

## **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES TRANSPORT PROGRAM (SDTP) FAMILY GUIDELINES**

Parents/guardians have the primary responsibility for transporting their children to and from school - Attendance at a specialist or integrated school does not automatically entitle a student to assistance or preclude parents from being primarily responsible for their child's transport arrangements.

An application can be made to the school to access travel assistance. At this time the family and student agrees to meet all of the *Conditions of Travel*.

The application is received and then the student's access is measured against the eligibility criteria.

An assessment will be made as to their fitness to travel on the available services.

There will be a meeting to develop an Individual Travel Plan for the student.

If applicable the families will need to provide all necessary equipment to enable the student to travel safely and in accordance with the Individual Travel Plan.

The student will then begin access to the chosen travel service.

### **Responsibilities of parents/guardians for the SDTP**

Parents/guardians are required to:

- discuss their child's travel needs and requirements with the school
- prepare their child for travel, giving consideration to toileting, hydration and medical needs
- work cooperatively with schools and the bus operator regarding day-to-day travel issues and be available to offer support when any issues arise
- report a recent change in their child's condition that might affect the safety of their child or other passengers
- ensure their child is at the pick-up point at least five minutes prior to the departure time
- ensure they are waiting for their child at the drop-off point at least five minutes prior to the arrival time unless the student's travel plan confirms the student may travel home independently from the drop-off point
- provide the receipt, use and return of specialised travel equipment required during transit
- ensure the school has their current contact numbers in the event of emergency
- report any incidents regarding travel that are a cause for concern to the school.

Parents/guardians must communicate directly with the school and not bus operators, except in the following circumstances:

- in the event of absence of their child from the morning bus run
- in the event of an emergency.

**The Department requires all students accessing a SDTP-provided service to be accompanied to and from the bus.** Alternative arrangements may only be made with the written agreement of the school and the parents/guardians. Students may return home without being met by an adult only when both the school and parents/guardians agree that the student has reached a suitable level of maturity; this should be documented in the student's travel plan.

**The Department/school may require parents/guardians to seek alternative transport arrangements if their child poses a health or safety risk to other students, staff and/or property on a service.**

Parents/guardians must be made aware that bus drivers are not medically trained and not expected to perform any medical procedures or administer medication.

### Preparing a child to travel

Parents/guardians must understand their child's travel arrangements and appropriately prepare their child for the journey to school.

Bus services are not safely able to facilitate rest stops and are not equipped to provide medical intervention (other than basic emergency responses on bus services where supervisors are trained in first aid). To minimise risk of choking, allergic reactions or other adverse events, food and beverages are not permitted on SDTP-provided bus services.

## Criteria Determining Eligibility for the SDTP

This section explains the criteria used to determine a student's eligibility to claim transport assistance under the SDTP. **A student must meet all of the criteria detailed below to be considered eligible.**

### Criteria 1 – Be eligible for the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD)

The PSD is a targeted supplementary funding program for Victorian government schools. It provides resources to schools to support the provision of school-based educational programs for a defined population of students with disabilities, with moderate to high needs.

For further information regarding this program, please refer to the PSD guidelines at: [Program for Students with Disabilities](#)

### Criteria 2 - Reside in the Designated Transport Area (DTA) of the school attended

A DTA has been established for each government specialist and integrated school to ensure the efficient provision of transport services. To be eligible for transport assistance, students must reside within the DTA of the specialist or integrated school attended.

Parents/guardians may choose to enrol their child at any specialist or integrated school outside of their DTA however, this precludes the student from accessing any transport assistance.

### Criteria 3 – Be enrolled for three or more days per week

Students must be enrolled at a specialist or integrated school for three or more days per week to be eligible for transport assistance.

### Criteria 4 – Be of school age and reside in Victoria

School is compulsory for all Victorian children aged between six and 17 years of age. For the purposes of the SDTP, students are eligible for assistance if they are aged between five and 18 years of age at the time of their application, and reside in Victoria.

**Note:** Students who turn 19 years of age during their time at school remain eligible for transport assistance until they complete their schooling.

## Other important information

### Change of address

If a student changes residential address, a new application must be made to the school and assessed against all criteria.

## Priority of transport considerations

Once the school has determined that transport is required, together the principal/delegate/delegate, family and Student Transport Unit (STU) will determine the most appropriate form of transport assistance for the student. Determining the type of travel assistance must be made considering the nature of the child's disability and, if possible, link to the student's learning plan with the view to developing life-long skills. In some cases travel arrangements may be a combination of travel assistance such as free bus travel and conveyance allowance.

The Department acknowledges that, due to the individual nature of each student's circumstances and disability, travel arrangements will vary for individual students.

