

# School Bus Services

The PTA is responsible for the administration of student transport policy, contract management and service delivery, and for performing inspections of school buses.

At 30 June 2004, 833 school bus contracts were being managed. Under those contracts, more than 24,000 students were transported to school safely each day during the school year.

## Contract reform

During the year, negotiations with contractors and their industry associations were finalised and a new contract and payment model was put into place on 16 January 2004. This applied to contractors with pre-1995 contracts, a total of 707 contracts. To move forward with contract reform and to bring arrangements into a modern and standard contractual setting, including providing increased certainty for both parties, these contractors signed new contracts. The new contracts, other than a small number of contracts with metropolitan-based operators, provided security of tenure for 20 or 25 years dependent on the type of bus. The new contracts' strength is that it provides an exit payment if a contract is terminated. There is an option for contractors to terminate their contract if the service route is reduced by 50%, and still receive an exit payment. There is an appeals mechanism with an independent referee to review default notices.

The new payment model provides for fixed and variable costs and a profit margin. The contract allows for all costs to be reviewed by an independent expert panel over a three-year period, with the power to bind both the Government and industry to its decisions.

These contractual changes provide greater certainty for both contractors and government, give clarity to the contractual conditions of service delivery and provide greater safeguards for school bus contractors.

## Operational issues

### Services

In addition to substantial contractual reform, a number of reviews were undertaken to maximise school bus service efficiency and ensure the school bus budget was used to the maximum advantage of the community, particularly in regional areas. A number of opportunities were identified for bus route improvement and rationalisation, and this allowed the savings to provide school bus services in areas where student transport entitlements had developed. In particular, school bus services were reallocated where there was a direct duplication of either Transperth services in the metropolitan area or government subsidised regional town bus services within regional towns. This was done in Australind and Leschenault where Bunbury City Transit services were expanded and routes rationalised. Similar changes occurred in Mandurah/Rockingham when the new Mandurah Bus Station was opened in September 2003, and most recently a school bus route rationalisation was implemented in the Eastern Hills area.

During the year, a number of new school bus services were introduced at Bullsbrook, Pinjarra, Karratha and Albany to cope with passenger loading issues. Due to changing demographics and declining population trends in some areas, particularly in the Wheatbelt, a small number of school bus services were withdrawn as student numbers fell below the minimum requirement of four students. This occurred in the towns of Westonia, Bruce Rock, Buntine, Ravensthorpe and Williams.

New school bus services for students attending special education facilities were commenced in the metropolitan area and covered the areas of Riverside, Peel and Forrestfield. The relocation of the Carawatha Language Development Centre to Beeliar Primary School saw a number of services re-routed. It also provided opportunity to rearrange a few services that had been travelling in excess of 90 minutes so that they fall within the 90-minute threshold.

### Liaison

To effectively manage the wide range of state school bus contracts, liaison visits to school communities are undertaken to discuss transport issues with contractors, school principals and school bus advisory committees. The highlight of these on-site visits in 2003/04 were visits to Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley to gain first-hand understanding of school community transport issues in that region.



*School bus driver Sue Spooner.*

### Bus maintenance

During the year, 1,630 inspections were conducted to ensure school buses were roadworthy and well maintained, and only 29 infringements were issued. This result highlights the benefits of the bus inspection program and no doubt contributes to the high safety record of the State's school bus arrangements.



*School buses in Ashworth Street, Cloverdale.*