Temora Shire Council

Guidelines for Rural School Bus Routes and Bus Stops

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Temora Shire Council Guidelines for Rural School Bus Routes and Bus Stops

Part One – Introduction

1.1 General

These Guidelines have been prepared to assist Temora Shire Council with the location, design and operation of school bus routes and stops in rural areas. A rural area for the purposes of these Guidelines is any location outside of a built-up area.

The Guidelines have been prepared based on Roads and Maritimes Service (RMS) and Riverina East Regional Organisation of Councils (REROC) guidelines and wherever possible existing RMS standards have been incorporated in the document. Where an RMS standard is not available the appropriate Australian Standard has been utilised.

The information contained in this document is a guide only and should be used together with established risk management techniques to ensure that all the factors of each rural school bus route and/or bus stop location are considered appropriately.

1.2 Scope

These Guidelines are intended to address the bus journey only. It is the parents' or guardians' responsibility to ensure that their child gets to and from the bus stop safely.

1.3 Responsibilities for Rural School Bus Routes and Bus Stops in NSW

1.3.1 Assessment and Approval Process for Rural School Bus Routes

The assessment and approval of a new rural school bus route or the extension of an existing route is the responsibility of the local road authority and in most cases this will be the local council.

Once the road authority assesses and approves a route, Transport for NSW (TfNSW) then makes a decision as to whether the route will be approved for funding.

All requests for a new rural school bus route, or an extension of an existing route should be lodged with the local road authority either by the bus operator or the funding authority. *(See Appendix One for Standard Application Form).*

Once the request is lodged, it is best practice to refer the matter to the Local Traffic Committee to discuss and make recommendations. Where the road is a classified road the request must be referred to the Local Traffic Committee.

In determining the suitability of a route, the road authority and the Local Traffic Committee should consider the route's proposed use, the ability of the bus to manoeuvre and where required to turn around. It is recommended that approval be given for the largest bus that can be used on the route, rather than just the bus proposed by the applicant, this will allow the operator greater flexibility in the determination of the vehicle to be used on any particular day.

If approval is given for a route that includes a road that is not all-weather, it should be noted on the approval conditions. Wherever possible an alternative route should also be identified.

Where the proposed route is not an all-weather road, the onus is on the bus operator to determine whether the road surface is safe for use depending on conditions at the time.

After the assessment is finalised, advice on the matter should be conveyed to TfNSW (with copies forwarded to the bus operator where necessary). This will enable TfNSW to decide the best option for a proposed service.

1.3.2 Approval Process for Rural School Bus Stops

The *Passenger Transport Regulation* 2007, Section104 Appointment of bus stops states:

(1) TfNSW may appoint bus stops, to be indicated by signs erected or displayed with the approval of the roads authority for the road concerned and on which the words "BUS STOP", "BUS STAND" or "BUS ZONE", or some suitable pictorial representation, appear.
(2) An operator of a bus service may appoint bus stops, but only in accordance with a prior written approval of the roads authority for the road concerned.
(3) If times are specified on a sign referred to in this clause, the sign operates only during those times, but if no times are so specified the sign operates at all times.
(4) In this clause, ***roads authority*** has the same meaning as it has in the *Roads Act 1993*.

The road authority, being Temora Shire Council, is therefore the sole approval body for the location of all school bus stops, rural or otherwise, within their jurisdiction. However, the responsibility of appointing bus stops is delegated, as detailed in writing, by the Director of Engineering Services to bus operators.

A bus operator is the person or persons who are contracted by TfNSW to provide a Rural and Regional Bus Service.

1.3.3 Road Authority Responsibilities

Temora Shire Council as a road authority defines the following terms:

- *Pick up and drop off points* are suitable locations along a bus route, either on private property or alongside public roads, where a bus can stop to collect or return students. Locations of pick up and drop off points that do not require infrastructure investment from Council can be determined by bus operators, under the written terms of their delegation from the Director of Engineering Services.

- *Bus bays* are bus stops that are purpose built, more permanent collection and return points servicing multiple users. Construction and maintenance of bus bays require the approval of Council.

It is the responsibility of the road authority to assess and comment on any applications from bus operators for changes to bus routes, prior to referral to TfNSW. It is also the responsibility of the road authority to assess any applications for new bus stops that, as determined by the bus operator, may require infrastructure investment to create or upgrade a bus stop.

