

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

March 24, 2009

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Transportation Discussion Paper

ORIGINATOR: T. Parker, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE

STAFF: Kelly Hehn, Lorne Parker

RECOMMENDATION

That submission of the following report as the Board's response to the ASBA's Transportation Task Force Discussion Guide, be approved.

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TRUSTEE REQUEST #193, MARCH 10, 2009 (TRUSTEE ESSLINGER): THAT THE TRANSPORTATION DISCUSSION PAPER BE PLACED ON THE NEXT CONFERENCE COMMITTEE MEETING AGENDA AND THAT THE ADMINISTRATION PREPARE A RECOMMENDED RESPONSE: In response to the five pressure points which were identified in the discussion guide, the following information is provided.

Driver recruitment and retention has been the singularly most problematic issue for Edmonton Public Schools transportation services in recent years. The issue has continued to escalate up to and including February 2009 and has resulted in the most negative impacts on transportation operations. In acknowledging that the district uses contractors exclusively, and that many districts run their own fleet operations, full support for any and all measures which address driver issues is possible in the event that both private and public carrier measures are applied equitably.

The 2.4 kilometer has been inaccurately referred to as a walk limit. The statutory requirement is a clearly defined distance whereby transportation services must be provided if the distance to school exceeds 2.4 kilometers. The School Act provides no directives as to the means of transportation or commute for students who reside less than 2.4 kilometers from their designated school. Recent funding increases have not kept pace with the significant increases in costs. A decrease from 2.4 kilometers to a lower distance threshold would only be supportable if there was a corresponding or exponential increase to funding.

School Choice is supported by the District, as evidenced through the 16 alternative programs and other unfunded transportation options which are currently provided. The funding available for supporting school choice is non-existent in the current funding formula model,

and creates issues in terms of escalating user fees to cover the shortfall. These user fees become a counter-productive necessity, in order to cover costs, and may be a contrarian challenge to the concept of school choice.

The current allocation structures available for use do not provide all possible flexibilities to provide efficient services and valued services. Specific examples of this include the forfeiture of funding on yellow buses which mix Special and Regular transportation on the same yellow bus, as this will suggest that the students with special requirements are actually capable of riding regular buses. The provision of Kindergarten Noon Service, non-language alternative programs, grandfathering and other temporary mitigation measures are not provided for or acknowledged. Due to Edmonton Public Schools providing special services to a large number of Special Needs riders, the most impactful issue is the narrow interpretation accorded to students who require these higher level and higher cost services. An example of the narrow interpretations is that the higher level of funding for special transportation services is only available for students coded as severe. The simplistic interpretation of a student's transportation needs creates an onerous situation for a district to compile and report information on an annual basis.

Transportation Fees are the result of a shortfall in funding, or an overprovision of services, or a combination of both. Edmonton Public Schools can acknowledge both the fact that services which exceed the requirements of the School Act are offered in the District, and that costs associated with all types of transportation are exceeding the recent increases in funding. As an example of these increases, Public Transit costs in Edmonton will have increased by more than 35 per cent between 2008 and 2010. The issue of equitable access to schools and programs is often being tied to the costs associated with transportation to these sites.

KH:gm

Attachment I – ASBA Transportation Task Force Discussion Guide



ASBA Transportation Task Force

DISCUSSION GUIDE

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

DIRECTORS:

Bev Esslinger – Chair
Lynda Akers
Serafino Scarpino
Jackie Swainson

ZONE REPRESENTATIVES:

Zone 1	Sharilyn Anderson	<i>(Peace Wapiti School Division No. 76)</i>
Zone 2/3	Judy Muir	<i>(Northern Gateway Regional Division No. 10)</i>
Zone 4	Colleen Butler	<i>(Chinook's Edge School Division No. 73)</i>
Zone 5	Karen Harries	<i>(Golden Hills School Division No. 75)</i>
Zone 6	Norma Peters	<i>(Horizon School Division No. 67)</i>

TRANSPORTATION REPRESENTATIVES:

Debbie Hunter
 Manager, Transportation Services *(Edmonton Catholic School District)*

Leigh McDonald
 Director, Transportation Services *(Grande Yellowhead Regional Division No. 35)*

ASBA STAFF SUPPORT:

Scott McCormack, Manager, Special Initiatives

Building from the work already completed in creating the ASBA Transportation Report ("At the Breaking Point: Alberta's Student Transportation System") the ASBA Transportation Task Force has met with zone representatives to create this discussion guide. This guide is intended to help facilitate discussions at the school board level on the issues identified in the report. Though this guide will provide a common basis for all school boards to consider these issues, there is no desire to limit the discussions or potential feedback to the committee.

All feedback provided to the ASBA Task Force will be collated for analysis and consideration by the Task Force members and ultimately, the ASBA Board of Directors. The ASBA Board of Directors seeks to ensure all boards have been heard and that opportunity for input has been

afforded to all. The feedback received will form an integral foundation for strategic plans developed to address the student transportation system.

PROCESS: *(as was discussed in the presentations made by this Task Force at your zone meetings this winter)*

1. Zone Representatives working with this Task Force *(as identified above)* will be bringing this discussion guide to the zone meetings for distribution and to answer any procedural questions **(mid January, 2009)**
2. From the zone meetings, the guide will be distributed to individual boards **(early February, 2009)**
3. Individual boards will have the opportunity to review the guide and in engage in related discussions with the purpose of providing feedback to the Task Force
4. Feedback will be returned by individual boards **to their respective Zone Representative (end of March, 2009)**
5. Zone Representatives will bring feedback to the Task Force for review **(early April, 2009)**

FOR DISCUSSION:

In considering the transportation report, the following five pressure points were identified:

1. **Driver recruitment and retention**
2. **The 2.4 kilometre walk limit standard**
3. **School Choice and its impact on transportation**
4. **Concerns regarding the current allocation structures**
5. **Transportation fees**

The purposes of your discussion will be to attempt to provide potential solutions for these pressure points, and any other issues deemed a priority by your jurisdiction.

