

DATE: May 17, 2022

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Transportation Fees for 2022-2023

ORIGINATOR: Kathy Muhlethaler, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE STAFF: Alison Cheesbrough, Geoff Holmes, Haydn Sanchez Avery, Christopher Wright

REFERENCE: [Funding Manual for School Authorities 2022/23 School Year](#)
[Student Transportation Regulation](#)

ISSUE

Student Transportation submits proposed fees to the Board of Trustees for review on an annual basis. Fees were last reviewed by Trustees at the April 27, 2021, Board meeting where Trustees voted to extend the 2020-2021 fee schedule for the 2021-2022 school year. Student Transportation is currently proposing a recommendation to extend fees with no increase for 2022-2023.

BACKGROUND

Student Transportation is funded from provincial transportation grants and student transportation fees. Since the 2019-2020 school year, Student Transportation's government funding was held constant pending the development of a new provincial funding model. In the years leading up to 2019-2020, funding fluctuated due to factors such as the School Fee Reduction Grant, enrolment growth, new school openings and provincial fuel subsidies. For a number of years, a combination of carry-forward reserves, additional Division funds and operational efficiencies were used to minimize increases to bus pass fees and to cushion gaps in funding.

Since 2018, Student Transportation staff have worked to identify and implement operational efficiencies to ensure the Student Transportation system is not reliant on additional Division funds. This work has maintained service levels while increasing the utilization of existing resources. Some examples of initiatives implemented include a new yellow bus carrier contract which minimizes the impact of fluctuating fuel prices, a shared transportation arrangement with Edmonton Catholic Schools, and working with schools to implement minor changes to bell times to allow more schools to share buses.

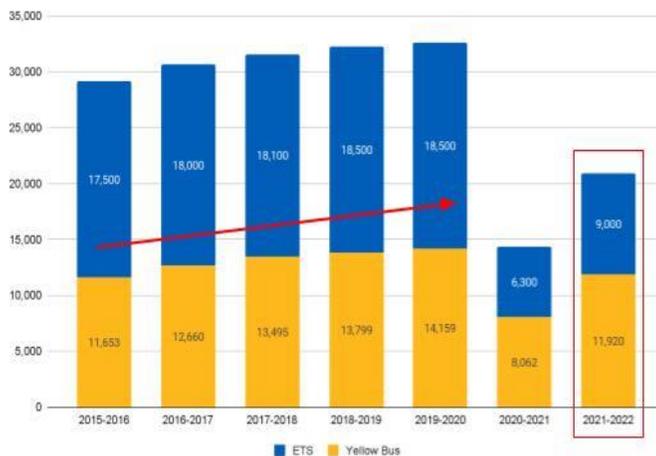
While the Division anticipates an increase of 4.6 per cent to Student Transportation's funding for the 2022-2023 school year, a revised provincial funding model has not been announced. Currently, transportation costs for 2022-2023 are expected to grow more than 4.6 per cent as a result of ridership growth and pressures on operating costs including driver compensation, insurance, fuel, and training. For example, the Student Transportation Association of Alberta (STAA) reported that in the first two weeks of March 2022, fuel costs increased by nearly 25 per cent. In a second example, the Alberta School Bus Contractors Association (ASBCA) reported that insurance costs have increased approximately 40 per cent in the past year. These increased costs are in addition to the labour market challenges yellow bus carriers have been experiencing over the past two years.

In order to ensure that yellow bus carriers have the appropriate resources required to recruit and retain enough drivers, the Division’s cost to provide yellow bus service is expected to increase. Although Student Transportation staff continue to identify additional efficiencies where possible to offset increased costs, over time these efforts may result in decreased service levels such as longer rider times. In order to minimize impacts to service levels and parent fees over the long term, an efficient Student Transportation system will require appropriate financial support.

RELATED FACTS

- The current fee schedule was implemented for the start of the 2020-2021 school year following a survey of stakeholders regarding the future direction of transportation fees and service levels.
- Since the current fee schedule was implemented, Student Transportation ridership has changed considerably as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Yellow bus ridership has increased by approximately 48 per cent (approximately 3,850 students) in comparison to 2020-2021 although remains 20 per cent (approximately 2,500 students) below pre-pandemic levels.
 - Ridership on Edmonton Transit System (ETS) remains 50 per cent (approximately 9,000 students) below pre-pandemic levels.
 - An operating surplus of approximately \$1.6 million was accumulated during the 2020-2021 school year as a result of efficiencies found as a result of decreased ridership due to COVID-19.
 - The School Transportation regulation states: “Any surplus from fees charged under subsection (1) or (2) must be used to subsidize the cost of transportation of students referred to in that subsection in the 2 school years following the school year in which the surplus was collected.”

What We Know: Ridership



2021/2022
12,000
Yellow bus riders

48%
from last year

- Beginning in September 2018, Student Transportation has implemented a number of operational efficiencies which provide lower costs without erosion of service which include:
 - A new yellow bus carrier contract which minimizes the impact of fluctuating fuel prices.