1.3.4 Bus Operator Responsibilities

Bus operators must ensure that they obtain approval for all bus routes from the local road authority prior to lodging an application for funding with TfNSW.

Bus operators must detail the location of all bus stops along the bus route to TfNSW as part of their contract.

Bus operators may only determine the location of bus stops and bus pick up and drop off locations in accordance with their written delegation from the Director of Engineering Services. Where a new bus stop or bus pick up and drop off location is requested by a parent/guardian, the bus operator will determine the suitability of the proposed site, based on their experience as an operator. Where a suitable location cannot be agreed between the bus operator and the parent/guardian, or the bus operator considers a proposed or existing bus stop site requires upgrading, the matter is referred to Temora Shire Council for determination.

If a property entrance requires upgrading in order to accommodate a pick up and drop off point, the work can be arranged to be completed by Council, however all costs will be the responsibility of the applicant.

Bus operators must only operate on approved bus routes using a bus of approved size. The operation of a bus on a non-approved route may be a breach of the contract conditions the operator has with TfNSW.

Where the approved route is not an all-weather road, the onus is on the bus operator to determine whether the road surface is safe for use on any particular day or at any particular time.

Bus operators are responsible for ensuring that any bus drivers operating the bus on their behalf understand and comply with these bus operator responsibilities.

1.3.5 Parental Responsibilities

It is the parents' or guardians' responsibility to ensure that their child gets to and from the bus stop safely.

At a rural school bus stop parents are responsible for their child prior to boarding and directly after disembarking the bus. While on the bus the child is the responsibility of the bus operator.

1.3.6 Transport for NSW Responsibilities

TfNSW is responsible for the funding of the school bus system. TfNSW contracts individual bus operators to provide services in both rural and non-rural locations for the purpose of school transport.

TfNSW only contracts bus operators on receiving proof of an approved route and/or stop/s from the local road authority.

Once that evidence has been noted, TfNSW will determine whether or not it will fund the proposed service.

If TfNSW is funding the proposed service, then the route and all the bus stops on the route that have been approved by the local road authority must be included in the service contract with the bus operator.

Part Two – Assessment of Rural School Bus Routes

2.1 General

It is the parents' or guardians' responsibility to ensure that their child gets to and from the bus stop safely. The bus route should be safe for the operation of the school bus that the operator has nominated for use on the route.

2.2 Determining the suitability of a route for a school bus

When determining the suitability of a proposed school bus route the following factors should be taken into account:

- Road geometry
- Pavement width
- Pavement surface
- Carrying capability of the route (bus size)
- Grade
- Climatic conditions e.g. fog
- If the route is used by more than two school bus services, in either the same direction or opposing directions at the same time of day
- If the route is highly used by heavy vehicles, tourist vehicles etc
- General traffic volumes

Assessment should determine the maximum sized bus that can be used on the route (the route's carrying capacity). This should be advised to the operator who will then have the flexibility to run any size bus up to the advised carrying capacity of the route.

Road authority approvals should inform the operator that the use of a vehicle in excess of the advised carrying capacity will impact on the route's approval.

2.3 Signage

Where guidelines have been met, signage is not required on rural school bus routes. It is not intended that Rural School Bus warning signs be used to justify unsafe school bus routes.

2.4 Bus Turning Areas

The school bus turnaround area should be in a location where the safety of the bus occupants and other road users are not compromised.

The road in the vicinity of the turn around area should provide sufficient visibility to approaching drivers and should be in good condition. It is best practice that a bus turn be located separate from a bus stop. This is so that children are not waiting on the ground when buses are turning around or manoeuvring.

A school bus turn around area along a school bus route may be signed, where for safety reasons, it is necessary to warn motorists of the possible presence/operation of the school bus on the road. The school bus turn around sign should not be used to justify an unsafe school bus turn around location.

Where bus turnaround areas cannot be achieved within the road reserve the bus operator must seek approval from TfNSW for an alternative turnaround area such as on private property.

Part Three – Assessment of Rural School Bus Stops

3.1 General

The locations of rural school bus stops should be carefully evaluated to optimise the safety of school children using the facility as well as for other road users.

