



**TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE
25 March 2009**

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders) (15:56): Once again, I bring to the attention of the house the plight of the family of a disabled young man living in rural South Australia and the ineptitude of this state government in relation to transport in regional areas. There are headlines in today's paper about free public transport for people in the city, but the most vulnerable, living in the country, have nothing. For months now, there has been no solution provided for Steve Richter's autistic son, Rodney, to enable him to access a bus service to Port Lincoln to allow him to attend the Moving On program.

On 2 February this year (eight weeks ago), I became involved and contacted the Minister for Disability by email seeking her intervention to resolve what I thought would be a relatively easy problem. Rodney had been catching a DECS-funded bus for eight years while he attended the excellent Port Lincoln Special School. However, since turning 20, Rodney is classified as an adult and no longer attends the school; instead, he has the opportunity to undertake the Moving On program through Bedford Industries at Compass in Port Lincoln.

The bus Rodney had been catching with his friends still drives past his farm gate morning and night, delivering students to the Port Lincoln Special School, less than a kilometre from where he needs to go; however, he is not allowed on the bus. I contacted minister with another email on 13 November, without response, before raising the matter in the Grievance Debate on 17 February.

With still nothing resolved, and with little response to the family, I asked the Minister for Education a question on 3 March. She responded that the Moving On the program was not part of the schooling system, that it was not paid for by DECS and that it was not in that system. How ironic! In this state, we have two departments that are unable to work together, with two ministers who sit at the same cabinet table but who cannot come to a sensible compromise. Let me remind these metropolitan ministers, and their city-based bureaucracies, that rural people do not have alternative transport options.

I will now share with you the consequences of the inaction of this government. Steve, Rodney's dad, is a qualified school bus driver, something he has been doing for 12 years. He is registered to drive for two schools, and is an emergency bus driver. However, now that he is forced to drive Rodney to and from his daily program, Steve is unemployable because he is not available when needed. It is bad luck that he has recently completed his renewed police reports, medical examinations and applications for positions.

Steve is also a self-employed computer consultant, but now that he has to be away from his business for at least four hours every day he is not available to clients, who are going elsewhere. Steve is well known in the district. Given his driving experience, he was contacted to undertake a local scrap metal truck run—another job he had to turn down.

Adding insult to injury, Steve has now been contacted by Centrelink, which wants to know why he is not actively seeking work and had not accepted two bus driving jobs. He is now waiting for a special Centrelink person to fly at great expense from Adelaide to assess his situation, and still the DECS-funded bus drives twice daily past Rodney's farm gate with his friends who travelled with him for eight years while he was 17, 18 and 19 years of age but with whom he is now no longer able to be with because suddenly he is 20 years old and a possible danger to them because he is an adult. Try explaining that to Rodney. As Steve says, 'Rodney may be 20 years by chronological measurement, but I am sure that some brilliant person in the government could quite easily assess him and discover that he is well below this in his psychological capacity.'

Steve is also a qualified and sought-after volunteer ambulance officer, having been awarded an Australian Citizen Award in 2006 for services during the Eyre Peninsula fires. He was entered into the inaugural *Whose Who* book in South Australia in 2006 and 2007 for his part in community services as an ambulance officer. He has been an advanced ambulance care officer for 14 years. Please keep in mind that in rural areas we do not have paid ambulance officers outside of Port Lincoln and one at Ceduna. We rely on our wonderful, committed and trained volunteers.

Steve was recently transporting Rodney to Port Lincoln when a category 2 ambulance call came in—category 2 being deemed a life-threatening situation. All that could be done was to despatch a paid paramedic team from Port Lincoln (50 kilometres away), leaving Port Lincoln shorthanded and losing valuable time that could have meant life or death to the patient.

So, now, while the Minister for Disability and the Minister for Education twiddle their thumbs, we have a family having to justify to Centrelink why they are not working, we have people in potentially life-threatening situations not being best served with ambulance services and we have Rodney distressed and separated from his friends, driving behind the bus to Port Lincoln morning and night. The cost in CO₂, time, money and sheer frustration of this ludicrous situation cannot be allowed to continue.

Time expired.

TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE 3 March 2009

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders) (15:17): My question is to the Minister for Education. Will the minister advise the house why a disabled young man cannot utilise the DECS-funded taxi service, which goes past his farm gate, to enable him to attend the DECS Moving On program in Port Lincoln?

I have been contacted by Steve Richter, whose autistic son, Rodney, has been attending Port Lincoln Special School for eight years utilising a DECS-funded taxi service with other disabled students from the area. Unfortunately, as Rodney has now turned 20, he can no longer attend school and is enrolled in the Moving On program.

Despite the taxi bus going past his farm every school day, Rodney is not allowed to access it. His parents cannot utilise the \$2,000 offered by the department as it must be paid to a taxi company. This amount would fund transport for only seven days anyway, and it essentially duplicates the existing service that runs parallel to it. People in rural areas do not have any alternative public transport opportunities, and volunteers are once again being called upon.

