

Wimmera VET Bus

WIMMERA, VIC

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Background

A lack of access to regular, reliable, and affordable transport in remote rural areas is the number one concern raised by young people throughout the Wimmera region.

Participation in secondary school options, further education, training and employment opportunities, recreation, health and welfare, and social activities are the disadvantages rural young people face through the lack of access to a regular, reliable, and affordable transport system.

Transport is a limiting factor in assisting young people to reach their full individual potential and participation in society.

Studies have proven that:

- A lack of transport is a major factor explaining the exodus of young people aged 15 years and over from outlying to larger centres (Green and McDonald, 1996)
- Transport for recreation and social contact is important as it reduces isolation and distance from cultural and social resources (Wimmera Regional Youth Committee, 1996)
- There is limited and often a complete absence of public transport available within a large geographical area to be covered (Wimmera Primary Care Partnership: Youth Adolescent Health Promotion, 2002)

The latest Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training in Victoria, also referred to as the Kirby Report, provided the research foundation for the Labor Government's policies and directions on education and training for young people. It makes strong recommendations around student retention rates, which are particularly relevant to this region where rates are one of the lowest in the state.

The Review states that recognised principals which underpin the establishment of regional planning/structures must: -

- Exist to improve the educational and training outcomes for young people aged 15-19 years.
- Ensure that there is open and fair access to services – including access to transport.
- Allow the movement of people between regions.

VET Bus Service

In the Wimmera there are approximately 520 young people undertaking Vocational Education Training (VET) courses. Students travel from the Shires of Horsham, West Wimmera, Buloke, Hindmarsh and Yarriambiack.

Students undertaking VET in the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) programs combine their VCE studies with a nationally recognised VET training certificate in their chosen field of interest. A typical VET certificate involves about 400 hours of training, delivered in a partnership arrangement between schools and a Registered Training Organisation (RTO). As a general rule, every 100 hours of VET training equates to 1 VCE VET unit (contribution to a student's VCE program).

VET in the VCE programs are:

- Agriculture
- Automotive
- Clothing Design
- Construction
- Engineering
- Horticulture
- Information Technology
- Retail
- Arts Multimedia
- Business Administration
- Community Services
- Electronics
- Horse Studies
- Hospitality
- Music

In 2001 a number of youth service providers came together to look at ways to enhance young people's access to VET courses. Eventually they were successful in sourcing funding and co-operation from across the region, government departments, and across sectors to enable a subsidised rural private bus service to be established. The bus service transports young people from outlying pick-up points and carries them to VET courses at regional training centres in Horsham and Longerenong.

From the start of the 2002 school year, students participating in VET programs from 8 Wimmera Secondary Colleges have travelled to and from their training by bus. Previously they had to rely solely on parents to transport them to the VET venues, which excluded many students from accessing this opportunity. The young people are required to arrive at Horsham and Longerenong each Wednesday morning to meet their VET course requirements. Some students travel up to distances of 260 kilometres per day return journey.

The VET Bus Service has been subsidised by: -

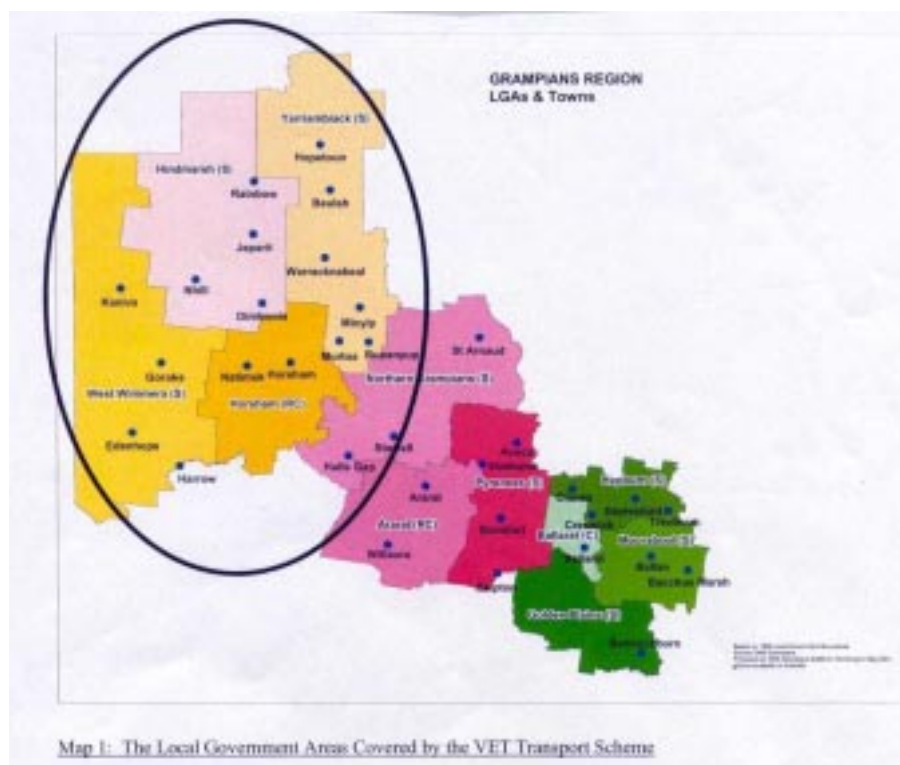
- School Focused Youth Service
- Local Learning and Employment Network
- Regional Youth Committee
- Department of Education and Training
- Schools and Shires

Parents

The scheme contracts a private bus line to run two transport routes each week, these are:

- The first transport route, which originates in Jeparit and travels through Nhill and Dimboola to Horsham and Longerenong. Students from Rainbow and Kaniva are responsible for private transport to Jeparit and Nhill respectively.
- The second transport route that departs from Hopetoun and travels through Beulah and Warracknabeal to Horsham and Longerenong. Students travelling from Donald and Birchip are responsible for making their own transport arrangements to Beulah to catch the Bus.

Yarriambiack Shire Council has appointed a Transport Co-ordinator to oversee the administration of the scheme.



Conclusions

The VET Transport Scheme has brought an opportunity to young people in the Wimmera to participate in improved education and training opportunities. The VET Bus service has proved to be extremely successful, resulting in a 100% school retention rate.

A Government subsidy assists in sustaining this service, as a large number of students would be unable to partake in VET without the bus.

A formal and independent evaluation of the VET Bus pilot program is presently being produced, it is currently in draft form and states that:

- Students utilising the Transport Scheme have reported benefits including increased social contact, making new friends, new experiences, an independence from parents, an increased likelihood of remaining at school, and a stronger connection to their community.
- It was noticed that the VET scheme and its associated work placements were leading to better employment outcomes for the young people and the community by encouraging young people to stay in their local communities, rather than moving to larger regional centres.
- The scheme also enhanced educational outcomes for students, increased community vitality in the area and increased retention rates of students in the secondary education sector.
- After the first year of the Wimmera VET Transport Scheme, it has achieved the objective of increasing student participation in VET courses and school retention.
- The cooperation between government and non-government agencies alike has been paramount in obtaining funding - Office of Youth, Department of Education and Training, School Focused Youth Service, Wimmera and Southern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network, and in-kind support, Yarriambiack Shire and Workco Limited.

Cooperative arrangements between schools and the regions to align programming (times and facility usage) and delivery days have also been something this region has been proud of. This is something that hasn't just happened, but has taken years of development and nurturing to get where we have got to.

