



ACT Government

Free School Buses and Wider Public Transport Concessions

Embargoed until 1 May 2001

The ACT Government will be providing free school bus travel for eligible ACT primary and secondary school students from 3 September 2001, as part of the 2001-02 Budget.

In addition, public transport concessions will be extended to those who hold a Health Care Card- Low Income – including many 1st year apprentices and trainees at CIT, existing student all-zone fares will be reduced, and public transport infrastructure will also be improved.

Eligible primary and secondary school students will receive an annual bus pass for school travel at absolutely no cost under the new *School Student Transport Scheme*, ACT Urban Services Minister Brendan Smyth and ACT Minister for Education Bill Stefaniak said today.

"This scheme will mean that parents no longer have to factor in the cost of travel to school, which could be quite significant for larger families. Eligibility requirements will apply and students who meet the criteria will be issued with a school bus pass," Mr Smyth said.

Students will need to reside in the ACT, be a full time student at an ACT primary or secondary school, and live more than 1.6km away from their primary school or more than 2km from their secondary school. Free travel will apply to and from school during the hours of 7.30am to 5.30pm, to accommodate most school-based after school activities. Normal student concessions will apply for bus travel outside of these times.

The ACT Government will provide an additional \$5.53 million this financial year, and a **total of \$18.7 million over 4 years** to provide additional services and administer the scheme.

"Although free travel will apply only to eligible primary and secondary school students, tertiary students will have access to a new student fare. The new 'flat' fare will enable students to travel across Canberra for the equivalent of a single zone fare," Mr Smyth said.

"I am also pleased to announce further public transport concessions. People on low incomes who hold a Health Care Card – Low Income will also now receive a concession fare. These concessions, including the enhancement of the taxi subsidy scheme for people in wheelchairs, amount to a total of \$2 million over four years," Mr Stefaniak said.

"Finally, I am also delighted to announce that as a consequence of the free school bus travel arrangements, **the ACT Government has also increased its allocation for transport arrangements for disabled students**, in government and non-government schools, by \$700,000 per annum over the next four years.

"This will ensure that students with disabilities will enjoy the same rights of access as the rest of the school population," Mr Stefaniak said.

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ACTION will be purchasing ten additional buses in 2001-02 to meet expected increased demand. \$7.98 million has been allocated over four years to purchase new low floor accessible buses.

"The Government will continue to provide accessible public transport facilities, in line with the ACT Government's ***Action Plan for Accessible Public Transport***," Mr Smyth said. "An amount of \$200,000 has been allocated in 2001-02 for the design and construction of bus pads and connecting pathways on various bus routes, which will improve access to buses for people with disabilities and maximise the use of the new low floor buses.

"\$400,000 has been allocated for the construction of **three new bus stops** in Gozzard Street Gungahlin to meet the growing needs of residents; installation of bike racks and lockers at major shopping centres and interchanges; and new seats and bus shelters for various bus stops in the ACT.

"**New bus laybys** will also be constructed on Yamba Drive Garran to improve safety for St Peter and Paul's primary schools students, and on Athllon Drive to service Melrose High students. \$150,000 has been allocated to these projects.

"**Changes to some of our bus interchanges** are also on the way, with forward design works to provide for a new on-street bus interchange in Woden, with \$150,000 allocated in the Capital Works program.

"The Woden and Belconnen interchanges, built in the 70's, are now outdated, unattractive, and perceived to be unsafe by some bus users. We're moving away from the closed-type bus interchanges to kerbside stops that are more integrated with surrounding commercial areas and in tune with passengers' needs. Belconnen interchange is being considered as part of the Belconnen Masterplan process currently underway.

"The 2001-02 Budget will improve public transport infrastructure across Canberra and provide valuable bus services to ACT school students and people with disabilities, demonstrating the Government's commitment to encouraging public transport in the community and easing the burden on those most in need."

Statement ends

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