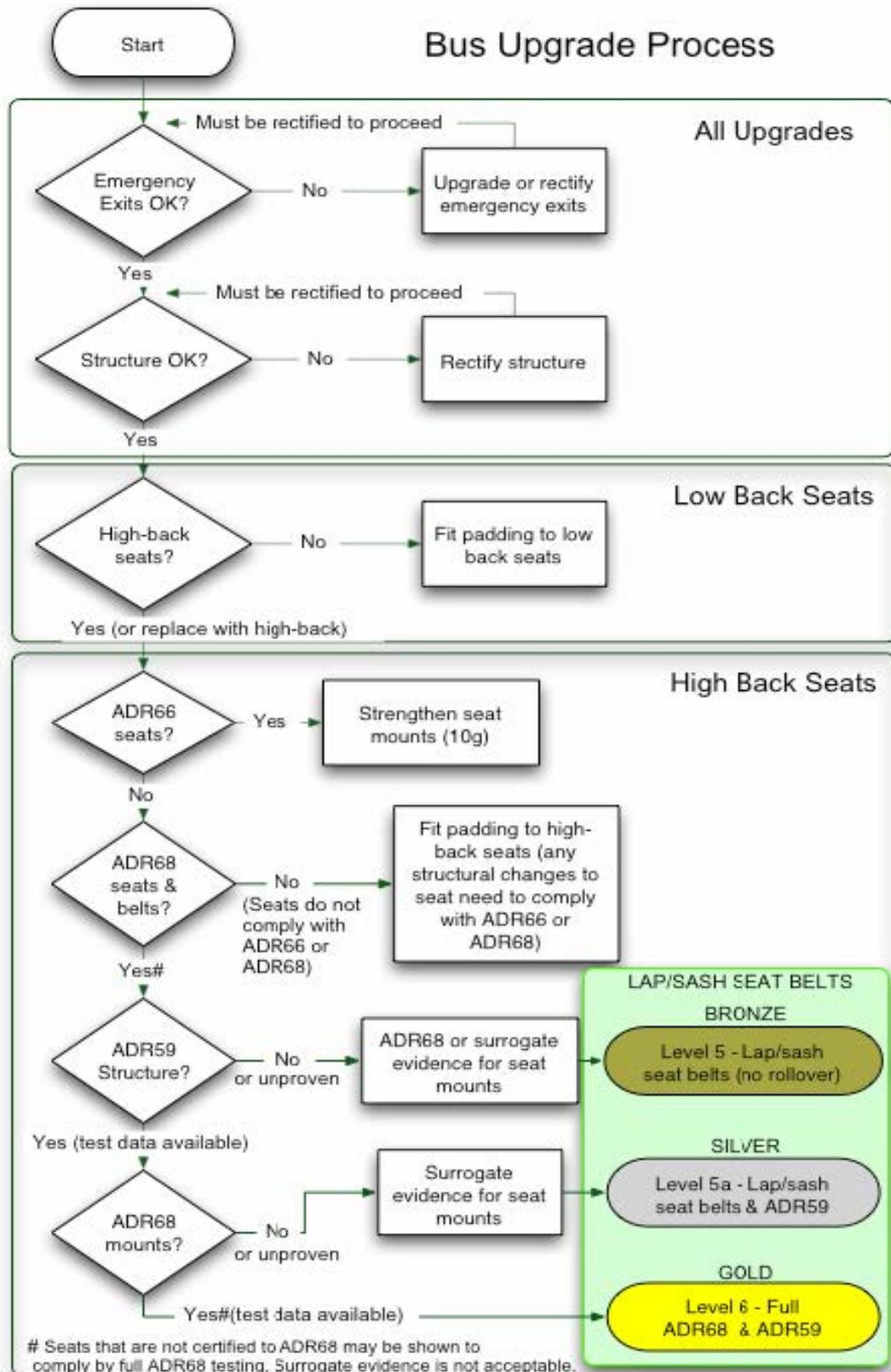
<b><i>Environment 2</i></b>
Non-urban
Lower population density
Higher speed limits (>70kph) and vehicle speeds
Longer journeys
<b><i>Variable</i></b> road and road environment conditions (for example, narrow, undivided unsealed roads; winding roads; roads with hazards such as livestock, wildlife, irrigation spraying or causeways; roadside hazards like trees close to the road; sandy desert roads)
<b><i>Variable</i></b> traffic conditions (for example, school bus routes are shared with heavy vehicles at higher speeds; freight routes; roads with heavy tourist traffic)

<b><i>Environment 3</i></b>
<b><i>Extreme</i></b> road or road environment conditions (for example, long steep or very steep roads, roads with precipitous drop offs).
<b><i>Extreme</i></b> traffic conditions (for example, non urban roads school buses share with a high volume of heavy vehicle traffic on narrow, undivided roads; open speed limited roads).
<b><i>Extreme</i></b> climate conditions (for example, fog, snow or ice for extended periods of the year).
Other identifiable high risk locations determined on a jurisdictional basis, for example blackspots.

