



MEMORANDUM

December 13, 2022
Regular Board Meeting

TO	Board of Trustees
FROM	Shauna Boyce, Superintendent
ORIGINATOR	Scott McFadyen, Associate Superintendent
RESOURCE	John Blood, Director, Transportation Services
GOVERNANCE POLICY	Board Policy 2: Role of the Board Board Policy 12: Role of the Superintendent Board Policy 17: Student Transportation
ADDITIONAL REFERENCE	Board Annual Work Plan
SUBJECT	TRANSPORTATION SERVICES DEPARTMENT REPORT 2022-2023

PURPOSE

For information. No recommendation required.

BACKGROUND

Parkland School Division operates one of the largest regional student transportation systems in the province. This means that we not only provide safe, effective and efficient transportation services to Parkland students, but also to other school divisions, which includes Evergreen Catholic Separate School Division, Black Gold School Division in Devon, Grande Yellowhead School Division in Evansburg, Living Waters Christian Academy, SML Christian Academy, Columbus Academy, Devon Christian School, Elves Special Needs Society, Alberta School for the Deaf and the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital.

The Transportation Department is open from 6:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. during bus operational days. During this time, staff handle all facets of the operation including bus dispatch and all external and internal inquiries related to transportation services and school attendance boundaries.

Report Summary

The following report outlines the Transportation Services Department for the 2022-2023 school term.

Transportation is continually evolving to maintain an efficient and cost effective Transportation system to all parties we serve. The report highlights the accomplishments along with some of the challenges that Transportation is facing both now and for the coming school year. The Transportation Services Department, it's contractors and Bus Operators, continue to tackle the challenges of maintaining consistent, safe, cost effective and reliable transportation service during the ever-changing hurdles of funding challenges and the ongoing driver shortages.

Administration would be pleased to respond to any questions regarding this report.

SM:rg



TRANSPORTATION SERVICES DEPARTMENT REPORT 2022-2023

DECEMBER 13, 2022

Presented to the Board of Trustees, December 13, 2022
 Name of Associate Superintendent: Scott McFadyen
 Resource: John Blood, Transportation Director

Our Students Possess the confidence, resilience, insight and skills required to thrive in, and positively impact, the world.

BACKGROUND

Parkland School Division (PSD) is a regional transportation provider. We travel 19,366 kilometres every day, which is 3,524,768 kilometres yearly. To put that into perspective, that would be equivalent to four-and-a-half trips to the moon and back. We transport 7,139 students or 2,598,596 passenger trips every year.

In addition to 5,621 PSD students, we also provide transportation services to Evergreen Catholic Separate School Division and a number of other organizations such as Black Gold School Division in Devon, Grande Yellowhead School Division in Evansburg, Living Waters Christian Academy in Spruce Grove, SML Christian Academy and Columbus Academy in Stony Plain, and Elves Specialized Program Society, Alberta School for the Deaf, and the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital in Edmonton.

Transportation Services had a challenging start to the 2022-2023 school year as two contractors choose to give up their routes over the summer as one vendor left the profession and one reduced their routes with PSD. Transportation issued a tender that was completed over the summer to fill the vacant routes.

Unfortunately, the day before school started, a major contractor lacked sufficient drivers to fill four routes that they had been awarded. This impacted startup for parents, students and transportation staff. Transportation had to consider alternatives in order to provide service, which included double running where possible, running the route late and amalgamating possible nearby routes, none of which were ideal. After an exhaustive look at every route in the affected areas Transportation managed to consolidate three routes into existing area routes. This was also not without challenges as it increased student loads on the units and increased the ride times for the students, but it allowed PSD to transport all students to school on time.

Ridership

We have seen an increase in ridership this year over the last couple of years and we believe this is mainly due to the end of restrictions regarding Covid 19. The most significant increase has been to the specialized transportation routes. We are experiencing an increased demand on the specialized transportation, especially for buses that can accommodate wheelchairs. It should be noted that the lead time to order a new bus equipped with a wheelchair lift is currently at over twelve (12) months from the order date. We had one of our contractors go to another Province to purchase a used wheelchair unit in order to obtain a unit quickly rather than wait, as these units are in short supply across Canada.

