



**DURHAM CATHOLIC
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD**
Learning and Living in Faith

Memorandum

To: Board of Trustees

From: Tracy Barill, Director of Education

Date: March 27, 2023

Subject: **Durham Student Transportation Services Update**

Origin: Jim Wilson, Superintendent of Education
Kelly Mechoulan, DSTS Chief Administrative Officer

Purpose

In accordance with provisions of the Education Act, a Board may provide transportation to students. There are ongoing challenges that continue to impact student transportation services in the Durham Region. The purpose of this report is to cover the impacts and management of:

- The bus driver shortage;
- Bus service in remote and rural areas including service in dead-end roads; and
- Durham Region Transit Bus Passes.

Background

1. Durham Student Transportation Services

Durham Student Transportation Services (DSTS) is a consortium formed by an agreement between Durham Catholic District School Board (DCDSB) and Durham District School Board (DDSB), for the purpose of providing common administration of student transportation services for Durham Region. DSTS is one of more than thirty consortia within Ontario mandated by the Ministry of Education.

DSTS transports approximately 30,000 students per day on 481 busses to over 180 schools throughout the region.

The role of DSTS is to provide efficient and effective student transportation. In order to meet this objective, the routes must be planned and implemented in a manner that optimizes the resources as well as considers service levels and the safety of students.

DSTS is governed by a joint transportation policy that was approved by the Trustees of both member school boards. DSTS administers this transportation policy and plans and implements all aspects of home-to-school transportation services. The entire policy and stakeholder responsibilities can be found on the DSTS website at www.dsts.on.ca.

The governing body for DSTS is the DSTS Governance Committee comprised of staff and trustees from each partner school board.

2. Bus Driver Shortage

Shortage of school bus drivers is an ongoing challenge. This is an issue of concern across the province, Durham Region included. DSTS continues to monitor the driver's situation and route cancellations. On average since the beginning of the school year, DSTS has needed to cancel four routes daily due to driver shortages.

All efforts are being made by School Bus Operators to recruit and retain drivers. These efforts are being supported by DSTS, DDSB, and DCDSB.

In order to optimize the number of buses required to transport students, as a proactive measure, significant changes were made to school bell times for the 2022-2023 school year. Since 2016, DSTS has reduced its overall fleet usage by 136 vehicles, and they continue to look for additional efficiencies wherever possible. In many cases, buses are triple, or quadruple routed in the morning and afternoon, to make the best use of available bus driver resources.

There are a small number of routes that do not currently have a permanent driver assigned to them (i.e. "open routes"), and there are not enough supply drivers available to cover all routes on a daily basis. DSTS works with operators every morning to ensure that as many routes as possible are covered and that no bus route is cancelled for more than three consecutive days. Though supply drivers are rotated through routes to get as much coverage as possible, drivers of permanent routes are not rotated.

3. Bus Service in Remote and Rural Areas Including Service on Dead-end Roads

Although ongoing challenges are experienced in all areas of Durham, bus service in remote and rural areas can be unique concerning bus stop locations, dead-end roads, inclement weather, and ride times.

Bus stop locations are selected to ensure the efficiency of the service while maximizing safety and reducing risks for students. Common community bus stops are used and walk distances to bus stops are maintained at a maximum walk distance of 800 meters whenever possible. In some situations in rural areas, road conditions and/or road design require students to walk further to a stop, or transport is required to get to an alternate stop location.

Generally school bus stops are not located on cul-de-sacs and dead-end roads. Buses are not designed, staffed, or equipped to safely back up on route or perform multi-point turns, stops are not assigned in areas where the bus does not have an adequate turning

radius to exit. Roadway maintenance and design are the responsibility of the township/municipality, roadways without adequate turnaround have been identified and communicated to all townships/municipalities throughout the Durham region.

Parents/guardians may request a review of the bus stop location by completing the review request form located on the DSTS website, www.dsts.on.ca

The region is split into four (4) separate weather zones.

- Zone 1 – Brock Area
- Zone 2 – Uxbridge Area
- Zone 3 – Scugog Area
- Zone 4 – Pickering, Ajax, Whitby, Oshawa Areas

Information about weather zones and any cancellations is posted daily on the DSTS website (www.dsts.on.ca). Media outlets are contacted for all weather-related cancellations. Also, families are encouraged to subscribe to the DSTS parent portal to receive updates on their child's bus route, including cancellations and delays.

As of March 14, 2023, weather conditions have resulted in 9 zone bus cancellations for this school year. 6 of these were for all zones, while 3 were specific for the northern zones.

Weather decisions impacting student transportation begin as early as 4:30 a.m. DSTS staff begin to receive calls from township/regional staff and bus operators. Weather is monitored by all groups and a determination of warranted cancellation is made at or before 6:00 a.m. and communicated no later than 7:00 a.m. When a bus does not travel a route in the morning due to a weather-related cancellation, it will not do so in the afternoon (i.e. when buses are cancelled, it is for the whole day).

DSTS operates under a maximum one-way ride time of 60 minutes where possible. Ride times for most rural areas are within the maximum. A longer ride time would be due to the location of the program for the residential address.

4. Request for Reconsideration

In situations where a parent/guardian disagrees with the way in which transportation policies and/or procedures have been applied, they may request reconsideration. There are two levels at which requests may be made. All requests are to be first submitted in writing with sufficient detail and relevant documentation to concerns@dsts.ca. Decisions will be made by the DSTS Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) based on policy and procedure and will be provided in writing within 15 working days. If there is still a concern, or if the parent/guardian is not satisfied with the response of the CAO, a further request for reconsideration may be made to the Administrative Committee of DSTS. Decisions made by the Administrative Committee will be provided in writing within 30 days.

