

# On the Buses

## Using School Buses to Improve Access to Public Transport in Rural and Regional Victoria

Sebastian Antoine  
Eva Gillett

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# RURAL



**Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body and leading advocate for young people aged 12–25 and the youth sector in Victoria.**

Our vision is that the rights of young people in Victoria are respected, and they are active, visible and valued in their communities.

YACVic Rural is a core agency of Youth Affairs Council Victoria. YACVic Rural works in partnership with young people, youth practitioners and our partner agencies in rural and regional Victoria to:

- advocate on issues that affect young people and the sector that supports them
- strengthen young people's community participation and self-advocacy
- support and resource youth workers and other people who work and volunteer with young people.

Sebastian Antoine and Eva Gillett acknowledge the support of the YACVic Rural team, the Rural Reference Group and YACVic Members in contributing to this submission. Photos from Thomas Feng and Sebastian Antoine.



YACVic Rural respectfully acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this continent. We pay our respects to the ancestors and Elders past and present of all Aboriginal nations in Victoria.

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# Executive Summary

YACVic welcomes the Victorian Parliamentary *Inquiry into the Use of School Buses in Rural and Regional Victoria*. The Inquiry responds to recommendations from young people and the rural youth sector, amplified by YACVic, over the past decade.<sup>1</sup>

Using currently underutilised school buses to improve public transport in rural and regional communities would generate significant benefits for young people and the broader community, and help regional and rural communities thrive.

This submission, developed with extensive input from young people in rural and regional Victoria, provides information and insights on transport disadvantage, and outlines the benefits of improving access to public transport. School buses can help alleviate transport disadvantage through more efficient usage and expansion of routes and timetables, but must be also considered as part of a broader network of transport.

Through adjustments to the existing School Bus Program, more young people not engaged in mainstream education could travel on the existing school bus routes at very little additional cost to the government or young people. Even more impactful would be the activation of school buses during their ‘down time’; currently school buses are parked for most of the day. Successful design and delivery of each of these initiatives requires meaningful engagement with young people as stakeholders.





# Summary of Recommendations

## **Recommendation 1:**

Prioritise young people as stakeholders of new public transport initiatives, especially young people not in mainstream education.

## **Recommendation 2:**

Create a comprehensive and place-based analysis of the public transport needs of young people, through engagement and co-design with young people and the youth sector.

## **Recommendation 3:**

The Victorian Government advocates to the Commonwealth to remove the exemption for school buses in the Disability Standards, and leads change by requiring buses to meet accessibility standards as part of contract management of the SBP. Consider grandfathering to allow companies to replace existing stock over time and incentives to support small bus operators.

## **Recommendation 4:**

Design new public transport routes and timetables around existing activities including:

- Employment centres at common shift start- and end-times
- TAFE classes
- Social and competitive sport trainings and games
- Shopping centres
- Medical centres

## **Recommendation 5:**

Design new public transport routes and timetables in partnership with existing youth programs and services.

## **Recommendation 6:**

Trial additional stops at employment or education centres on existing school bus runs to encourage young people to travel on the school bus to work, TAFE or university.

## **Recommendation 7:**

Collect and publish data on applications from non-students to travel on school buses, to inform transport planning. Include numbers of applications accepted and denied and the reasons for the denials.

**Recommendation 8:**

Promote the option for non-school students to travel on school buses, including to students leaving school for alternative pathways like TAFE, apprenticeships and employment.

**Recommendation 9:**

Meaningfully involve young people in design, governance, monitoring and evaluation of child safety initiatives in relation to sharing school buses.

**Recommendation 10:**

Meaningfully involve the Commission for Children and Young People, the youth sector and schools in design, governance, monitoring and evaluation of child safety initiatives in relation to sharing school buses. Consider requiring all passengers above the age of 18 who travel on school buses to have a Working With Children Check in lieu of verbal reference checks to the school principal.

**Recommendation 11:**

Use existing school buses to deliver additional routes before the morning school run, during school time, in the evening after the school run, and on weekends, according to demand. Ensure that new routes interact with existing routes without being in competition.

**Recommendation 12:**

Seek out and implement young people's outstanding recommendations for public transport in rural and regional Victoria, and for new initiatives using existing school bus assets.

**Recommendation 13:**

Embed youth participation in the design, delivery, governance, monitoring and evaluation of new and expanded public transport initiatives through use of existing school bus assets

**Recommendation 14:**

Local offices of Regional Development Victoria establish and convene high-level place-based public transport fora, through which all stakeholders work together to co-ordinate public transport initiatives using existing school bus assets and identify methods of ongoing collaboration.





# Introduction

YACVic welcomes the Victorian Parliamentary *Inquiry into the Use of School Buses in Rural and Regional Victoria*. The Inquiry responds to recommendations from young people and the rural youth sector, amplified by YACVic, over the past decade.<sup>2</sup>

Using currently underutilised school buses to improve public transport in rural and regional communities would generate significant benefits for young people and the broader community, and help regional and rural communities thrive.

## In This Submission

This submission provides information on transport disadvantage experienced by young people in rural and regional Victoria and outlines the benefits of improving access to public transport. School buses can help alleviate transport disadvantage through more efficient usage and expansion of routes and timetables, but must be considered as part of a broader network of transport.

Through amendments to the existing School Bus Program, young people not engaged in mainstream education could travel on the existing school bus routes at very little additional cost to the government or young people. Even more impactful would be the activation of school buses during their ‘down time’; currently school buses are parked for most of the day. Successful delivery of each of these initiatives requires meaningful engagement with young people as stakeholders.

This submission considers the experiences of young people aged 12-25 living in or

connected to rural and regional Victoria.