If bus travel is determined as the most appropriate form of travel assistance, school principal/delegates are responsible for assessing a student's travel application and for informing parents/guardians of the conditions for travel.

Principal/delegates must consider the following factors prior to placing a student on a Department-provided transport service:

- As parents/guardians have primary responsibility for transporting their children to and from school, what contribution are they able to make in the transport arrangement?
- Does the student have the capacity to learn to travel independently? If so, the student should have travel education included as part of their learning plan and have the goal of being able to travel independently to and from school.
- Is it possible for rural and regional students to travel on existing public transport or School Bus Program services?

With some services, the demand for seats can exceed the carrying capacity of the bus. In these situations, the principal/delegate should give preference to students with higher needs or those travelling five days a week. If after applying these criteria there is more seating available, preference should be given to those who have the greatest distance to travel and to the youngest students.

## Pick-up and drop-off points

### Designated pick-up points

Where appropriate, students are expected to meet the bus service at designated pick-up points. This ensures time spent on the bus is kept to a minimum for all students and enables bus services to run as efficiently as possible.

### Residential pick-up points

Residential pick-up locations are acceptable under the program but can only be endorsed once all transport factors have been considered, including:

- ability for the vehicle to navigate residential streets without a requirement to reverse or conduct a three-point turn;
- impacts to travel time for other students; and
- the ability for the individual to attend a designated pick up point to enable a consolidated pick up for students.

The principal/delegate/delegate, if they determine a student is unable to access a pick-up point and requires an alternative transport arrangement (including a residential pick-up point), must seek STU's endorsement. The STU will consider each application for an alternative arrangement on a case-by-case basis.

### Designated drop-off points

The Department requires all students accessing a SDTP-provided service to be met by a parent/guardian at the bus drop-off point. The student may only walk from the drop-off point to their home independently with the written agreement of the school and the parents/guardians. This agreement should only be made when the school and parents/guardians have determined the student is sufficiently capable of independent travel from drop-off point to home.

### **Students residing less than 4.8km from the school**

Parents/guardians are deemed responsible for their child's travel arrangements if they reside less than 4.8km by shortest practicable route (drivable by car) from their local specialist or integrated school.

Access to a bus service may be provided to students residing less than 4.8km from their local specialist or integrated school if:

- seating is available on the service after all students with a higher priority of access have been accommodated;
- the student's parents/guardians accept the conditions of travel (which include restrictions such as relinquishing the seat should a student with a higher priority of access require the seat); and
- the Department incurs no additional cost.

#### Exemptions

If the principal/delegate deems it necessary for the student to have unrestricted access to a seat then the parents/guardians may apply through the school for the STU to consider.

Conveyance allowance is generally not provided to students residing less than 4.8km from the school. If the principal/delegate deems it necessary for the student to receive conveyance allowance below this distance (in lieu of a bus seat), the parents/guardians may apply through their school for special cases consideration.

#### Independent Travel

Students travelling independently (in lieu of a bus seat), to and from school will have their public transport ticket (commonly the Victorian Student Pass) reimbursed by the Department through a conveyance allowance even if they reside less than 4.8km from the school/campus attended.

### **Students who reside at more than one address**

#### SDTP-provided transport services

Principal/delegates may approve students who reside at more than one address to access more than one service.

The student must be assessed against all criteria from each address. For example, if a student is eligible from two addresses, they may be permitted to access two bus services.

As students residing at more than one address will not be accessing either service fulltime, where spare capacity is limited, priority of access to each service must be considered by the principal/delegate using the advice above.

An eligible student who is accessing more than one service only contributes to a case for the addition, modification or retention of the service from their primary address. In situations where there is an equal time spent at each address, the parents/guardians must specify the primary address. Each student then only counts as one eligible student over the whole network.

#### Conveyance allowance

A student who resides at more than one address can be assessed for eligibility from both the primary and secondary residence.

For students who are eligible from only the primary or secondary address, payment will be at a pro-rata amount based on the number of days they reside at the address.

For students eligible from both addresses, the school will claim a full allowance from the primary address and allocate appropriate amounts to the parents/guardians. This also applies for multimode allowances.

## Exemptions to the eligibility criteria

### Travel to alternative locations

The Department only provides services between a student's residence and their local specialist or integrated school.

The Department does not provide shuttle services between school campuses, base rooms or annexes, or to any programs not located on the main school site or campus.

Travel to alternative locations, such as respite care, therapy or out of school hours' care, can only be accommodated if:

- students can be dropped off or picked up on their existing bus route;
- the alternative location is within the school's DTA;
- the arrangement does not adversely affect the other passengers or the existing timetable;
- the Department incurs no additional cost; and
- arrangements have been made for supervision at pick-up and drop-off points (for example, with respite facility staff).

