



Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

ACTION BUS SERVICES FOR SCHOOL-CHILDREN

Report No.11 of the Standing Committee on Urban Services

October 1998

Resolution of appointment

On 28 April 1998 the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory resolved to establish a general purpose standing committee, called the Standing Committee on Urban Services, to inquire into and report on:

planning and lease management, road and transport services, housing and housing assistance, government purchasing and public utilities purchasing, electricity industry and regulation, construction industry policy, parks and forests, private sector employment inspectorate, building services, environment, heritage and municipal services and any other matter under the responsibility of the portfolio minister.

Committee Membership

Mr Harold Hird MLA (Chair)

Mr Dave Rugendyke MLA (Deputy)

Mr Simon Corbell MLA (appointed on 25 June 1998, replacing Mr Wayne Berry MLA who was discharged on the same day)

Secretary: Mr Rod Power

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Recommendations

The committee recommends that:

in relation to school bus routes,

- a thorough review of school bus services be undertaken; that it closely involve the Departments of Education and Urban Services, together with the School Transport Liaison Committee; and that the review be reported to the Assembly. The review should examine (among other matters) the length of bus routes, their suitability, any problems with crowding, the proposed use of more articulated buses, and other specific problems raised during the course of this inquiry.
- the government give further consideration to the bus travel needs of students in the Gungahlin area.

in relation to the constitution of the advisory committee on school bus services,

- the School Transport Liaison Committee be provided with sufficient resources to operate on a regular basis with prompt follow-up of issues raised. Further, the committee should be expanded to include membership from ACT Roads and from students. The committee should be a forum in which specific operational issues can be raised and addressed.

in relation to the cost of school bus fares,

- Mr Corbell MLA: the proposed fare structure for students should not proceed until more detailed information is available to the Assembly about student travel patterns and other relevant matters.
- Mr Hird MLA and Mr Rugendyke MLA: the proposed fare structure for students should proceed, provided that the following adjustment is made for students who have a direct service over two zones. Instead of their fare increasing in one hit from the present 45c to \$1.20 (as is proposed), the increase should be brought in over a period of three years. In the first year, the fare would go from 45c to 75c; in the second year it would go from 75c to 90c; and in the third year it would reach parity with other fares across two zones, that is, \$1.20.
- the government should institute measures to ease the effect upon those existing students who travel by bus over two zones and whose families would be financially pressed by the increased fare. This is likely to mean that the present one-zone fare should be retained for these children whilever they remain at their present school
- no matter what the overall pricing system, students who need specialised schooling (such as students with disabilities) should pay the lowest fare.

in relation to the implication of traffic configurations around pick-up and drop-off points for school buses,

- the government should raise the priority given to problems identified by schools in relation to pick-up points and drop-off points. This would involve close liaison with the School Transport Liaison Committee. The government should identify, in next year's Draft Capital Works Program, appropriate measures to alleviate these problems in a program

extending, if necessary, over several years. The committee draws particular attention to long-standing problems at Daramalan College, St Clare's College and St Edmund's College.

REPORT BY THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON URBAN SERVICES INTO ACTION BUS SERVICES FOR SCHOOL-CHILDREN

1. The committee is pleased to present its report on ACTION bus services for school-children. The report is arranged in four sections as follows:

- resolutions of the Assembly;
- conduct of the inquiry;
- evidence; and
- recommendations.

Resolutions of the Assembly

2. There are two resolutions of the Assembly that are relevant to this inquiry. The first is the resolution of 20 May 1998 which effectively sets out the inquiry's terms of reference. The second is the resolution of 2 September 1998 which directed the government to retain the present fare structure until this committee's report has been considered by the Assembly. The full text of each resolution is set out in the following paragraphs.

3. The resolution of 20 May 1998 reads:

That the Standing Committee on Urban Services inquire into and report by Tuesday 27 October 1998 on ACTION bus services with particular reference to:

- (i) school bus routes;
- (ii) the constitution of the inter-agency advisory committee on school bus services;
- (iii) the cost of school bus fares;
- (iv) the implication of traffic configurations around pick-up and drop-off points for school buses;
- (v) any other related matter.

4. The resolution of 2 September 1998 reads:

That this Assembly:

(1) does not support the ACTION fare structure announced by the government in the 1998-99 Budget in relation to student fares;

(2) calls on the government to develop and introduce a new fare structure for students which removes the arbitrary zoning and applies the current one zone student fare to student travel throughout Canberra until the Standing Committee on Urban Services has reported on the inquiry into school bus services and that report has been considered by the Assembly.

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Conduct of the inquiry

5. The committee invited public comment on the terms of reference in advertisements placed in the *Canberra Times* (Saturday 20 June 1998), *Chronicle* and *Valley View* (23 June 1998).
6. In all, 27 submissions were received by the committee (and are listed in Appendix A). Each submission is summarised in the following section of the report.
7. On 10 September 1998 the committee conducted a public hearing during which the following organisations and persons addressed the committee:
 - *ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Association*: Mr Battersby (President) and Mr Evans (member of the executive of the Association);
 - *ACT Government - Department of Urban Services*: Mr MacDonald (manager of public transport) and ACTION: Mr Timbrell;
 - *Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools*: Mr Collins, Mr Chalmers, Ms Sellwood and Mr Gibbons;
 - *Copland College*: Mr Nimmo (student, and chair of the Board) and Ms Strauch (Principal);
 - *Dickson College*: Ms Coutts (Principal) and Ms Guy (Board);
 - Mr Pharaoh (student at Alfred Deakin High School);
 - *St Clare's College*: Ms Stevens (President, Parents & Friends Assoc);
 - *St Edmund's College*: Mr Dwyer (Headmaster) and Mr Purcell (director, student welfare); and
 - Mr Wilson (parent representative on the School Board of Lanyon High School);
8. The committee was pleased to welcome Mr Hargreaves MLA to the public hearing.
9. In mid-September 1998 members of the committee met informally with the government's consultant on ACTION (Mr Graham).
10. A second public hearing was held on 25 September 1998 when the following organisations appeared:
 - *Daramalan College* - Mr Fulton (principal), Mr Levy (president of Parents & Friends Assoc) and Mrs Tozer (chair of the Board); and
 - *Orana School* - Ms Nekvapil (administrator) and Mr Chalmers (member of the school Council).
11. The committee arranged for a transcript of the proceedings of the public hearings to be taken by *Hansard*. The report contains references to this Transcript.