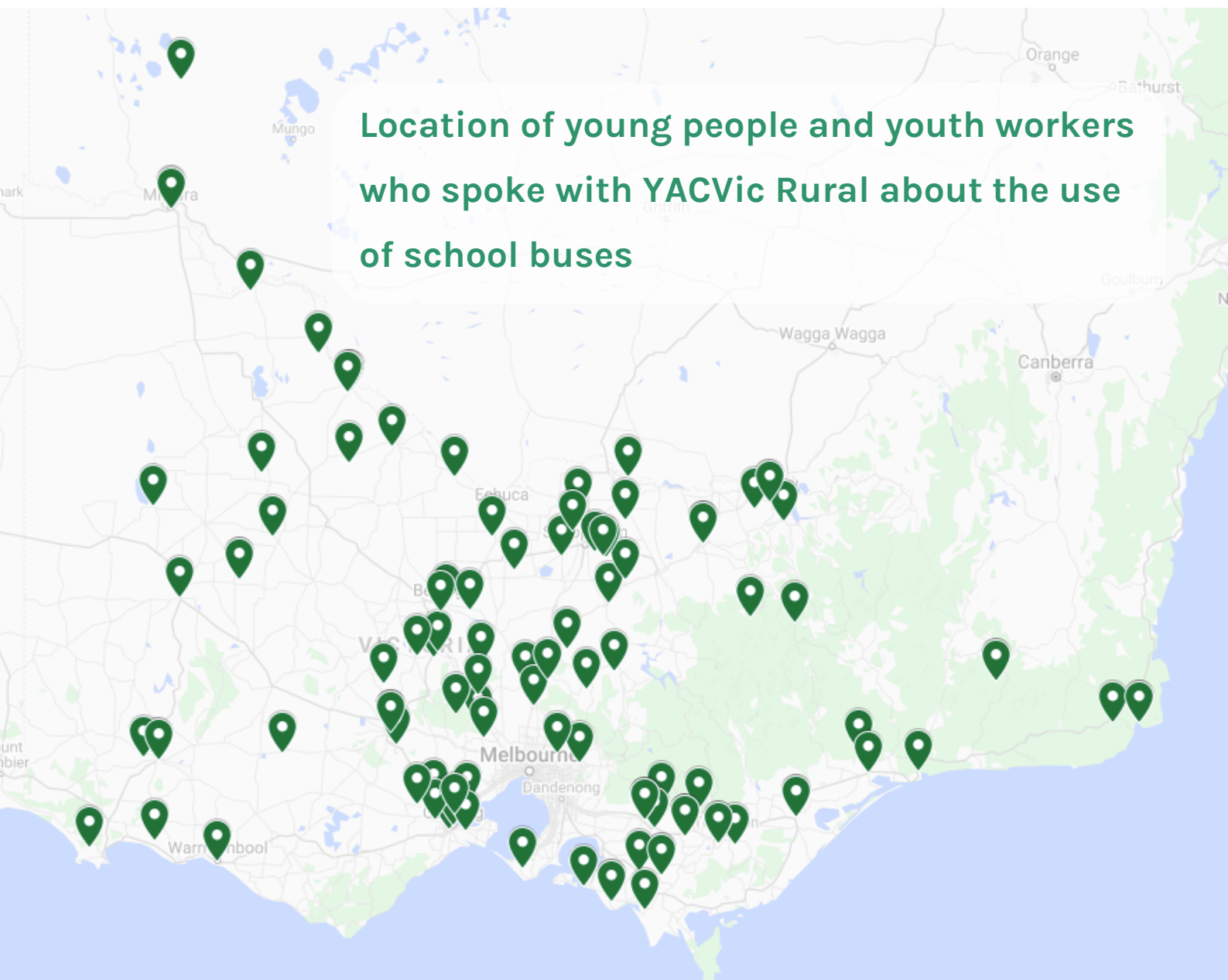
Amongst that group of young people are secondary school students, young people engaged in other education pathways (TAFE, apprenticeships, university), and young people who are employed or looking for employment. There are overlaps between these groups. These young people also have other interests and commitments which require them to travel including community sport, volunteering, social events and engagement with youth services.

## Methodology

This submission draws on the experiences, perspectives and ideas of rural and regional young people and the youth sector that works with them. YACVic Rural conducted targeted consultations with young people and the youth sector through a survey (N=187), focus groups and interviews. The resulting data aligns with existing research about transport disadvantage and young people’s ideas for an improved transport system, including previous research conducted by YACVic. The recommendations made in this submission aim to be within scope for the Parliamentary

Inquiry of school buses. The recommendations here must be considered as part of the broader public transport system.

## Location of young people and youth workers who spoke with YACVic Rural about the use of school buses





# Transport Disadvantage for Young People in Rural and Regional Victoria

Young people in rural and regional Victoria face significant transport disadvantage compared with their Melbourne-based peers, because of a lack of services. This prevents young people in rural and regional Victoria from accessing the same opportunities as young people in metropolitan areas, perpetuating inequalities and leaving rural and regional young people behind.

## Young People Rely on Public Transport

Young people are highly dependent on public transport compared to other members of the community. Young people below the age of 18 cannot drive themselves, so depend on public transport, family or friends to get around. Many young people of legal driving age still cannot independently drive because they have not yet passed their driver's test or cannot afford a car. Some young people who struggle to reach the required 120 hours of practice driving get support from the L2P Program which pairs volunteer drivers with learners; however demand outstrips the program's funding meaning that many young people cannot access this support.

## Public Transport that Works for Young People

Some towns have a regional rail service and some bigger regional centres have local and regional bus routes. Young people use these services to get around where they are affordable and run on timetables and routes that work for them. Among the young people

who spoke with YACVic Rural, 27 per cent had caught a regional train and 30 per cent had caught a local bus in the previous month.

