



Non State Schools

TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE SCHEME

BUS FARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM GUIDELINES

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ABBREVIATIONS

BFAP	Bus Fare Assistance Program
DETE	Department of Education, Training and Employment
DTMR	.....	Department of Transport and Main Roads
FFPOS	.....	Full Fee Paying Overseas Student
ISQ	.....	Independent Schools Queensland
NGSTAS	.....	Non Government Schools Transport Assistance Scheme
NSSTAS	.....	Non State Schools Transport Assistance Scheme
QCEC	.....	Queensland Catholic Education Commission
STAS	.....	School Transport Assistance Scheme
STMCFS	.....	School Transport Maximum Cash Fare Schedule
SWD	.....	Students With Disabilities

1 INTRODUCTION

The Queensland Government considers families have the prime responsibility for making suitable travel arrangements for their students to attend school. Since 1997 the Queensland Government has provided funding to enable the non-state school sector to administer a transport assistance scheme for students attending non-state schools.

The scheme is known as the Non State Schools Transport Assistance Scheme (NSSTAS). The scheme was originally known as Non Government Schools Transport Assistance Scheme (NGSTAS) until its name change in 2014. It is a joint initiative of the Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) and Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ). The scheme is administered by QCEC on behalf of all non-state schools.

The NSSTAS consists of two programs:

- Bus Fare Assistance Program (BFAP), and
- Students With Disabilities Transport Assistance Program (SWD).

These guidelines address the Bus Fare Assistance Program.

2 BUS FARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The purpose of the program is to provide financial assistance to families who pay more than a nominated weekly threshold in bus fares to transport their students to a non-state school located outside the Brisbane City Council boundary.

Funds are limited and the level of assistance provided to eligible applicants depends on the program funds available in the relevant semester.

3 ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES

3.1 FOR APPLICANTS

To be eligible for travel assistance an applicant must be paying more than a nominated weekly threshold on bus and/or ferry fares for the eligible students in their family.

Applications for assistance will normally be accepted only from a parent or carer of eligible students. However, in exceptional circumstances applications may be accepted from charitable organisations or government agencies acting on behalf of a student. Students who live independently of their parents or carer may also apply for assistance if they satisfy the eligibility criteria for applicants and students.

In special circumstances, some schools may elect to assist parents with the cost of fares by paying a proportion of the fares to the transport operator on behalf of the parent. To qualify for BFAP assistance it is essential that any parent receiving assistance from their student's school pay the relevant weekly threshold, as a minimum. These arrangements are at the discretion of the school principal.

Applicants with shared custody arrangements are encouraged to lodge one application if the student concerned resides mainly in one household during the school week. Where this is not the situation, separate applications may be lodged with parents indicating the appropriate proportion of weeks involved. For example in a 20 week semester in a 50/50 custody arrangement, one parent will apply with a start date of the beginning of semester marking 10 weeks absent and the other parent apply indicating a start date half way through the semester.

3.2 FOR STUDENTS

To be **eligible** for travel assistance a student must:

- reside in Queensland,
- be eligible to attract the Australian Government General Recurrent Grant for the school attended,
- attend an accredited non-state school in Queensland,
- reside by the shortest trafficable route, more than 3.2 kilometres for primary students and 4.8 kilometres for secondary students from the school attended. (Distance is checked via *Google Maps* or *Whereis* if not available on *Google Maps*.)
- attend a non-state school located outside the Brisbane City Council boundary, and
- (a) use a publicly available bus or ferry service operated by the company that has an urban service contract with Department of Transport and Main Roads (DTMR) for the area in which the student resides, if one is available, or
(b) travel on an NSSTAS approved service.

It is essential that the fares charged to distance eligible students, by the bus operator, do not exceed those set by DTMR in its School Transport Maximum Cash Fare Schedule (STMCFS). If the bus operator charges greater than the fare schedule fee, NSSTAS will take into consideration only the costs up to the maximum fare as per the Schedule.

All refunds of fares for students travelling on Translink services will be based on Go Card student concession fares.