Evidence

12. This section includes a summary of each submission, as well as references to supplementary information provided to the committee and to oral evidence obtained at the public hearings.¹ The material is listed in alphabetical order, with one exception. Because of its importance, the ACT Government's evidence is treated first.

13. The summary of submissions is intended as a guide to some important points made by each submitter - but it is not claimed to be exhaustive. All submissions were authorised for publication and are available from the Committee Office.

ACT Government

14. The government's aim is said to be: 'to ensure that as far as possible all students have access to a bus service(s) which enable them to travel to and from school in a reasonable time, at an affordable price and at times which are in line with the school's advertised commencement and finish times'.²

15. The submission quotes from the Graham review (1997): 'The current flat fare system with forced transfers [in relation to student travel] be abandoned and replaced by a more equitable system; one that does not erode ACTION's required levels of revenue, but more equitably apportions ticket prices according to the distance travelled'.

16. The proposed structure is 'designed to ensure that those customers who travel similar distances pay around the same price'. It includes a system of free transfers.

17. The submission states that the existing community service obligation [CSO] 'for school services is \$10.045m pa'. It adds: 'The government has decided that the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Commission should investigate and determine future prices for ACTION services. It is expected that the Commissioner will table his draft report in February 1999 for public consultation. The results of the inquiry will assist the Department to more accurately cost and determine CSO funding, including payments for school services'.

18. The submission also states:

- 18,000 students use ACTION bus services to and/or from school; and '50% of students travel on regular route buses and the other half on dedicated school buses... There are 370 dedicated school services provided in Canberra by ACTION of which 141 services are provided in the morning peak and 229 in the afternoon';
- the proposed student fare is 35% of the adult fare (up from the existing 25%);
- the proposed fare structure 'will have different impacts for different students. Students who currently catch two buses and travel within a zone will pay \$0.60, a reduction of \$0.30;
 - students who currently catch two buses and travel two zones will pay \$1.20 rather than \$0.90, an increase of \$0.30;
 - students who currently catch three buses and travel two or more zones will pay \$1.20 rather than \$1.35, a reduction of \$0.15; [and]
 - students who have a direct service over two zones... will pay \$1.20 rather than \$0.45, an increase of \$0.75.

¹ Quotations that are not footnoted are taken from the particular submission being summarised.

² Submission dated 7/8/98

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[Further,] students travelling to their local school (or within one zone) will have a reduced cost per term ticket, from \$68 to \$45'.

19. DUS subsequently provided greater detail about the impact of the proposed fares: 'Peak demand for school transport services is around 21,080 per day with 9,034 journeys undertaken in the morning and 12,046 in the afternoon... Based on peak demand, it is estimated that the proposed fare structure will have the following impact:

- 10,962 students (52%) will have a 15c increase from 45c to 60c (this reflects the lifting of the fare from 25% to 35% of the adult fare);
- 2,319 students (11%) will have a 75c increase from 45c to \$1.20 - a single bus travelling out of zone;
- 2,951 students (14%) will pay 30c more, from 90c to \$1.20 - a two bus journey travelling in two zones;
- 3,794 students (18%) will pay 30c less, from 90c to 60c - a two bus journey travelling within one zone;
- 422 students (2%) will pay 75c less, from \$1.35 to 60c - a three bus journey travelling within one zone; and
- 632 students (3%) will pay 15c less, from \$1.35 to \$1.20 - a three bus journey travelling in two zones.³

20. In response to a question about possibly introducing a flat fare structure for students (that is, the same fare to be paid by a student no matter where he or she travelled in Canberra to attend school), DUS stated that the fare would need to be about 80c if it was to produce 'a budget-neutral outcome for the government'.⁴

21. DUS provided the following information about bus costs:

- 'each bus costs \$21,000pa in depreciation and interest. This is \$105 per school day';
- 'a driver costs \$35 per driving hour';
- 'operating costs are 60c per kilometre'; and
- the Route 872 bus service from Tuggeranong to the Grammar schools, St Edmund's and St Clare's takes 105 minutes each morning, travels 62 kms from depot to depot, costs \$151.25 and obtains revenue of \$19.80.⁵

22. In relation to consultation issues, the government submission states:

- there is 'close consultation' with the Department of Education, the Catholic Education Office and the Independent Schools Association; and that 'any issues which cannot be satisfactorily resolved area addressed at the School Transport Liaison Committee'. Also, 'consultation by ACTION is carried out with schools' representative bodies, with individual schools and with parents direct';
- the School Transport Liaison Committee comprises the Department of Education, Catholic Education Office, Association of Independent Schools of the ACT Inc., ACT Council of

³ Supplementary information dated 25/9/98

⁴ Transcript of the public hearing on 10/9/98

⁵ Supplementary information provided by government officials at the public hearing on 10/9/98

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Parent & Citizens Associations, Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools, ACTION and DUS.