## **Appendix 2**

***Draft National Code of Practice for Retrofitting Passenger Retraints to Buses (Page 10)***

### **2.1.5.2 Certification process**



Dear Ms Walsh,

I would like to raise your awareness about the school bus quality and safety between Valla and Urunga in the state of New South Wales.

I am a father of three and I am quite worried to see my children going on the Pacific highway at high speed on these old recycled buses (see bus registration MMO651 as an example).

The lack of seat belts in these antique buses does not seem to conform to the Australian security standards for public transportation, the hard back and cross metal bar of the seats is highly dangerous for kids in case of sudden braking or shock. Please also note that the driver is alone with all the children in the bus at high speed on the highway, and that the section between Valla and Urunga is one of the most deadliest area in NSW.

Our children deserve better and safer means of transportation with modern and decent buses to go to school.

Please advise.

Best regards,

Jean-Marc Barthe

Dear Ms Walsh

I am writing to you as a concerned parent of a child that catches the bus to and from school - Valla Beach to Urunga Primary.

I am concerned by several issues -

- the lack of seat-belts on the buses given that seatbelts have been mandatory for cars for many years now.

- Further, the roads in the area are notoriously dangerous, with many crashes (some fatal) occurring every year.

- children standing up as the bus travels at high speed on the highway

- Hard, low, steel backed chairs that could cause massive injuries given the above points.

I would ask that consideration be given to making the installation of seatbelts on all school buses mandatory, and that funding be put towards this.

Yours sincerely

Atalanta Lloyd-Haynes

Dear Carolyn,

It is appalling that the Safety on School Buses in Country NSW is not a higher priority for Seatbelts given the state of the Pacific Highway with WINDY and HILLY COUNTRY ROADS where school buses travel to the 100KM Speed limit. People who use Coaches for Holidays MUST wear seatbelts, Why is this not an option for our children?????

Rachel Borthwick

I am in Year 4 and go to Urunga Public School.

I travel on my school bus from Valla Beach to School and back and get scared because the road is so bendy and we don't have seatbelts to wear.. Please put seat belts in our buses .

Thank you  
From  
Phoebe.

Dear Carolyn,

We appreciate the opportunity to register our concerns to the Bus Safety Committee, our apologies that it is one day late as there was some confusion with Busways North Coast also asking for submissions with the same closing date .

We have three children, two who travel on Busways buses from Valla to Coffs Harbour Christian Community School (CHCCS) in Bonville and one who we drive from Valla to Urunga Public School.

Busways North Coast are proposing changes to their bus route for Coffs Harbour Christian Community School (Bus 8) which covers the pickup area from Macksville, Nambucca Heads, Valla and now want to include Urunga to its route. This is anticipated to be an additional 8 pickup/drop-off stops. Our understanding is that Bus 8 is already full with only a couple of spare seats – with additional pickups on the route to school and back, they are expecting our children to stand while the bus travels at 100klms per hour down the Pacific Highway – **THIS IS ABSOLUTELY UNACCEPTABLE!** We need absolute confirmation that our childrens' lives will not be put in danger by having to stand and that every child will be seated with safety restraints for buses travelling to and from school on the Pacific Highway.

Regarding our son who started at Urunga Public School this year. After realising that some of the home school buses were already full, we could not believe that infants and primary school children are sometimes required to stand on buses that are travelling at 100klms per hour down the Pacific Highway and without safety restraints for those sitting. These are small children who are daily exposed to the RISK of death or injury which is **ABSOLUTELY UNACCEPTABLE!** We have made the decision to drive our son to and from school to ensure his safety despite the financial burden of increasing petrol costs.

If we as parents were to get in our car with three unrestrained children we would be fined \$1118 and lose 18 licence points. Why so expensive?? **BECAUSE WE KNOW THAT SAFETY IS THE PRIORITY AND THAT SEAT BELTS SAVE LIVES!** The opening paragraph from the NSW RTA site regarding seatbelts states

“Since the introduction of compulsory seatbelt wearing throughout New South Wales in 1971, there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of motor vehicle occupants killed or injured each year. This applies to drivers and rear and front seat passengers alike. However, each year on average there are more than 80 people killed who were not wearing a seatbelt, and almost 600 people injured. These deaths and injuries could have been prevented if seatbelts had been used correctly. The risk to front seat occupants is also increased if the rear passengers are not restrained.”

We cannot afford to be complacent about this – it is common fact that we live on the worst section of the Pacific Highway where the occurrence of accidents resulting in death and serious injury are extremely high. **IT IS SIMPLY**

GROSS NEGLIGENCE to ignore the risks that our children are subjected to on a daily basis.

We need seatbelts and an assurance that no child will have to stand on our buses and look forward to your support in making this happen.