Generally, rural school bus stops should be located and designed to:

a) maximise the safety of school children and other road users; and
b) minimise the interference to traffic flow on the road system.

In assessing a site for its suitability as a bus stop the assessment should be undertaken from both sides of the road. This will ensure that in situations where the child may be required to cross the road either coming home or going to school, all factors are taken into consideration.

In assessing any potential site for a rural school bus stop, the road authority/bus operator should always apply sound risk management assessment techniques and procedures.

3.2 Categories for Rural School Bus Stops

In rural areas the usage levels of individual sites can vary greatly, therefore it is impossible and impractical to have a "one size fits all" approach. For this reason three categories of sites have been identified. The categories are as follows:

- ***Single User Site:*** a location that picks up and sets down only the members of a single family. Single user sites are likely to be transient in nature, meeting the needs of a single family, possibly for a short amount of time. These sites are often "pick up and drop off points" that do not require the creation and maintenance of infrastructure by Temora Shire Council, being property entrances or level cleared sites alongside public roads.

- ***Multi-User Site:*** a location where the stop caters for the needs of more than one family. Multi-user sites are more permanent locations, which enable groups of families to meet in a common location to access either one or a number of different bus services. Multi-user sites may require infrastructure investment to create and maintain their use as a bus stop.

- ***Transfer Point:*** a bus interchange area where two or more buses meet to exchange students. A transfer point may also be a multi-user site.

  A transfer point is an off-road facility. It would normally be a permanent location that enables the safe exchange of students from one bus operator to another. It is also likely to be the permanent disembarkation

point for a number of students; therefore it will also need to cater for those students whose journey terminates at that location.

3.3 Assessing a Rural School Bus Stop

3.3.1 Fixed Criteria

This Guideline has identified a set of criteria for each category of site that should be considered by the Traffic Committee/Bus Operator in the assessment process. The criteria are as follows:

- Sight Distance
- Provision of a Lay-by (Access and egress for buses)
- Car Parking
- Waiting Area
- Safe Pedestrian Movement

Each of the criteria is to be assessed against the volume of traffic on the road and the speed of that traffic.

3.3.2 Heavy Vehicles

The number of Heavy Vehicles utilising the route will also affect the site's suitability. This impact could occur in the following ways:

3.3.2.1 Frequency of Usage

The number of vehicles using the route will impact on the safety of bus movements and on the safety of the stop itself. Heavy vehicle movements may occur on a regular basis or may be seasonally based e.g. harvest related. In assessing frequency of movement it is recommended that the determination should be based on the highest level of frequency. Observation studies may assist in determining frequency of movements.

3.3.2.2 Size of the Vehicles

Along with frequency the size of the heavy vehicles utilising the route should also be considered in making the assessment.

3.3.3 Variable Criteria

This Guideline recognises that there are variable criteria that apply to each site and that each has the potential to impact on the appropriateness of the site for use as a rural school bus stop. The level of impact of these variable factors will determine the response to be made by the road authority/bus operator with regard to the appropriateness of a proposed site.

The variable criteria should be taken into account in the risk assessment and should be assessed against speed and traffic volumes. The criteria are as follows:

- Road geometry
- Pavement and road reserve width

- Pavement surface
- Size of the bus using the road
- Grade
- Climatic conditions e.g. fog

3.3.4 Bus Stops at Intersections

From the bus passenger and pedestrian safety viewpoint, a bus stop located on the departure side of the intersection is safer than one located on the approach side. In this position the bus does not block the view of traffic controls and other intersection traffic.

Other advantages of the departure side bus stop include:

- reduced bus conflicts with vehicles turning left from the through road
- less restriction to sight distances; and
- shorter length requirements for bus stop approaches;

On very low volume roads a bus stop on an intersection may be appropriate subject to the outcome of a risk assessment.

3.3.5 Location of bus stops

The safe location of bus stops and pick up and drop off points involves considering the features of the site and its proximity to other bus stops, resulting in the number of stops along a bus route. Assessing about where a school bus stop is located must be considered from an overall perspective of safety for bus and road users, using the following considerations:

Location

- Buses can stop where a suitable approach sight distance is available so that slow moving and stationary buses can be readily seen as drivers approach.