The Task Force has provide some potential solutions at the end of this guide for your consideration and to further assist in generating discussion and feedback.

To assist in facilitating this effort, the Task Force has identified the following 'pillars' of the system:

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|------------------------|------------------|
| • Safety | • Time |
| • Collaboration | • Choice |
| • Environment | • Funding |

These pillars have been provided without affording any relative weighting within them. They are simply identified as key variables which might assist in guiding your discussions.

The following identifies the pillars along with factors for consideration. Feel free to review these pillars and provide feedback, however, we prefer that you use this information to focus your discussions with the objective of providing solutions.

Safety - *contemplating safety issues as it pertains to the bus, students and their walking and waiting environments, driver competency and supervisory demands*

➤ Physical Geography	➤ Vehicle safety & age of vehicle
➤ Students' wait time	➤ Driver recruitment/retention
➤ 2.4 km walk limit	➤ Personal safety of students and drivers
➤ Distance (students to bus stops & route distances)	➤ Supervision (students on bus & waiting for bus)
➤ Climate (pertaining to child attire and need for bus regulated climates)	

Time - *contemplating time as a factor for scheduling, staffing, and operation, its impact on students, staff, the bus and the environment*

➤ Reasonable time on bus	➤ Size of the bus
➤ Fuel and operating costs	➤ Environmental impact
➤ Coordination of field trips	➤ Driver retention
➤ Special needs students	➤ Behavioural students
➤ Staggered school start times	➤ Staffing considerations
➤ School of choice and impact to ride time	➤ Contractual obligations
➤ Safety of children due to extended ride times	➤ Stress of collecting students and coordinating pick-up and drop-off times
➤ Weather/climate/road conditions and traffic implications	

Collaboration - *contemplating implications of collaboration between boards*

➤ Extra funding involved	➤ Efficiencies within the system
➤ Common sense factor (reduce overlap)	➤ Competition for students
➤ Protection of students (ie. catholic, francophone, etc.)	➤ Collaboration/partnership between transportation departments

Choice - *contemplating implications of providing programming and school choices*

➤ 2.4 km walk limit	➤ Maintain boundaries otherwise unaffordable
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➤ Competition within a jurisdiction	➤ Competition between jurisdictions
➤ Reduce services or increase fees; fees charged significant to cover, but not exceed, the cost	➤ Parental expectations (reasonable or attainable)
➤ Motivation (programming, convenience, transportation, childcare, etc.)	➤ Utilization of private vehicle preferred to school bus
➤ Varying school calendars between schools/jurisdictions	

Environment - *contemplating issues pertaining to environmental protection*

➤ Availability of fuel and type of fuel	➤ Overlapping routes
➤ Traffic volume (private and school related traffic)	➤ Air quality (internal and external to educational facilities)
➤ Impact of anti-idling bylaws	➤ Environmental impact of transportation – school buses, private vehicles, impact on drivers and students
➤ Relationship between child attire, climate and need for bus regulated climates	

Funding - *overarching issue which the pillars are intended to support*

➤ 2.4 km walk limit	➤ Recruitment/Retention – compensation pressures within the industry
➤ Due to inadequate funding, 58% of jurisdictions have implemented additional fees	➤ Clarity and understanding regarding the direction of formulas; provide input into any decision making related to funding formula
➤ Ensure adequate and equitable funding to address their transportation needs; not seeking equality; desire consideration for varying needs of jurisdictions	➤ Funding formula to be reviewed and tweaked; address the funding formulas; review of rural formula last completed in 1998; review of metro formula not been conducted for some time now
➤ Funding based on the pillars identified; build flexibility into the pillars and provide a funding framework to support these principles	

Potential Solutions:

1. Reduce the walk limit from 2.4 kilometers to 1.6 kilometers.
2. Boards need to ensure sufficient staffing to provide regular and casual drivers to meet their transportation needs. The following steps may be implemented to assist:
 - provide flexibility to permit driver employment beyond age 65
 - permit drivers to bring their young children on their bus
 - provide an honorarium for staff identifying/recruiting drivers
 - extend health benefits and other compensation elements (ie. pension) to drivers
3. Amend the funding formula as follows:
 - increase the threshold for funding a community as a city (ie. from 10,000 to 50,000); conceptually tied to the notion of a community being able to afford to provide a public transportation system
 - variances within a jurisdiction with respect to arriving at equitable density formulas
 - incorporate a time factor in the formula considerations to account for excessive ride-times
 - incorporate a factor into the formula to subsidize additional transportation demands (ie. extra-curricular, field trips, etc.).
 - provide a complete review of the transportation funding formula every 5 years.
4. To the extent the government promotes choice, adequate transportation funding is required.
5. Conduct a review of the special needs transportation funding formula to ensure adequate funding for these transportation needs. Consideration needs to be given where special needs students are transported with other students.
6. Provide sufficient funding to support reasonable ride-times which do not exceed 60 minutes (one way).
7. Government, in collaboration with ASBA:
 - provide recognition, on a provincial level, for driver excellence (similar to teacher excellence, long service, Edwin Parr, etc.)
 - recognize those employers who support their employees in providing transportation services to boards
 - implement a public campaign to promote the value and respectful treatment of drivers

The ASBA Transportation Task Force Members would like to thank you again for your time and efforts.