

**THE EVOLUTION OF TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE  
FOR STUDENTS ATTENDING NON-STATE SCHOOLS  
IN QUEENSLAND  
1906 - MARCH 2001**

**A PROJECT**

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP  
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## ABSTRACT

This project documents the development of State Government funded transport assistance for students attending Queensland schools during the period 1906 to March 2001.

Although the project covers all major developments in transport assistance for State school students, its main purpose is to document the struggle for justice and equity in the provision of Government funded transport assistance for students attending non-State schools in Queensland. Particular emphasis is placed on the period 1976 to March 2001, as it was during this period that most developments occurred.

The earliest form of student travel assistance for school students was in the form of free rail travel for scholarship holders attending Grammar schools in Brisbane in 1906. Free rail travel had been extended to include primary and secondary students by 1920, however eligibility depended on students satisfying certain distance criteria. The earliest form of ferry assistance was introduced in 1924.

It took until 1945 for the Government to introduce free road travel for State primary school students. The Road Transport Services and licensed bus services conveyed distance eligible students, free of charge, to their nearest State primary school. It took until 1958 for free bus travel to be available for who attended State secondary students schools. In the same year, the Government introduced three different classes of Conveyance Allowance to compensate families for the costs involved in transporting their children to State primary and secondary schools in remote areas where rail and bus services were not available.

The first breakthrough for non-State students occurred in 1977 when the Government agreed to allow school bus services to travel beyond what was referred to as the Base School, to any non-State schools within the same

town. A Base School was a State school in the town. This benefit was only available if sufficient seating capacity was available on the bus service.

The first major breakthrough came in 1983, with the introduction of two new forms of Conveyance Allowance, classes D and E, specifically for students attending non-State schools.

Following a bitter struggle between the Goss Labor Government and the non-State school sector in the early 1990's, free rail travel on the Citytrain network was abolished in 1994 and was replaced by a user-pays principle. All students attending approved schools were eligible for subsidised rail travel.

In 1995 the Government introduced a Safety-Net scheme for financially disadvantaged students residing close to their nearest school. The Safety-Net scheme applied to students who were required to pay fares on privately operated bus services, Brisbane City Council buses and rail travel.

A special grant of \$1m by the coalition government in 1997 provided a substantial boost to the level of bus travel assistance available to non-State students. The money enabled the "hotspots" scheme to be established for families who had children attending non-State schools outside the Brisbane Statistical Division. An additional \$0.5m grant by the Beattie Labor Government in 1998 enabled the "hotspots" scheme to be expanded to include all non-State students at schools outside the Brisbane City Council boundary.

The success of the "hotspots" scheme led to a proposal for Queensland Transport to transfer responsibility for the administration of Conveyance Allowance classes D and E to the non-State sector. The Government has yet to make a decision on the proposal, however all initial indications are that the proposal will be approved in the second half of 2001.

The provision of transport assistance for students with disabilities attending State and/or non-State schools, has not been addressed in this project.

## DECLARATION

I certify that this project does not incorporate any material previously submitted for a degree at any University; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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Paul Travers

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to sincerely thank my wife Margaret for her constant inspiration and support during the preparation of this project and for proof reading the various drafts.

For more than thirty years Alan Druery and Leo Dunne played a significant role in the development of Catholic education in Queensland. During that period they devoted considerable time and energy to the issue of school transport. The travel assistance benefits available for students at non-State schools in April 2001 are largely due to their desire to achieve a more equitable school transport assistance scheme in Queensland. Without their contribution to the cause, many of the travel benefits now available would not exist and this project would not have been possible.

Finally I wish to thank my supervisor, Dr. Denis McLaughlin, for his encouragement, valuable advice and genuine interest in the content of this work.

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## INTRODUCTION

The provision of Government funded school transport for State school students in Queensland is closely linked to important milestones in the historical development of education in the state. In order to understand how the school transport system has developed in Queensland it is important to be aware of some of these milestones.

Similarly, if one is to fully appreciate how travel assistance for students attending non-State schools has developed, it is essential to understand how travel entitlements for State schools students have evolved.

The objectives of the various forms of transport assistance have never been explicitly stated. It is clear however that road transport was introduced to ensure the viability of non-metropolitan schools. In the earliest cases put forward (unsuccessfully) for the establishment of services to secondary schools in the late 1940's, there was concern for the need to establish viable secondary schools in non-metropolitan centres to ensure an adequate supply of teachers. It was argued that the existence of a transport service was a necessary condition to ensure the viability of these secondary schools.

Over the years, the level of assistance has been extended from time to time...but the question of who should be assisted and the need for assistance to be provided has never been addressed in a major review. However, each component of the scheme has been modified on an individual basis and the arguments put forward in each instance have always sought to extend the range and/or level of assistance provided.

The objectives of the current scheme of assistance cannot be stated explicitly, they can only be deduced from the criteria which determine who is eligible for assistance. (Education Queensland Vertical File 'School Transport', undated)

Whilst the Queensland Government accepts a responsibility for the provision of education facilities within the State, it adopts the approach that it is:

... the responsibility of parents to make suitable travel arrangements for their children to attend these facilities. For many years successive State Governments have provided assistance with school transport costs for eligible students in some circumstances. (Guide to the School Transport Assistance Scheme, 1996)

This project records the major developments in the provision of Government funded transport assistance for school students during the following periods.

- 1826-1900
- 1901-1950
- 1951-1975
- 1976-1980
- 1981-1985
- 1986-1990
- 1991-1995
- 1996-March 2001

# CHAPTER ONE

## A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION IN QUEENSLAND 1826 – 1900

Queensland's first school opened in 1826. It was a primary school administered by the Anglican Church and conducted by the wife of a soldier attached to the Moreton Bay penal settlement. Following a succession of teachers, most of whom were soldiers, the school closed in 1842, the year Queensland ceased to be a convict settlement and was opened to free settlers.

The first Catholic school opened in 1845 and for most of the next two decades, small denominational schools provided an elementary education for some of the children in the Moreton Bay District.

On 10 December 1859 Queensland was declared a separate colony, thereby severing its links with New South Wales. The separation meant that the Queensland Government was now responsible for the education of children within its boundaries. During the following year Queensland's first Parliament passed the *Education Act of 1860*. This Act placed all primary school education under one general and comprehensive system, to be controlled by a Board of General Education.

In the same year the parliament passed the *Grammar Schools Act*, "which allowed for the establishment of a Grammar school in any town where at least £1,000 could be raised locally." (Logan & Clarke, 1984, p. 6) The Grammar Schools Act also made provision for the awarding of scholarships. The State's first scholarships were awarded during 1864, for the 1865 school year at Ipswich Grammar, Queensland's first Grammar school, which had opened in 1863.

Between 1865 and 1873 about twelve scholarships had been awarded, but in 1873 the first State Scholarship Examination was held "to provide an opportunity for secondary education for a limited number of academically gifted students."

(Logan & Clarke, 1984, p. 6) The State Scholarship Examination was to become the basis for granting a specific number of scholarships to secondary schools and was maintained for ninety years, with the last examination being held in 1962.

The Queensland *State Education Act* of 1875 provided a number of key initiatives, including:

- Primary education for children aged from 6 to 12 was to be compulsory.  
[This provision was not fully implemented until 1900.]
- Education was to be secular, i.e. under the control of the State.
- Primary education was to be free.
- A Department of Public Instruction was established to administer the Act.

To ensure conformity with the State Education Act, state aid to denominational schools was abolished in 1880. "This provision occasioned considerable ill-feeling among Roman Catholics and some Anglicans." (Logan & Clarke, 1984, p. 2)



## CHAPTER TWO

### TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE FOR SCHOOL STUDENTS TRAVELLING BY RAIL 1901 – 1950

#### RAIL TRAVEL

It appears the earliest form of Government assistance for the transportation of children to and from school in Queensland began in 1906, when scholarship holders attending Grammar schools in Brisbane were granted free daily rail travel. (Department of Education & Queensland Transport, 1993, p. 1) Prior to 1906, free daily rail travel was only granted in exceptional circumstances. At that time, all trains operating within Queensland were powered by steam, as electric trains were not introduced onto the urban network until 1979.

Clause 37 of 'The Railway Coaching Traffic By-Law of 1910', which came into effect on 1 July 1910, states:

Season tickets, at half the full season ticket rates, may be issued to scholars attending any recognised day school, upon the certificate of the head master of the school, ....

Scholars under sixteen years of age residing more than two miles from a public school will be granted free second class season tickets for one month to enable them to attend the nearest public school to which the train service is available. (The Railway Coaching Traffic By-Law of 1910, 14/6/10)

The Deputy Commissioner and Secretary of Queensland Railways, A. Neeson, in a note to Greg Logan, Research Officer at the Department of Education, refers to the following endorsement which had been recorded in ink, opposite Clause 37 in an official Queensland Railways document:

May now be issued to children attending Roman Catholic or Private Schools provided they do not pass State schools. 10.354.2 22.9.1910

This amendment to the official policy suggests that non-State students were also eligible for free rail travel from September 1910, providing they did not pass a State school. (Neeson, 1981)

Although there were ten Grammar schools operating in Queensland by 1900, it was not until 1912 that the “huge task of bringing secondary education to all Queensland children was finally tackled...” (Logan & Clarke, 1984, p. 7)

The Government began a program of establishing a high school in places with a likely attendance of twenty five (25) qualified students, providing there was no other State-aided secondary education facility, such as a Grammar school, available in the town. During 1912 State high schools were opened in six country centres – Charters Towers, Gympie, Bundaberg, Mt. Morgan, Warwick, and Mackay. In the same year, secondary departments were attached to primary schools in Herberton, Gatton and Childers. In recognition of the growing importance of secondary education, the Government introduced free daily rail travel to these schools, for secondary students. To qualify for a free ticket students had to live more than two miles from the State high school. This privilege was extended to include secondary students attending denominational schools.

Until 1914 only a limited number of scholarships were awarded, the number varying depending upon the amount of money allocated by the Government. In 1914 the scholarship system was changed to enable all students who gained 50% or more in the examination to be awarded a scholarship for two years to any approved secondary school, which by then included State high schools.

The following regulation concerning free conveyance of pupils to school by rail took effect from 1 January 1916:

It has been arranged with the Railway Department that pupils under 16 years of age residing where there is no public school within one mile and a-half of their homes will be granted free second-class tickets, available for one month, to enable them to attend the nearest public, Roman Catholic, or private school to which the train service is available, provided that the scholars travelling do not pass a State school. (Education Office Gazette, Vol XVIII, 1916, p. 17)

In 1919 free daily rail travel was also introduced for non-scholarship students attending the Grammar schools in Rockhampton. During 1920 free daily rail travel was provided for students at Brisbane State High School, the only metropolitan secondary school granted this concession. As further non-metropolitan State secondary schools and denominational schools were established, students attending these schools were also granted free daily rail travel. For instance, in October 1920, free rail travel was extended to primary and secondary students attending both State and non-State schools in Brisbane. The assistance was based on primary school students residing more than two miles from their nearest State primary school; and secondary students attending their nearest State secondary school or nearest denominational school.

## CHAPTER THREE

### TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE FOR SCHOOL STUDENTS TRAVELLING BY ROAD OR WATER 1916-1950

#### ROAD TRANSPORT SERVICES

In 1916 the Government of the day made available a grant, not exceeding fifty pounds (£50), towards the cost of conveying children by motor boat to Maroochy State School. In the same year, the first School Road Transport Service ran from Spring Hill to Burnett Heads State School. (Copeman, 1950, p. 74) Approval was granted by the Department of Public Instruction in November 1924 for a Licensed Boatman to be paid twelve shillings per week to convey around twelve primary school students from Gympie Terrace to Tewantin State School. Prior to this decision the children had to row a dinghy on the river, two miles each way. A major concern for their parents was that in rough weather the children were exposed to the possibility of the dinghy capsizing.

Prior to 1 May 1945, the only assistance granted by the Government towards motor vehicle transport of children to and from State primary schools was in the nature of '*subsidy assistance*', and only to the extent of funds appropriated annually for such purpose. The subsidy assistance was a payment made to an operator for conveying children to school and provided the operator with a supplementary income, as the vehicles were not used solely for the transportation of school children.

A decision by the state Government on 1 May 1945 resulted in the establishment of departmental Road Transport Services in areas where there were more than the required number of students to be conveyed and there was no ***licensed service*** already operating. Road Transport Services were generally established in rural areas of the state and initially were only permitted to convey children to State primary schools.

A *licensed service* was one that had been issued with a license under the Transport Acts to carry passengers on a fares basis.

From 1 May 1945 the subsidy assistance scheme was replaced by a set payment schedule, whereby the operators of these Road Transport Services were paid a mileage rate, which was intended to cover the full operating costs of their vehicle, for the period of their casual service.

- Vehicles up to a weight of one ton were paid 6 pence per mile,
- Vehicles between one and two tons were paid 7.5 pence per mile,
- Vehicles between two and three tons were paid 10 pence per mile, and
- Vehicles over three tons were paid an additional 2.3 pence per mile for each additional ton or part thereof.

In 1944-1945 there were 47 Road Transport Services in operation throughout Queensland and the children using these services were conveyed to and from State primary schools free of charge. (Education Queensland Vertical File, 'School Transport', undated)

Although most of the children living in rural areas were conveyed to and from school in the back of a vehicle, such as a utility, milk truck or transport truck suitably fitted, there were contractors who owned a bus to transport children to and from school. The contractor's vehicle had to provide for the comfortable and safe seating of all children to be conveyed, and for the protection of the children from inclement weather by covered roofs and sides. Only suitable and safe vehicles, in good order and condition, as required by the State Transport Act, could be used. (Copeman, 1950, p. 169)

In 1945 the responsibility for the provision of school transport rested with the Department of Public Instruction. Prior to May 1945, all students who travelled to school on a licensed bus service were required to pay a fare. However, from 1 May 1945 the Department paid the full fares of *eligible students* travelling on licensed services to and from State primary schools.

*Eligible students were those authorised to use the Transport Service and for whom the bus payment structure had been devised:*

*Children were eligible to travel to the nearest accessible State school offering the relevant course, if the children resided permanently beyond the threshold distance from that school.*

The only *eligible students* were those primary school students under ten years of age who lived more than two miles from the nearest State primary school and those students over ten years of age who resided more than three miles from their nearest State school. In 1945 there was no provision for Government funded bus travel for secondary students.

By 1950 there were around 200 Road Transport Services in operation, transporting over 4,000 students to 145 schools on a daily basis. (Copeman, 1950, p.74)

# **A SUMMARY OF TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE FOR NON-STATE SCHOOL STUDENTS BY THE END OF 1950**

The only Non-State students receiving travel assistance from the State Government at the end of 1950 were those primary and secondary students who were eligible for free rail travel.

## **RAIL TRAVEL**

The following non-State students were eligible for free rail travel:

- Secondary students travelling to their nearest denominational school, and
- Primary students travelling to their nearest denominational school, providing they resided more than two miles from the nearest State primary school and did not pass a State school on the way.

## **BUS TRAVEL**

No Government assistance was available for non-State students.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### IMPROVED TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE BENEFITS FOR SCHOOL STUDENTS 1951 – 1975

A Cabinet decision in February 1951 ensured, for the first time, that students attending denominational primary schools would be granted the same status, with respect to school Road Transport Services, as students attending State primary schools. That is, they were to be counted as *eligible students* and could be transported free of charge to the nearest State primary school. However, they could not be transported beyond the State school. The only alternative travel options available for non-State students wishing to bypass their nearest State primary school were to walk, assuming the denominational school was within walking distance of the State school, or pay a fare to travel on a licensed fare paying bus service, if one was available. However, licensed services generally did not operate in rural areas.

During 1957, the Department of Public Instruction became known as the Department of Education and in April of that year the Minister for Education granted approval to a departmental recommendation that secondary school students be considered eligible in determining the need for a primary school bus service. There had been a number of previous attempts to introduce transport assistance for secondary students. For instance, in 1956 the State Cabinet agreed in principle that transport assistance should be provided to secondary students where it would be cheaper than opening a secondary department attached to an existing primary school. Despite this, Cabinet refused two such cases later that year. (Education Queensland Vertical File, 'School Transport', undated)

In November 1958 Cabinet finally approved the establishment of Secondary Road Transport Services for secondary school students. Secondary students who resided more than three miles from the nearest State secondary school were now



eligible for free bus travel to the nearest State secondary school. Secondary students attending a non-State school could use these new Road Transport Services, but only as far as their nearest State secondary school.

## INTRODUCTION OF CONVEYANCE ALLOWANCE

It was not possible for the Department of Education to provide Road Transport Services in all areas of Queensland due to the size of the state and the scattered population. However, in July 1958 Cabinet decided to introduce a transport assistance scheme that would partly compensate families for the costs involved in driving their children to school, by private motor vehicle. Providing they satisfied set distance criteria, families were paid an allowance based on the distance their children were conveyed.

A scale of 'Conveyance Distances' was established to determine the amount of financial assistance to be paid to eligible families. The following regulations appeared in the September 1959 edition of the Education Office Gazette:

Parents or guardians of children who are conveyed to school by motor vehicle will be eligible to be paid conveyance allowance as follows:

(1)	Conveyed more than 3 miles	£10 per pupil per annum.
	Conveyed more than 6 miles and up to 9 miles	£15 per pupil per annum.
	Conveyed more than 9 miles	£20 per pupil per annum.

provided that-

- (a) The children are conveyed to the *State primary school nearest to their place of residence*;
  - (b) They live more than 3 miles from the nearest State primary school;
  - (c) They cannot travel to school by train or licensed passenger bus or school transport service.
- (2) Parents of children conveyed more than 2 miles to a school transport service, licensed bus service, or railway station are eligible to claim a conveyance allowance at the rate of £10 per annum for each child conveyed. In calculating distance, the single journey between the home and school is to be taken.
  - (3) For a child living more than 3 miles from the nearest State primary school by the shortest trafficable route, the parent or guardian may

claim a refund of fares paid in excess of 5s. weekly for use of public road transport when travelling to that school.

*In paragraphs 1 and 3, the words "State secondary school" should be substituted for "State primary school" if secondary pupils are being conveyed.*

The concept of families being responsible for a certain 'threshold', as in paragraph (3) above, would later become a key feature of the Queensland Government's school transport entitlement for families with students attending non-State schools.

In the November 1965 Education Office Gazette the three types of Conveyance Allowance referred to above were given new titles.

The regulation in paragraph (1) became known as Class A,

The regulation in paragraph (3) became known as Class B, and

The regulation in paragraph (2) became known as Class C.

By November 1965 parents of students attending denominational schools were able to claim travel assistance based on the conditions set down in Conveyance Allowance Classes A, B and C. (Education Office Gazette, November 1965) To qualify for Conveyance Allowance Class A, B or C, non-State students had to reside more than three miles from the particular school attended, as well as satisfying the distance criteria applying to students attending State schools.

In November 1966, the year decimal currency was introduced, the Cabinet decided to extend the benefits of Class B Conveyance Allowance by removing the fifty cents (5s) 'threshold'. Whilst this meant that eligible students attending State schools could now travel free of charge, their counterparts in non-State schools might not receive a full refund of fares. In circumstances where a non-State student had to travel beyond the State school to reach the non-State school, the bus operator was entitled to charge a fare for the extra travel involved. The cost of this fare had to be borne by the student's parent/guardian.

In November 1971, following a request from the Parish Priest of Ayr, Monsignor Rush, the Diocesan Director of Education for the Townsville Diocese wrote to the Member for Burdekin, the Hon. Val Bird, about the problem of non-State school

children being unable to use school bus services. Regulations in force at that time allowed only a minority of non-State students to use the existing school bus services. The Diocesan Director, Monsignor D. Stewart, indicated that enquiries had "been addressed to the Department of Education from time to time without any significant result being achieved." (Stewart, 11/11/71)

Bird raised the subject at the Government Parties' Caucus Meeting on 17 November 1971.

...after considerable discussion, it was carried unanimously that the matter of extending school bus services to these schools be fully examined with a view [to] introducing a scheme to provide free transport to them at the earliest possible time.

It is expected that the Department of Education will now carry out a survey to determine the cost of extending school bus services and advise the Government Parties. (Bird, 18/11/71)

It is not known if the proposed 'survey' actually took place.

**A SUMMARY OF  
TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE BENEFITS GAINED  
FOR NON-STATE SCHOOL STUDENTS  
DURING THE PERIOD 1951 – 1975**

**RAIL TRAVEL**

There were no changes to the existing policy.

**BUS TRAVEL**

- Non-State primary school students could now travel free of charge to their nearest State primary school, provided they satisfied the distance criteria.
  
- Non-State secondary school students could travel free of charge to their nearest State secondary school, provided they satisfied the distance criteria.
  
- Non-State students, who lived more than three miles from the school they attended, were eligible to claim Conveyance Allowance, provided they satisfied the same eligibility criteria as State school students.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE CATHOLIC EDUCATION SECTOR CHALLENGES THE EQUITY OF THE SCHOOL TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE SCHEME 1976 - 1980

For many years Catholic education authorities had been aware of “a discriminatory bias in the legislation covering the use of ‘Government’ school transport by non-Government school children.” (Druery, 22/10/76)

Following representations made to the Queensland Minister for Education in the 1976 Bishops’ Standing Committee Submission, Fr. Bernard O’Shea, the Director of the Queensland Catholic Education Office (QCEO) and Mr. Alan Druery, the Secretary of the QCEO, met with the Assistant Director-General of Education, Mr. George Berkley.

