

Getting to school in the bush: rural school bus research

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Rural children have been transported to school for well over a century. In 1904, New South Wales led the way with horse drawn vehicles. In South Australia, old rural school records and magazines also show children travelling to school on horses or in the family sulky.

Later, covered lorries and buses replaced horse and carts and became more popular as vehicle reliability and rural road construction improved.

Free bus transport was an incentive offered by the South Australian government in the early 1940s to convince parents that closing small rural schools and sending their children to area schools would be 'the best thing to do'.

Today there are around 500 school bus services transporting about 16,000 rural students to and from school each day.

However, apart from factual information like how far buses travel and how much the fleet costs to operate each year, remarkably little is known about how school bus services impact on the lives of students and their families.

SAASSO has agreed to assist the Sidney Myer Chair of Rural Education and Communities at Flinders University to increase what we know about rural school bus services. Participation in the research is voluntary and no individual will be identified or named in any report.

Members of Governing Councils later this term will be invited via an online survey to respond to questions such as:

- does the length of a bus journey impact on children's learning?



- what do parents feel about very young children and year 12 students having to travel on the same bus?
- how do bus timetables shape how parents organise their day?
- how far do children have to travel to catch their bus?
- how do they travel to the bus stop?
- how are bus routes determined and what factors seem to be the most influential?

As well, in many rural communities, essential services which people in the metropolitan area take for granted are being rationalised or are non-existent. So for example, are there ways that rural school buses could provide a community courier service?

SAASSO will receive a report of the results for distribution to all members, and implications for school bus policy will be identified.