- the committee's role is 'to provide advice to DUS on (a) the transport needs of ACT schools; and (b) information and guidance on the policy and planning for government funded school transport';
- the committee has met six times since July 1997 and aims to meet 'at least four times a year'.⁶

23. DUS told the committee that it is 'concerned that members [of the School Transport Liaison Committee] are not bringing [their] concerns [about pick-up and drop-off points]. That is really their role quite clearly in the committee context to bring it along. I am not sure why but what we are proposing to do is to bring a person from Traffic and Transport and make them part of the committee so that might encourage people to bring those concerns about traffic congestion to the meeting knowing that there is a channel within the department to actually address them'.⁷

24. The government submission notes that it is proposed to make ACT Roads (part of DUS) a member of the Liaison Committee. Also, the submission notes a suggestion that each committee meeting should include a session 'for members to report on feedback from schools... in relation to policy deficiencies'. However, the submission also adds: 'specific operation questions should be addressed directly to the service provider'.

25. In relation to traffic configurations, the submission states: 'In future where traffic management problems are identified, it is proposed that the Department meet with the relevant school principal and P&C body if necessary and then undertake an investigation based on the outcomes of the meeting'. In addition, 'the AFP is considering the introduction of a voluntary school warden scheme...' Further, 'the use of more articulated buses may limit the number of buses that can enter school properties and [hence] increase the need to park on the road'.

ACT Council of Parent & Citizens Associations Inc.

26. The ACT Council of Parent & Citizens Associations Inc. [P&C] submits that government funds should not be spent on subsidising travel to out-of-area schools.⁸

27. The P&C states: 'If a student is going to her/his nearest [government] school... then it is unfair and arbitrary to regard that student as crossing a bus-zone boundary'. This may occur in the case of students from Lyons attending Alfred Deakin High School, and students from parts of Gungahlin attending Lyneham High School.

28. The P&C considers that, if bus zones are introduced, 'they should coincide with the priority enrolment areas for schools'. The P&C states that the government's system of bus zoning 'must not be in conflict' with the priority zoning 'for schooling'. The P&C insists that 'those people who are using their local school [should] not subsidise those people' who are using schools outside their local area.⁹

29. The P&C expresses concern at the inequitable treatment of Gungahlin travellers, whether students or not, and recommends that 'all townships must be treated, in their relationship with their adjoining townships, as Belconnen and Woden, respectively, are treated in relation to Civic'.

⁶ Transcript of the public hearing on 10/9/98

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ Submission dated 4/9/98

⁹ Transcript of the public hearing on 10/9/98

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30. The P&C points out that students attending specialist schools (such as students with some form of disability) should not be regarded 'as passing a bus-zone boundary'.

31. In relation to an advisory body, the P&C recommends that an advisory body be established by statute 'to monitor literature relating to school bus safety, to analyse incidents which arise, and to recommend improvements'.

Alfred Deakin High School

32. Alfred Deakin High School submits that:¹⁰

- it has 'traditionally maintained a high 'out of area' enrolment. Approximately 230 students (40% of the student population) live in areas of Woden, Weston Creek and the Tuggeranong Valley that form the South Zone';
- the school is located 'on the southern boundary of the Central Zone... [so] these students will, under the new arrangements, be required to purchase "all zone tickets" even though many of these students are travelling relatively short distances. For these students using fare-saver tickets, the school fare will increase by a staggering 167% from \$0.45 to \$1.70. Even if school term tickets are used, there is a 32% increase from \$68 to \$90 for these students. Under any measure such increases would appear to be totally unwarranted';
- 'for the 40 students who live in Lyons (a suburb in our priority enrolment area) there will be significant disadvantage under the proposed arrangements merely because their suburb falls on the wrong side of the arbitrarily drawn zonal boundaries';
- 'the school bus fare should be set at the Faresaver One Zone rate of \$0.60 per journey irrespective of the distance travelled. This still represents a substantial 33% increase in single journey fares... [The] reduction of school term tickets to \$45 [would serve] as an incentive for families to pre-purchase their ticket for the term';
- 'keeping school fares at a reasonable level will encourage students to utilise these services. After all, they are the adult passengers of the future'.

Association of Independent Schools of the ACT Incorporated

33. The Association of Independent Schools of the ACT Incorporated states that:¹¹

- 'Almost 36% of total primary and secondary enrolment in the ACT are found in non-government schools, ie over 21,000 out of 61,000 students';
- most of these schools 'have an enrolment body in excess of 1000 students';
- the ACT's population cannot support 'suburban [or] locality focussed' independent schools, resulting in 'many one-off independent schools' such as the Steiner school, the Uniting Church school and the single-sex schools.

34. The Association is concerned that the proposed fare structure would act as an 'impediment' in the way of the community exercising 'its right of choice to education'. Further, the Association is concerned 'that school start and finish times have had to change because of ACTION's scheduling of school buses'.

35. Another concern is that 'in recent years, the length of school runs have become longer as the number of services have declined and the number of suburbs increased'. This

¹⁰ Submission dated 7/8/98

¹¹ Submission dated 15/9/98

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means that some school runs are an hour long. The proposed new system 'is likely to exacerbate the situation as more articulated buses will be put into use'.

36. The Association also is concerned about ACTION's data base: 'despite an automated ticketing system, information regarding numbers on school services, travel patterns, ticket usage and so on is either not available or its accuracy is questionable'.

37. In relation to the School Transport Liaison Committee, the Association considers it has not been operating as an advisory body but is 'wholly a forum whereby ACTION informed the members of its actions'. While things have improved since the Committee is serviced by DUS rather than by ACTION, 'information is not available in a timely manner or in such a way that the members are able to contribute constructively'. An example is that members were not asked to comment on the proposed fare system.

38. The Association recommends that the liaison committee should 'have an agreed terms of reference by which it operates and the responsibilities this then creates. It should also set guidelines on the type and timing of information it requires to provide advice to the Minister...'

39. In relation to bus fares, the Association states that 'students having to travel to school via route buses should not be disadvantaged because dedicated buses are not available to them'. The Association understands that 'a dedicated school run contained a number of cost savings not necessarily available to route buses'. Further, the Association considers that a new fare structure should wait until the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Commission reports on a pricing structure in February 1999. In addition, the Association 'believes it unequitable that fares relating to school students only were changed and increased'.

