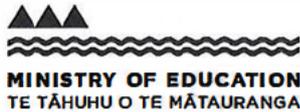


# Document 3



## Briefing Note: Elsthorpe and Havelock Schools' bus stop

<b>To:</b>	Hon Jenny Salesa, Associate Minister of Education		
<b>Cc:</b>	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
<b>Date:</b>	29 October 2019	<b>Priority:</b>	Medium
<b>Security Level:</b>	In Confidence	<b>METIS No:</b>	1208942
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### Purpose of Briefing

This briefing provides background on changes to bus routes in the Hawke's Bay as reported by Radio New Zealand on 10 October.

### Summary

- We recently reviewed bus routes in the Hawke's Bay area to ensure they are effectively designed to safely assist eligible students to and from school.
- One route in particular was operating well outside of policy and design, uplifting ineligible students and dropping them off on the side of the road so they could board a second Ministry bus to go to schools in Havelock North.
- We shortened the route to service eligible students only, and also made changes to the second bus route, including bringing it down Kahuranaki Road where it hadn't before travelled, and advised affected schools and bus operators in August.
- Following concerns raised about the proposed bus turning point on Kahuranaki Road, we have decided to not use it. We will soon advise affected schools and bus operators about where two new stops will be placed once confirmed.
- We are also cognisant that there have been delays in finalising route design. Because of this, we have extended the transition period with changes now coming into effect at the start of 2021.

### Recommendations

**Note** the contents of this briefing note.

**Noted**

**Agree** that this briefing note is proactively released as per your expectation that information be released as soon as possible.

**Agree / Disagree**

Kim Shannon  
Head of Education Infrastructure Service

29/10/19

Hon Jenny Salesa  
Associate Minister of Education

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## Context and Background

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### Context

1. School transport assistance is designed to help parents overcome barriers to education, such as distance and a lack of public transport, and meet their responsibility for getting their children to school.
2. In addition to other criteria, students must first attend the closest school they can enrol at to be eligible. This helps to ensure the careful application of the limited funding available to deliver school transport, and the integrity and sustainability of local schooling networks.
3. We apply eligibility criteria consistently across New Zealand to ensure we treat all communities and schools equitably and fairly. We design our routes only around the location of eligible students.
4. Assistance is not designed to facilitate parental choice in where they enrol their children. Given that we design our routes around the location of eligible students, and these locations change over time, we regularly review routes to ensure they provide the most effective, efficient service for eligible students.
5. We understand that at times, this will cause dissatisfaction in some communities who are no longer able to access school bus services that previously facilitated a choice in enrolments. However, we work to apply policy fairly and consistently in all communities.
6. Last month, we met with the MP for Tukituki, Lawrence Yule, to explain the route review process and outcomes.

### Review of routes in the area

7. A recent review of routes in the Hawke's Bay area revealed that the Elsthorpe route was running significantly outside of policy and design.
8. Some students from Elsthorpe, whose closest schools were Elsthorpe School (Primary) and Central Hawke's Bay College, have been boarding the Kahuranaki Road bus, and getting off it at its turning point where they then boarded another Ministry bus to take them into Hawke's Bay.
9. The changes we have made to both routes, which represent a more effective service for eligible students, mean that that these two services will no longer meet.
10. Some parents are dissatisfied because their children will no longer be able to access bus services to travel as ineligible students to schools in Havelock North, instead of to their closest schools. The Ministry does not record how many ineligible students are transported by our contracted operators, so we do not have reliable information about how many students will be affected by our changes and how long the bus routes have been operating out of policy.
11. Our bus routes are not designed around ineligible students and, given we are responsible for the safety of students from when they first board our services until we drop them off at school, our route design process does not involve situations where students change buses.
12. Initially, we gave over one term's notice of the changes, which is consistent with how we manage changes to bus routes nationally. For the reasons outlined in Points 14 – 16, we have decided it is the right thing to do to extend the transition period by one year, meaning the changes will be introduced in 2021. This will also provide extra time for parents and schools to adjust, and for the Ministry to consider any specific access challenges faced by students.
13. At that point, parents and caregivers will have the option to self transport or otherwise fund the transport of their children to their schools of choice. Alternatively, they may

choose to enrol their children at their closest school. As our bus routes are designed to meet the needs of eligible students, we will revisit our provision of school transport assistance should changes in enrolment patterns warrant this.

### **Safety concerns**

14. The local community has raised concern about the safety of the proposed turning point at 1234 Kahuranaki Road. This location was initially recommended to us by an Elsthorpe School Board member who said it was regularly used by buses. There was some debate about the turning point during the consultation on design, but we were advised by our two bus operators that it was safe for one small or medium sized bus at a time.
15. Following safety concerns raised through the media, on 10 October a Ministry official and a NZ Police officer from the Commercial Vehicle Safety Team visited the site and agreed it was not sufficiently safe, and two alternative stops were identified – one for the Elsthorpe School bus to the south of 1234 Kahuranaki Rd, and one to the north of the stop for the Havelock North school bus.
16. This decision to identify alternative stops has not yet been communicated to the affected schools or bus operators as the proposed stops are currently pending final decision-making. However, due to the late change in route design, we are delaying the implementation date from the start of 2020 to the start of 2021.

### **Media interest**

17. The audio story by Radio New Zealand included some misleading content.
  - i. The decision has not been taken as a result of roll pressures in Havelock North schools. The decision was taken as part of business as usual route reviews, when it became clear that the routes were operating out of policy.
  - ii. The article attributed a comment to Sharyn Pilbrow, Acting Head of EIS, stating that ‘families who wanted to keep the status quo may have to pay for the service themselves by negotiating a private agreement with the bus company’. This is incorrect and represents a misunderstanding of the media statement provided, as it implies that if families pay for it, the current routes could remain in place.
  - iii. In the story, parents indicate that they may have to enrol their students in Correspondence School if they cannot attend Havelock North High. However, Central Hawkes Bay College is closer than Havelock North High School, and if Elsthorpe students enrolled there, we would review transport provision to that school. Transport is not currently in place because students in this area choose not to go to the school.

### **MP interest**

18. The MP for Tukituki, Lawrence Yule, has said he will ask the Minister of Education to grant a 5 year exemption allowing the routes to continue to operate in their current format. Under the Education Act, school transport operational matters are for the Secretary for Education to decide. As outlined in Point 12, we will extend the transition period by one year to give families more time to adjust.