



BUSLINK

Real-life accounts of how the National Workforce Development Fund is benefiting Australian transport and logistics enterprises.

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*R*oad accidents can happen in less time than it takes to read this sentence. That's why Buslink protects passengers with precise standards of driver training.

"What do you reckon a safe driving distance is?" asks Buslink training and recruitment manager Barry Pett. "What do you reckon your reaction time is?"

At 80 kilometres an hour, the safe driving distance from the vehicle in front is 44 metres for cars and 88 metres for buses, Pett says. The typical reaction time is between 0.75 and 1 second. And at 80km/h, you travel 22 metres in 1 second.

"If a driver does nothing in that second, they now only have 66 metres to pull the bus up," Pett says. "Not every bus has seatbelts. Most carry 70 passengers, of which 13 would be standing. You don't have the luxury of hitting the brakes hard, because people will get hurt, spat out of their seats like rag dolls at 80km/h."

"So if we don't teach people how to drive properly, then that's our consequence."

Buslink Pty Ltd, a Northern Territory bus and coach company covering about 60 percent of Darwin's local service, including most school runs, developed a procedures manual while delivering a nationally endorsed driver trainer qualification.

The qualification, a Certificate IV in Transport and Logistics (Road Transport - Heavy Vehicle Driving

Instruction), was afforded under the National Workforce Development Fund, through the Transport and Logistics Industry Skills Council.

Buslink engaged TransQual, a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) from New South Wales, who travelled up to deliver the training in blocks over six months.

"When I started here two years ago, there were two driver trainers and they had no qualifications though one had been working for Buslink for about 16 years," Pett says.

Pett, whose career history includes several roles managing people's training and employment skills, quickly got to work to improve the company's standards.

"We put an expression of interest out and selected four people we knew to be good drivers. You can't train someone else unless you're able to do it yourself."

"The problem was, two of those drivers had been here for less than 12 months at the time, and we had drivers who'd been here 20 years. So you can imagine what that's like," he laughs: "Who are you to train me? You've been here five minutes!"

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Pett and the driver trainers wore down this resistance by compiling a best practice, competency based drivers' manual of Buslink's procedures and policies.

"Before, we used to just go out and teach them and we didn't really have a lesson plan to follow, we just did it based on what we knew they had to do," Pett says.

"The big difference now is that they accept we need to do certain things, because they've had input to developing these documents, these driver training plans."

They developed the manual in the six months it took to complete the Certificate IV. To take a C class driver to school run ready is now a "32-page process".

"So this document, which allows us to provide evidence (of competency), it's in the lesson plan, and we tick it off as we do it and we can't miss anything."

"We have procedures to a very high standard, and we teach people to be able to meet those standards, and until they do, they can't go out and drive a school bus."

The school bus route is something of a benchmark for driver training because of the special responsibilities and challenges that come with its young passengers.

Yet the school run can only offer 20 hours of work a week, so Buslink routinely loses as much as half of its workforce every 12 months to higher paid jobs.

And Buslink's limited-hours, government-capped income is not the only barrier to attraction and retention: drivers must have at least a C class licence to begin with, transport to get to work – which starts before the buses do – and reliability.

"Regardless of what happens, the buses have got to go out," Pett says. "We never miss a run because at the end of the day we don't get paid if we don't do the run."

So as much as the training regime has a strict safety and compliance focus, it's a necessary measure to ensure a steady supply of qualified, licensed drivers.

Pett says training costs Buslink a considerable amount per year, so it was "good we got the National Workforce Development Fund application sorted out".

"The Transport and Logistics Industry Skills Council were supportive of the whole thing, they encouraged us to do it, which was good because sometimes these things are hard to do, the amount of time and effort you have to put in."

Buslink, in operation since 1988, is the Northern Territory's largest private bus company specialising in public, school and charter bus services. The company has sister operations in the Queensland regions of Gladstone and Sunshine Coast and Mildura in Victoria.



Locally owned

The company covers about 60 percent of Darwin's local service, including most school runs, offering both full-time and part-time employment opportunities.



Experience counts

Buslink senior management have collectively over 100 years experience operating buses in the Northern Territory.



NWDF value

Total value of NWDF program to date:
\$20,000.



Where they are

Around 240 people in the Northern Territory are employed by Buslink with a further 150 in Queensland and 80 in Victoria.

For more information about how TLISC can assist your enterprise in accessing the National Workforce Development Fund, please contact our Workforce Development team:

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