

DATE: April 28, 2020

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Transportation Fees and Services for 2020-2021

ORIGINATOR: Dr. Lorne Parker, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE STAFF: Alison Cheesbrough, Geoff Holmes, Kim Holowatuk, Christopher Wright

REFERENCE: [Interim Funding Manual for School Authorities 2020/21 School Year](#)

ISSUE

Student Transportation annually submits proposed fees to the Board of Trustees for review. At the December 10, 2019, public Board meeting, the Board of Trustees approved a fee increase effective February 1, 2020, in order to offset the loss of \$5.3 million in Student Transportation funding that was eliminated in the October 24, 2019, provincial budget (Attachment I). A consideration in the decision was that fees for the 2020-2021 school year would need to be reviewed following the spring 2020 provincial budget.

BACKGROUND

Student Transportation is funded from provincial transportation grants and student transportation fees. In recent years, funding has fluctuated due to factors such as the inclusion and removal of the provincial fuel subsidy, the School Fee Reduction Grant, enrolment growth and new school openings. For a number of years, carry-forward reserves accumulated through a combination of operational efficiencies, and provincial fuel grants were used to minimize increases to bus pass fees and to cushion gaps in funding. In the 2017-2018 school year, all carry-forward reserves were exhausted.

Since 2018, Student Transportation staff have worked through the Student Transportation Framework to identify and implement operational efficiencies. To date, these efficiencies have resulted in savings of approximately \$2.2 million; however, a gap remains between funding and costs. In May 2018, the Board of Trustees approved a transportation fee increase of five per cent effective September 2018, and an additional five per cent fee increase for each year remaining in the term of this Board. The Board also directed that the five percent increase for 2018-2019, and any further funding gap (a total of \$3.8 million), was to be covered by Division surplus funds.

For the 2019-2020 school year, Student Transportation predicted a funding gap of \$2.4 million to be covered by Division surplus funds. With the removal of the School Fee Reduction Grant for transportation in the October 2019 provincial budget, the gap increased to \$7.7 million. As a result of the fee increase that was approved beginning February 2020, the gap between funding and revenue covered from other Division funds was reduced significantly, but not eliminated. Going forward, the remaining gap in funding will need to be addressed through a combination of operational efficiencies and fee revenue in order to avoid decreases to transportation services in future.

In anticipation of further discussions around Student Transportation fees, the Board of Trustees requested that stakeholder feedback be collected to guide them in their decision making. In January 2020, a survey was conducted to engage stakeholders regarding future direction about transportation fees and service levels. A summary of the feedback collected through this engagement is contained in Attachment II.

RELATED FACTS

- Approximately 32 per cent of students in the Division currently access transportation services.
- Student Transportation staff continue to look for efficiencies that will lower operational costs. In total, approximately \$2.2 million in operational efficiencies have been implemented by Student Transportation since September 2018, which provide lower costs without erosion of Student Transportation service. They include:
 - A new yellow bus carrier contract which minimizes the impact of fluctuating fuel prices. The new contract contains predictable carrier rates until the end of the 2020-2021 school year.
 - A total of 27 bus routes using a shared transportation arrangement with Edmonton Catholic Schools. Sharing the cost of these routes results in annual savings of over \$650,000 for Edmonton Public Schools.
 - Working with schools to implement minor changes to bell times to allow more schools to share buses.
- For 2020-2021, Student Transportation staff have identified approximately \$1.3 million in additional planned efficiencies that will maintain service and result in the increased utilization of existing resources.
- One component of planned efficiencies includes increasing the number of resources shared with Edmonton Catholic Schools.
- The January 2020 transportation survey was accessed by approximately 3,500 respondents. Feedback indicated:
 - Support for sharing resources with other jurisdictions (76 per cent) and making changes to bell times to increase access to alternative programs (66 per cent), lower ride times (74 per cent) and lower bus fees (59 per cent).
 - A strong level of support (86 per cent) that the age of a student should not be a factor in a transportation fee. Respondents were split in their support for fee differences based on program type, and 53 per cent of respondents agreed that everyone who rides the bus should pay the same fee.
- The Funding Manual for School Authorities 2019-2020 prohibited transportation fees for students in need of specialized supports and services who are not able to access regular transportation services. The Interim Funding Manual for School Authorities 2020-2021 confirms that the grant allocation for 2019-2020 will remain in place for 2020-2021.
- For students transported on Edmonton Transit (ETS), Edmonton Public Schools subsidizes the cost of Edmonton Transit passes.

RECOMMENDATION

That the attached 2020-2021 Proposed Student Transportation Fee Schedule be approved for implementation effective August 2020.

CONSIDERATIONS and ANALYSIS

If the recommendation for the Student Transportation Fee Schedule is approved (Attachment III), Student Transportation predicts a total fee revenue of approximately \$14.3 million in the 2020-2021 school year. This, combined with planned operational efficiencies, means that Student Transportation will eliminate the gap between funding and costs. As a result, additional Division funding will not be required for the 2020-2021 school year.

