

Shared school and passenger services: Does the benefit far outweigh the risk?

National Travel to Learn and School Bus Summit
2018

Wednesday June 27, Canberra

Janet Stanley
Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute
University of Melbourne
With thanks to Keith Foote

Content

➤ Yes – the benefit does far outweigh the risk!

1. The arguments for opening up the school bus
2. Blockages to this happening
3. Why is the integration of the school bus into a comprehensive transport system so important?
 - Unmet travel needs –children, in particular, paying the cost
4. Alternative model: Integrated, place-based transport
5. What a 'freed-up' school bus system might look like

Alternative model: The route bus

where all people are acceptable!



Vic:
65,000 children
travel on a
school bus;
886,000 don't!

1. Arguments for opening up the school bus: Considerable unmet transport needs in rural areas

General conclusions are:

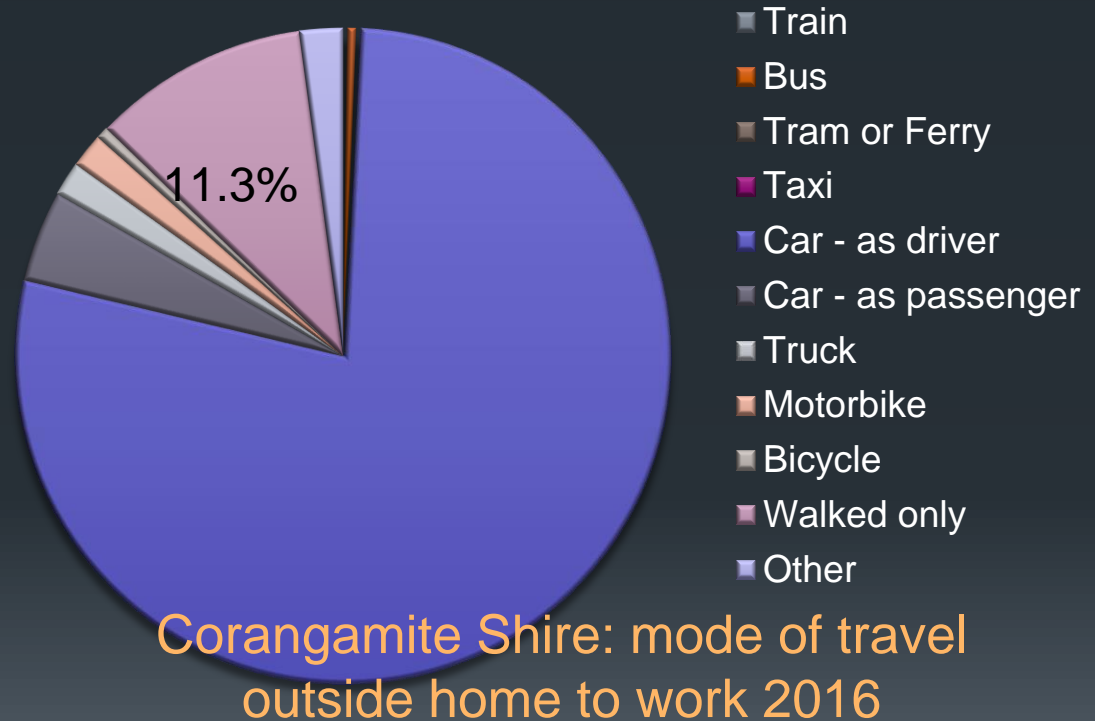
- Local regional bus services very limited, if they exist
- CT doing agency determined transport for their aged/disability/youth clients for mainly medical or welfare services
- There is extensive unmet transport needs (youth, aged, low income, children)

Why?

- Present local transport delivery runs in mode and purpose silos, rather than a single service delivery system
- There is considerable under-utilized capital assets
- We can respond to many unmet needs with existing resources
- The rest a demand responsive model, such as ConnectU

The importance of travel

- People located in rural areas travel long distances:
 - Essential services (education, health, welfare)
 - Melb average of 1.4 kms
 - Rural and small townships – 31.3 kms
- Car dependency – 1% took PT to work
- Travel other than to work rarely measured



Importance of facilitating travel (continued)

- Social exclusion is higher in rural areas than in Melbourne
- aged – sometimes the major population group in a small town - isolated and lonely
- Movement of low income families due to housing unaffordability and economic restructuring (absence of low skilled jobs)
- Displacement of travel costs from the service providers to customers with movement of businesses away from smaller towns
- Importance of the bus industry for regional prosperity – Lowe
 - School bus operators make a large contribution to their local community – way beyond the cost of their contract
 - Social externalities are not measured
 - Not recognised in transport procurement
- Risk of poor child development outcomes in regional/rural areas

Rural children at a higher risk of not being ready for school

In Victoria:

