

School Travel

Regional airfares

Due to geographic isolation, many rural and remote families need to travel large distances in order to access not only education and learning experiences, but also specialist assistance. Families also need to travel at times to support their students who can be attending schooling hundreds if not thousands of kilometres away. The availability of Air Travel in regional areas allows families to cover the distance necessary to travel to get to schooling or specialist services (such as speech language pathologists) much more quickly and directly, however this travel often comes at a huge cost. In addition, many families have to drive significant distances just to get to a regional airport before they begin their journey by air.

Air travel also offers the chance to access learning experiences that are not available in the regions where many of these students live, school excursions and camps for example.

People also travel into regional areas such as specialist coaches, music teachers, artists and many others to work with children who live outside of city centres at various times of the year. The cost of bringing in these people with specialised skills can be very difficult to meet for rural and regional schools and school communities.

ICPA is not aware of any "Student Concession" fares available for air travel. Bus services and railways often offer student concession fares to make student travel less expensive, but not airlines. Airlines also tend to have higher airfares for school holiday times, which are the times that many students who live in rural and remote areas need to travel to and from their place of schooling to their home.

Furthermore, there are inequities in Commonwealth Student Travel Allowances. While the Federal Government has in place Fares Allowances to assist with student travel under the ABSTUDY and Youth Allowance Schemes, there is no provision for travel in the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme which is the assistance a large number of geographically isolated children fall under.

ICPA (Aust) recommends:

- Governments consider further subsidisation of rural/remote/regional routes that show a demonstrated need
- National student concessions be available for air travel
- Airlines retain a number of seats at "normal" pricing for a certain block of dates leading up to School terms beginning and ending.
- Commonwealth Fares Allowances to be more uniform across assistance programs
- Airlines should be encouraged to work together for the benefit of customers in forming partnerships and make connecting to destinations more seamless.
- Programs such as the Remote Air Services Subsidy Scheme (RASS) be supported, and expansion provided for.

Roads

Some roads in rural and remote Australia are federally funded, particularly in the Northern Territory. Poor condition and deterioration of remote roads has become a major concern for remote residents that have no choice but to travel on roads that are clearly not safe and are indeed impassable for weeks at a time.

Roads are vital and play an integral part of the safe delivery of students to face to face functions, correspondence materials delivery and the safe passage of Distance Education Staff to students' home visits and for all Department of Education and Community Services staff visiting communities as well as health workers and child care services.

ICPA seeks the Federal Government's urgent commitment to a long-term maintenance strategy with adequate funding to bring national roads back to all weather and safe trafficable surface. Families and teaching staff have no option other than travelling on roads with extremely undesirable driving conditions which not only affects a safe environment but is also having a detrimental effect on education, and the business operations which sustain the lives of those in the bush.