



MEMORANDUM

December 17, 2024
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 2024 - 2025

PURPOSE

For information. No recommendation required.

BACKGROUND

Parkland School Division operates one of the largest regional student transportation systems in the province. We provide safe, effective and efficient transportation services to Parkland students and to other organizations including 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 2024-2025 school term.

Transportation is continually adapting to maintain an efficient, up to date and cost-effective transportation system to all parties we serve. The report highlights the accomplishments and challenges that Transportation is facing both now and for the coming school year. The Transportation Services Department, Contractors and Bus Operators, continue to address 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.

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TRANSPORTATION REPORT DECEMBER 17, 2024

Presented to the Board of Trustees, December 17, 2024
Scott McFadyen, Associate Superintendent, Corporate Supports and Services and CFO
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 19,232 kilometers every day, which is 3,480,992 kilometers yearly. To put that into perspective, that would be equivalent to four-and-a-half trips to the moon and back, or eighty-seven and a half trips around the earth. We transport 7,935 students or 2,872,470 passenger trips every year.

In addition to the 6,119 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, along with the Elves Specialized Program Society, Alberta School for the Deaf, and the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital in Edmonton.

Transportation Services had an excellent start to the 2024-2025 school year due in part to a great deal of advance preparations by the Transportation team. This ensured a smooth flow of information to contractors, drivers and parents. With the advanced preparations and the work done once registrations closed in March 2024, Transportation ensured that students were registered, placed on a route and received their bus passes in a timely manner.

In previous years, we had been impacted at startup by the driver shortage. This year, through ongoing dialogue with our contractors, we were able to ensure all routes had drivers.

Ridership

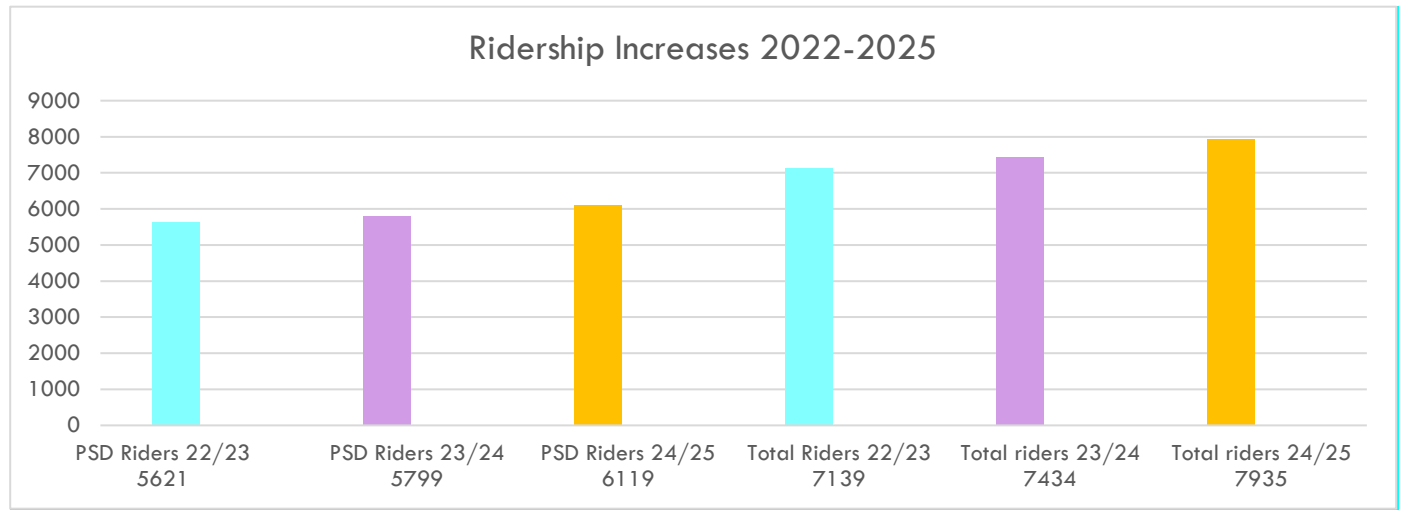
We continue to see ridership increases and attribute this growth to the change in regulated ride distances, increased enrolment, an easier registration process, along with the correspondence during and after the registration time frame. We also ensured that regular messaging went out to parents in June 2024 reminding them to register and pay the associated fees before the deadlines. The most significant factor in the increased ridership is the change in the eligibility distances which PSD chose to implement in the 2023-2024 school year. PSD chose to implement this change prior to the revised GOA mandate now coming in for the 2025-2026 school year. We have increased PSD ridership by 320, and overall ridership by 501 students over last year 23/24, (see chart below).

