

BUS SERVICES, REGIONAL May 10, 2006

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond): I wish to speak about provincial city bus services. The regular regional passenger bus services provide services to six provincial cities—Mount Gambier, Murray Bridge, Port Pirie, Port Augusta, Whyalla and Port Lincoln. Various types of services are now being offered in the provincial cities since local councils stopped paying a contribution to their town service. In Murray Bridge this was a cost of \$74 333 per annum to the Rural City of Murray Bridge, with the Department of Transport making a contribution of \$148 667. I have no problem with the Rural City of Murray Bridge deciding not to contribute from August last year. After all, why should Murray Bridge not receive full funding from the state government for the service when the government is more than happy to fully subsidise the town service in Mount Gambier?

I would like to think that the subsidy was not to shore up votes for the de facto Labor member in Mount Gambier. With the changes in funding arrangements, the government instigated an Integrated Transport Plan study for the town bus service in Murray Bridge, and I commend the government on taking this action. However, it seems to me that the study provided an option for a passenger transport service of least cost to the government but did not take into account the standard of actual delivery service. The Department of Transport seemed intent on changing the fixed route service to a full demand-responsive, dial-a-ride type of service. In the end, a combination of fixed route and dial-a-ride demand-responsive service was put in place.

According to the company delivering the combination service, the response by the public to this service has been disappointing. Whether it is because people do not like change or because they have not been appropriately informed as to how the new service operates is a real issue. Also, the seemingly one-way negotiations between the Department of Transport and the operator on how the service is funded have become a major issue. In conclusion, I believe that the Department of Transport needs to address the issues that are of concern to the town bus service operator and residents of Murray Bridge and the delivery service required by those residents. If these issues are not addressed, the community of Murray Bridge runs a very grave risk of losing the town bus service in Murray Bridge if a suitable contract cannot be negotiated.