- 25 bus routes using a shared transportation arrangement with Edmonton Catholic Schools. Sharing the cost of these routes results in annual savings of over \$600,000 for Edmonton Public Schools. A similar number of shared routes is expected in 2022-2023.
- Working with schools to implement minor changes to bell times to allow more schools to share buses and increase the utilization of existing routes.
- For 2022-2023, Student Transportation is providing support for 137 requests to change bell times. Some of these changes allow the Division to support the establishment of three new alternative program locations and 13 Division Centre Program locations with the use of existing yellow bus resources.
- The Funding Manual for School Authorities 2022-2023 confirms that Student Transportation funding is being increased by 4.6 per cent in comparison to 2021-2022 levels. This is the first change to Student Transportation’s government funding since it was frozen at 2019-2020 levels pending the development of a new funding model.
- For students transported on ETS, Edmonton School Division subsidizes the cost of Edmonton Transit passes. The cost for the Division to purchase ETS passes is expected to remain unchanged for the 2022-2023 school year.

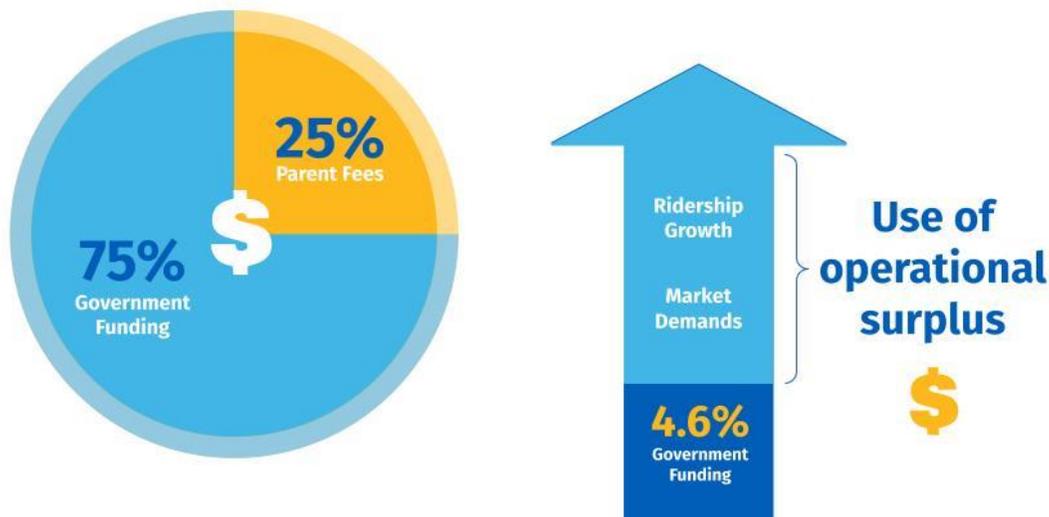
RECOMMENDATION

That the attached 2021-2022 Student Transportation Fee Schedule (Attachment I) be extended for the 2022-2023 school year.

CONSIDERATIONS and ANALYSIS

If the recommendation to extend Transportation fees is approved, Student Transportation will require the use of approximately \$1.6 million of transportation reserve funds accumulated in the 2020-2021 school year. This, combined with planned operational efficiencies, means that Student Transportation will be able to offset anticipated growth pressures and operational cost increases without significant decreases in service levels.

Fees for next year: No Increase



Additional considerations include:

- Student Transportation currently anticipates that a small operating surplus will be accumulated during 2021-2022 that will be carried forward to future years.
 - This surplus was accumulated through efficiencies found as a result of 22 routes combined to help alleviate the ongoing shortage of yellow bus drivers and ETS ridership that has not yet recovered from the decrease in ridership due to COVID-19. Where possible, funds that were saved were invested to offset fees for riders that did not receive service for extended periods due to the driver shortage.
- Although Student Transportation continues to search for additional operational efficiencies, further opportunities are not anticipated without a corresponding decrease in service levels such as longer ride times.
- Contract extensions with yellow bus carriers for the upcoming school year are expected to be finalized prior to the end of June 2022. A key component of the discussion is how the Division can provide support to yellow bus carriers to attract and retain a sufficient number of yellow bus drivers.
- Contracted yellow bus carriers have indicated that costs are expected to continue increasing throughout the 2022-2023 school year.

NEXT STEPS

If approved by the Board, the current Student Transportation fee schedule would remain in effect for September 2022. Following Board approval, a communication plan will be implemented to inform families of the fee schedule.

ATTACHMENTS and APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT I Approved 2021-2022 Student Transportation Fees

GH:kk

Student transportation fees

for 2021-22

Ready to ride the bus? Here's what you need to know about transportation fees and how to replace a lost or damaged bus pass. The fees are subject to change and cover a portion of the Division's transportation costs.

Transportation service	Monthly fee
Kindergarten to Grade 12 students taking ETS	\$60
Kindergarten to Grade 12 students taking yellow bus	\$38
Conditional riders taking yellow bus* <i>*Students who are not eligible for yellow bus service and request to ride on an existing route if there is space.</i>	\$38
Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 students who need additional care or specialized supports when taking yellow bus	\$0

Buying and replacing passes

You can buy yellow bus and ETS passes, including replacement passes, from your child's school each month. The replacement cost is \$6 for a yellow bus pass and \$73 for an ETS bus pass.

Using an ETS pass

Monthly passes are valid for unlimited travel on Edmonton Transit, including statutory holidays.

Need help paying for fees?

Talk to your child's school to see if your family is eligible for a fee reduction or other payment options. You can also check out the City of Edmonton's *Ride Transit Program*. The program offers subsidized ETS bus passes for eligible low-income Edmontonians. Learn more at edmonton.ca/ets/subsidized-transit.aspx.

For more information, contact **Student Transportation** at **780-429-8585** or talk to your school.