40. In relation to traffic configurations around pick-up and drop-off points, the Association 'is concerned that little provision has been made for buses to be accommodated safely and appropriately at the street site..., [meaning that] school car parks' are often used by buses. The Association does not favour student travelling through bus interchanges.

Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools Inc

41. The Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools Inc. [APFACTS] submits that 'the proposed student fare increases of 17.7% (\$351,000) take no account of the schooling opportunities and bus travel patterns of a substantial proportion of school students; and the fare increase, of between \$180 and \$300pa for between 2,000 and 2,500 students who use a direct bus to school and are now regarded as travelling in two zones, is exploitative, discriminatory and greatly restrict choice in the non-government school sector - it is an increase that alone could raise between \$360,000 and \$750,000pa'.¹²

42. APFACTS considers that the government should defer any decision on student fares until the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Commission reports on future pricing for ACTION in February 1999.

43. APFACTS states that 'in terms of non-government schooling, in most instances the three-zone system advantages people in the central [zone], and disadvantages people who live in the northern or southern zones. There are very limited secondary school choices in these zones, eg Catholic Yr 11 to 12 education is not offered in the northern zone'.

44. In relation to consultation, the Association states: 'The Schools Transport Liaison Committee, on which APFACTS is represented, provides an avenue for parent participation in school bus policy. However, parent representation on the committee is not always recognised. Unfortunately, the committee is used more as a forum for de-briefing interested parties, than as a vehicle for providing input into the policy making process. This limits its effectiveness'. The Association adds: 'No meetings of parents of students in non-government

¹² Submission dated 31/8/98

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schools were organised by ACTION to specifically consider the likely impact of the new zone arrangement on dedicated school buses’.

45. Further, APFACTS expresses concern ‘that information from DUS may not have been sufficient to alert the Department of Education to the fact that the three-zone system was likely to increase student fares overall, and have a severe adverse effect on many non-government school students’.

46. The Association states that it ‘has informally sought information on the number of school buses that service one school, two schools and more than two schools [but] this information does not appear to be readily available’. Also, it has sought information - again, unsuccessfully - about ‘the distribution of school bus journey by numbers of passengers carried’.

47. A representative of APFACTS told the committee: ‘We have evidence... [that] the availability or not of school buses does actually change behaviour and change the way in which the enrolments of the school move. I believe [that]... unless the extra research is done on the actual treatment of the school children, how they behave, how their parents move them around the system, you are not going to get the appropriate sort of answer to how the fare structure should be and how the bus system should be... Broad models may be okay for the whole bus system, they do not address the affect on individual schools’.¹³

48. In relation to safety, APFACTS is concerned about ‘crowding on buses, congestion at pick-up and drop-off points, arrival and departure time problems, behaviour at bus interchanges and behaviour on buses’. The Association states ‘there is a woeful lack of proper design at pick-up and set-down points... [and] many of the congestion problems have gone unresolved for many years’. The Association instanced problems at Daramalan, St Clare’s and St Edmund’s. Further, APFACTS considers congestion problems will worsen if the proposed fare structure is introduced because ‘there will be greater use of articulated buses and a greater number of parents are likely to drop off students at school to minimise the impact of new student fares’.

49. In relation to school bus routes, APFACTS is concerned about ‘the length of services and the advertising of routes’. It would like ACTION to resume its former practice of advertising school bus routes in newspapers and provide schools, especially large schools, with information about routes ‘in a more discrete geographical context, preferably with the use of separate maps for morning and afternoon services’.

50. In addition, APFACTS points out that ‘movement to split shifts [by ACTION] would greatly decrease the cost of providing direct school bus services’. The Association comments on a 1985 finding by the Auditor General that ACTION included ‘dead running’ costs in its calculation of the total costs of school services and ‘that the total number of hours charged included school holidays when school buses were not running’.

51. Further, APFACTS states that the statistical basis for ACTION’s figures on school patronage relate to ‘a sample of 833 students... who travelled to and from school in November 1996. Not only is this information somewhat dated but it also relates to a month [in which] most Yr 11 and 12 students are doing exams’. The Association considers that ACTION does not use any ‘consistent methodology’, as shown by three different estimates of student travel (31,500 students, 18,500 students and 22,000 students).

¹³ Transcript of the public hearing on 10/9/98

Bonython Primary School

52. Bonython Primary School drew the committee's attention to the request by eight families, with students at the school, for 'a bus service for their school age children after school hours'.¹⁴

Catholic Education Office (Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn)

53. The Catholic Education Office (Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn) submits that: 'The proposed changes to school bus services are extremely discriminatory in nature as fare increases of between 100% and 167% will have the greatest impact on students who attend Catholic and other non-government schools. Between 50% and 78% of students from the northern and southern zones who will seek Catholic College education in the four Catholic Colleges of the Central Zone will be forced to pay substantial fare increases of 167% as they will be subjected to travel across two zones'.¹⁵

54. The Catholic Education Office states that '26.7% of ACT students attend Catholic schools'.

55. The Education Office expresses doubt about the linkage between ACTION costs and distance travelled by buses. It also is concerned that 'the methodology used to cost the provision of dedicated school bus services and provide a basis for sound financial planning is not rigorous.

56. The Catholic Education Office recommends 'that a single fare system for students should be considered. Given better and accurate data collected by ACTION and DUS it should be feasible to quantify a single fare that meets the projected revenue target of \$2.3m. It is believed that a single fare of 50-55c based on 22,000 students over 2,000 days travel, would enable this target to be attained'.

57. The Education Office considers that 'serious safety considerations will arise if parents seek to avoid these massive cost increases by transporting children to zone boundaries, to interchanges or directly to schools'. The Office notes: 'Two schools most adversely affected by the proposed changes are St Edmund's College and St Clare's College in the central zone. These are schools already subjected to dangerous levels of congestion with attendant potential accident risk. Another school affected by congestion at pick-up and drop-off points is Sts Peter & Paul Primary School, Garran, with Yamba Drive being a significant problem'.