As in previous years we are again experiencing increased demand for specialized transportation, especially for buses that can accommodate wheelchairs. We are finding that more and more students are entering the school system with unique and complex needs and require transportation on specialized bus routes. In consultation with contractors, we will be issuing a RFP for the upcoming 2025-2026 routes in December 2024, allowing contractors more time, should they need, to purchase a new bus. It should be noted that the lead time to order a new build bus is anywhere from 8-12 months and buses equipped with a wheelchair lift require 12 plus

months. A contractor just received a wheelchair bus (Sept 2024) which was ordered in September 2023. That bus was used on a new route we had to add on September 30, 2024 due to the increase in students requiring wheelchair service. Used buses of all kinds continue to be in extremely short supply due to the significant price increases for new buses.

We continued to be proactive and optimized all routes once the 2024-2025 registration was closed in March 2024. Also, we looked at ridership increases and forecasted new routes that would be required for 2024-2025.

Bus utilization rate for the 2024-2025 year is currently @ 81.14 % based on weighted loads



Note: Rider stats up to November 01, 2024

Transportation expenses have increased over the past several years due to rising contract pricing from our Contracted Bus Operators. Our new contracts have inflationary components built into the multi-year contracts. Contractors are facing cost pressures due to inflation on new buses, driver costs, fuel and maintenance. These increases for the contractors are being subsequently passed on to PSD through the RFP tender process.

The majority of Transportation's \$12 Million-dollar budget is taken up by bus contracts, fuel subsidy and then department operating costs. Transportation spends approximately 1.5% to 2% of the budget on new equipment, purchased to maintain the fleet at current technological levels.

Department Statistics

In order to provide regional transportation services, PSD uses a variety of contracted school buses ranging from 20 to 84 passengers, taxi services and parent-provided transportation agreements.

In order to offer these comprehensive services Transportation utilizes:

- 171 Buses, conducting 221 bus trip routes (to-and-from school) for the AM & PM daily trips.
- 2 Buses in Fort Chipewyan, including one PSD Fort Chipewyan driver.
- 7 Taxi Cabs.
- 9 Contractors.
- 8 Office Staff and one share position with facilities (Electronic Technician).

- 14 Transfer Site Bus Monitors (0.133 FTE). The biggest transfer site is at Memorial, which sees 46 buses routed through the site. Followed by Greystone, with 35 buses routed and finally Copperhaven, with 25 buses routed.

