

## CODE OF PRACTICE

**Code Title:** **RURAL SCHOOL BUS ROUTES AND BUS STOPS**

**Reason for Code:** To ensure the location, design and operation of school bus routes and stops in rural areas are determined, assessed and approved in a consistent manner.

**Introduction:** Council is defined as a Roads Authority under the *Roads Act 1993*. The guidelines in this code were developed to assist Council with the location, design and operation of school bus routes and bus stops in rural areas.

This Code provides a framework for the assessment and approval process as well as the responsibilities of Council, Bus Operators, the NSW Ministry of Transport as well as Parental responsibility.

The scope of the Code is intended to address the bus journey only and not how school children get to and from the bus stop safely.

**Policy Details:** This Policy covers:

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##### 1. Introduction

###### 1.1 General

This Code has been prepared to assist Council with the location, design and operation of school bus routes and stops in rural areas. A rural area for the purposes of this Code is any location outside of a built-up area.

The Code has been prepared in consultation with the NSW Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) and wherever possible existing RMS standards have been incorporated in the document. Where an RMS standard is not available, the appropriate Australian Standard has been utilised.

The information contained in this document is a guide only and should be used together with established risk management techniques to ensure that all the factors of each rural school bus route and/or bus stop location are considered appropriately.

###### 1.2 Scope

This Code is intended to address the bus journey only. It is the parents or guardians' responsibility to ensure that their child gets to and from the bus stop safely.

###### 1.3 Responsibilities for Rural School Bus Routes and Bus Stops in NSW

###### 1.3.1 Assessment and Approval Process for Rural School Bus Routes

The assessment and approval of a new rural school bus route or the extension of an existing route is the responsibility of the local road authority and in most cases, this will be the local council.

Once the road authority assesses and approves a route, the NSW Ministry of Transport then makes a decision as to whether the route will be approved for funding.

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All requests for a new rural school bus route, or an extension of an existing route should be lodged with the local road authority either by the bus operator or the funding authority (*See Appendix One for a sample Standard Application Form*).

Once the request is lodged, it is best practice to refer the matter to the Local Traffic Committee to discuss and make recommendations. Where the road is a classified road the request must be referred to the Local Traffic Committee.

In determining the suitability of a route, the road authority and the Local Traffic Committee should consider the route's proposed use, the ability of the bus to manoeuvre and where required to turn around. It is recommended that approval be given for the largest bus that can be used on the route, rather than just the bus proposed by the applicant, this will allow the operator greater flexibility in the determination of the vehicle to be used on any particular day.

If approval is given for a route that includes a road that is not all-weather, it should be noted on the approval conditions. Wherever possible an alternative route should also be identified.

Where the proposed route is not an all-weather road, the onus is on the bus operator to determine whether the road surface is safe for use depending on conditions at the time.

After the assessment is finalised, advice on the matter should be conveyed to the NSW Ministry of Transport (with copies forwarded to the bus operator where necessary). This will enable the Ministry to decide the best option for a proposed service.

### **1.3.2 Approval Process for Rural School Bus Stops**

In NSW, the approval of bus stop locations is regulated by the *Passenger Transport (Bus Services) Regulation 2007*, Section 104 (1) and (2). The Regulation states:

- (1) *The Traffic for NSW (TfNSW) may appoint bus stops, to be indicated by signs erected or displayed with the approval of the roads authority\* for the road concerned and on which the words "BUS STOP", "BUS STAND" or "BUS ZONE", or some suitable pictorial representation, appear.*
- (2) *An operator of a bus service may appoint bus stops, but only in accordance with a prior written approval of the roads authority\* for the road concerned.*

*\* as defined in the NSW Roads Act (1993), Section 7*

The road authority is therefore, the sole approval body for the location of all school bus stops, rural or otherwise, within their jurisdiction. All requests for new rural school bus stops on local or unclassified regional roads must be directed to the local road authority; in most cases, this will be the local council (*See Appendix One for a sample Standard Application Form*).

Similar to the requirements for bus routes, it is considered best practice to refer the matter to the Local Traffic Committee to discuss and make recommendations. Where the road is a classified road the request must be referred to RMS.

Bus operators may not designate new bus stops without the approval of the local road authority. Operators should note that stopping at unapproved locations is a breach of the operator's contract conditions.

After the assessment is finalised, advice on the matter should be conveyed to the NSW Ministry of Transport (with copies forwarded to the bus operator where necessary). This will enable the Ministry to decide the best option for a proposed service.

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### **1.3.3 Road Authority Responsibilities**

It is the responsibility of the road authority to assess all rural school bus routes and bus stops and where appropriate approve those routes and stops for use, after consultation with the Local Traffic Committee.