58. In relation to consultation issues, the Education Office quotes the terms of reference the School Transport Liaison Committee (amended in 1997) which include: to 'provide feedback on the implementation of the new network and impact of the introduction of zone-based fares'. But, says the Office, no such consultation took place: 'The last meeting of the Committee was held on April 6, 1998. At that time, information on the proposal was not available and no details were communicated to or discussed with that committee'. Further, 'no minutes of [that] meeting have yet been distributed'.

Ms Child

59. Ms Child submits that 'seat belts should be fitted' to all school buses 'and only as many children taken on a bus as there are seats'.¹⁶

Copland College

¹⁴ Submission dated 7/8/98

¹⁵ Submission dated 24/8/98

¹⁶ Submission dated 22/8/98

60. Copland College states that 'public transport to Copland College is of such a quality as to be a critical factor in the decline of student enrolments'. The poor quality relates to 'long waits at the Belconnen interchange between services, crowding on many school buses, and difficulties with afternoon departure times from the College'.¹⁷

61. The College states that 'Gungahlin is a feeder area' but these students 'have to go to Belconnen Mall and then catch a second bus'. The College requests a direct bus for Gungahlin students.

62. The College also points out that, although 'Latham, Macgregor and Dunlop are in Copland's Priority Enrolment Area...', students have to catch two, and in some cases three, buses to return home after College'.

Daramalan College

63. Daramalan College estimates that 787 students (out of 1,332 students) will be affected by the proposed fare structure.¹⁸ Students from Gungahlin will be particularly affected. It is possible that the proposed fare structure will lead parents to choose schools other than Daramalan.

64. Further, Daramalan College expressed concern about the traffic problems in its vicinity: 'We have a difficulty [about] where parents could drop students off in a safe position, and then in Morphett Street we have [a] difficulty as to where buses are able to pull aside. We would be very grateful if the issue of lay-bys for buses could be looked at once again...'¹⁹

Dickson College

65. Dickson College objects to the effect of the proposed fare structure on 'the 94 students who are currently enrolled at [the] College and who live in the newly designated North Zone... [They will pay] double the amount' they presently pay each day. The proposed fares will particularly affect College students who live at Gungahlin, which 'is a designated priority enrolment area for Dickson College'.²⁰

Dickson College School Board

66. Dickson College School Board reiterates the above concerns: 'Under the new system, students from the Gungahlin area who wish to enrol at Dickson College will be required to pay twice as much in fares as students travelling to either of the other alternative public colleges'. The Board adds: 'By charging double fares for Dickson College students, ACTION is challenging the [Department of Education's] Priority Enrolment Area policy. The problem would not arise if ACTION were to acknowledge that a very large number of Gungahlin residents commute to Civic... [meaning that] Gungahlin would have to be zoned with the adjacent Central District...'²¹

67. The Board also states: 'ACTION appears to indulge in unacceptable discretionary provision for buses, eg ACTION provides a bus for Gungahlin students travelling to the Catholic school opposite Dickson College but refuses to provide a parallel bus for Dickson College students. In addition, Dickson College students are not allowed to utilise the service provided for the Catholic students.'

Mr Dwyer

¹⁷ Submission dated 7/8/98

¹⁸ Transcript of the public hearing on 25/9/98

¹⁹ *ibid*

²⁰ Submission dated 6/8/98

²¹ Submission dated 6/8/98

68. Mr Dwyer (Evatt) expresses concern about 'scrapping the weekly ticket [and lack of information about the future] of the adult off-peak daily ticket'. He states: 'Scrapping the weekly ticket means that travel by bus for a given seven day period increases from \$29 to at least \$34. This represents an increase of at least 17.2% and feels like revenue-raising by stealth'. Also, he states that 'the adult off-peak daily allowed very economical travel in off-peak periods and at the weekend'.²²

Ms Firth

69. Ms Firth states that her daughter's fare will increase by 167% under the new arrangements (for travel from Wanniasa to St Clare's College) whereas 'adult monthly tickets [will increase] by 0.9% [and] a daily ticket [will] increase by 4.5%. Surely an even increase across all users would be fair.' She states that she and her neighbours are likely to pool 'our resources and drive the girls to and from school'. She suggests that: 'If the zonal system was dropped [her daughter] would pay only \$6.00 per week, a mere 33.3% increase. Far more acceptable'.²³

Garran Primary School Board

70. Garran Primary School Board recommends 'that children travelling on designated school buses, particularly when no transfer is required, should only be required to pay for one fare'.²⁴

Ms Guy

71. Ms Guy objects to the inequitable treatment of Gungahlin residents, who will be 'double charged' under the new arrangements when they travel by ACTION bus to the city. She calls for improved, more qualified management of ACTION.²⁵

Ms Jackson

72. Ms Jackson (a resident of Palmerston) stated that she would cease to use ACTION if the proposed fares are brought in, because they are too costly. She works in Braddon and pays almost \$800pa to travel by bus to Braddon. The new fare structure increases her bus costs 'by a minimum of \$500pa'. She notes that it will cost \$2.00 to travel from Hughes to Dickson 'while a resident of Palmerston, living closer to Dickson, must pay \$4.00'. she considers that the zonal system is unwarranted but if a distinction must be made, she suggests a '\$2.00 inter-neighbourhood fare, and \$1.50 intra-neighbourhood fare'.²⁶

Mr Kendal

73. Mr Kendal (Monash) states that 'young people of school age should be encouraged to use public transport... the recent emphasis in fare regimes to recover all costs as much as possible should not be extended to this category of traveller. Experience has proven that long-standing NSW policy for free travel to school has been highly successful.' He would like the committee to recommend 'in principle support for free or subsidised travel for school-children to and from school and seek the development of an appropriate study as to the fiscal implications of this approach. The study should be published and comments sought from the public'.²⁷