Exchange students participating in a Student Exchange Program with an exchange organisation that is registered by the Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE) are eligible for travel assistance.

The following students are **not eligible** for travel assistance:

- Students who attend a state school,
- Students not eligible to attract the Australian Government General Recurrent Grant for the school attended,
- Full Fee Paying Overseas Students (FFPOS),
- Pre-preparatory year students,
- Students residing outside Queensland,
- Boarding school students, unless they are weekly boarders who make a minimum of two single journeys between home and school each school week[^],
- Students travelling on a bus/ferry service that is not an NSSTAS approved service, including buses owned, leased, chartered or arranged by a school or an individual or group associated with a school*, and
- Students attending any form of 'work experience' program.

[^]For example, a student may travel by bus from home to school at the start of the week and travel back home at the end of the week. For the purpose of determining BFAP eligibility, students who travel from their home at the start of a week to stay or board with a relative or friend during the school week, because the relative/friend resides closer to the student's school, are considered weekly boarders, providing they travel to their own home at the end of the week. The applicant would receive a rebate calculated on two trips per week, capped by the STMCFS set by DTMR. If the bus operator charges greater than the STMCFS, NSSTAS will consider only the costs up to the maximum fare level (STMCFS) for the two trips per week.

*Due to government approved arrangements implemented by DTMR prior to the introduction of the BFAP in 1997, school owned bus services operated by two non-state schools have been deemed NSSTAS approved services.

4 TRAVEL ASSISTANCE FROM DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT AND MAIN ROADS

Some students attending non-state schools may be eligible for bus fare assistance through DTMR's *School Transport Assistance Scheme (STAS)*. The assistance from DTMR may be provided for all or part of the journey to school, depending on the distance from the student's residence to the school attended and the nearest state school.

Parents/carers should contact their nearest DTMR office in the first instance, to determine if a student is eligible for travel assistance through STAS. For more information refer to the following website <http://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/>

Any fare subsidy provided by DTMR will not only reduce the weekly fares paid by families, it will also ensure NSSTAS funds are not used to subsidise fares that are the responsibility of DTMR.

If a student attending a non-state school is eligible for STAS, only the 'top-up' fare (see Section 4.3) will be claimable through NSSTAS.

4.1 URBAN SERVICE CONTRACT AREAS – FARE ELIGIBLE STUDENTS

Throughout Queensland several bus companies have been granted urban service contracts by DTMR. The companies are required to provide a range of services for the general public, including school students, within a declared geographical area. The contracts are generally restricted to cities and provincial towns such as Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton, Mackay, Toowoomba, Maryborough, Hervey Bay, Bundaberg, and Warwick.

Even though an urban service contract has been granted to a bus company for a particular geographical area other bus companies may also be permitted to provide bus services within that geographical area. However, government subsidies for school students are only paid for students who travel on buses operated by the company that has the urban service contract for a particular geographical area. To be eligible for a BFAP rebate students must use a bus operated by the company that has the urban service contract for the area in which they reside, if such a contract exists.

Even though a student may reside within an urban service contract area, on occasions it may be necessary for him/her to use a non-contracted bus service. This might occur when a student has no option other than to catch a late bus due to an after school activity such as sport or music practice. Providing the student uses the contracted service for the majority of trips to and from school, he/she will be eligible for a BFAP rebate.

4.2 OUTSIDE URBAN SERVICE CONTRACT AREAS

Students who reside in locations not covered by an urban service contract must use a bus operated by a bus company approved by the NSSTAS.