Applications for approval may come from a bus operator or directly from the funding authority.

### **1.3.4 Bus Operator Responsibilities**

Bus operators must ensure that they obtain approval for all routes and stops from the local road authority prior to lodging an application for funding with the NSW Ministry of Transport.

Bus operators must only operate on approved bus routes and approved bus stops using a bus of approved size. The operation of a bus on a non-approved route or to a non-approved stop may be a breach of the contract conditions the operator has with the NSW Ministry of Transport.

Where the approved route is not an all-weather road, the onus is on the bus operator to determine whether the road surface is safe for use on any particular day or at any particular time.

Bus operators are responsible for ensuring that bus users and their parents/ guardians are aware of the Traffic Management Plan for the bus stop that they utilise and that they adhere to the requirements of the Plan when using the bus stop.

### **1.3.5 Parental Responsibilities**

It is the parents or guardians' responsibility to ensure that their child gets to and from the bus stop safely.

At a rural school bus stop, parents are responsible for their child prior to boarding and directly after disembarking the bus. While on the bus, the child is the responsibility of the bus operator.

Parents should familiarise themselves with the Traffic Management Plan for their child's bus stop to ensure that they understand where the child should and should not walk, wait, board and disembark from the bus and where the designated car parking area is located.

### **1.3.6 NSW Ministry of Transport Responsibilities**

The NSW Ministry of Transport is responsible for the funding of the school bus system. The Ministry contracts individual bus operators to provide services in both rural and non-rural locations for the purpose of school transport.

The NSW Ministry of Transport only contracts bus operators on receiving proof of an approved route and/or stop/s from the local road authority.

Once that evidence has been noted, the Ministry will determine whether or not it will fund the proposed service.

If the Ministry is funding the proposed service, then the route and all the bus stops on the route that have been approved by the local road authority must be included in the service contract with the bus operator.

## **2. Assessment of Rural School Bus Routes**

### **2.1 General**

It is the parents or guardians' responsibility to ensure that their child gets to and from the bus stop safely. The bus route should be safe for the operation of the school bus that the operator has nominated for use on the route.

In assessing any potential site for a rural school bus stop, the road authority should always apply sound risk management assessment techniques and procedures.

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## 2.2 Determining the suitability of a route for a school bus

When determining the suitability of a proposed school bus route the following factors should be taken into account:

- Road geometry
- Pavement width
- Pavement surface
- Carrying capability of the route (bus size)
- Grade
- Climatic conditions e.g. fog
- If the route is used by more than two school bus services, in either the same direction or opposing directions at the same time of day
- If the route is highly used by heavy vehicles, tourist vehicles etc.
- General traffic volumes

Assessment should determine the maximum sized bus that can be used on the route (the route's carrying capacity). This should be advised to the operator who will then have the flexibility to run any size bus up to the advised carrying capacity of the route.

Road authority approvals should inform the operator that the use of a vehicle in excess of the advised carrying capacity will impact on the route's approval.

## 2.3 Signage

Where guidelines have been met, signage is not required on rural school bus routes. It is not intended that Rural School Bus warning signs be used to justify unsafe school bus routes.

## 2.4 Bus Turning Areas

The school bus turnaround area should be in a location where the safety of the bus occupants and other road users are not compromised.

The road in the vicinity of the turnaround area should provide sufficient visibility to approaching drivers and should be in good condition. It is best practice that a bus turn be located separate from a bus stop. This is so that children are not waiting on the ground when buses are turning around or manoeuvring.

A school bus turn around area along a school bus route may be signed, where for safety reasons, it is necessary to warn motorists of the possible presence/operation of the school bus on the road. The school bus turn around sign should not be used to justify an unsafe school bus turn around location.

Where bus turnaround areas cannot be achieved within the road reserve the bus operator must seek approval from the NSW Ministry of Transport for an alternative turnaround area such as on private property.

## 3. Assessment of Rural School Bus Stops

### 3.1 General

The locations of rural school bus stops should be carefully evaluated to optimise the safety of school children using the facility as well as for other road users.

Generally, rural school bus stops should be located and designed to:

- a) maximise the safety of school children and other road users, and
- b) minimise the interference to traffic flow on the road system.

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In assessing a site for its suitability as a bus stop the assessment should be undertaken from both sides of the road. This will ensure that in situations where the child may be required to cross the road either coming home or going to school, all factors are taken into consideration.

In assessing any potential site for a rural school bus stop, the road authority should always apply sound risk management assessment techniques and procedures.