- 20% developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains
- 9.9% on 2 or more domains
- Children living in the most socio-economically disadvantaged locations:
 - One or more 33%
 - 2 or more 18%
- Regions have more disadvantage than major cities
 - The gap is growing

Areas of competence (ready for school):

1. Physical health & wellbeing
2. Social competence
3. Emotional Maturity
4. Language and cognitive skills
5. Communication skills & general knowledge

There is a high cost to childhood disadvantage

In SA study:

- people on isolated farms, particularly with a migrant background are less likely to send their child to pre-school – lack of access to car
- M&CHN estimate about 25% of children, 0-5, have transport difficulties – also health access problems

‘The problem is large and worrying’ (Perry 2017)

➤ Gap equivalent to 3 year of schooling

Two years of pre-school have significant impact on a child’s developmental milestones and future opportunities and now understood as a critical investment in human capital

NIEIR – cost to society per person over a life-time is \$1.4 million due to a failure to move from disadvantaged to advantaged.

Youth

Mobility is fundamental for well-functioning regions

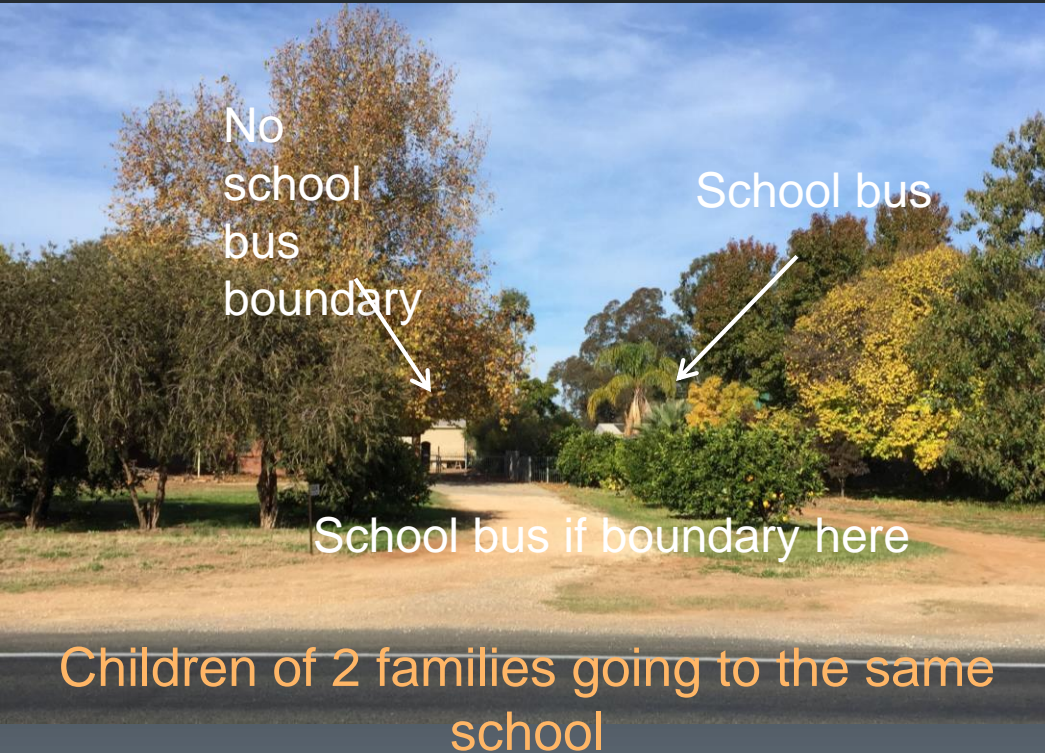
- Highly disadvantaged people: low bridging social capital, household income and cars per adult in the household.
- Bridging activities that connect them with societal opportunities (education, work, a broader network of contacts) therefore less available.
- Youth - risk of loss of self-esteem, hope and belief they can control their lives.
- High youth unemployment and movement away from rural areas



2. Barriers to freeing-up the school bus in Victoria

- I. The system is tied up in bureaucratic/administrative knots
 - This makes change very difficult
- II. The local management of school bus operations is outside transport expertise
 - Responsibility/risk is given to local school principal
 - In SA , Principals spoken to don't want to do this job
 - No space for operator/driver initiatives
 - Thus no strategic transport approach for transport in a catchment area
- III. Fear of a very serious but unlikely event (child sexual abuse)
 - When protective measures can be put in place
 - Of greater concern appears to be the bus stop
 - When another form of abuse (bullying) is present without a strategic response

Barrier I: Administrative regulations (Vic)



School students:

- Age (5-18)
- Distance from nearest school
 - Vic 4.8 kms or more

Post-secondary and apprentices – subject to conditions

- Distance from PT (1.6 kms+)
- Written undertakings
- Reference check (written record)
- Must have under 2 year break from education
- If seats available
- Re-apply each term
- No additional cost to Govt.

