

## EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

October 13, 2009

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Student Transportation Service Review Findings

ORIGINATOR: T. Parker, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE

STAFF: Richard Coish, Fraser Methuen, Lorne Parker, Michelle Tymchuk, Chris Wright

### INFORMATION

#### Background

Following a formal Request For Proposal process conducted in January 2009, Stantec Consulting Ltd. was contracted to conduct an independent review of transportation services provided by Edmonton Public Schools. Stantec Consulting Ltd. was directed to observe the following parameters:

- Review special transportation and fixed route transportation
- Engage internal stakeholders including schools, carriers and district staff
- Review Edmonton Public Schools service standard policies and eligibility practices
- Review peer transportation systems
- Review Alberta Government Grant formula changes and the implications
- Assess the extent of unfunded services being provided by Edmonton Public Schools

As a result of the review, Stantec Consulting Ltd.'s report (Attachment 1) provides recommendations on:

- The provision of transportation services by Edmonton Public Schools compared with the present and proposed levels of provincial funding
- The process related to establishing school neighbourhoods and Transportation Service Areas
- The extent to which Edmonton Public Schools policies and recommendations outline service standards and eligibility requirements for riders
- Operational practices within the Student Transportation D.U.

#### Future Timelines

The recommendations forwarded by Stantec Consulting Ltd. provide a basis for additional discussion and engagement. Student Transportation will prepare a formal report with recommendations for consideration and endorsement by the Board of Trustees. The projected completion date for the Student Transportation Report is early 2010.

CW:em

ATTACHMENT 1: Stantec Consulting Ltd. Report



**Edmonton Public Schools  
Student Transportation Review**

Prepared for:  
Edmonton Public Schools

Prepared by:  
Stantec Consulting Ltd.

File: 1135-11630

October 2, 2009

## Table of Contents

<b>1.0 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1.1</b>
<b>2.0 EXISTING CONDITIONS .....</b>	<b>2.1</b>
2.1 SPECIAL NEEDS.....	2.1
2.2 REGULAR AND ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS.....	2.3
2.2.1 Regular Program Transportation .....	2.3
2.2.2 Language & Alternative Program Transportation .....	2.4
2.2.3 Edmonton Transit System .....	2.4
2.2.4 Yellow Bus Operations .....	2.5
2.2.5 Alberta Education Grants.....	2.5
<b>3.0 PEER SYSTEMS REVIEW.....</b>	<b>3.1</b>
3.1 SPECIAL NEEDS.....	3.1
3.2 REGULAR AND ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS.....	3.3
3.2.1 Edmonton Catholic .....	3.3
3.2.2 Calgary Catholic .....	3.4
3.2.3 Calgary Public Schools.....	3.4
3.2.4 Other Jurisdictions .....	3.5
<b>4.0 ALBERTA EDUCATION TRANSPORTATION GRANT .....</b>	<b>4.1</b>
4.1 OVERVIEW.....	4.1
4.2 DISTANCE FACTORS.....	4.2
4.3 PROGRAMS OF CHOICE .....	4.3
4.4 SPECIAL NEEDS.....	4.5
<b>5.0 ISSUES - SPECIAL NEEDS TRANSPORTATION.....</b>	<b>5.1</b>
5.1 INTERNAL ISSUES .....	5.1
5.1.1 Special Needs Transportation Policy.....	5.1
5.1.2 Routing & Scheduling .....	5.3
5.1.3 Other Contractor Practices .....	5.4
5.1.4 Customer Service .....	5.4
5.1.5 Other Transportation Modes.....	5.5
5.1.6 Grant Structure and Performance Reviews .....	5.7
5.1.7 On-the-Road Supervision .....	5.8
5.1.8 Behavior Issues .....	5.8
5.2 EXTERNAL ISSUES .....	5.8
5.2.1 Policy on Entitlement for Transportation.....	5.8
5.2.2 Use of Unique Coding System.....	5.9
5.2.3 Need to Better Match Program Capacity .....	5.9
<b>6.0 ISSUES - REGULAR &amp; ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM TRANSPORTATION.....</b>	<b>6.1</b>
6.1 SITES FOR RECEIVING SCHOOLS .....	6.1

# EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## STUDENT TRANSPORTATION REVIEW

6.2	BOUNDARIES FOR ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS .....	6.1
6.2.1	Guidelines for the Drawing of Boundaries Based on Distance or Use of Transportation Zones.....	6.2
6.2.2	Tiered Ride Times and Fee Payments .....	6.3
6.2.3	Use of Congregated Stops .....	6.3
6.3	SERVICE DESIGN GUIDELINES & TARGETS.....	6.3
6.3.1	Walking Distance .....	6.3
6.3.2	Stop Distance .....	6.4
6.3.3	Ride Time and Transfers .....	6.5
6.4	TRANSPORTATION FEES.....	6.6
6.5	OTHER ISSUES .....	6.6
6.5.1	Edmonton Transit System .....	6.6
6.5.2	Technology .....	6.8
6.5.3	Organization .....	6.8
<hr/>		
7.0	KINDERGARTEN TRANSPORTATION .....	7.1
8.0	PERFORMANCE MONITORING .....	8.1
9.0	FUTURE SCENARIOS.....	9.1
9.1	WALKING DISTANCE .....	9.1
9.2	SPECIAL NEEDS.....	9.1
<hr/>		
10.0	RECOMMENDATIONS .....	10.1
10.1	SPECIAL NEEDS - STUDENT TRANSPORTATION IMPLEMENTATION .....	10.1
10.1.1	Transportation Department to Assume Scheduling and Routing for Special Needs .....	10.1
10.1.2	Transportation Department to Pay Contracts Per Special Needs Vehicle... ..	10.1
10.1.3	Transportation Department to Consider Alternative Modes When Appropriate .....	10.2
10.1.4	Customer Service Training .....	10.3
10.1.5	Assume More Proactive Role in Site and Facility Planning .....	10.3
10.1.6	Ensure Identification of District Raised Funds Spent On Transportation.....	10.3
10.1.7	Consider Software Upgrade .....	10.3
10.1.8	Behavior Issues .....	10.3
10.2	SPECIAL NEEDS - EXTERNAL IMPLEMENTATION.....	10.4
10.2.1	Revise Policy, Process and Participants For Determining Entitlement For Transportation.....	10.4
10.2.2	Adopt Provincial Coding for Special Needs Transportation.....	10.4
10.3	SPECIAL NEEDS - OTHER.....	10.5
10.4	REGULAR & ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM - STUDENT TRANSPORTATION IMPLEMENTATION .....	10.5
10.4.1	Transportation Entitlement.....	10.5
10.4.2	Board Approved Service Design Guidelines.....	10.5
10.4.3	Alternative Program Transportation Boundaries.....	10.6
10.4.4	Technology .....	10.6

# EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS STUDENT TRANSPORTATION REVIEW

## Table of Contents

10.4.5	Performance Monitoring .....	10.6
10.4.6	Transportation Fees.....	10.6
10.5	REGULAR & ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS - EXTERNAL IMPLEMENTATION.....	10.7
10.5.1	Receiving Schools .....	10.7
10.5.2	Organization .....	10.7
10.6	REGULAR & ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS - PROVINCIAL IMPLEMENTATION.....	10.7
10.6.1	Provincial Transportation Grants .....	10.7

## List of Tables

Table 3-1	Special Education Peer Comparison - Service.....	3.1
Table 3-2	Regular & Alternative Peer Comparison - Service.....	3.3
Table 3-3	Provincial Transportation Regulations .....	3.5
Table 4-1	Eligible Students and Transported Students 2008 – 2009 (excluding Special Needs) .....	4.3
Table 6-1	Transit Fares for Students Across Canada.....	6.7

## List of Figures

Figure 10-1	Alternative Modes Available in Edmonton .....	10.2
-------------	---	------

APPENDIX A – EPS 2008-2009 STUDENT TRANSPORTATION FEES.....	A.1
---	-----

APPENDIX B – EPS 2009-2010 TRANSPORTATION SERVICE AREA MAPS .....	B.1
---	-----

## **1.0 Introduction**

---

This study was commissioned by Edmonton Public Schools (EPSB) to review their current transportation practises and the impact of potential changes in funding from Alberta Education. Edmonton Public Schools is one of the largest school districts in Canada, and it also offers a unique blend of decentralised decision making and programs of choice with an open boundary enrolment policy. The decentralized decision making and open enrolment initiatives have created stresses on the transportation system, which remains a centralized function and cannot fully serve the open enrolment, alternative program orientation of the district.

This review documents existing conditions, transportation services at key peer systems, and identifies issues with Special Needs and Regular/Alternative Program student transportation at EPSB. Recommendations are included for possible changes and revisions to Board transportation policies and operating practises within the Transportation Department.

The position and proposed responses to the potential changes in grant structures from Alberta Education are based on the best information available. Alberta Education is continuing to examine transportation policy and funding, and the final action by the province may differ from the positions stated in this report.

## **2.0 Existing Conditions**

---

### **2.1 SPECIAL NEEDS**

As of March 2009, Edmonton Public Schools was transporting 3,081 mild, moderate and severe Special Needs students. The majority (about 2,887) were receiving curb to curb service. Curb service means the students are picked up immediately in front of their home, or the closest safe location, and driven to their school. The Block Grant provincial funding formula in place for 2008-2009 provided grants for about 932 severe Special Needs students claimed by EPSB. Under provincial regulations, students coded as severe, and eligible for the curb service grant, may not be transported on the same bus that transports students being claimed for the regular transportation grant.

The role of the Transportation Department in Special Needs transportation is to receive the requests for Special Needs transportation from principals. Generally the Transportation Department accepts the recommendation from the Principals and Special Needs consultants on the level of transportation to be provided and notifies the appropriate transportation contractor who must schedule the student. Principals make the final decision on the transportation to be provided for Special Needs students. When there is a conflict between the Transportation Department and schools, the issue is referred to Leadership Services for resolution. The Transportation Department keeps the contractor up to date on the status of the student, and address changes.

Special Needs transportation today is provided either by First Student Transportation, Southland Transportation or parent provided transportation. Both school bus contracts depend virtually entirely on charter school buses to transport Special Needs students. The contractors indicate that taxis are sometimes used when driver shortages or special circumstances warrant. Both contractors are provided with lists of students and schools and are responsible to design routes, assign students to buses and contact parents with the information. Parent provided transportation is reimbursed by EPSB at rates set by Student Transportation when a more appropriate means of transportation is not available.

First Student generally provides transportation to Special Needs programs located at designated schools. Students are transported to programs located in one of six transportation zones. Today about two thirds of students are transported to Special Needs programs located with the same zone as their residence. About one third are transported across zone boundaries. This is a reversal of the experience in past years when a majority of Special Needs students were transported outside their zone boundary. Students are transported across boundaries based on placement availability or based on school of choice, consistent with the EPSB open enrolment policy. First Student noted that they attempt to schedule at least 13 children on each Special Needs bus, claiming that was required to achieve their desired financial return.

Southland Transportation provides Special Needs busing to district wide programs such as L.Y. Cairns. Southland also provides some additional Special Needs transportation for students at community schools that cannot be scheduled by First Student. Both Southland and First Student are paid on a per student, per day basis. The rates are negotiated and established through a tendering process. The typical rates range from \$17.75 to \$48.37 per student, depending on if the student is transported within or beyond their residence zone, or if the student requires a wheelchair. There is a range of supplemental payments of \$1.31 to \$2.50 per student if the contractor is unable to average at least 13.5 students per bus.

The contractors may also transport Special Needs students for Edmonton Catholic Board of Education and the contractors do combine students from both districts on a single vehicle. The contractors do not provide any reduction in the rate charged per student for integrated services, but the potential for joint use may help keep rates lower.

During the 2008-2009 School Year both contractors reported driver shortages due to the tight job market in Alberta. The wages paid to heavy equipment and truck drivers exceed the rates that could be paid for school bus drivers. The driver shortage was blamed by the contractors and schools administrators for a number of issues including:

- Drop off and pickup times that did not allow for a full instructional day at school
- Chronic late pickups and drop-offs at home
- Missed trips
- Inexperienced drivers sometimes having difficulty managing student behavior on buses



## **2.2 REGULAR AND ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS**

In March of 2009, Edmonton Public Schools provided yellow school bus transportation for 6,801 students in regular and alternative programs. About 15% or 1,033 of the students using yellow school buses in March were attending kindergarten. In the same month Edmonton Public Schools sold 16,677 Edmonton Transit (ETS) unrestricted monthly passes to students in kindergarten through Grade 12.

Transportation for Kindergarten students in regular and alternative programs is free both for Yellow Bus transportation and Edmonton Transit. All other students are required to pay for a monthly pass. The complete 2008-2009 student transportation fee schedule is included as Appendix A. The passes range in price from \$24 to \$43 and the district offers a family maximum that is 2.8 times the price of a single pass. All expenditures on student transportation are covered by the transportation fees or the grants received from the provincial government. In 2008-2009 the Student Transportation Department operated at a surplus that will be applied towards future transportation costs, reducing the need for fee increases.

School districts in Alberta other than the four Metro Boards receive transportation grants for regular students who live more than 2.4 kilometres from their designated school. The four Metro Boards, including Edmonton Public Schools, receive a block grant for regular students and the amount of the grant is based on a projection of student numbers. Edmonton Public Schools does not use the 2.4 kilometre boundary to determine entitlement for transportation.

### **2.2.1 Regular Program Transportation**

The Board Policies and Regulations that deal with transportation state that busing will be provided when a school is not available, or has been closed, within the neighborhood boundaries defined by the school district. The requirement to provide transportation is met if there is an existing Edmonton Transit route. For students living in areas without Edmonton Transit the service is provided with Yellow Buses chartered by the district. The fee to the students in neighborhoods without schools is the same whether charter buses are provided or the students use ETS. Yellow Bus service is only provided from neighborhoods without schools to the designated receiving school(s) for the neighborhood. Students choosing to attend a school other than the school that has been designated may purchase an ETS pass, but will not be provided with guaranteed Yellow Bus service. If a Yellow Bus service is being run to another school a student may purchase a pass and use the service on a space available basis; however there is no guarantee the space will be available in future years. Space is only guaranteed for the current academic year, if it is offered.

Yellow Bus service to designated receiving schools uses existing ETS bus stops or other locations chosen to maximize safety and equitable distribution. The Transportation Department tries to locate stops within 400 metres of every student's residence, but this is not always possible.