The purpose of the meeting, held in August 1976, was “to investigate ways of ensuring continuing contact between the two authorities, State and Catholic, regarding several important issues, including State Government funding of our [Catholic] schools.” (Druery, 31/8/76) The issue of school transport services in country areas was discussed and it was clear that Berkley was aware of problems being experienced by Catholic families in transporting their children to Catholic schools.

In an effort to find a solution Berkley agreed that, on several occasions each year, the Catholic education sector could present him with a consolidated list of school bus problems from the different areas of the State. He was prepared to take action to ensure the problems were given serious consideration and where possible find a solution. Problems were not being experienced in all dioceses, due largely to the fact that in many rural areas Catholic families had no alternative but to send their children to the local State school.

A close working relationship already existed between the QCEO and the Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of Queensland. It was therefore appropriate that as well as seeking the support of the Diocesan Directors of Education, Druery would also seek the cooperation of parents in "preparing the list of properly documented complaints." (Druery, 31/8/76)

In October 1976 Druery wrote to the respective Directors of the Catholic Education Offices in Sydney and Melbourne, seeking copies of each State's legislation relating to school transport. As the Queensland Catholic Education Office was intending to present a comprehensive submission to the State Government, it was considered important to have a clear understanding of the school transport arrangements in other States. The information supplied by the two Catholic Education Offices revealed that Catholic school students in New South Wales and Victoria fared better than their counterparts in Queensland.

For instance, in 1976 all New South Wales students living more than 1.6km from school had access to free bus travel, irrespective of whether the student attended a State school or a non-State school. During 1977 the 1.6km restriction was lifted for students in Kindergarten, Year One and Year Two.

In April 1977 the regulations relating to student rail travel were modified slightly. Free daily economy rail travel was available to:

- Students under sixteen years of age who were residing more than 2.4 kilometres from the nearest State school, denominational or other private school to which the train service was available, provided students did not pass a State school.
- Students who had completed year 7 and were attending an approved secondary school, a secondary department of a State school or were attending full time classes at a Technical College.

These amendments to previous policy meant that secondary students at non-State schools were not obliged to attend their nearest denominational school to qualify for free daily rail travel.

In November 1977, the Director-General of Education in Queensland advised each of his Regional Directors, that as a result of a Cabinet decision on 23 May 1977, Regional Directors of Education could approve an extension of School Transport Services beyond the **Base School**, to Non-State Schools and State Opportunity Schools.

*A Base School is the State School (Primary or Secondary) to which the main bus route operates.*

Provided certain conditions were met, this decision meant that these bus services could be extended “beyond the Base School in or on the perimeter of a larger centre, to the nearest other school (State or non-State) in that centre offering the required course.” (Gilmour, 23/11/77) One of the conditions ensured that there would be no consideration given to an extension beyond the nearest school offering the required course, to another school of the same type. Another condition ensured that no extension would be approved if a suitable licensed bus service was available to transport the students. It was estimated that the annual cost to the Government of extending the bus routes would be in the vicinity of \$60,000. An example of such an extension was the bus service that travelled beyond Petrie State School to Holy Spirit Primary School at Bray Park.

The decision to approve extensions of School Transport Services meant that non-State students travelling on kilometre-based bus services were now permitted to travel beyond the nearest State school, providing sufficient room remained after all eligible students had been accommodated. As the Government paid the bus operators for the extension of the kilometre-based services, any non-State students travelling beyond the State school were not required to pay a fare.

Although the responsibility for school transport issues still rested with the Minister for Education, the Bishops' Standing Committee believed some benefit could be obtained by discussing the problems being experienced with the Minister for Transport. During February 1979, Mr. Leo Dunne, the President of The Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of Queensland, arranged for

representatives of the Queensland Bishops' Standing Committee on educational funding issues to meet with the Hon. K. Tomkins, MLA, Minister for Transport. The meeting would enable the representatives to raise "some aspects of school transport services which have generated difficulties for the Catholic school sector in recent years." (Dunne, 1/3/79)

In his letter to the Minister, prior to the meeting, Dunne wrote:

Constantly we are made acutely aware of the parent's right to exercise choice in relation to schools without severe financial penalty as a result. We trust, therefore, our meeting with you will be a positive step towards greater justice for all parents and children.

One of the issues discussed at the meeting related to the fact that secondary students travelling to school by rail were able to do so free of charge, whereas those students using buses were required to pay a fare. The Minister mentioned that free rail travel dated back to the time when there were only a few centrally located State High Schools. In his view, subsequent Governments had not considered it politically expedient to repeal this arrangement. He suggested that rail transport would continue to remain an important consideration for school authorities responsible for planning the location of future secondary schools. The Minister acknowledged the difficulties experienced by the Catholic sector due to the inflexible nature of existing bus routes and the struggle to have buses be permitted to travel beyond a State school to the nearest denominational school.

The deputation sought the Minister's view on the fact that the expansion of State High Schools along existing feeder bus routes to Catholic schools resulted in an erosion of existing free travel concessions to some Catholic secondary colleges, especially those in the outlying suburbs. This occurred because non-State secondary students were only eligible for free travel from their residence to the nearest State secondary school.

The Minister suggested that the non-Government sector could argue that the expansion of State high schools should result in the Education Department spending less money on bus travel for State school students. This saving might



provide the Department more room to move within their own transport vote, by relaxing some of the existing regulations and extending some of the bus routes.

The meeting with the Minister and his officers was considered "very valuable" and led to Druery writing to the Chairman of the Metropolitan Transit Authority. The Minister had indicated that the Authority could be interested in the transport problems being experienced by the Catholic sector. Subsequent discussions with two officers from the Metropolitan Transit Authority resulted in the Catholic Education Office preparing a submission for consideration by the Authority's Planning and Research staff. The submission was intended to ensure the Authority was conversant with the bussing needs of Catholic schools in outlying areas of Brisbane. Whilst the Authority did not provide any firm commitments, it indicated "it would endeavour to take the needs into consideration during its 1979-80 review." (Welding, 9/7/79)

A letter from Dunne to all Cabinet Ministers, in August 1979, contains an example of the reasonable and rationale approach being adopted by representatives of the Catholic education sector, in their efforts to achieve a more equitable school transport policy for students attending Catholic schools:

The prior and basic "Right of Choice" is between a Government and Non-Government school and in reference to transport we in the Catholic sector would seek subsidised support equal to that given to children attending the nearest appropriate State school in order that children attending Catholic schools could attend their nearest appropriate school.

We would agree that parents wishing to exercise their right of choice beyond that nearest appropriate school would be expected to pay the additional costs. Some children, relatively few in number, attending the only appropriate school available to them may need special consideration. (Dunne, 13/8/79)

In December 1979 Dunne and Druery met with the Hon. Val Bird, Minister for Education, to discuss certain aspects of the school transport arrangements which were, in some parts of Queensland, having "urgent implications". Although sympathetic towards their position the Minister stressed that the funds needed to alleviate the Catholic sector's problems would need to be provided through an additional allocation to education. (Druery, 20/12/79)

In February 1980, The Federation of Parents and Friends' Association of Queensland delivered a submission entitled 'School Transport Arrangements Catholic School Children' to the Government. The submission had the endorsement of the Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) and the Queensland Bishops' Standing Committee on State Aid for Education.

The submission contained a range of immediate and longer term proposals aimed at improving the provision of transport assistance for students attending non-State schools. Included in the 'immediate' proposals was a suggestion that because the catchment areas of Catholic primary schools were at least four times greater than those for State primary schools, Catholic primary school students be permitted to travel on existing secondary school bus services in country areas to the nearest Catholic primary school accessible by those services. (Federation of P&F Associations of Qld, February 1980)

In a reply to Dunne, the Member for Landsborough, the Hon Mike Ahern, advised that the submission had arrived after the Select Committee on Education had completed its work and had produced its report. Ahern suggested Dunne forward copies of the submission to other members of parliament. (Ahern, 28/02/80)

During March 1980 representatives of the Federation of Parents and Friends Association arranged a deputation to the Deputy Premier and Treasurer, the Hon. Dr. Llew Edwards. Following the meeting, Edwards wrote to Dunne addressing the various issues raised in the Federation's submission. He referred to comments provided by his colleague the Minister for Education and stressed that the limited funds available needed "to be allocated as equitably as possible to the various functions of Government." (Edwards, 31/3/80) A subsequent letter from the Secretary of the Premier's Department, Mr Keith Spann, merely endorsed the message conveyed by Edwards. (Spann, 28/4/80)

During the remainder of 1980 Dunne wrote to several politicians seeking an improvement in the school transport entitlements for students attending Catholic schools. His letter to the Hon. Peter McKechnie, Member for Carnarvon, drew the following response, "It is indeed a complex matter as a reduction in numbers at

small State schools may force their closure and have a detrimental effect on the community as a whole.” (McKechnie, 21/4/80)

In presenting the 1980-81 State Budget to Parliament, Edwards made the following reference to the school transport issue:

No provision has been made at this time for any changes to the present transport schemes as they affect students attending non-Government schools. However I am anxious to ensure that no disadvantage accrues to the non-Government sector as a result of existing policies and practices. My colleague, the Hon. the Minister for Education, will be closely examining the position and an appropriate announcement will be made in due course.

(Treasury Working Party Report, September 1982)

The Queensland Catholic Education Office ensured that the school transport issue remained high on the Government’s agenda. In June 1980, Druery issued a survey to each of the five Diocesan Directors. The survey was in response to a suggestion by Treasurer Edwards, that if the Catholic Education sector could provide an estimation of the costs involved in bussing students to Catholic schools, he “may be able to do something about it.” (Druery, 3/6/80)

During September 1980 Fr. O’Shea, the Chairman of the Queensland Catholic Education Commission, wrote to the Premier, the Treasurer and the Minister for Education about a range of issues concerning Catholic education, including the school transport problems being experienced by many Catholic families. (O’Shea, 2/9/80, 3/9/80 & 16/9/80)

In a letter to Fr. O’Shea, the Deputy Premier stated that a Liberal Government would:

implement as quickly as possible and as funds became available, the extension of bus transport under the present transport scheme for primary children serviced to State schools. This would be extended to private schools in the vicinity.

....from the first day of the second semester 1981, we would implement a scheme of free bus transport for all secondary school children on approved routes to approved schools. As indicated, this would include private schools in areas close to State schools. The only exception to this would be where the bus travels long-distances as a special arrangement for a private school. (Edwards, 21/11/80)

As a result of the political lobbying by the Catholic education sector, including parents, the Government was well aware of the differences in transport costs being incurred by parents of State school children and those of non-State students.

The cost differences were largely due to the fact that the Government assistance schemes were oriented towards students attending State schools. Even though some non-State students did receive travel assistance, it was “generally dependent on the distance from the student’s home to the nearest State school.” (Treasury Working Party Report, September 1982) Parents of non-State students were responsible for the cost of additional travel involved in accessing the nearest non-State school. This often created a significant financial burden for many families.

“Prior to the 1980 State election the Government parties agreed to the formation of a Working Party representing Treasury, the State Education Department and Catholic Education (or non-Government schools).” (Dunne, 4/6/81)

**A SUMMARY OF  
TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE BENEFITS GAINED  
FOR NON-STATE SCHOOL STUDENTS  
DURING THE PERIOD 1976 - 1980**

**RAIL TRAVEL**

Free daily rail travel was now available for:

- students under 16 residing more than 2.4 kilometres from the nearest State school, denominational or other private school to which the train service is available, provided students did not pass a State school.
  
- Students who had completed year 7 and were attending an approved secondary school, secondary department of a State school or on a full-time basis at a Technical College.

**BUS TRAVEL**

From November 1977 School Transport Services (kilometre-based services) could be extended beyond a State school to a non-State school, subject to certain conditions. For instance, no extension would be approved if a licensed bus service was available. This meant that if a kilometre-based service operated beyond the nearest State school, non-State students were permitted to travel on the bus, to the nearest school of the type attended, in the same centre (town), providing sufficient room remained after all eligible students had been accommodated.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SIGNIFICANT GAINS IN TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE FOR NON-STATE SCHOOL STUDENTS 1981 - 1985

Following negotiations between the Premier, Deputy Premier and Messrs. Druery and Dunne at a meeting on 18 February 1981 and subsequent discussions between Dunne and the new Minister for Education, the Hon. William Gunn on 24 March 1981, the proposed Working Party was established. It met for the first time on 19 May 1981.

#### THE 1981 REVIEW OF SCHOOL TRANSPORT

The Working Party was chaired by the Under Treasurer and Under Secretary, Mr Leo Hielscher. The non-State school sector was represented by Druery, in his capacity as Secretary of the Queensland Bishop's Standing Committee on State Funding for Education and Dunne, President of the Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of Queensland. The other three members of the Working Party represented the Departments of Education and Treasury.

The objective of the Working Party was "to clarify issues associated with Government assistance to non-State schools and generally to attempt to achieve a mutual understanding of problems jointly confronting the State Government and the non-State school sector." (Treasury Working Party Report, September 1982) Although other important matters were dealt with at the initial meeting, the Working Party's discussions focussed mainly on the issue of School Transport because it was seen as the most pressing and complex problem. It was also the subject of special reference and commitment by the Hon. Deputy Premier and Treasurer, Dr Lew Edwards.

*Appendix A* provides a summary of the various forms of school transport assistance that were available to State and non-State students in 1981. This document (Appendix A) formed part of the Working Party's final Report.

From the outset, the Working Party acknowledged the complexity of the existing School Transport Arrangements as they related to State school students. It soon became apparent that adding a further dimension to a scheme that already contained anomalies, to cater for the needs of the non-State sector, would inevitably further complicate the administration of the Arrangements. It would "quite probably introduce further anomalies even to the point of placing the State school students in a relatively disadvantaged position. It was therefore decided to overlay new benefits on the existing Arrangements rather than to make modifications to them." (Treasury Working Party Report, September 1982)

It is particularly interesting to note some of the suggestions put forward by the Queensland Catholic Education Office (QCEO) in a paper presented to the Working Party in June 1981. It is reasonable to assume that these suggestions had a bearing on the eventual recommendations of the Working Party.

The QCEO paper offered the suggestion that "a per capita entitlement for school bus transport costs might be determined for certain categories of non-Government school children". (Submission to Treasury Working Party, June 1981)

The Working Party accepted that financial constraints would prevent non-State students being granted full parity with their State school counterparts. There was a strong desire to avoid a situation whereby those parents who were sending their children to State schools, because of financial considerations, "would review their positions with the possible consequence of a major drift from State to non-State schools, thus seriously disturbing the existing fabric and balance of the overall education structure." (Treasury Working Party Report, September 1982)

It was agreed that in order to arrive at an acceptable solution it would be necessary to obtain additional information, by means of a survey. The survey was conducted in November 1981 and "involved the distribution of questionnaires to virtually every non-State school in Queensland and to a large proportion of families with students attending these schools." (Treasury Working Party Report, September 1982) The Queensland Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools of Queensland (AISQ) arranged for the distribution of

survey forms to their respective schools. There were 277 Catholic schools and 64 non-Catholic schools surveyed.

Although the AISQ may have been independently involved in lobbying politicians on school transport matters prior to the formation of the Working Party in 1981, it appears that the survey was the first cooperative effort on the issue of school transport, between the AISQ and the Catholic education sector.

The survey revealed that an estimated 25,550 of the 43,500 families involved in the survey may have been experiencing difficulties based on the distance from school, the cost of transport or general dissatisfaction arising from the existing school transport arrangements.

It also showed that approximately 1,300 families paid in excess of \$10 per week for bus conveyance. Of these, an estimated 350 were located within the Greater Brisbane Area. In nearly 30% of cases of dissatisfaction with bus transport, cost was cited as a cause.

Although certain non-financial aspects of school transport were cited as major causes of dissatisfaction, the Working Party adopted the view that these also applied to students attending State schools and that they did not fall within the scope of the Working Party. It therefore directed its efforts towards alleviating the financial difficulties being experienced by families. Any new measures would need to be implemented within cost parameters likely to be accepted as reasonable by the Government.

After assessing a variety of options, it was agreed that any assistance to families of non-State students should be superimposed upon the existing scheme and that it should be family/cost oriented rather than student/distance oriented, as with the existing scheme. It was felt that such a solution would provide assistance where it was most needed whilst causing minimum disturbance to existing arrangements.



The Working Party made the following recommendations for submission to the Government:

a) That two additional Conveyance Allowances be established. The following provides a summary of these provisions.

(i) **Class D - Private Vehicles.**

This is effectively a parallel of the Class A and Class C allowances, and provides assistance to non-State school families who, because of proximity to a State school, do not qualify for either of these allowances.

The distance qualification for Classes A and C generally will apply but will be related to the nearest school of choice.

The level of assistance will be a flat amount per family equal to the minimum rate of payment available per student under Classes A and C (currently [1982] \$105 per annum but under review) and will apply without regard for number of students in the family using the vehicle or the distance travelled.

(ii) **Class E - Assistance with Cost of Fares.**

This is a supplement to the Class B allowance, and provides additional assistance to non-State school families to offset those fare costs incurred in accessing the nearest school of choice, which are in excess of costs recovered under the Class B scheme.

The distance qualification for Class B will apply but will be related to the nearest school of choice.

Payment will be made on a family basis and will represent two-thirds of the amount in excess of \$12 per week by which the costs incurred by the family in accessing the nearest school(s) of choice exceed assistance received under the Class B scheme.

(b) That there be no variation of the existing arrangements regarding access to Free School Bus Services.

- (c) That the proposed Class D and Class E allowances apply only outside the Greater Brisbane Area (it being accepted that exclusion of the Greater Brisbane Area would reduce the possibility of introducing anomalies and increase the prospect of focussing on families in need).

The conditions relating to the two new classes of Conveyance Allowance are set out in detail in **Appendix B**, which also formed part of the Working Party's final Report to the Government.

The position adopted by the Department of Education representatives on the Working Party was that:

the degree of assistance needed to be contained to a level, which was not sufficient to precipitate a movement from the State school to the non-State sector. If, on the basis of the newly introduced provisions for transport assistance, sufficient parents elected to send their children to a non-State school in a larger centre, the enrolment at a small State school could fall below the minimum level forcing its closure. This could well be to the detriment of the community as a whole. (Treasury Working Party Report, September 1982)

In view of this concern, it was considered important that families should be responsible for a proportion of any fares in excess of the threshold.

It is worth noting that the initial proposal for the Class E rebate was for families to receive only half of any fares in excess of the \$12 per week threshold. However, Dunne "expressed a strong view in regard to the likely effectiveness of the proposed Class E allowance." (Treasury Working Party Report, 13/9/82)

He contended that the \$12 "threshold" was too high and that many families would find the payment of \$12 per week to be a heavy burden. He suggested a threshold of \$10, or less, would be more appropriate and that families should be able to recoup 100% of costs in excess of the threshold. Although this viewpoint did not prevail, Dunne was able to convince other members of the Working Party that the rebate should be increased to two-thirds of any expenditure in excess of the threshold.

In delivering the State Budget on 23 September 1982, Edwards announced that the Government had accepted the Working Party's recommendations. The two new categories of conveyance allowance (Classes D and E) were to be introduced from the commencement of the 1983 school year. The announcement represented a major breakthrough for families with students attending non-State schools.

In the conditions relating to the two new classes of Conveyance allowance, reference is made to the '*nearest school of type attended*'. A memorandum from the Assistant Director-General (Finance and Administration), for the Department of Education, provided the following guidelines regarding the '*type of school*'.

#### *School of Type*

- (a) *All Catholic schools are of the same type.*
- (b) *All schools conducted by the same religious denomination are of the same type.*
- (c) *Where an issue arises that cannot be resolved in terms of the above two guidelines, the matter should be referred to the Assistant Under Secretary, who will take the necessary actions to have the matter resolved. (Hinchy, 7/1/83)*

In the same memorandum, the following definitions were provided in relation to the administration of the two new classes of Conveyance Allowance. The definitions were the result of a Cabinet decision taken on 20 December 1982.

- (i) **Private vehicle** *a privately owned and registered motor vehicle, not used for the organised, collective transport of school children.*
- (ii) **Public transport** *a transport service operated under an unrestricted Department of Transport permit or license, for which fares are charged.*
- (iii) **School road transport service** *a school road transport service operated under the authority of the Department of Education.*

The memorandum also stressed:

- there were to be no changes to the conditions governing the operation of school road transport services (kilometre-based bus services), and
- Class D was to apply only where parents convey their children and not to situations where school operated or chartered buses were used, and
- that fares charged on buses operated by non-State schools or their nominees under Department of Transport permits that were restricted in any way, were not to be used in determining the level of Class E.

This meant that parents who were paying to have their children transported by school operated, or chartered buses, could not access the benefits of the two new classes of conveyance allowance, even if they were paying more than the \$12.00 threshold.

In a letter to the new Minister for Education, the Hon. Lin Powell, in March 1983, Dunne indicated that the implementation of the new school transport guidelines was a matter for concern. As well as difficulty being experienced in interpreting the guidelines, he mentioned that, "the regulations prepared by the department were not in harmony with what we believe to have been the spirit of the discussions with the Treasury Working Party." (Dunne, 30/3/83)

Dunne also alerted the Minister to other long standing problems that created "serious disadvantage" for parents of children wanting to access non-Government schools. viz:

- The \$12 threshold and the fact that families had to pay part of the balance,
- Class D should be paid on a per student basis similar to Class A,
- The definition of 'private transport' precluded many students from seeking assistance,
- The need to investigate the kilometre-based bus situation,
- The disruption to existing services to non-State schools caused by the establishment of new State schools,

- The increasing demand for system/school initiated school-based bus operations because it is the only way to resolve the problem caused by existing regulations, and
- Access to secondary school bus services would alleviate some problems.

