

BUS FARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM GUIDELINES

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ABBREVIATIONS

BFAP		Bus Fare Assistance Program
CEQL		Catholic Education Queensland Limited
QED		Department of Education
TMR		Department of Transport and Main Roads
FFPOS		Full Fee Paying Overseas Student
ISQ		Independent Schools Queensland
NSSTAS		Non-State Schools Transport Assistance Scheme
STAS		School Transport Assistance Scheme
STMCFS		School Transport Maximum Cash Fare Schedule
SWD		Students With Disability

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). It is a joint initiative of Catholic Education Queensland Limited (CEQL) and Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ). The Scheme is administered by CEQL on behalf of all non-state schools.

NSSTAS consists of two programs:

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

These guidelines address the Bus Fare Assistance Program.

2 BUS FARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The purpose of the Bus Fare Assistance Program is to provide financial assistance to families who pay more than a nominated weekly threshold in bus fares to transport their student 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. A family for the purposes of this Scheme is defined as: *A student or cluster of students at one address under the care of a responsible applicant.*

Applications for assistance will normally be accepted only from a parent, guardian 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 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 provider 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.

Parents with shared custody arrangements are encouraged to liaise with each other to lodge only one application for the parent who pays the bus fares for the student concerned. Alternatively, the application has the provision at "Full Weeks Not Travelling?" to notify when the student was not residing at a particular address.

3.2 FOR STUDENTS

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

- reside in Queensland,
- attend an accredited non-state school in Queensland which is located outside the Brisbane City Council boundary,
- be eligible to attract the Australian Government General Recurrent Grant for the school attended,
- 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 (if the parent is a current concession card holder, this restriction does not apply), and
- use a publicly available bus or ferry service.

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

- pre-preparatory year students,
- Full Fee Paying Overseas Students (FFPOS),
- students travelling by train,
- 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 or ferry service that is 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.

*The shortest trafficable route is checked via *Google Maps* or if not available on *Google Maps*, *Whereis*.

^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 School Transport Maximum Cash Fare Schedule (STMCFS) set by the Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR). If the transport provider charges greater than the STMCFS, NSSTAS will consider only the costs up to the maximum fare level per the STMCFS for the two trips per week.

4 TRAVEL ASSISTANCE FROM DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT AND MAIN ROADS

This section is for your information only and touches on the travel assistance that may also be available for students attending a non-state school through the Department of Transport & Main Road's (TMR) *School Transport Assistance Scheme (STAS)*.

The assistance from TMR 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 should contact their nearest TMR office in the first instance, to determine if a student is eligible for travel assistance through STAS. For a more thorough explanation refer to the following website tmr.qld.gov.au.

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

If a student attending a non-state school is eligible for STAS, only the 'top-up' fare (see Section 4.2) will be claimable through NSSTAS.

4.1 SERVICE CONTRACT AREAS – STAS FARE ELIGIBLE STUDENTS

Throughout Queensland several transport providers have been granted service contracts by TMR. 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 a service contract has been granted to a transport provider for a particular geographical area other transport providers 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 transport provider that has the service contract for a particular geographical area.

Even though a student may reside within a 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.

4.2 STAS 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.

It is essential that parents of distance eligible students apply for travel assistance through TMR 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 transport provider that has the service contract for the area in which the students reside.

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 per family (depending on whether the transport provider 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 per family (depending on whether the transport provider 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. A Services Australia 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 Services Australia concession cards are:

- Health Care or Pensioner Concession, or
- Department of Veterans' Affairs Pensioner Concession.

A DVA Health Card issued by the Department of Veterans' Affairs is not acceptable.

If you are a current concession card holder, then the distance restriction (whereby the student must 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) does not apply to you.

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/ferry fares.

5.3 REBATE CALCULATIONS

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

If the bus pick-up/ set-down point differs from the student's residential address and the Scheme has that alternate address on record, the application distance will be calculated using the shortest trafficable route* to the school attended. The shortest

trafficable route used will be whichever is shorter: the route from the student's residence or the route from the bus pick-up/ set-down point.

For a student travelling on a Translink service or other service with discounted fares, the rebate we pay you is based on Go Card concession fares or discounted fares (depending on the average weekly number of trips the student catches the service).

For a student travelling on a single/return/pay-as-you-go ticketed service, the rebate we pay you is based on the average weekly number of trips the student catches the service.

For a student travelling on a Weekly, Monthly, Term, Semester or Annual ticketed service, the rebate we pay you is based on the average weekly number of trips the student catches the service when we apply the STMCFS to cap your fares:

0-1 trips per week	Weekly fare we assess is zero
2 trips per week	Weekly fare we assess is calculated on 2 trips per week
3-5 trips per week	Weekly fare we assess is calculated on 5 trips per week
6-10 trips per week	Weekly fare we assess is calculated on the weekly rate of the ticket type purchased.

*The shortest trafficable route is checked via *Google Maps* or if not available on *Google Maps, Whereis*.

6 APPLICATION PROCESS

Parents, guardians or carers applying for NSSTAS 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 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 NSSTAS travel assistance cannot be accepted by after the closing date.

The school principal is required to complete a confirmation report for students, following communication from NSSTAS.

Travel assistance rebates are normally deposited into the nominated bank accounts of eligible applicants by the end of August for Semester One and the end of January in the following year for Semester Two. All eligible applicants are advised via email that their entitlement has been deposited into their nominated bank account.

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 CEQL 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 CEQL Privacy Policy and Privacy Compliance Manual available by entering 'privacy' in the search field at ceql.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) invoices/receipts from the transport provider
- (b) used bus/ferry tickets issued to the student
- (c) a letter from the transport provider confirming fares and travel frequency
- (d) a transaction record from a registered Translink Go Card
- (e) a signed statutory declaration confirming expenditure (please note that should this form of evidence be submitted, NSSTAS will confirm as necessary, the expenditure with other parties).

It is recommended that applicants retain evidence of expenditure for three months from the date the NSSTAS payment was received for that semester (NSSTAS will not ask for these to be provided after three months from that date).

9 APPEAL PROCESS

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

Non-State Schools Transport Assistance Scheme
C/o CEQL
GPO Box 2441,
BRISBANE QLD 4001