

Question on Notice

No. 635

Asked on Thursday 19 April 2007

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

QUESTION:

With reference to school bus services—

(1) Why is it considered acceptable for large numbers of children to travel standing up on school buses, including on a notoriously dangerous 110 kph section of the Bruce Highway at Palmview?

(2) Will he explain why an additional school bus service introduced to meet demand for children travelling from Palmview to Chancellor State College is scheduled so that it is unable to deliver the children to school until after the time they are expected to be on campus?

(3) Given the parking and safety issues that exist at schools like Chancellor State College, why does the department not provide a safe and effective school bus service rather than forcing parents to drive their children to school?

ANSWER:

(1) I am advised that the carriage of standing passengers is a normal operational matter for providers of bus services. Bus operators need to manage issues such as fluctuating student numbers, shifts in student populations and route changes to be able to provide effective services. This is particularly true in areas such as the Sunshine Coast, where there are a large number of students travelling to an increasing number of schools in a variety of locations.

Carrying standing passengers on occasion allows operators to address these operational issues to ensure that they can meet the changing demands for school bus travel.

I have been further advised that passengers are permitted to stand on buses provided that: the vehicle is specifically designed for the purpose, with hand-holds and suitable floor space; no passenger stands for more than 20 kilometres; and the road has not been gazetted as a road not permitted for buses carrying standing passengers.

Finally, I should point out that travel to and from school by bus is the safest form of road transport for our students. Each year, about 60 million school bus passenger trips take place in Queensland, with a safety record second to none. Each year, the Beattie government spends over \$100m on school bus transport for eligible students to travel to and from school. Also in the last 5 years, we have spent approximately \$20m upgrading the school bus fleet under the School Bus Upgrade Scheme. This scheme, which is an initiative of the Beattie government, will provide a further \$10.5m over the next 2 years and \$3m a year in subsequent years up to 2027.

In addition, the Beattie government has committed to spending a further \$12m over 4 years under the SteepBUS program to update school buses travelling on steep roads. Previous governments have not provided any funding to replace older school buses at all.

(2) Buslink is contracted to TransLink to provide school services for students to Chancellor State College.

Two new services were introduced in 2007 to accommodate an increase in the number of students attending the college. One of the new services is dedicated to carry Palmview students to schools in the area. While there have been some instances of late running services, TransLink and the local operators are investigating options to minimise this occurring.

Buslink currently provides school services to the Sippy Downs precinct utilising 18 large buses, with 7 of these buses servicing Chancellor State School and 4 buses servicing Chancellor State College. Departmental advice to me is that these buses are not currently running to full capacity.

Additionally, Glasshouse Country Coaches provide school bus services to the non-state schools in the Sippy Downs precinct. Through TransLink, Sunshine Coast Sunbus operates a range of scheduled passenger services in the Chancellor Park/Sippy Downs area.

(3) Queensland Transport "Safe School Travel" (SafeST) program aims to provide safety to all school students on the way to and from school no matter what method of travel they choose. In addition to the current school bus services, QT supports a number of additional safety programs such as the School Crossing Supervisor Scheme and the Safe Walking & Pedalling Program. The QT Travel Smart program has also successfully increased the percentage of students cycling and walking to school.

I am advised that the school crossings at Chancellor State College have amongst the highest student use on the entire Sunshine Coast with up to 300 students using the supervised crossing in Scholars Way each morning and afternoon. In May 2006 QT increased the number of crossing supervisors so that four supervisors work on each school day assisting the children safely cross the road.

In the last two years QT has also recently funded bicycle racks for student use at the college, as well as \$10,000 towards the approximate total of \$14,000 cost of two bicycle sheds (\$7,000 each) to store the two class sets of bicycles owned by the college. In January this year QT also supported the entire Chancellor Park Community by constructing an all weather concrete foot & cycle path which runs between Sienna Catholic College and Chancellor Primary Campus.

For the 2006-07 financial year, funding for roadworks rose to \$206 million in Noosa and Maroochy Shires and Caloundra City from around \$50 million under the coalition government. Over the next five years it is anticipated that the government will spend \$776m on roads on the Sunshine Coast.

Work is underway for the upgrading of a four-kilometre section of the Sunshine Motorway to four lanes between Sippy Downs and Kawana Way. This work is scheduled for completion in July 2007.

Work is also scheduled to commence in June 2007 on the Dixon Road/Claymore Road Interchange and associated local roads within Sippy Downs, with completion in mid 2008. This will provide a second access to the University and Chancellor State College.