The contents of Dunne's letter to the Minister were also included in a submission to the Chairman of the Treasury Working Party in late March 1983.

A report on the meeting of the Joint Treasury Working Party on 8 June 1983 reveals that Dunne and Druery acknowledged the gains in the previous budget, but highlighted the discrepancy between the scheme in practice and the Government's intent, as expressed in the 1981-82 Budget speech. They argued that the \$12.00 threshold was too high, the two-thirds rebate was inadequate and that the issue of "school-operated" services should be addressed. (Druery & Dunne, 18/6/83)

A meeting between representatives of the Queensland Catholic Education Office and the Department of Education was held on 10 February 1984, to discuss a range of issues concerning non-Government school transport problems, including:

(a) **Class E threshold level**

The Catholic representatives suggested the existing \$13 per week threshold should be \$5 or \$6 per week. The Departmental response was that this would create an inequitable situation for those Catholic families who were paying more than \$6 per week, but were ineligible for Class E assistance because they did not satisfy the distance criteria. That is they did not live more than 4.8km (secondary students) / 3.2km (students under 10 years of age) from the nearest school of type.

(b) **Class E family contribution**

The Catholic representatives gave notice that they would maintain their efforts to remove the condition requiring families to pay one-third of any fares above the \$13 per week threshold.

(c) **Extension of bus routes**

The representatives stressed the need for more generous provisions, which would allow kilometre-based school transport services to service non-State schools.

(d) **What constitutes private transport?**

The Catholic representatives expressed concern about the Cabinet decision of 20 December 1982 that defined "private transport". The Cabinet decision was based on advice from the Department of Education, despite the fact that the matter had not been discussed with Catholic education representatives prior to being submitted to Cabinet. The restrictive definition was considered contrary to the spirit of the deliberations of the Working Party. The Catholic representatives felt there was a need to re-examine the benefits available to those using school-based (owned) buses. They believed that, school owned buses, where students paid a fare to travel on the bus, should be included in the definition.

(e) **Access to kilometre-based school transport services**

The Catholic representatives indicated there was a need to allow non-State students to travel on kilometre-based buses beyond the nearest State school to a provincial centre where an appropriate non-State school was located.

The Departmental response was that these students already had access to the new Class D conveyance allowance, which provided a payment to the family for driving their children to a non-State school. It was also stressed that the viability of small State schools would be threatened if non-State students were granted unrestricted access to kilometre-based bus services. The inevitable increase in cost to the Government was also cited. The Catholic sector's response was that the viability of some of the smaller Catholic schools could be in jeopardy if access to kilometre-based buses was denied.

(f) **Liberalised conditions for Class D payments**

The Catholic representatives felt that the Class D allowance should be available to those families who satisfied the distance criteria and drove their children all the way to and from a non-State school, even though their children had access to public transport or a school road transport service. Their rationale was that in cases where the bus fares were below the Class E threshold, they would not be eligible for any Class E assistance. The only means by which they could obtain some financial benefit from the new provisions was if they used private transport and were able to claim Class D.

(g) **Comparability of Class A and C to Class D**

The Catholic sector representatives pointed out an inconsistency in the rules applying to Conveyance Allowances Classes A and C, compared to Class D. Classes A and C were paid on a per student basis, on a graduated scale, based on the distance travelled. Class D, on the other hand, was paid on a per family basis at a flat rate, irrespective of the number of students conveyed or the distance travelled.

### **THE 1984 EVALUATION OF SCHOOL TRANSPORT**

In June 1984 the Department of Education's Financial Research and Analysis Branch published a paper which sought to evaluate the operation of the two new classes of conveyance allowance. The report was based on a survey distributed to each Regional Office of the Department of Education and revealed that up until 30 April 1983:

471 families had received a benefit under Conveyance Allowance Class D,  
and

130 families had received a benefit under Conveyance Allowance Class E.

Approximately \$80,000 in additional assistance had been paid to parents with children in non-State schools as a result of the introduction of Class D and E. The extent of the Class E benefit to individual families ranged from the twenty-two families who received less than \$1 per week to the two families who received more than \$22 per week.

63% of all Class D and E approvals were from the Department's Brisbane North Region and within this region the allowance was confined to a relatively small number of schools. There were no approvals for families living in the South-Western Region, the North Western Region or the Wide Bay Region.

The Evaluation report noted that the publicity surrounding the introduction of Conveyance Allowance Classes D and E, resulted in an overall increase in the number of applications for conveyance allowance Classes A, B and C, particularly from families with students attending non-State schools. (Queensland Department of Education, 19/6/84)

It should be kept in mind that some students attending non-State schools were eligible to receive Conveyance Allowance Classes A, B and C, providing they satisfied the guidelines.

The Evaluation report cited seven scenarios to demonstrate how families had benefited from the introduction of Class D and Class E.

e.g. A family living at Mount Morgan, 2 kilometres from the local State High School, had a son attending Year 10 at St Joseph's College in Rockhampton and a daughter in Year 8 at the Range Convent High School in Rockhampton. Bus fares amounted to \$22.40 per week, of which \$6.93 per week was refunded under Class E.

It is worth noting that the Evaluation report mentioned that, "The scheme has not provided benefits for as many families as would have been anticipated, nor have the financial benefits provided to families been as high as expected." (Department of Education, 19/6/84)

Following the publication of the Evaluation report, Dunne wrote to the Premier, the Hon. Joh. Bjelke-Petersen, advising him that the two new classes of conveyance allowance had provided "only very minor assistance." (Dunne, 14/9/84) "In response to persistent and increasing pressure by many parents", Dunne drew the Premier's attention to a number of problem areas concerning school transport and offered recommendations to resolve two of these problems. The problems



referred to were those unresolved issues already raised numerous times in other forums.

In relation to the Class E threshold, the recommendation offered was:

“We are seeking a reduced threshold and abolition of the requirement for parents to pay 1/3 of the fare over the threshold.” (Dunne, 14/9/84)

In relation to the definition of ‘private transport’, the recommendation offered was:

“Assistance to be provided to private bus operations owned by schools, Parents and Friends or parishes, by similar regulations as apply to kilometre-based buses with a bus conveyance committee; or subsidy to parents as under conditions applying in Class A.” (Dunne, 14/9/84)

Despite follow up action by the Federation of Parents and Friends, the Queensland Catholic Education Commission and the Bishops’ Standing Committee, no further action was taken by the Department of Education.

However, the letter to the Premier achieved some success in that the 1984-85 State Budget presented to parliament made provision for an improvement in the level of assistance available under Class D.

From the beginning of the 1985 school year the Class D allowance was increased to \$137.00 per annum, for each eligible student. Previously the allowance was calculated on a per family basis. Although the increased benefit was appreciated, the new level of Class D assistance had been set at the minimum level of assistance available under Classes A, B or C. The new Class D allowance still did not take into consideration the actual distance between the child’s residence and the school of type attended.

In a document dated 29 April 1985 under the heading ‘What Constitutes Private Transport?’, Druery and Dunne state:

“We believe that the definition of private transport, as expressed by Cabinet Decision no. 39245 of 20 December 1982, is far too restrictive and is contrary to the spirit of discussions of the working parties.”

This document also mentioned that the non-State sector had constantly appealed to the Government for re-consideration of Class E. It also noted that the threshold had increased to \$14 per family per week and that the Government had been urged to reduce this to \$10 per week as well as introducing a total remittance of any fares incurred beyond the threshold.

Although the existing transport regulations provided for an extension of bus services beyond the nearest State school, very few non-State schools received the service without private arrangements and additional costs, causing difficulties for many students and their parents. "We strongly believe that such services paid for by community taxes should not discriminate against children attending non-Government schools." (Druery and Dunne, 1985)

Druery and Dunne also referred to the constant stream of complaints from those parents who wanted their children to be allowed to travel on a kilometre-based bus service to a centre where a Catholic school existed. The Catholic school sector proposed that the children be permitted to travel on kilometre-based buses beyond the State school, for the payment of a fare.

The Department of Education's *Administrative Instruction AI 450 (Rev.1)*, effective from 13 September 1984, stated that kilometre-based bus services could be instituted by the Department of Education for the "conveyance of students from their residence to the nearest State school, when an application is made on behalf of a number of students residing in one general direction from a school and at the required distance ...from the nearest State school." (Department of Education, 1984) Before an application for such a service could be approved "the number of eligible students to be conveyed had to be large enough to ensure that a daily average of nine would be maintained. The proposed route must not be too long or the estimated cost per student be prohibitive." (Department of Education, 1984)

Each kilometre-based service would "normally operate to the nearest State school and will be provided to assist those students who reside more than 4.8 kilometres from the State school to which the transport service operates and who do not reside within 4.8 kilometres of any other school." (Department of Education, 1984)

Any student under 10 years of age was eligible for free travel providing they resided more than 3.2 kilometres from the nearest State school. As soon as a student reached 10 years of age they became ineligible for free travel unless they resided more than 4.8 kilometres from the nearest State school. Eligible primary students were permitted to use secondary school bus services if other means of free travel were not available.

Students attending a non-State school in a centre to which the approved kilometre-based service operated could use the service under the conditions applicable to students attending the State school. That is, non-State students had to live more than 4.8 kilometres from both the nearest State school and the school attended. For students under 10 years of age the distance was 3.2 kilometres.

This policy discriminated against families who had students attending non-State schools. As well as creating economic hardship for many families in rural areas of the state it meant that a significant proportion of the parents' time was spent driving children to and from school.

In December 1985 two families with children attending St. Columba's School in Dalby wrote to the Regional Director of Education for the South-Western Region seeking approval for their children to travel into Dalby on an existing kilometre-based bus service running from Jimbour to Dalby. Both families had elected not to send their children to the local Jimbour State school. According to one of the parents, Mr J. Matthews, the bus had plenty of spare seats, and both the bus operator and local Conveyance Committee were happy for the children to use the service.

The Regional Director of Education, Mr N. Adsett, advised both families that:

School transport services are instituted to convey students from their residence to the nearest school offering the appropriate year of study. The Department does not accept responsibility for conveyance of students (State or Non-State) beyond a school offering the appropriate year of study and to which a school transport service officially operates. (Adsett, 3/1/86)

**A SUMMARY OF  
TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE BENEFITS GAINED  
FOR NON-STATE SCHOOL STUDENTS  
DURING THE PERIOD 1981 - 1985**

**RAIL TRAVEL**

There were no changes to existing policy.

**BUS TRAVEL**

From January 1983 non-State students were eligible for Conveyance Allowance Class D and Class E, in addition to any entitlements they may have been eligible to receive through Classes A, B and C.

In 1985 Conveyance Allowance Class D was changed to allow payment on a per student basis rather than per family.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### TWO SCHOOL TRANSPORT REVIEWS DELIVER MINOR GAINS FOR THE NON-STATE SECTOR 1986 - 1990

In May 1986 the Department of Education's Financial Research and Analysis Branch prepared a draft paper entitled 'Principles Underlying a Transport Assistance Scheme'. The paper set out nine principles that could underlie a transport assistance scheme for all Queensland students, including suggestions that the scheme should:

- provide equality of access, to ensure each student had an equal opportunity to access education, no matter where they reside in the State,
- incorporate equity provisions which would avoid policies and practices which advantage some social groups and disadvantage others,
- operate efficiently and effectively,
- be simple to understand and administer, and ensure the safety and welfare of students.

Several of the principles included in the Department of Education's draft document were subsequently incorporated into a set of proposed principles for discussion by the Funding and Accountability committee of the Queensland Catholic Education Commission, on 30 May 1986.

Meanwhile, the problem of not being able to access kilometre-based bus services, was also being experienced in other regions of the state. Early in 1987 Dunne made representation to Powell, the Minister of Education, in relation to transport difficulties being experienced by Burpengary and Morayfield primary school children travelling to Caboolture to attend St Peter's School and the inability of primary school students to travel on a high school bus to Boonah.

In his reply to Dunne, the Minister indicated, in reference to the Boonah situation, that he:

...could not agree to allow the children to use this bus without providing concessions for all other children in similar situations throughout the State.... The Class D and E Conveyance Allowances were introduced in recognition of the costs to parents committed to a non-State school education for their children and this is the only assistance which can be provided in these circumstances. (Powell, 8/4/87)

The Minister mentioned that there were also many families who incur considerable expense in transporting children to their nearest State schools and that State school children who by-pass local schools do not receive any additional assistance. He indicated that the provision of school transport assistance during the 1985-86 financial year was in excess of \$43 million. "Any relaxation of the eligibility conditions or increase in the level of assistance provided would increase this cost significantly and I regret that I am unable to offer any additional assistance at present." (Powell, 8/4/87)

In June 1987 the secretary of All Saints' School at Boonah wrote to the Brisbane Archdiocese Parents and Friends Council regarding the plight of several local families. Because of their decision to send their children to a Non-State school, they were "feeling the strain of high fuel costs on top of school fees. Several parents feel that unless their children are allowed to travel on existing buses, they may have to consider changing schools." (Sinawski, 15/6/87)

As in the Jimbour to Dalby situation, the bus operators in the Boonah district were willing to convey the students to All Saints' School, however the Department of Education's transport assistance policy rendered them ineligible. Although the eight families involved were eligible for Conveyance Allowance Class D for driving their children to school, the annual allowance of \$155 did not adequately cover their motor vehicle running costs. Neither did it compensate them for the added inconvenience of having to travel an average of eighty kilometres each day.

## THE 1988 REVIEW OF SCHOOL TRANSPORT

In 1988 the Premier, the Hon. Mike Ahern and the new Minister for Education, Hon. Brian Littleproud initiated a Review of School Transport in Queensland. The Review had two major objectives:

- Improve effectiveness, efficiency and economy of current arrangements, and
- Determine [an] appropriate split of Department responsibilities.

It was intended that the Review, which was a joint initiative of the Departments of Education and Transport, would examine all forms of transport assistance being provided to students who attended State and non-State schools, including special education facilities. The views of interested transport industry and community groups were sought.

The Review summary presented to interest groups showed how the school transport arrangements in Queensland had “grown up like topsy without any clear objectives other than to meet Education Department requirements and the needs of students attending State schools.” (Bishops’ Standing Committee Submission to Government, May 1990)

During 1988, a number of parents of children attending Boonah’s All Saints’ School wrote to their local member, the Hon. Kevin Lingard, Premier Ahern and Littleproud. They expressed their dissatisfaction about the ongoing problem of not being able to access existing kilometre-based bus services in their local area. In a subsequent letter to Dunne, in February 1989, the Secretary of the All Saints’ School P & F Association indicated that the letters to the Members of Parliament did not provide “any satisfactory result.”

As a direct result of the 1988 Review, the total responsibility for the administration of school transport was transferred from the Department of Education to the Transport Department in July 1989.

In February 1989 Druery was appointed Chairman of the Queensland Catholic Education Commission, a position he held until March 1996, following a decision to appoint an independent chairperson. In conjunction with Druery’s appointment,

the word 'Office' was dropped from the title 'Queensland Catholic Education Office'. Since then, the Catholic sector's peak education body has been referred to as the Queensland Catholic Education Commission.

During the lead up to the December 1989 State election, the Shadow Minister for Education, the Hon. Paul Braddy, made the following statement in response to a question from the Queensland Catholic Education Commission:

The Australian Labor Party supports non-Government student access to Government provided services on the same basis as Government school students and the application in an instance of the "user-pays" principle would be even-handed as between Government and non-Government students.

In Government, the Labor school transport policy will facilitate the right of parents to choose their children's schooling. It is an area which will be reviewed in Government and anomalies in existing arrangements such as differences between students travelling by rail and by bus will be rectified. (Bishops' Standing Committee Submission to Government, May 1990)

On 2 December 1989, the Labor Party was elected to Government, after thirty-two years in opposition. In an effort to "reduce the number of anomalies and inequities which had been identified in the scheme", the new Minister for Transport, the Hon. David Hamill, invited the Queensland Catholic Education Commission to identify areas that needed changing, in order to bring about greater equity for all children and if possible, to provide an estimate of the cost involved in bringing these changes about. (Hamill, January 1990)

### **THE 1990 REVIEW OF SCHOOL TRANSPORT**

On 26 April 1990 Hamill announced yet another Review of the existing school transport arrangements. The Review took place within "a tight budgetary framework" and involved representatives of student, parent and transport bodies. (Hamill, 1990)

The Minister's invitation to the Catholic Education Commission resulted in the appointment of Frank Long, from the Brisbane Catholic Education Office, to assist Vic Lorenz, Senior Education Officer at QCEC and Leo Dunne, in gathering the information required for the Review. Long consulted principals, teachers and



parents from a number of Catholic schools that were major users of school transport services. He also held discussions with officials from the Department of Transport seeking information needed to draw satisfactory conclusions.

Long arranged for more than 5,000 survey forms to be distributed through thirty (30) Catholic schools. Drawing from the data obtained, he prepared a submission based on case studies of four areas of the state - Boonah, Kingaroy, the Sunshine Coast and Mackay.

The AISQ, which represented 101 independent schools in 1990, agreed to participate in the school transport Review.

In May 1990 the Queensland Bishops' Standing Committee on State Funding for Education presented a submission on School Transport to the Government. The opening paragraph unequivocally stated the position of the Catholic school authorities:

School bus transport arrangements in Queensland have always favoured children who attend State schools. Unlike some other states, for example Tasmania and New South Wales where right of choice of parents has been properly respected by Governments, Queensland has allowed a definite discriminatory policy against parents who choose a non-Government school and require school transport to access that school. (Queensland Bishops' Standing Committee Submission, 1990)

The submission presented a historical overview of the various school transport evaluations and reviews that had occurred between 1981 and 1989. It also outlined a series of 'principles', the Standing Committee believed should apply to any school transport policy. viz:

### **Equity**

All regulations concerning school transport should apply across all sectors and be seen to be fair and even handed in their application.

### **Simplicity**

Regulations must be administratively simple.

### **Right of Choice**

The United Nations Charter, supported by all Australian Governments, allows parents the right to choose the kind of education that best suits their children.

## **Safety**

The school transport services provided by the Government should ensure the safety of children being transported.

## **Role of the Minister**

The Minister for Transport should have equal responsibility for all school children, irrespective of the type of school they attend.

## **Providing for the Needy**

Where it is demonstrated that special circumstances exist, consideration should be given to the provision of additional assistance.

## **Equal Treatment of all Children**

Irrespective of the type of school attended, the geographical location of the student's home, the mode of transport chosen, the ethnic origin of the child and the income level of the parents, all children should be treated equally.

In appreciation of the fact that, "the further the pendulum moves in the direction of equity the higher the cost to Government and therefore all taxpayers", the Catholic school authorities stressed that Catholic families were prepared to accept some of the cost involved in school transport, providing the "price charged did not impede the parents exercising [their] right of choice." (Queensland Bishops' Standing Committees Submission, 1990)

Consistent with the principle of equity espoused previously, the submission recommended some changes to the regulations concerning Conveyance Allowance and kilometre-based buses. It was also suggested that the benefits associated with Conveyance Allowance Classes A, B and C should apply equally to all students and that Classes D and E should be abolished. For Class A, eligibility would be based on the student attending their 'nearest school of type'. That is, those families who had to drive their children to the 'nearest school of type' should be paid a conveyance allowance based on the distance between their residence and the school attended.

It was also recommended that the regulations concerning kilometre-based buses be reviewed to ensure all children were treated equally. It was suggested that:

- the section of the regulations relating to 'nearest State school' be abolished,

- kilometre-based buses be permitted to convey children to the nearest school of type attended,
- secondary school services be permitted to carry primary school students to the nearest school of type attended,
- where the minimum average number of students existed, a kilometre-based bus service should be introduced to service a non-State school, in the same manner as would apply to a State school,
- the review of the kilometre-based services be undertaken by a committee comprising Government and non-State school authorities, bus operators, conveyance committees and the Department of Transport.

The Minister invited interested parties to a meeting on 10 September 1990, to discuss a range of issues dealing with school bus and rail transport. At the conclusion of this meeting, Hamill circulated a paper entitled 'Proposed Changes to School Transport Policy in Queensland' and, according to Dunne, immediately left the meeting. The paper, which had been prepared by the Department of Transport's Policy Planning Unit, revealed that 1990-91 the budget for school transport had been reduced by \$3.6 million in real terms. It also stated that "the package focuses on ensuring assistance is available to access the State education system for all Queenslanders." (Qld. Dept. of Transport, 1990) This was clearly inconsistent with Labor Party policy outlined by Braddy prior to the December 1989 election. Other than a change to the eligibility conditions relating to primary students, the proposals relating to student bus travel focussed mainly on cost saving strategies.

The paper proposed that there would be a change to the existing policy whereby primary school students had to meet different eligibility requirements once they turned 10 years of age. It was proposed that the change in eligibility requirements would now take place at the end of year 7 in primary school. This was a logical improvement to the scheme, as it linked eligibility to the stage of a child's education, primary or secondary.

Dunne and the Executive Director of the AISQ, wrote independently to Hamill about the proposed changes. Dunne stressed that although the Government

supported a policy of freedom of choice, its school transport policies and regulations inflicted high costs on many of the families that chose to exercise that choice. As the Government's proposals were released at the end of the school term, it was not possible to consult with schools and parents, so Dunne provided the Minister with an interim response.