We again optimized all the routes once the 2022 – 2023 registration was completed in March 2022 and gained some efficiencies on the routes.

Transportation is experiencing increased costs for the services, due to the contractors facing increased operating costs for routes. These increases for the contractors, are being subsequently passed on to PSD in the form of increased bids for routes that go to tender (RFP) each year. In the 2021-2022 fiscal year Transportation had a small surplus due to being unable to run several specialized routes due to the lack of bus drivers, despite issuing a onetime payment to all contractors to assist them with the increased costs.

Department Statistics

In order to provide regional transportation services, PSD uses a variety of contracted school buses ranging from 20 to 90 passengers, taxi services and parent-provided transportation agreements.

In order to offer these comprehensive services Transportation utilizes:

- 153 buses, conducting 595 bus trip routes (to-and-from school) for the AM & PM daily trips
- 2 buses in Fort Chipewyan
- 6 Cabs
- 154 + Bus Operators, including one Fort Chipewyan driver (very few spare drivers)
- 13 Contractors
- 7 Office Staff
- 12 Transfer Site Bus Monitors (0.133 FTE). The biggest transfer site being Memorial where we have forty-six (46) buses routed through the site. Next is Greystone site with forty (40) buses routed and finally Copperhaven with nineteen (19) bus routes.

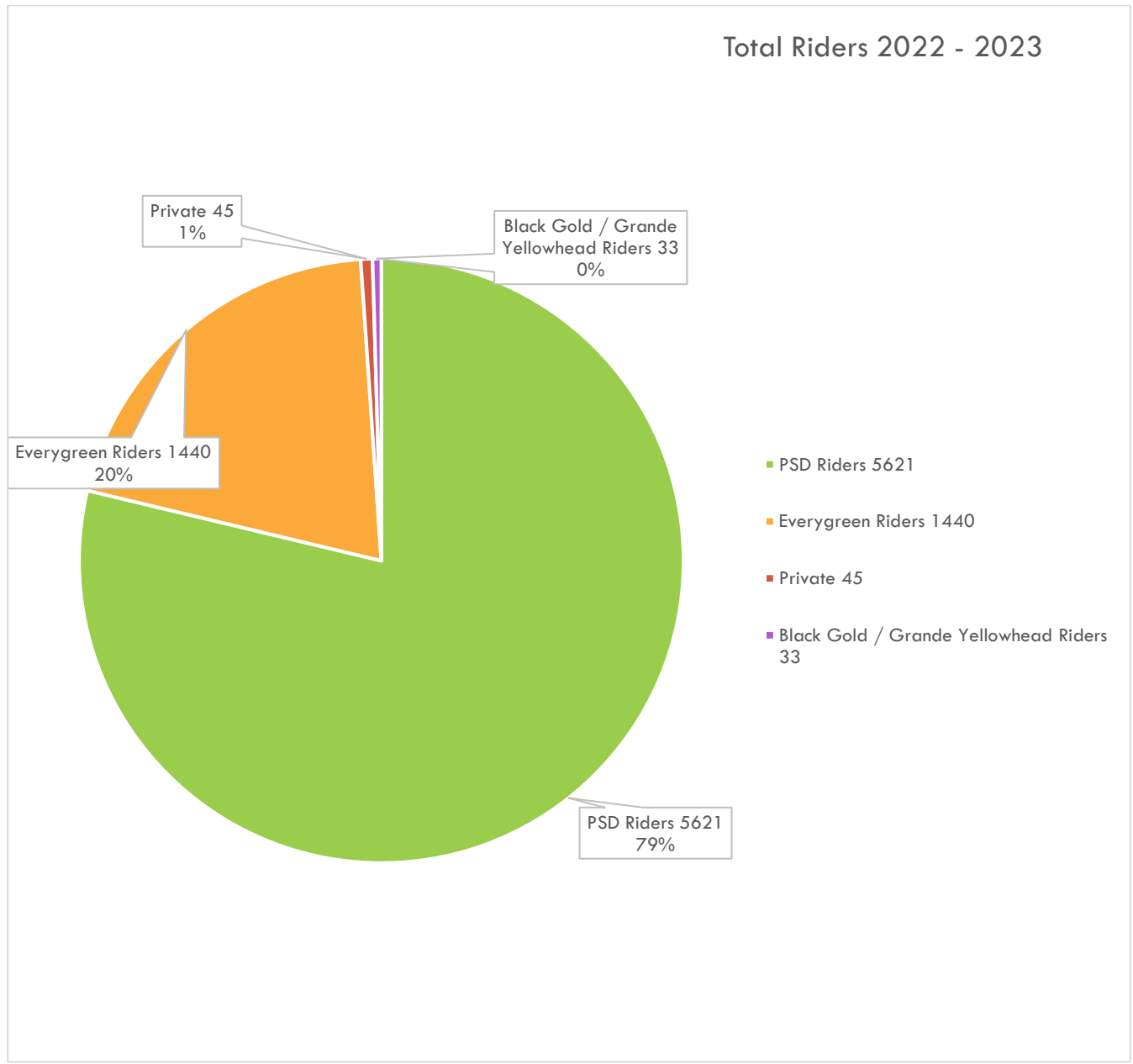
Transportation has responded to many customer service requests including:

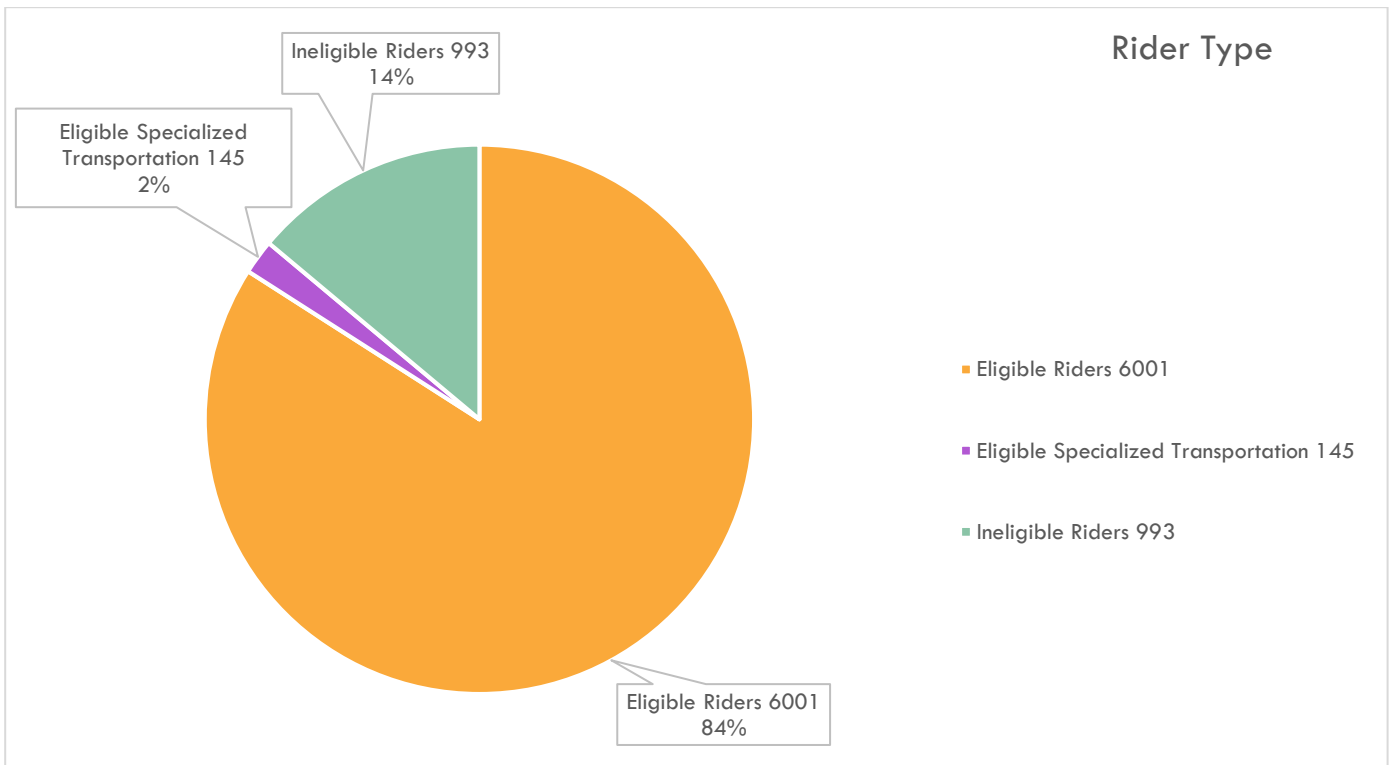
- 1,638 transportation change requests from July 3, 2022 to October 28, 2022
- 8,786 telephone inquiries from July 3, 2021 to October 28, 2022
- 111 bus pass replacements from September 1, 2022 to October 28, 2022
- 738 Transportation Admin fees applied from August 30, 2022 to October 28, 2022
- 263 Route change fees applied from August 30, 2022 to October 28, 2022

