

**Question on Notice**

**No. 905**

**Asked on 7 June 2005**

MR FINN asked the Minister for Transport and Main Roads (MR LUCAS)—

**QUESTION:**

Will he outline what the Government is doing to improve safety for children traveling on school buses?

**ANSWER:**

I thank the Honourable Member for his question.

The safety of students traveling on school buses is one of the most important, and often emotive, issues faced by Government and school communities. However, I am proud to say that the Beattie Government continues to be proactive and committed to making school bus travel safer.

While any accident is a tragedy, statistics supplied by Queensland Transport show that travel to and from school by bus remains the safest form of travel and has an excellent safety record. Students traveling in cars, bicycles and on foot have accounted for the majority of school-travel-related crashes in the past 10 years. For example, between 1994 and 2003 there was one school bus passenger fatality involving a student, compared with 32 fatalities in private cars, 18 pedestrians, and nine cyclists.

In relation to school bus safety, the Queensland School Transport Safety Task Force report of 2001 found that the most severe injuries are suffered by bus passengers in the event of a rollover crash. It therefore recommended that the Government should accelerate the introduction of rollover compliant buses into the Queensland school bus fleet.

For this reason, the Government introduced the School Bus Upgrade Scheme (SchoolBUS) in 2002. SchoolBUS provides financial assistance to contracted school bus operators to replace older vehicles with buses up to five years of age. All of these buses comply with Australian Design Rule (ADR) 59/00, which relates to design and construction standards to protect the passenger compartment of the bus in the event of a rollover crash.

SchoolBUS has been a particularly successful Beattie Government initiative. With an annual budget of \$3 million, it provides operators with assistance of 40% of the purchase price of a bus, to a maximum of \$120,000. To date, more than 180 buses have been approved for replacement funding. These buses operate in all areas of the State, outside of urban areas.

In February of this year, I announced an expansion of the SchoolBUS program. An additional \$12m will be available to the Queensland school bus industry to upgrade school buses. This new initiative will mean that a total of \$24 million will be provided for upgrading the school bus fleet over the next four years. This initiative also provides funding for the voluntary fitment of seatbelts for school buses in other non-urban areas.

In February this year, I also announced that the introduction of the following safety requirements for school buses would commence from 5 July 2005.

- All new school buses introduced on steep and hazardous areas must be fitted with lap-sash seat belts, meet rollover requirements and be fitted with an additional braking system.
- All school buses must be fitted with flashing warning lights and school bus warning signs. The warning signs and lights are intended to warn motorists of the possibility of school children in the area of a bus stopped at the road side.
- All school buses, except for those within 2 years of their maximum age, will require internal padding to enhance passenger safety.
- Additionally, by December 2009, all new and existing school buses in steep and hazardous areas will need to have seat belts, meet rollover requirements and have an extra braking system installed.

Queensland Transport is also reviewing the "Code of Conduct for School Children Travelling on Buses" to assist school communities and bus operators to encourage students to wear seat belts. Furthermore, Queensland Transport is working with seat and seat belt manufacturers to examine the reasons behind complaints of discomfort and to address the adjustability issues.

In addition, approximately \$500,000 is provided each financial year to improve the safety of school bus travel by reviewing selected school bus routes through the Safe School Bus Routes program. Initiatives to improve safety include widening and increasing visibility around curves, the construction of bus stops and the installation of school bus route warning signs.

The Beattie Government will continue to give school bus safety a high priority, but I call on all road users, parents and school communities to continue to play their part in ensuring the safety of our school children.