²² Submission dated 24/6/98

²³ Submission dated 6/8/98

²⁴ Submission dated 7/8/98

²⁵ Submission dated 5/8/98

²⁶ Submission dated 4/8/98

²⁷ Submission dated 20/6/98

Lanyon High School Board

74. Lanyon High School Board is concerned that the proposed timetable will mean that 'all buses servicing the Lanyon Valley... will commence and cease at the Lanyon Marketplace' whereas it would be preferable if those buses 'commence and cease at Lanyon High School'. This would mean that 'special school buses would not be necessary to transport students each morning and afternoon'.²⁸

Orana School for Rudolf Steiner Education

75. Orana School for Rudolf Steiner Education expresses 'deep concern' at the proposed changes for reasons that include the following:²⁹

- the school's philosophy places a premium on a child's environment and this includes 'how the child gets to and from school';
- the school 'draws on a wide catchment (one of the reasons for its location in a central area)';
- '146 students come to Orana from the Central Zone. All will pay the two Zone bus fare under the new proposed scheme';
- 'currently Ainslie is the most popular suburb for Orana families, in part because of the effectiveness of the school bus in servicing this suburb';
- 'Because the Northern Zone has no direct bus service and is a significant distance, the number of students from this zone has dwindled over the last five years to ten students. Families have tended to move closer to the school, or out of Canberra (NSW students have free bus transport to Orana)';
- 'There are now 126 students in the Southern Zone, with no dedicated school bus';
- 'Safety on access roads and at drop-off points is an increasing issue. Any change in bus arrangements which may increase the traffic density and thus the chance of motor accidents through increased congestion is of particular concern to parents';
- 'Orana's location, at the edge of two zones but outside a town centre, provides the right environment for a school, but results in totally inappropriate travel structures under [the] proposed system. The only dedicated school buses available, even for children quite near to the school, involve two-Zone travel';
- 'Orana has shown that well located and thought-out, dedicated bus routes do attract student passengers and do increase the number of families in the area serviced by the route over time. Likewise, poor routing, high costs and unsafe locations will result in poorer utilisation'.

76. Orana School recommended that, 'if the proposal is to be retained, Orana be considered to form part of a shared Zone encompassing the public facilities in this area'. Also, the School requested 'an extra, dedicated school bus from the Tuggeranong/Weston Creek area to Orana'. Lastly, the School suggested that the proposed fare structure be replaced by 'a single 50c bus fare for all dedicated school buses. This system would be fairer overall, more in keeping with the government's policy of providing equity and choice in schooling and significantly less costly to operate'.³⁰

²⁸ Submission dated 10/7/98

²⁹ Submission dated 21/9/98

³⁰ *ibid*

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77. In oral testimony, Orana School stated that 'a lot of the issues [about] school bus travel problems are the result... of not having enough consultation...'.³¹

Mr Pharaoh

78. Mr Pharaoh (a student at Alfred Deakin High School) expressed concern about the lack of interest shown in the past by the Department of Education in problems of bus transport to Alfred Deakin High School.³² He states that the department, 'behind our backs, had requested that ACTION not run public school buses past other public schools, effectively meaning [that Alfred Deakin High School] could not get buses into Tuggeranong. This policy... meant that there was no competition between public schools, it meant you would go where you were told. This in itself is wrong... In these days of competition policy, a number of students and their parents are voting with their feet by choosing out-of-area schools. For the Department of Education to restrict and limit choice, this must be rejected'.

79. Mr Pharaoh suggests that a student representative be added to the liaison committee.

Ms Reid

80. Ms Reid (Macarthur) is concerned about the Route 545 bus service to Fadden Primary School and Isabella Plains campus of Mary McKillop College. This service drops children at Fadden School '40 minutes before school commences' yet, in Ms Reid's case, she lives only 'five minutes away from the school'. The bus then continues to Mary McKillop College 'in line with the 9.00am commencement time for the older students' at that College. She states that 'in previous years as many as 25 children from Fadden Primary School used the morning bus service. Now only as few as four to six children use the service. I believe this drop in numbers is directly related to the earlier pick-up time'.³³

St Clare's College

81. St Clare's College has 1,170 students, '856 of them come from the southern zone and 14 come from the northern zone, so that amounts to nearly 80% of our girls are out of zone'. Their fares will increase from 45c to \$1.20 and so the girls will be 'severely affected'. The College noted that 'there is no girls-only school in the southern zone [so] the school needs special consideration'. Further, 'many of the girls are locked in now, they are in Years 7-9, and they are locked in for the period of junior... school and the sudden dramatic increase would have been quite drastic...'.³⁴

82. A representative of the College's Parents and Friends Association acknowledged 'that fares will have to go up... [but] it was the 167% increase from one term to the next that we could not quite stomach'.³⁵

St Edmund's College

83. St Edmund's College states that its students come from all over the ACT as well as surrounding NSW: 'Currently, some 230 of our students receive free bus travel, because they live in NSW'.³⁶

³¹ Transcript of the public hearing on 25/9/98

³² Submission presented to the committee at the public hearing on 10/9/98

³³ Submission dated 7/7/98

³⁴ Transcript of the public hearing on 10/9/98

³⁵ *ibid*

³⁶ Submission dated 14/8/98

ACTION bus services for school-children

84. The College states that parents choose to enrol their children at St Edmund's because they prefer the school's philosophy and pastoral care, as well as preferring a single sex boys school.

85. The College estimates 'the increase in bus fares could add a further \$1500 to [the] annual outlay' of parents with children at both St Edmund's and St Clare's Colleges. Further, the College states that 'none of the families can readily absorb a 167% increase in ACTION bus fares as the price of freedom of choice in education when it is based on the arbitrary drawing of a line on a map'. The College estimates 'that 82% of our students and their families will be affected by the increase... [so] the introduction of the new fares will cause serious hardship to a large number of our families'.

