

Rann stalls school bus contracts

School bus contractors have been left in financial limbo and regional school bus services are at risk as the Rann Government refuses to resolve the long-running issue of expiring contracts.

“Four years after the Government announced that new school buses would be fitted with air-conditioning and seatbelts, the continuation of reliable school transport in regional South Australia remains at risk,” Liberal Member for Flinders Peter Treloar said today.

“The Government must act now to negotiate new contracts for school bus operators.”

The South Australian Bus and Coach Association has been trying for two years to negotiate with the Government, with no success, and has been forced to seek legal advice on the matter.

With 65 contracts expiring this year and up to 150 expiring in the next year and a half, the Government has refused to provide bus drivers with any certainty only offering them temporary two year rollover contracts.

The Government will not guarantee these longstanding service providers realistic operating cost increases or the benefit of a selective tender process widely used in other government transport contracts.

“Regional school bus contractors are being denied certainty for their employees and their local school communities, not to mention the ability to plan for their businesses,” Mr Treloar said.

“The Rann Government wants to put contracts out to general tender risking contracts going to large interstate operators and squeezing out South Australian businesses.

“By risking a decision based on price for school transport the State Government is also ensuring that locally manufactured buses built for poor local road conditions, that are safer and more reliable, will lose out to cheaper foreign-built vehicles.

“If the Treasurer is prepared to spend 16 days overseas at enormous cost to the taxpayer bidding for contracts to build armoured vehicles for the army in South Australia, the Rann Government should be prepared to promote the interests of local coach builders in the same way.

“How will the Premier achieve his election promise of 100,000 new jobs if local businesses and manufacturers are discriminated against in government projects and tenders?”

South Australia is also the only State still operating a DECS style yellow school bus fleet. Other States are serviced solely by private operators.