Transportation has taken several steps to address driver shortages for safety of our student, staff and contractors by:

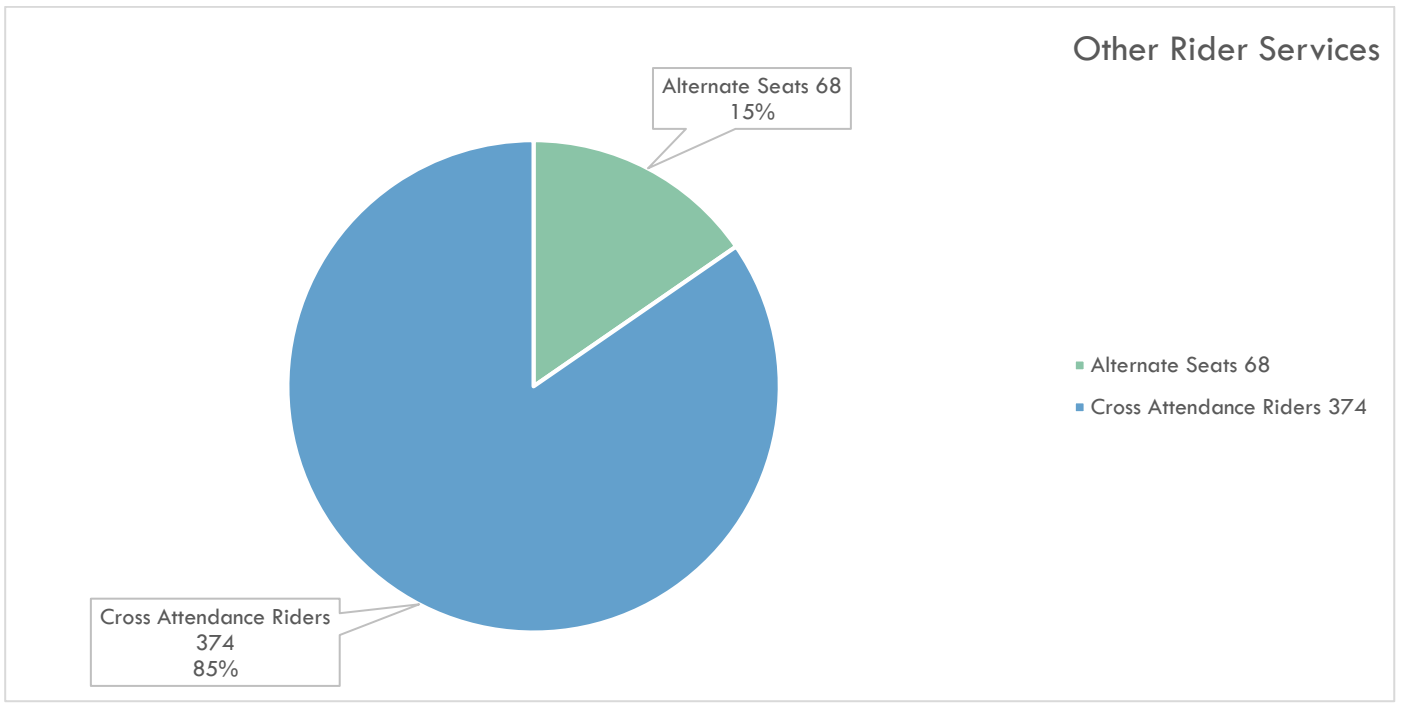
- Ensuring where possible routes are being fully utilized to minimize the late / double running of buses
- Working with operators, drivers, schools, students and parents
- Providing addition supports for any new drivers to the Division, i.e. going over the route map, in some cases doing ride-alongs to ensure they are fully trained and understand the route.
- Bus routes are adjusted based on the difference between registration & actual ridership at the start of the year.
- Obtain detailed seating plans.
- Facilitated, along with a major contractor, a Bus driver recruitment day.
- Designed an ad campaign shared via school newsletters and websites, PSD Social Media platforms, and local radio stations.

