

View from Canberra



12 September 2019

Frank Oliveri, a well-known Queensland bus operator, Uncle Frank to me, says that school transport is a missed opportunity for governments, the industry, the community and the nation. He has been saying this for a long time.

I think he has annoyed most people in the industry to do something in this space for many years, still is, but he does have a point and the real discussion is how we go about increasing school bus patronage levels as an industry.

Can anyone explain why school bus travel is a “stand alone, ginger haired step-child” to the rest of the passenger transport task. Whoops I think I was not PC then, sorry to all ‘rangas’ and stepchildren and school bus operators.

In these days of serious concern about climate change being responsible for the end of everything as we know it very soon, it confounds me that only about a quarter of kids catch the bus to school.

The majority it seems are transported in cars every morning and afternoon mainly in our cities where most people live, and traffic congestion and environmental concern are largest. Yet it seems governments in all states and territories do not see school bus travel as part of the solution to these major national challenges for cities and growing regions.

What would it take to make school bus travel 50% of all trips to and from school? We all see what happens in school holidays when it comes to congestion reduction. Surely there is a need to focus on how school transport in a car can be reduced.

Part of the answer must be better school and transport services, be they dedicated school bus services or to use PT services generally. It seems a no brainer that parents and children concerned about climate change would support more and better alternatives to get to school.

With increased and improved school services, including measures of child safety, parents would be more inclined to let their children catch the bus and play their direct part in contributing to a reduction in greenhouse emissions from cars (by far the biggest polluter) and educate the next generation on future transport choices and why the car should not be the first option.

Maybe Australian governments need to get together and think about this and agree some strategies to increase school bus patronage, perhaps have a double patronage target on school buses and reduce the number of school trips by car. Just saying?

And, of course, bus is the flexible transport service provider that can make all the difference. This is a real area that State Associations could focus to have state and territory governments increase school bus services and patronage and possibly seek federal government support for such initiatives that address amongst other things, greenhouse emissions from transport and a congestion busting strategy for the Prime Minister in the peak travel periods.

The trick is getting state and territory governments to commit to school bus and ‘travel to learn’ transport services as part of the overall transport strategy and not just services that seems to be based on historical reasons developed before cars were common.

I am sure we can do better than we currently are for huge benefits.



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National Conference Update Nov 17-20

A reminder of the upcoming national conference in Canberra November 17 to 20. At the time of writing this column, the main accommodation venue was nearly sold out. I urge you to get onto your accommodation arrangements sooner than later as hotel rooms in Canberra during spring time can get expensive. The latest program, accommodation, travel and local deals are regularly updated on the conference website www.movingpeople.com.au.

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Cities and Regional Development will be at the conference to engage with bus operators on their National Heavy Vehicle Charging Pilot program. The National Pilot is an innovative industry partnership that is testing potential direct road user charging options for heavy vehicles through a series of On-Road Trials. A Large Scale On-Road Trial is planned to commence in 2020 and the federal government is seeking participants of all sizes from the Bus Industry across all states and territories. Representatives from the Department will be at the conference to talk with interested bus operators. Information about the National Pilot can be found online at: www.infrastructure.gov.au/nationalpilot.

Bus Australia Network

