

## **Question on Notice**

**No. 930**

**Asked on 26 May 2006**

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

### **QUESTION:**

With reference to the high school students from the Howard area who have to travel to the Isis High School if they wish to take advantage of the School Transport Assistance Scheme and as there are a growing number of parents who have concerns that an option is not given to them as to which school they can send their child and the cost of sending their child to an alternative school is \$35 per week and as some parents have more than one child requiring bus travel and can ill afford the cost—

Will he amend the School Transport Assistance Scheme Policy to allow parents to send their children to the school of their choice and still be entitled to free bus travel?

### **ANSWER:**

I thank the Honourable Member for his question-

The Beattie Government understands that one of the most significant issues facing parents and guardians is access to education for their children. That's why the Government continues to invest heavily to provide local schools and, where a local school is not available, provides transport assistance through the School Transport Assistance Scheme (STAS).

One of the central principles of STAS is that assistance is provided to transport students to the nearest school. This principle is applied consistently across the State. The reason for this principle is that the scheme, with a budget of more than \$140 million each year, is one of the largest assistance programs funded by the Queensland Government. You would appreciate that with such significant funding each financial year, the Government must ensure that the assistance available under STAS is distributed in a consistent and transparent manner and as effectively as possible.

Under current arrangements, only 25% of parents receive some form of STAS. The remaining 75% of parents fully fund their child's travel to and from school, either because they do not meet the criteria of STAS, or, commonly, because they wish their child to attend other than their nearest school.

If students received Government funded travel on services other than to their nearest school, the cost of the scheme would increase considerably. The result would be that an unsustainable amount of additional funding would be required or fewer families would receive assistance. The Government could also be in a position where it has funded the provision of a local school, but it is also funding students to travel directly past that school to another school. This would be a duplication of resources and an inefficient use of taxpayer's funds.

Moreover, implementation of a school of choice principle could result in unpredictable fluctuations in student numbers on many bus routes. Such uncertainty could undermine the viability of services in many parts of Queensland and in areas of low passenger numbers this could mean closure of some services. Overall, this would not be a desirable outcome for the scheme or the community.

In the particular case to which you refer, I am advised that a fully funded service is provided to Isis District State High School. School of choice would mean multiple bus services from places such as Howard without any regard for efficiency or effectiveness of each bus. I am further advised that students in the Howard area have access to this fully funded service to Isis or a number of commercial services if they wish to attend other than their nearest school.

The Honourable Member may be interested to know that in April 2002 Queensland Transport conducted a survey of parents of children from the Torbanlea, Howard, Takura, Toogoom and Burrum Heads areas who travel to Isis District State High School and Hervey Bay High School. This was to gather community feeling about the school bus service provided in the area. The overwhelming majority of parents did not express any desire to have the arrangements for school transport changed.

Under current arrangements, only 25% of parents receive some form of STAS. The remaining 75% of parents fully fund their child's travel to and from school, either because they do not meet the criteria of STAS, or, commonly, because they wish their child to attend other than their nearest school. Families are of course entitled to have their children attend the school that they believe will best meet their individual circumstances. However, travel costs associated with transport to other than the nearest school are the responsibility of parents or guardians.