As well as public transport provided by Public Transport Victoria, young people at secondary school have access to the School Bus Program (SBP) delivered through the Department of Education and Training (DET). Around one third (35 per cent) of the young people who spoke with YACVic Rural could walk to the nearest school bus stop to travel to school with the SBP. The remaining young people relied on parents to drive them to the nearest school bus stop or to school. This is an inefficient use of time for parents who could be otherwise productive.

*Some families are currently driving in excess of 15km each way to drop and collect children from school bus stops.*

*- Youth worker in Rochester*

## Transport Disadvantage for Young People

Even with the SBP and other regional public transport services, young people's access to

public transport is far worse in rural and regional Victoria than in metropolitan Melbourne. Significant gaps in services and regular delays mean that many young people are locked out of public transport, or find it unappealing. In some parts of rural and regional Victoria, public transport beyond the SBP simply does not exist. An estimated 30 per cent of people in regional Victoria live near public transport compared with 94 per cent in the middle ring of Melbourne suburbs and 99 per cent in Melbourne metro.<sup>3</sup>

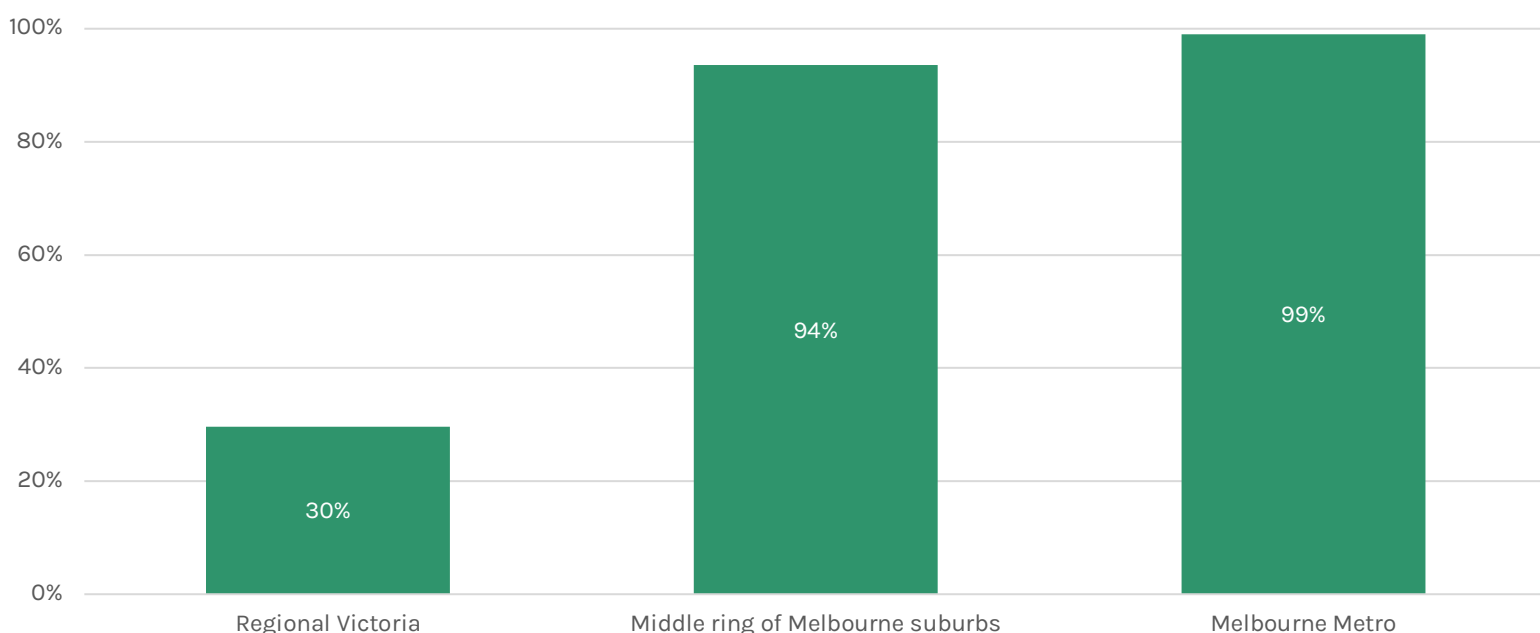
Young people who spoke with YACVic Rural rated the availability public transport to get them to their destination an average 4 out of 10. Three quarters of respondents rated public transport in their area 5 or lower. Very few young people who spoke with YACVic Rural can catch local public transport to university (7 per cent), TAFE (10 per cent), community events (11 per cent), work (14 per cent) or medical appointments (14 per cent).

Young people who are not in mainstream education are further impacted by limited public transport. While they might be allowed to use the school buses to access other commitments, the routes and timetables may not meet their needs. Young people who have left school to pursue other pathways have different learning and work schedules that do not always align with school bus times. Existing school bus routes do not cater to apprentices, trainees, TAFE students and part-time or casual workers because they are designed solely for school runs.