The Hon. J.D. LOMAX-SMITH (Adelaide—Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Minister for Tourism, Minister for the City of Adelaide) (15:18): I am happy to help the member opposite. She has her details somewhat tangled, as ever. I understand the issue she raises; it relates to a young man who has left school, who is no longer of school age and who is therefore not attending a public school or the sort of educational facilities run by DECS.

As she would realise, DECS clearly provides transport assistance to disabled students attending schools, and it does that so that they can attend the closest special unit, whether that be a special unit, a preschool or a school within the area. I know that DECS has not been able to continue taking this young man to his Options destination, which is not part of the schooling system, not paid for by DECS and not a public school or a secondary school; it is not in that system.

What we can do, and we are doing, is look at the taxi service, which is funded through DECS, which is paid for through our budget and which is a service provided to individuals going to school, and see whether an arrangement can be made to allow other individuals to be carried on these buses.

The reality is that there are more complex issues that the member does not understand. Schools have a duty of care when transporting students within their control, and there are complex issues that need to be addressed before adults are carried. Certainly, we are looking at how the taxi provider might provide services for another individual, but the member is inaccurate when she suggests that the young man is attending schools. She is not attending a DECS service. As I understood what she said, she does not quite have the facts correct. I am very happy—

Mr Williams: A moving on program.

The SPEAKER: Order!

The Hon. J.D. LOMAX-SMITH: I am very happy to brief her—

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order!

The Hon. J.D. LOMAX-SMITH: —on this matter, on this program, which is not funded and run by DECS. I have explained—

Mrs Penfold interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order!

The Hon. J.D. LOMAX-SMITH: —though the member does not appear to want to listen—that there are ways that this matter might be resolved, and we are happy to look at it, but there are complex issues in dealing with an adult involved in bus services for children that those opposite do not wish to hear about.

Disability Services 17 February 2009

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): I spoke again this morning to the father of a disabled son, who had sent me an email more than two weeks ago that I am about to put on the record. He has heard nothing from the Minister for Disability or the Minister for Education and Children's Services, despite them receiving copies of this email requesting urgent action immediately after I received it, and despite numerous follow-up phone calls and emails sent.

The most recent email, marked 'Urgent', was sent on Friday to the Minister for Disability. It stated:

Jennifer, the following letter was emailed to your chief of staff on 2 February for urgent action. To date this family have heard nothing. Every day their disabled son sits at home—he is rapidly losing any motivation that he gained from attending school. Every day the same taxi that he caught for several years to school drives past his gate with other students aboard. It drives past Compass Services—his moving on facility. This situation is ludicrous. Surely some liaison between Disability Services and the education department can resolve this problem. I seek your urgent intervention.

His letter states:

The Education Department Logical Wisdom. Painting the Picture. I have a son who is autistic, now 20. For the past eight years he has been attending the special school in Port Lincoln. We live 65 kilometres from that school. Every school day that he has attended he has been picked up by a taxi bus with multiple other special needs people. The rules of the taxi as far as the way the taxi bus is contracted by the education department are: the trip is charged at roughly \$130 per trip each way, a total of \$260 approximately per day.

If there is one person on the bus or 10 persons on the bus the rate is the same. Because the bus is chartered by the education department they, the education department, will not allow Rodney to travel on the bus to go to what is called Compass, part of the Bedford Industries section for disabled people, in a program by the education department called Moving On. The taxi bus will still be coming up past us to pick up other disabled people for the special needs school in Port Lincoln and goes right past the Compass facilities before it gets to the special needs school.

If Rodney is to continue his Moving On program with the education department we have to personally drive him 220 kilometres round trip each day to a point where Compass (Bedford Industries) has agreed to pick him up and drop him off each day. The education department in their wisdom awarded Rodney \$2,000 towards travelling expenses that we the parents cannot personally claim. It must be paid to an independent body such as the taxi

bus.

So, if a separate taxi is provided for Rodney and costs approximately \$260 per day Rodney will be able to attend his Moving On program for 7.5 days of the year. Rodney's program should be renamed Moving On To Nowhere. I would be interested in your opinion, please. The person I believe who said Rodney cannot use the...bus was—

and the departmental person's name was used. It continues:

The same bus he has been on the whole time he has attended the special school. While a lot of other kids have started their school year, Rodney has yet to start. Could this be discrimination? Yours...Signed by Rodney's father.

Once again, government rules and regulations impact unfairly on country people. There is no public transport such as metropolitan residents can use and which is supported by taxpayers. If it is a matter of insurance then surely the \$2,000 would be sufficient to cover the necessary insurance. Rules and regulations are essential for any community; however, one of the options that the minister has is to apply some flexibility so that rules and regulations do not descend into a farce, such as that which has happened in this instance. Rodney has not started his work education year and is idly hanging around at home, a situation that has no positives but a number of negatives for him and his well-being and that of his family. I urge the ministers to look again at this instance and display common sense to resolve the issue as quickly as possible.

In the short time I have left I draw members' attention to the fact that parents and carers of autistic children and adults are unable to obtain disabled parking permits. In South Australia the requirement for a disabled parking permit is:

...persons with a temporary or permanent physical disability whose speed of movement is severely restricted by the impairment and whose ability to use public transport is significantly impeded by the impairment.