



TASSO SUBMISSION

Government Businesses Scrutiny Hearings - Metro
Tasmania Pty Ltd

***We're in this together.
We speak as a proud voice for families within the
Tasmanian State School community to
make sure their needs and ideas are heard.***

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Country

Tasmanian Association of State School Organisations pays respect to the Palawa people as the Traditional Custodians and first educators of the land in beautiful Lutruwita, Tasmania.

We pay respect to elders past, present, and emerging and acknowledge their deep connection to country.

We also express our gratitude that we share this land today, our sorrow for some of the costs of that sharing, and our hope and belief that we move to a place of equity, justice, and partnership together.

Acknowledging Parents

TASSO acknowledges parents and caregivers as the first educators in their child's life. We celebrate and honour the diversity of families and recognise the vital role family and community play in supporting children and young people throughout their learning journeys.

TASSO prepared this submission with the consideration of Tasmanian students, parents and caregivers.

Jenny Mannering
Secretary
Government Business Scrutiny Committee A

jenny.mannering@parliament.tas.gov.au

27 November 2024

Dear Secretary,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the services offered by Metro Tasmania Pty Ltd prior to scrutiny by the Legislative Council Government Businesses Scrutiny Committee A on 3 December 2024.

Metro Tasmania Pty Ltd provides essential school bus services in Burnie, Hobart, and Launceston for many students of government schools and non-government schools. This includes a mixture of contracted school bus services and public timetabled services. These services play a critical role in ensuring that students can attend school.

Key Issues and Recommendations

We have noted the issues and recommendations below as ‘system-wide’ – many of these areas may ultimately fall within ‘shared’ responsibility between Metro Tasmania, Department of State Growth, Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP), and Local Government.

1. Importance of Reliable School Transportation

Attendance at school is vital for students to achieve their educational potential. Lack of reliable transportation should never be a barrier to education in Tasmania.

When students miss their buses or services are cancelled, it often results in significant delays—sometimes an hour or more—before alternative transport is available. This disrupts their learning and may lead to chronic attendance issues.

We note that school transportation includes both designated school services and for many students, public timetabled services.

Key points of understanding may be:

- How many scheduled school services have been cancelled in the last year?
- How many scheduled timetabled services used by school students (e.g. those between 7:00am-9:00am and 2:45pm-4:45pm) have been

permanently/temporarily or indefinitely cancelled? How many have been more than 10 minutes late?

- Does Metro have a list of areas and routes (and/or specific schools) which are either underserved or cannot be fulfilled due to issues such as a lack of drivers and buses/mechanics?
- Is Metro aware of the impact on school students of the suspension of services through some Hobart suburbs/routes due to driver safety concerns? How many journeys by school-aged children were likely to have been impacted?

2. Timetabling and Route Challenges

Schools report that bus timetables and routes do not always align with school start and finish times. For example, one parent shared that their child has less than five minutes to leave the classroom and reach the bus stop two streets away from the school for a public bus service, as their child's school of 500+ students is not serviced by *any* school bus services. If the bus arrives early, it does not wait, and the next service may be an hour later, due to service cancellations, raising duty-of-care concerns. Another parent noted that their school child must stand on the side of a busy 4-lane highway for an hourly bus which frequently does not stop, due to travelling at highway speeds with significant variability in its arrival time.

Furthermore, service cancellations are not reflected in many sources of timetable information, including google maps and printed timetables at bus stops, leading parents to advise their children for wait for the next bus (which isn't coming) rather than organising alternative transport for the child.

We recommend:

- Synchronise bus route reviews with school intakes during the Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) intake area reviews.
- Engage School Associations during bus route and timetable evaluations.
- Account for school start and finish times when scheduling services to ensure students have sufficient time to catch their buses.
- Ensure that service cancellations are reflected in near-real time through commonly used mapping services (such as google maps).

Key points of understanding may be:

- How many government schools are there within Metro service areas?
- How many of these have school bus services?
- How many schools are within 100m of a bus stop for public/timetabled services?
- Are there any procedures for 'early' buses to hold at bus stops near schools?

3. Financial Accessibility and Delays in Bus Pass Distribution

The cost of bus travel can be a barrier for some families. Delays in issuing bus passes at the start of the school year further compound this issue. Students without valid passes may face financial barriers to attendance.

We recommend:

- Permanent free bus travel for all students.
- Implementing a grace period at the start of the school year to allow students without passes to travel without penalties until passes are issued.

Key points of understanding may be:

- What impediments are there for schools to issue student bus passes/Metro green cards directly to students? Could this apply to providing temporary bus passes for lost passes?
- How many schools have provided reimbursement to cater for transport for students who have been unable to obtain new bus passes?