### 3.2 Categories for Rural School Bus Stops

In rural areas the usage levels of individual sites can vary greatly, therefore it is impossible and impractical to have a “one size fits all” approach. For this reason, three categories of sites have been identified, each utilising a different set of assessment criteria. The categories are as follows:

- **Single User Site:** a location that picks up and sets down only the members of a single family. Single user sites are likely to be transient in nature, meeting the needs of a single family, possibly for a short amount of time.
- **Multi-User Site:** a location where the stop caters for the needs of more than one family. Multi-user sites are more permanent locations, which enable groups of families to meet in a common location to access either one or a number of different bus services.
- **Transfer Point:** a bus interchange area where two or more buses meet to exchange students. A transfer point may also be a multi-user site. A transfer point is an off-road facility. It would normally be a permanent location that enables the safe exchange of students from one bus operator to another. It is also likely to be the permanent disembarkation point for a number of students; therefore, it will also need to cater for those students whose journey terminates at that location.

### 3.3 Assessing a Rural School Bus Stop

#### 3.3.1 Fixed Criteria

This Code has identified a set of criteria for each category of site that should be considered in the assessment process. The criteria appear in the individual Assessment Matrices on pages 11, 12 and 13 of this Guide. The criteria are as follows:

- Sight Distance
- Provision of a Lay-by (access and egress for buses)
- Car Parking
- Waiting Area
- Safe Pedestrian Movement
- Traffic Management Plan

Each of the criteria is to be assessed against the volume of traffic on the road and the speed of that traffic. The Matrices also includes an allowance for Heavy Vehicles. Where an appropriate standard applies this has been included in the Matrices.

#### 3.3.2 Heavy Vehicles

The number of Heavy Vehicles utilising the route will also impact on the site’s suitability. This impact could occur in the following ways:

##### 3.3.2.1 Frequency of Usage

The number of vehicles using the route will impact on the safety of bus movements and on the safety of the stop itself. Heavy vehicle movements may occur on a regular basis or may be seasonally based e.g. harvest related. In assessing frequency of movement, it is recommended that the determination should be based on the highest level of frequency. Observation studies may assist in determining frequency of movements.

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### 3.3.2.2 Size of the Vehicles

Along with frequency, the size of the heavy vehicles utilising the route should also be considered in making the assessment.

### 3.3.2.1 Heavy Vehicle Allowance

The Assessment Matrix suggests the use of a Heavy Vehicle Allowance during the assessment process. The Allowance is a provision to increase a Sight Distance in order to provide sufficient distance for a heavy vehicle driver on an approach with priority to observe a vehicle entering the road, decelerate and stop prior to a point of conflict.

### 3.3.3 Variable Criteria

This Code recognises that there are variable criteria that apply to each site and that each has the potential to impact on the appropriateness of the site for use as a rural school bus stop. The level of impact of these variable factors will determine the response to be made by the road authority with regard to the appropriateness of a proposed site.

The variable criteria should be taken into account in the risk assessment and should be assessed against speed and traffic volumes. The criteria are as follows:

- Road geometry
- Pavement and road reserve width
- Pavement surface
- Size of the bus using the road
- Grade
- Climatic conditions e.g. fog

### 3.3.4 Bus Stops at Intersections

From the bus passenger and pedestrian safety viewpoint, a bus stop located on the departure side of the intersection is safer than one located on the approach side. In this position, the bus does not block the view of traffic controls and other intersection traffic.

Other advantages of the departure side bus stop include:

- Reduced bus conflicts with vehicles turning left from the through road,
- Less restriction to sight distances, and
- Shorter length requirements for bus stop approaches.

On very low volume roads, a bus stop on an intersection may be appropriate subject to the outcome of a risk assessment.

### 3.3.5 Frequency of Stops

The number of times a bus has to stop along a section of road should also be considered. It is not a safe practice for a bus to pull on and off the road too frequently. It is, therefore recommended that where there are a number of single sites within a reasonable distance of each other that the road authority should consider amalgamating the single sites into one multi-user site to be located at the safest point along the route.

## 3.4 Suggested Standards and Definitions for Rural School Bus Stops

In determining the assessment criteria for rural school bus stops, this Code utilises wherever possible, established RMS standards. Where this is not possible, an appropriate Australian Standard has been utilised.

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### 3.4.1 Traffic Volumes

Traffic volumes stated in the Assessment Matrices are based on the total number of vehicle movements per day in both directions.