Kindergarten is a half day program at Edmonton Public Schools. As a result kindergarten students require a dedicated bus at noon to bring them to the school or take them home. Transportation is free for all eligible kindergarten students on Yellow Buses or ETS, if they are attending their designated school.

### **2.2.2 Language & Alternative Program Transportation**

Students within Edmonton Public Schools are given the opportunity to select any alternative program or school within the district, on a space available basis. The transportation policy of the Board states that:

*“The Board may choose to facilitate student at French immersion, bilingual programs, academic challenge, Arts Core, Caraway, Cogito, Logos, and Sports Academy Programs by providing bus transportation for elementary students leaving their local neighbourhood to attend district centers for such programs.”*

The policy also states that:

*“if such a service is provided, in setting fares the following factors shall be considered:*

- *The cost of providing and administering the service*
- *The funds available from the provincial government*
- *The fees charged for other services*
- *The fees charged for this service in the past”*

Including Kindergarten students, 1,598 students receive transportation to language programs and 1,388 students are transported to alternative programs (as of March 2009).

### **2.2.3 Edmonton Transit System**

ETS operates more than 875 buses and an LRT line and carries about 157,000 daily passengers on a typical weekday. The ETS network is primarily designed to get workers and post secondary students to their destinations across the city. They also carry almost 17,000 Edmonton Public School students to and from school each day (34,000 trips). Edmonton Public Schools purchases monthly passes from ETS for \$57.50 per month (2009/2010 rate), and makes them available to students at a subsidized rate of \$43 per month. In areas where a local elementary school is not being provided a family maximum cost of \$65.00 per month is also provided.

Sales of passes increased by about 5% when Edmonton Transit removed a restriction that prohibited students from using the passes on weekends. Edmonton Transit does sell a youth pass available during the summer months however it is not available during the school year due to the competition from the reduced fare passes sold by the school districts. The \$57.50 pass is only available for \$43 at Edmonton Public Schools or through other schools boards at prices

determined by those boards. Yellow Bus passes are accepted on ETS for up to six trips per month.

#### **2.2.4 Yellow Bus Operations**

Edmonton Public Schools currently charters yellow school buses for regular/alternative program service from four different operators, including First Student, Southland Transportation, Golden Arrow and Cunningham. The routes and schedules are designed by Edmonton Public Schools and provided to the operators. Each operator is responsible for on the road supervision of their own vehicles, and EPSB does not have a regular program of on the road observation or supervision. Early in the 2008-2009 school year the operators all reported difficulties with driver recruitment and retention. However changes in the economic conditions reduced this issue toward the end of the year.

In the fall of 2009 Edmonton Public Schools reported to Alberta Education that they contracted for 332 Yellow Buses, including vehicles used for Special Needs. A total of 139 buses had seating capacity of 24 passengers or less (based on 3 passengers per seat), and 108 had capacity of 72 (3 passengers per seat).

Edmonton Public Schools has maximum time guidelines established by the Transportation Department for different types of school transportation services, ranging from 55 to 90 minutes. The EPSB website indicates that the majority of school bus riders experience ride times less than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the maximum time standards.

Generally students are picked up at Yellow Bus stops along collector roads. Wherever possible the stop locations are co-located at Edmonton Transit bus stops in order to take advantage of restricted parking, benches and shelters. In the 2008 – 2009 and previous school years congregated stops were used in some areas to reduce travel times and extend coverage without increasing costs. Congregated stops generally require students to walk to the local neighbourhood school to board the bus rather than have the bus spend additional time circulating through the neighborhood.

The Edmonton Public School Board of Trustees does not have any Board approved policies on service design attributes such as maximum ride time, walking distance and the use of congregated stops. The existing guidelines in these areas were developed by the Transportation Department for use by staff.

#### **2.2.5 Alberta Education Grants**

Alberta Education currently uses a block grant formula for the four Metro Boards (Edmonton Public, Edmonton Catholic, Calgary Public, and Calgary Catholic). Under this system Edmonton Public receives a single grant for regular, immersion, and bilingual transportation regardless of how many students are being transported, what schools they are attending, or how far they are travelling. In 2008 – 2009 Edmonton Public transported about 27,000 (March 2009) students

(Special Needs, fixed route and ETS) and received \$18.12 million as a Block Grant for transportation. This covered about 72% of the cost of providing the transportation services. The remainder (about \$7 million) was generated through user fees (i.e. payments for Yellow Bus and ETS passes).

### 3.0 Peer Systems Review

---

In depth interviews were conducted with the three other Metro Boards in Alberta and a literature scan was conducted across Canada.

#### 3.1 SPECIAL NEEDS

Edmonton Public Schools transports significantly more Special Needs students on curb to curb transportation than any of the other three metropolitan districts as shown in Table 3-1. In addition, the other school districts also make use of alternative modes such as taxis, and the city provided transportation services for persons with disabilities (e.g. Calgary HandiBus). The Calgary districts design the routes and schedules for Special Needs children, but Edmonton Catholic is similar to Edmonton Public practice and delegates this function to the school bus contractors. At the Calgary districts the eligibility for Special Needs transportation is handled by Special Needs consultants. The consultants specifically identify the type of transportation that is required for each student, including options such as transit, regular charter, Special Needs, corner stop, or curb to curb.

A shortage of charter bus drivers was also a problem in Calgary, as were long ride times, particularly for city wide programs. Calgary Catholic noted that their typical load on a Special Needs bus was 4 to 7 children.

**Table 3-1 Special Education Peer Comparison - Service**

School District	Total Enrolment	Total Special Needs Receiving Transport	Special Needs Receiving Curb to Curb Transport	Special Needs Receiving Curb to Curb Transport (as % of Enrolment)	Students on Taxis
Edmonton Public	79,572	3,081	2,887	3.6%	None
Edmonton Catholic	32,943	742	536	1.6%	Yes (# not Available)
Calgary Public	103,000	1,916	865	0.8%	120
Calgary Catholic	44,000	575	575	1.3%	6

One of the issues that was raised among stakeholders during the review of peers was the difference between Edmonton and Calgary in terms of the number of private and charter schools. It was suggested that a comparison was inappropriate since Calgary has five charter schools and numerous private schools. Edmonton has fewer charter and private schools. Upon further review it was found that there are very few Special Needs students attending any of the five charter schools in Calgary. The private schools charge substantial tuition fees for most students and are not eligible for any transportation grants from Alberta Education. It therefore appears unlikely that the presence of more private schools in Calgary is responsible for the large difference in the number of students coded as severe Special Needs.

## 3.2 REGULAR AND ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS

Table 3.2 summarize some of the important characteristics of the services of each of the four Metro Boards in Alberta for regular and alternative programs. .

**Table 3-2 Regular & Alternative Peer Comparison - Service**

School District	Total Enrolment	Regular* Students Bused	Percent of Students Receiving Busing	Students on Transit*	Students on Yellow Buses
Edmonton Public	79,572	23,478	30%	16,677	6,801
Edmonton Catholic	32,943	14,100	43%	7,200	6,900
Calgary Public	103,000	38,859	38%	26,105	9,754
Calgary Catholic	44,000	6,800 + Transit	n/a	n/a	6,800

\* Includes alternative program students.

### 3.2.1 Edmonton Catholic

The basic transportation policy of the Edmonton Catholic Separate School District is:

*“(The district) shall arrange transportation for students who are entitled to transportation under the School Act or who are designated by the district to attend a specific school or program.”*

The actual transportation being provided exceeds this policy statement in several areas. In practise the Catholic school district, like Edmonton Public, does not use the School Act standard of 2.4 kilometres to determine entitlement for transportation. In the inner city Edmonton Catholic provides transportation within neighborhood boundaries for inner city schools.

Edmonton Catholic Schools transported about 14,000 students in 2008-2009. The Catholic district has estimated that about 4,220 of the 14,000 students now being transported would not be eligible for a provincial grant if the 2.4 kilometre rule was in effect.

The Catholic transportation department has had some success with adjusting bell times and currently operates shared service on 33 routes serving 25 schools and has double runs on 13 routes serving 15 schools.

In 2008 – 2009 Edmonton Catholic sold ETS passes for \$27 per month for elementary students and \$39 per month for junior and senior high students. This is a greater subsidy than provided

by Edmonton Public Schools. The same price is charged for Yellow Bus service, although kindergarten transportation to the designated schools is free.

### **3.2.2 Calgary Catholic**

Calgary Catholic Schools currently provides transportation for elementary students who live more than 1.2 kilometres from their designated school or a Program of Choice. About 6,800 students are transported on Yellow Buses. Junior and Senior High students who live further than 2.4 kilometres from their designated school are able to purchase a subsidized and unrestricted Calgary Transit pass. Calgary Transit sells the passes to the school district for \$50.50 and the district sells them to students for \$35.50. There are no Yellow Buses for junior and senior high students.

Calgary Catholic charges full and half day kindergarten and elementary students \$175 per year with a family maximum of \$350. Overall the transportation program is operating in a deficit.

Most yellow school bus routes serve two schools and the maximum allowable ride time is 60 minutes. Ride times have shifted to the outer range of the limit in recent years due to growth of the city and budget limitations. Calgary Catholic has a rule that routes are designed to provide a maximum walking distance to a bus stop of 800 metres. In actual practice the longest walk is about 500 metres and most students walk less than 250 metres. Transfers are permitted, but are rarely used. When transfers are done it usually results in significant ride time savings.

As in Edmonton, the Calgary school bus contractors have dealt with a driver shortage throughout the 2008 – 2009 school year.

### **3.2.3 Calgary Public Schools**

In the past Calgary Public Schools provided charter Yellow Bus transportation for regular elementary students who lived more than 1.2 kilometres from their school. The district is now working on creating custom designed walk zones for each elementary school. The walk zones will take into account not just distance, but also neighborhood boundaries, geographic barriers and conditions. The new zones will extend the walking distance up to 1.6 km if no geographic barriers or other issues are present. All students who receive Yellow Busing must pay a transportation fee of \$165 per year, with a family maximum of \$330.

The maximum ride time for charter buses is set at 60 minutes, however about 5% of regular students had ride times in excess of 1 hour (one-way). Routes are designed without transfers. A program of adjusting bell times to improve transportation efficiency has been underway for three years. As a result, half of all Yellow Bus routes now make two trips, and some route even make three trips.

Junior and Senior High students who live more than 2.4 km from their school are entitled to receive a rebate of \$185 per year on their Calgary Transit pass. The passes may be purchased



at any Calgary Transit outlet, and the rebate claimed at their school. Students living less than 2.4 km are not eligible to receive the rebate.

Transportation is provided to K-6 alternative programs offered by the Calgary Board of Education however some of these programs use congregated stops. Congregated stops may not be located in each residential neighborhood, or within walking distance of all students. Each alternative program has a unique transportation boundary. Bilingual programs have regular Yellow Busing that does not utilize congregated stops. Some programs of choice do not have Yellow Buses, and students must ride Calgary Transit and claim a rebate for the transit pass.

Calgary Public anticipates losing about \$2,000,000 in funding if the Alberta Education urban grant formula replaces the current Metro block funding system with a distance based formula based on 2.4 km.

### 3.2.4 Other Jurisdictions

#### Canada

In seven out of ten provinces there are regulations that set a distance that students must travel to school in order for funding for transportation to be provided to the local school district. About 11% of school districts in Canada subsidized transportation of students who were not eligible for provincial transportation grants according to a 1987 survey by the Canadian Education Association.

**Table 3-3 Provincial Transportation Regulations**

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Walking Distance for Transportation</b>
Newfoundland	1.6 km
Prince Edward Island	1.6 km
Nova Scotia	3.6 km
New Brunswick	2.4 km
Manitoba	1.6 km rural only
Alberta	2.4 km
British Columbia	4 km Grades 1-3; 4.8 km for Grades 4-12

The same survey found that about 65% of school districts in Canada have established guidelines for the distance from home to a school bus stops. The common distance limit in 1987 was 800 metres. The survey also found that 60 minutes was generally the longest time that students were expected to spend on a Yellow Bus, although some jurisdictions permitted 75 or 90 minutes. The 1987 survey found that about half of all school districts in Canada offered transportation to programs of choice.

**Saskatchewan**

In Saskatoon, elementary students (K-8) attending Saskatoon Public Schools are provided with free bus tickets for Saskatoon Transit if a suitable bus route exists, otherwise transportation is the responsibility of the parents. The same program applies to students attending special programs for academically talented students at two specific schools. Transportation is also provided by Yellow Bus for neighborhoods without local schools and for students in French immersion programs. High school students living more than 3 km from the closest schools are entitled to purchase a transit pass at a 50% discount, however relatively few students qualify.

In Regina, Kindergarten and Grade 1 students are provided with transportation to their designated school if they reside more than 0.6 kilometres from the school. All other elementary students (2 - 8) are provided with transportation if they live more than 1.2 kilometres from their designated school. No transportation services or transit subsidies are provided for high school students.

**Manitoba**

The Winnipeg School Division provides transportation for K-4 students who live more than 1.6 km from their designated school. Transportation is only provided to the designated school. Students in K-4 who choose to attend a language or alternative program at a school other than their designated school are not eligible for transportation. It is the policy of the School Division that bell times should be adjusted if it can improve transportation efficiency or reduce busing costs.

The Winnipeg School Division has a number of special situations that supersede the general rules. There are at least 8 schools where safety or geographical barriers require the school division to provide busing. In addition there are 10 French and three other language programs that provide busing for their students after grade 4. No transportation service or subsidies are available for regular high school students.

**British Columbia**

Provincial transportation grants are only paid to B.C. school districts for students up to Grade 3 who live more than 4.0 km from their designated school. Students in Grades 4 – 12 must live more than 4.8 km from their designated school to be eligible to receive a grant from the provincial government. Major school districts like Vancouver and Surrey enforce the provincial walk distance standards and do not provide additional service. Vancouver does not provide any transportation for students in alternative programs.