4. Student Welfare and Safety on Buses

Concerns regarding student welfare and safety on buses have been frequently raised. Issues include bullying and anti-social behaviour both on buses and in bus malls, creating an unsafe environment for students.

We refer to previous confidential evidence submitted to a parliamentary committee, which noted multiple incidents on buses and an apparent absence of duty of care for students.

There have also been reports of drivers failing to check buses before driving off from terminus/interchanges, leaving students to alight at the nearest bus stop when discovered, and not stopping for waiting students, in both cases leaving them stranded and vulnerable.

Overcrowded or standing-only buses compromise student safety, particularly during peak travel times. Addressing these issues is essential to ensure a secure and supportive transport experience for all students.

We recommend:

- Enhancing training for bus drivers on duty-of-care responsibilities.
- Introducing measures to address and report bullying or anti-social behaviour.

- Ensuring adequate capacity to prevent overcrowding and standing passengers.

Key points of understanding may be:

- How many bus services have students standing or in the last period? Is there a process for drivers to report such instances?
- How many crashes have there been in the previous period involving buses carrying students? If so, does Metro have an account of any injuries?
- What is the protocol if a bus reaches maximum capacity and students are left behind?
- How does Metro report poor/inappropriate behaviour, harassment and bullying incidents on bus services to schools? How many reports have been made in the previous period?
- Is there a process to provide footage of incidents on buses to/from school to schools without police involvement? How many times has this occurred? Is Metro aware of occasions where incidents have occurred, but no request has been made?
- Is Metro Tasmania required to be a Child and Youth Safe Organisation? How does Metro Tasmania comply with the Child and Youth Safe Organisation frameworks?
- Does Metro have a system to ensure that young and potentially vulnerable students not accompanied by parents are seated in view of the driver?
- What specific training do Metro drivers receive to manage the unique needs of transporting school-aged children?
- Are Metro drivers expected to intervene where they become aware of incidents involving students on buses? How often has this occurred in the last period?

5. Accessibility

Whilst bus services are more accessible for students with physical disabilities, supporting infrastructure (such as bus stops, footpaths, and bus shelters) remain problematic.

We are not aware of specific formal arrangements to assist younger students and students with special needs and non-physical disabilities on public bus services, such as preferred seating and announcement of key stops.

Tasmanian buses do not have in-bus 'next stop' announcements and display boards to reinforce location awareness as is common in other places to comply with Disability Discrimination Act requirements.

We recommend:

- Ensuring drivers clearly announce key bus stops, such as those near schools and interchanges.
- Establishing (and publicising) formal processes for students and young people (especially those with special needs) around ensuring that drivers are able to actively assist them to reach their destination.

Key points of understanding may be:

- Are students, young and vulnerable people included in Metro Tasmania's Accessibility and Inclusion Plan 2024-2029?
- What proportion of Metro's services comply with current Australian Standards for Access and Mobility, and the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport (DSAPT)?
- Are there specific processes for students who may have difficulty navigating the public transport system and where are these published?

6. Service Improvements

Parents and schools have highlighted several areas where improvements to the bus services could significantly benefit students and families.

- A need for a more integrated transport system that provides seamless connections between Metro and other public transport services.
- Real-time tracking tools and wayfinding systems would allow families and schools to monitor bus locations and schedules more effectively.
- Upgraded infrastructure, such as activated bus stops, and expanded waiting areas near schools, would enhance safety and accessibility for all users.
- Greater flexibility in bus schedules is needed to accommodate students participating in after-school activities, ensuring reliable transportation options beyond regular school hours.

Key questions:

- How are students and parents informed of delays, cancellations, or changes to routes or schedules?
- How many years more will we need to wait for real time bus tracking?
- What proportion of trips made by students on designated school bus services versus public timetabled bus services?
- How many student trips involve changes between buses on their daily journey?

Metro Tasmania provides vital school transport, thank you the opportunity to highlight these concerns. Addressing these issues will enhance student attendance, safety, and overall access to education.

We appreciate the Committee's consideration of our submission and are available to provide further information if needed.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John Allan', with a stylized flourish at the end.

John Allan
President, TASSO

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About the Tasmanian Association of State School Organisations

TASSO is the peak body representing the parents and communities that form School Associations within Tasmanian government schools, advocating on behalf of their students. We represent School Associations across all Tasmanian government schools. At TASSO, we believe in the value of government education and are committed to ensuring that it delivers the best possible outcomes for all children. We speak as a proud voice for Tasmanian families, ensuring their needs and ideas are heard.