

Date	November 25, 2025
To	Board of Trustees
From	Ron Thompson, Superintendent of Schools
Subject	Student Transportation Update
Originator	Cliff Richard, Chief Infrastructure and Technology Officer
Resource Staff	Alison Cheesbrough, Geoff Holmes, Haydn Sanchez Avery, Christopher Wright
Reference	Student Transportation Regulation

ISSUE

In recent years, Administration has provided the Board of Trustees with a mid-year update on various issues impacting transportation services such as: industry challenges, ridership changes, and initiatives to improve services. As an update was not provided for the 2024–2025 school year, Administration is currently providing an update on initiatives undertaken to improve service delivery for Division families since September 2024.

KEY POINTS

- Student Transportation provides daily transportation service to nearly 18,000 students on yellow buses.
- Since 2020, yellow bus ridership has continued to outpace overall Division enrolment growth (22 per cent versus 18 per cent).
- Student Transportation currently designs and manages around 850 yellow bus routes, which is approximately the same number of routes that were on the road prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. This means the Division accommodates 22 per cent more students on approximately the same number of bus routes as the 2019–2020 school year.
- The driver shortage that occurred between 2020 and 2024 began to resolve at the beginning of the 2024–2025 school year when routes were fully staffed. As carriers became fully staffed, they indicated they were able to accommodate new work and were able to add routes to address overloads and longer ride times.
- Since September 2024, 64 new routes have been added to the system. Although the system has grown, routes are fully staffed and Division families are experiencing fewer delays.
- The Division issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a new yellow bus contract in spring 2025, with new contracts coming into effect in August 2025. Through this process, the Division added one new carrier to the existing four carriers, helping to increase the overall market capacity for yellow bus routes.
- The Edmonton Transit ARC card program has been fully implemented as of September 2024 providing families and schools with a number of benefits, such as the ability to recover a bus pass if the student's ARC card is lost.
- In September 2026, Student Transportation will implement the new provincial eligibility boundaries of 1.6 kilometres for students in Grade 6 or lower, as referenced in the Student Transportation Regulation.

This change will impact approximately 1,500 families. Student Transportation aims to accommodate as many of these riders as possible through conditional ridership and will communicate with affected families.

BACKGROUND

Edmonton Public Schools provides daily transportation service to nearly 18,000 students on yellow buses. Student Transportation provides oversight, guidance and support to carriers, parents and schools on issues related to Division student transportation services.

Peak ridership on Edmonton Public yellow buses in the 2023–2024 school year was approximately 16,200 riders, and has grown by a further 9.3 per cent (1,500 riders) as of November 2025. For several years, ridership on yellow buses has outpaced Division growth, and this trend is expected to continue as available school space is increasingly distant from where students reside.

Between 2020 and 2024, the Division experienced the effects of an industry-wide driver shortage which began to resolve for the 2024–2025 school year when routes were fully staffed and carriers had sufficient spare drivers to cover driver absences. Contract carriers have worked hard to recruit and retain more drivers and the increase in service reliability results in a reduced burden on students, parents and school staff. In addition, carrier staff are able to be more proactive about day-to-day issues due to increased capacity through sufficient driver staffing. Student Transportation continues to support carriers by providing initiatives such as professional development and appreciation events intended to improve driver engagement and retention. A new yellow bus contract came into effect as of August 2025. This contract adds one new carrier to the existing four carriers and provides additional capacity to serve Division students.

CURRENT SITUATION

Since the beginning of the 2024–2025 school year, carriers have indicated all routes are staffed with permanent drivers, with adequate spare driver capacity to cover driver absences. As a result, during September 2024–2025, the Division saw a significant decrease (31 per cent) in the number of late buses observed in comparison to the same time period in 2023. The average delay during the time period was also 31 per cent shorter than the previous year (29 minutes versus 42 minutes).

September 2025 saw an increase in yellow bus delays reported, but the average delay remained constant at under 30 minutes. The total number of delays reported under 30 minutes made up over 70 per cent of all delays in September 2025, which was consistent with September 2024. The delays the Division experienced during September 2025 were generally related to an increase in traffic congestion and construction zones. During September, Student Transportation adjusted times on approximately 40 per cent of routes which resulted in greater on-time service. By the end of September, approximately 1 per cent of overall routes had reported delays.

In November 2024, the Division had approximately 17,700 riders. This was an increase of 1,500 (9.3 per cent) in comparison to 2023–2024. Ridership numbers for November 2025 are similar to last year at approximately 17,700 riders. Since 2019, yellow bus ridership has grown by approximately 22 per cent, outpacing overall

Division growth of approximately 18 per cent. A key reason for this is due to increasing numbers of students requiring transportation services as the city grows and programming is geographically distant.

Student Transportation currently designs and manages around 850 yellow bus routes, which is approximately the same number of routes that were on the road prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, those routes are transporting 22 per cent more riders than in the spring of 2020 while maintaining a similar average ride time (28 versus 26 minutes). Student Transportation has added 64 routes to our system since September 2024. These additional routes primarily serve new Division Centre classes and address long rides and high bus loads.

Currently, approximately 93 per cent of one-way ride times are less than 60 minutes which has remained constant since November 2023. The longest rides continue to be experienced by students in new and developing communities. A more detailed summary of ride times is contained in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Ride Times, November 2023 to November 2025

	One-Way Ride (Minutes)					
	November 2023		November 2024		November 2025	
Program Type	Average	Maximum	Average	Maximum	Average	Maximum
Regular	17.3	90.0	17.6	100.0	18.6	102.0
Division Centre	34.6	110.0	35.5	105.0	35.8	105.0
Pre-Kindergarten	34.1	89.0	35.6	92.0	34.3	92.0
Alternative	33.6	95.0	34.3	95.0	36.6	105.0
Conditional (All Programs)	29.3	92.0	29.7	95.0	31.0	105.0
Overall	27.0	110.0	27.0	105.0	28.0	105.0

For a number of years Student Transportation has worked to create and maintain an efficient transportation system that provides a sustainable level of service. Although current overall ridership is similar to November 2024, the system is experiencing strain due to the continued growth in development in some areas of the city. As the city continues to grow, there will be a need for additional busing resources to offset increased distances to available school space to maintain current ride times.

In the upcoming year, Student Transportation will continue to be responsive to the needs of Division students:

- Student Transportation continues to collaborate with our contract carriers to identify strategies that will result in building market capacity to meet future demand.

- Student Transportation will continue to develop and deliver professional learning opportunities for bus drivers and carrier staff to enhance the quality of bus service and improve driver retention.
- The provincial transportation eligibility guidelines for students in Grade 6 and younger will change from 1 kilometre to 1.6 kilometres for the 2026–2027 school year. This will impact approximately 1,500 students currently receiving transportation services across the Division. Student Transportation aims to accommodate as many of these riders as possible through conditional ridership and will communicate with affected families.
- As of November 2024, Edmonton Transit ARC cards have been fully implemented across the Division. Student Transportation continues to provide support to schools as staff and students build experience with the new system and offer system enhancements as they are made available by the City of Edmonton.

HSA:ks