4.3 DISTANCE ELIGIBLE STUDENTS

Some students may be eligible for free bus travel to and from school. Others may be eligible for a Part Pass, which provides free bus travel for part of the journey between the student's residence and school attended. The balance of the fare must be paid by the parent/carer. ***It is essential that parents/carers of distance eligible students apply for travel assistance through DTMR to ensure they receive their STAS entitlement.***

If the distance to the non-state school attended by the student is greater than the distance to their nearest state school, the student must pay a fare to cover the cost of travelling the additional distance to their non-state school known as the 'top-up'. This arrangement only applies to distance eligible students who travel on a bus operated by the company that has the service contract for the area in which the students reside. Students who travel on a non-contracted service are not eligible for the assisted travel provided by DTMR to distance eligible students, however they may be eligible to receive the NSSTAS rebate based on the distance from the nearest state school to the non-state school attended utilising the STMCFS.

5 FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

5.1 NSSTAS WEEKLY THRESHOLD

Eligible applicants will receive a rebate for any bus and/or ferry fares they have paid in excess of the weekly threshold. The weekly threshold is a per family threshold, not a per student threshold. The weekly threshold is determined on a semester by semester basis and depends on the government funds available for distribution to eligible applicants as well as the amount of money spent on fares during the semester by all eligible applicants.

e.g. A family with one student spending \$40.50 per week would receive a rebate of \$5.50 per week, if the weekly threshold was set at \$35.00 per family per week (depending on whether the bus operator is charging the maximum cash fare as per STMCFS).

OR

A family with three students spending a total of \$86.50 per week would receive a rebate of \$51.50 per week, if the weekly threshold was set at \$35.00 per family per week (depending on whether the bus operator is charging the maximum cash fare as per STMCFS).

5.2 CONCESSION CARD BENEFITS

Applicants who hold a concession card will be eligible for additional assistance, provided the card is current and valid. The Government concession card must have been issued in the name of the applicant or have the applicant's name listed on the front of the card.

Valid concession cards are:

- Health Care
- Pensioner Concession
- Veterans Affairs Pensioner Concession

The additional assistance takes the form of a lower weekly threshold. The weekly threshold for holders of valid concession cards is lower than that applying to applicants who do not have a valid concession card.

Students living independently who apply for assistance through this program may qualify for the lower weekly threshold if they have a valid concession card issued in their own name and are paying their own bus fares.

6 APPLICATION PROCESS

Parents, guardians or carers applying for travel assistance may submit an online application form available during the month of May for Semester One and October for Semester Two on the NSSTAS website at <http://www.schooltransport.com.au/>

All applications must be received by the 31st of May or October (whichever applies) to be eligible for funding for that semester. Applications for BFAP travel assistance cannot be accepted by NSSTAS after the closing date.

The Principal or authorised representative is required to complete a confirmation report for students, following communication from the School Transport Unit at NSSTAS.

Travel assistance rebates are normally deposited into the nominated bank accounts of eligible applicants by September for Semester One and March for Semester Two. All eligible applicants are advised that their entitlement has been deposited into their nominated bank account via email.

A small fee may be deducted from the entitlement of applicants who provide inaccurate bank account details or fail to advise NSSTAS of any changes to bank account details prior to rebates being paid.

7 PRIVACY

By submitting an application through NSSTAS, the parent consents to the disclosure of personal and sensitive information to QCEC and/or NSSTAS to enable the administration of NSSTAS. This information is collected through a standardised application form. This information may be shared with Government authorities, for example Centrelink (if concession card details are provided). If this information is not disclosed, full or partial payment by NSSTAS may not be possible. Further information is available in the Privacy Compliance Manual available by using the search field at <http://www.qcec.catholic.edu.au/>.

8 BFAP FARE AUDITS

Each semester a sample of applicants are selected to provide proof of the expenditure declared on their application form. The proof may be in the form of:

- (a) receipts from the bus operator
- (b) bus tickets issued to students
- (c) a letter from the bus company
- (d) a signed statutory declaration or
- (e) a transaction record from a registered Translink Go Card

It is recommended that parents retain evidence of their student's travel expenditure for a period of six months after the semester has ended.

9 APPEAL PROCESS

Any appeal under these guidelines should be brought to the attention of the Reference Committee via email to: schooltransport@qcec.catholic.edu.au or post to:

Executive Officer – School Transport
QCEC
GPO Box 2441
BRISBANE QLD 4001