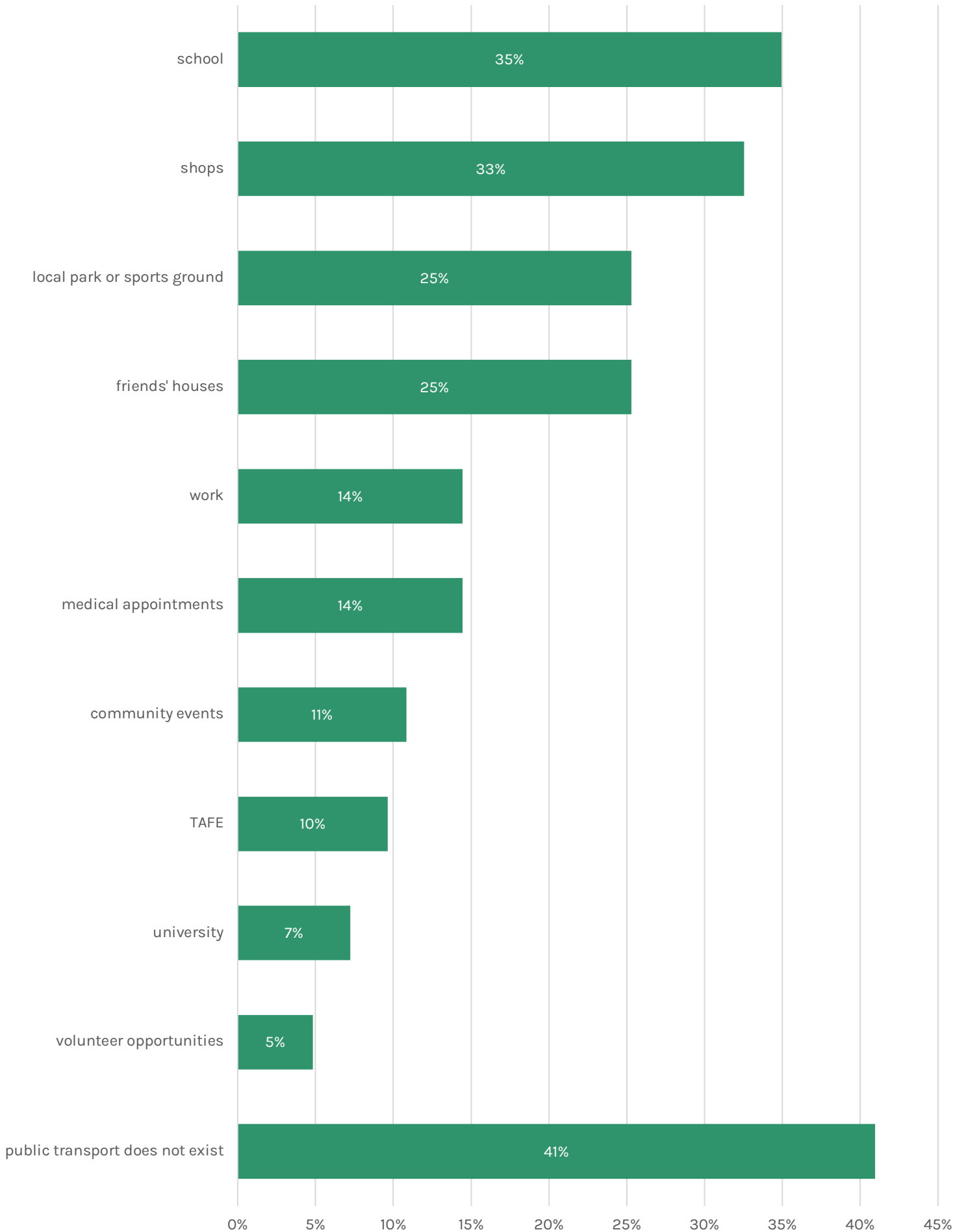
Of the young people who spoke to YACVic Rural, 89 per cent reported that they are unable to get to work using public transport. Nearly 90 per cent of young people told us that they could not access their TAFE or university using public transport. Some young people told us that they either had to leave their classes early or wait for extended periods to get home.

*I had to leave TAFE early or stay around really late because the VLine bus from Yarram to Leongatha are at shocking times*  
- Angie, 23 from Leongatha

Proportion of people who live near public transport



## The proportion of young people can take public transport to...



*The only public transport is my school bus which runs weekdays once in the morning and once in the afternoon.*

**- Finn, 15 from Banyena**

Without regular and reliable public transport services, young people in rural and regional Victoria miss out on opportunities that are taken for granted by young people in metropolitan Melbourne and regional cities. Poor public transport reinforces and further entrenches disadvantage leaving rural and regional young people behind their Melbourne-based peers.

#### **Recommendation 1:**

**Prioritise young people as stakeholders of new public transport initiatives, especially young people not in mainstream education.**

#### **Community Connection**

Without access to public transport, young people also miss out on a range of important development and social activities including local sport, visiting friends, going to the local park and engaging in volunteer work.

*Because of a lack of public transport, I've missed out on all social and extracurricular activities. Unless I get driven, I cannot even get to the school bus and home again, so I miss out on everything, netball, social events, absolutely everything. Without mum to drive me around I can't do anything but stay at home on the farm.*

**- Susan, 12 from Barham**

A comprehensive analysis of where, when, and how young people want to travel is needed to better understand the gaps in

public transport across rural and regional Victoria. This will require engagement with a range of both young people, parents and youth workers to map improvements in services, routes, and timetables.

*I couldn't be on the AFL team because I couldn't get to trainings and games.*

**- James, 17 from Mallacoota**

#### **Recommendation 2:**

**Create a comprehensive and place-based analysis of the public transport needs of young people, through engagement and co-design with young people and the youth sector.**

#### **Impact on Youth Services**

Youth workers in rural and regional Victoria consistently identify transport as a key barrier for young people accessing services. Lack of public transport prevents young people who need support from accessing youth services.

Over 80 per cent of workers who spoke with YACVic said that young people engaged in their services primarily rely on a parent or guardian to drive them to and from the service. Fewer than 40 per cent of workers identified that young people ever access their service independently via public transport. Around 60 per cent of workers identified that some young people also walk or cycle to their organisation. Only one in three workers worked in an organisation with funding to operate an outreach service where they travel to the young person's home, school or other location.

