



Ministry of Education, Heritage & Arts

POLICY ON TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE FOR SCHOOL STUDENTS

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1.0 POLICY OBJECTIVE

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear direction and framework to guide the Ministry of Education, Heritage & Arts (herein after referred to as MEHA), stakeholders and schools regarding the transport assistance arrangements for eligible school students. This will enable students to gain access and equity to quality educational facilities within their home zone schools.

2.0 POLICY

2.1 Modalities of Providing Transport Assistance To Students

- 2.1.1 Transport Assistance for students is delivered using two modalities:
 - 2.1.1.1 E-Transport Cards; and
 - 2.1.1.2 Transport Vouchers for use in rural or maritime areas.
- 2.1.2 E-ticketing is the preferred method of providing transport assistance as it reduces the risks compared to transport vouchers. In rural and maritime areas where E-ticketing is not available the voucher system may continue to be used, provided the controls set out in this policy are in place.

2.2 Determining Eligibility for Transport Assistance

- 2.2.1 All students in Years 1-13 whose parents/guardians' combined household income is below the eligibility income as determined by the Government for that financial year are eligible to apply for transport assistance.
- 2.2.2 MEHA will enter a data-sharing Memorandum of Understanding with the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS) to enable verification of parental/guardian income declarations.
- 2.2.3 Students requesting transport assistance shall apply to MEHA annually. The application process will be conducted in Term 3 of each school year (for the following school year) and may continue into the start of Term 1 of the School Year (eg. for new students).
- 2.2.4 Applicant's parents/guardians are required to provide details of their income on the application form to confirm their eligibility. Failure to provide the necessary documentation will result in the application for transport assistance being declined. The following documentation must be provided to support the application:
 - 2.2.4.1 Copy of Tax Identification Number (TIN) notifications for both parents/guardians;
 - 2.2.4.2 Salary slips and/or employment contracts of working parents/guardians;
 - 2.2.4.3 Other documentation such as evidence of social welfare payments.
- 2.2.5 A statutory declaration will be required for applicants whose parents/guardians do not have other documentation to substantiate their income.

- 2.2.6 The application must include details of the student's transport route to school, including the mode of transport and cost of the fare.
- 2.2.7 The application form will need to be signed by the student's parents/guardians. If applications are not received within the specified deadline the student will not qualify for the transport assistance until the following term.
- 2.2.8 The School Head is responsible for reviewing and certifying applications for transport assistance before they are entered into FEMIS, confirming all the details are correct to the best of their knowledge and that all necessary documentation has been provided with the application. The School Head will be held accountable for any breaches of the eligibility criteria.
- 2.2.9 The Transport Assistance Unit (TAU) is responsible for collating the list of students proposed by Schools to receive transport assistance through each modality. (eg. Using E-Transport Cards or Vouchers). The TAU is also responsible for verifying of parental/guardian income with FRCS to confirm that students on the listing meet the eligibility criteria.
- 2.2.10 The Permanent Secretary is responsible for approving the final Transport Fare Assistance Listing. The approval is valid for the remainder of the school year or until a student's circumstances change.
- 2.2.11 Priority for transport assistance will be given to eligible students residing within their school's home zone as defined in the Policy on School Zoning in Fiji (for urban schools only).

2.3 Agreement with E-Transport Provider

- 2.3.1 MEHA will enter into an agreement with the Fiji Government E-Transport Provider to facilitate the program for transport assistance to students.
- 2.3.2 The E-Transport Provider will provide services such as
- 2.3.2.1 Provision of E-ticketing services across various forms of transport;
 - 2.3.2.2 Issuing new E-Transport cards to MEHA;
 - 2.3.2.3 Issuing and registering replacement cards to students (with authority from MEHA);
 - 2.3.2.4 Cancelling lost or damaged E-Transport cards and transferring balances to replacement cards;
 - 2.3.2.5 Placing or removing restrictions on card usage as requested by MEHA; and
 - 2.3.2.6 Provision of regular reports on fare utilisation and account balances as requested by MEHA.
- 2.3.3 The services to be provided by the E-Transport Provider will be specified in the agreement. This will include specific provisions on reporting to be provided to MEHA and processes for resolving data issues.

2.4 Issuing E-Transport Cards to Students

- 2.4.1 Blue E-Transport Cards are provided to students receiving Transport Assistance.

2.4.2 Blue E-Transport Cards will only be issued to approved students that are listed on the Transport Fare Assistance Listing approved by the Permanent Secretary.