86. The College submitted that 846 students at St Clare's College would be affected by the proposed zonal fare structure in that they reside in the south zone.

87. The College states that 'if these fare and zoning proposals are implemented, parents are faced with only one option if they continue having their sons remain at [the] College. This will involve driving them to school. The increased density of traffic and the safety issues at drop-off points are matters a responsible government could not lightly dismiss.' The school considers the present traffic arrangements are 'really an accident waiting to happen'.³⁷

88. The College concludes: 'We believe that the new fare structure is directed entirely towards solving declining income for ACTION'. In response to a question about a better fare structure, the College stated that it would prefer just one zone. The College acknowledged some increase may be justified but only 'a reasonable amount': perhaps 'in the order of 50c or 60c per ride' (up from the present 45c).³⁸

St Monica's Primary School Parents and Friends Assoc

89. St Monica's Primary School Parents and Friends Assoc. calls upon the government 'to abandon the new system of bus fares'. The Association states that the proposed fares are not 'based on paying for the distance you travel', as claimed by the government. The Association cites the case of a student 'who travels from Giralang to St Francis Xavier, Florey, having to pay a multi-zone ticket, whereas that same student could travel from Giralang to St Edmunds in Griffith or to Marist College in Pearce on a single zone ticket (destinations two or three times further away)'.³⁹

90. The Association expresses concern that 'fares are being decreased for travel within a zone at the same time as they are being increased for travel outside'. This acts to the advantage of local area schools.

91. The Association 'accepts that some differential in fares to reflect longer distances travelled is appropriate. However, the extent of any differential should be much less than the present glaring disparities between single zones and multi-zones, and be based on distance travelled rather than on whether one happens to cross from one bus zone into another'.

³⁷ Transcript of the public hearing on 10/9/98

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ Submission dated 25/8/98

St Thomas Aquinas P&F Association

92. St Thomas Aquinas P&F Association is concerned about:

- 'the morning bus arrives at the school approximately 8.30am to 8.40am which is up to 50 minutes prior to the time that classes commence';
- 'the morning and afternoon buses do not run the same route. The morning route allows only about four children to catch the bus to school while the afternoon route allows around 32 children to catch the bus home'; and
- 'the increase in bus fares will mean that many parents will... search for an alternative...'⁴⁰

St Thomas Aquinas Primary School Board

93. St Thomas Aquinas Primary School Board is concerned about:

- the early arrival of the morning school bus before teacher supervision commences;
- the morning bus should be re-routed to include Flynn and Fraser (which are served by the afternoon bus); and
- 'The lack of provision of Catholic education in the Belconnen area for the senior years of Years 11 and 12 necessitates that parents and students wishing to exercise their right of choice are forced to travel out of area. The ACT Government is thus cruelly discriminating against such families...'⁴¹

Mrs Walczuk

94. Mrs Walczuk (Wanniassa) is concerned about the increase in bus fares for her daughter attending St Clare's College. She also expresses concern about crowding on the school bus and its regular lateness in getting her daughter to school.⁴²

D&K Westmore

95. D&K Westmore object to the proposed fare increase for students travelling across zones. They will pay \$30 per week as against the present charge of \$15.00 per week; and 'the mere thought of having to find this much extra money per week scares me'. Their children 'are happy at their schools and it is unfair to have to consider moving them'.⁴³

Recommendations

96. This section addresses each of the terms of reference for the committee's inquiry.

97. In relation to school bus routes, the committee considers that sufficient community concern exists to warrant a careful review of the bus routes to ensure that, to the maximum extent possible, they provide a convenient service to students. The committee is concerned about some evidence indicating that some bus runs are an hour long. The committee also is concerned about evidence that some bus runs deliver children to school before any teacher supervision is present. A number of submitters and witnesses commented on the crowding of some school buses. And it is possible that greater use of articulated buses may add to existing problems rather than mitigate them.

⁴⁰ Submission dated 20/7/98

⁴¹ Submission dated 20/7/98

⁴² Submission dated 3/8/98

⁴³ Submission dated 5/8/98

98. Further, it is essential that any review of bus services involve both the Departments of Urban Services and Education.

99. ***The committee recommends that:***

- ***a thorough review of school bus services be undertaken; that it closely involve the Departments of Education and Urban Services, together with the School Transport Liaison Committee; and that the review be reported to the Assembly. The review should examine (among other matters) the length of bus routes, their suitability, any problems with crowding, the proposed use of more articulated buses, and other specific problems raised during the course of this inquiry.***

100. The committee is particularly concerned about student bus services from Gungahlin. This area does not yet have a government college and so students are required to travel 'out of area'. Many students travel to Dickson College which, the committee understands, can be regarded as effectively in the Priority Enrolment Area for a student living at Gungahlin. It does not appear equitable that these students should be regarded as travelling across two zones, given this situation.

101. Further, it is desirable to maximise the use of direct school buses so that the students do not have to utilise an interchange. The committee appreciates that the government has trialed direct bus services from Gungahlin to Copeland College, though the numbers to date are 'quite small'. A representative of DUS acknowledged that 'we do not discount the problem, however, and we need to find other solutions'.⁴⁴ The committee concurs.

102. ***The committee recommends that:***

- ***the government give further consideration to the bus travel needs of students in the Gungahlin area.***

103. In relation to the constitution of the advisory committee on school bus services, the committee heard sufficient evidence to indicate that the existing committee has not been consulted often enough, nor consulted on important issues such as the proposed fare structure for school-children. The committee sees merit in encouraging student representation on the committee, and certainly it should meet regularly, with its secretariat having sufficient resources to prepare and distribute agendas in advance and to follow up matters raised at meetings. Further, the committee should include membership from ACT Roads.