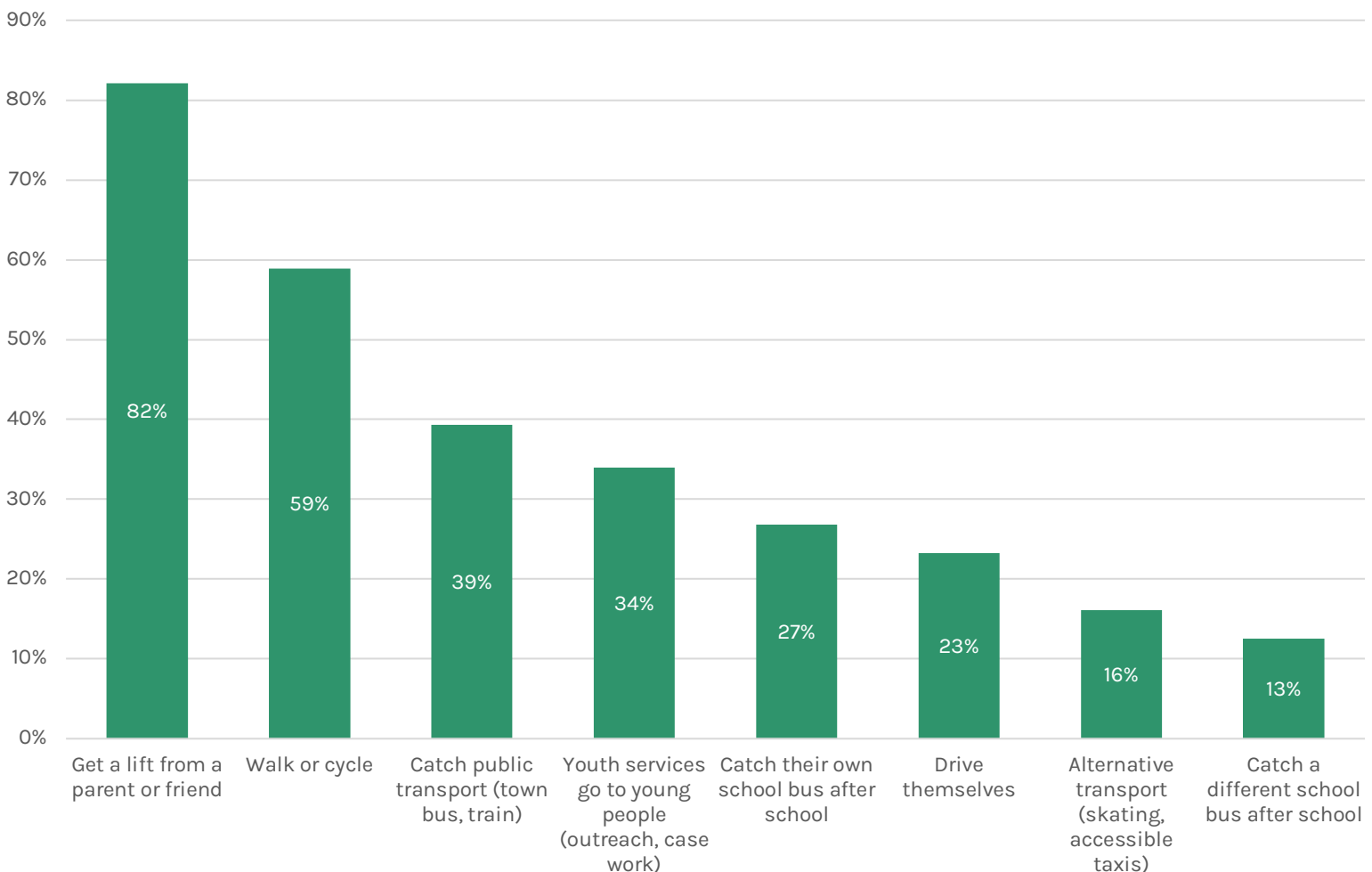
Transport disadvantage means that many youth services funded by local, state and federal governments cannot support the young people who would benefit most. Some youth services are forced to use program funding to provide transport to enable young people to attend the service. Youth workers told YACVic Rural about organising a private bus service, paying for taxis, or requiring support workers to chaperone young people to and from the service. This financial burden on youth services is an inefficient but necessary use of resources which could be alleviated by improving public transport services.

*I couldn't go to the headspace group in Bairnsdale, [because I] don't have a way to get there and home after school.*

**- Fred, 15 from Lakes Entrance**

Relying on private transport to access services also presents a challenge to young people who might be marginalised within their family context. Young LGBTIQ+ people who are not yet 'out' to their parents cannot ask them for a lift to an LGBTIQ+ social or support group. This limits their access to crucial health and wellbeing services that provide support to diverse communities. Similarly, young people who are worried about privacy or stigma in relation to mental health or reproductive health services may not be willing to ask for private transport from family.

## How do young people get to youth services?





## Accessibility and Inclusion

Current legislation allows school buses an exemption from the federal *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002*, meaning that disabled students can be excluded from existing services.<sup>4</sup>

Inaccessible transport further marginalises disabled young people, negatively impacting their connections with community, education and employment. Without legislative amendments and upgrades to existing school buses, disabled students will continue to be excluded from school buses and new initiatives which use existing school bus assets. While some young people can use their NDIS funding to pay for specialised accessible transport, this is expensive and an inefficient use of funding. Further, not all disabled young people have access to the NDIS. Forcing disabled young people to use specialised transport to travel also continues harmful practices of exclusion.