## **4.0 Alberta Education Transportation Grant**

---

### **4.1 OVERVIEW**

Since 1991 Alberta Education has used a Block Grant formula to fund transportation at the four Metro School Boards in Edmonton and Calgary. In recent years the Block Grant has been supplemented with an additional grant of \$5,000,000 to offset a portion of the costs not covered by the grant, and to minimize transportation fees. In order to claim the grant, EPSB completes a form that uses an estimate of the number of eligible students as of the end of September. An eligible student is a student residing 2.4 or more kilometres from the school they are designated to attend. In 2008-2009 Edmonton Public Schools estimated the number of eligible students at about 35,400 in the grant application. As part of the analysis for this project it was determined the actual number of eligible students (excluding Special Needs) is about 26,700 in Grades 1 – 12. This is more than the number currently transported (about 23,500 as of March 2009), but well below the number claimed in the 2008-2009 provincial transportation claim. However, the actual students being transported are not all eligible. The number of eligible students found is similar the number of eligible students estimated by Alberta Education. A review of the data files at EPSB found that are more than 38,000 students living more than 2.4 km from the school they are actually attending, which is about 2,600 more than were claimed in the 2008-2009 grant application.

Prior to 1991 funding eligibility was limited to Special Needs students or students living more than 2.4 kilometres from their designated school and actually receiving transportation. Rural areas in Alberta currently have a funding formula based on distance from the designated school, volume and density while urban areas use a formula based on density and a flat 2.4 kilometres from the designated school. Alberta Education has initiated a review of the current Metro Block Grant and informal indications are that the eligibility formula used in rural areas will be applied to the Metro (and urban) Boards, although the actual dollar amount of the grants has not been finalized.

The proposed funding methodology consists of two parts. The first part is a formula to determine student eligibility for transportation grants. The second part establishes the grant amount for each eligible student. Decreasing the number of eligible students will not necessarily decrease the total grant if the grant per student increases. On the other hand if the number of eligible students is increased, the total grant could still decrease if the funding per eligible student declines.

The use of the new formula is anticipated to result in a grant based on fewer students than the number of students presently being funded under the Block Grant system. At this time it is not clear if the calculation would result in a reduced grant level, as the grant amount itself is subject to Alberta Education budget approvals and the overall provincial budget. The other Metro Boards have variously estimated that the grant would be calculated on as many as 4,200

students less than are being currently transported or a potential loss of more than \$2,000,000, if grant levels are set at existing urban levels.

The impact on Edmonton Public Schools has been estimated by taking the 2008 – 2009 enrolment through the urban grant funding formula using geographic information system (GIS) software. The results show that under the rural formula the grant for regular and alternative students would be calculated using the 26,700 eligible students, a reduction of about 8,700 students. The 2008-2009 urban grant used a base rate per student of \$522. This rate would have to increase significantly in order for Edmonton Public to maintain its funding for regular and alternative transportation under the proposed scenario.

## **4.2 DISTANCE FACTORS**

Interviews with senior staff at Alberta Education revealed a desire to implement the same transportation funding regime for the Metro Boards that is applied to other school districts in the province. Alberta Education indicates that they are seeking a funding framework that is rational and transparent and encourages the Metro Boards to be judicious in their spending on transportation programs. The rural formula eligibility rules are based on a walking distance of 2.4 km to the designated school. Students living less than 2.4 km, regardless of age, would not be eligible to receive a grant. Students attending programs of choice, at schools other than their designated school, would not be eligible for a grant unless the program of choice is a French Immersion or bilingual program sanctioned by Alberta Education or they are also 2.4 km from their designated school.

The 2.4 kilometre walking distance rule appears to have originated with the Northwest Territorial Government prior to 1905 (a soft metric conversion of a 1.5 mile walking distance in the Territorial Education Act to 2.4 km). In 2009 this rule is an anachronism. The conditions in 1905 in Alberta were very different from today including safety, security, education resources, taxes, the road network, urban densities, and the urban – rural population base. The other Metro Boards in Alberta as well as in other jurisdictions have adopted walking distance entitlements for elementary schools of 0.8 km (Minneapolis) to 1.6 km (Calgary Public).

The anticipated Alberta Education formula uses distance as a factor to determine the grant level. Distance may be reasonable to use in rural settings where congestion is not a factor, and the time to travel a kilometre and speed limits are relatively consistent. However in urban areas congestion, delays due to traffic signals and many different speed limits make distance an inappropriate factor for determining grant levels for the Metro Boards. In Edmonton a trip of 5 kilometres can take less time than a trip of 2.5 kilometres depending on the route. A route that takes longer could cost the District more money, but under the proposed new formula the route that is farther, but faster would be eligible for the bigger grant.

Senior staff at Alberta Education believes that they have compensated for a longer distance (2.4 km) by providing a grant for students regardless of whether or not they actually receive transportation. Edmonton Public Schools, and the other districts in the province, need to present

to the province that if it is the desire to create a more rational and transparent funding stream, the walking distance limit, particularly for elementary students should be changed to reflect current expectations of how far an elementary school student can walk to school in Alberta. The policy should ideally give school boards the discretion to deal with specific hazards such as water crossings, railway tracks, ravines and freeways.

Walking distance limits for Junior High and Senior High school students can be longer. A range of 1.6 km for elementary schools, 2.0 km for Junior Highs and 2.4 km for Senior High students would appear to reflect a reasonable expectation of how far students should walk to school.

Table 4-1 shows that EPSB currently receives a grant based on about 35,414 regular students. Under a flat 2.4 km eligibility rule about 26,717 students would be eligible; however as of March 2009 only about 23,500 students were receiving transportation. If the 2.4 km rule was adopted EPSB would have at least 8,697 fewer eligible students to claim. With the 2008-2009 grant rate of \$522 per student, the district would lose about \$4.5 million in grant revenue.

If a graduated distance eligibility rule was adopted by the province the number of eligible students would increase to about 30,400, fewer than EPSB claimed under the Block Grant, but more than would be included under the proposed flat distance rule. The lower distances for elementary and Junior High would ensure that more students are eligible, and increase the potential for the district to earn grants. Under this scenario the loss to the district would be \$2.61 million.

**Table 4-1 Eligible Students and Transported Students 2008 – 2009 (excluding Special Needs)**

School	Eligible Based on 2.4 km	Eligible Based on Graduated Distance <sup>1</sup>	Actual Students Being Transported (Mar 2009)			Reported Eligible Students Existing Block Grant (2008-2009)
			Yellow	ETS	Total	
Elementary	6,383	8,705	5,214	343	5,557	10,601
Junior High	6,344	7,702	1,587	5,824	7,411	8,888
Senior High	13,990	13,990	-	10,510	10,510	15,925
<b>Total</b>	<b>26,717</b>	<b>30,397</b>	<b>6,801</b>	<b>16,677</b>	<b>23,478</b>	<b>35,414</b>

### 4.3 PROGRAMS OF CHOICE

The Alberta Education website states that the department supports the concept of schools or programs of choice for Alberta students. Edmonton Public Schools has embraced this concept with 50 alternative program sites, including 25 French Immersion and Bilingual Program sites.

<sup>1</sup> 1.6 km for elementary, 2.0 km for junior high, 2.4 km for senior high

Alberta Education however will only fund transportation for students who live more than 2.4 km from the school they are designated to attend, or to the closest French Immersion or Bilingual Program of their choice. For students choosing to attend other alternative programs, there is no eligibility to receive a transportation grant, if they are not also at least 2.4 km from their designated school.

As an example, Edmonton Public Schools operates a K-12 performing arts program at Victoria School that draws from the entire city. Edmonton Public Schools supports this program by providing Yellow Bus routes as well as subsidized Edmonton Transit passes for students attending this program of choice. Only students living more than 2.4 km from their designated local school would be eligible for a transportation grant. In Calgary a similar program operates at a publicly funded Charter School. In that case every student who attends the school, and lives more than 2.4 kilometres from their 'program of choice' school, is eligible for a transportation grant. All students in the province are not being treated equally under the current funding scheme. If it is the intention of Alberta Education to provide a rational and transparent funding regime the policy needs to be changed to equalize access to alternative programs for all students attending publicly financed education facilities. Such action would make the provincial education transportation funding eligibility formula consistent with the education policy on programs of choice.

Alberta Education needs to recognize that there is a transportation cost to school districts that choose to implement programs of choice. Operating programs of choice without funded transportation effectively limits program access to elementary students within walking distance, elementary students who have a non-working parent with a car, or those that can make or fund alternative transportation arrangements. Public transportation provides access for Junior and Senior High Students in virtually all areas.

Edmonton Public Schools transports about 2,986 students (March 2009) to programs of choice. Making students in programs of choice eligible for transportation grants does not guarantee sufficient funding to cover all costs, but it ensures that provincial education transportation funding matches education program goals.

The designation of schools is another area where the application of the proposed Alberta Education regulations may conflict with the practice of Edmonton Public Schools. During the 2008-2009 school year EPSB had 1,309 students residing in dual designated neighborhoods, as no single receiving school has capacity for all of the students in an area without a neighborhood school. This multiple designation permits students a choice of designated schools while maintaining entitlement to subsidized transportation. The proposed Alberta Education regulations would require each student to be designated to a single school. Different parts of a neighborhood could be designated to different schools, but the student would not have a choice. If an entire neighborhood is dual designated, Alberta Education will only accept the closest school as being the designated school. This is primarily a service issue for elementary students that depend on Yellow Buses.

#### **4.4 SPECIAL NEEDS**

The 2008-2009 Edmonton Public Schools transportation application indicated that 932 students were eligible for curb to curb service due to Special Needs based on Alberta Education codes. However EPSB actually transported 2,887 students with curb to curb service, of which 2,110 were coded using the EPSB system as having severe Special Needs. If the EPSB coding methodology is accepted by Alberta Education the number of children eligible for the higher Special Needs funding will increase by 1,178. This is equivalent to an increase of about \$2.6 million over the amount assumed in the Block Grant application.

Actually realizing this increase may be difficult as EPSB has previously only claimed 932 severe Special Needs students, and those numbers are in line with the claims of the other Metro Boards. The difference in coding between the province and Edmonton Public Schools may also raise issues with Alberta Education.



## **5.0 Issues - Special Needs Transportation**

---

The issues facing Special Needs transportation at Edmonton Public Schools can be divided into issues that are in the direct control of the Transportation Department and their contracts (Internal Issues) and those that are beyond their direct control (External Issues). The external issues include not only policy and procedure issues in other Edmonton Public School departments, but also outside the control of the district including Alberta Education funding formulas, regulatory and legal issues, traffic and economic conditions.

### **5.1 INTERNAL ISSUES**

#### **5.1.1 Special Needs Transportation Policy**

Edmonton Public School Board Policy EEAAR guides the provision of student transportation services. The policy was approved in 1997. In reference to Special Needs the policy states in part:

*A. General Regulations*

- 1. The following transportation services shall be available with a cost charged to parents or independent students:*
  - b. To a designated school for any student designated by the district to attend that specific school.*

*C. Charter Bus Service*

- 6. The district shall not be responsible for providing transportation to students with moderate or severe Special Needs who choose not to attend their designated school.*
- 7. For students with moderate or severe Special Needs who are attending their designated school, the administration may enter into an agreement with the parent whereby the parent transports the student and receives payment from the district for doing so.*

Part A of the General Regulation is being implemented as outlined in the policy except that early childhood transportation services are being provided at no cost for Special Needs students. Part C, subsection 6, requires that transportation will only be provided to Special Needs students attending their designated school. This policy provides that each moderate and severe Special Needs student is to be assigned a designated school and if a student chooses not to attend the designated school the district will not provide transportation. This policy is often not



followed, and students are transported to another school of their choice where the same program is offered.

Elsewhere the policy identifies that Special Needs programs are not part of the school of choice program, or open enrolment policy of the district. The transportation policy item C, Charter Bus Service, specifically identifies the programs of choice and they do not include Special Needs programs as part of the policy.

**C. Charter Bus Service**

**4. Alternative Programs**

- a. *The board may choose to facilitate student attendance at French immersion, bilingual programs, academic challenge, Arts Core, Caraway, Cogito, Logos and Sports Alternative Programs by providing bus transportation for elementary students leaving their local neighbourhood to attend district centres for such programs. Additions or deletions to the number of programs included in the service are at the board's discretion through the budget process.*

The existing Special Needs transportation service is not consistent with Board approved policies. The service being provided is more generous than envisioned in the current policy. The reasons why the actual service no longer follows Board Policy were not fully identifiable, but appear to be in part attributable to the competition among schools for students, the involvement of principals in transportation decisions, and to erroneously considering Special Needs programs as Alternative Programs within the Board Open Enrolment Policy

The current Board student transportation policy also leaves significant latitude to staff to design transportation routes, schedules and service. As discussed in the following section, much of this discretionary power has in fact been transferred to the school bus contractors for Special Needs. Issues that are important indicators of service quality including maximum ride times, pick up (morning) and drop off (afternoon) locations and maximum number of students on a bus are major determinants of transportation cost and quality. The Board of Trustees should have the opportunity to set these service guidelines and buy-in on these targets. These guidelines or policies need not be absolute but provide for goals and targets (e.g. 90% of severe Special Needs students to spend less than 60 minutes on the bus each way) that maintain some flexibility, but still provide for accountability and a means for the Trustees to measure performance.

Policy goals and objectives for transportation are a logical responsibility for the Board as they affect the quality of education, and the education experience of students. Well designed policies

would help the staff to design services with appropriate routes and schedules and to prepare annual budgets designed to fulfill the service policies and objectives.

### **5.1.2 Routing & Scheduling**

Routing and scheduling for Special Needs students is now done by the contractor responsible for the transportation of the specific student. Edmonton Public Schools pays for each Special Needs student per day of transport. This gives the contractor a very strong incentive to put more children on each bus, which results in longer ride times. Having more children on each bus was also a concern that was raised by school administrators since many of these students have behavioral difficulties. Although no contractors or schools reported any safety issues the concern about the potential for out of control children on board buses was raised by both school administrators and bus contractors.

Allowing the bus contractor the discretion to route and schedule the buses gives them an incentive to be efficient, however the financial benefit of their efficiency accrues entirely to the contractor and likely provides a ride time penalty to the students. The cost of operating a Special Needs bus is largely fixed based on a minimum four hour shift (two hour call-out in morning; two hour call-out in afternoon). The major cost of the vehicle, insurance and garage are largely fixed costs that will not vary if a vehicle is used four, five or six hours per day. The costs that do vary by distance include fuel, brakes, oil and preventive maintenance, while driver costs will increase for runs that last more than four hours. The costs of the contractor do not directly vary with the number of students carried, yet EPSB is paying the contractor per student.