Late in September, the Minister's office organised a second meeting to further explore questions raised by the proposals already put forward. Whilst general agreement was reached on most of the bus issues, the proposals relating to rail travel were of major concern. The circumstances surrounding this highly volatile issue are addressed in the following chapter of this project.

When Hamill released the 'Approved Changes to School Transport Policy in Queensland' in November 1990, it became clear that the 1990 Review of School Transport had resulted in only minor modifications being made to bus travel provisions under the School Transport Assistance Scheme.

The following changes took effect from the beginning of the 1991 school year:

- (i) All primary students living more than 3.2 kilometres from their nearest State school would be eligible for free transport by bus/ferry to that primary school. The significance of this change was that all primary students over 10 years of age could now travel to school free of charge. Previously free transport was restricted to students under 10 years of age. This generally meant that students in Years Six and Seven had not been eligible for free transport to their nearest State school.
- (ii) The regulations relating to secondary school students remained unchanged. Providing they resided more than 4.8 kilometres from their nearest State secondary school they were entitled to free bus/ferry transport.
- (iii) Another change made to the kilometre-based bus service regulations related to the financial viability of the service. These services had to meet a Government imposed per capita financial limit before a service could be

introduced or extended. If it was going to cost more than the per capita limit to establish or extend a kilometre-based service, it could not proceed. At the time of the review, the limit was \$5.15 per student per day. If, for example, ten (10) students were to be transported to school, the maximum cost to the Government for the service was limited to \$51.50. However this figure did not adequately reflect the circumstances in rural areas, where there were generally fewer students travelling on a bus and the distances involved were greater than in urban areas. From the start of 1991, the per capita payment was increased to a maximum of \$10.00 per student per day.

- (iv) A change to the Conveyance Allowance rules meant that conveyance allowance would be paid on a per vehicle basis, rather than on a per student basis as before. This change was supposedly designed “to better reflect distance travelled.” (Education Office Gazette, November 1990)

These changes did little to address the inequities still inherent in the School Transport Assistance Scheme. In correspondence to both Hamill and Braddy, Dunne, in his capacity as Deputy Chairman of the Queensland Catholic Education Commission, referred to the Government’s “band-aid approach to the whole school transport problem.” (Dunne, 1990)

**A SUMMARY OF  
TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE BENEFITS GAINED  
FOR NON-STATE SCHOOL STUDENTS  
DURING THE PERIOD 1986 – 1990**

**RAIL TRAVEL**

Refer to the end of chapter 8.

**BUS TRAVEL**

There were no changes to existing policy, which specifically improved benefits for non-State students.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### GOVERNMENT ATTEMPTS TO CHANGE SCHOOL RAIL TRAVEL PRACTICE 1986- 1990

In mid-November 1987 a memorandum concerning free rail passes was distributed to principals of all State and non-State secondary schools and colleges. The memorandum was designed to alert principals to their responsibilities in relation to the regulations concerning free rail travel for secondary students using the metropolitan rail network.

Principals were advised that expenditure on rail travel, by the Department of Education, had escalated significantly since 1980. The increase could not be explained by increases in school enrolments or by approved fare increases during the period. The Department was concerned that many students were being granted rail passes they were not entitled to because school principals were not rigidly applying the regulations relating to the issuing of free rail passes. Although rail and bus passes were meant to be issued only to those students who used the services on a regular daily basis, passes were being issued to students who did not satisfy this requirement.

The increased expenditure was also being caused by the fact that students were being granted a rail pass that enabled them to bypass their nearest school of the type attended. Principals who authorised free rail passes under such circumstances were acting outside the authority of the Minister, irrespective of the fact that their decision to act outside the guidelines may not have been intentional. Parents were supposed to be responsible for any additional fares incurred by any of their children who travelled beyond the nearest school of the type attended.

Accompanying the memorandum was a copy of the 'Guidelines for Principals'. This guidelines were meant to "remove any doubt regarding the eligibility of students." (Adsett, 1987)

The memorandum indicated that the existing arrangements would be allowed to stand until the end of 1987, however any rail passes issued in error would need to be rectified before free travel was authorised for 1988. Parents who might be effected by this adherence to the guidelines, "should be given adequate prior advice by Principals that free passes will no longer be issued outside the approved guidelines." (Adsett, 1987)

Principals were also reminded that when authorising free rail/bus passes they were acting on behalf of the Department and were expected to abide by its policies and to be able to produce appropriate documentation, if so requested.

In 1987 the rail travel provisions for non-State students were as follows:

Primary students who resided more than 2.4km from the nearest non-State primary school were eligible for free rail travel to school, providing their school was not located past the State primary school.

Secondary students were eligible for free rail travel between the railway station nearest to a student's home and the nearest school of the chosen denominational type. No distance criteria applied.

In response to the sudden and unexpected memorandum, Dunne convened a meeting of the executive members of the Archdiocesan P & F Council. He subsequently wrote to Catholic school principals expressing the Federation's concerns and outlining a range of suggested strategies which could be utilised to have the decision to enforce the rail travel guidelines rescinded. If the guidelines were enforced, Dunne argued that it would create significant financial stress for many families who were already committed to having their children attend a particular school. Schools themselves could face a loss of enrolments, which would have a negative effect on their budget and staffing arrangements.

Although the guidelines had existed for some years, Dunne argued that "the accepted and condoned practice had been to allow free rail travel to students from any locality to the school of their parents' choice." (Dunne, 1987) He believed that



some principals were not aware of any guidelines to the contrary. Whether the timing of the memorandum was deliberate or not, the fact that it came near the end of the school year ensured that it was difficult for the non-State sector to organise an effective response.

However, Druery and Dunne, representing the Bishops Standing Committee on State Aid, met with the Minister for Education, the Hon. Lin Powell, on 23 November 1987. Powell agreed, subject to Cabinet approval, that the 'status quo' should apply for non-State schools during 1988.

By February 1988 Powell had been replaced by the Hon. Brian Littleproud, who convinced Cabinet that a concession should be granted for 1988, to enable his Department "to conduct an operational audit of the whole matter before considering it further." (Littleproud, 1988) School principals, rail authorities and the Regional Directors of Education were encouraged to exercise leniency in applying the existing policy during 1988.

However, as mentioned in a letter from Druery to the Principal of Iona College:

school authorities are somewhat at the mercy of students and families, some of whom have taken the attitude that applications for rail passes cost nothing and therefore can be justified in any circumstances. The reality, of course, is that every pass claimed must be paid for by "someone" as if it were used on a full-time and continuing basis. (Druery, 1988)

During discussions with Littleproud, Druery ensured that the Minister was aware that the uncertainty surrounding the rail travel issue was likely to have a negative effect on enrolments in Catholic schools for 1989. Parents intending to enrol their child at a school needed to know in advance the extent of any associated transport costs.

In September 1988 Littleproud advised Druery that the concessional arrangements that had been operating during 1988 would continue for 1989. The Minister's decision was linked to the school transport Review that had been undertaken jointly by the Departments of Education and Transport. As the completed Review

was under consideration by the Government, it was felt that the proposed examination of rail transport, in isolation, was no longer appropriate.

As mentioned previously, a Labor Government had been elected to power in December 1989. This resulted in Hamill being appointed Minister for Transport and Braddy, Minister for Education.

Although the Queensland Bishops' Standing Committee presented a submission in relation to school transport to the Government in May 1990, it made no specific reference to rail transport.

On 10 September 1990 Hamill called a meeting of all interest groups. At the end of the meeting, a discussion paper entitled 'Proposed Changes to School Transport Policy in Queensland' was circulated. It had been prepared by the Minister's Policy Planning Unit, following completion of the Review.

The paper acknowledged that existing guidelines were being interpreted in a way that resulted "... in Queensland Railways providing free school transport for many students beyond the original intent of the scheme." (Queensland Department of Transport, 1990)

In an attempt to remedy the situation and to provide equity between bus and rail travel, it was proposed that the eligibility requirements applying to bus travel should also apply to rail travel. If accepted, this would result in rail travel being provided:

- a) to students residing more than 3.5 km (for primary students) and more than 5 km (for secondary students) from the nearest State school, and
- b) for travel to the nearest State school or an equivalent distance.

It was proposed that these changes be implemented from the commencement of the 1991 school year. A further meeting of the School Transport Working Group was convened for 27 September 1990.

On 28 September 1990, in response to the proposed changes to the school transport policy, the Queensland Catholic Education Commission and the Parents & Friends Federation submitted a joint response to the Government. The submission acknowledged the inequity inherent in the existing provisions for rail travellers and indicated that the Catholic sector was not opposed to a charge being made. A system of zonal rail fares was suggested as an attractive option, providing the same rates applied to all bus travel.

In a letter accompanying the submission, Dunne reminded Hamill that whilst the Government espoused a policy of freedom of choice in relation to a family's selection of school for their children, in practice the Government's policies and regulations resulted in high transport costs, effectively denying parents their right of choice.

On 2 October, the day after school resumed for term four, principals of Catholic schools that were major users of rail services attended a hastily organised meeting and were briefed on recent developments. Dunne invited representatives from Queensland Transport to attend the meeting. The representatives, Messrs. Mick McShea and Ian Herbert, provided the first indication of the magnitude of the fares to be charged.

The following day Dunne wrote another letter to Hamill urging him to undertake further consultation before making any decisions that would adversely affect Catholic students. The Minister was advised that the Catholic sector was "planning major meetings of parents to advise them of the Government's position with regard to rail and other school transport issues." The Minister was also urged "... to consider further consultation prior to taking decisions that would be seen to adversely affect Catholic students." (Dunne, 1990) Accompanying this letter was a new submission on School Transport Policy – Rail Services, prepared by the Queensland Catholic Education Commission. Dunne also wrote to the Premier, the Hon. Wayne Goss, about the meetings with parents and provided him with a copy of the submission. Similar letters were sent to all Ministers in the Goss Government, as advice had been received that Cabinet was planning to make a quick decision on the matter.

The QCEC submission proposed that all students (State and non-State) should be required to pay rail fares. It was suggested that all students within a 5 km radius of their school, should pay \$2.00 per week. Any students beyond the 5km radius would be required to pay \$4.00 per week. The submission outlined a range of social, administrative, political and economic benefits that would flow as a result of the introduction of a fare for all students.

On 5 October Dunne and Lorenz met with Herbert and two representatives from State Rail. It soon became clear that the fares being contemplated by the Government were in fact higher than McShea and Herbert had suggested at the meeting on 2 October.

As the Government did not provide any feedback on the latest submission, Catholic sector representatives proceeded to arrange a series of "information nights" on the issue. A meeting at Iona College attracted 240 parents from twelve non-State schools. The following motion was carried unanimously at five of the six regional school community meetings. At the sixth meeting, only one person voted against the motion:

That the Government provide free school transport for all Queensland students to their school of choice by 31 December 1991. (Dunne, 1990)

The Liberal Shadow Minister for Education, the Hon. Bob Quinn, was sent a copy of the letter that had been distributed to all Ministers of the Goss Government. Quinn issued a media release in which he criticised the Government for breaking a key pre-election promise concerning "the right of parents to choose their children's schooling." (Quinn, 1990)

On 24 October a delegation of parents from one of the meetings met with Hamill and the Deputy Premier, the Hon. Tom Burns, to convey their concerns.

In the wake of intense political pressure from the non-State education sector, on 29 October Hamill placed four options before Cabinet for its consideration. Despite the Government's original intention to reduce spending on school travel, Cabinet decided to adopt one of three options that involved spending more money

on school transport. This ensured there would be no change to school rail policy for the 1991 school year. Cabinet also agreed that Hamill should meet with representatives of the School Transport Industry Working Group as soon as possible, to outline the decisions of Cabinet. Accordingly, a meeting was held on 5 November 1990.

The document, 'Approved Changes to School Transport Policy in Queensland - November 1990', indicated the Minister would, "continue to liaise with interested parties regarding the present situation where 7,000 students out of a student population of 600,000 are thought to be receiving travel concessions to which they may not be entitled."

An article in the 'Courier Mail' on 7 November 1990 reported that the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) had been asked to investigate the alleged robbing of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money through the student transport system. The Queensland Parents and Citizens Association had estimated that up to \$3.76 million a year could be saved if the free rail travel system was administered correctly. The Queensland Parents and Citizens Association wrote to the chair of the CJC, seeking advice and requesting that a review of the school rail travel system be conducted.

*The school rail travel issue flared again during the period 1991–1995. In order to ensure continuity, the events that took place during that period will be addressed in the following chapter, before returning to the school bus issue.*

**A SUMMARY OF  
RAIL TRAVEL BENEFITS GAINED  
FOR NON-STATE SCHOOL STUDENTS  
DURING THE PERIOD 1986 – 1990**

**RAIL**

There were no changes to existing policy.

## CHAPTER NINE

### GOVERNMENT INTRODUCES A 'USER PAYS' PRINCIPLE FOR SCHOOL RAIL TRAVEL 1991-1995

In March 1991 the Minister for Transport initiated a further Review of the school transport assistance program, to be conducted in cooperation with interested groups. Two committees were formed to implement the Review. The first, an Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) comprising representatives from eight Government departments, was established to develop options and to prepare a comprehensive report for Cabinet. An Industry Working Group comprising representatives of bodies associated with State and non-State schools, transport operators and the Departments of Education and Transport was also established. This latter group was required to provide comments on options developed by the IDC.

By October 1991 Cabinet had six options to consider, ranging from the provision of free transport to the school of choice for every Queensland child to maintaining the status quo. The writer could not locate any evidence to suggest anything concrete had resulted from the release of the October 1991 Options Paper, however it is clear that the Department of Education was still actively engaged in finding a resolution to what it perceived to be a waste of taxpayer's money. In 1993, about 24,500 students were issued with rail passes for daily travel to and from school. The Department of Education claimed to have strong evidence in relation to the underuse of these passes, which were paid for by the Department, irrespective of whether they were used or not.

In October 1993, the Department of Education's School Transport Review Team, under the leadership of Mr Neil Whittaker, produced four options for the consideration of interested parties. The options put forward were:

- Alignment of the bus and rail policies. This would eliminate all concerns relating to equity, as assistance would have been provided only to those students who lived beyond a threshold distance from school.
- A user pays contribution. All users of rail would be required to pay a base rate, such as \$0.50 per trip. The Options Paper pointed out that this option would mean that the Department of Education would pay for the “choice” element of school travel. It was mentioned that “choice is made by parents and they should probably feel the economic impact of their choice.” (Whittaker, October 1993)
- A user pays scheme whereby the Department of Education paid the initial portion of the fare, (e.g. up to \$3.00 per week) with the balance to be paid by the parents.
- Strict adherence to the existing policy.

Following the Goss Government’s announcement, in late 1990, that there would be no change to the conditions applying to student rail travel, there was no subsequent announcement by the Government on the matter of rail passes during 1992 and 1993. The accepted practice that existed in 1990 was still operating in November 1993.

However, on 19 November 1993 the ‘Courier Mail’ ran a front page article under the headline ‘Principals in rail rort’. (Koch, 19/11/93) It reported that Education Department investigators had found some school principals had engaged in widespread abuse of the state’s free student rail pass scheme and that “there is also evidence of limited usage of such passes once obtained.” According to the article, in July 1993 the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) had alerted the department about allegations that some principals tried to attract “desirable students” by falsely certifying that students were eligible for travel. “The rort is costing taxpayers several million dollars a year.” (Koch, 19/11/93)

The QCEC issued a media release in response to the article in the ‘Courier Mail’, in which Druery, the Commission Chair, claimed the newspaper headline was “...an unnecessary attack on the integrity of Queensland school principals in both the Government and non-Government school sectors.” (QCEC, 19/11/93)



Druery went on to say that, "At issue is the inadequacy of the existing rules and their uneven and inconsistent interpretation by Government officers over the years, not the attitudes or practices of school principals." He regarded the CJC statement as a serious distraction to the significant review of School Transport that was in progress, particularly in light of the fact that the Commission, the Education Department and school principals had already addressed and resolved some of the identified problems.

On the same day as the article appeared in the 'Courier Mail', the Director General of Education, Professor Roger Scott, wrote to principals of State and non-State schools, about the issuing of rail passes for student travel. Scott stressed that principals were not permitted to exercise any discretion in varying the stated policy. Dunne, in a letter to Scott, expressed the Catholic sector's concern with the "proposed departure from the current practice." (Dunne, 26/11/93) Dunne argued that the existing policy discriminated against State school students as well as Catholic students and was not in accordance with Government policy, which espoused a commitment to social justice and equity.

On 1 December 1993 Druery was advised that a further communication on the issue of rail passes had been sent to school principals by I. Mathers, Queensland Transport's Director (Passenger Transport). His letter advised that interim arrangements would be developed for the start of the 1994 school year and that a more comprehensive system would be developed during 1994. Druery immediately faxed a letter to Mathers, pointing out that the interim arrangements, as outlined, would impose "an intolerable burden of work on principals at this time of the year." (Druery, 1/12/93)

One component of the interim arrangements was that school principals would be required "to notify students and [their] respective parent/guardian" where students had been identified by Queensland Transport as being ineligible. (Mathers, December 1993). As the letter from Queensland Transport was not forwarded to schools until the end of November, some senior students had already finished school and insufficient time remained to do what was expected by Queensland Transport. Druery believed Mather's request to be unrealistic and unfair and

advised him that his letter and the events of the previous weeks had caused considerable distress among parents and it was likely that the unrest would be voiced in the public forum. In line with the co-operative approach adopted by the Commission during the previous twelve months, Druery offered to meet with Mathers to explore ways to resolve the problem. Mathers agreed to a meeting on 7 December 1993, but restricted the subject of the meeting to the administrative processes designed to ensure only those students eligible to receive a rail pass were in fact issued with one. As Druery was unavailable on that date, Dunne and Lorenz were nominated to meet with Mathers and other representatives of Queensland Transport and the Department of Education.

As an indication of the importance of the issue and the pace of events at the time, Druery, on the same day (1/12/93):

- spoke with the Transport Minister's senior staff to alert them to the possibility of strong public reaction from parents if nothing was done to moderate their concerns,
- briefed the Archbishop and indicated the action proposed, and
- took up a long standing invitation to communicate directly with the Office of Cabinet when public conflict seemed inevitable.

The 7 December meeting resulted in the Catholic sector agreeing to the previously mentioned interim arrangements being set in place, for the first semester of 1994. Both Government departments recognised that compliance may not be possible until students returned to school at the start of 1994. Dunne and Lorenz left the meeting confident that the School Transport Review would address many of the concerns expressed by the Catholic sector and that many of the anomalies identified would be accommodated in the Review's recommendations.

Druery and Dunne spent over four hours, on 28 January 1994, in discussions with officers from the Department of Education about the interim rail travel arrangements. Although the departmental officers were co-operative and constructive, the meeting failed to provide a satisfactory resolution, as they were constrained by directives imposed on the Director-General of Education by the

CJC. Therefore, Druery and Dunne sought an urgent meeting with the Director-General.

Druery and Lorenz met with Scott and two of his senior officers on 2 February 1994. Scott indicated he was unable to vary the rail pass guidelines given the CJC's position. He did, however, suggest that there was scope for him to vary the guidelines in relation to schools that were providing "a specialised curriculum to meet the needs of students with special education needs." Scott advised that State Rail and the Department of Education were negotiating several options to reduce the financial impact on parents who were required to pay because of the implementation of the guidelines. It was reaffirmed that the Government would be reviewing the whole school transport issue in March and that students in uniform, or with student identification would be able to travel on trains free of charge, until the end of February 1994.

Meanwhile, Queensland Transport continued to process applications for rail passes based on information submitted by individual schools. The assessment of each student's application was based on the rail travel eligibility criteria provided by the Department of Education. In mid-February, Queensland Transport provided schools with individual letters addressed to parents, providing details of each student's rail travel assessment. Schools were asked to distribute the letters to the parents/guardians.

In addition to the ongoing efforts of QCEC and parents, individual school principals wrote to politicians, voicing their disapproval of the Government's intention to enforce the existing rail travel policy. Bro. Vince Skelly, Principal of St. Patrick's College at Shorncliffe, in a letter to G. Nuttall MLA, the Member for Sandgate wrote:

.... I am astounded that a Labour [sic] Government, which prides itself on its concern for the poor, the underprivileged and issues of social justice, would be attempting to crush the aspirations of those very people whom it pledged to protect. (Skelley, 17/2/94)

Skelley explained that many of the students attending his school were being penalised because they were by-passing Kolbe College at Petrie, which, according to the guidelines was “the nearest school of type” to the student’s residence. Their parents were now required to pay the rail fares from Petrie station to Shorncliffe, even though Kolbe College had a ceiling of 200 students and was already full. Skelley also mentioned that one parent from his school had been advised by a Queensland Transport official that because the student passed Boondall station on the way to Shorncliffe, the fare from Boondall to Shorncliffe would need to be paid by the parent. The explanation provided was that the child could access Nudgee College from Boondall station. Nudgee College was considered the ‘nearest school of type’. The school fees at Nudgee College, at the time, were \$2,500 p.a. compared to \$908 p.a. at St Patrick’s College, which prompted Skelley to write, “So our people are penalised by your Government because they are too poor to go to a wealthy school?!” (Skelley, 17/2/94)

On the same day Druery wrote to Bob Lenehan, the Director of Facilities & Services with the Department of Education. He spelt out the difficulties being created for many Catholic parents by the Department’s insistence that both Kolbe and Seton Colleges be classified as the “nearest school of type”. As Druery explained, “Both schools are offering very limited access to students not requiring some special assistance. In this context it seems totally unjust that these schools be classified as “the nearest school of type attended”.