2022 – 2023 Ridership Numbers





Note: Specialized Transportation numbers are for reference only and are included in the eligible rider numbers.



Initiatives

School Bus Safety:

School Bus Safety week was from October 16 - 23, 2022. This year with the lifting of the previous Covid restrictions, transportation conducted a fully comprehensive campaign to bring awareness to the students and the public. We had full page newspaper advertisements, secured space on the four Spruce Grove electronic billboards. We also had the articles on the PSD web site and sent out the Student Transportation Association of Alberta (STAA) colouring contest to all PSD schools.

Along with the media awareness, transportation staff also attended at school sites and transfer sites in order to conduct in person school bus evacuations. Due to the previous Covid restrictions, this was the first time in several years for the actual in person evacuations so transportation offered training to any contractor / driver that needed to obtain refresher training before the drills were conducted.

We had drivers verbally instruct the students with the correct evacuation procedures prior to conducting the actual evacuations to ensure they were well versed as some students had never done this procedure before. We are submitting all entries we received back from schools in regards to the School Bus Transportation Association of Alberta (STAA) safety poster competition to the STAA and are hoping to obtain some recognition for the students and schools from the STAA. We have also posted the video footage from the new exterior (stop arm) camera system we are currently installing on the buses. The video shows the views that we have available for the exterior cameras. The external views can be submitted to law enforcement agencies when a person goes through the red "student loading" lights along with the driver's report. This footage can be requested by law enforcement agencies should it be required to support the issuance of a traffic tickets or for any other law enforcement aspect or court case.

GPS live tracking:

Transportation is launching a pilot of the GPS live tracking app to parents for a trial in a Rural (Tomahawk) and Urban (Millgrove) area in order to test the system and alleviate any issues. It took a while to overcome the technical issues with the developer, so during the trial we will be verifying the accuracy of the app / data before going division wide with the release of the tracking app. The GPS live tracking system shows that the student has scanned on and off the bus accurately, it also displays to the user when the bus is approaching their designated bus stop. During the trial period we will also be working with the contractors to ensure the unit assigned to a particular route is accurate, or the system will not report accurately

Route Monitoring:

Bus stops and pickup locations have been a challenge for some parents. Transportation conducted an extensive review of the concerns raised. During the route compilation in April / May each year we review the stop locations and associated areas to ensure they are positioned in safe locations. As part of our continuous commitment to safety, field monitoring of routes, drop offs and turn around areas is completed to ensure all safety standards are met and approved by transportation.

Bus routes for the 2022-2023 school term are being reviewed at this time for both consistency and to ensure maximum efficiency of all the routes. The review is very extensive and this information will be utilized in the generation of the basic routes for the 2023-2024 school year.

Ridership Tracking:

Mandatory scanning of bus passes is in place on all buses. Transportation continues to educate students and Bus Operators on the relevance of scanning. Bus Operators are responsible to report bus pass infractions to both the Transportation and school administration. This allows the schools to both support Transportation and educate students and parents in the safety aspect of having the passes.

We still require drivers to have a detailed seating plan, this aids for both student discipline issues and if there are any infractions taking place on the bus route.

