

Summary of EMRS consultation

The Core Passenger Services Review has engaged EMRS consultants at separate points in our consultation process to gain a better appreciation of what the community's priorities are in respect of passenger services. To that end, EMRS has conducted focus groups sessions across the State on behalf of the Review.

The first set of 6 focus groups were held in mid-December 2004. One group consisted of school bus operators. The remaining groups were made up of school bus users. There was no mixing of bus operators and bus users. This was a deliberate choice by the Review team to gain an appreciation of the views of 2 different stakeholder groups.

Six key attributes were identified by the Review for discussion in the focus groups. These were:

- the buses (including their age and safety);
- routes and route coverage;
- timetables;
- the types of services available (and who should be permitted to travel on particular services);
- the level of integration between services; and
- fares.

Observations

The following observations can be drawn from the work undertaken by EMRS:

- (1) There was a strong feeling in areas currently serviced by student only school services that adults should not be permitted to travel with school children, and if they are to travel, those adults need to be vetted (same police check as all adults in schools have) or carried at the bus drivers' discretion.
- (2) There is a concern about bus safety, which encompasses the age and condition of buses, but also issues related to the wearing of seat belts, seating (ie 3 for 2 seating), the number of students permitted to stand and the length of time for which it is acceptable for students to travel in either 3 for 2 seating or as standing passengers.
- (3) Off the bus safety was given a very high priority by bus users. The state of the roads on which the buses travel, heavy vehicle traffic sharing roads with school buses, the use and operation of interchanges and the safety of bus stops were all identified as areas of concern. (need to point out that safety on the bus was more important though).
- (4) Existing routes and coverage was considered acceptable and not an area of concern.
- (5) Greater integration of services was not identified as a significant issue.
- (6) Fares were not considered an issue for school bus users (though they were aware of inconsistencies). There was concern that the Review may be used as a device to introduce fares on existing free to user school services.

In the lead up to the Bridport Workshop, a further series of focus groups was conducted. A total of 9 sessions were held; 4 in the North/North-West and 5 in the South. Separate focus groups were run with operators and user groups. In contrast to the earlier focus groups, which focussed specifically on school bus services, these focus groups were concerned with all the core passenger services.

This second series of focus groups allowed the Review to test assumptions about stakeholders' hopes and fears- that is, what do stakeholders hope to see come out of the Review, and what do they fear will come out of the Review. They also provided the Review with the opportunity to identify areas of common interest with operators and user groups.

They also gave participants the opportunity to express views that may not come out in public forums or through direct meetings with the Review team.

Summary of findings

The focus groups found a strong desire for changes in the delivery of core passenger services amongst participants. While there is underlying suspicion as to the Government's motives for conducting the review, and the Government's commitment to devoting the resources to achieving lasting change, the hope remains that an improved public transport system will emerge through the Review.

Table 1 provides a high level summary of the key hope and fears for operator and user groups.

Table 1 - Summary of stakeholder hopes and fears

	Hopes	Fears
Operators	Government will identify efficiencies and commit resources so that safety of travellers and the quality of the services will be improved.	There is a fear that the Government will lack either the will to reform or the willingness to commit resources to the public transport system. Many operators remain unconvinced that the Review will achieve a better system.
Users	Efficient public transport system that is responsive to community needs and meets the needs of a larger proportion of the travelling public in rural and fringe areas.	Independent schools fear discrimination. Decrease in services. Increase in costs (to users).

The focus groups also highlighted some differences in the focus of operator and user groups. Operators in particular were concerned with the lack of a cohesive transport policy at the present time. User groups were far more likely to focus on issues that affected them personally. The areas of common concern for operators and users were buses and infrastructure, behaviour of students on school services, overcrowding on buses and the level of flexibility within the system to respond to changing community demands.

A summary of the key issues and themes raised in the course of these focus groups is set out in Attachment 1.

Issues/Themes identified

Target markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to services for post high school students (college, university, TAFE, etc). • Belief that the current focus is on free school buses while ignoring needs of general access regular scheduled services. • Mixed views on adults travelling with children in regional and rural areas. • Independent school want to be treated the same as State school students.
Routes and timetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity of the system to respond to changes in transport patterns or needs of public. • Relationship between bus timetables and school timetables.
Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services would be improved through integration between operators and co-ordination of timetables. • North-West Coast in particular identified as an area requiring greater integration. • Opportunities for school buses to be used for additional services. • Potential for integrated ticketing identified. • Availability of information on services. • Lack of co-ordination with HACC services and existing service providers.
On Bus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age of vehicles. • Doubts over the effectiveness of DIER's vehicle inspection program. • Internal fit-out of buses. Difficulties with seatbelts recognised. • Perception of a link between quality of vehicles and public unwillingness to use public transport. • Overcrowding on buses- including use of 3 for 2 seating and standees. • Discipline and bullying
Off bus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Road conditions • Location of bus stops and pull off areas • Behaviour at bus stops/interchanges
Bus drivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay rates and minimum hours per day • Age and health of drivers • Driver responsibilities- control the bus, not children's behaviour • Hard to find drivers

Operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainty of contract tenure- need for a fixed period contract. • Investment in industry inhibited by inadequate returns and uncertainty of tenure. • New funding model required • Tenders to be offered to local operators first
Users (Fares)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fares were not raised as a significant issue for parents. • Treatment of TAFE and University students • Independent schools want to be treated the same as State school students • Prospects of zone based fare systems and Metro style fares raised.
Rationalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of potential for rationalisation. • Recognition that some operators will have to leave the industry - but compensation will be available to them.
Contracts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief that lowest tender always wins. • Operators believe that preference should be given to existing operators (in the area). • Need to receive a brief for tenders