

REGIONAL PASSENGER TRANSPORT

1. Background

The Minister's Local Government Forum supported the establishment of a joint State/Local Government Passenger Transport Group in March 2003. The Forum further indicated that it receives reports, on progress made, on an "as needs" basis.

The lack of suitable passenger transport in regional South Australia remains an issue for regional communities, with it consistently being raised as a high priority issue in Government sponsored community forums.

2. Progress to date

The State/Local Government Passenger Transport Group, which is jointly chaired by the President of the Local Government Association and Executive Director of the Office of Public Transport, has met three times.

Issues on which there is agreement are:

- Passenger transport in regional South Australia is a significant issue that needs to be effectively addressed within the shortest practical timeframe
- A whole of government approach is essential
- The integrated passenger network approach being implemented by the Office of Public Transport, in which Councils take a prominent community advocacy role, is supported
- Eligibility criteria and valuation of vouchers for the South Australian Transport Subsidy Scheme (SATSS) need to be reviewed.

Issues on which there is not agreement are:

- Responsibility for transportation of students to schools other than their school of right
- The cost sharing agreement between provincial cities and Government for town bus services.
- Taxis

3. Emerging issues

Addressing passenger transport in regional South Australia is becoming an increasingly complex issue. Factors contributing to this include:

- The Provincial Cities Association recently informed the Government that they have recommended to their members that they withdraw their 1/3rd contribution to the cost of provision of town bus services in 2005, citing as grounds the inequity in funding arrangements for bus services between metropolitan and regional Councils.

- The Bus and Coach Association is becoming increasingly concerned with the medium to long-term viability of bus operators, particularly the route service operators. This is in the main due to falling patronage, combined with a rapidly ageing fleet and the impending requirements of compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act.
- Growing unrest between provider groups as margins fall.
- The apparent number of Government and Council funded vehicles that are providing passenger transport services to individual groups in those parts of regional South Australia still to have needs analyses conducted – for example in excess of 40 Government or Council funded van or buses have been identified in work currently being undertaken in the Riverland. Note this does not include cars funded by the same groups, or Department of Education and Children's Services vehicles.

It is becoming apparent that, in addition to the continued roll out of the integrated passenger networks, there needs to be an examination of the future role of the various groups in passenger transport provision in regional South Australia. Issues that should be included in this examination include:

- The role of Community Passenger Networks
- The merit in maintaining route area rights for both long distance and short distance bus operators and the period of validity of these rights
- The merit in consolidating all responsibility and associated funding for passenger transport into the one Government agency.

Policy surrounding the points on which there is not agreement in the Joint State/Local Government Passenger Transport Group, the emerging issues and the future roles of provider groups is of a high level nature and will require involvement of senior managers to draw it to an end point.

A discussion paper entitled 'Access for Regional South Australians' was completed on 18 November 2003 and was prepared jointly between the LGA and State Government. The paper addresses many of the issues for regional passenger transport and will be progressed through the joint State/Local Government Passenger Transport Group.

It is suggested that the Government host a Forum to which all relevant players would be invited. These include Councils, bus operators, Government Departments, taxi operators, user advocates and Community Passenger Networks. At the Forum a report will be made on progress made to date on issues identified at a similar Forum held on 19th June 2001, as well as an evaluation of current passenger transport policies. The outcome of the consultation on the discussion paper may also be communicated at this Forum.

4. Recommendations

That the Forum

- 1. Note the update report provided**
- 2. Endorse the Chief Executive of the Department of Transport and Urban Planning and the Executive Director of the Local Government Association facilitating completion of a State Government policy on “Passenger Transport Access for Regional South Australians”, in consultation with the Joint State/Local Government Passenger Transport Group**