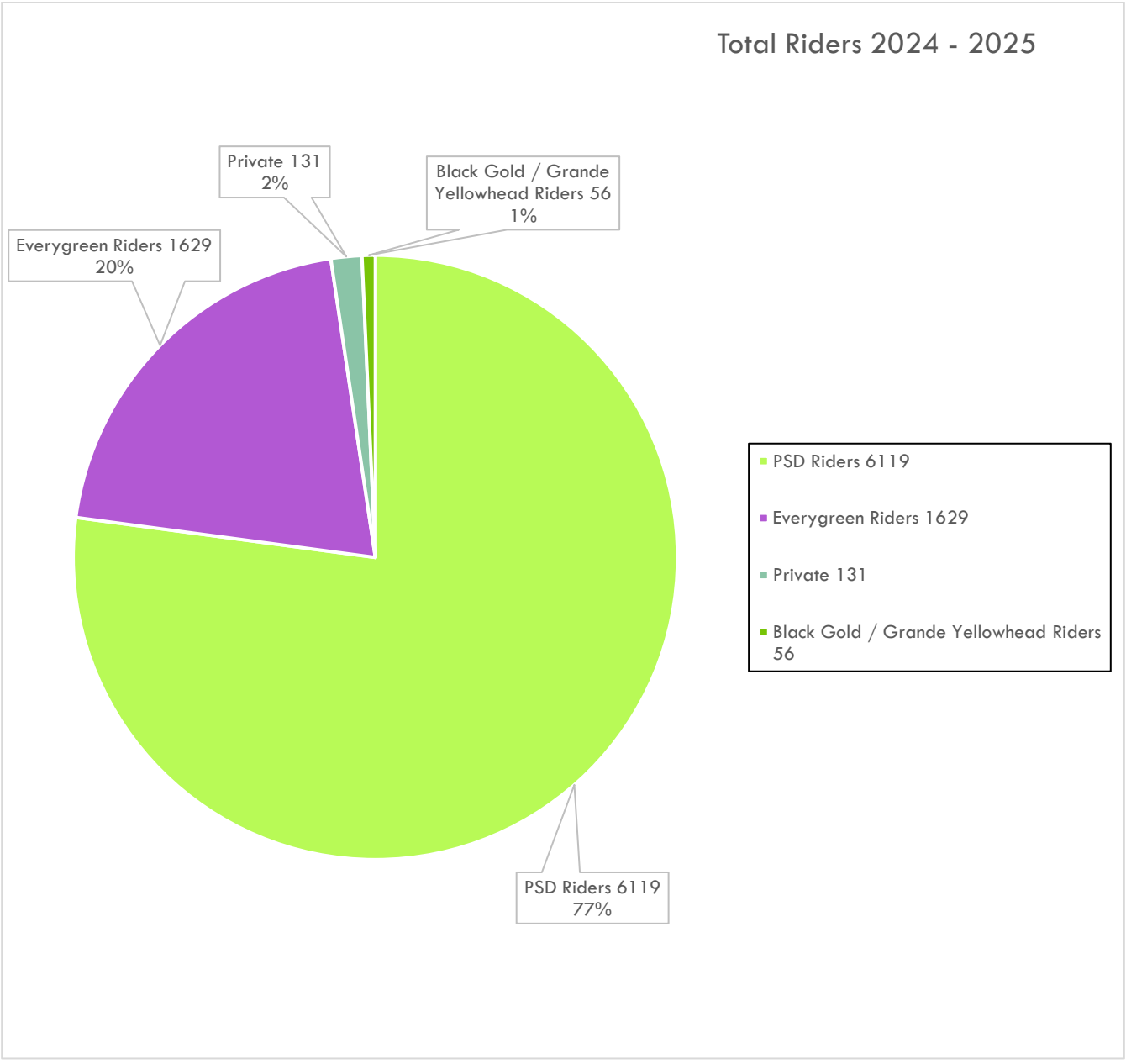
Transportation has responded to many customer service requests including:

- 976 transportation change requests from May 01, 2024 to November 01, 2024.
- 5703 telephone inquiries from July 4, 2024 to November 01, 2024 (1,779 calls less than last year).
- 132 bus pass replacements from September 1, 2024 to November 01, 2024.
- 481 transportation administration fees applied from September 01, 2024 to November 01, 2024.
- 181 route change fees applied from September 01, 2024 to November 01, 2024.