A Special Needs bus with an average of 13.5 students would net the contractor \$239.63 per day, (based on no out of zone students, and 1.5 wheelchairs) compared to a fixed route bus which has a rate of about \$200 per day. About \$7.00 of the difference may be attributed to the potentially higher pay given to Special Needs drivers. Transporting 15 students in a Special Needs bus would raise the total rate per day to \$266.25, a significant premium over fixed route service. If any students on the Special Needs bus are travelling outside their zone the fee paid the contractor increases by about 8%. If the system wide average of Special Needs students drops below 13.5 students per bus the rate per student may increase \$1.31 per student. The contract does not include any incentives for reducing ride time, but does include maximum ride times of 60, or 80 minutes depending on if the trip is in or out of transportation zone. Overall this means the contract is one sided, in favour of the contractor. If the average number of students increases through the contractor's efficiency the full financial benefit accrues to the contractor. If the contractor is inefficient in scheduling, the Edmonton Public Schools pays a penalty of between \$1.31 and \$2.50 per student. No incentive is paid if the contractor manages to reduce ride time.

The smaller buses generally used for Special Needs also cost the contractor less to acquire, and use less fuel. Given that the smaller buses do carry fewer students and are easier to drive the need for the premium for Special Needs drivers may also unnecessary.

### **5.1.3 Other Contractor Practices**

If Edmonton Public Schools schedules a regular student on a bus carrying a severe Special Needs student, the severe Special Needs student is no longer eligible for Special Needs funding. The Transportation Department does not do this, however, the school bus contractor has reportedly negotiated some deals directly with parents. During the stakeholder interviews the consultants were informed by both a Principal and the bus contractor that at least one such arrangement was made this year. The result was the parent paid a bus driver, or First Student directly to transport a student that the Transportation Department would not authorize for bus transportation. The current contract between Edmonton Public Schools and the Special Needs bus contractors make no mention of the right of the bus contractor to carry students other than those assigned. The contractor mentioned that this practice was more wide spread in the past, and they are working to eliminate it. There are many reasons why this practice should not be permitted now or in the future. Carrying unauthorized passengers on an Edmonton Public Schools chartered bus creates a liability issue in the event of an accident. Although space might be available it is unfair to other students who are not being accommodated in compliance with EPSB policy, and the revenue is accruing to the driver or contractor and not the school district.

The Yellow Bus contractors were also found to be requiring some students to transfer between Yellow Buses in order to complete their Special Needs journey. This transfer procedure contrasts with the service design procedures for fixed route Yellow Buses which currently do not permit transfers. By forcing students to transfer the bus contractor is designing and operating a more efficient service, however the financial benefit is being fully accrued to the operator, rather than the district.

The current contract with the bus contractors does not require specific training in student management; however both Special Needs contractors stated that they provide such training. The contract between the Board and the contractors requires the contractors to provide the best possible care for disruptive students through a variety of behavior management techniques. Education staff at several schools expressed an interest in developing an in-service on such behaviour management techniques for the contractor's trainers or drivers.

### **5.1.4 Customer Service**

During the stakeholder consultation phase of this project some school administrators stated that the customer service skills of the staff at the Transportation Department needed improvement. It is understood that at certain times of the year the staff of the Department are under intense pressure. The ability to make every 'customer' feel that their concern is important and will be acted upon or at least considered is an important aspect of dealing with the public. Companies usually ensure that front line staff receive training in dealing with irate customers, and offer a path to move disgruntled callers to higher levels.

The current job description for transportation call center/telephone staff does not call out training for customer service. The requirement for such training should be required for the position or within 4 months of assuming the position.

#### **5.1.5 Other Transportation Modes**

Edmonton Public Schools depends almost entirely upon the bus contractors to arrange transportation for Special Needs students. In rare cases the bus contractors themselves will seek out other modes, specifically taxis when they are unable to handle a request due to driver shortages or behavioral problems.

The rate that Edmonton Public Schools pays for mild, moderate and severe coded students riding on First Student or Southland would be sufficient to pay for taxis or DATS. A typical taxi ride within a Special Needs transportation zone might cost about \$15.00, regardless of whether there are 2, 3, or 4 passengers. The same trip on a charter bus under the current contract would cost \$16.54, for one student, and up to \$66.00 for 4 students. Significant monetary savings can be realized if suitable agreements can be made with a taxi company. Clearly not every Special Needs student can be transported by taxi, and not every taxi driver may have the personality to transport Special Needs students. The use of taxis offers the potential to reduce costs and improve service to some Special Needs students. Some taxi fleets also provide wheelchair accessible vehicles.

If taxis are to be regularly utilized for student transportation some specific guidelines would have to be prepared and contractually agreed to by the taxi operators. These include insurance requirements, driver consistency, and priority during winter storms and other peak demand periods. Edmonton Public Schools currently requires \$20,000,000 insurance for school buses licensed to carry up to 72 passengers (about \$277,000 each). In Alberta, taxis are required to carry a minimum of \$1,000,000 of passenger insurance for three or four passengers (about \$250,000 - \$333,333 per passenger).

The City of Edmonton operated Disabled Adult Transportation Service is open to any physically disabled person at least 16 years of age who cannot use regular transit. The following extracts from the DATS Handbook from April 2009 describe the services and eligibility for use:

##### *WHAT IS DATS?*

*DATS is a door-to-door public transportation service for adults who cannot use regular transit for all trips because of a physical or cognitive disability. DATS is NOT a taxi service - it is a shared-ride public transportation service operating within the City of Edmonton. Trips are scheduled to make maximum use of this shared ride service while staying within our budget.*

*Wheelchair lift equipped vehicles, sedans, mini-vans and passenger vans are used to provide DATS service. Vehicles used are clearly identified as "DATS" vehicles.*

*DATS is administered and scheduled by the DATS Section of the Edmonton Transit System (ETS). The DATS budget is supported primarily from the City of Edmonton tax levy. Cost of the service is partially offset with fares collected from the DATS users.*

#### **WHO CAN USE DATS?**

*DATS service is available to people (permanent residents of Edmonton), 16 years or older, who cannot use regular transit service for all trips because of a physical or cognitive disability. DATS eligibility is established by City Council and is defined in City Policy C451C.*

#### **Youth Service**

*Youth service is available for people between the ages of 13 and 15 years who cannot use regular transit service because of a physical or cognitive disability. Service is offered during off peak hours only (with or without an escort). Service is NOT provided for educational trips.*

#### **Subscription Trips**

*Subscription trips go from the same origin to the same destination, at the same time and on the same day of each week. There is no maximum or minimum time period on booking subscription trips. These can be for one or more times a week; one time every two weeks (or 3 or 4); or one trip per month regular day booking (e.g. first Monday of every month, etc.). Subscription trips must be booked before 12:00 noon the day before and up to a maximum of 10 days in advance. Once booked, subscription service runs as long as needed.*

The availability of subscription service for educational trips means that some disabled high school students are eligible to book subscription trips to and from school. The price for unlimited use of DATS is \$74 per month, significantly less than the rate charged for Special Needs transportation by the charter bus contractors. The use of DATS would represent a financial savings and the service offered would be comparable to that provided by the charter bus contractors.

Calgary Public Schools transports about 14% of their severe Special Needs students on taxis. If the same percentage was applied to Edmonton Public Schools the savings would be at least

\$500,000 assuming all students are transported within their zone, and no wheelchairs are included. It also assumes an average transport of 5 kilometres per student and two students per taxi.

### **5.1.6 Grant Structure and Performance Reviews**

The proposed provincial regulations will reintroduce a new consideration in the planning and provision of student transportation in Edmonton – eligibility. Under the current block grant formula the amount of transportation grant money received by Edmonton Public Schools did not fluctuate for regular and Special Needs students. Regardless of how many or how few students Edmonton Public Schools transported the grant amount did not change. This block grant formula has been in place for 18 years, or almost a full generation, and one of the by-products has been the development of culture throughout the district that does not consider the eligibility for grants when decisions are made about providing transportation. This is common within the Transportation Department, as well at schools and throughout the central office. Many factors go into decisions regarding transportation service, but eligibility for grants has not been a major consideration.

Based on the availability of data for this project, it appears that the Transportation Department currently produces a narrow range of performance indicators related to budget performance and ride times. The department does have financial indicators that are produced elsewhere in the district to report on budget variances, but there are no quick statistical summaries to measure and compare performance, although the numbers may be available within the Department. Transportation is a service that lends itself to quantitative goals, objectives, targets and performance, but neither performance targets nor indicators are set. Possible performance indicators for Special Needs transportation include:

- Cost per severe student
- Cost per mild/moderate student
- Percentage of mild/moderate or severe coded students travelling more than 90, 120 or 180 minutes per day
- Percentage of Special Needs students scheduled to arrive less than 5 minutes before bell time
- Percentage of Special Needs students scheduled to leave sooner than 5 minutes after dismissal bell.
- Percentage of mild/moderate or severe being transported outside of their transportation zone
- Percentage of mild/moderate or severe students being transported
- Percentage of mild/moderate coded students walking more than 100 metres to a bus stop

- Percentage of severe coded students not receiving service within 25 metres of a door their place of residence

These types of statistics should be readily available from computerized scheduling software and could be published monthly or semi-annually to monitor service delivery. Under the current arrangement, with contractor scheduled services, and manual scheduling, this data is not available or difficult and costly to obtain.

### **5.1.7 On-the-Road Supervision**

The position description for the Senior Route Planner includes responsibility for onsite investigations. Discussions with the planning staff revealed that site investigations or on site observation of charter bus operations is rarely conducted. At one time Edmonton Public Schools contracted with Edmonton Transit to conduct on site investigations. This level of on the road supervision may not be needed at this time, however increased observation of charter bus operations by all planning staff would provide the planners with a better understanding of operating conditions, and help to ensure the contractor is operating in a safe manner and following contract provisions.

### **5.1.8 Behavior Issues**

Provincial regulations require that EPSB provide transportation for students attending Special Needs programs. Other provincial regulations also protect school bus drivers from driving in any situation that is deemed to be unsafe, which can include dangers arising from students with severe behavioral problems. Balancing the requirement to provide transportation but also ensure the safety of the driver and other passengers can create difficulties for the Transportation Department which must also operate with limited financial resources.

## **5.2 EXTERNAL ISSUES**

### **5.2.1 Policy on Entitlement for Transportation**

The transportation operation works best if there is both an internal policy framework and an external policy framework. The internal policy framework (discussed in 5.1.1) addresses service design objectives and targets, while the external policy guidelines should address issues such as transportation entitlements and accommodation policy.

Currently the final decision on transportation entitlements for Special Needs is being made by Principals, rather than Special Needs Consultants. Principals have an incentive to attract children to their school as a result of site based decision making and other considerations. Having a clear policy on who determines entitlement to curb service, and the availability of criteria or guidelines would make the decision making process more transparent to everyone involved in transportation decisions.



Alberta Education is considering revising the transportation grant regulations for Metro Boards to only fund curb service for students coded as having a severe special need, including physical disabilities. This proposed change would make the funding regulations for school boards in Edmonton and Calgary the same as other urban districts elsewhere in Alberta. Beyond the financial implication there is no limitation on Edmonton Public offering curb service to more students (e.g. mild/moderates), however clearly defined criteria or guidelines for the additional entitlements would make the decision making process more transparent and easier for the Transportation Department to implement and explain.

Both Alberta Education and Edmonton Public School Board regulations and policy clearly indicate that transportation will be funded and provided only when Special Needs students attend the school they are directed to attend. The existing Board policy provides that Special Needs students may not attend a school of choice and receive transportation; however this policy is not currently being followed, and has been sidestepped for a number of years.

Edmonton Public Schools has a choice of designing a transportation system that conforms to current Board policy or revising the policy. The existing system with the network of six transportation zones could be incorporated into a new policy that allows Special Needs students to be transported to any school offering the program to which they have been designated within their zone of residence. The result of such a policy however will be longer ride times, indirectly high costs (due to bus trips that on average are longer), and the potential loss of eligibility for provincial grants.

### **5.2.2 Use of Unique Coding System**

Edmonton Public Schools is using a unique student coding system that is different from the provincial coding system in use by every other school district in Alberta. This decision made little difference to the Transportation Department in the past due to the provincial Block Grant Formula for funding transportation at the Metro School Board. With the new proposed regulations Edmonton Public Schools will have to determine the eligibility of each student based on the Alberta Education coding system to determine if they are entitled to receive a transportation grant. Although matching and cross referencing of the codes is possible, and is now done for other purposes, the potential for disputes with Alberta Education seems likely to increase for transportation. Use of the provincial coding system, at least for transportation, would improve relations with Alberta Education, and reduce the potential for disputes over eligibility.

### **5.2.3 Need to Better Match Program Capacity**

The Transportation Department has divided the city into 6 zones. The objective of the department is to transport Special Needs students to schools in the same zone as they reside. Currently about one third of Special Needs students are transported across zone boundaries due to parental choices, insufficient places in their required program, or the need to attend a program that is only available in a single location (e.g. L.Y. Cairns). There are many



considerations that go into decisions by Planning and Accommodation staff regarding program locations. Transportation is only one of the factors that must be considered in the facility planning process. The facility planning process must accurately assess transportation issues including ride time and ongoing operational expense against other issues such as one time capital expenses for school renovations. Having both departments under a single Director is a positive step; however efforts need to be taken to ensure that transportation issues are given sufficient weight in the facility planning process.

## **6.0 Issues - Regular & Alternative Program Transportation**

---

Regular and Alternative Program transportation may include busing for all grades 1 to 12 students who are not receiving curb service transportation for Special Needs. It includes mild and moderate Special Needs students, as well as alternative programs that offer transportation but are not classified by the provincial government as Special Needs.

### **6.1 SITES FOR RECEIVING SCHOOLS**

Currently Edmonton Public Schools uses a variety of criteria to select receiving schools for areas with neighborhood schools that have closed or not yet been built. The Alberta Education proposal to re-introduce a distance based eligibility formula to determine the level of funding for transportation could make transportation an even more important factor. The reintroduction of a 2.4 km walking distance criteria for determining eligibility for transportation grants has the potential to become a significant factor in determining which schools should be selected to be a receiving school.