- A suitable shoulder width or property entrance width is available to allow for a school bus to pull completely clear of through traffic.

- The area surrounding the bus stop is suitable for pedestrians and is maintained to minimise any hazard to children moving to and from the bus.

- A stationary bus will not pose a hazard to other road users.

- It is generally not a safe practice for a bus to pull on and off the road too frequently.

Parking

- Bus stops must have sufficient space for parents to park their vehicles without obstructing the roadway.

Pick up and Drop off Points – assessment by Bus Operators

- A bus pick up and drop off point can be assessed and deemed suitable by the bus operator in accordance with their written delegation from the Director of Engineering Services. The suitable sites can be property driveways or level cleared areas alongside the road of a bus route located on sections of road that have good sight distances.

- The bus operator must ensure that the location is suitable for both pick up and drop off, or there is a corresponding site on the opposite side of the road.

- By using property entrances, this may be safest location for bus stops, even if these property entrances are in close proximity to one another, such as one kilometre apart. This is because opportunities for parents to safely park their vehicles at a nearby existing site may be limited. However, these single user stops should not require infrastructure investment from Council.

- Any upgrade of the property entrance to accommodate a safe bus stop that is located within 5 kilometres of an existing bus stop will be the responsibility of the property owner. Property owners to liaise with Council to arrange any upgrade.

Bus Stop Bays – assessment by Council

- Where a bus operator receives an application for constructing a new bus stop, the matter is referred to Council for their decision. This will involve considering the proximity of the new stop to existing bus stops.

- It is not an efficient use of Council resources to be creating and maintaining many bus stops in close proximity.

- Where no other stops exist within 5 kilometres the request location is looked at and judged on its safety merits.

- Safety merits assessment of the proposed bus stop site is undertaken by the Traffic Committee. This involves considering the site distances available at the location, with the distance required depending on the speed limit and the gradient of the site, as shown in Table 3.4.1 (page 14).

- Consideration is needed for bus stop sites that may not have a corresponding safe bus stop area on the opposite site of the road, as this may lead to children crossing the road in unsafe locations, buses stopping in unsafe locations, or demand for infrastructure investment from Council. In approving a new bus stop, Council may need to consider specifying an alternative site that is not directly opposite in order for bus to safely stop, provision of a waiting area for parents and visibility for the bus to safely re-enter the roadway.

- Where there are a number of single sites within a reasonable distance of each other, and the existing bus stops do not have suitable conditions in relation to sight lines and stopping and parking areas, Council may consider amalgamating the single sites into one multi-user site to be located at the safest point along the route.

- Where new driveways for rural dwellings are created, Council should require that the road access point created is wide enough to accommodate a school bus safely pulling off the road.

- In relation to signs for bus stops, “if the bus stop is situated where it is considered it needs a “Bus Stop Ahead” warning sign, then the opinion is that the bus stop should not be there at all. (See Part 2, 2.3 Signage) The stop should be relocated to a site that provide adequate sight distance.

Funding

- RMS will contribute costs for bus stop creation on a 50% – 50% basis on Council roads and 100% on State roads provided that the site meets all safety standards and is not located within the 5 kilometre distance of another established stop.

- Other proposals for bus stops that do not meet these criteria, but deemed by the bus operator to require infrastructure investment, will need to be funded by the applicant following approval of the bus stop location by Council.

3.4 Suggested Standards and Definitions for Rural School Bus Stops

Where a road authority is required to assess an application for a new or upgrading of a rural school bus stop, the following criteria will be used to determine the application:

3.4.1 Traffic Volumes

Traffic volumes are based on the total number of vehicle movements per day in both directions.

3.4.2 Speed

Low Speed and High Speed usage are defined as follows:

- Low Speed – a speed under 70 kilometres per hour
- High Speed – a speed of 70 kilometres per hour or higher

3.4.3 Sight Distances

Sight distances for bus stops are not a standard figure and will vary depending on the speed limit at the bus location and the gradient of the road. The assessment of sight distances should always be undertaken in both directions unless circumstances indicate otherwise.

3.4.3.1 Stopping Sight Distances

Stopping sight distance is the minimum distance required by an average driver of a vehicle travelling at a given speed to react and stop before reaching an object in the vehicle's path. The Stopping Site Distance can be assessed using the **Approach Sight Distance Table** provided in the table below.

