



SCHOOL BUS REVIEW PROGRAM

Client: Department of Transport and Planning (DTP)

Location: VIC, Australia

Project value: \$200,000

Project lifecycle stage: Strategise and Development

Duration: November 2022 – August 2023

At a glance: The School Bus Program (SBP) assists families and rural and regional Victoria by transporting students to school. The Department of Education's (DOE) SBP Policy outlines the specific roles and responsibilities for schools involved in the provision and management of the SBP. It is DTP's responsibility to administer the SBP in accordance with this policy through contractual arrangements with bus operators. The services delivered under the SBP are reviewed regularly to ensure the program is effective and in line with DOE's policy.

Objectives

The State Government spend approximately \$330 million per annum operating school bus services across Victoria. In mid-2021, the State launched Victoria's Bus Plan, a landmark policy that provided a strategic framework to reform the bus system across the State. Key features of Victoria's Bus Plan include reforming the network to deliver a more cost effective and targeted network to meet passenger needs. DTP initiated the School Bus Review Program Study to undertake a pilot program of a performance review, including the review and reform of school bus routes, cost benefit analysis and consideration of potential new contract types for targeted SBP networks. The purpose of this study was to assess the viability of undertaking a future review program of all SBP services.

Our services

SmedTech was engaged to:

- Undertake analysis of routes and patronage on SBP and public transport services where students no longer meet criteria for free travel due to proximity to public transport, and identify opportunities for reform, including identifying and assessing options for converting SBP routes to fare-paying Public Transport school services.
- Develop and assess alternative contract models to allow for SBP routes to be converted to Public Transport services.

- Undertake an eligibility assessment for all students travelling on SBP routes under review, assess forecast future demand for services under review and apply validated data to identify routes that no longer meet the minimum criteria for retention as defined by SBP Policy
- Calculate whole of government savings/costs associated with operating routes that must be retained to meet demand as public transport under an alternative contract model.
- Prepare a report and suggested new framework for the management and delivery of SBP services across the State.

Our impact

The work undertaken by SmedTech identified that:

- There were significant cost savings that could be achieved, together with major contract management and operational benefits to be gained from the reform process.
- Opportunities existed to utilise Commercial Passenger Vehicles (CPV) to support reform and deliver significant operational cost savings in areas with lower demand for SBP services.
- A new, bespoke contract model could be developed that would provide major cost savings and network flexibility to improve the provision of SBP services across regional Victoria.

The outcomes of the Study provided a robust framework for DTP to commence a broader reform of SBP services across the State.