### 3.4.2 Speed

The Assessment Matrices assess on the basis of Low Speed and High Speed usage. These terms are defined below, this Guideline uses 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speeds:

- Low Speed – a speed under 70 kilometres per hour
- High Speed – a speed of 70 kilometres per hour or higher

### 3.4.3 Sight Distances

The assessment of sight distances should always be undertaken in both directions unless circumstances indicate otherwise. In order to provide guidance as to the determination of sight distances this Guideline utilises the values contained in the *Austroads Guide to Road Design – Part 4A: Unsignalised and Signalised Intersections*. While these definitions have not been specifically developed to deal with bus stops, they have been deemed to be the most appropriate measures available for use because they provide a recognised and established basis for determining sight distances in NSW.

#### 3.4.3.1 Stopping Sight Distances

Stopping sight distance is the minimum distance required by an average driver of a vehicle travelling at a given speed to react and stop before reaching an object in the vehicle's path. The Stopping Site Distance can be assessed using the **Approach Sight Distance Table** provided in the *Austroads Guide*, the table is reproduced below.

#### 3.4.3.2 Safe Intersection Site Distances

This provides sufficient distance for a driver on an approach with priority to observe a vehicle entering the road, decelerate and stop prior to a point of conflict.

The Safe Intersection Site Distance can be assessed using the **Safe Intersection Sight Distance Table** provided in the *Austroads Guide*, the table is reproduced below.

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Table 3.4.1- Intersection Sight Distance for level pavement

<b>Design Speed</b>	<b>Approach Sight Distance (ASD)</b>	<b>Safe Intersection Sight Distance (SISD)</b>
40	40	73
50	55	97
60	73	123
70	92	151
80	114	181
90	139	214
100	165	248
110	193	285
120	224	324

Source: Austroads Guide to Road Design – Part 4A: Unsignalised and signalised Intersections (2010)

**Notes:**

1. Refer to Austroads guide for details regarding the procedures for measurement of the above sight distances.
2. For grade corrections to ASD and SISD, see below Table 3.4.2 - Grade corrections to ASD and SISD.

<b>Design Speed (major road) (km/h)</b>	<b>Correction (m)</b>							
	<b>Upgrade</b>				<b>Downgrade</b>			
	<b>2%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>40</b>	-1	-2	-2	-3	1	2	3	5
<b>50</b>	-1	-3	-4	-5	2	3	5	8
<b>60</b>	-2	-4	-6	-7	2	5	8	11
<b>70</b>	-3	-5	-8	-10	3	7	11	15
<b>80</b>	-4	-7	-10	-13	4	9	14	20
<b>90</b>	-5	-9	-13	-16	5	11	18	25
<b>100</b>	-6	-11	-16	-20	6	14	22	31
<b>110</b>	-7	-13	-19	-24	8	17	26	38
<b>120</b>	-8	-16	-22	-29	9	20	31	45

Source: Austroads Guide to Road Design – Part 4A: Unsignalised and signalised Intersections (2010)

**Note: Corrected sight distances should be rounded up to the nearest 5m.**

**3.4.4 Shade/shelter at Bus Stops**

Shade or shelter is desirable but not essential. Road authorities should assess the need for shade/shelter on an individual basis. It may be appropriate to include shelter at transfer point sites because of their permanent nature.

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### 3.4.5 Pedestrian Access

Pedestrian access for the purpose of this Code refers to the ability of students to move safely around the site and to embark and disembark from the bus.

It is the parents or guardians responsibility to ensure that their child gets to and from the bus stop safely.

### 3.4.6 Car Parking

Car parking would normally be required at multi-use and transfer point sites. There should be sufficient space to accommodate the number of families using the site. The car parking area should be clear of through traffic movement and placed to ensure that there is no interference with the movement of the bus.

### 3.4.7 Provision of Lay-by

Lay-bys suggested in the Assessment Matrices comply with **Council standards**. The lay-by provision is intended to accommodate the acceleration and deceleration needs of buses at bus stops, and where appropriate the required access and egress to a transit point site.

### 3.4.8 All Weather Surface

An all weather surface is required in all instances for the bus stand area, i.e. the area where the bus will stop and children will either embark or disembark and where the bus will leave and enter the site.

### 3.4.9 Traffic Management Plans

A Traffic Management Plan should be prepared for each approved bus stop location and provided to the bus operator for distribution to users, parents and guardians.

## 3.5 Signage at Rural School Bus Stops

Where guidelines have been met, signage should not be required. It is not intended that Rural School Bus warning signs be used to justify unsafe school bus stopping areas.