3.4.3.2 Safe Intersection Site Distances

This provides sufficient distance for a driver on an approach with priority to observe a vehicle entering the road, decelerate and stop prior to a point of conflict.

The Safe Intersection Site Distance can be assessed using the **Safe Intersection Sight Distance Table** provided in the table below.

Table 3.4.1- Approach and Intersection Sight Distance for level pavement

Design Speed (km/h)	Approach Sight Distance (ASD) (metres)	Safe Intersection Sight Distance (SISD) (metres)
40	**35**	**60**
50	**45**	**80**
60	**60**	**105**
70	**80**	**130**
80	**100**	**160**
90	**120**	**190**
100	**150**	**225**
110	**210**	**295**
120	**250**	**330**

3.4.4 Shade/shelter at Bus Stops

Shade or shelter is desirable but not essential. Road authorities should assess the need for shade/shelter on an individual basis. It may be appropriate to include shelter at transfer point sites because of their permanent nature.

3.4.5 Pedestrian Access

Pedestrian access for the purpose of these Guidelines refers to the ability of students to move safely around the site and to embark and disembark from the bus.

It is the parents' or guardians' responsibility to ensure that their child gets to and from the bus stop safely.

3.4.6 Car Parking

Car parking would normally be required at multi-use and transfer point sites. There should be sufficient space to accommodate the number of families using the site. The car parking area should be clear of through traffic movement and placed to ensure that there is no interference with the movement of the bus.

3.4.7 Provision of Lay-by

The lay-by provision is intended to accommodate the acceleration and deceleration needs of buses at bus stops, and where appropriate the required access and egress to a transit point site.

3.4.8 All Weather Surface

An all weather surface is required in all instances for the bus stand area, i.e. the area where the bus will stop and children will either embark or disembark and where the bus will leave and enter the site.

3.5 Signage at Rural School Bus Stops

Where guidelines have been met, signage should not be required. It is not intended that Rural School Bus warning signs be used to justify unsafe school bus stopping areas. Rural school bus warning signs should only be used, where necessary, to improve safety along routes where there is no alternative stop and conditions are not ideal, such as roads with traffic characteristics of high speed and high frequency of heavy vehicles, but sight distances are adequate.

3.6 Assessment

Issue of school bus stops will be assessed annually at the local traffic committee meeting, prior to the commencement of the new school year. Bus drivers will provide advice to Council of any proposed new bus stops so that their suitability can be assessed by Council. Bus drivers to advise Council of any concerns with existing bus stops and pick up and drop off points.

Under the Temora Rural School Bus routes and Bus Stops Policy, Transport Management Plans for each bus stop are not required.

Bus drivers to advise Council of any needs to assist them with rural school bus operations, such as a bus travel handout to provide to parents to advise of safety responsibilities.

Appendix One

Application for Approval for a Rural School Bus Route or Rural School Bus Stop

APPLICANT DETAILS

Applicant's Name: _____

Bus Company Name: _____

Address: _____

Contact Phone: _____**Fax:** _____ **Email:** _____

REQUEST FOR A RURAL SCHOOL BUS ROUTE

Road Name:_____

Anticipated Number of Stops on Route: ___ **Anticipated Number of Users**: ___

Type of Bus to be Used on Route:
Passenger Capacity: _____ **Length:** _____

If the proposed route is not an all-weather road please nominate the proposed alternative route for the service:

_____

REQUEST FOR A RURAL SCHOOL BUS STOP REQUIRING CONSTRUCTION/UPGRADE

Is the proposed stop on an existing approved bus route? Yes No

Road Name:_____

Rural Address for Proposed Stop: _____

Anticipated Number of Users: _____ **Anticipated Ages of the Users**: _____

Where are the closest bus stops immediately before and immediately after the proposed stop? *(please provide the rural addresses and the estimated distance between the stops):*

_____

_____

Will the pick up and drop off points be on the same side or different sides of the road? *(please circle)*: Same Side Different Side

Will users have to cross the road to access the bus stop? *(please circle for each time of day)*: **Mornings** Yes/No **Afternoons** Yes/No

Signed: _____ **Date:** _____