Additional considerations include:

- Attachment IV contains further information regarding the impact of adding a family maximum amount to the proposed 2020-2021 Student Transportation Fee Schedule.
- Anticipated funding for 2020-2021 is based on the Interim Funding Manual for School Authorities. The document indicates that a new transportation funding model will be developed and implemented in the future. Transportation fees will need to be reviewed when further details about the new model are communicated to school jurisdictions.
- The information in this report assumes that the pandemic response to COVID-19 will not have an impact in Student Transportation for the 2020-2021 school year. Future impacts may require revisions to transportation fees.

NEXT STEPS

If approved by the Board, the new Student Transportation fee schedule would come into effect for September 2020. Following Board approval, a communication plan will be implemented to inform families of the changes.

ATTACHMENTS and APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT I	Approved Student Transportation Fees, effective February 1, 2020
ATTACHMENT II	Transportation Fee Survey: What we heard
ATTACHMENT III	2020-2021 Proposed Student Transportation Fees
ATTACHMENT IV	Family Maximum Amount: Additional Information

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Student Transportation Fees



Fee increases effective February 1, 2020

Starting February 1, 2020, transportation fees are increasing for some students. Families who previously didn't have to pay for yellow bus, those who received ETS pass subsidies and all Kindergarten students will now be required to pay.

	KINDERGARTEN to GRADE 6				GRADE 7 to 12			
	Yellow Bus (Monthly)	Yellow Bus (Annual)	ETS (Monthly)	ETS (Annual)	Yellow Bus (Monthly)	Yellow Bus (Annual)	ETS (Monthly)	ETS (Annual)
Students attending their designated school (regular program)								
Students attending their designated school who reside 2.4 km away or more	\$33	\$260	\$33	\$260	\$60	\$515	\$60	\$515
Students attending their designated school who reside less than 2.4 km away	\$33	\$260	\$33	\$260	\$60	\$515	\$60	\$515
Grade 7-9 students continuing to attend the same designated school they attended in elementary	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$33	\$260	\$60	\$515
Students not attending their designated school								
Students attending a bilingual or immersion program	\$33	\$260	\$33	\$260	N/A	N/A	\$60	\$515
Students attending another alternative program (not bilingual or immersion)	\$60	\$515	\$60	\$515	N/A	N/A	\$60	\$515
Other students not attending their designated school regardless of distance	N/A	N/A	\$60	\$515	N/A	N/A	\$60	\$515
Students in need of specialized supports and services								
Students attending special education programs who are able to use regular transportation services	\$33	\$260	\$33	\$260	\$60	\$515	\$60	\$515
Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten and students from Grade 1 to 12 who are unable to use regular transportation services	\$0	\$0	N/A	N/A	\$0	\$0	N/A	N/A
Conditional riders								
	\$60	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$60	N/A	N/A	N/A
Replacement cost (lost or stolen)								
	\$6	N/A	\$75	N/A	\$6	N/A	\$75	N/A
Family maximum (Kindergarten to Grade 6 only)								
Students attending their designated school	\$80	\$625	\$80	\$625	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Students attending a bilingual or immersion program	\$80	\$625	\$80	\$625	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Students attending another alternative program (not bilingual or immersion)	\$150	\$1250	\$150	\$1250	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

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

ANNUAL PASS

- Annual yellow bus passes look different than monthly passes.
- Annual passes must be paid in full at the school office by September 20, 2019.

EDMONTON TRANSIT PASSES

- Students enrolled at a Division elementary, junior high or senior high school can purchase an ETS bus pass at their school.
- Passes are valid for unlimited travel on Edmonton Transit, including statutory holidays.
- Students can buy a replacement ETS pass at their school, or request a free replacement for a damaged ETS pass by turning in an identifiable piece of the damaged pass.

Infrastructure: Transportation Fee Survey

WHAT WE HEARD

January-February 2020

BACKGROUND

In response to changes in government funding for Student Transportation, changes to the Fee Schedule are being contemplated. The Board of Trustees requested stakeholder feedback be collected to support their decision making.

WHAT WAS DONE

An online survey was open to all stakeholders January 16-31, 2020. A link to the survey was sent via SchoolZone to all current Edmonton Public Schools families, posted on our Division website (carousel) and shared through social media (Twitter, Facebook). A total of 3,488 people accessed the survey.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Below is a high level analysis of the responses to the questions relating to bus fees and to bus service. For the purposes of this executive summary, responses reported as 'agree' are inclusive of both 'agree' and 'strongly agree'; responses reported as 'disagree' are inclusive of both 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'.

BUS FEES (Questions 5-8)

- 86 per cent of respondents agree that the age of a student should not be a factor in a transportation fee.
- 63 per cent of respondents agreed that students attending their designated school should pay less.
- 62 per cent of respondents feel they should not pay more for transportation if they choose to attend an alternative program school.
- 53 per cent of respondents feel everyone who rides the bus should pay the same fee.

