

Infrastructure Sector Forum

School Transport Assistance - 22 June 2021



If you have any questions, please email eis.engagement@education.govt.nz

Presentation summary

School Transport Assistance

The Ministry provides school transport assistance to help parents overcome distance and/or accessibility barriers to education and meeting their responsibility to get their children to school.

Students must meet all of the following three criteria to be eligible for School Transport Assistance:

1. The school must be the closest state or state-integrated school where the student can enroll
2. Students must live more than a certain distance from the school, depending on their year level
3. Years 1-8: at least 3.2 kms from the school
4. Years 9-13: at least 4.8 kms from the school
5. There must be no suitable public transport options

Transport eligibility zones (TEZ) are used to determine what is the closest school for students. Most boundaries are set at the half-way point (by road) between schools of the same type i.e. two state secondary schools. A TEZ is different from an Enrolment Zone. An Enrolment Zone is a geographically defined area around a school, designed to prevent overcrowding.

Every school must have a bus controller whose job is to:

- Identify eligible students at the point of on-boarding
- Supervise loading and unloading of buses
- Manage any unsafe or inappropriate behaviour from students
- Incident support

For more information on school transport eligibility, read more, or watch the School Transport Assistance video on our [website](#).

Why do school transport zones often not match with enrolment zones?

Transport Eligibility Zones (TEZ) and Enrolment Zones are designed to manage different things. The enrolment zones ensure the catchment of students is the correct size for the school to prevent overcrowding.

A TEZ is used to determine what is the closest school for students. Ministry funded school bus routes are designed to run within TEZs. The purpose of a TEZ is to ensure that we can sensibly design the most efficient routes.

Are the distances (criteria for school transport assistance) determined on a driven route distance or 'as the crow flies'?

The distances are based on a driven route distance:

- Years 1-8: at least 3.2 kms from the school
- Years 9-13: at least 4.8 kms from school

Our current bus is shared with other schools. How do I find out who the Bus Controller is? Or must there be one per school?

It is our expectation that there is a bus controller at every school, as there is a requirement at every school to ensure the safe loading and unloading of students. This is where the greatest risk will be, which is why we'd like to see every school with a bus controller.

Any route that encompasses a number of schools will have a head school. We would absolutely require a bus controller to be here. The bus controller at the head school is responsible for liaising with all schools on the route, but this does not mean that other schools do not need a bus controller.

[Bus Controller Allowance – Education in New Zealand](#)

If the Bus Controller supports with loading and unloading, is it required that the Controller be at the morning pick up point also?

No, the Bus Controller is not required at either the morning pick up points or the afternoon drop off points. The Bus Controller is only required to be at the school to ensure safe loading and unloading.

If at a transition point, where is the "on boarding" point in the morning? If students get on one bus from home and again at a transition point, then there is a changeover.

The expectation is that the Bus Controller is at the school.

While we try to avoid transition points as much as possible in our route design, where we have transition points, we require the transport service providers to identify safe pick up or drop off locations.

For clarity, the Ministry does not provide any shelter infrastructure, but this must be a safe location for students, as determined by the transport service provider.

What is the process for ineligible students to use Ministry provided transport to attend a school that is NOT their local zone? It seems they just pay the bus operator (do they?) and get taken to a different school?

Ministry school bus services are only designed for eligible students. Transport service providers are not allowed to pick up ineligible students from outside of the TEZ. An out of zone student may board a Ministry service if a) if they are eligible in the zone of their nearest school and b) if they travel to an approved pick up/drop off stop within the zone of operation of the service they wish to use. We call this transfer of eligibility.

Some schools, by mutual agreement, may support the transport of ineligible students. If this agreement is in place, Ministry will not stand in the way of that agreement.

Under current contracts, suppliers who carry ineligible students must charge these students a fare. Under new contracts coming into force in 2022, they may charge ineligible students a fare, but it will not be compulsory. Eligible students are not charged a fare.

Some suppliers have historically sought out ineligible students for additional revenue. A number of our suppliers are pulling out of these arrangements as they find they lose some operational flexibility.

You can watch our video on eligibility criteria [here](#).

How does a school address the issue if there is no agreement from the local school for a bus operator to transport our eligible students out of zone? What do we do?

If there is no agreement from the local school, the Ministry will no longer support the transport of ineligible students. We have had situations where a school's assent to the transport of ineligible students has been assumed or reported as verbally given, but the school later clarifies that they do not approve of that transfer of ineligible students. In these cases, we must put our foot down and say that the ineligible students are no longer allowed to ride on the Ministry bus.

Effectively, if the school is concerned that another school is picking up their students, then we cannot run a service by the Ministry that undermines the integrity of the school network.

Bus Controller Allowance is not available to Specialist School controllers, as the majority of the buses are under 13 seats, so not actually considered a bus. In our school, there are 12 taxi vans per day at each end, which requires a significant amount of control and supervision each day. Can the Bus Controller Allowance rules be looked at to incorporate Specialist School controllers?

The Ministry would prefer Bus Controllers at all schools (including Specialist Schools) where the management of loading and unloading of school transport vehicles requires them. There are no ministry rules prohibiting the use of a Bus Controller.

The question of whether the person in that role is eligible for a Bus Controller Allowance is a separate matter and is negotiated through collective agreements and not something in the Ministry's control.

As operators upgrade their fleets, could the Ministry begin to introduce mandatory seatbelts on buses?

The research that the Ministry relies on says that travel on school buses, with or without seatbelts, is the safest way to travel to and from school. The evidence suggests that it is far safer than travel by car. Research also shows that on buses, the results of an accident are not sufficiently improved by the introduction of seatbelts.

Within the Ministry, we do not have the expertise or the mandate to set road safety regulations or guidelines. If the Ministry of Transport or Waka Kotahi – NZ Transport Agency makes the decision that seatbelts should be mandatory on buses, we would implement that requirement as expediently as practicable.

Is the Bus Controller allowance only available teachers? If a support staff member steps up to hold the position can they receive the allowance?

School employees who are not teachers cannot get the Bus Controller Allowance. However, non-teaching staff can be paid for bus duties by completing a Timesheet for Non-Teaching Staff Form (NOVO13nt).

[Novo forms – Novopay website](#)

How are we notified if we become the Lead School? Our local College was, then a couple of years back I was approached to complete a profile of the bus service. When I queried why we were approached to answer this I was told we are now the Lead School as we have the majority students riding.

Your Regional Transport Advisor (RTA) should notify you if you become the lead school. The RTA is your first point of contact with the Ministry. Going forward, we will ensure that RTAs know they need to keep schools up to date with any change in status.

We also have TCMs, or Transport Contract Managers. They are responsible for the relationship with the transport service providers. RTAs and TCMs are working more closely now than they have in the past.

Closing

We work hard to make sure money is spent where it is needed most. While at a local level it may not always be clear why we are so insistent on enforcing our policy, looking across a 2,000 route portfolio, small changes can set precedents that have significant knock-on effects.

We rely on our schools and transport advisors to be effective communicators with their communities. I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your role in this.

If you do have further questions, contact your Regional Transport Advisor.

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equitable and excellent outcomes**