

Positions Moved to Fremont Street

On April 1, 2018, the Transportation Director (John Hennessey) and an Assistant Transportation Coordinator (the position was restructured in FY19 to a new position titled "Router") were moved from the Durkin Administration Building to the Fremont Street WPS bus yard facility. This is the eleventh year that the bus yard has operated from the Fremont Street location. The move of these two positions was done in order to have all transportation operations and supervision at one location, allow the Transportation Director to directly oversee all operations onsite, and to have the Director directly develop and implement a new support staff organization that was adopted in the FY19 budget. In addition, having the all Transportation Department staff in one location has enabled the development of a positive climate and culture among drivers and monitors that their supervisors are onsite, their supervisors are approachable, and demonstrate that all department staff are working together to support the transportation needs of the district. This move has been very well received and has been extremely successful in building a transportation team amongst drivers, monitors, support, and administrative staff.

The move was also intended to provide direct support of an additional eleven big bus routes that the district began directly providing this year resulting from not receiving any bids for the athletic transportation contract for this year. This is the first time in known history that the WPS is directly operating big bus transportation. In order to be cost effective in providing athletic transportation, the district also operates eleven morning and afternoon routes for home-to-school transportation. Overall, the transition of eleven district-operated big buses saved the district \$402,000, with \$208,000 invested in new support positions for transportation operations (see pages 62 and 176-177 of the FY19 budget book) resulting in FY19 savings of \$194,000. The current eleven district-operated big bus routes are attached. The afternoon routes are designed and assumed to be available for athletic transportation daily at 2:15pm.

Transportation Staffing

Two recent administrative vacancies were the Assistant Transportation Director (position recently filled) and Operations Supervisor (currently vacant after retirement in October). The district is advertising, recruiting and in the process of filling this position as soon as possible.

Of the eleven district-operated big bus routes, the district has hired eight drivers and has covered the remaining routes with "mid-size" bus drivers and licensed support staff throughout the year thus far. To date, 100% of the eleven big bus routes have operated every single day this year. The district continues the civil service hiring process to add big bus drivers (up to the budget amount of 14).

Transportation Update

Unrelated to the operation of big bus routes or the administrative office relocations, every year there are initial school year start-up issues that are resolved in the first few weeks of school. The issues are generally the same year-to-year and fall under the following categories:

- Special Education School and Transportation Assignments
- Bus Overcrowding
- New Bus Stop Requests
- Late Buses

Some of these issues were prolonged longer than usual this year and the district and transportation administration has been working to determine the root cause and long-term solutions to each of these areas.

The following describes these issues and solutions going forward:

Special Education Assignments

Students eligible for curbside-to-curbside transportation on a midsize or wheelchair bus are generally coordinated through a Special Education Team Chairperson by submitting a transportation order for the student. The transportation order is uploaded into the district transportation routing software. Bus routes are then scheduled for students accordingly.

In order for students to be routed properly, all student information in the student database program (SAGE) or transportation routing software must be entered correctly. The student must be active in the system, must have the correct home address, the correct "special request" location (daycare or other), and must have the correct school or program to attend, and have proper AM or PM designation for preschool students. The Transportation Department does not have the ability to make any of these changes to the database and if any of these fields change (student moves, changes school, changes daycare, etc), that requires the student's SAGE system to be updated and uploaded into the transportation software for updated routing. If any of these data elements are incorrect could possibly result in a route change needed for the student.

It is very common for students to move or placements to change during the summer. To date, there have been 2,004 special education transportation route changes made from the beginning of the school year through November 15, 2018 accommodating a total of 2,108 students transported on mid-size or wheelchair school buses. Any change in a location for an existing student results in the re-routing of up to four bus routes: the two new routes (morning and afternoon) and the two prior routes (morning and afternoon) and the accommodation for a new student changes two bus routes (one morning and one afternoon) that need to be identified, scheduled, re-routed appropriately.

Special Education Transportation Order Solution: First, the Transportation and Special Education Departments will work collaboratively in late June to better identify / anticipate student transportation orders for planning purposes to eliminate as many late summer transportation orders (resulting in hundreds of route changes) as possible. Second, the district IT Department will develop a transportation order module as part of SAGE that will centralize (and electronically capture) all special education transportation orders and will allow appropriate transportation, special education, and district administrators to view the status of the order (pending, approved, completed, etc.). These transportation orders will be tracked in SAGE from submission to completion and will also track the frequency of address changes, school changes, and other relevant information. This transportation module will be scheduled to be in place for the 2019-20 school year.

Bus Overcrowding

Scheduling and routing of school buses for the upcoming school year begins in early summer after the student enrollment database is "rolled over" to the new school year. Students eligible for transportation (distance or safety reasons at the elementary level) are routed on bus routes based on vehicle capacity and efficient use of the school bus. Overall, bus routes do not change significantly change from year-to-year. The adjustment and balancing of routes based on student enrollment (mostly as students transition to into middle and high schools) occurs based on expected ridership estimates. The district uses bus passes at the secondary level to manage bus loads. The bus passes are provided by the schools to students based on bus routes that are loaded by the Transportation Department into the district's SAGE program. Often, bus passes are distributed by the schools towards end of September when all school start up issues are resolving. Prior to that, the Transportation Department receives actual ridership headcounts at the

beginning of the year from bus drivers and balances ridership loads as quickly as possible. In this interim time between the start of the school year and the issuance of bus passes is typically when the greatest number of overcrowding issues occur. Often, we find that non-eligible riders (those that board buses before bus passes are assigned and live less than 2 miles from school) contribute to most of the overcrowding issues. We also see when students that enroll in the district or change schools (move) during the summer after the database "rollover" may contribute also, but far less often, to overcrowding issue as well. All of these issues are rebalanced or resolved as soon as possible.