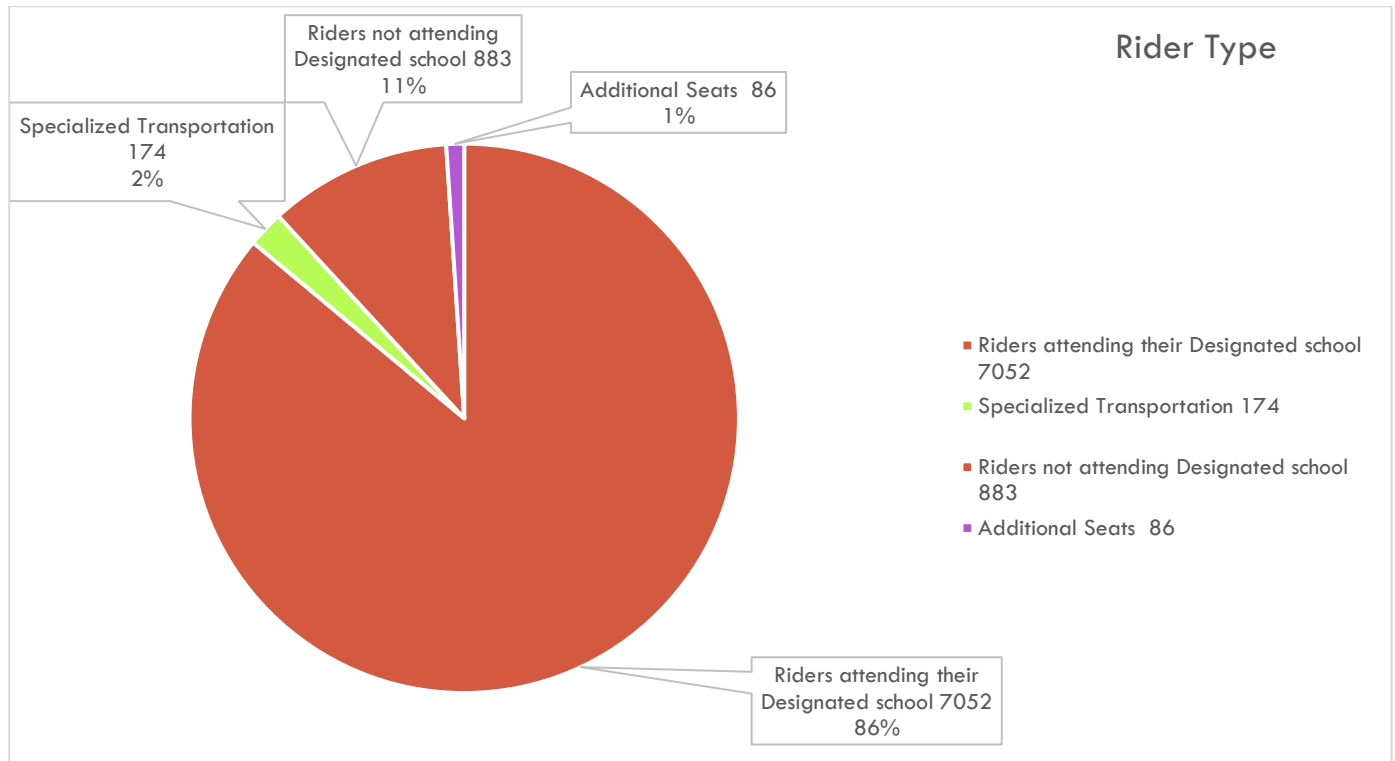
Transportation continues taking a pro-active approach to address driver shortages:

- Transportation is in constant dialogue with all contractors to ensure they are actively recruiting new drivers.
- We review all routes to be sure maximum efficiency.
- Provide addition support for any new drivers to the Division to ensure they have the knowledge to take on the route. For Example, going over the route map and in some cases doing ride-alongs.
- Host two “open houses” per month, allowing drivers to come in and talk about route issues or possible changes to the route. Drivers have expressed that these meetings are very beneficial.
- Driver Workshops; Emergency Evacuations, Winter Driving, and Student Management.
- Bus routes are adjusted based on the difference between registration and actual ridership at the start of the year.

2023-2024 Ridership Numbers



Note: Rider stats up to November 01, 2024.



Note: Specialized Transportation and alternate seats are not counted for the purpose of this chart

Initiatives

School Bus Safety:

School Bus Safety week was from October 20 - 27, 2024. Transportation conducted a comprehensive campaign to bring awareness to students and the general public. We used advertisement space on the four Spruce Grove electronic billboards and the electronic sign outside of the CFE office; posted articles on the PSD web site and on our social media; and sent out the Student Transportation Association of Alberta (STAA) colouring contest to all PSD schools. Submissions received have sent on to the STAA for the competition judging deadline.

Along with the media awareness, Transportation staff visited schools and transfer sites to conduct in-person school bus evacuations. In preparation for school bus safety week, bus evacuations refresher courses were conducted for all drivers. These sessions were well attended by both new drivers and existing drivers.

For the actual evacuations, we had drivers verbally instruct the students with the correct evacuation procedures prior to conducting the actual evacuations to ensure everyone was well versed. Some students had never completed this drill before so it was essential that we ensured everyone knew what to do and was ready.

Our buses each have 7 cameras on them for safety. Examples of exterior camera footage showing the views from these exterior cameras are on our website. The external views are submitted to law enforcement agencies when a person goes through the red “student loading” light along with the driver’s report. The exterior camera footage can be submitted to law enforcement should a vehicle go through the red “student loading” light or it could be requested by law enforcement agencies to support the issuance of traffic tickets or court case.