2.4.3 The TAU is responsible for identifying which students require new cards, registering the new cards in the E-Transport Provider System and distributing the cards to Schools via the District Education Offices.

2.4.4 Schools are responsible for issuing the E-Transport cards to students and registering the cards in the Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS).

2.5 Loading of Credit to E-Transport Cards

2.5.1 Credit is loaded to the E-Transport Cards of approved students on a termly basis.

2.5.2 The termly transport assistance for E-Transport Cards is calculated based on the number of school days in the term and the daily approved transport fare.

2.5.3 The TAU is responsible for calculating the funds to be loaded to each Student E-Transport Card and the payment required to the Transport Provider, factoring in carried forward balances from the previous term. The TAU is also responsible for loading funds to individual cards in the E-Transport Provider System after approval by the Permanent Secretary.

2.5.4 The Permanent Secretary will approve the listing of funds to be loaded to each Student E-Transport Card and the payment to be made to the E-Transport Provider.

2.5.5 The eligible student upon being notified that the card has been credited can redeem the balance at any E-Transport Provider outlet, District Education Office or MEHA Headquarters. It is the responsibility of parents and/or students to ensure that cards are redeemed on a timely basis.

2.6 Altering Student Transport Information During the School Year

2.6.1 When student circumstances change during the school year, they can apply to have their Transport Assistance Fare reviewed by the School Head.

2.6.2 The School Head is responsible for reviewing and certifying applications for altering transport assistance, confirming all the details are correct to the best of their knowledge.

2.6.3 In exceptional circumstances the District Transport Assistance Officer (DTAO) may be responsible for updating the student transport information in FEMIS.

2.7 Loss Or Damage to E-Transport Cards

2.7.1 Students and/or Parents are responsible for the safe keeping of E-Transport Cards and taking the maximum precautions to prevent loss or damage to the cards.

2.7.2 Instances of lost or damaged E-Transport Cards for subsidised students must be immediately reported to the School Head.

2.7.3 If the report of a lost card is not provided in timely manner to the School Head, then any losses arising from this will not be reimbursed to the replacement card.

- 2.7.4 The School Head is responsible for authorising a block on lost/damaged E-Transport Cards, verifying circumstances of lost/damaged cards are legitimate and authorising the issue of replacement cards.
- 2.7.5 The E-Transport Provider is responsible for cancelling lost/damaged E-Transport Cards, issuing new E-Transport Cards and transferring the balance of lost/damaged cards to replacement cards upon receiving the appropriate authorisation from MEHA or the School Head.
- 2.7.6 The first replacement card is provided to the student free of charge. Students will be required to pay a fee for any subsequent replacement cards.
- 2.7.7 The School Administration Officer (or similar) is responsible for registering any replacement E-Transport Cards in FEMIS.

2.8 Restrictions on E-Transport Card Usage

- 2.8.1 Subsidised E-Transport Cards are only to be used by eligible students for travelling to and from school on the route as per the Transport Fare Assistance Listing approved by the Permanent Secretary.
- 2.8.2 The Ministry will work with the E-Transport Provider to place necessary restrictions on E-Transport Cards to ensure that these are only used by the card holder as intended, and to prevent misuse of cards.

2.9 Printing, Registration and Distribution of Transport Vouchers

- 2.9.1 The TAU is responsible for printing, storing, distributing and registering transport vouchers. TAU will only provide additional vouchers to District Education Offices upon receipt of previous months reports.
- 2.9.2 The District Education Offices are responsible for receiving, storing, distributing and registering transport vouchers. The District Education Office will only provide additional vouchers to schools upon receipt of previous month reports.
- 2.9.3 The number of vouchers distributed to a School will be based on the listing approved by the Permanent Secretary at the beginning of the year.
- 2.9.4 Unused transport vouchers must always be stored in a secure location by the TAU, District Offices and Schools.

2.10 Management of Transport Vouchers at School Level

- 2.10.1 The School Administration Officer (or similar) is responsible for receiving, storing, distributing, registering and reporting on transport vouchers.
- 2.10.2 The School Head is responsible for monitoring the distribution of vouchers and the approval of reports on transport voucher utilisation by the school.
- 2.10.3 Missing vouchers are to be immediately reported by the School Head to the District Education Office together with the alphabet and serial numbers of the missing vouchers which can be obtained from the school record.