104. ***The committee recommends that:***

- ***the School Transport Liaison Committee be provided with sufficient resources to operate on a regular basis with prompt follow-up of issues raised. Further, the committee should be expanded to include membership from ACT Roads and from students. The committee should be a forum in which specific operational issues can be raised and addressed.***

105. In relation to the cost of school bus fares, the committee is concerned about deficiencies in key data which make it difficult to feel confident that the most appropriate fare structure has been determined. The committee also notes the government's expectation that the report of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Commission (due in draft form in February 1999) will 'assist [DUS] to more accurately cost and determine Community Service Obligation funding, including payments for school services'. This suggests that the department is not confident of its present information.

⁴⁴ Transcript of the public hearing on 10/9/98

106. The serious deficiencies lead one member of the committee (Mr Corbell) to conclude that no changes should be made to the existing fare structure for students until more detailed information is available. This information, in the view of Mr Corbell, should be tabled in the Assembly for debate before the government finalises an appropriate student fare structure.

107. On this basis, one member of the committee recommends that:

- ***Mr Corbell MLA: the proposed fare structure for students should not proceed until more detailed information is available to the Assembly about student travel patterns and other relevant matters.***

108. However, two members of the committee consider that, while the deficiencies in the data are of concern, they do not warrant indefinite deferral of a new fare structure - provided one significant change is made.

109. This change relates to the fare for students who have a direct service over two zones. These students currently pay 45c. It is proposed to increase this fare to \$1.20. In the view of members, this increase is too great to be brought in quickly. It would be preferable to increase the fare in stages.

110. The first stage should see the fare rise by 30c to 75c. This fare would apply for the first year of operation of the new scheme. The second stage would see the fare rise to 90c. This would apply in the second year of operation of the proposed scheme. And the final fare rise would be to \$1.20, which would take effect in the third year of operation of the new scheme.

111. A majority of members of the committee recommend that:

- ***Mr Hird MLA and Mr Rugendyke MLA: the proposed fare structure for students should proceed, provided that the following adjustment is made for students who have a direct service over two zones. Instead of their fare increasing in one hit from the present 45c to \$1.20 (as is proposed), the increase should be brought in over a period of three years. In the first year, the fare would go from 45c to 75c; in the second year it would go from 75c to 90c; and in the third year it would reach parity with other fares across two zones, that is, \$1.20.***

112. In making this recommendation, the majority of members of the committee recognise that the basic rationale for the fare increase is to bring the fare for this category of students to the same level that is proposed for all other student travel over two zones, that is, \$1.20. The relevant comparison is to students who currently catch two buses and travel two zones (who currently pay 90c but who will pay \$1.20 under the proposed scheme) and students who currently catch three buses and travel two or more zones (who currently pay \$1.35 but who will pay \$1.20 under the new scheme). After three years, all student travel over two zones will be charged the same amount.

113. The committee is conscious that even a staged introduction of the above fares may cause financial difficulty for some students and families. The committee recognises that families have made decisions about their present schools on the basis, at least in part, of the level of bus fares currently applying. The committee acknowledges evidence put before it during the inquiry about the considerable financial sacrifices that some families are making to enrol their children in specific schools.

ACTION bus services for school-children

114. The committee considers it is essential that those students who are already enrolled in schools, and whose families can demonstrate financial hardship, should be protected. The committee would be very concerned if families were forced to remove their children from schools because of the increased cost of ACTION bus travel

115. Therefore, the committee considers that it would be appropriate for the new fare structure for travel on a direct service over two zones not to apply to those students (and their families) able to demonstrate financial hardship, whenever those students remain at their existing school. In effect, this means that the proposed structure would not be fully implemented for five or six years.

116. The committee recommends that:

- ***the government should institute measures to ease the effect upon those existing students who travel by bus over two zones and whose families would be financially pressed by the increased fare. This is likely to mean that the present one-zone fare should be retained for these children whenever they remain at their present school.***

117. The committee is concerned about is the possible effect of the proposed structure upon students with disabilities. These students may need to travel from one end to Canberra to another in order to attend a specialised school adapted to their needs. These students should be regarded as travelling within just one zone.

118. ***The committee recommends that:***

- ***no matter what the overall pricing system, students who need specialised schooling (such as students with disabilities) should pay the lowest fare.***

119. In relation to the implication of traffic configurations around pick-up and drop-off points for school buses, the committee is concerned about comments by some submitters and witnesses to the effect that ACTION and DUS have not addressed some long-standing problems in the vicinity of schools. Further, the committee is concerned about suggestions that a large increase in bus fares for some students might encourage their parents to use private cars rather than ACTION, and hence add to existing traffic congestion.

120. ***The committee recommends that:***

- ***the government should raise the priority given to problems identified by schools in relation to pick-up points and drop-off points. This would involve close liaison with the School Transport Liaison Committee. The government should identify, in next year's Draft Capital Works Program, appropriate measures to alleviate these problems in a program extending, if necessary, over several years. The committee draws particular attention to long-standing problems at Daramalan College, St Clare's College and St Edmund's College.***

Harold Hird MLA

Chair

Standing Committee on Urban Services

28 October 1998

Appendix A - List of submissions

ACT Government

ACT Council of Parent & Citizens Associations Inc

Alfred Deakin High School

Association of Independent Schools of the ACT Incorporated

Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools Inc.

Bonython Primary School

Catholic Education Office (Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn)

Ms Child

Copland College

Dickson College

Dickson College School Board

Mr Dwyer

Ms Firth

Garran Primary School Board

Ms Guy

Ms Jackson

Mr Kendal

Lanyon High School Board

Orana School for Rudolf Steiner Education

Mr Pharaoh

Ms Reid

St Edmund's College

St Monica's Primary School Parents and Friends Assoc

St Thomas Aquinas P&F Association

St Thomas Aquinas Primary School Board

Mrs Walczuk

D&K Westmore