



November 2021

## Free public transport for all children and young people

### Background

The use of public transport is a key determining factor of children and young peoples' capacity and ability to engage with school, employment, sport, interests and recreational activities. When transport is unaffordable, it has a disproportionate impact on their lives. The cost of public transport is an additional impost on a family's budget and the cost of educating and raising children.

Currently, accompanied children under five years of age travel free at all times. School students who are holders of a Student metroCARD are eligible for concession fares on Adelaide Metro services. Children between 5 and 14 years of age are eligible for a Student metroCARD without carrying photo ID. Students aged 15 years or over must carry an approved photo ID card. However, students studying online or by correspondence are not eligible for concession travel.

While school students are currently entitled to concessional travel, the 2019 report from the Commissioner for Children and Young People<sup>1</sup> highlighted the difficulties associated with the eligibility criteria and the accessing of concession cards, the harassment of commuters regarding fare-paying and the imposition of unnecessary fines<sup>2</sup> due to the bureaucracy associated with concessions. In addition, this monitoring and fare-issuing system is an administrative cost to the Department, with limited revenue or community benefit.

### Policy Response

Free public transport for all South Australian children and young people until the end of their secondary education would eliminate the need for the monitoring and policing of transport fares and concessions, and would reduce administration costs. A range of revenue-related functions (revenue accounting, revenue inspection, ticket system maintenance, fines management) would be abolished, leading to operating cost savings.

---

<sup>1</sup> Commissioner for Children and Young People <https://www.cyp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/CCYP-Fines-Report-V7.3-Web.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Fining public transport users has significantly increased in recent years. The Commissioner for Children and Young People (2019) found that during 2017-2018, a total of 11,848 formal cautions were made and 19,780 expiation notices were issued, most often for ticketing issues or insufficient proof of concession eligibility.

A universal scheme of free public transport for all children and young people of school-going age would benefit low income families in particular, and decrease the level of regulation and scrutiny required on public transport. Free access to public transport for this age group should be automatic, but in the event that proof of school-going age was required, this could be provided by the young person being in a school or sports uniform or carrying a student card.

Given the outsourcing of public transport services, it may be necessary for Adelaide Metro and the Department of Transport to vary its contracts with the relevant transport companies, indicating that concessions for free travel have been provided to all school students.

The proposed scheme would potentially lead to an increase in patronage and make using public transport the norm for young people as they move into adulthood.

In addition, the uptake of public transport would reduce the demand on parents or other adults driving students to and from school or activities, reduce demand on parking and have positive environmental effects. Inducing higher public transport patronage levels by introducing free public transport for school students would indirectly contribute to reducing negative environmental impacts. Public transport is approximately four times as energy efficient per passenger kilometre as the private motorcar – energy consumed per passenger kilometre in public transport is between one-fifth and one-third that of private transport. In general, public transit modes are less greenhouse emitting than private modes such as cars and motorcycles; energy consumed per passenger kilometre in public transport is between one-fifth and one-third that of private transport.<sup>3</sup>

Lessons could be learned from Luxembourg, which has become the first country in the world to completely abolish fares for trains, trams and buses nationwide. The government has said it was introduced in order to reduce road congestion and pollution, as well as supporting low-income earners.<sup>4</sup>

### **SACOSS Proposal**

1. Introduce free public transport for all South Australian children and young people until the end of their secondary education, irrespective of whether they are studying online or by correspondence.

---

<sup>3</sup> Salter et al. (Eds) 2011, *Technologies for Climate Change Mitigation – Transport Sector* UNEP p. 12, at <https://www.osti.gov/etdeweb/servlets/purl/1013767>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-luxembourg-politics-transportation/luxembourg-becomes-first-country-to-make-public-transport-free-idUSKBN20NORX>