On 20 February the ‘Sunday Mail’ ran an article entitled ‘Student Fares Bungle... Poor pay but rich go free’, in which the CJC was criticised by the Shadow Minister for Education, Bob Quinn. Two days later the CJC issued a Media Release refuting the claims. The CJC Chairman, Rob O’Regan, explained that in July 1993 the CJC had received a complaint from a concerned principal about the suspected widespread abuse of the student free rail travel system. It had been alleged that some principals had incorrectly certified students as eligible for free travel, as an inducement to parents to send their children to particular schools. The CJC had decided “that the complaint did not warrant investigation because it was not alleged that those involved were seeking any personal gain.” (CJC Media Release, 22/2/94)

O'Regan explained that the matter was then referred to the Director-General of the Department of Education, who, following a departmental investigation, found evidence to support the allegations of widespread abuse. Quinn was criticised by O'Regan for making "such an offensive statement...so completely at odds with the facts without bothering to check with the Commission..." (CJC Media Release, 22/2/94)

Due to the fact that there was less than one week left before the interim rail travel arrangements were due to cease, Druery wrote to Premier Goss. Speaking on behalf of the Commission and with the unanimous support of the Queensland Bishops, Druery informed Goss that there would "be serious, widespread and public expressions of parental dissatisfaction and frustration with the present guidelines as they are being implemented." (Druery, 23/2/94) He told Goss that the Commission advocated an immediate suspension of the existing guidelines. Such a decision by the Government would not only address the CJC's concerns, but reaffirm the last known public statement made by the Government in 1990. That statement indicated that "the current arrangements for school transport should be maintained..." pending the outcome of the deliberations of "a school transport working group... to pursue these matters."

The results of the Review were already with the Government and it was expected the report would be considered during March. Druery advised Goss that the Government's "handling of this Report will be critical to the achievement of harmony and peace and the settling of widely held parental perceptions. .... ..there is need for immediate resolution of the problem since on 1<sup>st</sup> March community frustration and anger is likely to reach its peak." (Druery, 23/2/94) The relevance of 1<sup>st</sup> March was that it was the day on which students were required to utilise their newly issued rail passes. On the same day Druery also wrote similar letters to Education Minister Comben and the Director-General of the Office of Cabinet, Kevin Rudd. To ensure all relevant Ministers were aware of the gravity of the situation, a letter was sent to Transport Minister Hamill on 24 February.

An invitation from the Office of Cabinet on 24 February, resulted in Druery and Dunne meeting with senior officials from the Office of Cabinet. Initially the

Government officers tried to explain that parents could not absorb yet another change of direction by the Government, having already had to deal with three changes in a relatively short period and with the possibility of further changes after the Government had examined the Review report. Once this line of argument had been rebutted, Druery and Dunne proceeded to outline the Catholic sector's case. The Government officers agreed to put their requests to Goss overnight.

Meanwhile the Brisbane Diocesan Parents and Friends Council had arranged to convene a series of six meetings for interested people, at separate venues in Brisbane and Ipswich, between 27 February and 3 March.

Late on the evening of Friday 25 February, Druery received a phone call from the Minister for Transport's office, during which a Government proposal was discussed. The Government was prepared to extend the "moratorium" to 31 March. It had already been extended to 7 March. The Review report recommendations would be implemented by 1 July. It was suggested that some level of user-pay might be included in the new arrangements. In the interim, those parents who had not already paid for their child's term one rail pass would be required to pay before 31 March. This payment would cover the period up until 30 June. Those parents who had already paid were not required to make another payment for the period to 30 June.

Whilst Druery acknowledged the Government's shift in position, he stated that the offer fell short of the Catholic sector's preferred position and that he would need time to consult with interested parties before committing the Commission or other Catholic authorities to acceptance of any compromise position. The Minister's representative offered to consult with senior Government staff and presumably the Minister. (Druery, 28/2/94)

Comben issued a media release on Sunday 27 February 1994, in which he announced the Government's compromise offer. On the same day the 'Sunday Mail' ran an article under the headline "Anger builds over 'grab for money'".

Brad Smith, the Executive Director of the AISQ, was opposed to any compromise with the Government. It can only be assumed that his opposition would have related to the fact that many AISQ schools were not 'of the same type'. Therefore students attending these schools were able to travel free on the rail network because they were not bypassing another school 'of the same type'. As stated in the 'Sunday Mail', "Because there are so few grammar, Presbyterian, Methodist, Anglican or Lutheran schools, most students at those institutions travel free." The idea that these students might now be required to make a contribution towards their fare, would have been difficult to accept, as these students previously had access to free rail travel. The AISQ believed that any changes to the rail travel scheme should only take place at the beginning of a school year, rather than changing in mid stream, as being proposed by the Government.

On Monday 28 February, Druery faxed a memorandum to Diocesan Directors and Principals of Order-Owned Schools in South-East Queensland seeking responses in relation to the Government's compromise offer. Principals were asked to confer with their local school community.

On 4 March, Druery responded to the Government's compromise offer in a fax to Jackie Byrne, the Director, Social Policy Unit - Office of Cabinet. The response amounted to "a request for an extension of the "moratorium" until the review outcomes can take effect" and a request "for consultation on the content of the review report when that becomes available." (Druery, 4/3/94)

On 15 March, Catholic sector representatives held "exploratory" talks with the Government's senior policy advisers from the Office of Cabinet, Education and Transport Departments and the Education Minister's Office. Similar sessions were held on 16 March with other interest groups including those from the Government school sector.

The Catholic sector representatives kept "in touch with Government-school parents" throughout the negotiations with the Government over the rail issue. (Druery, 2/3/94) Although the Government school parents were not vocal in their support of the Catholic sector's efforts, they did offer their passive support. They

had much to gain if the Catholic sector was successful, as it would mean that students attending State schools would be able to travel past their nearest State school to another State school of their choice and still qualify for a free rail pass.

Following the series of parent meetings throughout Brisbane earlier in the month, the Brisbane Diocese Parents and Friends Association organised a protest march and rally to be held in the Brisbane CBD on Sunday 27 March 1994. Patricia Waldby, President of the Brisbane Diocesan P & F Council at the time, claimed 1,800 people attended the rally. (Waldby, 31/3/94)

On 31 March 1994 Comben finally announced the Government's decision in relation to the school rail travel issue. The compromise reached with the various stakeholders resulted in students being able to travel to the school of their choice, at a concessional rate of one-third of the adult fare. A new Safety Net scheme was also introduced to protect lower income families from the financial burden of school transport costs, by providing them with free rail travel. Details relating to the Safety Net scheme are outlined in Chapter 10 of this project. The moratorium that had been planned to conclude on 31 March, was extended until 1 July 1994, the day the new travel arrangements would commence. The Government also agreed to introduce a new Safety Net provision for school bus transport, effective from 1 January 1995.

In a Joint Statement released on 31 March 1994, Druery stated that the Government's decision acknowledged the principle of 'school of choice' and that social justice principles had been followed in developing the Safety Net policy. (Druery, 31/3/94)

Although a fair and equitable resolution of the rail travel issue had been achieved, the Government had yet to address the problems associated with student bus travel, particularly outside Brisbane.

At meetings of parents throughout Brisbane it was argued that all student rail travel should be free. During negotiations with Government representatives the views expressed at these meetings were faithfully reported. However, from the



outset of negotiations the officials adopted the position that free rail travel for all students was definitely not an option. Following the Government's decision, QCEC received a number of letters from several Parents & Friends Associations and a number of individual parents, expressing their disappointment and anxiety about the impact of the new arrangements. One parent, wrote, "You have been conned by experts, and all our efforts were in vain." (Layton, 19/4/94) In response to the criticism, Druery offered the following explanation:

Perhaps those who organised the public meetings could have strengthened our cause had they taken up the offer to participate directly in the negotiations. They declined to do that. (Druery, 21/4/1994)

His comments were clearly a reference to the fact that during the negotiation period some members of the Brisbane Diocesan Parents and Friends Council appeared to lack confidence in the ability of the negotiating team to achieve a satisfactory outcome. For these people, a satisfactory resolution would have involved the Government agreeing to free rail travel for all students, to the school of their choice.

In mid April 1994, Druery, on behalf of Archbishop Bathersby, conveyed a request to officers of the Premier's department, for the Government to reconsider the Rail Pass decision. The Queensland bishops were particularly concerned that the decision would result in many families facing a genuine financial burden, particularly due to the fact that these costs were not anticipated when they enrolled their children at Catholic schools. Many families with several children at school would not qualify for the Safety Net benefits. On 4 May 1994, Druery outlined to Comben precisely what the bishops had requested and offered one possible solution. It was suggested that families be required to pay no more than a maximum of \$10 or \$11 per week in school travel costs. Comben refused the bishops' request. (Comben, 16/6/94)

**A SUMMARY OF  
RAIL TRAVEL BENEFITS GAINED  
FOR NON-STATE SCHOOL STUDENTS  
DURING THE PERIOD 1991-1995**

**RAIL**

From 1 July 1994, Non-State students were required to pay a fare for each journey, whereas previously they had been allowed to travel free of charge. However the new guidelines allowed both State and non-State students to travel beyond the nearest State school or nearest school of type, without any financial penalty. This ensured that all students travelling by rail had access to a policy that respected their right to attend the school of their choice.

The introduction of a Safety Net scheme ensured that lower income families had access to free rail travel.

## CHAPTER TEN

### IMPROVED BENEFITS FOR NON-STATE SCHOOL STUDENTS TRAVELLING ON KILOMETRE-BASED BUSES 1991 – 1995

In March 1991, the Minister initiated a further review as the Government had been unable to identify a satisfactory option to address the School Transport Assistance Scheme's fundamental structural problems in October 1990. The new Review was to be conducted in cooperation with interested stakeholders.

An inter-departmental committee comprising representatives from eight Government departments and the Office of Cabinet was established to develop options and to prepare a comprehensive report to Cabinet. An Industry Working Group comprising representatives from State and non-State schools, transport operators and the Departments of Education and Transport was also established. The function of this latter group was to provide comment on the options developed by the inter-departmental committee. The 1991 Review "promised some real hope for parents in the non-Government sector as it was based on sound principles of social justice – equity, access, participation and equality." (Dunne, 23/3/94)

In October 1991, a paper outlining six options ranging from free transport to the school of choice for all Queensland children to retention of the existing scheme was finalised. It was intended that the paper would be presented to Cabinet, for its consideration, during November 1991.

The responsibility for policy and finance, with regard to School Transport, was given to the Education Department in December 1991. Operational management and responsibility remained with the Transport Department and the Transport Minister.

In March 1992 the Bishops Standing Committee gave a presentation to the Minister for Education, during which a range of problem issues were highlighted, such as:

- Policy to be simple to understand and administer,
- All students be considered eligible to use public transport facilities to school of choice,
- All transport be limited to a fee within reach of all parents and families,
- Conveyance allowance be equitable across all students regardless of school attended.

In July 1992 the Principal of All Saints' School at Boonah wrote to Braddy, in the hope that the Government might reconsider the policy concerning the ineligibility of students to travel on a kilometre-based bus service to attend a non-State school, if it meant travelling past a State school.

In her letter, the Principal, Ms Kathleen Lambourne, mentioned that, "Many parents in our area have been, and, even today, are still being denied a basic human right - that of being able to send their child to the school of their choice." She pointed out that Boonah was serviced by 'licensed runs', as well as 'kilometre-based' bus runs. For families who lived in an area serviced by a 'licensed' bus service, the system was satisfactory, because the children could legitimately travel on the bus and pay a fare to travel to the school of their choice. However, for those families who resided on a road or area serviced by a 'kilometre-based' service, "the situation ceases to be equitable." (Lambourne, 15/7/92)

Lambourne stressed she was not suggesting that the Government provide free bus travel for the families involved. She was simply "asking that their children be allowed to board a school bus, pay their fare and travel to a Catholic school, simply because they belong to the Boonah parish and they wish their children to receive a Catholic education." (Lambourne, 15/7/92)

In its 1994-95 budget the Government undertook to review travel arrangements for the commencement of the 1995 school year. The non-State school sector formed a Working Party to develop a non-Government schools position on school

transport with the aim of providing advice to the Government on its review of bus travel arrangements. The Working Party, which comprised representatives from the AISQ, QCEC, the Federation of Parents and Friends Associations Queensland, the Independent Parents and Friends Council (IPFC) and the Queensland Association of Independent Schools (QATIS) met for the first time on 6 June 1994 and elected Dunne as Chair.

A survey designed by the Working Party to gather comprehensive data on how students were travelling to and from school was distributed to all non-State schools in July 1994. The survey also sought details on the costs involved, adequacy of existing services and the types of bus service being used.

The travel circumstances of 15,000 non-State students were analysed in preparing the submission that was finally forwarded to the Government in October 1994. It had the unqualified support of the non-Government school organisations. The proposals and recommendations contained in the submission were presented as a package. The essential elements of the proposals were:

- Safety net (as in rail travel arrangements),
- Concessional fare arrangements with discounting for pre-payments,
- Maximum family fee of \$10 per week,
- Access and safety issues, and
- Realistic right of choice.

In their letter to the Hon. Pat Comben, Minister for Education, Druery and Sir William Knox, the President of AISQ, stressed that the outright deletion of one or more of the “essential” elements could jeopardise acceptance of the outcomes.

In subsequent meetings with Comben and Ms Jackie Byrne, the Deputy Director-General of the Office of Cabinet, it became clear that the Government would resist school bus transport reforms, except for the introduction of a Safety Net mechanism. Druery reminded Comben that the resolution of the rail travel issue was accompanied by a commitment from Government representatives that the bus

transport issue would be addressed by applying “the same principles as enunciated for the rail travel arrangements.” (Druery, 11/11/94)

Byrne invited Druery to make a further submission, in an attempt to produce a proposal that would meet the Government’s objectives. On 25 November, Druery submitted a modified proposal, which suggested a three tiered ticketing system that would provide free travel to Safety Net students, discounted fares for Family Payment recipients and discounted fares for all other students, but at a rate less generous than for Family Payment recipients. In each case the fares would be based on access to the child’s school of choice. It was estimated that implementation of the proposals would cost \$19.8 million. As it would not be possible to implement such a scheme by the start of the 1995 school year, Druery suggested the arrangements could be phased in during 1995.

### **INTRODUCTION OF DROUGHT ASSISTANCE**

In 1994 the Government introduced a new form of Conveyance Allowance known as Drought Assistance (Additional Conveyance Allowance). To qualify for drought assistance, families had to reside on drought declared primary producing properties and be in receipt of Conveyance Allowance Class A or C. The allowance paid was in addition to the Class A or C allowance.

The Drought Assistance (Additional Conveyance Allowance) was only paid during the period when the primary producing property on which the claimant resided remained on the drought declared list and for a further period of two years past the date at which the property was removed from the drought declared list.

### **INTRODUCTION OF SAFETY NET PROVISIONS**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, State Cabinet decided to extend the School Transport Assistance Scheme in December 1994 by introducing new Safety Net measures for financially disadvantaged students residing close to their nearest school and travelling to school by bus and/or rail. The scheme was designed to protect lower income families from the financial burden of school transport costs.

In announcing the scheme, Comben claimed that it would add an additional \$12.5 million to the State's school transport budget.

The Safety Net benefit was available to:

- primary school students attending a State school which was less than 3.2km from their home.
- Secondary school students attending a State school which was less than 4.8km from their home.
- Primary school students attending a non-State school providing that either the nearest State School or non-State primary school of the type attended was less than 3.2km from their home.
- Secondary school students attending a non-State school providing that either the nearest State School or non-State secondary school of the type attended was less than 4.8km from their home.

To be eligible for Safety Net assistance a student had to be in one of the following categories:

- A student in a family receiving above the minimum levels of the Department of Social Security Family Payment, including families in receipt of income tested pensions, New Start or Job Search allowance; or
- A student in a family receiving the Department of Veterans' Affairs Dependent Child Add-on; or
- A 16 or 17 year old student receiving secondary Austudy (not Basic Student Payment) and students aged 18 or more receiving secondary Austudy (not Basic Student Payment) provided the student has been in continuous education from year 10; or
- A student receiving Abstudy Living Allowance; or
- A student placed under a Care and Protection Order by the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care.

The actual Safety Net benefit available to a student depended on the method of transport being used in travelling to and from school.

## **SAFETY NET PROVISIONS FOR STUDENTS TRAVELLING BY RAIL**

Students attending an approved primary or secondary school in Queensland on a full-time basis were eligible for a Government funded rail pass.

## **SAFETY NET PROVISIONS FOR STUDENTS TRAVELLING ON KILOMETRE-BASED BUS SERVICES**

Primary and secondary State school students who lived less than 3.2km (primary) or 4.8km (secondary) from their nearest State school, were entitled to free transport providing there was spare capacity on the bus route.

Primary school students attending a non-State school were eligible for Safety Net assistance provided they resided less than 3.2km from **either** the nearest State primary school or the nearest non-State primary school of the type attended.

Secondary school students attending a non-State school may have been eligible for Safety Net assistance provided they resided less than 4.8km from **either** the nearest State secondary school or the nearest non-State secondary school of the type attended.

Eligible students travelling on kilometre-based school bus services were transported free of charge, however spaces could not be guaranteed even though the student was eligible.

## **SAFETY NET PROVISIONS FOR STUDENTS TRAVELLING ON FARES BASED SCHOOL BUS SERVICES**

Although the distance conditions were identical to those applying to Safety Net students travelling on kilometre-based school bus services, the actual benefit available to eligible Safety Net students travelling on fares-based bus services was in the form of a discount on the fare charged. Queensland Transport paid a maximum amount directly to the bus operator, on behalf of eligible students. It was the student's responsibility to pay the balance of the fare, if the fare exceeded the amount paid by Queensland Transport.



In 1995 the approved rates were:

Secondary students:	up to \$6.50 per week per student
Primary students:	up to \$5.00 per week per student

Safety Net eligible students travelling on the Brisbane City Council bus service were entitled to a 1-zone fare pass towards the cost of travel. Students were responsible for any travel costs in excess of one zone. (Queensland Transport, Student Travel Information Statement No. 1/95)

There is no doubt that the Safety Net scheme provided additional assistance to families in financial need. Because these families resided inside the 3.2/4.8km distance threshold set by the Government, prior to the introduction of Safety Net they were not eligible for any Government assistance to transport their children to school. Safety Net was therefore a valuable improvement to the School Transport Assistance Scheme.

While the Catholic sector was appreciative of the new assistance being provided for needy families under the Safety Net scheme, there were still a large number of Catholic and other families incurring intolerable levels of expense to transport their children, by bus, to a non-State school.

Catholic education authorities were extremely disappointed that the Government had not addressed the bus transport issue as effectively as had been done with the rail issue earlier in the year. Druery's stinging attack on the Government was indicative of the feeling that existed following the Government's announcement:

Before this Government was elected, and on many occasions since, they have constantly promised to find realistic and satisfactory solutions to problems in the school transport area.

After 5 years in Government and several major reviews of school transport and extensive consultation, all they can come up with is a scheme that is limited in its scope and does not recognise in any way the basic right of parents to their school of choice, even when they are willing to pay something towards the cost of access.

We accepted the user pay principle in relation to student rail travel in the clear expectation that the same principle would apply to bus travel.

This Government decision will be a massive disappointment for many school communities. The Government should realistically expect that their disgust will find expression when school resumes in January. (Drury, 5 December 1994)

The Regional Director of the Rockhampton Catholic Education Office, Joe McCorley, was also extremely disappointed with the Government's decision, claiming that "maintaining the 'nearest state school' program is an inequitable, biased anachronism that parents of Catholic school students have endured for 50 years." (McCorley, 11/12/94)

On behalf of the parents of all students attending Catholic schools in Queensland, Dunne wrote an uncharacteristically critical letter to all Government Ministers, including the Premier, the Hon. Wayne Goss. He expressed his displeasure at Cabinet's decision not to make any changes to bus transport provisions for non-State students, other than to introduce a Safety Net scheme. (Dunne, 7 /12/94)

The Government defended its decision not to introduce additional benefits for families of non-State students, by suggesting that to do so would mean fewer teachers, fewer schools and less resources for classrooms. Reference was also made to the varying nature of the rail and bus infrastructure within Queensland.

It was also mentioned that the state rail network was owned by the Government and operated in a very small part of the state, in an area where a large proportion of the population lived close to schools, whereas the bus network operated state-wide and was owned by "thousands" of different operators. It was argued that, with budgetary constraints, it was simply not possible to provide discounted fares to all students travelling by bus. (Edmond, 27/1/95)

Dunne reminded the Ministers that the Catholic education authorities had "risked hostile elements in their own community to give support to the Government to solve the rail fiasco, in response to a clear understanding given by Senior Government spokespersons that in return the bus transport problems throughout Queensland would be reviewed and resolved." (Dunne, 7/12/94)

Later in his letter, Dunne stated that:

It is beyond comprehension that a Labor Government would apply selective social justice in this fashion after making a written commitment, at the time of being elected, that all students would be treated equitably.

..... It would appear certain that the non-Government community will express their anger when school commences in 1995 and that efforts to persuade the Government to accommodate their requests will be on-going. (Dunne, 7/12/94)

Early in 1995 the Government decided to lift the passenger restrictions that had previously applied to kilometre-based school bus services. From 30 January 1995 fare-paying students were allowed to access any of the kilometre-based services, providing spare capacity existed on these services. (Queensland Transport, Student Travel Information Statement No. 2/95)

At the time there were around 1,200 kilometre-based school bus services operating throughout Queensland. The change in policy meant that previously 'ineligible' students could now access a kilometre-based bus service by paying a fare. However, distance eligible students had priority over any other passenger, as these services were originally established to transport 'eligible' students to their nearest State school.