Regards,  
David and Linda Lang

Please let me add my voice about bus safety for children re seat belts and safe buses. If you lived where we do and saw the highway we must travel to get anywhere, you would want these safety changes...our children must travel this stretch of road twice a day. Please do something NOW,  
thankyou,  
Lucinda Lum

Submission to the  
**NSW School Bus Safety Community Advisory Committee**  
**20 September 2011**

From: Deborah Gorman

I wish to make this submission to your committee in light of the ever present need for safety measures on school buses in our state.

It would seem that NSW is sadly lagging behind our other states as far as taking safety on school buses seriously.

I am personally aware of the 10 years a small group of dedicated parents have taken out of their lives (some no longer even have school aged kids but have not given up) to have this matter taken on board by various government bodies and the many different people put into roles of responsibility for this matter. Each time it is passed on to someone else in Government they have had to put their submissions in again. Why has it taken this long?

It is now time to finalise this and get it happening.

I have spoken to the mother of a young girl who was a front seat passenger on a school bus that was involved in a rear collision with a car in which the driver of the car was killed. That little girl saved the life of a younger child who was sent flying down the centre aisle towards the windscreen.

These incidents (and there are many) are avoidable. I travelled recently on a bus to Sydney from Newcastle on major roads and was required, by law, to wear my seat belt at all times. How can this not be so for children travelling in buses on country roads at high speed?

Yours sincerely

Deborah Gorman

## Rural School Bus Safety Submission

By Rose-Marie Johnson

Many concerns regarding safety of my children in relation to catching rural buses to school have arisen in the decade since my first child began catching the bus for the 15km trip into town, in 2001. We live in a rural residential subdivision with a lot of traffic and so many children that there are a few high school buses as well as the primary one. The obvious concern is the lack of seatbelts. Another is the need to cross an arterial road, with speed limit 90kph, around the busiest time of day. Another is the importance of the design of the road where the bus pulls in. Also designing for the safe parking and turning of cars dropping off and picking up children. Another is the lack of a safe road verge to walk along on the way to and from the bus stop. Another is the way local councils manage road works in the vicinity of school bus stops.

Seatbelts are especially important on country routes since the speed limits are high (up to 100kph), country road conditions are generally poor and the risk of hitting a kangaroo, or braking sharply to avoid hitting one, is also high. My children have had a number of incidents where they were thrown from their seats with heavy braking and one lost a baby tooth when his head hit a handrail. Also, buses are passing many oncoming extra large heavy vehicles such as logging trucks, gravel trucks with trailers and stock transporters on narrow roads, with little clearance between them and at high relative speeds.

It would be good have a reduced speed limit near bus stops on arterial roads during the times when buses are scheduled. Of course this would vary for each bus stop depending on its distance from town. Currently the traffic has to slow while the bus is there with flashing lights, but the children need to wait for the bus to go in order to see that the road is clear to cross. It would be even better if the intersections at side streets where buses set down groups of children were designed so that the bus could pull into the side street, set down the children and turn to exit the street. This way it would be the whole, highly visible bus that's crossing the arterial road, not the more vulnerable children.

It would be good to have a specified standard for the width of the verge at an official bus stop, so that there is sufficient room for the bus to pull fully out of the stream of traffic and enough room left over for the children to disembark and stand back from the departing bus without the risk of falling in the roadside ditch. This became a problem at our local bus stop when the council widened the tarred part of the road so that it took up most of the gravel verge, leaving insufficient space for the bus to fully pull out of the lane of traffic and virtually no space for the children to disembark beside a deep ditch. Fortunately they rectified this when I pointed it out to them.

Especially where parents wait to pick up in the afternoon there needs to be enough space for cars to park away from the traffic where the children can safely get in. The drop off area also needs to allow for children to be dropped off safely. I needed to ask the council to block off the grass verge near the bus stop because one foolish parent in a four wheel drive was driving there, past bushes which blocked visibility right at the track where children walked. She twice almost hit my son who is half deaf and can't tell the direction of sounds.

On busy roads where children walk to the bus the verge should be wide enough for them to keep a safe distance from passing traffic, especially at culverts and curves.

It would be good to have a specified minimum standard for maintaining functionality of school bus stops during road works. An issue which I took the Palerang council to task about was conflicting use of the bus stop area during road works for a gravel dump, which left inadequate space for the children to safely walk, as well as for parking machinery which came and went whilst children were arriving. There was heavy machinery picking up gravel at the site during scheduled bus pick-up times, leaving only about a metre to spare for the children to skirt around to get to the bus shelter and the stairway down to the bus. Another problem during road works was the unsafe way the dirt was left mounded up at the side of the road for weeks, making a sharp hump over a foot high that the children had to climb over to embark (especially difficult for the little kids). Also, the slip lane for the bus was blocked so it had to pull out sharply into the stream of traffic. At another stop the surface was being retarred during the critical afternoon bus times, parents were blocked from driving down the street to the bus stop and the children were stranded beside the steaming tar truck which was stationed at the stop.