2.11 Payment Process for Transport Service Providers

- 2.11.1 The Transport Service Providers will collate the transport vouchers received from students. The vouchers must be presented to the District Education Office on a regular basis with a payment claim upon the Ministry.
- 2.11.2 The DTAO is responsible for verifying payment claims, forwarding payment claims to the TAU and filing these for audit purposes. The payment claims and vouchers must be stored in a suitable manner that enables checking at later date.
- 2.11.3 The TAU is responsible for conducting further verification of payment claims and processing the payment to the Transport Provider in accordance with normal MEHA payment processes.
- 2.11.4 Payments will be made on terms as mutually agreed with Transport Service Providers. The payment terms will consider the transactional costs of processing frequent payments to large numbers of Transport Service Providers.

2.12 Reporting and Monitoring Transport Assistance

- 2.12.1 The Transport Assistance Program will be closely monitored to ensure that E-Transport Cards and Transport Vouchers are being used only as intended by authorised students.
- 2.12.2 The E-Transport Provider is required to provide reports to the TAU each month on student card transactions as set out in the service agreement.
- 2.12.3 The District Education Office is required to report on transport voucher utilisation and balances of vouchers at the end of the month.
- 2.12.4 The TAU is responsible for analysing and monitoring reports from the E-Transport Provider and District Offices to confirm that E-Transport Cards and Transport Vouchers are utilised as intended by authorised students. The TAU is also responsible for preparing a monthly report on Transport Assistance for the Permanent Secretary, which will highlight any abnormal usage or violations of policy during the month.

2.13 Fraud And Corruption in Relation to Transport Assistance

- 2.13.1 The Ministry has a zero-tolerance approach to fraud and corruption on the Transport Assistance Program for Students.
- 2.13.2 Any School Head, School Teacher or MEHA official that suspects misuse of E-Transport Cards or Transport Vouchers is obliged to report this immediately. This report can be submitted to the District Education Office, Director Finance and/or the Permanent Secretary.
- 2.13.3 Any student found to be misusing E-Transport Cards or Transport Vouchers will be required to pay the funds back to MEHA and will be subject to disciplinary procedures.
- 2.13.4 The Permanent Secretary shall refer any MEHA officer found to be engaging in fraud and corruption on transport assistance to the Fiji Police or Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) for their intervention. The Permanent Secretary may also refer the matter to the Performance and Discipline Unit in accordance with the Ministry disciplinary procedures.

2.13.5 All officers involved processing of Transport Assistance applications will need to sign a Conflict of Interest Declaration.

2.14 Safety Measures and Registration of Transport Providers

2.14.1 MEHA is responsible for working with schools and relevant regulatory authorities to ensure that transport assistance is provided in a way that promotes safety for students.

2.14.2 The School Head is responsible for identifying a transport provider for their area. They will provide a letter of support to the transport provider which will be used to apply for the relevant passenger licence with the LTA or the MSAF. The School Head is also responsible for reporting vehicles or boats that are suspected of being operated without current documentation or necessary safety equipment to relevant regulatory authorities.

2.14.3 Any transport provider that is engaged in the provision of transport assistance for students must comply with the safety requirements issued by the relevant regulatory authorities – these are the Land Transport Authority (LTA) or Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF). All vehicles transporting students shall be registered with the LTA. All drivers must have a valid driver's licence. All boats transporting students shall be registered with the MSAF and must have a Survey Certificate. All boat captains must have a valid licence certificate.

2.14.4 Performance/safety issues with transport providers should be resolved between the School Head and transport provider. If transport providers don't meet expectations/safety standards the School Head should report the issue to the relevant regulatory authority.

2.14.5 The DTAO is responsible for keeping a register of vehicle and boat documents and licenses to monitor expiry dates. The DTAO is also responsible to liaise with School Heads and transport providers to ensure vehicle/boats are not operating without the necessary licences. The DTAO is also responsible for reporting vehicles or boats that are suspected of being operated without current documentation or necessary to the relevant regulatory authority.

2.14.6 The TAU will conduct checks at the District Education Office to ensure that the necessary documents are held on each transport provider.

2.15 Complaints on Transport Assistance

2.15.1 Complaints on Transport Assistance should be made to School Heads in the first instance, or to the District Education Office/TAU.

2.15.2 Schools, District Education Offices and the TAU shall keep a register of all complaints made and note the actions taken in response to these issues raised.

2.15.3 School Heads shall refer all matters concerning transport assistance to the relevant District Education Office. The District Education Office shall resolve the matter and forward a report to the TAU and must ensure they provide feedback to persons making complaints on the outcome of the process.

