



Transportation Update on Changes to Bell Times in 2020-21

To: Finance, Budget and Enrolment Committee

Date: 13 May, 2020

Report No.: 05-20-3884

Strategic Directions

- Allocate Human and Financial Resources Strategically to Support Student Needs
- Build Strong Relationships and Partnerships Within School Communities to Support Student Learning and Well-Being

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Transportation Update on Changes to Bell Times in 2020-21 be received.

Context

When the Board passed its 2019-20 operating budget, it included a two year implementation plan to balance the Board's budget. The plan included budget changes for 2019-20, as well as planned reductions for the 2020-21 school year.

Phase Two of planned changes for the 2020-2021 budget year included adjusting bell times to improve route efficiency, thus saving the Board \$2.5M annually. This report provides an update on how schools, parents/guardians and staff were notified, provides some feedback and adjustments since first proposed and outlines the final plan for implementation

Background

Currently, the TDSB spends approximately \$67.2M on student transportation and receives \$63.7M in funding from the Ministry of Education (based on 2019-2020 figures). This results in an annual operating deficit for Transportation of approximately \$3.5M.

In addition to the financial impetus for this change, several other factors were considered:

- *Driver shortages* – centralizing bell times allows us to plan routes more efficiently. An analysis conducted by our software vendor estimated that approximately 55-60 buses will be taken off the roads by more efficiently planning routes. This will minimize the impact of driver shortages by reducing the number of drivers needed across the system by approximately 55-60 drivers/routes. This will be of particular importance coming out of the pandemic and returning to school as buses have not been on the road since March 13 and there will likely be additional retirements and there has not been an opportunity to train new drivers. Some drivers may also not be able to return to work due to pre-existing conditions or age; factors that could leave them vulnerable to COVID-19.
- *Limit Service Disruption* – By altering bell times, the Board will ensure that all students who are currently eligible for Student Transportation will remain eligible.
- *Environmental impact* – Every bus on the road emits approximately 50 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide per year. By removing 55 buses off the roads, over 2,750 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide will be reduced.

In the analysis of this plan provided by our software vendor, Georef, the following parameters were put on the changes:

1. Bell times would be in the following ranges:
 - a. Morning bell times would be between 8:15 and 9:15 a.m.
 - b. Afternoon bell times would be between 2:45 and 3:45 p.m.
2. No change in bell times would be greater than 30 minutes
3. Only full size (big bus) vehicles that were configured to carry 70-72 students or 41 students were included.

Action Plan and Associated Timeline

The Board began informing parents/guardians, schools and communities of the bell time changes in February to provide at least 6 months' notice so that families could make any necessary adjustments to their schedule.

In order to implement the changes to bell times, staff planned to conduct 4 in person information sessions throughout the City of Toronto. As a result of the province-wide closure of schools, these in person sessions were reduced to 2; one at David and Mary Thompson School and one at Earl Haig Secondary School. In addition, two live webcasts were held (one during the day and one in the evening). The approximate attendance at each session is outlined below:

| Information Session | Date | Approximate Attendance |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Earl Haig SS | March 9, 2020 | Approximately 15 people attended. |
| David and Mary Thomson | March 12, 2020 | 10 people attended. |
| Facilitated Web Chat # 1 | March 26, 2020 (morning) | At its peak, 90 people were registered in the session. |
| Facilitated Web Chat # 2 | March 26, 2020 (evening) | At its peak, 55 people were registered in the session. |

In addition to the information sessions, meetings or calls were also held with:

- Trustees (through the Committee of the Whole on January 29)
- Superintendents
- Principals
- Early Years Senior Staff (Feb 13)
- PIAC (February 18, 2020)
- SEAC (March 2, 2020)

The website was also updated in mid-February to include the list of impacted schools (finalized list in Appendix A) and a Q and A document on Frequently Asked Questions (See Appendix B). People were also invited to email belltimes@tdsb.on.ca and approximately 150 such emails were received.

The changes impacted 145 schools initially. This was reduced to 128 as there were some schools where the bell time was changing for an elementary school but not a correlating impact on the middle school. What this meant for many families was that an older sibling would be unable to walk a younger sibling. Further, two schools were removed from the list as they no longer had any student transportation going forward.

Through the information sessions, emails and phone calls, some parents indicated that they prefer the new times while others have indicated that it would provide challenges for their work schedule, child care or other concerns. Each issue was addressed through the updating of the Q and A documents as well as individually responding to parents/guardians and offering to assist by writing a letter for employers as well as encouraging them to look at local solutions such as coordinated walking groups.

Resource Implications

The bell time changes will result in a budget savings of \$2.5M as outlined in the 2019-20 budget plan. There may be some modest one-time increase in costs for the month of September as impacted schools have been offered an increase to 30 minutes of supervision for the month of September to assist in the transition. The one-time costs will be approximately \$50,000 to \$100,000 depending on the number of schools requesting this.

Communications Considerations

By now, all impacted families have received letters of the changes and had an opportunity to ask questions. We will continue to work closely with Communications and ensure that the bell times' email is closely monitored, emails are responded to, and that the website maintains the updated bell times and Q and A documents. The Toronto Student Transportation Group (TSTG) website will also maintain this information.

Board Policy and Procedure Reference(s)

- i. PO20 – Transportation of Students
- ii. PR504 – Transportation of Students

Appendices

- Appendix A: Bell Time final list of changes for 128 schools
- Appendix B: Frequently Asked Questions

From

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