5. Durham Region Transit Bus Passes

Currently, most elementary and secondary students living outside the walk distance are transported to and from school on DSTS contracted school buses. In 2022, DSTS Governance Committee along with staff representatives from both partner school boards engaged in discussions on how to explore expanded student access to public transit to help ensure ongoing access to sustainable and reliable transportation for all eligible students. The expanded use of Regional Transit for students would have many benefits including increased flexibility for students in selecting travel times to and from school, which would allow students better access to co-curricular activities that happen before and after classes. From an environmental perspective, other jurisdictions in Ontario have embraced partnering on student transportation as a method of introducing young people to the regional transit system in the hopes that they would continue to use it beyond their years in high school.

Following the discussions in 2022, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was developed under the guiding principle that all parties are committed to enhancing the use of public transit for youth in Durham Region, including secondary school students, within a fiscally responsible framework.

Currently, the DCDSB utilizes transit for the Regional Arts Program and Alternate Education, with the DCDSB purchasing 380 transit passes monthly. Through the MOU, Durham Regional Transit currently offers subject to yearly approval the following discounts:

- Less than 126 monthly passes: youth rate or 20% discount on standard fare (\$93.50)
- 126-250 monthly passes: 25% discount on standard fare (\$87.75)
- More than 250 monthly passes: 35% discount on standard fare (\$76.05)

While there are benefits, some of which have been mentioned above, it is important to note that increased use of bus passes would not necessarily have a direct and immediate impact on resolving the issue of driver shortage. Currently, there are areas across the Durham region where transit services are not widely available or require multiple transfers to arrive at school. In these areas, school buses would still be required. Additionally, transportation-eligible secondary students are bussed to and from school bus vehicles through tiering (i.e. one bus doing up to three or four runs before and after school). Increasing transit use would not necessarily reduce the overall number of bus drivers required unless elementary bell times were reviewed and shifted to further tier vehicles reducing the overall number of fleet usage.

The MOU is reviewed annually between the parties and DSTS and DRT meet at least semi-annually to monitor progress and review priorities.

Next Steps

The DCDSB will collaborate closely with DSTS and work in partnership concerning driver recruitment and efficiencies with routing. Routing and technology continue to be a priority through further implementation of the the Bus Planner Software and the MTransport pilot in order to enhance the efficiency in optimizing school bus routes.

The DCDSB continues to collaborate with Durham Region Transit concerning the use of DRT transit passes. The MOU is a starting point from which the partner boards will continue to engage in discussions with DRT toward expanding student access to transit across the Region and eventually increasing capacity. Through a combination of successful outcomes related to the MOU and ongoing advocacy for the province, there is the potential to see an expansion of greater participation and increased service levels available for secondary students on transit.

TB/JW



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Durham Student Transportation Services Update

Monday, March 27, 2023

Listening, Learning, and Living in Faith

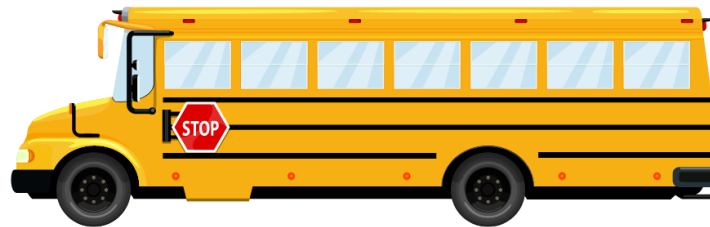
Durham Student Transportation Services

- Durham Student Transportation Services (DSTS) is a consortium formed by agreement between the DDSB and DCDSB.
- The role of DSTS is to provide efficient and effective transportation.
- DSTS is governed by a joint transportation policy.
- The governing body for DSTS is the DSTS Governance Committee comprised of staff and trustees from each partner school board.



Bus Driver Shortage

- On average since the beginning of the school year, DSTS has needed to cancel 4 routes daily due to driver shortages.
- DSTS works with operators every morning to ensure that as many routes as possible are covered.
- Various efforts are being made to recruit and retain drivers.
- Since 2016, DSTS has reduced its fleet usage by 136 vehicles due to significant bell time changes.



Bus Service In Remote and Rural Areas

- In some situations in rural areas, road conditions and/or road design require students to walk further to a stop.
- Generally school bus stops are not located on cul-de-sacs and dead-end roads.
- Weather conditions have resulted in 9 zone bus cancellations for this school year. 6 of these were for all zones, while 3 were for northern zones.
- Ride times for most rural areas are within the 60 minute maximum.



Durham Region Transit Bus Passes

- In 2022, the DSTS Governance Committee with staff from both boards engaged in discussions concerning student access to public transit.
- A memorandum of understanding was developed with Durham Region Transit.
- DCDSB purchases 380 Durham Region Transit Passes.
- Increasing public transit has potential benefits such as increased flexibility for students and positive environmental impact through encouraging life-long use of regional transit.
- Increasing use would not necessarily result in the reduction of the overall number of bus drivers unless elementary bell times were reviewed.



Next Steps

- The DCDSB will continue to support DSTS concerning driver recruitment and efficiencies with routing.
- The DCDSB will continue to collaborate with Durham Region Transit to facilitate an expansion of greater participation and increased service levels available for secondary students on public transit.