Specialist or integrated schools that believe student transport services could be improved with the introduction of direct transport or shuttle services should contact the STU and request a comprehensive review of their network to occur for consideration of transport redesign.

### Other exceptional circumstances or appeals or special cases

Parent/guardians wishing to apply for special consideration or appeal a transport decision must make an application through their school. Schools must have the application endorsed by their regional office prior to submitting it to the STU.

Special case applications will be considered by the STU if the application falls into one of the following categories:

- The student has commenced the final year of the school they attend and changes residential address.
- Students who are the subject of specific court orders that stipulate the student must continue their education at a particular location (copy of court order is required with the application).
- In circumstances where a student has moved school for reasons of:
  - Genuine concern for personal safety or for the safety of other students (documentation from the original school of enrolment and the student welfare coordinator will be required to support the exemption; information will be also accepted from external welfare agencies).
  - Consistent with the staged approach recommended in the student engagement policy guidelines, the school has developed flexible learning options for the student, which may include transfer of a student to another school setting (this does not include intercampus movements). This recommendation must be supported by DET's regional director and the two principal/delegates of the schools involved in the student transfer.

Requests for special case approval that are complex in nature may be reviewed by an independent panel known as the Transport Special Cases Consideration Panel, which is convened by the Department's chief finance officer. Representation on the panel includes members from the Student Transport and Allowances Branch, practising principal/delegates and when required, an independent representative, and/or a representative from the Department's Disability and Inclusion Branch and PTV.

The panel meets monthly in term one and once per term thereafter. Prior to the panel hearing, the STU may seek further advice from the lodging government school's regional director.

The student's application must include applicable supporting documentation such as recommendations from the school's student support group (as defined by the student engagement guidelines), and any individual education and/or behavioural plans.

Incomplete applications will not be processed; the STU will contact the lodging school and request further information prior to submission of the case to the panel.

Transport assistance will not be available to a student until such time as the panel meets and considers their application.

All recommendations of the panel will be forwarded to the Department's Deputy Secretary, Infrastructure and Finance Services Group, for approval.

The following applies to special case approval:

- special case approval is limited to the student and transport service involved in the application. Sibling rights do not apply.
- special case approval will cease if the student moves residential address, changes school or transport mode.
- special case approval is not automatic. Each case will be considered on merit with reference to the transport infrastructure in the area and precedents established.

## Types of Assistance Available

The Department offers several different types of transport assistance under the SDTP.

Schools are to discuss with parents/guardians the types of transport assistance at enrolment time. It is an opportunity for parents/guardians to consider how they may contribute towards their child's transport needs and also consider their child's long-term transport-related education goals, which may include learning to be an independent traveller.

### Travel education

There is an expectation that students with access to public transport and assessed as cognitively, emotionally and behaviourally able will or will be taught to travel independently to and from school.

Students travelling independently to and from school will have their public transport ticket (commonly the Victorian Student Pass) reimbursed by the Department through a conveyance allowance.

In discussion with the STU, schools may arrange for students to retain their seat on an SDTP school bus service while they are learning to travel independently.

The Department has developed the Travel Education Framework to assist specialist schools in the development of their travel education program.

### Conveyance allowance

Conveyance allowance provides financial assistance to parents/guardians transporting their child to and from school or to students travelling independently to and from school using public transport.

Students may be eligible for the conveyance allowance if a physical, behavioural or health reason prevents them from accessing the SDTP-provided bus. The STU will require documentation supporting the conveyance allowance claim before it can be submitted to the Conveyance Allowance Unit for payment.

#### Multimode conveyance allowances

Multimode conveyance allowance applies when a student uses more than one mode of transport (e.g. private car and SDTP school bus) for a journey between home and school.

A conveyance allowance may be granted at the appropriate rate for private car or public transport where the distance travelled is 4.8km or more for each leg of the journey. This provision does not apply if the journey could have been undertaken using a single mode transport or one leg of the journey is less than 4.8km.

Principal/delegates are responsible for coordinating applications for conveyance allowance and submitting applications onto the Student Conveyance Allowance System (SCAS) for approval.

### **SDTP school buses**

The Department offers bus services to and from government specialist or integrated schools. Schools are to discuss individual student circumstances with families, as SDTP bus services may not be suitable for all students in all circumstances.

### **School Bus Program (SBP)**

The SBP provides transport to students attending government and non-government schools in rural and regional Victoria. In some situations it may be deemed appropriate for a student attending a specialist or integrated school to access an SBP service. Specialist and integrated school students are assessed under the SDTP criteria and where deemed appropriate should access SBP services that operate within the DTA of their school.

Students accessing SBP services must be able to travel independently as no supervisors are on the buses or at interchange points.

For more information, please refer to the School Bus Program Policy and Procedures available at: [Student Transport](#).