Non-State students were now eligible to travel on kilometre-based services under the following conditions:

- primary students had to live more than 3.2km from the nearest non-State school of the type attended and from the nearest State primary school, and
- secondary students had to live more than 4.8km from the nearest non-State school of the type attended and from the nearest State secondary school.

The new policy was another significant breakthrough for non-State students as it removed a discriminatory practice that had existed since the introduction of Road Transport Services in 1945, half a century earlier.

The decision to lift the passenger restrictions on kilometre-based services was not restricted to school students. From 26 April 1995 a range of other fare-paying passengers were also allowed to access the services, providing spare capacity

existed. For rural communities with no other form of public transport, this was an important new benefit, as it enabled TAFE students and other adults to utilise the service, providing they paid a fare.

In a 'Transport Update' document prepared by Dunne in August 1995, he listed a number of school transport 'difficult areas' in Queensland. The list included localities where the cost of school bus transport was still a major concern for families wanting to send their children to a Catholic school.

- e.g. Herberton from the Tablelands  
Cairns from the northern beaches  
Mossman from Port Douglas  
Bundaberg from Childers  
Gympie from surrounding districts  
Nambour from surrounding districts

In 1995 families were required to pay the following bus fares to enable their children to attend St John's College at Nambour:

Sunshine Beach	\$43.00 per student per week
Coolum	\$36.00 per student per week
Cooroy	\$30.10 per student per week

The following fares were being paid to send children to St Thomas More primary school at Sunshine Beach:

Cooroy	\$27.60 per student per week
Coolum	\$20.00 per student per week
Pomona	\$29.90 per student per week

As many of these families had two or more children, their weekly bus fares would have created a considerable financial burden. Even though many of the families would have been eligible for Conveyance Allowance Class E, their entitlement was not received from Queensland Transport until June and December each year. Parents were therefore required to outlay bus fares for a full semester before receiving their rebate from Queensland Transport.

A family living at Sunrise Beach and having two children at St John's College in Nambour would have had to outlay \$89.20 on bus fares each week. At the end of the first semester, after paying \$1,784.00 in fares to the bus operator, the family would receive a Class E conveyance allowance payment of \$989.33 from Queensland Transport. The family therefore paid a net amount of \$794.67 for the first semester of 1995, or \$1,589.33 for the year. As net amounts such as these were quite common, it was not surprising that numerous families were paying more in bus fares than school fees.

**A SUMMARY OF  
BUS TRAVEL BENEFITS GAINED  
FOR NON-STATE SCHOOL STUDENTS  
DURING THE PERIOD 1991-1995**

**BUS**

Safety Net provisions to assist lower income families were introduced from the start of the 1995 school year.

From 30 January 1995 non-State students could access kilometre-based bus services, providing they satisfied the normal distance threshold from both the nearest State school and the nearest school of the type attended.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT IN TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE FOR NON-STATE STUDENTS

1996 - 2000

During 1994 the State Government embarked on a program to reform public transport in Queensland. Following the change of Government in October 1995 the new Minister for Transport and Main Roads, the Hon. Vaughan Johnson, directed a Public Transport Reform Audit be established. The audit would “assist the department and Government identify the strengths and weaknesses of the legislation and reform process to date and recommend any changes in policy and/or practice which would be desirable.” (Queensland Public Transport Audit Team, 22/7/96, p. 1)

The audit team’s report made reference to the fact that the Federation of Parents and Friends Associations Qld was seeking the operation of school transport services (bus and ferry) to school of choice, for both primary and secondary students, rather than the nearest State school, as was the policy at that time. The report also noted that the Non-Government School sector had presented a submission to the former Government, seeking the right of school of choice in the operation of school transport services.

The audit team was of the opinion that the adoption of a school of choice policy would have “considerable funding implications for both Government and industry.” (Queensland Public Transport Audit Team, 22/7/96, p. 29) They recommended that the Non-Government School sector’s request be noted and deferred until the overall State Budget became clearer and the financial constraints which had been imposed on all Government programs, including the School Transport Assistance Scheme, were known.

At the October 1995 State election, the Labor Government was defeated and replaced by a coalition Government. During the lead up to the 1996-97 State

budget the Non-Government Schools Council submitted a request for \$7.5 million in additional assistance to enable non-State students to access public funded transport, to their school of choice. “The amount was based on some research several years ago to determine the cost of implementing arrangements for buses similar to those applying for metropolitan rail travel.” (Lorenz, 28/1/97)

The budget, which was brought down on 10 September 1996, indicated \$500,000 (\$1.0m in a full year) would be provided to facilitate improved access to non-State schools, however it made no provision for any substantial changes to the School Transport Assistance Scheme. During pre and post budget consultations, mainly at the instigation of Dunne, the main priority put forward for the use of these funds was to remedy the “hot spots” throughout the state where families were paying relatively high fares to enable their children to access Catholic schools.

In December 1996 Quinn arranged for his Director of Finance, Mike Keily, to convene a sub-group of an existing working party on non-State school recurrent funding, to consider arrangements for school transport in “difficult areas”. In addition to Keily, the sub-group included Ian Herbert and Ian Matthews from Queensland Transport as well as Neil Whittaker and Greg Duck from Education Queensland. Lorenz represented the Catholic sector with Ms Lorrie Maher representing the AISQ.

The Working Party met for the first time on 24 January 1997 and developed five possible options for using the additional funds, including:

- an ad hoc approach whereby individual schools would be asked to submit requests for assistance,
- an examination of the existing conveyance allowance arrangements in an effort to improve them, and
- using the peak bodies (QCEC and AISQ) to distribute the funds.

At the second and final meeting of the School Transport Group, on 10 February 1997, it was agreed that Duck would prepare a paper on the five options. This would form the basis of a paper to be presented to the Minister for Education. At



both meetings of the School Transport Group, the term “difficult areas” was replaced by “hot spots”.

Lorenz, in a letter to Diocesan Directors and Principals of Order owned Schools, proposed that the funds be shared between QCEC and AISQ, based on a model to be determined by both organisations. It was suggested that each organisation could distribute the funds to parents. He also proposed that a person be appointed to take responsibility for the project. (Lorenz, 28/1/97) Lorenz acknowledged that there would be some benefits in a “joint appointment”, whereby the person would effectively work for both peak bodies.

In February 1997, the Queensland Catholic Education Commission approved the appointment of a part-time School Transport Officer, to be funded from the grant provided by the Government. Paul Travers was appointed to the position on 9 April 1997, initially on a twelve month contract. It was agreed to establish a joint Task Force “to assist in the development of processes for the disbursement of funds and have these endorsed by the Minister to facilitate the flow of funds.” (Druery, 9/4/97) At a meeting on 23 April 1997 it was confirmed that AISQ and QCEC would work co-operatively on the project.

The joint Task Force met for the first time on 6 May 1997 and elected Dunne as its Chair. QCEC’s representatives were Lorenz, John Browning and John Dalton, while the AISQ was represented by the Executive Director, Dr John Roulston, Lorrie Maher, Clem Davies and Allan Todd. Travers was appointed Executive Secretary of the Task Force. At subsequent meetings, Patricia Waldby represented independent school parents. The task force met on three occasions during 1997. Herbert, Matthews and Duck represented their respective Government departments, in an advisory capacity, at the July and August meetings.

One of the difficulties confronting the Task Force at the first meeting was the total lack of information available on the level of bus fares being paid by parents across the state. Queensland Transport’s database only contained information on students who were receiving some form of travel assistance from Queensland

Transport. Information on non-State school students who were paying fares to travel on kilometre-based bus services, **deregulated bus services** or school owned services was not available.

*A deregulated bus service is a commercial service that does not have a contract with the State Government. These services do not attract any financial assistance from the Government.*

A decision had to be reached on an agreed mechanism for distributing the funds. Should the money be directed to individual families, schools or bus operators? How would the scheme cater for school owned buses? Would the scheme provide any additional financial support to low-income families? Although the general consensus at the initial Task Force meeting was that the payment of money to individual families would be administratively burdensome and that other options should be canvassed, it was eventually agreed that the money should be distributed to eligible families.

The Task Force believed that the \$1m available for the 1997 school year would fall well short of what was required to provide a realistic level of financial support to families. This opinion was no doubt based on the 'research' undertaken in the early 1990's, which culminated in the Non Government Schools Council requesting \$7.5m "for additional assistance to enable students to access public transport to their school of choice" in the 1996-97 budget submission. (Lorenz, 28/1/97) A mechanism for restricting the number of applications had to be determined. From the options proposed, it was eventually agreed that the financial assistance for the 1997 school year would be restricted to families who had children attending non-State schools located outside the Brisbane Statistical Division. Task Force members were well aware that this decision was bound to disappoint many families who had children attending non-State schools inside the Brisbane Statistical Division.

The Brisbane Statistical Division included all suburbs within the Brisbane City Council boundary as well as localities such as Caboolture, Burpengary, Deception

Bay, Ipswich, Samford, Browns Plains, Waterford, Beenleigh Point Lookout and Victoria Point.

The Task Force also decided that the assistance provided to individual families would be to compensate them for their children's bus fares. Any expenses incurred in driving children to school by private motor vehicle would not be covered by the scheme. It was also considered important to incorporate a social justice perspective into the program to aid low income families. The committee agreed that students paying fares to travel on kilometre-based bus services should be eligible for assistance through the scheme, as they were not eligible for conveyance allowance Class E from Queensland Transport. Although it was never formally documented, the Task Force decided that fares paid on ferries would also be taken into consideration in determining a family's level of assistance. This decision was in line with Queensland Transport's policies relating to State School students and was never challenged by Herbert, Matthews or Duck.

Travers researched each of the unresolved issues in an effort to find viable solutions for consideration by the Task Force. At the August 1997 Task Force meeting, it was agreed that those families who had a current Commonwealth Government Health Care Card, Pensioner Concession Card or Veterans Affairs Concession Card should be eligible for special consideration through the scheme. A final decision on how to provide for these families was deferred until a later date.

It was also agreed that the guidelines presented to the Minister for Education should recommend that the scheme be permitted to assist families who were:

- paying fares on buses that were owned, leased or chartered by a non-State school, and
- paying bus fares to send their children to their 'school of choice'.

Based on decisions made at the three Task Force meetings, Travers prepared a series of guidelines for presentation to Quinn, the Minister for Education. The suggested guidelines were forwarded to Quinn, through the Non Government Schools Council, in mid September 1997. Whilst waiting on the Minister's response, Travers arranged for a small number of schools to participate in a trial

application process. Eligible families were required to submit an application form, via their child's school, detailing the weekly bus fares for each of their children.

Quinn eventually accepted all but two of the suggested guidelines. He indicated that the request relating to school owned buses was "inconsistent with Government policy which supports public passenger services. In view of the need to ensure a consistent whole of Government approach to this issue, I do not believe it is good policy to extend the eligibility to school-owned buses and would propose that these buses should not be eligible under your guidelines." (Quinn, 17/10/97)

The proposal that the non-State sector be permitted to use program funds to assist students who were attending their 'school of choice', was in line with Government policy introduced in 1994 for students travelling on the City rail network. However, Quinn advised that he would prefer the non-State sector used the term 'school attended', rather than 'school of choice'. The Task Force's interpretation of the Minister's request was that Quinn had effectively agreed to the 'school of choice' proposal submitted to him in August 1997, despite the fact that he wanted us to use an alternative term. The net effect of this decision was that parents were eligible to receive "hot spots" funds even if their children were not attending their 'nearest school of type'. However, Quinn did stress that "this should be regarded as a special case peculiar to this funding and should not be regarded as a precedent for the School Transport Assistance Scheme." (Quinn, 17/10/97) This decision was a major breakthrough for the non-State sector as it meant Government funds were now available to assist students in travelling to their 'school attended' ('school of choice'), by bus and/or ferry.

On 23 October 1997, following receipt of the Minister's response to the suggested guidelines, an information package outlining how the Non-Government Schools Bus Fare Assistance Program ("Hot Spots" program) would operate, was forwarded to the Principal of all 251 non-State schools located outside the Brisbane Statistical Division. Principals were asked to distribute the information to all families who had children travelling to and/or from school by bus or ferry. To apply for assistance, families had to complete an application form and return it via

their child's school to Travers at QCEC. Only those families who were paying fares of more than \$12.00 per week were entitled to submit an application. Families were not able to claim fares paid for pre-school students or children attending State schools.

Although a database would have been the ideal medium for managing the large quantity of information obtained from each family, because of the limited time available to design and trial a database, Travers elected to utilise a spreadsheet to record the details of each applicant and their respective children. Herbert had previously indicated that the database used by Queensland Transport to manage its School Transport Assistance Scheme had taken several years to develop and was constantly being refined.

As part of the process of determining the level of assistance for each applicant, it was essential to know which applicants had received Conveyance Allowance Class E from Queensland Transport during 1997. As the 1997 "hot spots" entitlement was to be based on each applicant's net fares for the year, it was essential to take into consideration any Class E already provided by Queensland Transport. Queensland Transport was able to provide this information by matching the "hot spots" data with its own database records. For 1997, only those families with net weekly fares greater than \$12.00 were granted a rebate.

In accordance with the approved guidelines, the program incorporated a special 'needs based' feature for those low income families who held a current Commonwealth Health Care Card, Pensioner Concession Card or Veterans Affairs Concession Card. An additional weighting was applied to ensure these applicants received 25% more assistance than non-card holders, assuming both had identical annual net fares.

Until the data from all the applications had been analysed it was not possible to determine how far the \$1m Government grant, less administrative expenses, would spread. In the end, the available funds were sufficient to provide all eligible families with a significant rebate.

For the 1997 distribution, it was decided that the rebate to individual families would be in proportion to their annual net fares. This resulted in 1,326 families receiving a total of \$904,000. 25% of the 1,326 families benefited from the special supplementary assistance available to lower income families.

The phone calls and letters of appreciation received from many of the families granted assistance verified that the program had been extremely well received. Even at that early stage, it was clear that the “hot spots” program had the potential to be a significant factor in a family’s decision to send their child to a non-State school. Prior to the introduction of the “hot spots” program, many families were paying more in bus fares each year than they were on school fees. The 1997 “hot spots” program had not only reduced the financial burden for families in the ‘difficult areas’ noted by Dunne in 1995, it provided assistance to families who were previously not eligible for any bus fare assistance, because their children were travelling on kilometre-based services or deregulated bus services.

For the 1998 school year it was decided to allow families to apply for “hotspots” (*replacing “hot spots”*) assistance at the end of each school semester, as Education Queensland had agreed to allocate the funds in two tranches of \$500,000. This ensured that rebates to eligible families could be made as soon as possible after the expenses had been incurred. Although minor changes were made to the 1998 application form, the general process remained the same as in 1997. Following the positive response to the 1997 program, it was inevitable that an increased number of families would apply for assistance in 1998. There was an average increase of 39.4% in the number of applicants granted assistance from 1997 to semester one 1998. (1,326 to 1,849) Refer **Table 1**, p. 93.

At the February 1998 Task Force meeting, the possibility of extending the “hotspots” program to additional schools was discussed. If extra Government funds could be obtained, it would be possible to extend the program so that it covered the sixty-one (61) non-State schools located inside the Brisbane Statistical Division, but outside the Greater Brisbane Area. Dunne met with Quinn to discuss the possibility of additional funds being granted to enable such an extension of the “hotspots” program. In February 1998 Druery wrote to Quinn

formally requesting an additional \$0.5m to enable an extension of the "hotspots" program. (Druery, 20/2/98) Quinn advised that the request would be considered in the context of the 1998-99 State budget. (Quinn, 27/2/98)

A Labor Government was returned to power on 13 June 1998, under the leadership of the Hon. Peter Beattie. The State budget, released in September 1998, revealed that the new Government had approved an additional \$0.5 m to enable an expansion of the program into what was referred to, by the Task Force, as the 'extended zone'. It was reassuring to know that both the Liberal/National Party opposition and the new Labor Government supported the principle of travel assistance being provided to enable non-State students to attend their 'school attended'.

For the 1998 "hotspots" program it was decided to vary the method used to calculate the level of financial assistance that would be allocated to eligible applicants. It was agreed that all families should be responsible for a certain weekly threshold, irrespective of the number of children in the family using buses and/or ferries. This principle was similar to that used by Queensland Transport in calculating Class E entitlements. The rebate granted would be based on each applicant's net fares above an agreed weekly threshold. It was not possible to determine the actual threshold for semester one 1998 until all net fares had been calculated. Sufficient funds were available to set the weekly threshold at \$12.00 per family, for all applicants who did not hold one of the approved social security cards. For those families who had a Health Care Card, Pensioner Concession Card or Veterans Affairs Concession Card, the threshold was set at \$9.00 per week. Sufficient funds were available to maintain the same weekly thresholds (\$12.00/\$9.00) for semester two 1998.

For semester one 1999 it was decided to treat all applications from schools outside the Brisbane Statistical Division separately from those in the 'extended' zone. Due to the extent of the increase in the number of applications from families who had children attending schools outside the Brisbane Statistical Division, it was necessary to increase the weekly threshold by \$1.00, to \$13.00 and \$10.00 per week respectively. Although there were only sixty-one (61) non-State schools

within the 'extended zone', it was not possible to know if the additional funds would enable identical thresholds to be set until the applications had been processed.

Considerably less applications than anticipated were received from families who had children at schools within the 'extended zone', so it was decided to apply the same \$13.00/\$10.00 thresholds that had been set for schools outside the Brisbane Statistical Division. Only \$50,634 was needed to cater for applications received from the 'extended zone' in semester one 1999. Considering the Government had provided \$500,000 for a full year, it was obvious that there would be a large surplus in the 'extended zone' funding pool unless there was a significant increase in the number of applications received for the second semester of 1999.

In view of the low number of applications from the 'extended' zone and a desire to retain the \$12.00/\$9.00 thresholds for the second semester, Travers obtained approval from Duck to combine the two pools of money. With the funds now in a single pool, it was decided that all semester two 1999 applications would be considered as being from a single zone. This zone covered all non-State schools throughout Queensland, except those located inside the Brisbane City Council boundary. A single geographic zone was also used during 2000 and 2001.

Over the period 1997 to semester two 1999, approximately \$150,000 of 'reserve funds' had been accumulated. However, during the same period the number of eligible applicants had increased by 90%. Despite the availability of the 'reserve funds', in the first semester of 2000 it was necessary to increase the weekly threshold from \$12.00 to \$15.00. This was due to:

- a 14.4% increase in the number of applicants from semester two 1999 (2,554 to 2,922) Refer to **Table 2** on p. 108,
- the erosion of the 'reserve funds', and
- Queensland Transport's change of policy relating to contracted bus services, an issue that will be explained in chapters twelve and fourteen.

For applicants with a Health Care Card, Pensioner Concession Card or Veterans Affairs Concession Card, the weekly threshold had to be increased from \$9.00 to \$12.00. This change in the weekly threshold meant that 312 families who would



normally have received a “hotspots” rebate, had to be declared ineligible, as their net weekly fares did not exceed the newly established threshold.

**Table 1** on the following page provides a breakdown of the grants distributed to eligible applicants during the first four years of the program's operation.