Any initiatives to use existing school buses to expand access to public transport in rural and regional Victoria must be fully accessible and inclusive, to benefit all community members. YACVic Rural stands with Victorian Council of Social Services, Disability Resources Centre and Youth Disability Advocacy Service in calling for fully accessible public transport to be a top priority for the Victorian Government.<sup>5</sup>

### Recommendation 3:

**The Victorian Government advocates to the Commonwealth to remove the exemption for school buses in the Disability Standards, and leads change by requiring buses to meet accessibility standards as part of contract management of the SBP. Consider grandfathering to allow companies to replace existing stock over time and incentives to support small bus operators.**



# Benefits of Better Transport

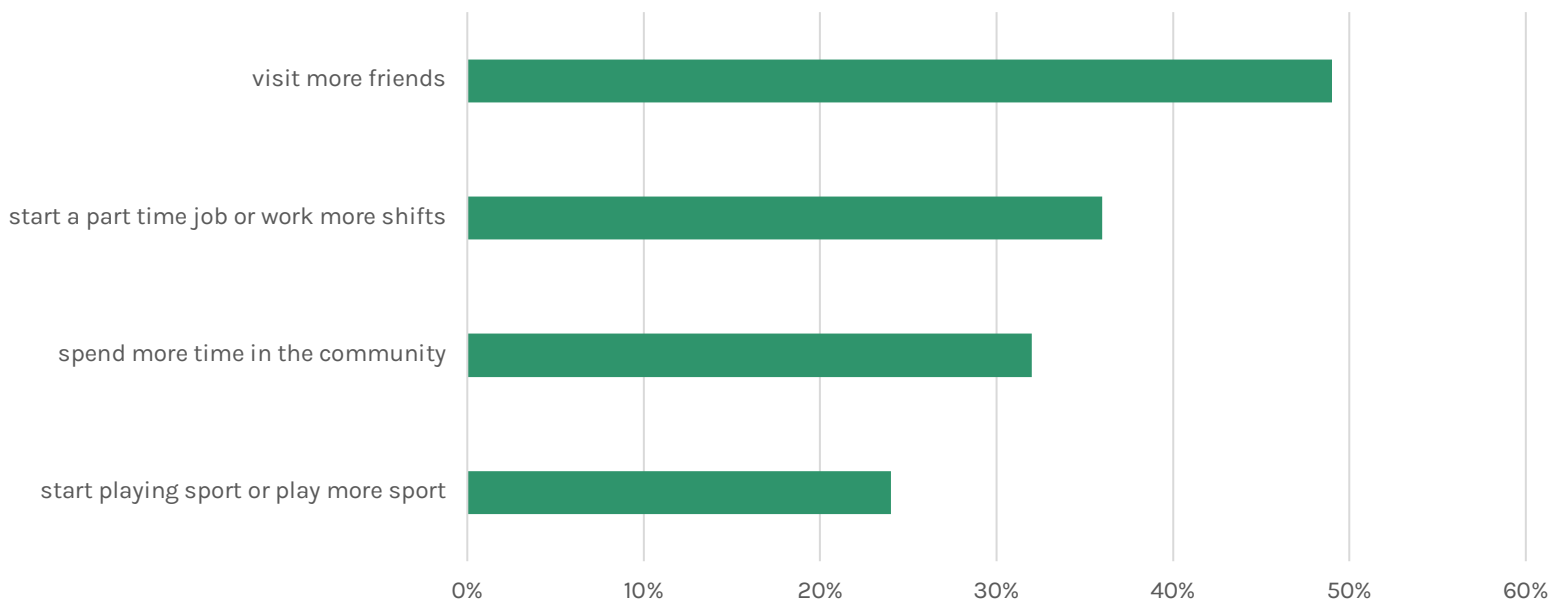
Quality of life for young people in rural and regional Victoria would be much better if public transport was improved in their area. Improved public transport would allow young people to access meaningful employment opportunities, further education, community participation and their social networks. The public transport system must be considered a piece of social infrastructure which provides vital benefits to the whole community.

## Increasing Access to the Community

Improving public transport access in rural and regional Victoria would have a direct positive impact on young people. Enabling young people to move more freely and independently would make life better for young people and the wider community. Enabling young people to more easily connect with their communities would support better outcomes for their health, mental wellbeing, community participation, participation in the workforce and educational outcomes as well as addressing issues of loneliness and isolation.

One in three young people we spoke with said that improved public transport would allow them to start a new job or work more hours. In the context of high youth unemployment and underemployment exacerbated by COVID-19, and mismatches with job vacancies, the opportunity to support a third of unemployed and underemployed young people into work is unmissable. School buses could enable young people to be better connected with work opportunities in both regional and metropolitan employment centres. This will give young people the chance to explore meaningful local employment opportunities.

## Better public transport would enable young people to...



Improved public transport would allow more young people to explore different tertiary courses and career pathways that are not available locally. This would enable young people to pursue their own interests while staying connected to their community.

*Improving public transport would allow young people to catch the bus to and from school, to work, TAFE, classes, or even just to see friends. There are many isolated communities in East Gippsland. Being able to catch the bus to just visit a friend would bring so many social benefits for young people.*

- Kathryn, youth worker at East Gippsland Shire Council

*[Improved public transport] would mean that young people can participate and access more facilities, activities and services in their community, improving their community and social inclusion as well as health and wellbeing. It would be a step in the right direction to support equity for young people in our region.*

- Philippa, youth worker at Ballarat Community Health

#### **Recommendation 4:**

**Design new public transport routes and timetables around existing activities including:**

- **Employment centres at common shift start- and end-times**
- **TAFE classes**
- **Social and competitive sport trainings and games**
- **Shopping centres**
- **Medical centres**

#### **Access to Youth Programs and Services**

Youth workers in rural and regional Victoria deliver valuable programs and services that connect young people with their local communities, create opportunities for young people to develop their skills and experience, engage in education or employment and provide mental health support. Improving public transport access would allow many more young people to access these vital programs and services.

