

Questions and Answers

on the Washtenaw Transportation Consolidation Design

as of April 22, 2010

At the request of its ten public school districts, Washtenaw Intermediate School District is coordinating an effort to develop a countywide consolidated transportation model.

1. What is the Washtenaw Transportation Consolidation Design?

Our schools are designing a model, in cooperation with Washtenaw Intermediate School District, which will allow school leaders to determine if consolidating transportation services will meet the needs of our students and district.

2. Why is it being done?

Over the last several years, our schools have cut budgets and consolidated services while striving to maintain the quality of educational programming. Since February 2007, representatives from all 10 local school districts (Ann Arbor, Chelsea, Dexter, Lincoln, Manchester, Milan, Saline, Whitmore Lake, Willow Run, and Ypsilanti) and Washtenaw Intermediate School District (WISD) have been participating in a countywide committee to further examine and implement areas in which our schools can economize by sharing or consolidating services. Currently, our school districts are collaborating in more than 87 different areas. But, with the current fiscal pressures challenging our schools today, we still need to find additional ways to reduce costs while preserving services for students and families.

3. What is the goal of this design?

The goal is to maintain the quality and safety of transportation services while creating a sustainable, efficient, and consolidated operation that will generate cost savings in the 18%-25% range.

4. Which districts are participating in the design?

All of the public school districts in Washtenaw County: Ann Arbor, Chelsea, Dexter, Lincoln, Manchester, Milan, Saline, Whitmore Lake, Willow Run and Ypsilanti are participating in the design phase.

5. If a district participates in the planning, does that mean it is automatically going to implement the plan?

No. Once the planning work is completed, each district's board of education will have an opportunity to review and decide if the district is going to participate in the consolidation plan.

6. How have district employees been involved?

Facilitated teams of individuals from the school districts in Washtenaw County have been working with consultants from Xavier Leadership Center and Transportation Strategies, LLC as part of the design process.

7. How will our schools benefit?

Under this consolidated system, all school districts in Washtenaw County can continue to provide students with safe, reliable transportation to and from school because of the cost savings made possible by this countywide model. In addition to safe, efficient, cost-effective service, participating districts will benefit from:

- Countywide routing for special education transportation
- Single fuel vendor and fuel type (bulk purchasing)
- Common fleet and equipment specifications (bulk purchasing and maintenance/parts standardization)
- Single inventory for parts purchasing and supplies enabling interchangeability, fewer storage needs, faster access to parts, lower price via bulk purchase
- Reduced empty-bus miles
- Implementation of a registered-rider program
- Single routing software with global positioning (for improved routing, tracking, safety and management)
- Common, standard routing and safety guidelines
- Consolidated and shared maintenance facilities
- Standard driver-evaluation system
- Single administrative and employment structure.

All efficiencies will be made in accordance with applicable state and federal rules and laws.

8. Will this new system be safe?

Yes, the consolidated transportation system will be safe and efficient. As required by law, it will operate under state and federal transportation rules and standards. And, Washtenaw Intermediate School District will continue to provide comprehensive beginner and advanced bus driver training.

9. What are the additional safety benefits of this countywide system?

Under this design, all school district bus routes will be computerized, using the same routing software and all buses will eventually be equipped with enhanced communication using Global Positioning Software.

10. How will this impact students?

If a student currently rides the bus, he or she will be picked up at the designated bus stop and returned to the designated bus stop at the end of the day in accordance with Washtenaw Routing Guidelines for Safety.

11. If the system is countywide, will students from different districts ride on the same bus together?

Not usually, however, students from different districts may travel on the same bus to centralized programs like career and technical education and special education—as they do now.

12. Will certain students be transported door-to-door?

Under this design, only those students in special education whose Individualized Education Plan (IEP) specifies such transportation will receive services at that level. All others will be transported according to the Washtenaw Routing Guidelines for Safety developed by our local school district routing team.

13. Will you transport school-of-choice students?

The law [MCL 388.1705c (17)] does not require a district to provide transportation for a nonresident pupil enrolled in the district or for a resident pupil enrolled in another district. However, at the time a nonresident pupil enrolls in the district, a district shall provide to the pupil's parent or legal guardian information on available transportation to and from the school in which the pupil enrolls.

14. How will field trips and athletics be addressed?

Field trips will be handled centrally. Athletics will be handled like field trips.