2.15.4 Schools, District Education Offices and the TAU must report on number and status of complaints on transport assistance as part of their usual monthly reporting.

3.0 BACKGROUND

The MEHA was given the responsibility of implementing the bus fare assistance to students in accordance with the approval from the Prime Minister in October 2009 through a task force led by the Permanent Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office.

School enrolment in Fiji, according to law, is dependent on the choice of the parents. The Education Act Cap 263, section 3 stipulates that 'pupils should be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents'. Parents therefore have the right to enrol their children in any school of their choice. The free choice of schools for parents is associated with long distance traveling of students, which means that parents pay more in terms of transport costs, which for some families, is a burden.

The free transport initiative is therefore an attempt by the Fiji Government to reduce the financial burden on parents who are unable to afford transportation costs involved in sending children to school. This will ensure equal access to quality education for all Fijian students from Primary, Secondary and Vocational Schools.

4.0 DEFINITIONS

- 4.1 **Applicants** are students who make a complete application for transport assistance to the MEHA Transport Assistance Unit of the Finance Section.
- 4.2 **Boat Providers** provide boat transportation to students in areas where they must travel by boat to get to school and return.
- 4.3 **Combined household income** is the gross income of both the parents/guardians.
- 4.4 **DTAO** refers to the District Transport Assistance Officer.
- 4.5 **Eligible student** is a student whose parent's combined income is below the eligibility income as determined by the Government for that financial year.
- 4.6 **E-Transport Card** refers to electronic card that is the accepted medium for payment of bus fare for a bus ride.
- 4.7 **E-ticketing** refers to electronic ticketing which is the digital method of payment for transportation that replaces the cash-based ticket system on buses.
- 4.8 **FICAC** is the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption
- 4.9 **FRCS** is the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service.
- 4.10 **Gross Income** for the sake of determining Transport Assistance will include any parental/guardian income from employment, income from property and income from business/investments before any tax deductions are made. MEHA uses the same definitions for income as the Fiji Revenue and Customs and Service (FRCS).
- 4.11 **FEMIS** is the Fiji Education Management Information System.
- 4.12 **LTA** refers to the Land Transport Authority

- 4.13 **MEHA** is the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts.
- 4.14 **MSAF** refers to Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji.
- 4.15 **Non-eligible student** is an enrolled school student who does not qualify and/or who does not receive transport assistance from MEHA.
- 4.16 **Rural Service Licence (RSL) Provider** is a transport provider that services students in the rural areas approved by the LTA
- 4.17 **School** is a facility registered/recognised as a School with/by the MEHA and includes ECE Centres, Primary, Secondary, Special, Inclusive and Vocational Schools.
- 4.18 **School home zone** is the zone or area between residences of students located within two kilometres radius from the School.
- 4.19 **School Head** is anyone employed as a School Head in a School.
- 4.20 **Subsidized student** is an enrolled school student who qualifies and/or who receives transport assistance from MEHA.
- 4.21 **Student** means a person of any age for whom education is provided in a School.
- 4.22 **TAU** refers to the MEHA Transport Assistance Unit.
- 4.23 **TIN** refers to Tax Identification Number

5.0 RELEVANT LEGISLATIONS AND AUTHORITIES

- 5.1 Fiji Education Act 1978
- 5.2 Republic of Fiji Constitution 2013
- 5.3 Electronic Fare Ticketing Act 2014
- 5.4 Sustainable Development Goal 4
- 5.5 National Development Plan (2017-2036)
- 5.6 MEHA Strategic Plan 2019 – 2023
- 5.7 Cabinet Memorandum on Bus fare – CP (2009), 18th December 2009.

6.0 PROCEDURES

- 6.1 After approval of this policy by the Honourable Minister, the Permanent Secretary will issue Standard Operating Procedures on Transport Assistance for School Students to assist in the implementation of this policy.

7.0 IMPLEMENTATION

- 7.1 All MEHA Officers, including those in Schools, shall implement this policy. Non-compliance with the policy will be deemed a disciplinary issue and will be referred to the Performance and Discipline Unit in accordance with the Ministry disciplinary procedures.

8.0 EFFECTIVE DATE- 1ST June, 2021

9.0 REVIEW DATE- 1st June, 2024

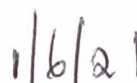
10.0 KEY SEARCH WORDS

Transport Assistance Initiative, E- Transport Card, Voucher, Rural Service License

11.0 APPROVED BY THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, HERITAGE & ARTS, HONOURABLE ROSY SOFIA AKBAR



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Signature



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Date