# BUS FARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM STATISTICS

1997 TO 2000

Year	Payment period	No. families granted assistance	Total \$ rebated in payment period	Total \$ granted annually	Weekly threshold to be paid by families
1997	Only one payment	1,326	904,110		n.a.
1997				<b>904,110</b>	
1998	Semester one	1,849	494,684		\$12/\$9
1998	Semester two	1,802	429,722		\$12/\$9
1998				<b>924,406</b>	
1999	Semester one	2,291	613,587		\$13/\$10
1999	Semester two	2,507	659,884		\$12/\$9
1999				<b>1,273,471</b>	
2000	Semester one	2,610	732,113		\$15/\$12
2000	Semester two	2,420	650,196		\$15/\$12
2000				<b>1,382,309</b>	

**Table 1**

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### QUEENSLAND TRANSPORT INTRODUCES CHANGES TO THE SCHOOL TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE SCHEME

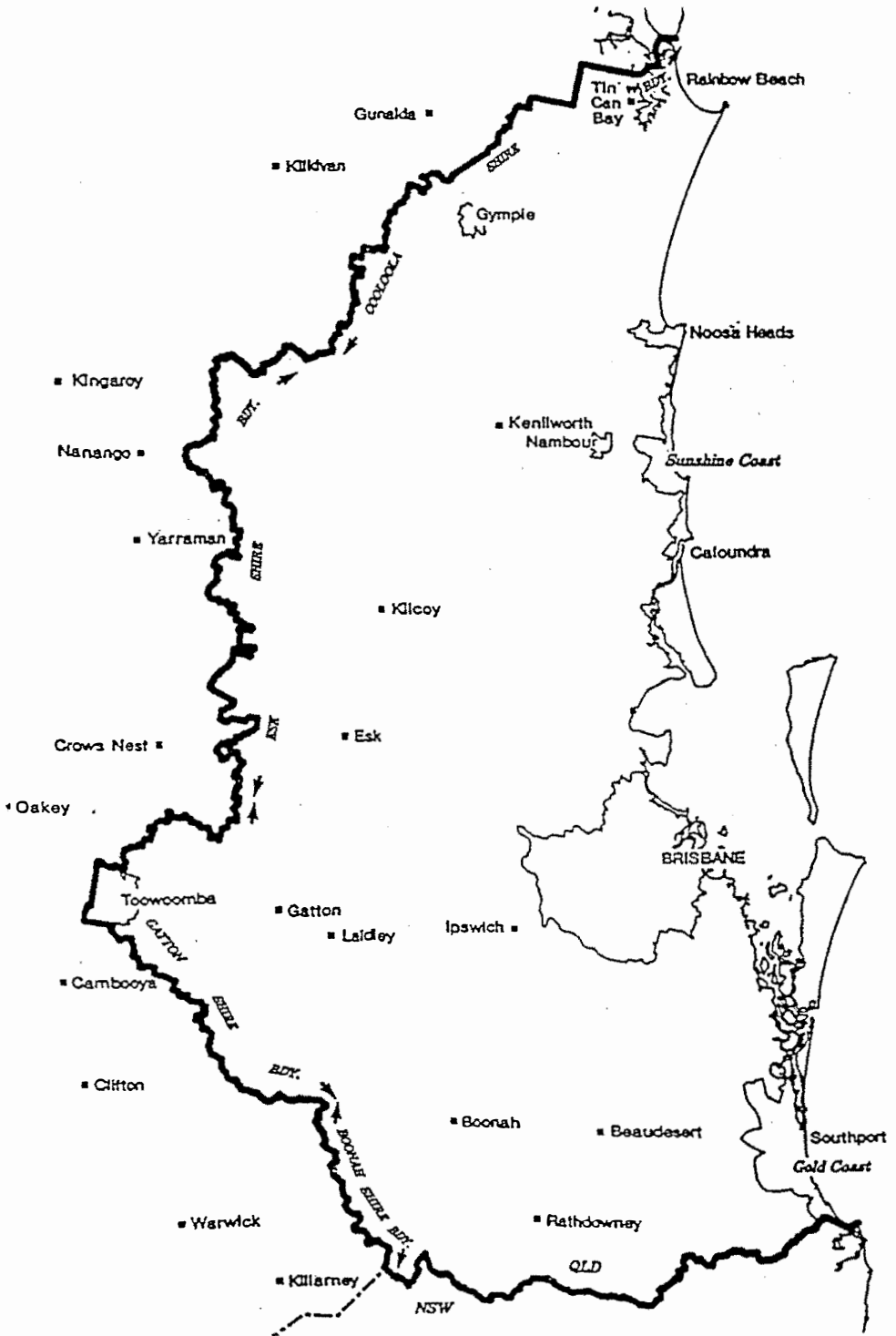
#### INTRODUCTION OF CONVEYANCE ALLOWANCE CLASS I

In recognition of the relatively high cost of school transport for families in isolated areas of Queensland, the State Government approved funding for the School Transport Isolation Package as part of the 1998/99 budget. The package resulted in a new class of Conveyance Allowance, Class I, being incorporated into the School Transport Assistance Scheme. Class I was implemented at the start of the 1999 school year.

To qualify for conveyance allowance Class I a student had to reside:

- more than 16km from the nearest State school and the nearest approved bus service which could transport the student to the nearest State school, and
- in an isolated area, outside the South-East Queensland School Transport Zone (refer to **Map 1** on page 96) or other nominated areas as set out in the *School Transport Isolation Definition* on page 97.

# SEQ School Transport Zone



Map 1

## SCHOOL TRANSPORT ISOLATION DEFINITION

To be classified as isolated under the School Transport Isolation Package, students must :

(1) reside outside the South East Queensland School Transport Zone (see attached map);

AND

(2) reside in the 7 week Summer Vacation Zone ie the area in Queensland west of the 144th meridian of east longitude or north of the 16th parallel of south latitude and the following centres: Alpha, Aramac, Augathella, Barcaldine, Blackall, Cameron Downs, Charleville, Cunnamulla, Eulo, Hughenden, Ilfracombe, Isisford, Jericho, Longreach, Muttaborra, Prairie, Quilpie, Tambo, Wyandra and Yarak;

OR

reside more than 50 kilometres, measured by the shortest trafficable route from the main Post Office in each of the following centres:

{ Atherton	{ Home Hill	{ Proserpine
{ Ayr	{ Ingham	{ Ravenshoe
{ Bowen	{ Innisfail	{ Rockhampton
{ Bundaberg	{ Kingaroy	{ Sarina
{ Cairns	{ Mackay	{ Stanthorpe
{ Dalby	{ Malanda	{ Toowoomba
{ Gladstone	{ Mareeba	{ Townsville
{ Gympie	{ Maryborough	{ Tully
{ Hervey Bay	{ Mossman	{ Warwick

Families are permitted to share transport arrangements with other families by carpooling and still be eligible for the full Class I allowance. Queensland Transport's rationale for paying the allowance to each family involved in car pooling is to reduce duplication of travel and to minimise the time parents are away from their homes.

Another feature of Conveyance Allowance Class I is the reduction, from nine to seven, in the number of students required for a subsidised school bus service to be established. Pre-school students can be considered in determining the number of eligible students, however they are counted as 0.5 in the calculations. Recipients of Conveyance Allowance Class I are not eligible to also receive Class

*A, C or D Conveyance Allowance or Drought Assistance (Additional Conveyance Allowance).*

*The maximum amounts to be paid per family for Conveyance Allowance Class I during 1999 were:*

<b>APPROVED SCALE</b>	<b>WEEKLY RATE (\$)</b>
<i>16.01 km to 20 km</i>	<i>16.45</i>
<i>20.01 km to 30 km</i>	<i>31.10</i>
<i>30.01 km to 40 km</i>	<i>52.00</i>
<i>40.01 km to 50 km</i>	<i>72.90</i>
<i>50.01 km to 60 km</i>	<i>93.80</i>
<i>60.01 km to 70 km</i>	<i>114.70</i>
<i>70.01 km to 80 km</i>	<i>135.60</i>

*Each 10km increment over 80km to be paid at an additional \$20.90 per week.*

## **QUEENSLAND TRANSPORT FINALISES THE INTRODUCTION OF COMMERCIAL CONTRACTS**

In November 1999 Queensland Transport, under the legislative requirements of the Transport Operations (Passenger Transport) Act 1994, finalised the issue of commercial and school contracts throughout the state. Under these contracts, bus companies were required to provide transport to the nearest State school for students who resided in their contract area or in a designated area serviced by a contract route. The bus companies could, as a business or commercial decision, also provide services for students resident in their contract area to other than the nearest State school.

This meant that for a student to qualify for travel assistance from Queensland Transport, they had to be using a bus operated by the holder of the contract for the area in which they resided. If students used an alternative bus operation, transport assistance was not available from Queensland Transport.

Whilst the majority of students throughout the state were not effected by this policy, some non-State students, and therefore their families, were seriously disadvantaged. Herbert mentioned to Travers that a minor number of State school students were also affected by the change in policy.

As part of the introduction of the new system, Queensland Transport agreed to continue providing travel assistance to those students who had been eligible for Class E prior to the policy change, but subsequently found they were ineligible because the bus they were using was not operated by a contracted operator. However eligibility ceased whenever a student:  
changed address, or  
changed school, or  
changed from primary school to secondary school, even if attending the same school.

New students, even siblings of previously eligible students, who travelled on non-contracted bus services did not qualify for any form of travel assistance from Queensland Transport, including Conveyance Allowance Class E.

To ensure families of non-State students affected by Queensland Transport's November 1999 policy changes were not financially disadvantaged, compared to other "hotspots" applicants, they were treated in the same manner as families who had children travelling on kilometre-based services and some deregulated services. That is, their "hotspots" entitlement was based on their net semester fares. As these families were not eligible to receive Class E, their net semester fares were effectively their gross fares. This meant that "hotspots" funds were now being used to pay rebates that had previously been paid by Queensland Transport, thereby putting additional strain on "hotspots" funds.

Without access to Queensland Transport's records, it was difficult to estimate the precise impact of the November 1999 variation in policy on the "hotspots" budget. However, it was clear that the impact would increase in subsequent years, as a growing number of students became ineligible for travel assistance because they had either changed schools or moved on to secondary school.

Travers initially estimated that the impact of the policy change would be as high as \$200,000, or 13.3 % of the annual “hotspots” grant in the year 2000 alone. This estimate was based on the fact that there had been a noticeable drop, between semester two 1999 and semester one 2000, in the percentage of gross semester bus fares paid by “hotspots” applicants that had been rebated to them, through Conveyance Allowance Class E, by Queensland Transport. As there appeared to be no other obvious explanation, it was assumed that the drop of 5%, from 24% to 19%, had to be related to Queensland Transport’s new policy. This issue will be discussed in more detail in chapter fourteen.

At a meeting early in 2000, the Non-Government Schools Council decided to refer to the travel assistance programs operated by the non-Government sector as the *Non-Government Schools Transport Assistance Scheme*, to distinguish it from Queensland Transport’s *School Transport Assistance Scheme*. The non-Government scheme had two elements, the Bus Fare Assistance Program (“hotspots”) and the Students with Disabilities Transport Assistance Program.



## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

### **THE NON GOVERNMENT SCHOOL SECTOR OFFERS TO ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF CONVEYANCE ALLOWANCE CLASSES D & E**

#### **AMALGAMATION OF CLASS E AND HOTSPOTS**

From 1998 to 2000 the school transport Task Force regularly discussed the possibility of assuming responsibility for Conveyance Allowance Class E from Queensland Transport. Herbert had often indicated that his department would be pleased to dispense with the administration of Class E, as it did not 'fit comfortably' with Queensland Transport's School Transport Assistance Scheme. According to Herbert, Queensland Transport staff found it difficult to explain to parents of State school students why students attending non-State schools were eligible for travel assistance if they by-passed their nearest State school to attend the 'nearest school of type'. State school students who elected to by-pass their nearest State school to attend another State school were not eligible for any travel assistance beyond their closest State primary or secondary school.

On 10 September 1998 Dunne, Travers, McShea and Herbert met with Bredhauer, the Minister for Transport and Main Roads, to discuss a range of school transport issues of mutual interest. At that meeting Bredhauer authorised McShea and Herbert to formally enter into discussions with the non-Government school sector concerning all aspects of school transport relating to students attending non-State schools.

During 1999 Travers researched the positive and negative effects of assuming responsibility for Class E. The Task Force considered his findings on 8 February 2000 and it was recommended that the non-State sector should offer to assume responsibility for Class E, but not Class D, from Queensland Transport. The Executive Directors of QCEC and AISQ were formally advised of the recommendation on 11 February 2000. With their support, the Non-Government Schools Council formally endorsed the recommendation on 6 March 2000.

During the period March to October 2000, Dunne and Travers had several meetings with Herbert and Matthews to advance this and other important issues that had arisen during that period. Assuming all the necessary procedures and protocols could be set in place in time, it was initially agreed that the most appropriate date for the transfer of responsibility would be 1 January 2001. However, at a meeting in July 2000 it was decided that the proposed transfer would need to take place on 1 July 2001, as it had become clear that there was insufficient time to implement the necessary administrative systems by 1 January 2001.

At the July meeting the issue of Class D was raised. It was agreed that there were several good reasons why the non-Government sector should assume responsibility for Class D as well as Class E. This would limit any confusion for parents and make for a smoother transition. Both classes of conveyance allowance were introduced in 1983 for students at non-State schools, so it was logical that they should continue to be administered by one authority.

Then, at a meeting in September 2000, the proposed date for the transfer of responsibility was extended to 1 January 2002. The reason for this change was to ensure that the transfer was made at a time that would cause minimise confusion for parents. Despite the obvious advantages for Queensland Transport in making the change at the end of a financial year, it was agreed that a change at the end of a calendar year would be more logical, from the parents' perspective.

On 13 October 2000 Dunne wrote to Bredhauer, proposing that:

The responsibility for the administration of Conveyance Allowance classes D and E be transferred from the Queensland Transport to the non government school authorities at a mutually agreed time e.g. after the next election. Appropriate administrative costs to be transferred with the scheme. This would in effect transfer approx. 10,000 students with the associated costs of \$ 2 million. By mutual agreement Queensland Transport will continue to provide assistance, where appropriate, for example membership of committees, assistance with the design of administrative processes and verification of certain data.

An outcome of this proposal will be that eligible students seeking travel assistance to non state schools will be catered for by the Non

Government STAS (Hotspots Program) and students seeking bus assistance to their nearest state school will be serviced by Queensland Transport's STAS. This will provide a consistent approach to the Transport Operations Passenger Transport ACT and simplify access to government assistance. It is expected that there will be a considerable reduction in complaints to Ministers responsible, as well as to Queensland Transport. (Dunne, 13/10/00)

On 30 October 2000 Dunne, Travers and Herbert met with Bredhauer, to discuss a range of key issues relating to the Non Government Schools Bus Fare Assistance Program ("Hotspots") and the Non Government Schools Students with Disabilities Transport Assistance Program. At that meeting the Minister gave his in-principle agreement to the proposal that the non-State sector assume responsibility for conveyance allowance Class D and Class E. However, he recommended that an endorsement from Wells be sought, as Education Queensland provided the funds for the Non Government Schools Transport Assistance Scheme. Bredhauer indicated that the matter would be taken to Cabinet for a decision if Wells supported the proposal. The financial issues discussed with Bredhauer and Wells will be covered in chapter fourteen.

Dunne and Travers met with Wells on 3 November 2000. He offered his in-principle agreement to the transfer proposal and asked Duck to convene a small Working Party to advance the idea. The group consisted of Duck, representing Education Queensland, Herbert, Matthews and Dan Collins, Queensland Transport and Dunne and Travers, the non-Government school sector. At its first meeting, on 14 December, the Working Party focussed on the existing "hotspots" program guidelines and the type (classification) of buses that would be regarded as 'approved' services under an amended set of guidelines.

It was unanimously agreed that a major problem associated with the administration of the existing "hotspots" program would be removed by transferring the administration of Class E to the non-Government sector. Under the system that had been operating since 1997, in order to calculate a family's "hotspots" entitlement each semester, it was necessary to know the amount of Class E, if any, a family may have received from Queensland Transport. Whilst this may appear to have been a relatively simple matter, it proved to be an on-going source

of frustration because of the inaccuracy of some of the data provided by Queensland Transport, as well as being extremely time consuming.

If the non-Government sector assumed responsibility for Conveyance Allowance Class E, Queensland Transport would no longer need to make any bus travel rebates to families of students attending non-State schools. These would be paid by the non-State sector itself. Such an arrangement was expected to remove considerable confusion for parents. Since the inception of the "hotspots" program in 1997, many families had indicated that they were confused by the fact that there were two travel assistance schemes, each with different guidelines.

The fact that many non-state students might continue to be eligible for one or more of Conveyance Allowance class A, B and C meant that it would not possible to establish a 'one-stop' shop for parents of non-State students. Eligible students would still need to apply directly to Queensland Transport for either class of assistance.

It was expected that the money spent by Queensland Transport on Class D and E each year, approximately \$2m, would be paid to the non-State sector, in addition to an agreed amount to defray some of the administration expenses created by the extra workload. This money, together with the annual "hotspots" grant would be used to assist families who had children attending non-State schools outside the Brisbane City Council (BCC) boundary. It would not be used to provide assistance to any student attending a non-State school inside the BCC boundary.

By the end of March 2001 a decision had not been made in relation to families who lived outside the Brisbane City Council (BCC) boundary, but had children attending a non-State school inside the BCC boundary. e.g. a family that lived at Albany Creek and had a child at Mt. Maria Senior College at Mitchelton and another at Mt Maria Secondary College at Everton Park. Under Queensland Transport's guidelines these families were eligible for Class D and Class E.

The "hotspots" guidelines specified that travel assistance was only available to students who attended a non-State school located outside the BCC boundary. To

continue providing assistance to students attending a non-State school inside the BCC boundary would create an inconsistency in any new guidelines. However, the removal of an existing Government entitlement had the potential to upset, even infuriate, some of the families who had been eligible for class D and/or class E.

One option put forward for resolving this problem involved 'grand-fathering' eligible students out of the system. The allowances could be terminated at a particular point in time, such as when a student changed schools, changed residential address or changed from primary to high school. Any application from new students who attended a non-State school inside the BCC boundary would be declared ineligible. The option of removing entitlements altogether, from 1 January 2002, was considered too harsh.

At the second meeting of the Working Party, on 27 March 2001, Herbert offered to use Queensland Transport's school transport funds to continue paying eligible families, on a phase out basis as mentioned above. He believed the cost involved in phasing out these students would be insignificant in terms of Queensland Transport's annual budget for school transport. However, Dunne and Travers believed it was important to investigate the likely impact on parents and schools if these families were going to be eventually declared ineligible for class D and E. They planned to conduct the investigation early in term two 2001.

The State election in February 2001 resulted in the Beattie Labor Government being returned to power with a significantly increased majority. The Hon Anna Bligh replaced Wells as Minister for Education. Bredhauer was retained as the Minister for Transport and Main Roads.

Assuming Bligh and Bredhauer eventually approved the proposal to amalgamate Conveyance Allowance Class E with the "hotspots" program, it was intended to dispense with the term "hotspots", as it would no longer be applicable. Therefore, in correspondence to schools, parents and Government officials, the term *Bus Fare Assistance Program* was progressively used instead of "hotspots".

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

### **THE EROSION OF PROGRAM FUNDS BY EXTERNAL FACTORS**

At the meeting with Wells on 3 November 2000, as well as discussing the proposed transfer of Class D and E, Dunne and Travers spent considerable time focussing on various factors that were impacting on the Non-Government School Transport Assistance Scheme. Each of these factors had the potential to seriously erode the ability of the programs to continue providing similar levels of assistance in future semesters. A comprehensive letter outlining the reasons for the concerns was left with Wells at the conclusion of the meeting.

#### **IMPACT OF QUEENSLAND TRANSPORT'S NEW (NOVEMBER 1999) POLICY**

As mentioned in chapter twelve, Queensland Transport's change of policy in November 1999 appeared to have had a marked impact on the finances of the Bus Fare Assistance Program in semester one 2000. The fact that the percentage of gross bus fares paid by "hotspots" applicants that was rebated to eligible families by Queensland Transport, in the form of Class E, had dropped 5%, from 24% in semester two 1999 to 19% in semester one 2000, was of grave concern. The change in policy had the potential to drain approximately \$200,000 of "hotspots" funds in the year 2000 alone. Even if the drop was only 2.5%, the impact would have been in the order of \$100,000 during the year 2000.

As mentioned previously, in semester one 2000, "hotspots" funds were used to allocate rebates that had previously been paid by Queensland Transport. The same thing happened in semester two 2000. If allowed to continue, it would place an intolerable strain on "hotspots" funds.

At the time Dunne and Travers met with Wells to discuss this problem, the calculation of semester two 2000 "hotspots" entitlements had not been concluded, so it was not possible to know the impact of Queensland Transport's new policy during that semester. However, by February 2001 it had become clear that the

impact in semester two 2000 was not as great as in the first semester of that year. Reference to **Table 2** on the following page will reveal that 19% of gross fares were rebated to families, through Class E in semester two 2000. This still confirmed that the policy change was definitely eroding program funds. The fact that the percentage of fares rebated as Class E had dropped from 24% in semester two 1999 to 22% in semester two 2000, indicates that the impact on the "hotspots" funds in the second half of 2000 was around \$40,000. For the first half of the year the impact had been around \$99,000, making a total of \$139,000 for the year. To ensure the Non Government Schools Transport Assistance Scheme was adequately compensated for the impact of Queensland Transport's policy change, the figures would have to be closely monitored in future semesters to ensure accurate information could be made available to the Government.

# HOTSPOTS & CONVEYANCE ALLOWANCE CLASS E STATISTICS

1997 TO 2000

Period	No. hotspots applicants	No. eligible applicants entitled to a rebate before any deductions from their calculated entitlement	No. hotspots applicants granted a rebate through the hotspots program	No. hotspots applicants that received Class E from Queensland Transport	Percentage of hotspots applicants that received Class E from Queensland Transport	Percentage of gross fares paid by hotspots applicants that were rebated as Class E
1997 whole year	1,332	1,326	1,326	675	51	25
1998 semester one	1,888	1,849	1,849	859	45	24
1998 semester two	1,872	1,796	1,802	921	49	27
1999 semester one	2,441	2,082	2,291	987	40	22
1999 semester two	2,554	2,520	2,507	1,135	44	24
2000 semester one	2,922	2,617	2,610	1,033	35	19
2000 semester two	2,539	2,471	2,420	1,092	43	22

Table 2



## **IMPACT OF THE GST**

The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on 1 July 2000 also had the potential to have a significant impact on both transport assistance programs, particularly the Bus Fare Assistance Program, as it involved over 4,500 students, all of whom were paying bus fares to travel to school. Based on industry advice, it was anticipated that bus fares would increase by around 8% as a result of the GST. The only way the \$15.00/\$12.00 thresholds could be maintained would be to increase the level of program funds rebated to families. This would seriously erode the 'reserve funds' that had been accumulated, particularly when the other eroding factors were taken into consideration. The non-Government sector believed that without additional funds being made available by the Government to compensate for the effect of the GST, it would not be possible to maintain the weekly threshold at existing levels (\$15.00 or \$12.00 for holders of a concession card).