15. Which buses will be used in this model?

School buses that are currently transporting students will become part of the countywide fleet as long as they meet or exceed all the federal motor vehicle safety standards, as the law requires. Buses used to transport students with disabilities will comply with federal standards specifically applicable to such pupils, their wheelchairs, and related wheelchair securement and occupant protection systems. Any new buses will be purchased using locally agreed upon common fleet standards that are in compliance with Michigan's Pupil Transportation Act. Each district is responsible for providing vehicles for its non-IEP-mandated transportation services. Existing specialized transportation vehicles will be used by WISD to provide IEP-mandated transportation services. Future specialized transportation vehicles will be provided by WISD.

16. Will the schools be working with public transportation providers?

We are examining all options including opportunities for high school students to ride public transportation. Some students—including those with special needs—already use public transportation to navigate around the community successfully.

17. Under this new system, who will I contact if I have a transportation concern?

You will contact the central transportation office. Your local school district will also have a representative on the countywide transportation oversight group.

18. What happens if my district chooses not to participate in this new transportation model?

Each district has the option to participate fully, partially or not at all in the new transportation model. The overall system will achieve maximum efficiency and savings if all 10 school districts participate fully. However, this is a local decision and each school district's situation is unique. Your board of education will consider its options and make the decision that it believes is best for your school district at this time.

19. What's the difference between this and privatization?

This plan is being developed as a potential alternative to privatization of school transportation services. Under this scenario, the transportation staff could remain as public school employees. Under a privatization model, the staff would not be public school employees.

20. If the schools choose this model, does that mean the system won't be privatized?

There are two phases to the Consolidated Transportation System Design: the design phase, and the implementation phase. We are currently in the design phase. Upon completion of the design phase, each district will consider to what extent it will participate in the implementation phase, either fully, partially, or not at all. The first set of cost estimates are being developed assuming transportation staff will continue to be public school employees. The district will consider if the design meets its anticipated savings goal. If the district's savings goal is not achieved, the board/boards could use the design work to issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) to privatize the transportation service.

21. Who will employ the staff?

If the boards determine to operate the system under the public employment option, staff could be employed by one of the local school districts or Washtenaw Intermediate School District (WISD) instead of by each individual school district. It could also be possible for the system to be operated publicly, while the staff is employed by a third-party employment firm. If the boards determine the savings under the public options do not meet their savings goal and a Request for Proposal (RFP) is issued and a contract is awarded, the successful bidder would become the employer of the staff. [Note: Under Michigan law employee groups may choose to bid on the RFP.]

22. Will the staff be able to continue to participate in the school retirement system?

If the public option is adopted, staff could continue to participate and earn years of credit in the Michigan Public School Employees Retirement System. Under the other options employees' credit in the retirement system would be frozen.

23. Will staff be eligible to receive fringe benefits?

This is still under study.

24. Will background checks be run on all potential bus drivers?

Yes, according to Michigan law [MCL 257.1853 Sec. 53 (4)] upon receipt of an application from a person for the position of school bus driver, a school shall request from the department of state police the identical background check and fingerprinting that is required for all school employees including but not limited to: teachers, bus drivers, food service workers and administrators.

25. When will the design be completed?

The Washtenaw Transportation Consolidation Design will be completed by the end of May 2010.

26. When will local districts make participation decisions?

Local school boards will decide their level of participation by the end of June 2010.

27. Why should our school district consider participating?

Statistics show that by working together the total cost of providing transportation services can be reduced. In this design, your school district can choose to either participate fully, partially or not at all. In most cases:

- the level of participation of each district will determine that district's savings, and
- the more participating school districts, the greater the overall countywide savings. However each district's situation is unique.

28. What if our district is satisfied with our current transportation system?

Even if you're satisfied with the overall efficiency of your current transportation program, your district may want to consider participating in: Countywide routing for special education transportation, single fuel vendor and fuel type, single inventory for parts purchasing and supplies, and common fleet/equipment specifications.

29. If our board does not fully participate now, will there be opportunities to participate later?

The answer is most likely yes. But, the greater the participation now, the greater the savings now.

30. If approved, when will it start?

If approved, parts of the model could be implemented as soon as the Fall of 2010.

31. Where can I get more information?

For Washtenaw County updates, visit:

www.wash.k12.mi.us.