Communication

In the event of any bus delay greater than ten minutes from the planned schedule or in the case of a bus route cancellation, Transportation notifies all registered bus students through parent provided contact information and updates the Transportation Services information on the PSD website. This provides easy access for parents/guardians to be able to check on the most current status of their child's bus route(s), inclement weather procedures, transportation fees and general information.

In addition, we also update the "bus status" app which enhanced the ability to accurately report lateness, etc. to parents in a timely manner. We continue to encourage all parents / staff to download the app, as it provides instantaneous alerts to all users. By downloading the app onto their mobile phone parents can select their child's bus route to receive instant alerts should the bus be late or canceled.

The Transportation office has a dedicated phone line, the "parent/guardian hotline", for any emergencies regarding a student or bus route to provide quicker response to situations such as a student not reaching their intended destination. We also have a "contractors hot line" to enable contractors or Bus Operators to call in regarding any issues for their route allowing them access to transportation office staff without tying up the main transportation phone line.

All buses are equipped with two-way radios, along with the transportation office and the Transportation Department vehicles. This allows staff members to maintain radio communication whether in the office or in transit to the scene of a busing incident.

Transportation conducts regular meetings with contractors to keep them up to date on relevant issues and to receive feedback from them. This allows our office to maintain communication with all our contractors and Bus Operators on any emergent issues.

Safety and Compliance

Safety / compliance issues are all handled by the Transportation Supervisor, with assistance from both the planners and the Director when required. The supervisor has been dispatched to several sites since the start of the school year to review or witness a variety of issues regarding pickup locations, road hazards, etc. All investigated issues, are then reviewed with a Transportation Planner or other transportation staff to offer a group solution. This also ensures that transportation staff are aware of any of the issue(s) should they arise again, ensuring a consistent approach to all concerns.

Safe Stop Assessments:

Alberta Education requires the annual completion of a route assessment form for every route in operation. Every Bus Operator completes the form to assess the safe operation of their route. This route assessment is required by Alberta Education-Transportation to show that the routes are safe and that drivers are aware of any issues on the route. These route assessments are currently being reviewed by Transportation, we then follow up with any route operators that may have listed concerns. We present solutions to the Bus Operator(s), which we believe will rectify the issue and discuss and solicit feedback in order to provide an effective resolution to the operator’s concern. Resolutions may also include liaising with local agencies in order to correct any listed deficiencies.

School Bus Rodeo:

PSD held a local School Bus Rodeo at the Memorial transfer site at the end of last school year on May 28, 2022. We invited bus drivers from Paul Band and some other local divisions to attend in order to make this a fun day. Along with the rodeo event, transportation staff hosted a “driver appreciation” BBQ as a thank you to the drivers for the dedication and continued commitment to transporting students to school all year, in all conditions.

We had twenty-two (22) participants at the PSD rodeo and the top three were eligible to attend the Provincial School Bus rodeo in Nisku on June 04, 2022. We had three drivers represent PSD at the Provincial Rodeo, one driver received second place and the most professional driver award, another driver placed tenth out of the fifty-three drivers and receive the best “rookie” driver. The event was well attended and was welcomed back by everyone after having been cancelled due to Covid restrictions. Following the event, a banquet and awards ceremony was hosted at a local hotel which was a huge success.

Transportation Department Safety Statistics July 03 to October 28, 2022

1. Reported stop arm violations.....	5
2. Student management event	
• Behavior Issues.....	71
3. S-Endorsement Drivers Trained, classroom only.....	7
4. Service reviews / concerns Investigated	426
• Service reviews conducted. This would include fee questions, stop locations, alternate requests & school of choice concerns.....	247
• Service Concerns. This would be safety concerns, late buses, full buses / waiting lists, ride times, driver issues, environmental issues-bus to hot / cold, bullying.....	179

Professional Development

Bus Operators Safety Seminar:

This year, Transportation hosted four “startup / safety meeting” in early August for all drivers & contractors. The meetings were hosted at the Centre for Education. Hosting the smaller gathering worked well to allay any fears regarding Covid. The smaller meetings were well received and productive, especially after having no face to face meetings for two years. It was good to meet the drivers, and to provide all our route & safety information going to all parties.