### **6.2 BOUNDARIES FOR ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS**

The Board of Edmonton Public Schools has put in place an education system that features open enrolment and offers a diversified menu of alternative programs that include bilingual programs as well as programs that focus on particular academic areas, sports or the arts. Although students and parents have the ability to choose their school and program, the transportation policy of the Board recognizes that there is not equal access to transportation for all schools and programs, particularly at the elementary level. At the Senior High, and perhaps to a lesser extent Junior High, there is equal access to all schools and programs as a result of the universal student subsidy program for Edmonton Transit monthly passes. Most parents are unwilling to let their elementary age students ride on public transit beyond their local neighborhood, particularly if it involves a transfer. Student Transportation also does not consider an Edmonton Transit trip that requires a transfer to be an acceptable service for elementary students.

The transportation boundaries for alternative programs are custom designed by the transportation department each year in consultation with the site planning group and the school principal. The design process includes factors such as current demand, transportation resources available, historical loads, and ride times. Appendix B includes a sample of the boundaries for a number of the alternative programs. The maps show that in many cases students outside the boundary can be closer to the school than students inside the boundary. Although boundary adjustments are made to accommodate some students, not every student or parent can be accommodated. The boundaries are drawn to include the maximum number of students, but can vary significantly from program to program or school to school.

The boundaries take into consideration the location of other schools offering the same program, and enrolments, the availability of buses and the cost to provide the service. Some schools may

have relatively small transportation boundaries, (e.g. schools with French Immersion which is offered in many locations) or may be city wide, such as Victoria's performing arts program. Although each of the factors taken into consideration may be individually reasonable and appropriate, the result is a high level of inconsistency in the size and shape of Transportation Service Areas for alternative programs of choice.

In some cases an exception to a boundary may be granted or the boundary might be adjusted to accommodate a student just outside the line. The existence of a line and map may very well discourage children from applying for or attending a program of choice. To some extent it may also be true that if one student is outside the boundary he or she would not be accommodated, but if several neighbors also wanted to attend the same program there would be greater possibility of creating an exception to the boundary or moving the boundary to accommodate them. In such cases it is not the student's location that determined he or she was not entitled to receive transportation, but rather the denial came because not enough neighbors decided to attend the same program.

The current situation for elementary students could be improved by implementing strong guidelines for the design of transportation boundaries and the provision of transportation services. Possible modified approaches include the following.

#### **6.2.1 Guidelines for the Drawing of Boundaries Based on Distance or Use of Transportation Zones**

For example, transportation will be provided to a particular program for residences beyond 1.5 km but less than 3 km walking distance, with adjustments for geographic barriers as required. Students living outside the boundaries will be accommodated in any given year if they can be transported to the school in less than 1 hour, and no other child's trip is extended beyond one hour as a result. Transportation in future years for students living outside the boundary would not be guaranteed.

Alternatively the six transportation zones used to determine entitlements for Special Needs transportation could also be used as alternative program transportation zones. Yellow Bus transportation would only be provided to alternative programs within the zone where a student resides. ETS passes would be available to travel to schools and programs outside the zone of residence. In this case it might be necessary to subdivide the zones for programs such as French Immersion or Logos with multiple sites, or make some exception if there are no sites within a specific zone (e.g. Mt Pleasant Cogito is in the southwest but serves the southeast).

The Transportation Department does have internal guidelines for the design of service, however because they have not been approved by the Board of Trustees they are subject to changes and exceptions.

## **6.2.2 Tiered Ride Times and Fee Payments**

It may be desirable to tier the provision of transportation for programs of choice resulting in longer ride times beyond a certain distance from the school (e.g. 3 km) and/or to charge higher student transportation fees for students living beyond the boundary. The longer the ride time on a school bus, generally the higher the cost it is to provide the service. Some parents will pay for transportation regardless of the cost, or the ride time. If higher fees are adopted for longer trips it would recognize these costs, but some type of means test for exemptions might be required to ensure that education at the elementary level was not being impacted by financial considerations. The Student Transportation Department believes that any means test should be the responsibility of the school sites.

Establishing that ride times outside specific boundaries could be as much as 30 minutes longer than inside a boundary will make it clear to parents that there are tradeoffs that come with selecting a program of choice that is far from their residence.

## **6.2.3 Use of Congregated Stops**

The term 'congregated stops' refers to the use of a single bus stop to serve a large area. For example a single bus stop at the neighborhood school would be the only stop in the neighborhood for a Yellow Bus destined for a program of choice at a distant school. The advantage of a congregated stop is that fewer stops are required, and travel on the bus will be quicker, allowing a single bus to serve a larger area. Congregated stops are used for alternative programs at Calgary Public, and they have proven effective in keeping down costs, although they are not always popular. The argument can be made that students are not walking further than they would have to their neighborhood school and that additional time spent walking will be offset by shorter ride times. The downside can be that if a bus is delayed or does not show up due to mechanical or driver issues it is possible that children could be left standing at a location where adequate shelter is not available. Congregated stops offer efficiencies but there is also extra effort required to find suitable sites to locate stops or develop parent support at the stops.

## **6.3 SERVICE DESIGN GUIDELINES & TARGETS**

The Board of Trustees of Edmonton Public Schools has not endorsed or approved any specific service design objectives or targets for school transportation. However three service design aspects of transportation probably draw the most calls from parents as well as having a direct impact on transportation costs. These factors are: walking distance, stop distance and ride time. The Transportation Department has instituted a call tracking system this year to identify the subjects that generate the most calls from parents.

### **6.3.1 Walking Distance**

Currently Edmonton Public Schools does not publish any specific distance targets to define when transportation is to be provided for Regular and Alternative programs. The current policy

on when transportation is to be provided depends entirely on neighborhood boundaries, which are variable and inconsistent across the city. Neighborhood boundaries are established by the Edmonton Public School Planning Department considering several factors to define a neighborhood including geographic barriers, arterial roads, population, walking distance and area. Many other districts simply use walking distance to school as the determining factor when busing is to be provided.

Walking distance to school is an important consideration for most parents. Establishing specific numeric targets with the ability to be flexible in cases of safety (e.g. railway tracks) or geographic barriers would clarify the service parameters for parents, and trustees. Earlier in the report potential guidelines of 1.5 km for elementary, 2.0 km for Junior High and 2.4 km for Senior High were suggested. Parents and the Trustees must have an opportunity to comment on these distances. A flat 2.4 km walking distance boundary would generate about 26,700 eligible students, while a graduated walking distance would generate about 30,400 eligible students. In both cases not every student that the Board transports is eligible. Currently the Board applies for grants equivalent to about 35,400 students under the Block Grant formula.

### **6.3.2 Stop Distance**

Stop distance is the walking distance between the residence of a student and the bus stop for a yellow school bus or an Edmonton Transit bus. The provincial requirement for students eligible for busing is a stop within 2.4 km of the residence of the student. The City of Edmonton goal is to provide an ETS bus stop within 400 metres of every residence; however this guideline cannot always be met due to subdivision design, phasing of development, or transit ridership. The stated objective of Edmonton Public Schools is to have a bus stop (Yellow or Transit) within 400 metres of every student entitled to transportation.

A reasonable policy objective would be to have 95% of elementary students living beyond 1.5 km from their neighborhood or designated school within 400 metres of a school bus stop. Including a percentage target makes it clear that not everyone might be included in the target, but that Board has an objective and target and expects almost all students to fall within the policy objective. Stops could be placed as far apart as possible, while still meeting this guideline.

For Junior and Senior High Students living more than 2.0 km or 2.4 km from their designated school the target might be 95% of students within 500 metres of an Edmonton Transit service providing service to their designated school with not more than one transfer for Junior High and two transfers for Senior High. The inclusions of a target figure (90%) emphasizes that it is a target or objective, but offers a high level of assurance that the students will not be walking more than 500 metres to a stop.

### **6.3.3 Ride Time and Transfers**

Currently, the goal for district-arranged transportation services is to minimize the number of students who have a one-way ride of more than 60 minutes and to ensure that 75% of students spend less time than the maximum on a bus. The time limit can be up to 90 minutes when students are being transported to city wide programs such as Victoria. When busing is provided to programs of choice the catchment area may still be quite large so a longer ride time may also be necessary, perhaps up to 75 minutes. Currently there is no Yellow Bus to Yellow Bus transfers anywhere in the system for regular or alternative program students. Transferring is sometimes used by the Yellow Bus contractors for Special Needs service.

These guidelines are used by the planning staff, but are not official policies of the Board of Trustees. However both ride time limits and transfers have a potential impact on cost and are sensitive issues for parents. A sixty minute ride time limit, except for city wide programs, appears to be comparable to the guidelines used by the other Metro Boards and should be adopted by the Edmonton Public School Board of Trustees.

Since there will always be some exceptions the policy guidelines should be stated as policy objectives and targets of less than 100%, rather than absolute standards. Examples would be:

- 95% of all students traveling to their designated program should have a ride time on Yellow Buses of 60 minutes or less in each direction.
- 95% of all students travelling to a program of choice should have a ride time on Yellow Buses of 75 minutes or less in each direction.
- 95% of all students travelling to a city wide program should have ride time on Yellow Buses of 90 minutes or less in each direction
- Whenever feasible the routes should be designed so that students who are first on in the morning are first off in the afternoon in order to balance ride time.

Edmonton Public Schools does not currently design fixed route Yellow Bus service to include transfers; however schools did report that Special Needs students (curb service, designed by contractors) were transferring. If transfers are included in the Yellow Bus system, travel times can be reduced and it may be possible to cut expenses. Making Yellow Bus transfers work does require some coordination and the selection of sites that are safe and can provide transfers without students crossing streets. The program of choice educational system used in Edmonton would appear to be suited to a busing network designed around a limited number of transfer locations. In order for transfers to work bus schedules need to be reliable and ride times consistent. With transfers a single late bus can cause all the transferring buses to also become late. Transfers are an accepted part of riding on public transit, and appear to have potential applications on Yellow Buses in Edmonton.

## **6.4 TRANSPORTATION FEES**

The student transportation program operated by Edmonton Public Schools is expensive to operate and requires all students except Kindergarten to pay monthly fees. The fees per student range from \$24.00 to \$43.00 per month, with discounts for multiple students in the same family, or for payment of a full year in advance (\$180 per year for regular students). The fees are slightly higher than those required at the other Metro Boards:

- Calgary Public – Yellow Bus \$165.00 per year, monthly not available.
- Calgary Catholic – Yellow Bus \$175.00 per year, monthly not available
- Edmonton Catholic – Yellow Bus/ETS \$27.00/mo for elementary, \$39.00/mo Jr./Sr. High

Edmonton Public and Catholic Board offer the option to pay per month which offers a more expensive rate than the Calgary Boards, but for students who can walk or ride bikes during the warmer months the total annual cost may actually be lower.

The fees collected at Edmonton Public allow the district to provide transportation services that go well beyond the minimum levels funded by Alberta Education. Reductions in fees may be possible if actions are taken to reduce costs as recommended in this report and grant levels remain the same. On the other hand if costs are reduced, and the fee level is maintained it may be possible to fund additional services, if grant levels are unchanged.

The Alberta Education Transportation Grant is based on the number of students reported on September 30. Under the current Block Grant formula the actual number of eligible students is not a factor and is provided for statistical purposes. If the grant formula is revised the grant amount will likely be based on the number of eligible student on September 30. The grant is paid for a full year, even if an eligible student only rides one or two months or never rides.

The system in use in Calgary where Yellow School Bus passes are sold only on a yearly basis also recognizes that Yellow Bus costs are consistent throughout the year, and each student that uses the service should pay a share of the total annual costs, even if their seat is empty some months.

## **6.5 OTHER ISSUES**

### **6.5.1 Edmonton Transit System**

Each month Edmonton Public Schools sells about 17,000 passes for Edmonton Transit. This makes EPSB one of the largest single customers of the transit system. The student pass sold by Edmonton Transit is one of the most expensive student passes in Canada, but the cost is mitigated by Edmonton Transit's policy to permit the use of Yellow Bus passes on ETS up to six times per month, at no additional cost to EPSB. Using the cost of a youth transit fare the value



## EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## STUDENT TRANSPORTATION REVIEW

Issues - Regular &amp; Alternative Program Transportation

October 2, 2009

of the six free trips is about equivalent to a 15% discount on the price of the student transit pass. Table 6-1 provides a summary of public transit fares for school age children across Canada.

**Table 6-1 Transit Fares for Students Across Canada**

City	Student Fare or Pass
Edmonton	\$57.50 unrestricted student pass, Yellow Bus pass valid for 6 ETS trips per month
Calgary	\$50.50 per month unrestricted student pass, valid anytime
Victoria	\$28 per month but 6 month minimum purchase, valid anytime
Vancouver	30 - 35% discount on single fares with student I.D. card, valid anytime
Saskatoon	\$48.00 per month, unrestricted, valid anytime
Winnipeg	\$49.20 per month, unrestricted, valid anytime
Toronto	12 years old and under 75% discount on single fares; Over 12 years old, 33% discount on single fares valid anytime
Ottawa	\$65.25 per month, unrestricted, valid anytime
Montreal	\$37.00 per month, unrestricted, valid anytime
Quebec	\$48.00 per month, unrestricted, valid anytime
Halifax	15 years old and under \$52.00 per month unrestricted valid anytime; Over 15 years old, \$64.00 per month

Edmonton Transit student passes are provided to EPSB at a price that is discounted from the adult rate and then further subsidized by the school district. Some school districts, such as Calgary Public, do not sell transit passes but will pay subsidies directly to parents if they are entitled to receive subsidized transportation. A number of jurisdictions across Canada buy bus tickets from transit systems and distribute them for free or at discounted price to their students. There does not appear to be a consistent approach to transit fares. The current system appears to be working well in Edmonton, although Edmonton Transit prefers the Calgary system where the transit operator looks after student pass sales and the school district pays the subsidy to the parents. The advantage to Edmonton Transit would be that passes could be sold at all outlets and available to all youth, not just students, and would be more readily available during the summer months. The issue may be resolved in the future as Edmonton Transit moves to a renewable, reloadable Smart Card fare system to replace paper passes.

Edmonton Transit is a willing partner with the school district and transports significant numbers of students. Their operation likely has additional capacity to transport students in the off peak direction, however during peak times school travel is often in the same direction as peak commuter flows. In 2008 - 2009 the restrictions prohibiting using the ETS pass during weekend were removed, making the pass more attractive to students. The pass price to the school board is scheduled to increase to \$63.00 per month in 2010/2011.



