



ACT
Government

School Bus Services Policy

TRANSPORT CANBERRA AND CITY
SERVICES DIRECTORATE

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to set out the ACT Government’s policy regarding the provision of school bus services as part of Canberra’s broader public transport network.

1.2 Application

This policy applies to all school bus services operated or contracted by the ACT Government, which are defined to include the following:

- Dedicated school bus services connecting schools with transport hubs or residential areas (including from rural areas of the Territory), which follow a regular timetable and route and are available to students only, and not to the general public;
- Specialised school trips (“S Trips”) which operate on school days only on regular routes, are available to both students and the general public, and may consist of additional trips to add capacity on all or part of a route on school days, and/or include diversions or extensions to provide access to specific schools; and
- General public transport services that carry students to and from schools, are available to both students and the general public, and operate regardless of whether schools are open.

This policy does not apply to Special Needs Transport services between home and school for students with disability, which are managed under different arrangements.

1.3 Background

Transport Canberra’s public transport network is designed to facilitate a wide variety of trip types throughout the day, seven days per week, maximising mobility for Canberrans. The network is focussed around a core offering of frequent “Rapid” bus routes and light rail to move people quickly along high-demand corridors and across longer distances, with local services connecting at town centres that provide access to areas not within walking distance of the Rapid routes. Nearly every school in the Territory is served by at least one Rapid or local route.

Supplementing the general public transport network are a number of dedicated school bus services, designed to provide additional capacity on the network during peak student travel times and to improve access to schools and student activities. This document summarises the Territory’s policy around the provision of these dedicated school bus services.

2.0 Dedicated school bus service principles

2.1 General policy statement

The ACT Government is concerned to ensure the Transport Canberra public transport system moves (i) as many passengers as possible across the entirety of its network, and (ii) as many school students as possible to and from school. The ACT Government also aims to encourage active travel and public transport useage by students in a manner that promotes the ongoing useage of those forms of transport once students reach an age when they are permitted to drive cars.

All public transport networks operate within constraints, which include fleet numbers, road designs, budget and operator numbers. To achieve the policy objectives listed above, it is necessary to consider those constraints when designing complementary general and school public transport services. This *School Bus Services Policy* seeks to maximise the benefits available to the Canberra community (including school students) through the design of the Transport Canberra public transport network, having regard to both the ACT Government's objectives and system constraints.

2.2 Introduction - Facilitating safe, reliable transport to and from school and extracurricular activities

School bus services are designed having regard to factors such as student age, special needs, social inclusion and geography. Dedicated school bus services are intended to facilitate safe travel for students by supplementing the general public transport network and serving stops with safe pedestrian connections to school campuses.

Some types of school bus services are considered to be part of the general public transport network while others are dedicated services available only for use by students.

Dedicated school bus services supplement the general public transport network to provide additional capacity for students during peak student travel times, avoid crush loads of students on routes used by the public and ensure that students can reasonably travel to their local public school (that is, within the priority enrolment area for that school).

The school bus service network is designed to maximise frequency of service and flexibility for students, allowing them the option of traveling at more than one time to get to or from school.

2.3 Introduction - Leveraging the general public transport network

The general public transport network is designed to provide access to as many schools as possible in the Territory, meaning a significant number of students have the options of using the regular route network to get to and from school. In particular, there is a focus on providing access to public schools for students living within each school's Priority Enrolment Area, whether on regular routes, using "S-trips" on regular routes or with dedicated school services.

The general public transport network provides coverage of most Territory suburbs, maximising flexibility for students and promoting safety by allowing students using dedicated school bus services to catch the bus at a general public stop. The Rapid Route network provides fast,

frequent service to destinations across Canberra, allowing students to efficiently travel longer distances if required.

2.4 How Dedicated School Bus Services are Determined

The provision of dedicated school bus services will be determined according to three main criteria:

1. The prioritisation of service types;
2. The resources available to deliver dedicated school services; and
3. Other criteria – demand, age, special needs, social inclusion and geography.

These are discussed below.