GPS Live Tracking App:

During the 2023-2024 school year, Transportation launched a pilot of the GPS live tracking app to parents in some rural schools and in the Millgrove area which allowed us to address a few technical issues. User feedback was limited but mostly positive. The GPS live tracking system shows the parent / guardian that the student has scanned on or off the bus. It also shows the user when the bus is approximately five (5) minutes away from their designated bus stop, which will be beneficial when the weather turns adverse.

In August, “e-Link” was launched which allows parents to login to their child’s account and obtain the bus route information including pickup / drop off times and stop locations. In order to ensure parents obtained this vital information, we also had drivers conduct an introductory call. The system is now operating division wide and we have received nothing but positive feedback from parents. The implementation of “e-Link” has drastically reduced the amount of calls regarding pickup times and stop locations. We believe this system will be instrumental for sharing information with parents regarding times, stop locations and any updates to bus route information.

Route Monitoring:

Bus stops and pickup locations are always a challenge especially for parents with younger students and Transportation takes any concerns raised seriously. During the annual route compilation in April and May, we conduct an extensive review of all 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 that includes drop off and turn around areas is completed to ensure all safety standards are met and approved by Transportation. For example, upon review of a Wabamun route it was deemed an inherent safety risk and unacceptable to cross Highway 16 five times resulting in the route being changed prior to it starting.

2024-2025 bus routes are regularly reviewed in depth for both consistency and to ensure maximum efficiency and any findings may be utilized in the generation of the basic routes for the 2025-2026 school year.

Ridership Tracking:

Mandatory scanning of bus passes has been in place for several years now and is invaluable should a student get on the wrong bus or get off at a wrong location. Making scanning mandatory supports Transportation in helping both parents and students understand the safety aspect in having a pass. Once we are notified of a missing student, our first check is with the bus pass scans which allows us to know the stop location the student exited the bus. In the majority of these situations, parents realize that their child knows someone at that location and the parents are able to establish contact with their child. Additionally, tracking stop locations, allows us to provide external agencies with information in a timely manner should they need to be involved in the incident.

Transportation continues to educate students and bus operators on the relevance of scanning. Having bus operators check that students have a valid scan card helps them familiarize themselves with their riders, cutting down on the possibility of students getting on wrong buses.

We still require drivers to have a detailed seating plan, aiding in both student management issues and the identification of students should there be any damage to seats or if any other infraction taking place on the bus route.

First Ride Program:

For the second time, since Covid, we ran the First Ride Program for new kindergarten students and based on the resounding success / feedback from last year we enhanced the presentation for this year. We ran six full classes of 22 students over three days. The program exposes students to all aspects of riding the bus, including

scanning and sitting in the seat. Child friendly video presentations and talks are followed by a bus ride to the Memorial transfer site. Focusing the training at the children as opposed to the parents, really helped in the success of this program and we received fantastic feedback and compliments from parents who attended with their children.

Communication

In the event of bus delays greater than ten minutes or in the case of a bus route cancellations, Transportation first posts the delays on the Bus Status 4 app which pushes out updates to users of the APP. We continue to encourage all parents and staff to download the “Bus Status 4” app, as it provides instantaneous alerts to all users. Registered bus students may also then be notified through parent provided contact information. Depending on the situation, updates may also be posted to the PSD website which also allows parents / guardians easy access to items such as the Inclement Weather policy, transportation fees and other general transportation information.

The Transportation office has a dedicated phone line, “Parent / Guardian Hotline”, for emergencies regarding a student or bus route. This allows for quicker response time to sensitive situations such as a student not reaching their intended destination. Once the “my Stop” app is live, parents will be provided with an additional way to verify the bus has reached their stop and to see if their child has scanned off the bus hopefully reducing the volume of calls received from parents.

We also have a “Contractors’ Hotline” providing contractors or bus operators’ direct access to Transportation office staff should they need assistance with any route issues. Both the parent and contractor hotlines bypass the main transportation phone line allowing for quick response times.

All buses are equipped with two-way radios and all staff in the Transportation Department can access the radio via a software program on our computers. The Transportation Department vehicles are also equipped with two-way radios which allows office staff to maintain radio communication with someone out in the field who may be responding to the scene of a busing incident.