### **6.5.2 Technology**

There are two significant areas of technology that continue to evolve quickly and are worthy of consideration. These include on board cameras and Global Positioning Systems (GPS). GPS for schools buses is now a proven technology and has been installed on thousands of buses across North America. First Student, a contractor for EPSB uses this type of equipment in other districts. It provides real time information on the location of every bus, which can be used for planning and monitoring performance. It makes a powerful tool when linked to computerized scheduling and routing software and can be used to advise parents of the location of the bus and their child. It may also result in some lower costs for the operator as a result of better monitoring of driver performance and fleet usage.

GPS systems are relatively inexpensive to purchase, particularly when amortized over the life of a school bus, which can be 15 or more years. The live monitoring fees can be significant if cellular technology is used, but significantly less if upgraded radio systems are used for the live link. GPS offers significant benefits, potential for cost savings and better information for planning that could result in savings. The entire fleet does not need to be converted at once, and it can be phased into operation as the fleet is renewed.

On board video camera technology is available now on a few buses in the Edmonton area. Making it available on more buses has the potential for reducing behavioral problems, vandalism and enhancing safety. Behavior issues were raised by school Principals and contractors, particularly in regard to Special Needs Transportation. Video cameras would provide district staff with accurate information about problems and driver response. Not every vehicle needs to be equipped with cameras every day, but having the ability to quickly install cameras and recording units into camera ready locations would meet most needs.

The software used by EPSB is spatially accurate and GIS capable however difficulties were encountered in producing some of the data required to complete this study. An update to the computerized scheduling and routing software used by the district may be required in the future to fully implement GPS.

### **6.5.3 Organization**

Edmonton Public and Edmonton Catholic school districts run completely segregated transportation operations that may serve the same neighborhoods and schools located within a few metres of each other. Twenty years ago both districts contracted with Edmonton Transit to design Yellow Bus routes, and some level of integration or sharing of resources was possible. However, today each district plans its own routes, contracts for carriers and sets its own level of service.

There are examples across Canada where two or more school districts in urban areas have collaborated to provide a joint transportation service. The reason for combining the transportation services is invariably to reduce transportation expenses and improve service if

possible. One of the longest running examples in Alberta is the combined transportation operation of Lakeland Catholic School District and Northern Lights School Division in Cold Lake. In Quebec the law requires that school boards must share transportation resources.

In Ottawa, the Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA) was formed as a result of reforms by the Ministry of Education that required school districts to develop partnerships and fully integrated transportation services. The province of Ontario enacted the reforms to move towards the cooperative provision of effective and efficient student transportation in areas where local districts serve the same areas.

The two Ottawa Boards began with a joint steering committee that eventually led to the creation of OSTA. The mandate of the OSTA is *“to manage and deliver student transportation services effectively and efficiently for the more than 60,000 students of the Ottawa Catholic and Ottawa-Carleton District School Boards receiving transportation services each day.”* In order for such a system to work in Edmonton the two districts would either have to harmonize their level of transportation service or develop an equitable means of sharing costs and revenues. Such a system has the potential to create cost savings for parents and taxpayers, and an overall improvement in the quality of the service delivered in Edmonton.

## **7.0 Kindergarten Transportation**

---

Kindergarten students are bused to and from their half day program if they live in a neighborhood without a school and the walk distance is deemed to be excessive. Full day kindergarten is also being tested at a limited number of sites. The Transportation Department does not publish a quantitative definition of what is excessive or what other special factors may be considered. The Transportation Department also advises that limited Kindergarten busing is provided at most sites that have alternative program busing. Eligibility for Kindergarten Noon Yellow Busing includes the following:

1. Student must be enrolled in the Regular Program and attending their designated school.
2. Student must live outside the attendance area (walking area) of the neighborhood in which the designated receiving school is located.
3. Student must reside inside the transportation service area for the designated school.
4. Yellow Bus must be able to pick-up and drop-off the student within the transportation service area for their designated school.

Kindergarten students in the morning are picked up with regular students, and in the afternoon are dropped off with regular students. At noon a special bus is provided for Kindergarten students only and it provides service to the pickup or drop off address or as close as possible. Time is allowed in the schedule for the buses to be met by parents or guardians. Ride time on Kindergarten buses is designed to be 60 minutes or less. Meeting the 60 minute guideline may be difficult for schools with alternative programs with large catchment areas or city wide attendance boundaries and the door to door service level.

The province does not provide grants for any kindergarten transportation.

## **8.0 Performance Monitoring**

---

A good performance monitoring system should be derived from policy objectives set by the Board of Trustees, and offer measurements based on quantitative criteria that reflect the effectiveness and efficiency of the services being offered. The data needed to monitor performance should be derived from the computerized scheduling system, budget reports and the contractors.

Possible performance indicators for regular and alternative transportation include:

- Cost per regular student to be transported to designated school
- Cost per student to be transported to program of choice
- Percentage of cost of complete transportation operation covered by user fees
- Percentage of regular students (attending designated receiving school) riding less than 100 and 120 minutes per day (round trip)
- Percentage of program of choice students riding less than 120, 150 or 180 minutes per day (round trip)
- Percentage of trips per month that arrive at school before first bell
- Percentage of regular students that live within 400 metres (or established guideline) from closest Yellow Bus (or Edmonton Transit) stop
- Average number of students per Yellow Bus trip
- Average maximum utilization of Yellow Bus routes at peak load point
- Average number of runs per a.m. or p.m. Yellow Bus trip

## **9.0 Future Scenarios**

---

### **9.1 WALKING DISTANCE**

EPSB currently uses neighborhood boundaries to determine entitlement for transportation. This entitlement is determined independent of Alberta Education eligibility requirements and indeed under the block grant formula currently in place has no impact on the amount of funds received for transportation from the government.

The provincial government is planning to reintroduce a requirement for EPSB to determine eligibility based on a walking distance standard of 2.4 km. There are 12,105 students living in neighborhoods as defined by EPSB that do not have Elementary or Junior High Schools. Under the current EPSB policies all of these students are entitled to transportation. If the proposed provincial rules are applied about 5,030 elementary students and 2,825 Junior High students would be eligible for a transportation grant because they live more than 2.4 km from their designated school. A further 770 would also be eligible as they are attending an approved French immersion or bilingual program. Grants would not be available for about 3,480 students under the proposed rules. These students are currently funded by Alberta Education under the Block Grant system.

### **9.2 SPECIAL NEEDS**

Edmonton Public Schools currently provides curb to curb transportation for about 2,887 Special Needs students. The consultant team reviewed EPSB enrolment data and has estimated that 2,110 students meet the provincial definition of students being coded as having severe Special Needs. The current Block Grant application shows only 932 students as being coded as having severe Special Needs. This suggests that the amount of grant revenue EPSB will receive for severe Special Needs may increase. However the number of severe Special Needs students found in the EPSB enrolment data is significantly higher per capita than at other Metro Boards. About 2.3% of students enrolled at EPSB would qualify for Special Needs curb service, compared to 0.8% at Calgary Public, 1.6% at Edmonton Catholic, and 1.3% at Calgary Catholic. All of the other Metro Boards use the provincial coding manual and provincial codes, while EPSB uses its own unique coding system.

If Alberta Education accepts the number of severe Special Needs students determined by EPSB the actual grant could increase by about 1,178 students, or \$2.6 million at current funding levels. If EPSB also follows through and ceases to provide curb service to the 777 mild/moderate Special Needs students who currently receive curb service there will also be a financial saving of at least \$2.4 million in Special Needs transportation, but a potential increase in fixed route costs of \$600,000, for a net savings of \$1.8 million (assumes 23 new fixed route, single trip services).

## **10.0 Recommendations**

---

### **10.1 SPECIAL NEEDS - STUDENT TRANSPORTATION IMPLEMENTATION**

#### **10.1.1 Transportation Department to Assume Scheduling and Routing for Special Needs**

It is recommended that for the 2010 – 2011 school year the Transportation Department assume the function of scheduling and routing Special Needs buses. This includes curb service and additional fixed route service for mild and moderate Special Needs. Dry runs can be completed during the 2009 – 2010 school year to familiarize staff with use of the Trapeze software to schedule Special Needs and to determine if new software is required. The dry run period will also allow the staff to assess the potential savings and assess the opportunities for using alternative modes. This period will also assist management in determining if changes are required to the staffing levels within the department. The District will have complete control over ride times and pickup and drop-off times and be better able to meet the needs of students, parents and schools.

It is understood that the existing contractor operates some Special Needs services that serve both the Public and Catholic schools. Therefore the feasibility and financial impact of operating an integrated Special Needs scheduling function should also be investigated jointly with the Catholic District during the 2009 – 2010 school year.

The alternative to shifting the scheduling function in-house would be to renegotiate the contract to provide incentives for the contractors to reduce ride times and make greater use of alternative modes that may have lower cost for the district. It is unlikely that this alternative approach would achieve the same positive impacts as bringing the scheduling function in-house.

#### **10.1.2 Transportation Department to Pay Contracts Per Special Needs Vehicle**

It is recommended that Edmonton Public Schools switch their payment schedule for Special Needs from one based on in or out of zone, ambulatory or wheelchair to a system that is based on a flat rate per bus. With the district doing the routing and scheduling the most favorable contract would be one that sets a flat rate per bus, per day for a minimum call out of two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon. Any route that is scheduled beyond that time would be paid more, in quarter hour increments. This type of formula would recognize that there are generally fixed costs for owning, insuring, storing and maintaining the bus regardless of the number of hours or miles operated. If the time exceeds the standard amount (four hours per day) there are additional costs that would be incurred for drivers, fuel and maintenance (assumes longer time equates to more distance covered). Wheelchair buses may cost more to purchase and maintain, and a supplement maybe considered for any bus required to transport wheelchairs, payable on a per bus basis. Similarly the payment schedule could be adopted to respond to different Special Needs vehicle sizes or with lower payments for small cutaway style vehicles and higher payments for larger conventional school buses.

Using this type of payment system will help to quickly identify any students who can be transported on alternative modes at lower cost or significantly shorter ride times. The shift from payments per student to payment per bus will mean that the benefit from more efficient scheduling will be realized by the District.

### **10.1.3 Transportation Department to Consider Alternative Modes When Appropriate**

It is recommended that the Transportation Department continue to consider alternative transportation modes for Special Needs transportation. The two most obvious choices are taxis and DATS. There are some issues with taxis, including driver training, maintaining consistent drivers, and reliability in inclement weather however there are likely to be some students for whom a taxi is the best and most economical choice. DATS offers an economical and reliable choice for students over 16 with mobility disabilities. Any use of taxis must also consider special contractual issues such as maintaining driver consistency, minimum insurance levels, and priority during peak periods.

**Figure 10-1 Alternative Modes Available in Edmonton**



*Wheelchair Accessible Taxi*



*Wheelchair Accessible Paratransit Service for >16 year old (DATS)*



**10.1.4 Customer Service Training**

It is recommended that a requirement for telephone call centre customer service training be added to the position descriptions for anyone at the department who handles front line calls from the schools or the public.

**10.1.5 Assume More Proactive Role in Site and Facility Planning**

It is recommended that the Transportation Department take a more proactive role in presenting the transportation issues during the process to determine program locations. The facility planning process must accurately assess transportation issues including ride time and ongoing operational expense against other issues such as one time capital expenses for school renovations.

**10.1.6 Ensure Identification of District Raised Funds Spent On Transportation**

It is recommended that structures be put into place to identify any time that money from locally raised transportation fees is needed to supplement the Alberta Education transportation grant. This recommendation is not intended to change the school of choice policy of EPSB, but rather to identify the costs of the program and allow an assessment of whether transportation is the most appropriate use of funds not originally allocated for transportation. It may lead to other innovative concepts such as requiring schools to pay for transportation that they request that is above and beyond the levels funded by Alberta Education.

**10.1.7 Consider Software Upgrade**

It is recommended that Edmonton Public Schools review the current software being used for routing and scheduling. There may be optional modules available that can add functionality that is now missing from the current software such as the ability to include student codes or expand the use of GIS data. The choice of adding new modules or switching to a new software provider is not a decision to be taken lightly, and a conversion can take a year or more to fully implement. Any change in software should be contemplated together with the recommended repatriation of the scheduling and routing function for Special Needs.

**10.1.8 Behavior Issues**

It is recommended that Edmonton Public Schools convene a task force with the objective of developing policies and guidelines for the transportation of children with severe behavioral problems. The policies and guidelines shall address when restraints, onboard monitors or other systems or techniques shall be employed to ensure the safety of school bus operations, the driver and other children. The task force should include participation from the Transportation Department, Special Needs Consultants, Schools, bus contractors and possibly parents.



## **10.2 SPECIAL NEEDS - EXTERNAL IMPLEMENTATION**

### **10.2.1 Revise Policy, Process and Participants For Determining Entitlement For Transportation**

It is recommended that the Transportation Department encourage the district to move towards the goal of having the transportation needs of Special Needs students determined by a committee with multi-disciplinary representation. Determining the transportation entitlement should therefore be the responsibility of a committee that can consider all of the needs of the students including programming and transportation. Having all requests funnel through a single group would ensure that there is a uniform application of the transportation policies and guidelines throughout the district and provide an organized approach to dispute resolution. It is also recommended that an appeal process and committee be established to review requests from parents for alternative solutions.

A weakness of the current site based decision making model employed by Edmonton Public Schools is that some Special Needs transportation decisions are made at the school level, but the financial responsibility for the decisions rests with the central office. The proposal to have a committee responsible for transportation decisions reduces or eliminates this weakness.

It is also recommended that the Transportation Department encourage the development of specific policy guidelines and criteria that contemplate instances in which mild/moderate Special Needs students may not be entitled to curb to curb transportation. The Transportation Department has already begun the process of transitioning mild and moderate Special Needs students to fixed routes. A total of 223 students were transitioned in 2008 – 2009, however there are more that should make the transition.

It is also recommended that the Transportation Department seek clarification that the existing policy which permits provision of transportation to Special Needs students to the school which they have been directed is consistent with the school of choice policy of the district. The existing policy is consistent with the proposed new funding requirements of Alberta Education, and any additional transportation entitlements would not be funded by the province. The reaffirmation of the policy would enable the Transportation Department to end the transportation of Special Needs students to schools other than the one to which they have been directed.

### **10.2.2 Adopt Provincial Coding for Special Needs Transportation**

It is recommended that the Transportation Department work with other EPSB departments to develop a coding scheme for transportation needs that is fully compatible with Alberta Education coding for Special Needs. In the past the different coding schemes were more convenient for some purposes and inconvenient for others, but did not affect the transportation grant revenue. In the future the coding of students will be very important in determining eligibility for provincial grants. Having a common coding system will minimize conflicts and ensure that grants are processed with minimal difficulty.