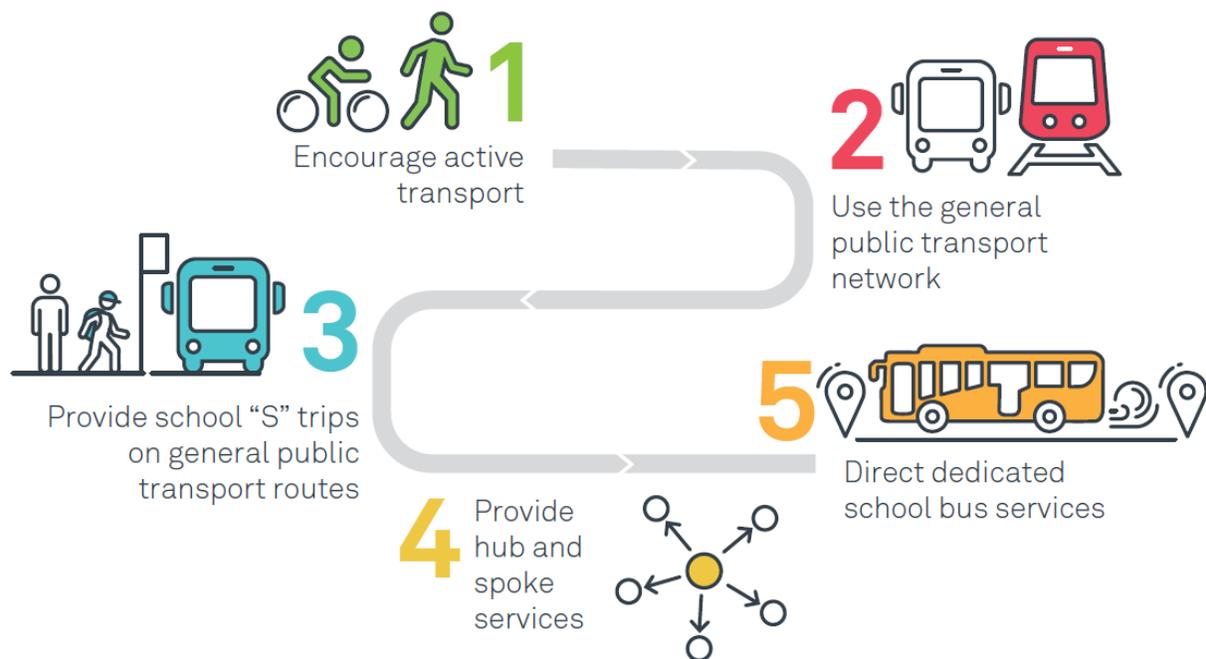
2.4.1 The Prioritisation of Service Types

The provision of school services by Transport Canberra will be guided by the following prioritisation of different travel options:

Service Hierarchy

For Canberra Dedicated School Bus Services

Several different types of routes complement the general public transport network to provide student transport. These additional dedicated school bus services are included in the following school travel hierarchy:



1. First priority is to encourage active transport—any students who are able are encouraged to walk or cycle to school.

- This leverages ACT Government programs that seek to provide safe walking and cycling routes to schools.
 - Pedestrian improvements will be considered and prioritised where possible to facilitate active travel as well as safe movements between schools, bus stops and parent pick-up/drop-off areas.
 - Crossing guards or safety officers may be considered for intersections where large numbers of students must cross a busy street.
 - The ACT Government recognises that active travel is not an appropriate option for school travel for all students. In particular, active travel is generally not a viable option for students living longer distances from their school, or for students who cannot safely walk or cycle to school because of their age, degree of independence or access to an appropriate route to school.
2. Second priority is use of the general public transport network, which serves most schools in the Territory and is designed to operate at regular frequencies throughout the day.
 3. Third priority is to provide School “S” trips on general public transport routes – these services would operate on all or part of a regular route and would be included in that route’s timetable, but may divert to serve one or more schools along the way.
 - “S” trips are used to provide additional capacity where the demand created by school students results in crowding on the general public transport network.
 - “S” trips may be used to provide diversions or extensions of general public transport routes to facilitate safe access for students to walk between the bus stop and schools.
 - “S” trips facilitate the ability to deploy safety officers onboard vehicles by concentrating students on specific trips.
 4. Fourth priority is to provide hub and spoke services – these services would connect schools with one or more transport hubs.
 - Hub and spoke services are ideal for connecting non-government schools, high schools and colleges with transport hubs to ensure access between the schools and the wider public transport network.
 - Hub and spoke services are typically short, allowing multiple trips to be operated with a single vehicle, increasing flexibility in travel times for students and carrying more students with fewer vehicles.
 - Hub and spoke services may operate between larger schools and more than one transport hub, minimising the number of transfers that students would need to make.
 - Hub and spoke services deposit large groups of students at a transport hub at once, from which they disperse, avoiding the overloading of local routes in the network at school bell times.