Transportation’s bi-monthly “open houses” along with regular contractor meetings keep all parties up to date on relevant issues. Holding these meetings allows us to have a more personal connection with both the drivers and contractors inherently improving the relationships and provides an opportunity for feedback that can guide us in improving our processes.

Safety and Compliance

Safety and compliance issues are mainly handled by the Transportation Supervisor, with assistance from both the planners and the Directors when required. So far this year the Supervisor has already investigated and addressed a number of areas within our operating boundary such as pickup locations, road hazards, and turn-a-rounds. All issues are discussed with the relevant staff (planners, Director), to facilitate a group solution. This also ensures that Transportation staff are aware of any of the issue(s) should they arise again, ensuring consistency to all concerns.

Safe Stop Assessments:

Every year we are required to submit a completed route assessment form to Alberta Education for every route in operation. Each bus operator completes the form, assessing the conditions along their route and including any potential obstacles or barriers that may cause the bus driver (or students) difficulty with the safe operation

of their route. Transportation planners extensively review the forms and follow up with any route operators that have listed concerns. After soliciting feedback, we bring forward potential solutions we believe could rectify the issue providing an effective and timely resolution to the operator's concern. In some cases, resolutions may also include liaising with local agencies or the County in order to correct any listed deficiencies. This route assessment shows that the routes have been designed in a safe and logical way and that drivers are aware of any potential issues on their route.

School Bus Rodeo:

PSD did not hold a local School Bus Rodeo this year, due to low participation numbers. PSD did however enter two drivers into the Provincial Rodeo held on June 8, 2024 at the AMA site at Edmonton International Airport which saw 73 total participants. Both of the drivers who represented PSD at the Provincial Rodeo enjoyed taking part in the competition, however due to a change in the judging procedures contestants were not advised of their final ranking in the competition.

Transportation Department Safety Statistics September 01, 2024 to November 01, 2024

	2023	2024
1. Reported stop arm violations	5	8
2. Student management event		
• Behavior issues	71	166
3. S-Endorsement drivers trained, classroom only	7	10
4. Service reviews / concerns investigated	426	739
• Service reviews - This would include fee questions, stop locations alternate requests and school of choice concerns	247	476
• Service concerns - This would be safety concerns, late buses, full buses / waiting lists, ride times, driver issues, environmental issues-bus to hot / cold, and bullying	179	263

Professional Development

Transportation hosted three "startup / safety meetings" in August for all drivers and contractors. Meetings were held at CFE as well as off-site and aimed at regular route drivers or specialized transportation drivers. The meetings were well attended and we received positive feedback from the drivers and the contractors who also expressed that they prefer the smaller type meetings.

The annual professional development for Transportation staff is tentatively scheduled for February 6, 2025, location to be determined. We are planning on organizing guest speakers to present on complacency, accident protocols and, Red student loading lights that will emphasizing the process to be followed when a motorist passes a bus loading students.

Specialized Bussing:

We provide training for all of the specialized transportation routes to ensure drivers have the correct training for the different types of mobility devices encountered daily. With the influx of new and larger mobility aids, we found that we are having to conduct a great deal of research into securement methods for these new devices.

Training is therefore constantly evolving for the specialized drivers and school-based staff to ensure everyone is familiar and confident with securement methods and systems.

We have now taken the approach whereby we conduct individual meetings with both the parent and the student whenever a student is required to wear a securement vest. These meetings serve two purposes, one we can fit the vest to the student to ensure it is the correct size. Second, we ensure parents received training on the correct way to fasten and secure the vest.

We are continuing to schedule audits for all the specialized routes. The first audits took place in October and November and involved a transportation staff member going to the school in the PM to observe the loading of students, securement of vests / mobility aids, as well as a check in with drivers, school staff and students. In the AM audits, we would be at the school or ride part of the route to observe the unloading of the students, correct wheelchair ramp operation and to check-in with everyone. By conducting these audits, we ensure that drivers are current on the securement methods for the various mobility devices. The audit also ensures the route is operating as designed. Typically, the specialized route drivers have more issues to deal with regarding the students they transport so it is essential we keep in touch with these drivers and resolve issues straight away.