#### **Recommendation 5:**

**Design new public transport routes and timetables in partnership with existing youth programs and services.**





# Improvements to the School Bus Program

Amendments to the existing SPB could provide substantial benefits at low cost to young people not engaged in mainstream education, but more is needed to fully end transport disadvantage. This section proposes changes to the SPB which would allow more young people, and members of the wider community, to use the school buses, while still ensuring child safety.

## Sharing Existing School Buses

The SPB already allows for people not engaged in mainstream secondary education to apply to travel on the school bus with school students on a regular basis. This program enables people who are not secondary students to travel from home to town, and has the potential to encourage access to other education options like TAFE, or employment opportunities including apprenticeships and traineeships.

The current model requires potential passengers to apply to the school principal and pass reference checks. YACVic Rural understands that very few community members either apply for or are accepted to travel on school buses. However, DET does not systematically collect data on the number of applications or their outcome. The low uptake of the existing system could be caused by a range of issues which may differ by region:

- School buses are already at capacity so there is no room for additional passengers.

- School buses do not follow the routes or timetables that work for non-school students because they are designed specifically to take school students to and from school.
- Community members are unaware of the option to use school buses as a form of public transport.
- Students who have been expelled from school or have a bad relationship with the school principal are unlikely to feel comfortable applying to continue travelling on the school bus.

*Build more bus stops and give other citizens access to the school buses.*

*- Maddock, 14 from Warragul*

## Recommendation 6:

**Trial additional stops at employment or education centres on existing school bus runs to encourage young people to travel on the school bus to work, TAFE or university.**



#### **Recommendation 7:**

**Collect and publish data on applications from non-students to travel on school buses, to inform transport planning. Include numbers of applications accepted and denied and the reasons for the denials.**

#### **Recommendation 8:**

**Promote the option for non-school students to travel on school buses, including to students leaving school for alternative pathways like TAFE, apprenticeships and employment.**

#### **Child Safety: What Young People Say**

YACVic Rural welcomes the Inquiry's specific consideration of child safety. YACVic Rural takes child safety and the wellbeing of children and young people seriously. In Victoria, Child Safe Standards aim to protect children and young people from abuse, including physical violence, sexual offences, serious emotional or psychological abuse and/or neglect.<sup>6</sup> The Victorian Standards work alongside the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.<sup>7</sup>

Both the Child Safe Standards and the National Principles ask organisations to meaningfully involve children and young people in conversations and decisions around child safety.<sup>89</sup> To begin to fulfil this standard for our discussions around using school buses, YACVic Rural directly asked young people their thoughts on the proposal of allowing other members of the community to catch their buses.

Generally, young people were happy with the proposal, recognising the lack of public transport as a major issue for people not able to catch school buses. Some young people identified that school students in metropolitan Melbourne already share their (public) transport to school with the broader community. One young person whose school bus already carries an older community member identified that this system is working well, and was aware that community members have to go through appropriate background checks before taking the school bus.

Some young people expressed concern about the logistics of having members of the wider community ride the school buses, specifically that buses are already full.

Other young people raised concerns about allowing community members to ride the school bus, a place that has traditionally been a place solely for young people. Their suggestions to address their concerns included physically separating school students from other community members with dedicated seats, implementing a chaperone on school buses or providing training to bus drivers on Child Safety.

*I wouldn't care [about sharing my school bus with adults] as long as they're local.*

**- Billy, 15 from Maramingo Creek**

*I share with adults sometimes anyway and it doesn't bother me.*

**- Ella, 12 from Swan Hill**

*Probably no room on it anyway.*

*- Peter, 17 from Colbinabbin*

*It might be a bit weird [to share my school bus with adults]. The bus is pretty crowded already.*

*- Sam, 12 from Gunbower*

*I would prefer not to but I'm sure it would be fine. I know everyone on my bus well enough to make it one of the safest feeling places I am in during my usual week, and having a constant flow of potentially ever changing strangers could disrupt that. The school bus feels like a place to hang out rather than just the transport to school which is why it seems strange having strangers on there too.*

*- Cameron, 16 from Violet Town*

#### **Recommendation 9:**

**Meaningfully involve young people in design, governance, monitoring and evaluation of child safety initiatives in relation to sharing school buses.**

#### **Child Safety: What Youth Workers Say**

Youth workers in rural and regional Victoria expressed some concerns for child safety if members of the broader community are allowed onto existing school bus runs, but argued that the risks can be mitigated and the benefits for the community are too good to be missed.

Several youth workers identified that the Working With Children Check system for ensuring child safety would be appropriate and effective in instances where members of the broader community share school buses with school students. Working With Children Checks are easily accessible and free of charge for people who do not intend to do paid work with young people. Holding a Working With Children Check could also be beneficial for young people looking for their first job.

*If you are going to allow other adults on student buses, does that mean you're going to screen all the adults with a Working With Children's Check and a Police Check? Because there's no way I'd allow my own son or daughter on a bus with random adults.*

*- Meg, youth worker in Wangaratta*

*I think it could be reasonable for adult passengers on a school bus to have a Working with Children Check as this can be obtained free of charge.*

*- Karensa, youth worker in Warrnambool*



*I have no major concerns with having students and other community members on the same bus. At the moment, a number of kids travel into school on the public bus with everyone else. So, this new bus is no different. Some of our school buses are completely full, so we could put the shared service on a second bus. I know people might have concerns, but this happens all the time and there is a precedent there.*

**- Michelle, school principal at St Mary MacKillop College in Swan Hill**

**Recommendation 10:**

**Meaningfully involve the Commission for Children and Young People, the youth sector and schools in design, governance, monitoring and evaluation of child safety initiatives in relation to sharing school buses. Consider requiring all passengers above the age of 18 who travel on school buses to have a Working With Children Check in lieu of verbal reference checks to the school principal.**



# Activate the ‘Down-Time’

Alongside improvements to the SPB to allow young people not engaged in mainstream secondary education, and wider community members, to catch existing school buses, the bus assets could be put to work when not being used for school runs. Using school buses to improve public transport would help rural and regional communities to thrive.