5. Fifth priority is to provide direct dedicated school bus services – these services would operate on alignments not served by the regular route network.
 - Direct dedicated school bus services operate between schools and students homes, and are used to provide safe, direct, student-only travel for primary school students who are unable or live too far from school to walk or cycle, or students with special needs.
 - Direct dedicated school bus services may be considered to “fill in the gaps” in the general public transport network where there is high demand for school trips but little or no demand for travel otherwise.

2.4.2 Resources Available to Deliver Dedicated School Services

Dedicated school bus services will be provided up to the maximum levels set forth in the table below. This table is designed to provide clarity to the ACT community as to the resources which are available for dedicated school bus services.

Category	Maximum
Morning bus services on school days	120
Afternoon bus services on school days	120

The table above may be periodically reviewed by the ACT Government.

2.4.3 Other criteria

Where dedicated school services may be appropriate based on the service hierarchy, Transport Canberra will, in consultation with the School Transport Liaison Committee, prioritise school services as part of the regular review process (described in Section 3).

The core factors that will be taken into account as part of this prioritisation are:

- **Demand for services** – priority will be given to potential dedicated school services where there is high demand from students. This demand will primarily be measured by existing demand for bus services based on ticketing data, in addition to potential demand for services based on enrolment data provided by schools (where available).
- **Capacity of students to use regular public transport services** – priority will be given to potential dedicated school services based on the likelihood that students will be able to use alternative, regular route services (which may involve changing buses as part of a trip to school). This will take into account factors such as the age of students who would use the service, any particular students with special needs, the complexity of alternative travel options and any other factors that would materially affect the capacity of students to use alternative services. Priority will also be given to potential dedicated school routes where there is no regular route service available.

Other factors that may be considered in designing dedicated bus services for school students include:

- **Social inclusion:** Ensuring appropriate access to education for students is a priority for the ACT Government, especially for students who may have no other practical option but travel on a school bus to get to and from their local school.
- **Geography:** some locations are easier (or harder) to serve with public transport, and these physical constraints will impact whether a dedicated bus service is able to be provided.

3.0 School Transport Steering Committee and regular reviews of services

Transport Canberra is responsible for the design and management of dedicated school bus services.

The School Transport Steering Committee will support Transport Canberra by serving as a forum for consultation relating to how the transport network supports student access to schools. The Steering Committee will be chaired by a Transport Canberra nominee, and will include senior representatives from:

- the Education Directorate
- the Association of Independent Schools
- the Catholic Education Office
- the Council of ACT Parents' and Citizens' Associations; and
- the Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools.

The Committee may, from time to time, establish working groups to consider specific issues, or to undertake more detailed work in relation to regular reviews of school bus services.

Both the Committee and any working groups it establishes will be supported by a secretariat within Transport Canberra.

3.1 Regular review of services

The ACT Government will periodically determine the resources available to provide dedicated school bus services.

In consultation with the School Transport Steering Committee, Transport Canberra will periodically review the provision of school services, including dedicated school bus services. These periodic reviews will occur as determined by Transport Canberra, though generally they will be:

- annually;
- when route or timetable changes that would impact on school students are proposed;
- when additional buses become available for school services;
- when the Education Directorate makes significant changes to the school system, such as opening a new school or materially changing priority enrolment areas; and
- as otherwise determined by Transport Canberra.

Regular reviews will provide a mechanism for particular schools or other stakeholders to request additional services. In preparation for each review, Transport Canberra and the committee may seek information from ACT schools, including:

- current enrolment information, and anticipated enrolments for future years (if known);

- suggestions or requests for new routes or changes to existing routes (including dedicated school services or regular services);
- suggestions or requests for improvements to local infrastructure near schools or used by school students, such as footpaths, bus stops or pedestrian crossings; and
- any other issues of concern to schools relating to students travelling to and from school.

At each review, the Transport Canberra will need to consider and consult on whether:

- the allocation of resources for school bus services between different routes and groups of students is appropriate, including whether there is a need to reallocate resources from existing services; and
- the total resources available for school services is appropriate, and if necessary, make a recommendation for changes to the resource cap to Government.