### **10.3 SPECIAL NEEDS - OTHER**

It is recommended that the Transportation Department be actively involved in the review of the Education Act that is now being conducted by Alberta Education. The Education Act and related regulations control the funding of school transportation. If Edmonton Public Schools wishes to receive funding for the transportation of Special Needs students to any appropriate program within a transportation zone there needs to be changes made to the Education Act and its regulations. This review will provide an opportunity for Edmonton Public Schools to make their case to the province.

### **10.4 REGULAR & ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM - STUDENT TRANSPORTATION IMPLEMENTATION**

#### **10.4.1 Transportation Entitlement**

It is recommended that the Transportation Department ask the Board of Trustees to approve entitlements to transportation based on walking distance, and other recognized criteria (e.g. geographic barriers, safety issues) and there should be separate guidelines for Kindergarten, Elementary, Junior High and Senior High.

The policy should be designed to reduce or remove ambiguity and achieve buy in and understanding from the Board. The policy should be in the form of an objective, with an indicator and target and should be independent of provincial requirements. Its role is to reflect what the Trustees of the Edmonton Public School Board believe is a reasonable distance to expect each type of student to walk and overall financial impacts.

#### **10.4.2 Board Approved Service Design Guidelines**

It is recommended that the Board of Trustees be asked to approve service design guidelines for Yellow Bus transportation. The service design guidelines should be written as a policy, but in the form of objectives, criteria and targets which will provide a basis to measure the performance of the transportation system. The key characteristics requiring service design guidelines include:

- Walking distance to Yellow Bus or ETS stops by school type (elementary, Junior High & Senior High)
- Maximum ride time by program type
- On time performance
- Acceptable use of transfers

#### **10.4.3 Alternative Program Transportation Boundaries**

It is recommended that a uniform system of alternative program transportation boundaries be adopted by the Board of Trustees. The system could utilize maximum travel distance or ride time, or be based on the six transportation zones use for Special Needs, but it would have the effect of making access equitable and reduce the number of service complaints. Service beyond the agreed upon boundaries could still be provided with the understanding that costs could be higher, or ride time will be longer. Several years of phase in would be required to bring the new procedures into effect.

#### **10.4.4 Technology**

It is recommended that, in future contracts with Yellow Bus providers, Edmonton Public Schools require a minimum number of buses be equipped with wiring to allow the temporary installation of video surveillance cameras, and targets be set for the implementation of a system wide GPS monitoring system.

It is also recommended that consideration be given to updating the Yellow Bus routing and scheduling software to enable it to work with the GPS monitoring system and to easily generate the types of data need for the performance monitoring system.

#### **10.4.5 Performance Monitoring**

It is recommended that a comprehensive performance monitoring system be implemented to provide management with monthly reports on the ability of the transportation system to meet budget requirements and the service performance targets approved by the Board.

#### **10.4.6 Transportation Fees**

It is recommended that Edmonton Public Schools consider only selling annual Yellow Bus Passes. Yellow School bus costs remain constant throughout the year, and students that only buy passes during the coldest months are being subsidized by the students who buy passes for every month. If every Yellow Bus passenger purchased a pass for the entire year the average price of a Yellow Bus pass could be reduced.

A similar program would not work with the existing ETS passes since the Board purchases the passes on a monthly basis from ETS. Discussions could be held with ETS to see if a better price could be negotiated if students purchased the passes in 5 or 10 month blocks, however this change would be a lower priority than making changes to the Yellow Pass system.

## **10.5 REGULAR & ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS - EXTERNAL IMPLEMENTATION**

### **10.5.1 Receiving Schools**

It is recommended that the criteria for the selection of receiving schools be amended to include a provision that they should attempt to be at least 2.4 kilometres from neighborhood. This will ensure that Edmonton Public Schools receives the maximum possible transportation funding. This is based on the assumption that revisions to the provincial formula for transportation grants will result in funding only being provided for students living more than 2.4 km from their designated school.

### **10.5.2 Organization**

It is recommended that discussions be held between Edmonton Public Schools and Edmonton Catholic Schools regarding some degree of merger of the student transportation functions of the two districts. The discussions could also include the Conseil Scolaire Centre-Nord, local Charter Schools and the Province of Alberta. Integration of Yellow School Bus transportation has the potential to reduce costs based on the experience of other jurisdictions in Alberta and elsewhere.

## **10.6 REGULAR & ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS - PROVINCIAL IMPLEMENTATION**

### **10.6.1 Provincial Transportation Grants**

It is recommended that the Board of Trustees of Edmonton Public Schools make their position clear to the Province of Alberta that funding for transportation for the Metro area boards should not be decreased. It is recommended the Board advance the position that if a new formula is required it should reflect the actual levels of transportation service being provided in the Metro areas and that the proposed formula based on 2.4 km for all students is unrealistic and at odds with the provincial support of programs of choice, and charter school transportation grants. In the Metro areas the regular grant should remain a flat amount and distance should not be a factor in determining the dollar value of the grant per student.

## **Appendix A – EPS 2008-2009 Student Transportation Fees**

---


**2008-2009 Student Transportation Fees**

TYPE OF TRANSPORTATION	MONTHLY FEE	ANNUAL FEE	REPLACEMENT COSTS (lost or stolen) Per pass/month
<b><u>EDMONTON TRANSIT</u></b>			
Kindergarten	No Charge	No Charge	\$49.75
Elementary Special Needs	\$24.00	\$200.00	\$49.75
Elementary (school has been closed or not built)	\$24.00	\$200.00	\$49.75
Family Maximum (school has been closed or not built) Kindergarten not included	\$65.00	\$580.00	n/a
Elementary (attending a school other than designated school)	\$43.00	\$390.00	\$49.75
Family Maximum (attending a school other than designated school)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Elementary (Bilingual or Immersion)	\$24.00	\$200.00	\$49.75
Elementary (Other Programs of Choice)	\$43.00	\$390.00	\$49.75
Junior High	\$43.00	\$390.00	\$49.75
Senior High	\$43.00	\$390.00	\$49.75
Family Maximum (Junior or Senior High)	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b><u>YELLOW SCHOOL BUS</u></b>			
<b>Regular:</b>			
Kindergarten	No Charge	No Charge	\$6.00
Elementary (school has been closed or not built)	\$24.00	\$200.00	\$6.00
Family Maximum (school has been closed or not built) Kindergarten not included	\$65.00	\$580.00	n/a
Junior High	\$43.00	\$390.00	\$6.00
Junior High (student attends same school as attended in elementary)	\$24.00	\$200.00	\$6.00
Senior High	\$43.00	\$390.00	\$6.00
Family Maximum (Junior or Senior High)	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>Special Needs Curb Service:</b>			
Kindergarten and Early Education	No Charge	No Charge	\$6.00
Elementary	\$24.00	\$200.00	\$6.00
Family Maximum (Elementary) Kindergarten and Early Education not included	\$65.00	\$580.00	\$6.00
Junior High	\$43.00	\$390.00	\$6.00
Senior High	\$43.00	\$390.00	\$6.00
Family Maximum (Junior or Senior High)	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>Alternative Programs:</b>			
Kindergarten	No Charge	No Charge	\$6.00
Elementary (Bilingual or Immersion)	\$24.00	\$200.00	\$6.00
Family Maximum (Bilingual or Immersion) Kindergarten not included	\$65.00	\$580.00	n/a
Elementary (Other Programs of Choice)	\$43.00	\$390.00	\$6.00
Family Maximum (Other Programs of Choice) Kindergarten not included	\$120.00	\$1140.00	n/a
<b>Conditional Riders:</b>			
Kindergarten to Grade 12	\$43.00	n/a	\$6.00
Family Maximum	n/a	n/a	n/a

**Annual Pass**

- Paid in full September 2008.
- A specific pass will be available for the annual yellow pass. For ETS, a new pass needs to be given out each month.

**Edmonton Transit Passes**

- Valid for **unlimited** travel on Edmonton Transit. Students must be enrolled in either an Edmonton Public elementary, junior or senior high school.
- Replacement passes are available at the school which the student is registered or through the ETS Customer Information Office at Churchill LRT station (99 Street and 102A Avenue).
- Mutilated passes will be replaced at no charge if the student turns in an identifiable remnant. The mutilated pass must be returned by the school to Financial Services.

## **Appendix B – EPS 2009-2010 Transportation Service Area Maps**

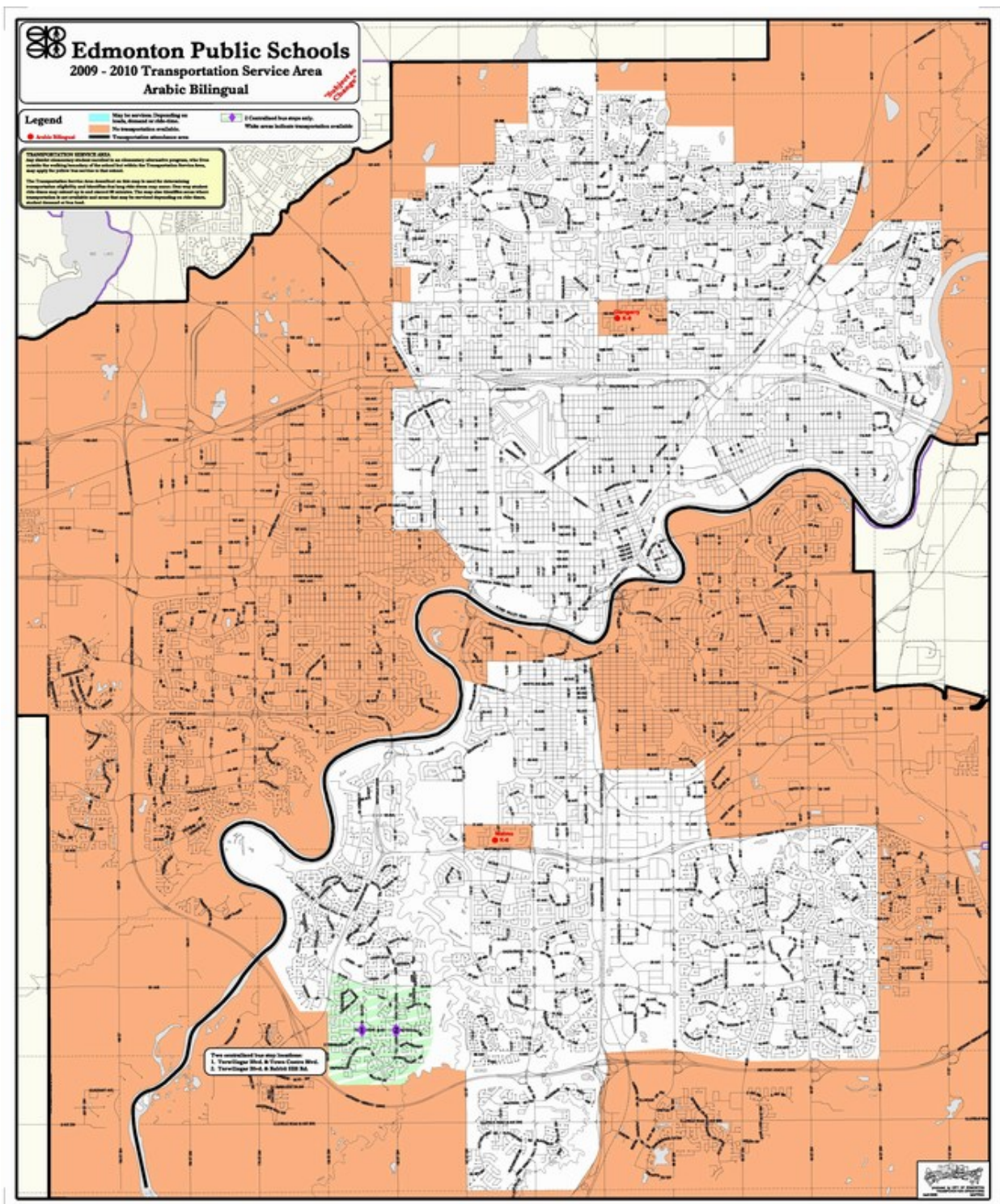
---



**EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
STUDENT TRANSPORTATION REVIEW**

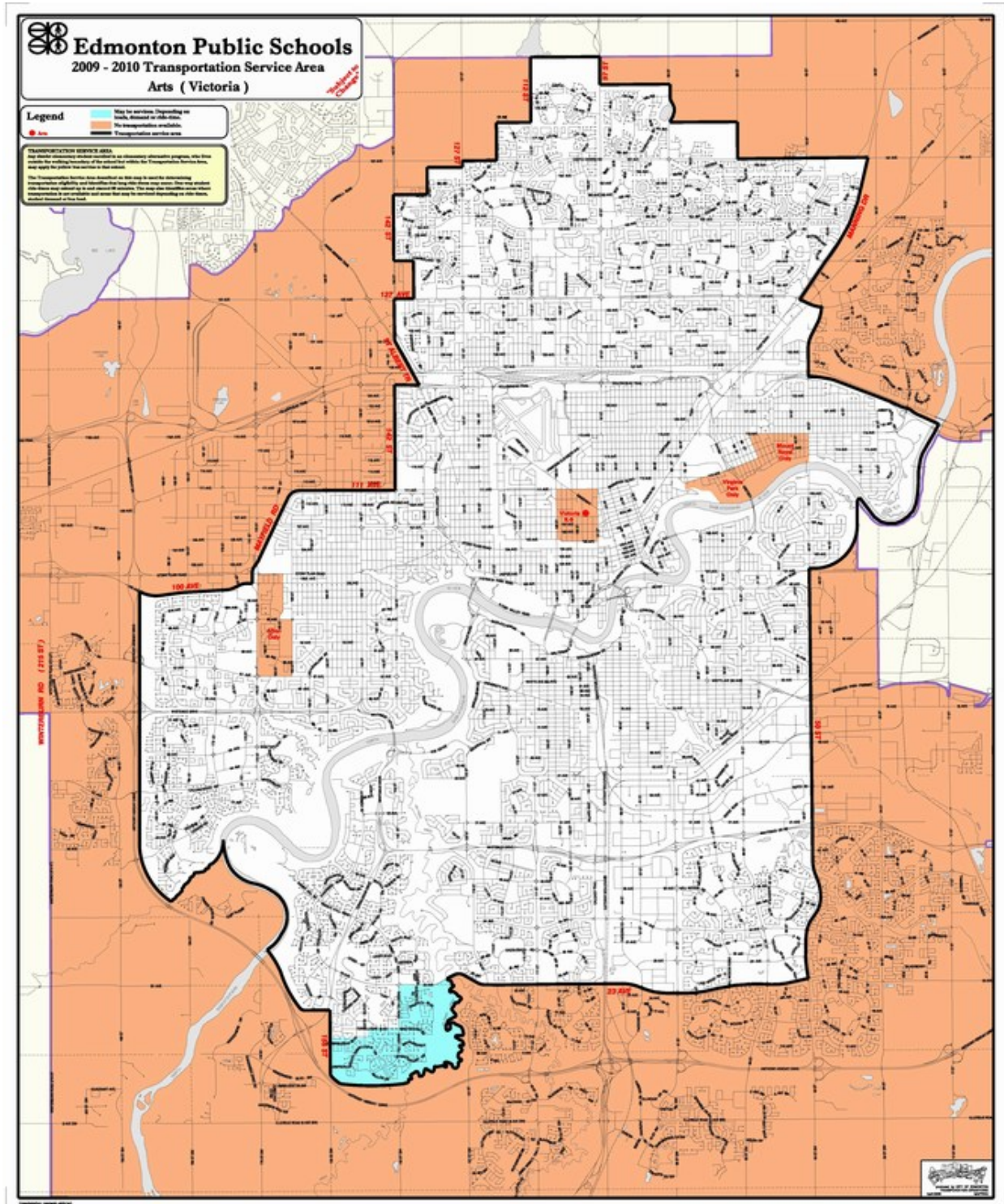
Appendix B – EPS 2009-2010 Transportation Service Area Maps