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### 3.6 Assessment Criteria Matrix for Rural School Bus Stops

#### 3.6.1 Single User Site Assessment Criteria

	Low Volume Traffic <100		Medium Vol. Traffic >100 < 1000		High Volume Traffic >1000		<b>Heavy Vehicle Allowance</b>
	Low Speed	High Speed	Low Speed	High Speed	Low Speed	High Speed	
<b>Sight Distance</b>	Stopping Sight Distance	Stopping Sight Distance	Stopping Sight Distance	Safe Intersection Sight Distance	Safe Intersection Sight Distance	Safe Intersection Sight Distance	+20%
<b>Provision of Lay-by</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	As per RTA Road Design Guideline Section 3.4	As per RTA Road Design Guideline Section 3.4	As per RTA Road Design Guideline Section 3.4	N/A
<b>Car Parking</b>	No	No	No	No	No	No	N/A
<b>Waiting Area (For Students)</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
<b>Safe Pedestrian Movement</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
<b>Traffic Management Plan</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A

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3.6.2 Multi User Site Assessment Criteria

	Low Volume Traffic<100		Medium Vol. Traffic >100< 1000		High Volume Traffic>1000		
	Low Speed	High Speed	Low Speed	High Speed	Low Speed	High Speed	<b>Heavy Vehicle Allowance</b>
<b>Sight Distance</b>	Stopping Sight Distance	Stopping Sight Distance	Stopping Sight Distance	Safe Intersection Sight Distance	Safe Intersection Sight Distance	Safe Intersection Sight Distance	+20%
<b>Provision of Lay-by</b>	As per RTA Road Design Guideline Section 3.4	As per RTA Road Design Guideline Section 3.4	As per RTA Road Design Guideline Section 3.4	As per RTA Road Design Guideline Section 3.4	As per RTA Road Design Guideline Section 3.4	As per RTA Road Design Guideline Section 3.4	N/A
<b>Car Parking**</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
<b>Waiting Area (For Students)</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
<b>Safe Pedestrian Movement</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
<b>Traffic Management Plan</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A

\*\* For very low traffic volume roads it may not be necessary to provide a lay-by and a car parking area at the site, subject to the outcome of a risk assessment.

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**3.6.3 Transfer Point Assessment Criteria**

	Low Volume Traffic <100		Medium Vol. Traffic >100< 1000		High Volume Traffic >1000		<b>Heavy Vehicle Allowance</b>
	Low Speed	High Speed	Low Speed	High Speed	Low Speed	High Speed	
<b>Sight Distance</b>	Stopping Sight Distance	Stopping Sight Distance	Stopping Sight Distance	Safe Intersection Sight Distance	Safe Intersection Sight Distance	Safe Intersection Sight Distance	+20%
<b>Access and egress for buses</b>	Provision of lay-by as per RTA Road Design Guidelines Section 3.4 and sufficient to cover the number of buses using the location	Provision of lay-by as per RTA Road Design Guidelines Section 3.4 and sufficient to cover the number of buses using the location	Provision of lay-by as per RTA Road Design Guidelines Section 3.4 and sufficient to cover the number of buses using the location	Provision of lay-by as per RTA Road Design Guidelines Section 3.4 and sufficient to cover the number of buses using the location	Off	Off	N/A
<b>Safe Pedestrian Movement</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
<b>Waiting Area (For Students)</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
<b>Traffic Management Plan</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A

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**Part Four Sample Application for Approval for a Rural School Bus Route or Rural School Bus Stop**

**APPLICANT DETAILS**

Applicant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Bus Company Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**REQUEST FOR A RURAL SCHOOL BUS ROUTE**

Road Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Anticipated Number of Stops on Route: \_\_\_\_\_ Anticipated Number of Users: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Bus to be used on Route: \_\_\_\_\_

Passenger Capacity: \_\_\_\_\_ Length: \_\_\_\_\_

If the proposed route is not an all-weather road, please nominate the proposed alternative route for the service:  
\_\_\_\_\_

**REQUEST FOR A RURAL SCHOOL BUS STOP**

Is the proposed stop on an existing approved bus route? Yes No

Road Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Rural Address for Proposed Stop: \_\_\_\_\_

Anticipated Number of Users: \_\_\_\_\_ Anticipated Ages of the Users: \_\_\_\_\_

Where are the closest bus stops immediately before and immediately after the proposed stop?

*(please provide the rural addresses and the estimated distance between the stops):*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Will the pick up and drop off points be on the same side or different sides of the road? *(please circle):*

Same Side

Different Side

Will users have to cross the road to access the bus stop? *(please circle for each time of day):*

Mornings Yes/No

Afternoons Yes/No

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Responsible Officer:	Director Infrastructure Services	Rural School Bus Routes and Bus Stops Code of Practice			
Min No.	13/272	Report No:	O13/56	Effective Date:	10 Sept 2013
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