Following the introduction of the GST, parents of State school students who were eligible for free travel were not required to spend any of their Pay As You Go (PAYG) taxation savings on school transport, as the State Government paid their children's fares to the nearest State school. In doing so, the Government effectively absorbed any fare increases caused by the GST. Unless the Government provided additional funds to the non-Government sector for its School Transport Assistance Scheme, to compensate for the GST, the value of the assistance already being provided would be seriously eroded.

On 13 November Druery wrote to Wells, endorsing the concerns raised by Dunne and Travers. Druery indicated that the AISQ also endorsed the approach by Dunne and Travers. "It may be sufficient for me to say that the erosion of the value of the funding provided by the Government (and widely acclaimed at the time by our authorities and communities) has now created the risk of widespread dissatisfaction with the diminishing assistance available to individual families." (Druery, 13/11/01) The Minister was asked to "inject our very real need for this additional assistance into the deliberations of the body responsible for the mid-year budget review." (Druery, 13/11/01)

The non-Government sector adopted the view that the Government should recognise the fact that without additional funds being made available, families with children at non-Government schools outside the BCC would be required to use some of their taxation savings on school transport. This would create an inequitable and intolerable situation.

Based on advice from Queensland Transport that the GST would probably result in an increase of approximately 8% in bus fares, Travers estimated the impact to be almost \$292,000 in the 200-2001 financial year alone (\$260,000 for the "hotspots" program and \$32,000 for the Students with Disabilities program).

### **ANTICIPATED INCREASE IN FUEL COSTS**

During the latter part of 2000, fuel prices began to rise in many countries, including Australia. Based on advice from Queensland Transport and the Bus & Coach Association (Qld), an increase of similar proportions to the impact of the GST was anticipated. If the increases eventuated, the impact on the Non-Government Schools Transport Assistance Scheme would be approximately \$292,000.

In addition to the three problems outlined above, Wells was reminded of the promise made by the Premier during campaigning in 1998, when he agreed to maintain all programs to non-Government schools in real terms. His promise was reinforced in the Labor Party's *New Directions Statement - Labour Supporting Non Government Schools*, released in 1998.

Wells was also made aware of the growth in the number of families applying for assistance through the Bus Fare Assistance Program. There had been a growth of 120% in the number of families applying for assistance between 1997 and the first semester of 2000. Despite this, the rate of growth was showing clear signs of plateauing. Dunne and Travers requested that the non-Government sector's transport assistance programs be funded on a similar basis to Queensland Transport's School Transport Assistance Scheme. The annual grant to Queensland Transport was increased in line with any change in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) as well as a growth factor to cover such things as increased enrolments and increased fares.

Correspondence from Wells' Senior Ministerial Policy Advisor, Tim Eltham, on 21 December 2000, revealed that the Minister understood and appreciated the case for additional funding. It was claimed that there was no capacity within the budget for Education Queensland to fund the request, so the Minister had written to Treasurer Hamill, to ask him to consider the case for additional funding.

As the Premier had called a State election for 17 February 2001, the Government was now effectively in caretaker mode, so it was not possible to make any progress on the issues during January 2001. A letter to Dunne, from the Under Treasurer, on 7 February, indicated that "your representations will be passed on to the Incoming Government for consideration within the framing of the 2001-2002 State Budget." (Bradley, 7/2/01)

For some unknown reason, the number of applications for assistance through the Non Government Schools Bus Fare Assistance Program for semester two 2000 dropped by almost 400, or 13.1%, compared to semester one of that year. This, combined with the fact that the impact of the GST and the anticipated increase in fuel costs had not been as severe as expected, the amount of money rebated to families was considerably less than had been projected. Based on the anticipated impact of the GST and assuming there would be a small growth in the number of applications, it was originally anticipated that \$865,000 would be required to pay the semester two 2000 rebates. However, the final amount paid to eligible families was only \$650,064. Refer to **Table 1** on page 94.

Based on advice from Queensland Transport that the increase in fuel costs would definitely have an effect on bus fares during the first semester of 2001, Travers revised the financial projections for the program. It became clear that an additional \$150,000 would be required during the 2001-2002 financial year, to maintain the weekly threshold at 2000 levels. Even with an additional \$150,000, the 'reserve funds' that had accumulated would be exhausted during the 2001-2002 financial year.

In light of the revised financial projections, it was essential to advise the Government that the original estimates had been revised to reflect the changing

circumstances. This was done as part of the 2001-2002 QCEC budget submission. The submission sought an increase of \$150,000 on the \$1.5m grant provided in the 1999-2000 financial year. It was also proposed that future program funding be determined via an agreed formula. The suggested formula was:

Program amount \* CPI \* Projected enrolment growth.

CPI to be advised by Treasury annually.

Projected enrolment growth to equal the same percentage as applied to the Basket/Nexus calculation which automatically determines the level of recurrent funding for the non-Government sector.

It was also proposed that a formal review be held after each three year period to determine if any adjustments were required.

Unfortunately, the outcome of the revised bid had not been advised by the end of March 2001.

## **CHAPTER FIFTEEN**

### **THE FUTURE OF THE BUS FARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

#### **DEVELOPMENT OF A DATABASE TO MANAGE THE PROGRAM**

At the “hotspots” Task Force meeting on 8 February 2000, it was decided to proceed with the development of a database to enable the administration of the “hotspots” program to be refined. An external consultant was engaged to develop a database capable of managing both the Bus Fare Assistance Program and the Students with Disabilities Transport Assistance Program. As progress was considerably slower than anticipated, in March 2001 it was decided to terminate the services of the initial consultant and engage another company. The new company commenced the development phase in late March and expected to have completed the project by the end of June 2001. If completed on time, it would allow sufficient time to effectively trial the database prior to assuming responsibility for conveyance allowance class D and E at the start of 2002, assuming the Government approved the proposal.

#### **TASK FORCE DISMANTLED**

In March 2001 the Non Government Schools Council decided to disband the Bus Fare Assistance Program Task Force and the Students with Disabilities Transport Assistance Program Task Force, both of which had been formed in 1997. The Council felt both committees had completed their original brief to assist in the establishment of transport assistance programs for students at non-State schools. It was agreed that in their place a small reference group of four members would be formed, two each from QCEC and AISQ. Membership of the reference group was expected to come from the disbanded committees. The reference group would support Travers in guiding the future of the Non Government Schools Transport Assistance Scheme.

#### **DETERMINING WHICH BUSES WOULD ATTRACT TRAVEL ASSISTANCE**

A major problem facing the Working Party was to determine which buses would qualify for travel assistance under a revised scheme for students attending non-

Government schools. The existing “hotspots” guidelines did not permit program funds to be used to subsidise students who were travelling on buses that were either owned, leased or chartered by a school, except where ‘special approval’ had been previously granted by the Government. At the time the guidelines were approved by Quinn in 1997, only three schools had this ‘special approval’. They were:

Sunshine Coast Grammar School at Forest Glen,  
South Burnett Catholic College at Kingaroy, and  
Peace Lutheran Primary School at Gatton.

At the start of 2000, Sunshine Coast Grammar School operated six chartered buses. When the school opened in 1997, ‘special approval’ had been granted by Queensland Transport to ensure students travelling on these buses would be eligible for Class E. As a result of Queensland Transport’s November 1999 policy change, any new students using these buses did not qualify for Class E. As the school attracted its students from a large geographical area, the new system of commercial contracts had the potential to cause many families to withdraw their children from the school, because they would no longer be able to afford the unsubsidised bus fares, in addition to the school fees.

In June 2000, the Stagecoach bus company purchased three of the bus companies that had been operating within the Sunshine Coast region. The purchase enabled the Sunshine Coast Grammar School to withdraw from its chartering arrangements, as the majority of the students who had been using buses chartered by the school were now able to use a Stagecoach bus. As Stagecoach had the contract for a large proportion of the Sunshine Coast, the students were now eligible for Conveyance Allowance Class E and “hotspots”.

In 1990 South Burnett Catholic College, found it necessary to purchase its own buses, as there was no alternative means of public transport available for students from outlying areas such as Murgon, Wondai, Nanango, Yarraman and Blackbutt. Without these ‘school owned’ buses, families from these districts would not have been able to provide their children with a Catholic education. Despite the fact that the buses were owned by the school and were therefore not ‘fares-based’

services, a Government decision ensured the students were declared eligible for Conveyance Allowance Class E. They were also granted “hotspots” assistance from 1997.

The Peace Buses used by students at the Peace Lutheran Primary School in Gatton were actually owned by the Lutheran Church in Gatton and not the school itself. Because the school did not own the buses, the students using them had been eligible for “hotspots” assistance since 1997. As well as conveying students to the Lutheran school in Gatton, the buses transported students to Concordia College in Toowoomba. Students using the Peace Buses had been declared eligible for Class E, despite the buses not being ‘fares-based’ services, as was normally required by Queensland Transport.

At a meeting of the Working Party on 14 December 2000, it was decided to develop a comprehensive list of bus services that would be regarded as ‘approved’ services. The list would assist in determining a student’s future eligibility for travel assistance through the Non Government Schools Transport Assistance Scheme. It was also agreed that, to qualify for travel assistance:

- a student must use a contracted service, if one existed in the area where the student resided, and
- the fares paid by the student had to be consistent with Queensland Transport’s Maximum Cash Fares Schedule.

It was decided that any bus service used by students who had been declared eligible for “hotspots” assistance in the year 2000, would be included on the list of ‘approved’ services. This meant that, as well as those students who were using contracted services or services operated by a contractor, students using the following buses would continue to be eligible for travel assistance, even though they were not contracted services:

- Peace Buses at Gatton, (only on specific routes)
- Buses operated by South Burnett Catholic College at Kingaroy, and
- The deregulated bus services operating from Gin Gin to Bundaberg and Childers to Bundaberg.

A line in the sand had effectively been drawn on 31 December 2000. It meant that any bus service that had not attracted “hotspots” assistance before the end of the 2000 school year was considered a non approved service. On 8 February Travers wrote to the principals of all schools outside the BCC, to explain the new Bus Fare Assistance Program (“hotspots”) eligibility guidelines and to invite schools to submit a written request if they believed they had good reason to have a bus run approved. Before submitting an application, schools should have approached and received written advice from their local contracted bus operator/s that they were not able or willing to transport students to and from the school on a daily basis. Although Travers was aware of one school that was being serviced by ‘non-approved’ buses, by 31 March 2001 no applications had been received.

### **AN ALTERNATIVE MEANS OF PAYING BUS FARES**

The introduction of the “hotspots” scheme ensured that the net cost of bus fares for families who had children at non-Government schools resulted in them paying no more than a certain weekly threshold. However, families had to pay their children’s bus fares for the entire semester before receiving their rebate from Queensland Transport and/or the non-Government sector. For many families, this proved to be a significant financial burden, particularly in cases where the fares were high and more than one child was involved. In semester two 2000, one family paid \$5,270 in gross bus fares for their five children to travel from El Arish to Innisfail. During that same semester, forty one (41) families paid more than \$2000 in gross fares and 114 paid more than \$1,500.

During 2000, members of the Task Force discussed ways to avoid families having to pay the entire semester bus fares before receiving their rebate. One solution proposed involved families paying only the weekly threshold to the bus operator. The balance of the fares owing would be paid to the various bus operators by the non-Government sector, on a monthly basis. Although such an arrangement sounds relatively straight forward, there were several major hurdles to overcome, one of which was how to deal with families that had children travelling on more than one bus company. Another involved the level of threshold to be paid. One feature of the 2001 Bus Fare Assistance Program was that it was not possible to set the weekly threshold in advance, as done by Queensland Transport. The



reason for this was that the “hotspots” threshold was dependent upon the number of applications received, the total fares involved, the amount of money available to be distributed to eligible families and the amount of Class E paid by Queensland Transport. Finding a solution to these and other problems will be a major challenge once the database has been developed and commissioned.

It is regrettable that it was necessary to complete this project prior to the finalisation of the many outstanding issues raised in chapters thirteen, fourteen and fifteen.

## **A SUMMARY OF TRAVEL ASSISTANCE BENEFITS GAINED FOR NON-STATE STUDENTS DURING THE PERIOD 1996 – March 2001**

### **RAIL**

There were no changes to existing policy.

### **BUS**

The introduction of the “hotspots” scheme in 1997 resulted in significant financial savings for families with children travelling by bus to non-State schools located outside the Brisbane Statistical Division.

A modification to the “hotspots” scheme in 1998 ensured that no family with children attending non-State schools located outside the Brisbane Statistical Division would pay more than \$12.00 per week (net) in bus fares. For low-income families the weekly threshold was only \$9.00.

For 1999, the geographical eligibility zone for the “hotspots” scheme was extended, resulting in all families with students attending non-State schools located outside the Greater Brisbane Area being eligible to receive assistance through the program.

The weekly threshold was increased to \$13.00/\$10.00 in semester one 1999, reduced to \$12.00/\$9.00 in semester two of that year, but increased to \$15.00/\$12.00 in 2000.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### CONCLUSION

The level of travel assistance available to students attending non-State schools in Brisbane in 2001 stands in stark contrast to what was available in 1950. The achievements are the result of a difficult and lengthy process that often involved confrontation with politicians. The increased levels of assistance have removed many of the inequities that had become ingrained in a travel assistance scheme biased in favour students who attended State schools.

The families of students attending non-State schools outside Brisbane in 2001 are now able to exercise 'freedom of choice' in selecting their children's school without incurring excessive transport costs. Although there are still some refinements to be made to the Non Government Schools Transport Assistance Scheme, the scheme provides a level of assistance only dreamed of in the early 1950's.

The current transport assistance benefits are the culmination of the effort of numerous individuals over a period of at least thirty years, with Druery and Dunne featuring prominently throughout the entire period. Their work has been complemented by the contributions of individuals within QCEC and AISQ, the various Parents and Friends Associations throughout the state, the clergy, the Catholic Education Offices and several schools. The contribution of employees within Education Queensland and Queensland Transport, particularly during the last decade has also been a key factor in the evolution of transport assistance for non-State students. Their guidance and co-operation has enabled the complex area of school transport to be navigated effectively.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### A SUMMARY OF SCHOOL TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE IN 1981

#### RAIL

Free rail travel was available to:

Primary students under 16 residing more than 2.4 kilometres from the nearest State school. Non-State students had similar benefits, provided they did not pass a State school.

Students who had completed year 7 and who were attending any approved school or TAFE college full-time.

#### SCHOOL BUSES

School buses were available free of charge to State and non-State schools services, for students who met threshold criteria expressed in terms of distance from the nearest State school.

Subject to compliance with certain criteria a school bus route could be extended past a State school to a non-State school. However, no primary student, State or non-State, could use a kilometre-based school bus service (which could be operating to provide secondary students with access to secondary education in a large centre) to attend a primary school in this large centre, if in so doing the primary student by-passed a state primary school in another centre.

#### COUNCIL BUS CONCESSIONS

Provided by Councils in Brisbane and Rockhampton.

## **CONVEYANCE ALLOWANCE**

### Eligibility Guidelines :

Assistance was payable if :

- student lived more than 4.8 km (3.2 km if under 10 years) from the nearest State school,
- student lived more than 1.6 km from the nearest railway station, and
- a train or school bus was not available.

(Assistance related only to transport to nearest State school but was payable to State and non-State students alike.)

### Forms of Allowance:

**Class A :** Private Vehicle (to and from school)

Annual rate of payment for each student as follows:-

Over 4.8 km (3.2 km if child under 10) \$105.00

Over 9.6 km \$144.00

Over 14.4 km \$198.00

Over 19.2 km \$246.00

**Class B :** Licensed Passenger Bus Services etc.

Refund of fares incurred in travelling to school or to rail or school bus

**Class C :** Private Vehicle (to and from other transport)

\$105 per annum per student was payable if student was required to be transported more than 3.2 km to nearest rail, licensed bus or school bus.



## **Appendix B**

### **CLASS D CONVEYANCE ALLOWANCE (CONVEYANCY BY PRIVATE MOTOR VEHICLE)**

#### **CONVEYANCE ALLOWANCE DISTANCE**

For each non-State school student the single journey distance by the shortest trafficable route between the home and nearest approved non-State school of the type attended (having a suitable year level) will be known as the student conveyance allowance distance.

For each family the longest student conveyance allowance distance for those students who are actually conveyed to and from school by private motor vehicle, will be known as the family conveyance allowance distance.

#### **ELIGIBILITY FOR ASSISTANCE**

Parents of students attending a non-State school are eligible for financial assistance in the form of conveyance Allowance, Class D, provided that:

the family conveyance allowance distance is more than 4.8 km (or 3.2 km if the student is under 10 years of age);

the family lives more than 1.6 km from a school road transport service and from the nearest railway station from which the student can travel to the nearest school of the type attended;

the family is not in receipt of Class A or Class C Conveyance Allowance for any student; and

the family lives outside the Greater Brisbane Area.

Eligibility for assistance will not be affected if a student does not attend the school of the type attended which is nearest to his/her home.

## **LEVEL OF ASSISTANCE**

The family rate of payment will be the minimum per student rate payable under Conveyance Allowance Class A, irrespective of the number of students conveyed or the distance traversed.

When an eligible family, not otherwise entitled to payment of Conveyance Allowance, Class D, must convey a student (with a student Conveyance Allowance distance of more than 4.8 km (3.2 km if the student is under 10 years) more than 3.2 km to a school transport service, a licensed bus or railway in order to attend the nearest school of the type attended, the parents or guardian may claim a Class D Conveyance Allowance.

## **CLASS E CONVEYANCE ALLOWANCE (ASSISTANCE WITH COST OF FARES)**

Financial assistance will be provided in respect of fares incurred for public transport (excluding taxis and air transport) or for the use of a school road transport service according to the criteria set out below.

### **ASSESSED FARE**

For students the cost of the fares for the journeys to and from the nearest approved school of the type attended having a suitable year level (using concessional forms of transport where available) will be known as the assessed fare.

However, the assessed fare will be zero if any of the following criteria apply:

- (a) the student lives 4.8 km or less (or 3.2 km if under 10 years of age) by the shortest trafficable route, from the nearest approved school of the type attended having a suitable year level; or
- (b) the student lives 1.6 km or less by the shortest trafficable route, from a school road transport service on which he/she is entitled to travel free to within 1.6 km of the nearest school of the type attended; or

- (c) the student lives 1.6 km or less by the shortest trafficable route, from a railway station from which he/she can travel free to within 1.6 km of the nearest school of the type attended; or
- (d) the student lives within the Greater Brisbane Area.

### **ELIGIBILITY FOR ASSISTANCE**

To be eligible for assistance under this scheme families must have one or more students with an assessed fare of more than zero which is not fully reimbursed under the conditions of Conveyance Allowance Class B.

Eligibility for assistance will not be affected if the student does not attend the nearest school of the chosen type. However, the cost of fares to the nearest such school will be used in determining the assessed fare which in turn determines the level of assistance available.

### **LEVEL OF ASSISTANCE**

The total of assessed fares for all students in the family who use public transport or a school road transport service to access their chosen school will be determined. From this amount, the total of payments of Conveyance Allowance Class B for students in the family will be deducted. The balance represents the assessed fare for the family. Where the assessed fare for the family exceeds twelve dollars per week, (to be indexed) parents may claim reimbursement for two thirds of the excess paid.

## Appendix C

### KEY MILESTONES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE FOR SCHOOL STUDENTS IN QUEENSLAND

- 1906 Free daily rail travel provided to scholarship holders attending Grammar schools in Brisbane.
- 1916 Free second-class rail travel provided for pupils under 16 years of age if no public school existed within one mile and a-half of their residence.
- 1920 Free rail travel extended to primary and secondary students attending both State and non-State schools in Brisbane. The basis of assistance was that primary students residing more than one mile and a half from their nearest state primary school were eligible and secondary students were assisted to attend their nearest denominational school.
- 1924 A licensed boatman was paid to convey primary school students, by boat, from Gympie Terrace to Tewantin State School.
- 1945 Introduction of Road Transport Services and free bus travel for State school students in areas where there were more than the required number of students to be conveyed.
- Free bus travel on licensed services for eligible students attending State Primary schools.
- Students under 10 years received free travel to attend nearest primary school if they resided more than 2 miles from the school.

Students over 10 years received free travel to attend nearest school if they resided more than 3 miles from the school.

1958 Introduction of free bus travel for Secondary school students attending State secondary schools, provided they lived more than 3 miles from the nearest school.

Introduction of Conveyance Allowance to compensate families for bus fares and/or expenses incurred in transporting their children to either a State Primary or Secondary school, a bus or train, in a private motor vehicle. The allowance assisted families that lived in areas remote from rail or bus services or a school.

1977 Approval granted for an extension of School Transport Services beyond the Base School to Non-State Schools and State Opportunity Schools.

1983 Two new forms of Conveyance Allowance (Classes D and E) were introduced for students attending non-State schools.

1994 Free rail travel abolished. All students travelling on Citytrain network were now required to pay a fare. All students, including State school students, were able to access the school of their choice, providing they paid the appropriate fare.

An additional form of Conveyance Allowance, Drought Allowance, was introduced for families living on drought declared properties.

1995 A Safety Net scheme was introduced to provide financial relief for low income families.

Non-State students were granted approval to travel on kilometre-based bus services beyond their nearest State school by paying a

fare to the operator and providing spare space was available on the service.

- 1997 Introduction of the 'hotspots' scheme (Bus Fare Assistance Program) for students attending non-State schools outside the Brisbane Statistical Division.
- 1998 Extension of the 'hotspots' scheme to include all students attending non-State schools outside the Greater Brisbane Area.
- 1999 A new form of Conveyance Allowance (Class I) was introduced for isolated students.