

**DATE:** May 22, 2018

**TO:** Board of Trustees

**FROM:** Trustee Michael Janz

**SUBJECT:** Motion re: Student Transportation Fees

**REFERENCE:** [DEA.BP Student Transportation Trustees' Handbook – Section 5.2.2 – Notices of Motion](#)

---

## ISSUE

Notice of motion was served at the May 8, 2018, Board meeting.

## BACKGROUND

One of my ongoing advocacy priorities is the need to eliminate transportation fees across Edmonton—not just for students attending their designated school, but for alternative programs too. I know the government wants to make this change, and *Bill 1: An Act to Reduce School Fees* was a first step towards that end.

Next steps could contemplate a reduction or elimination of transportation fees via a phased reduction through the Board of Trustees requesting support from the City of Edmonton (we subsidize ETS riders), the Government of Alberta, or amendments as posed by my colleagues at the May 22nd Board meeting.

*Bill 1* eliminated school transportation fees for some parents, and it was a step in the right direction. Unfortunately, it didn't go far enough. We need to cover all transportation fees for parents, including for students in language or alternative programs. We value programs of choice just as we value regular programs, and we want to see equity—we want to see school transportation fees eliminated for all students.

Removing barriers to families that have students riding the bus is positive for all Edmontonians, whether they have children in school or not. Better transportation reduces traffic congestion, helps the environment, and makes life easier for families with children by reducing wasted driving time.

Together, let's build on the momentum of *Bill 1* and, as EPSB Trustees requested in our March 20, 2017 letter to the Minister of Education, eliminate student transportation fees.

## RELATED FACTS

- Transportation fees paid by families generate approximately \$13 million annually
- Transportation costs for the current level of service are approximately \$45 million annually
- Approximately 30 per cent of Edmonton Public students (31,000 students) ride the bus each year (total combined Yellow Bus and ETS, split between elementary, junior high, across programs of choice and neighbourhoods)

## RECOMMENDATION

**That student transportation fees be eliminated through a phased approach over the next four years**

## OPTIONS

1. Approve the recommendation.
2. Provide feedback and request changes to the recommendation for approval.

## CONSIDERATIONS and ANALYSIS

Eliminating transportation fees could attract more students to the District, reduce congestion on roads, reduce traffic in neighbourhoods, reduce our carbon footprint and support families by reducing time spent transporting children to school. Specifically, it can offer the following benefits:

- **FAIRNESS:** Many rural school boards do not charge any transportation fees as the majority of their students have long geographic distances to travel so the *Bill 1* walk limit does not apply; however, urban students also have long ride times, traffic to contend with and conditions such as busy roads and terrain that make walking to school unsafe.
- **COMPETITIVENESS:** School districts are funded on a per pupil funding model. Eliminating fees could incentivize public schools as a choice for families. For instance, the Edmonton Catholic School District (ECSD) does not charge for Kindergarten students to ride the bus, and appears to have successfully used transportation as a loss-leader to recruit more students. Approximately 25 per cent of ECSD students (10,000 students) are non-Catholic; waiving transportation fees could contribute to our competitiveness.
- **MUNICIPAL IMPROVEMENTS:** Junior high students currently purchase District-subsidized ETS bus passes at their schools. Supporting no-fee school bus transportation through a contribution from the City of Edmonton could help attract young families to our city and make our community more desirable for our youngest citizens. Edmonton is renowned for our excellent no-fee public library.
  - Eliminating school bus fees could contribute to further making us a world-class city in which to raise a family.
  - For many families, eliminating fees contributes to the End Poverty Edmonton Initiative and provides more money in parents' pockets to spend in the local economy.
- **SYSTEM EQUITY and EFFICIENCY:** Contributing to bus fee elimination fixes inequities with *Bill 1* by eliminating fees for all students. The provincial government has the ability to legislate collaboration between school districts for transportation systems. Edmonton is operating two duplicate, redundant transportation systems. According to a preliminary study in 2014, shared transportation with the Edmonton Catholic School Board, with Public and Catholic students riding the same bus to different schools, could save \$2.5 Million annually through the Edmonton Student Transportation Authority (ESTA), as well as reducing ride times if it were signed or legislated. The Province is currently conducting an [online survey](#) on student transportation. For further information on possible cost savings, see the *Edmonton Journal* article, [Shared busing could save \\$2.7M: study](#).
- **CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY:** For the sake of our students, our city and our planet, we must address climate change. Steps to end automobile dependency at all levels should be enabled. Eliminating school bus fees further supports the municipal climate change strategy. It inculcates a culture of public transportation usage in our next generation, reduces traffic in our neighbourhoods and congestion around our schools. In the longer term, this can contribute towards building a better urban form and a more efficient transportation system.

## NEXT STEPS

Should the Board of Trustees approve the recommendation, administration would be asked to bring forward a fee freeze for the forthcoming year as well as a four-year plan to reduce school fees. Meetings with regional school boards, Edmonton City Council and the provincial government would be sought to try and find additional sources of funding or efficiencies to replace the annual costs of parent fees.

MJ:km