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YORKE PENINSULA HEALTH BUS

Mr GRIFFITHS (Goyder) (15:24): I wish to speak briefly this afternoon about the Yorke Peninsula Health Bus. I acknowledge that the fact that the health bus exists is because it is an initiative of the government, and I am grateful for that. It has been under a trial arrangement since 6 August last year, and that trial was extended until 30 June, but there is an enormous amount of indecision, it appears, as to what is going to occur in the future.

Yorke Peninsula people are very alarmed about this. It is actually on the front page of the local newspaper this week with some comments from me. It is very alarming because, in the period since the trial first started on 6 August, about a thousand people have used it. A thousand people might not sound like a lot, but for a thousand people who have to travel for hours and hours from their homes on Yorke Peninsula (all the way from Marion Bay to the Copper Coast area) to go to Adelaide for appointments, which is what the purpose of the health bus is, it is important for them that it continue.

At the moment with the seemingly apparent centralisation of specialist health services, more and more people, instead of being able to have their health needs serviced at Yorketown or Maitland or the Wallaroo Public Hospital or the private hospitals, have to go to Adelaide for specialist appointments. A lot of these are older people who do not have the ability to actually transport themselves there. Being on a larger-scale bus is nearly impossible for them, so they have to use the opportunity that the smaller-scale health bus provides, especially as a carer can travel with them at no charge, too.

To now be told that while an evaluation is actually taking place there is no surety of its continuing is of great concern. I am grateful for the fact that Yorke Peninsula was used as a trial for potentially rolling this out across the state. I think the trial has worked pretty well and, while it is possible that it will be used as a template to roll out to other parts of regional South Australia, to be told that there is a great chance that our program will stop at 30 June and then have to recommence (if indeed it does start again when the service begins in other areas of the state) is frustrating.

I have written to the minister about this. A letter that I wrote to him in April this year contains a couple of really great comments from a constituent who has spoken to my electorate office that I would like to insert in *Hansard*. The letter states:

It was heartening to receive a letter the other day from a lady who has accessed the service frequently during the trial and to hear of how it has helped her enormously in attending specialist appointments. Her comments included high praise for the drivers who she describes as 'so kind and helpful' and 'as an aged pensioner makes our Drs or specialist appointments more bearable.'

If we do not have the health bus available, we will again have to rely on volunteer drivers, who will use their own car or the vehicles of YP Community Transport and Services. This will mean taking a far smaller number of people in multiple vehicles, so, to me, it seems that, in terms of economy and efficiency, continuing the health bus service is the obvious way to go.

Since I have written that letter to the minister, and another one confirming my support for the bus service, we have had a letter back from the minister agreeing to a deputation from YP Community Transport and Services and me to meet with him on 17 June. We were hopeful that an announcement was going to be made last week about the future of the YP health bus, but now we are told that that has to be held back.

A lot of my constituents want to be quite outspoken about their opinion on the indecision and delays in announcing an extension of the service. We are trying to do the right thing; we are trying to build positive

relationships with the minister. The minister has allowed us a chance to meet with him next week and, while we are going to put a very strong case, it is frustrating to us that this service, which has had 1,000 people use it in about seven months and which obviously has proven itself to be viable in the longer term, does not have that ready demonstration of support from the government already.

It is a cost-efficient way of doing things. It is certainly far more financially viable, I would presume, than the Patients Assistance Transport Scheme that provides a direct reimbursement for people who use their own cars. It is a lot better than getting taxis to come over and pick up people. The health bus allows people to have appointments focused around the middle of the day between 10 o'clock in the morning until about 2.30 in the afternoon. There is a lounge where they can relax in between appointments or wait for the bus to come to pick them up and take them home. They can watch television there, and have a shower there. It seems as though everything is actually working together. There are doctors on the peninsula making appointments based around the times that the health bus will actually operate, so the doctors' practices are working well. The service is proving itself. People want to use it, and all we need is the dollars to be committed.

I think that the health bus is an example of the future needs of regional South Australia. If we are going to have Port Lincoln, Whyalla, Berri and Mount Gambier as a focus for health services in regional areas, it is important that people who do not live in those areas have the opportunity to travel to Adelaide for their specialist appointments. As the population in regional South Australia ages, the ability for them to drive themselves will diminish, so it is important that the health bus continues, and I offer my full support for it.

Time expired.