

8 May 2024

Hon Simeon Brown  
Minister of Transport  
Parliament Buildings

(via email: Simeon.Brown@parliament.govt.nz)

Hon Erica Stanford  
Minister of Education  
Parliament Buildings

(via email: Erica.Stanford@parliament.govt.nz)

Dear Ministers,

### **School Bus Safety**

I'm writing to alert you to an opportunity as we approach Road Safety Week 2024. NZTA recently published a research report on the safety of school bus journeys. This follows on from a similar 2010 report and unfortunately, while it's pleasing to see school buses remain the safest form of transport for children to get to and from school, some of the issues highlighted in the 2010 report are still prevalent today.

Children are most vulnerable when transitioning on or off school bus services. The law requires drivers to slow to 20 km/h when passing a stationary school bus. Surveys undertaken in 2010 showed that in most cases this was not occurring. Pictures of dangerous driving examples were taken during these surveys and are included in the 2010 report. Average speeds well above 20km/h were recorded. Even the most considerate drivers were measured at speeds around 30km/h with the distribution of speeds ranging from 27km/h to 104km/h.

Bus drivers tell us little has changed today and when even police vehicles are observed by drivers passing their bus at speeds well in excess of 20km/h, the consequence will continue to be deaths or serious injuries (three per annum over the last ten years according to the latest research report).

The impact on children, their friends and families and our bus drivers can be devastating as indicated in the story attached below my signature block. This was prepared by our Circular magazine editor, and we are looking at how to use it over Road Safety Week (20-26 May).

The latest NZTA research report contains this primary recommendation:

The primary recommendation of this project is that a government or industry-wide school bus safety working group be established to review the findings of this report, to consider how the interventions identified in this chapter will be progressed and assign responsibility for the investigation and delivery of them. This group should include key government agencies (NZTA, The Ministry of Transport Te Manatū Waka, Ministry of Education and NZ Police) and other relevant industry stakeholders, including school bus operators and relevant community/stakeholder organisations.

One of the Bus and Coach Association's five advocacy themes is to encourage *better across Government planning*. The latest research report makes it clear that improved school bus safety outcomes require cooperation from and coordination across multiple agencies and parties.

The Bus and Coach Association commends NZTA for commissioning the latest research report and supports the primary recommendation. We are prepared to contribute to work on making school bus journeys safer. We see an opportunity for you both as senior Government Ministers to indicate your support for the primary recommendation and request advice by the end of this year on the interventions that would be most effective in reducing the likelihood of tragedies like the one outlined in the story below.

You could make such an announcement to coincide or precede this year's Road Safety Week.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Delaney Myers', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Delaney Myers  
**Chief Executive**

## Appeals for school bus safety after heartbreaking loss

*Ongoing education of motorists about the rules surrounding stopped school buses is paramount, and so too is students' awareness of road safety, if fewer children are to be harmed on our roads.*

The devastating pain of 12-year-old Hinerangi Iese's death in November 2019, when she was struck by a truck and trailer after stepping off her school bus, has never waned for the Pukenui community.

Hinerangi, a vibrant young girl with a bright future ahead, was eagerly awaiting her time at the Far North district's primary school to come to an end so she could begin her journey at Kaitiaki College.

Her teacher of three years, Jo Arthur, described her as an old soul in a child's body, noting her gentle nature and beautiful singing voice.

"Her voice left a lasting impression on those around her," says Jo.

Raised by her great-grandmother, Hinerangi developed a love for the older generations' music, enjoying artists like Neil Diamond and Wanda Jackson.

"We shared a special bond, perhaps because of our mutual love for music. "It brought us together."

While the old cliché of time and wounds might be correct for Jo, it is never a situation she wants to see or the school and community to experience again.

For that to happen, ongoing education for motorists on speed limits around school buses and greater awareness for students about the risks of the road are essential.

The incident unfolded on SH1 north of Pukenui, a stretch familiar to the locals, where you did not cross.

