

Question on Notice

No. 425

Asked on Tuesday 13 March 2007

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

QUESTION:

- (1) How many students from the Kallangur Electorate have been provided with free school transport this year?
- (2) How do the eligibility requirements for free school transport apply to students whose parents have shared custody arrangements in place?

ANSWER:

(1) I am advised that whilst data on students eligible under the School Transport Assistance Scheme is not stored on an electoral basis the number of eligible students assisted in 2006 by each Queensland Transport region was:

- South East Region – 70 500 students
- Southern Region – 30 900 students
- Central Region – 16 700 students
- Northern Region – 19 000 students.

(2) I am advised the issue of multiple addresses for assistance has been considered on a number of occasions – not only for separated families but for other requests such as day care, grandparents, workplace and other personal circumstances.

In each case, it has not been able to be implemented due to practical, administrative and budgetary reasons. It is also made very clear in School Transport Assistance Scheme guidelines that school transport arrangements are an overall parental responsibility.

In the case of family separation, there are two issues. Firstly, the verification of separation status and the actual travel incurred. At present, with only one nominated address accepted, travel is for a maximum of ten journeys a week.

Sporadic changes to that travel are not requested or recorded because bus operators need surety of income over time. In other words, funding for equal travel per week per student is provided for each application. It would also not be practical from an administrative point of view to track actual travel for 140 000 students assisted across the State.

If a second address was introduced for any reason, this would introduce a new layer of processing complexity in that all travel movements would have to be recorded to prevent paying for more than ten trips a week for these students.

I am advised that If implemented, this would mean overall greater expense for the scheme without increasing eligible student numbers. Operators would be paid from two addresses or two operators would be paid for the same student.

Queensland Transport advises that even if this was possible, it would not be equitable to recognise only one group of separated families with court orders rather than informal arrangements where families possibly can't afford legal process.

The School Transport Assistance Scheme has a budget of about \$140m each year. To create a system for separated families could significantly increase the cost of the scheme beyond its current allocation. It would also increase administrative costs and change the focus from a targeted assistance scheme to a general assistance scheme relating to personal circumstances.

Taking all issues into account, QT advises the current scheme offers a reasonable balance between cost to the taxpayers and assisting eligible families to access to education facilities.