Solution: The district Transportation Department proposes that all bus passes will be generated for students in the summer and distributed to the school to be handed to students on the first day of school. Presently the bus pass is a simple paper card, and the district can continue this method, but the district is also exploring bus passes encoded with RFID technology (radio-frequency identification) can be linked to existing GPS technology on buses. This technology can be used for immediate and accurate passenger counts to allow for quicker response to any overcrowding issues. This technology can also be linked to a secure parent portal that informs parents/guardians if and when their student got on and off their school bus and at which location. This new technology is in the early stages of research, study, and cost analysis and no recommendation from the Administration is provided at this time.

New Stop Requests (also response for gb#8-341)

The Student Handbook (page 44) describes the process for new stop requests as, "all requests for additions or changes of school bus stops must be made through the student's school principal or designee." The district evaluates and processed new stop requests from schools (not directly from parents/guardians). The process is slightly different for private, parochial, and charter schools, as the district requires these students to apply for transportation on an annual basis. As part of the application process, stop requests are considered based on a number of factors as described below.

New stop requests are evaluated based on safety, distance from school, and reasonableness issues. Instances where student safety is an issue is prioritized and addressed as soon as the safety issue is confirmed. Stops may be added to the existing trip or routes may change depending on how the new stop impacts existing routes to the school. Generally, new stop requests around distance from school occurs when students are newly enrolled in citywide programs (WTHS, Burncoat fine arts, Goddard Scholars, etc.) and the student enrolled late or the student database for school / academy within a school assignment is incorrect. While students maybe expected to be up to a mile from their assigned bus stop, every reasonable effort is made to accommodate requests much closer to home when possible.

To date, there have been nearly 500 changes to big bus route this year through November 14, 2018. This total is approximately 130 more (or 40% more) than the five-year previous average through the same point in time of the year.

Solution: The district is exploring a new electronic workflow management module that can track all new bus stop requests and will allow the district transportation liaisons to have real-time information regarding the status of the request to be able to share with the parent/guardian or school.

Late Buses and Solutions:

The district attributes the vast majority of late buses this year to the following reasons: (1) driver absence (combined routes), (2) overcrowding (double-tripping routes), (3) loading times, routing / traffic and road construction issues, and (4) chronically late buses.

When driver absences in excess of any spare drivers occur, routes are often combined resulting in extended route times and lateness to the next schools (or in some cases the bus doesn't show up). As of November 15, 2018, since the WPS took on 11 big bus routes this year from Durham, these bus routes have operated at 100% coverage this school year. However, the district continues to monitor Durham School Services driver absences, daily bus shortages, or reported bus delays. The district withholds payments when buses do not operate; Durham has indicated that they do not intend to self-reduce billing to the district for these non-operated/combined buses. The Administration has developed a reporting protocol for schools to report late bus issues so that Transportation Department can explore these issues with Durham (and deduct payment as warranted and authorized under the contract).

While addressing overcrowded buses, in some cases buses had to "double-trip" the run – taking one group of students to/from school and returning for the remaining group. This caused some of the late buses earlier in the year and these are immediately resolved when overcrowding loads are rebalanced. The ability to reduce/eliminate early year overcrowding (see solution on previous page) will also eliminate late buses in subsequent trips.

The planning of routes assumes reasonable time for student dismissal, loading, and buses leaving school property. Delays at one school cause a ripple of delays at other schools later in the day. In our study of late buses this year, we experienced a number of instances that the dismissal, loading, and exiting of buses was taking much longer than anticipated (or in some cases needed). There are a variety of contributing site-by-site factors to these delays. In many cases, we have encouraged schools to be more efficient with the dismissal process. In other cases, we need to segregate student / parent traffic patterns where possible. The Administration has also identified street flow issues that should be looked at for future traveling efficiencies as well. These issues will be continually addressed as needed going forward.

In some cases, trips may be scheduled too efficiently (too tightly), and they need to be adjusted based on current conditions: construction, traffic, or otherwise to allow for greater travel time. Sometimes these issues may be temporary and other cases the solution requires a routing change. This issue most often occurs in buses that are travelling across the city to/from citywide programs.

Finally, a recent review of several chronic late buses indicate that the buses are (1) not combined, (2) there has been no overcrowding issues earlier in the day/route, and (3) there are no traffic/road construction issues impacting arrival times. Simply stated, the Administration believes that there is ample time to arrive at the next school on time for dismissal or arrival.

Student Transportation is an important link for the 12,000 students that board buses each day. The timeliness of the buses is important so that students have the full instructional day available to them, so that parents can get to work or other obligations on time, and so that schools can operate smoothly without interruption in schedules. The proposed solutions will make significant improvements in scheduling and balancing of buses in a more efficient and effective manner. The district expects to be held accountable for the performance of the 11 big bus routes and 35 mid-size bus routes that the WPS operates. The district will hold all contracted vendors accountable for the routes that have been assigned to them as well.