## **Parked School Buses are a Golden Opportunity**

YACVic, along with young people and the youth sector, has long called for better utilisation of school bus assets.<sup>10 11</sup> Young people identify that school buses have extended periods of ‘down time’ during the school day and after school runs, while young people and broader community members still have transport needs. In communities with no or little local public transport, school buses are an underutilised resource that could otherwise be used to connect young people with opportunities and improve their safety.

*The buses could be used throughout the day rather than sitting in a shed. There are many population groups that would benefit from this.*  
- Jess, youth worker at Moira Shire Council

*A later bus so I could stay in town and do extra-curricular activities without relying on mum, might be nice.*  
- Sam, 12 from Gunbower

*Anyone who doesn't drive. There needs to be more options. If you miss the bus or train that's it. Day is ruined.*

- James, youth worker in Ballarat

*The Victorian Government should use them [school buses] outside school bus times instead of having them parked.*

- Cameron, 16 from Violet Town

## **Recommendation 11:**

**Use existing school buses to deliver additional routes before the morning school run, during school time, in the evening after the school run, and on weekends, according to demand. Ensure that new routes interact with existing routes without being in competition.**

## **Young People Can See What’s Needed**

Young people have previously identified ways to ensure effectiveness of new public transport initiatives using existing school buses. Previous research conducted by YACVic and our member organisations, along with consultations informing this submission, identified key recommendations



for the operation of new public transport initiatives:

- Implement free public transport for young people under the age of 25, or at least for young people engaged in education (school, TAFE, apprenticeships and university).
- Allow young people to use ID cards issued by TAFEs and universities as proof of concession when travelling on Public Transport Victoria services.
- Trial on-demand buses in some areas to test demand.

#### ***Make school buses free***

***- Elizabeth, 12 from Warragul***

***Add some on-demand buses for serving new estates and use them to gather data regarding whether a new public route is needed in that area.***

***- Anthony, 16 from Wodonga***

#### **Recommendation 12:**

**Seek out and implement young people's outstanding recommendations for public transport in rural and regional Victoria, and for new initiatives using existing school bus assets.**

#### **Embed Youth Participation**

The design and delivery of public transport in rural and regional Victoria requires the genuine participation of young people. A public transport system developed using co-design processes that meaningfully value diverse lived experiences will be more successful.

Successful co-design with young people builds on a commitment to sharing responsibility and decision-making roles. This process empowers young people and all other stakeholders to learn from each other and collectively create the best outcome. YACVic, alongside many other organisations and academics, has developed a model of youth participation that would benefit initiatives to improve public transport. YACVic's model emphasises empowerment, purposeful engagement and inclusiveness.<sup>12</sup>

The community has a responsibility to ensure that young people are included in the development of public transport initiatives. Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly states that young people have the right to participate and contribute to decision making processes that affect them.<sup>13</sup> The use of co-design principles to ensure that young people are involved in the development of systems, routes and timetables is consistent with this obligation.

Involving young people in shaping public transport in rural and regional Victoria does not end with the announcement of new bus routes. Young people should be engaged to review, evaluate, determine future priorities, take part in decision-making processes, continue providing a lens of lived experience and connecting priorities to the experiences of communities. Best practice for youth participation includes having young people meaningfully involved in governance and evaluation. This ongoing engagement of young people in the process will ensure that public transport effectively responds to the



unique needs and preferences of young people in rural and regional Victoria.

**Recommendation 13:**

**Embed youth participation in the design, delivery, governance, monitoring and evaluation of new and expanded public transport initiatives through use of existing school bus assets**

**Coalition of Voices**

Alongside young people, a broad coalition of voices and perspectives is necessary to ensure that new public transport initiatives effectively meet demand. New public transport services in rural and regional will sit within a pre-existing, complex and locally specific mesh of transport services, geographies, destinations and needs.

New routes and timetables using existing school buses should be developed with meaningful input from the following voices, among others:

- Young people and youth services
- Relevant Ministers and local members of Parliament
- Department of Education and Public Transport Victoria

- Schools, TAFEs and universities
- Community services organisations
- Disability advocacy groups and service providers
- Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations
- Emergency services and disaster response organisations
- Local government
- Bus drivers
- Local employers, including employers who regularly host apprenticeships and traineeships

*Talk to TAFE about their VCAL student transport needs.*

*- Helen, youth worker at South West TAFE, Portland*

**Recommendation 14:**

**Local offices of Regional Development Victoria establish and convene high-level place-based public transport fora, through which all stakeholders work together to co-ordinate public transport initiatives using existing school bus assets and identify methods of ongoing collaboration.**



# Citations

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- <sup>5</sup> Disability Resource Centre (2021). *Transport For All*. Retrieved from <https://drc.org.au/join-transport-for-all/>
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- <sup>11</sup> Youth Affairs Council Victoria (2016). *Turning Ideas into Action Youth Forums 2016 Summary Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.yacvic.org.au/assets/Documents/YACVic-Rural-Youth-Forums-2016-Report-Feb17-2.pdf>
- <sup>12</sup> Youth Affairs Council Victoria (2021). *Yerp*. Retrieved from <https://yerp.yacvic.org.au>
- <sup>13</sup> *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, opened for signature 20 November 1989, 1577 UNTS 3 (entered into force 2 September 1990).



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