The annual professional development for drivers that is normally available in February / March is again being more directed towards drivers receiving the “S” (school Bus Endorsement) refresher course as some issues have become apparent lately that drivers should be aware of. Conducting a “S” refresher course allows transportation to get the message / training to more drivers. Along with the “S” refresher courses we are soliciting ideas – feedback from contractors to see what issue / subject is a “hot topic” for drivers that they would benefit from.

“S” Endorsement Training and Refresher:

Two (2) Transportation staff are certified as “S”- Endorsement Instructors; they typically share the training sessions in order to maintain the required training hours to ensure they maintain their licenses.

Transportation ran four “S” Endorsement and an “S” refresher course in 2022, which consists of sixteen hours of class instruction with a knowledge test after each series and then a pre-trip & road evaluation all of which needs to be completed before sign off can occur. We also have another “S” endorsement course planned for November 2022 to assist the schools in getting school staff trained.

We are in the planning stages for arranging courses for 2023 with initially two courses scheduled but it may increase to four courses. We will also be running the “S” endorsement refresher courses for drivers in February / March 2023.

Equipment / Systems

Cameras

- To assist in managing student behavior, along with the increased frequency of vehicles going through the student loading lights, we are near completion of all the camera upgrades to the fleet. We have added a new hard drive unit and increased the cameras from four to seven or eight to obtain more video capture areas. The upgrade allows us to add two exterior stop arm cameras along with a “dash camera”. The stop arm cameras will capture footage of any vehicles that go through the student loading lights.
- Cooperation with local authorities and Alberta Transportation is also ongoing in helping with bus stops and locations that may be experiencing frequent stop arm infractions. This coupled with the eventual installation of the stop arm cameras across the fleet will aid in the safety aspect for both students and drivers.
- Along with the camera upgrades Transportation has been checking and replacing other equipment that is coming to its end of life or has starting to cause issues. With our replacement program, we have a twofold benefit, one it avoids a huge equipment purchase and two, it keeps the equipment at the most current technological level.

Bus Registrations

Transportation is already in the planning stages for the 2023 registrations that will commence on February 13, 2023 for all students, with a registration deadline of March 24, 2023. Registrations completed after the deadline may experience a delay in receiving their bus passes, but every effort will be made to ensure bus passes are received in time for student’s first day of school.

Operations Optimization

Cross training took place this year and will be ongoing within Transportation. This will benefit the department by enabling all employees to assist with any and all unexpected emergencies and aid in efficient optimization of staff. With staff being cross trained it provides increased awareness of all facets of the department and aids in advancement for staff.

Challenges

Bus Operators:

Bus Operator shortages are extremely evident at this time. At the start of the year, the shortages had a significant impact on PSD and students, we managed to alleviate this by the end of September. The driver shortage is still very real and affects PSD on any given day due to drivers being sick etc., we adapt to the situation daily. The driver shortage across the Province will only get worse as bus Operator shortages are expected to continue to hamper the student transportation industry for many years to come.

Equipment:

Buses and associated equipment are very difficult to obtain in a timely manner along with price increases to the contractors of twenty (20) percent per unit. Wait times for the purchase of new buses, have in some cases increased to around twelve months which in itself causes issues as we cannot predict what if any specialized units we may need until the start of the school year.

We recently required a contractor to obtain a wheelchair unit and the wait time was quoted over 12 months, the contractor went to another Province and bought a used unit in order to fill the PSD route. These equipment issues along with parts shortages / price increases continues to hamper both PSD and the industry.

Operations:

- Revenue from the Government of Alberta will always be an issue for the Transportation department especially at this time as we await the results of the Transportation funding review that was conducted two years ago.
- Depending on the changes introduced by the GOA it could affect service levels, ride times and eligibility for students. It could also affect the fees that Transportation has to apply if service is to be maintained at the current levels.
- Increases in the carbon tax levy and insurance premiums will have an impact on costs, affect our routes and ridership.
- Bus Drivers shortages is an issue that will hamper every school division.