For statewide transportation information, go to:

www.msbo.org.

For local district information, contact your superintendent's office.

General School Transportation Questions

32. Is the school district required to transport my child?

No. School districts are NOT required by law to transport children in general education. Michigan Compiled Law (MCL) 380.1321 outlines the obligations of the school district IF its board of education elects to provide transportation. Under Article 3 of the Revised School Code, the school district is obligated to provide for the transportation of a special education student if the Individualized Educational Planning Committee (IEPC) has determined that the transportation is a specialized service which is included within and necessary to carry out the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP).

33. My child is starting kindergarten. Will the bus pick my child up in front of my house?

There are no special laws or regulations for transporting general education students enrolled in kindergarten. If your district provides transportation, it will be provided in accordance with the requirements of MCL 380.1321 [The Revised School Code (excerpt) Act 451 of 1976], Section 55 of the Pupil Transportation Act, and Washtenaw Routing Guidelines for Safety with regard to the placement of the bus stop.

34. Is there a law about how far my child has to walk to the bus stop?

No law specifies the maximum distance a student may walk to the bus stop.

35. What about the safety of my child getting to and from the bus stop?

It is the responsibility of the parent or legal guardian to see that a child gets safely to and from the bus stop. The school district provides transportation as a non-mandated service and establishes placement of the bus stops in accordance with the requirements of the law.

36. Is there a specified distance that must exist between school bus stops?

The lights on a school bus which are used to notify other traffic of an upcoming stop must, by law, be activated 200 feet from the stop. Thus, bus stops must be at least 200 feet apart.

37. What other factors are involved in establishing where the school bus stops?

There are many factors which should be taken into consideration when schools establish the placement of school bus stops. The basic legal factors are spelled out in MCL 257.1855 [Michigan's Pupil Transportation Act], but the primary concern is visibility of the bus to other traffic and the consideration of stopping distances necessary for other motor vehicles in order to accomplish safe loading and unloading of the children. In general, state law requires 400 feet of clear and continuous visibility on a highway or roadway where the speed limit is more than 35 miles per hour, and 200 feet where the speed limit is less than 35 miles per hour. There is no state law that specifies a maximum distance between stops.

38. Is there a law stating that an adult—other than the bus driver—riding on a school bus for monitoring purposes be seated at a specific location on the bus?

There are no laws pertaining to this issue. In most cases when adults are assigned to monitor students who are being transported on a bus, they are near the student or students who require the greatest amount of supervision.

39. Why might buses from two different school districts travel down the same road?

Most likely the school districts border each other and while the buses may be traveling down the same road to pick up students, their final destination may be in two very different directions.

40. Why are empty buses traveling on the road?

Usually, the buses are either on their way to pick up students from the secured bus yard where they were parked overnight or heading back to the secured yard after dropping off the last student of the day. [Note: The Washtenaw Transportation Consolidation Design will work to minimize the number of empty-bus miles by using strategically placed secured bus yards throughout the county, in situations where it is appropriate.]

41. My child spends more than two hours a day just riding the bus to and from school. Is there a maximum riding time in the law?

There is no maximum riding time in the law for children in kindergarten through grade twelve. Child care licensing regulations establish a maximum riding time of 60 continuous minutes for the transportation of preschool children.

42. What qualifications must a school bus driver have?

Michigan law [MCL 257.1849, MCL 257.1851, and MCL 257.1853] lists the minimum qualifications a school bus driver must have including a chauffeur's license with appropriate vehicle group designation and required passenger vehicle and school bus endorsement.

43. What are the safety training requirements for a school bus driver in Michigan?

The Michigan Pupil Transportation Act requires the driver of a school bus transporting passengers to be enrolled in the entry level school bus safety education course or have successfully completed a course in school bus safety education within the immediately preceding two years. Bus drivers are required to successfully complete the beginning bus driver safety education course within 90 days after enrollment and an advanced 6-hour continuing education course within two years of their initial certification. A driver who fails to successfully complete the entry level course within 90 days after enrollment or to meet the continuing education requirements shall not be permitted to drive a school bus transporting passengers. MCL 257.1851 (1).

44. Where can I find the complete Michigan Pupil Transportation Act?

The Pupil Transportation Act, Act 187 of 1990 can be found at:

<http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/mcl/pdf/mcl-act-187-of-1990.pdf>.