October 2, 2009

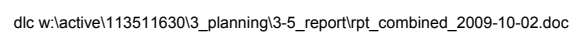




**EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
**STUDENT TRANSPORTATION REVIEW**  
 Recommendations  
 October 2, 2009









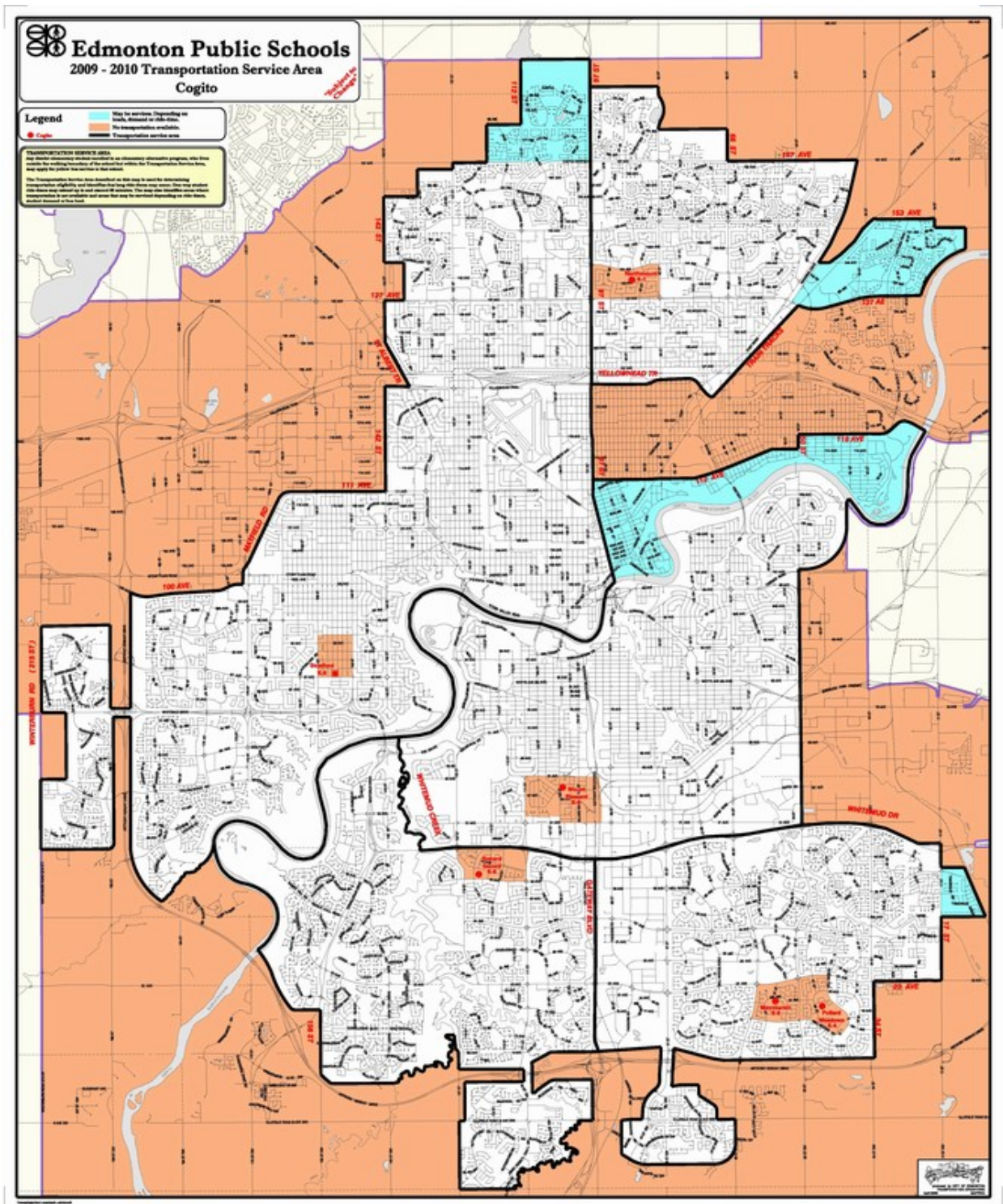




**EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
STUDENT TRANSPORTATION REVIEW**

Appendix B – EPS 2009-2010 Transportation Service Area Maps

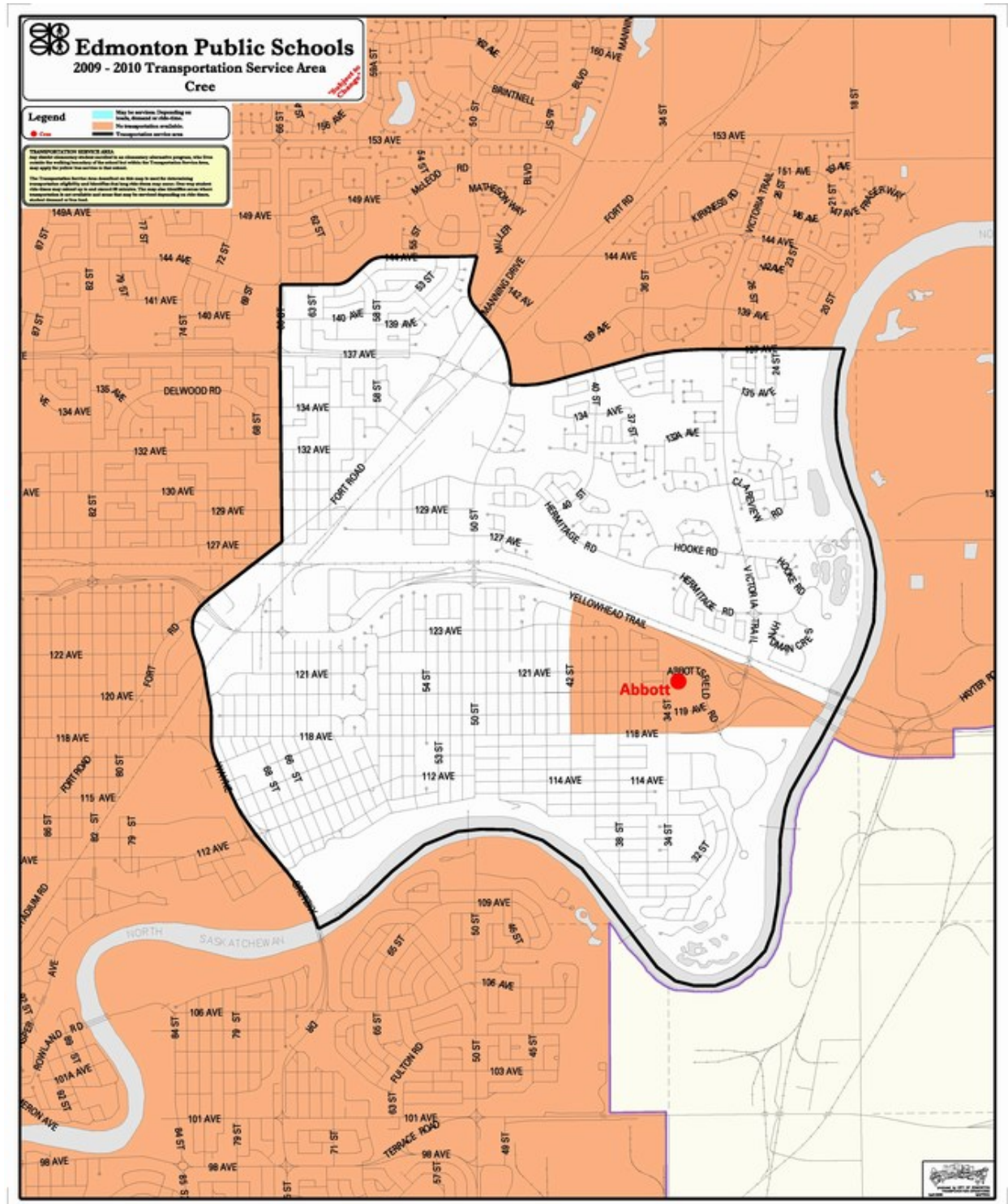
October 2, 2009



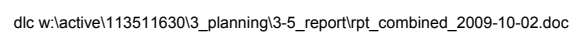
# EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS STUDENT TRANSPORTATION REVIEW

Recommendations

October 2, 2009

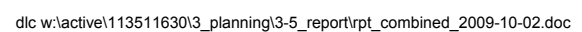






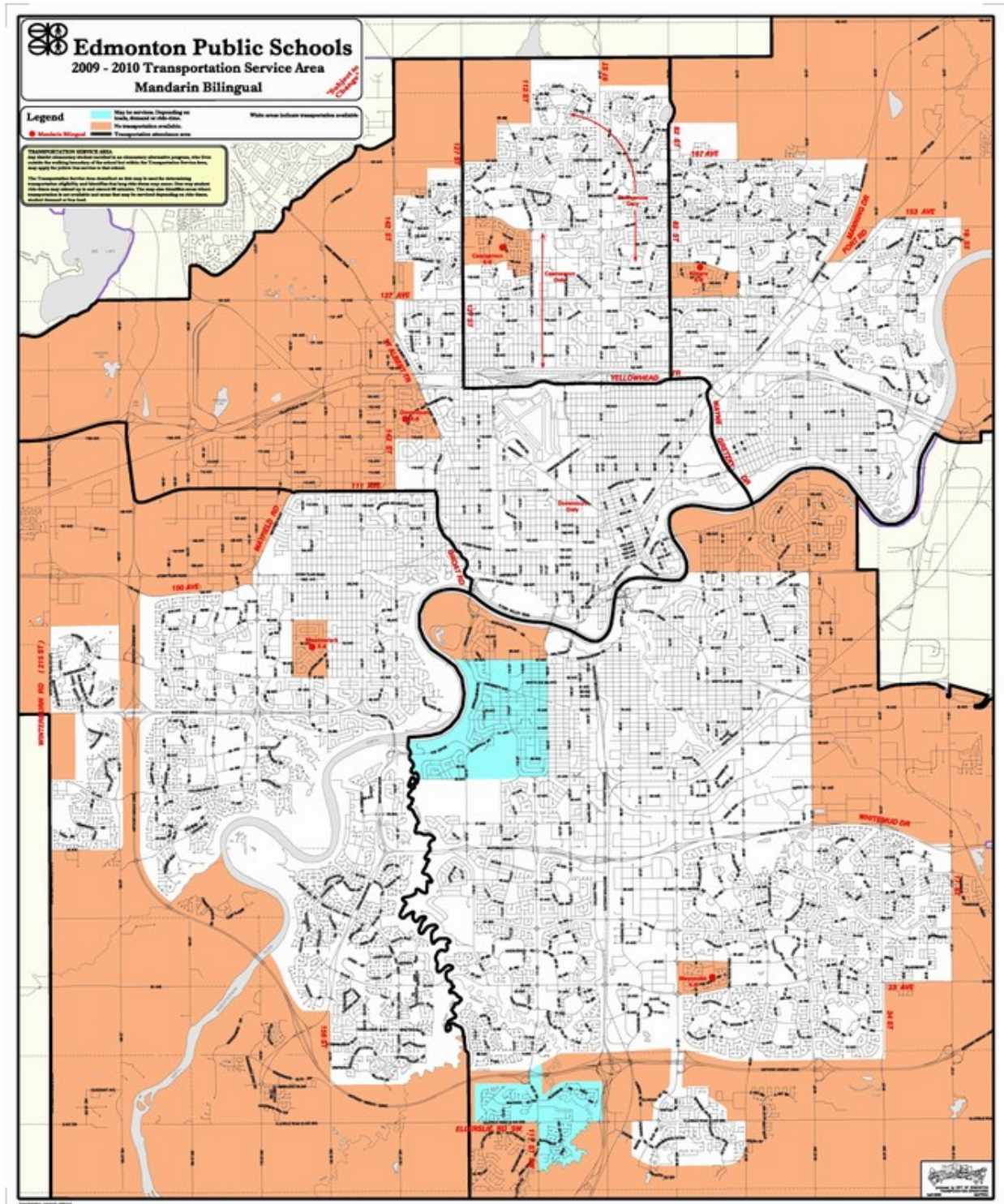




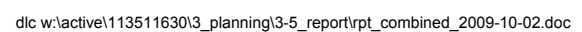




**EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
**STUDENT TRANSPORTATION REVIEW**  
 Recommendations  
 October 2, 2009













**EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
STUDENT TRANSPORTATION REVIEW**

Appendix B – EPS 2009-2010 Transportation Service Area Maps

October 2, 2009