Despite the bus stopping on her side of the road, Hinerangi, excited about a new phone arriving, decided to check the mailbox, leading her to cross the busy road.

As the bus moved on and a truck followed, Hinerangi stepped out behind it, unknowingly into the path of an oncoming truck and trailer.

Jo received the news from the bus driver and hurried to the scene. The remoteness of the location meant that emergency services took longer than usual to arrive.

"So, I simply lay with her on the side of the road, feeling utterly helpless.

"All I could do was be there for her, letting her know she wasn't alone."

Despite efforts to save her, Hinerangi's condition remained critical and she required urgent airlift to Auckland's Starship Hospital.

"Tragically, her condition deteriorated en route, and as they passed the Mangamuka Gorge, Hinerangi passed away," Jo says.

"The following morning, a Saturday, I removed all the desks in the classroom and filled them with cushions, beanbags, comfort food, and drinks."

From 6am until 3pm adults, students, and members of the community came through to reflect, grieve, share stories of Hinerangi, and be present with one another.

Many of Hinerangi's classmates recalled her daily ritual of tapping her fingers along the glass of the bus to the tune of *Knock Three Times*, a 1970s hit by American pop music group Tony Orlando and Dawn. Unfortunately, Hinerangi hasn't been the only child to lose their lives on the same stretch of highway.

Grant Scott-Collins, just 13 years old, died in 2008. Deputy Chief Coroner Brandt Shortland's made some recommendations that have been highlighted again in a recent 2023 research report commissioned by the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) and released publicly in April 2024.

### **Urgent action needed**

The latest 2023 research report just released by NZTA indicates an average rate of three deaths or serious injuries per annum between 2010-2021 related to school bus pick-up and drop-off points. Speed remains a significant factor.

An earlier 2010 research report also highlights the vulnerability of children, particularly those of primary school age, to misjudge traffic speed and act impulsively.

It emphasises the importance of standard health and safety practices in addressing hazards: elimination where possible, isolation if elimination isn't feasible, and minimisation if isolation isn't achievable.

Recommendations included strategies to reduce children crossing roads, such as encouraging parental presence at bus stops and reconfiguring bus routes.

The emphasis was placed on collective responsibility in preventing children from darting across roads. And it called for traffic speed amendments to be enforced near school buses and the enhancement of bus stops, particularly in rural areas.

Researchers stress the impact road safety education can play in improving attitudes and knowledge around buses and school zones. And Jo agrees.

"Education begins at home and extends into the classroom," she says.

She says students should be taught not only the basics of road safety but also the importance of responsible behaviour as pedestrians and passengers.

"We need to instil a deep understanding of why these rules exist and how they contribute to the safety of everyone on the road."

However, she was quick to mention that education doesn't stop with the students; it extends to drivers and parents as well. Drivers must be well-informed about school bus safety protocols and the legal obligations associated with sharing the road with buses.

Jo also says it's not just about making changes, it's about enforcing existing regulations. But that can be hard to do.

### **Speed limits relating to school buses**

When meeting or overtaking a stopped school bus that is displaying a school bus sign and is stopped for the purpose of picking up or dropping off school children, or that is displaying a specified school bus sign on which the lights are flashing, a driver must—

- drive with due care for the safety of the children; and
- drive at a speed not exceeding 20 km per hour while passing any part of the school bus.

Garth Petricevich, of Commuter Tours which provides services to Pukenui School, points out the grey area in the regulations.

"If a bus is starting to move off, that's generally when the kids begin to walk off too. But the speed limit doesn't apply then, only when the bus is completely stationary.

"The kids aren't in any less danger from other motorists now that the bus is starting to move on.

"But it doesn't help that no one seems to slow down – no matter if the bus is stopped or not – and I mean no one. Not even the police. Also, no one seems to enforce the rule."

Unfortunately, Grant's company provided services during both tragedies and both times, the drivers were devastated.

"They get to really know these kids pretty well. When they see it happen in front of them ... it's really not a nice thing for anyone."