“S” Endorsement Training:

Three Transportation staff are now certified as “S” Endorsement Instructors. They are all able to conduct the necessary training and testing, for the issuance of the Alberta Government documents that are a mandatory requirement in order to drive a school bus. They all share the training sessions so they can log and maintain the training hours required to maintain their certification.

Transportation conducted two “S” Endorsement courses in the first part of 2024, in September and November 2024 and, have another one planned for April 2025. The course consists of two days of classroom instruction that includes a knowledge test after each module, an on-bus pre-trip and, a road evaluation. We also ran an “S” refresher course in February 2024 and have plans for another refresher course in March / April 2025. The “S” refresher is designed to assist contracted drivers with remaining current on new procedures as well as avoid stagnation / complacency from those who have been driving for many years without receiving regular training.

Equipment / Systems

Cameras:

Seven cameras are installed on all busses to help with managing student behavior and to assist with issues that may arise. Having a PSD equipment installer helped immensely in ensuring all new buses were fully equipped with cameras, two-way radios and, GPS / RFID scanners before the start of bus operations. Having our own equipment installer also ensures any faulty equipment is both looked at or replaced in a timely manner.

Cooperation with local enforcement agencies along with Alberta Transportation is continuing to grow which ultimately is helping deal with locations that may be experiencing frequent stop arm infractions. This coupled with the installation of the stop arm cameras across the fleet, will aid in the overall safety culture we have built within the division and support educating and awareness for school bus related incidents.

Transportation continues to ensure the equipment (GPS, cameras, radios, scanners) is up to date. Keeping up with the equipment maintenance, allows us to install the most current version as the electronic / computer-based equipment is constantly evolves and advances rapidly.

Bus Registrations:

Transportation is in the preliminary planning stages for the 2025 registrations and is expected to open on February 18, 2025 with a registration deadline of March 28, 2025. Registrations completed after the deadline may experience a delay in receiving bus passes however, every effort will be made to ensure bus passes are received in time for student's first day of school.

Operations Optimization:

We have maintained the "cross" training started in September 2023 where all three Transportation Associates rotate through the AM & PM dispatch shifts along with the customer service position. This allows greater flexibility and ensures the Associates are fully trained in all aspects which helps should we have staff members off due to illness. Cross training also gives each Associate the skills to handle unexpected emergencies as well as to contributing to the overall efficiency of the whole department.

Challenges**Bus Operators:**

Bus operator shortages are extremely evident, but as previously mentioned with our constant dialogue and pre-planning with bus contractors we were able to alleviate driver shortages at the beginning of the school year. We still face driver shortage across the province partially due to illness and lack of spare drivers. This is constantly at the forefront of any discussions with our peers and with the associations that represent our industry, but it is not expected to improve anytime soon despite the additional funding from the government.

Budget / Contracts / Inflation:

PSD initiated changes in June 2023 to the Standard Bus Contractor contract, introducing variable contract terms along with the ability to add a yearly inflationary escalation increases into contract pricing. This allows the contractor more stability regarding pricing and inflationary costs, it also allows the contractor more financial certainty when looking to obtain credit for the purchase of new buses.

The challenge for PSD is there is increased operating costs with no known increases to the funding formulas used to determine our Government revenue. This ultimately could affect our ability to maintain service at the current levels if funding does not match the inflationary pressures.

Equipment:

Buses, along with associated equipment are still very difficult to obtain in a timely manner and continue to increase in price. A year long wait time for a bus purchases hampers our ability to meet changing needs.

Operations:

Revenue from the Government of Alberta will always be an issue for the Transportation Department, especially as parental expectations continue to increase year over year. The demand for daycare service continues to increase and requires additional services which in some cases can lead to higher operating costs per route.

The changes to the eligibility distance that were scheduled to be introduced by the GOA starting September 2024 have now been pushed back to September 2025. These changes could impact service levels despite PSD

being an early adopter of the new rules as we still have difficulty finding contractors with capacity to take on additional routes let alone finding drivers.

Transportation Routing Software

Transportation is in the process of issuing an RFP (January / February 2025) for the replacement of the current routing software. The current software used was introduced in 1996 and will no longer be supported by the developer in the next few years.

Once a decision has been made on the replacement software then it will be introduced in January / February 2026 to run in parallel with the current software until June 2026 when we will fully switch over to the new software.