



Memorandum

Date: August 15, 2019
To: Board of Education
From: Planning and Facilities Committee
Prepared By: Gail Prokopchuk, Transportation Manager

Information Item: **Transportation Services Department Update**

1.0 RELEVANT BOARD MOTION/DIRECTION

None.

2.0 BACKGROUND

The Central Okanagan Public Schools Transportation Department transports approximately 5,000 students every day throughout the District. The Central Okanagan Public Schools has the largest bus fleet in the Province and the Transportation Department maintains the fleet with a full-service mechanic shop that inspects, repairs, and provides regular maintenance to District school buses, white fleet, trailers and equipment.

Although the provision of transportation services is not a requirement under the School Act, Central Okanagan Public Schools has historically and continues to be committed to providing a safe, efficient service to students while maintaining a service level that will be sustainable to the District's future growth and changing demographics.

There were a number of items mentioned in the last report regarding current service levels, bus route design and route planning for the 2019-2020 school year. As a result, the Board of Education requested a Transportation Committee be formed to review and discuss transportation service levels and areas of concern or attention. Since February, the "Transportation Steering Committee" was formed and have met on two separate occasions and are planning to meet again in August 2019.

To date, the Transportation Steering Committee has focused their attention on current service levels and a review of the transportation policies and procedures as outlined in:

- Policy 470 – Transportation Services Management
- Policy 470R – Transportation Services Management (Regulations)
- Policy 475 – Transportation: Authority and Responsibility
- Policy 475R – Transportation: Authority and Responsibility (Regulations)

There have been several items of mention relating to transportation procedures that have been addressed and are included in this report. The Transportation Manager is currently reviewing the above policies and regulations an update will be presented at a future Policy Committee meeting.

Eligibility for school bus transportation is based on the distance a student resides from their catchment school. To be eligible for school bus transportation, elementary students must be 4.0 kms or more

from their catchment school and middle/secondary school students must be 4.8 kms or more from their catchment school. These are historical walk limits originally determined by the Ministry of Education and does not represent what is believed to be the distance a student could reasonably be expected to walk to school, but rather a measure of distance that could be accommodated within the transportation system. Transportation Services uses Edulog, a routing software, to measure the shortest/most direct drive path from a student's residence to the designated school.

Although school bus registrations are received throughout the year, changing student demographics requires the Transportation Department to continually review bus routes and make adjustments where required. Adjustments can include the addition or removal of bus runs, entire routes or changes to service levels. The Department must also consider future development areas and propose a plan for any transportation requirements needed.

CURRENT – IN PROGRESS

Each year, the Transportation Department opens up registration for the school year and parents are required to register their child for the school bus before a designated deadline. Bus routes for the school year are developed over the summer months and are designed based on the registration of eligible students. Once the registration deadline has passed, courtesy wait registrations are processed and assigned a seat on a bus route, provided:

- there is seat space available on the school bus;
- the student meets the bus at an existing stop along the route; and,
- the fee for transportation service has been paid

Planning school bus routes has its challenges as there are multiple changing factors throughout the school year. These include growth, late registrations, and family movement around the District, courtesy waitlists, educational programming, geographic accessibility, road upgrades, and the occasional capping of schools.

To promote consistent timelines for route planning, Transportation Services has established the following "school bus registration deadline dates".

- February – School bus registration for the next school year will be open in February each year.
- July 31 – Eligible rider registration deadline for the upcoming school year.
- August 5 – Begin assigning courtesy riders on routes with seat space available.
- August 31 – Any students requesting transportation for the upcoming school year must be registered by this date as seat space is not guaranteed after this date. Registrations after this date will continue to be processed and students will be placed on a route if or when seat space becomes available.

Some of the significant changes and challenges for the upcoming year that were identified at the February meeting include:

- **Opening of Canyon Falls Middle School** – There have been no additional routes added to this area as the existing school bus routes were reviewed and realigned to accommodate transportation of eligible riders to Canyon Falls Middle School.
- **Expansion of French Immersion Programs to Hudson Road Elementary School and Glenrosa Middle School** – Transportation will be provided for students who wish to attend the French Immersion Program at Glenrosa Middle School. A transfer location for the French Immersion students has been organized at École George Pringle Elementary School. Students can meet the 'Glenrosa' bus here or they may transfer from their regular route.