Barrier 1: Regulations (continued):

Pre-school children 4+ can travel if:

- 3 written undertakings and confirmations made to school principal
- Parent considered to be 'public'

General public can travel if:

- At least 1.6 kms from PT
- If seating is available
- Fare paid in advance of travel
- No ad hoc or occasional travel
- Written undertaking to principal that other arrangements will be made if a seat is unavailable
- Working with children check
- Criminal check
- Two written references

Barrier II: Transport managed out of the transport sector

Responsibility of the coordinating school

- Bus rolls
- Route maps
- Timetables
- Relevant procedures
- Conditions of travel and travel applications
- Emergency contact details

Responsibility of bus operator (rules)

- Must transport all passengers approved by principal
- Approved route and timetable as approved by principal
- Cannot pick up other passengers
- Unauthorized student to be picked up in morning, reported to principal and not taken home in the evening

Loss of authority of driver

Barrier III. Risk of child abuse? Some facts

- Most child abuse occurs within the family & sexual abuse by caregivers of the child: relative, baby-sitter, sports coach, teacher, priest...
- In the US (2005) 4 children per 1000 aged 2–17 years had experienced a sexual assault by an **adult stranger** in the study year
- In the UK (2008) 161:2420 children (7%) reported they had been sexually assaulted or been the subject of an attempted or completed abduction by a **stranger** – at some stage, in any location
 - Very few occurred when children were in the company of adults.
 - Two-thirds of all incidents took place in just two locations: 'streets' and 'parks and fields'
 - The rest in a wide range of locations, including bus stops and in car parks.

Barrier III: Child Abuse facts (continued)

- More than one-third of sexual assaults on young people are committed by a youth
 - More likely to offend in groups and at schools; mainly boys and a male victim
 - Offender commonly aged 12 to 14 years; 16% under 12 years
- Thus:
 - Bus as such is not a likely location – although bus stops more risky
 - Youth may be a perpetrator (mixed ages may be a problem)
 - Adults present reduce the likelihood of an assault



Barrier III: Another hurdle: Perceptions of stranger danger

- Australian research found that 88% of **parents** of 5 & 6 year olds and 81% of parents of 10 & 12 year olds were concerned about strangers
- These concerns are at odds with crime statistics
- **Government** also holds these misconceptions.
- An Inquiry was held in SA following a rape of a school child by an after-hours care worker, at the school. Despite the 43 recommendations not relating to school transport, it is now more difficult for adult to travel on a school bus.

Bullying on school buses: An under-recognized concern

- Bullying is common on a school bus
- Often younger/disabled children are the target
- Bullying can be a serious risk to mental health
 - Consequences can be depression and anxiety, low self-esteem, loneliness, insomnia, decreased school performance and avoidance of school
- Witnesses to bullying can also experience negative mental health outcomes
- Where a bystander intervenes, they can stop the bullying about 50% of the time
- When the victim is assisted by a bystander, the victim feels safer and at less risk of having negative outcomes
- Thus, other passengers on a school bus may reduce bullying

Possible conclusions to abuse of children:

- While you cannot say no child will ever be abused on a school bus, there is not the evidence to support the perceived risks.
- The presence of adults on the bus is likely to be advantageous:
 - Abuse may be less likely to occur – by an adult or youth
 - Adult presence is likely to lessen the occurrence of bullying – a far more commonly occurring problem and can be highly damaging
- Numerous studies suggest that the presence of other people can limit fear of crime



The school bus system should be part of a coordinated place-based, locally run transport system

- Where all local transport is coordinated.
- Transport is partly funded by other departments – health, education
- Often the term ‘Total Transport’ is used (UK & Europe)

Some cities are operating a version of this: Vancouver, in UK, Freiberg, Portland, in The Netherlands. Also versions of this model in a couple of Australian locations.

ConnectU as a model in Victoria

- An integrated transport service in Warrnambool started in October 2012
- A Regional Accessibility Committee (RAC) to co-ordinate, review and facilitate local transport
- Representatives in RAC of all people with a transport interest, integrating all modes, including land use planning
- Priority to utilize public transport options where possible
- Aims to integrate under-utilised vehicles – where there are spare seats and where the vehicle is parked
- A demand responsive service for those unable to use PT

Sitting idle in Glossop, Riverland, SA



Bus operator's parked vehicles
during the day



Plus: Buses parked at the high school

What a 'freed-up' school bus system might look like

1. Contract private providers to provide the school bus service as part of an integrated place-based transport system.
2. School bus integrated as part of Regional Accessibility Committee with responsibility for allocation of spare seats on school bus services who would take this decision in the context of optimising the meeting of overall regional transport needs, incorporating the school bus
3. Remove regulations except priority for school children (except environmental and safety regulations), but:

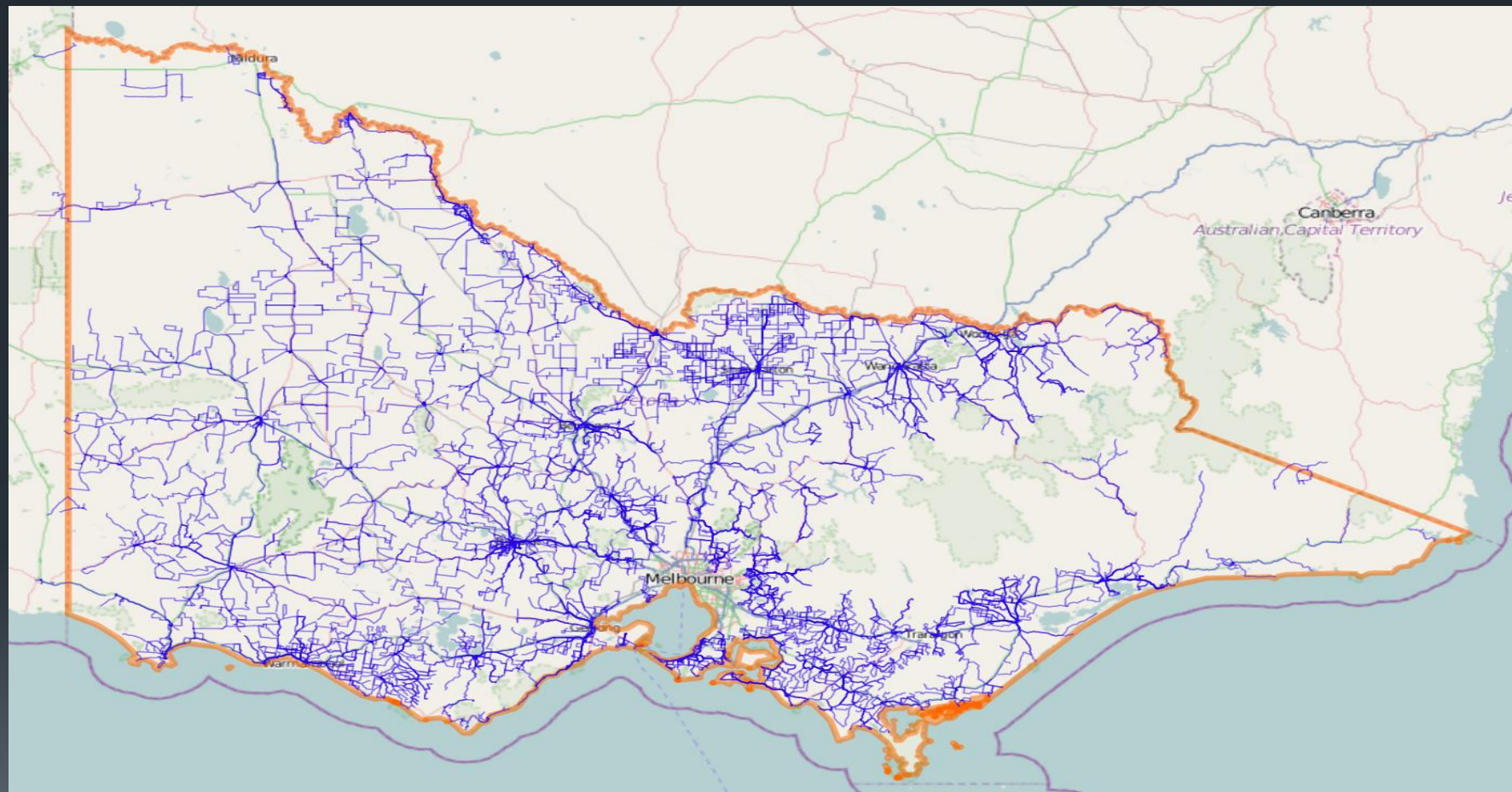
don't downsize school buses or amalgamate routes

- Include priority for pre-school children and parents and post-school education students

‘Freed-up’ school bus (Continued)

4. Student tracking introduced at regional level, using the technology that has been developed in the Riverland and by Crown coaches
5. Possible measures to restrict child abuse and bullying on all public vehicles and waiting/loading areas:
 - Open school buses to the travelling public
 - Driver has training in grooming behaviour and intervention in bullying
 - Volunteer travel on vehicle where there are some concerns
 - Driver has right to refuse entry where passenger is not fit to travel
 - Actions to improve safety at bus stops
 - Undertake research about child safety on buses





How do we get from 'school bus' to 'public bus'?

What is the difference between car sharing and bus sharing?

- Car sharing has not been seen as a problem
- Most buses are 'shared' with all people.