- **Some bus routes are at full capacity** – Bus routes are designed to service multiple schools (Elementary–Middle–Secondary school runs). Hence the need for 2 or 3 "runs" on a single bus route. Bus runs that are already at full capacity with eligible riders are the middle and secondary school runs as there are less of these schools so distance to the catchment school for these students tends to be further. Most bus routes have an elementary run assigned but have very few eligible riders assigned as there are more elementary schools so most students reside within the 4 km area.
- **Increased demand for courtesy riders** – In previous years, additional "runs or shuttles" have been added to routes to accommodate the high number of registrations for courtesy riders. Transportation Services must be mindful when adding additional runs or stops on a bus route as this may result in higher costs, additional time added to the bus route, increase ride times for eligible riders and may increase school supervision time needed before and/or after school.
- **Transportation of students who were moved from a capped school** – The Transportation Department currently tracks "capped" students who are eligible for transportation and will grandfather the students' transportation needs until they graduate to the next school, move to another catchment area or out of the district.

Throughout the school year and during the route review process conducted each summer, Transportation Services has flagged areas of concern. As we continue to build routes for the 2019-2020 school year, the Board of Education should be aware that transportation guidelines and policies are being applied as written, which may result in an increase of concerns reported from parents, in particular, students who are attending a school of choice.

- There are currently 474 students who have registered for school bus transportation to a school of choice. Historically, if these students could be accommodated on a route, they were permitted to ride as a courtesy rider. In some cases "shuttles" were initiated to transport students from their catchment school, to the school of choice. As there are no provisions in policy or procedure for transportation to a school of choice, these school bus transportation applications will be denied transportation per the guidance from the Transportation Steering Committee.
- A number of families in the Chute Lake – Crawford area have chosen to attend École Dorothea Walker Elementary School (55 students as of June 2019) to access the French Immersion Program and have historically been provided transportation as courtesy riders to that school of choice. Transportation services has identified these students and will, for the interim, continue to transport them to École Dorothea Walker Elementary School. We would not typically provide transportation to École Dorothea Walker Elementary School so any new registrations received are denied transportation. No new students have been added to the École Dorothea Walker Elementary School bus run since September 2018.
- Transportation Services has also identified 22 students who reside in the South Kelowna catchment area that have historically been transported to École Casorso or Raymer Elementary schools. The Transportation Steering Committee recommended that the Transportation Manager prepare written notice to these parents, indicating that 2019-2020 will be the last year that school bus transportation is provided to these schools.
- One other area of concern is Lake Country where we have seen an increase in the number of requests for transportation from the Davidson Road Elementary School catchment, to École Peter Greer Elementary School. Transportation is currently compiling historical information to determine which of these students were impacted due to the school catchment reconfiguration several years ago and those who are attending École Peter Greer Elementary School as a school of choice. New registrations received from students who wish to attend École Peter Greer Elementary School as a school of choice have been denied school bus transportation.

- The District has historically been transporting students from the Big White and Idabel Lake area. These areas are not included in Central Okanagan Public Schools district boundary but we will continue to transport these students until the Transportation Steering Committee can review and provide recommendations to the Board of Education.

3.0 INFORMATION STATEMENT

Central Okanagan Public Schools encompasses a large geographical area that includes the District of Lake Country, City of West Kelowna, City of Kelowna, District of Peachland and the Regional District of Central Okanagan that includes the Westside Road to Vernon.

Services include bus transportation to schools, field trips and travel for sports teams. School bus routes are designed to service eligible students who have registered for the school bus. In establishing bus routes, considerations will be student safety, costs, distances, road conditions, and the number of students involved. The many field trips for schools and sports team transportation places additional challenges on the Department to continue to provide the high level of service.

4.0 DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS

Transportation services within the District is complex and evolves daily. Staff have been using the guidance from the first phase of the Transportation Steering Committee to manage the bus routing and rider eligibility. These changes have ensured more consistent and equitable treatment of students throughout the district.

In the second phase of the Transportation Steering Committee, further recommendations to change existing practices to better align to policies or for the Board of Education to make policy changes will be brought forward with the goal to further improve equity and to ensure the financial stability of the district.