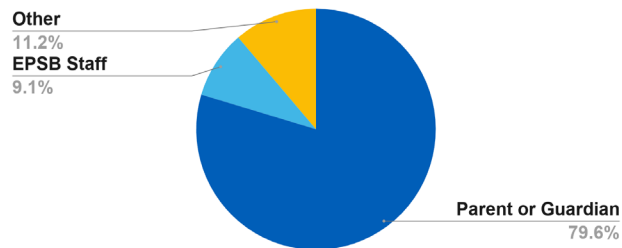
BUS SERVICE (Questions 9-12)

- 77 per cent would support sharing busing with other school divisions.
- 73 per cent of respondents agree that students who choose to attend an alternative program should receive the same level of bus service as students going to their designated schools.
- 74 per cent agree that they would support shifting school hours by up to 45 minutes if it meant a shorter ride time.
- 66 per cent agree that they would support shifting school hours by up to 45 minutes if it meant a greater range of alternative programs.
- 59 per cent agree that they would support shifting school hours by up to 45 minutes if it meant a lower bus fee.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Summary: Feedback by Question

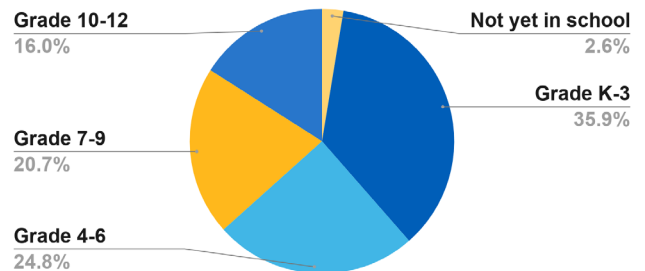
1. I am a:



3,488 responses

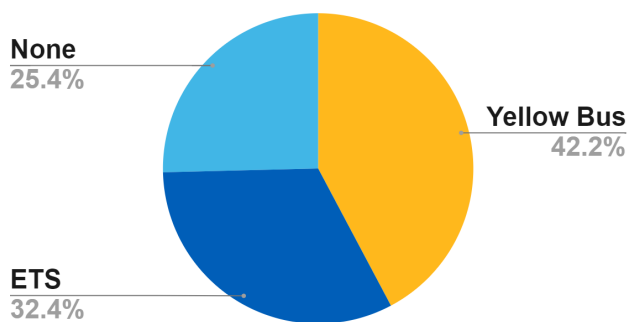
2. My child(ren) is/are in:

2,808 responses



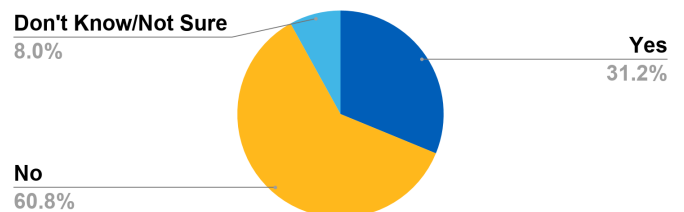
3. Does your child(ren) currently ride:

2,808 responses



4. Does your child(ren) attend an alternative program?

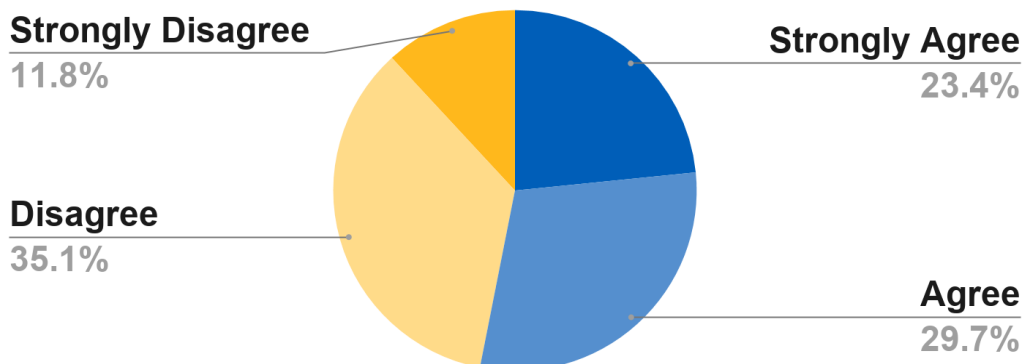
2,808 responses



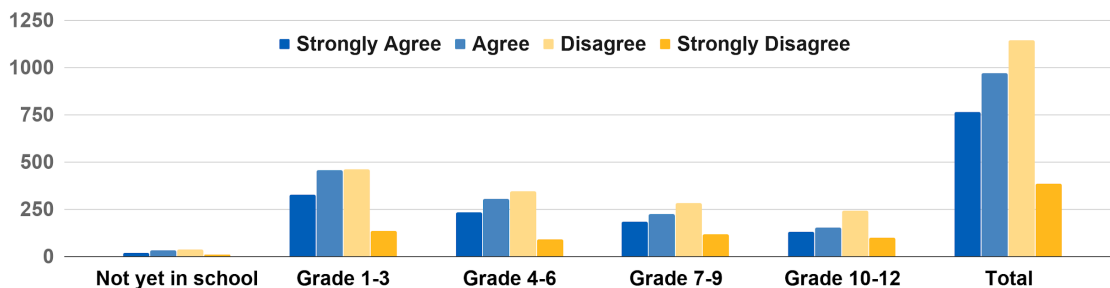
For demonstration purposes, the feedback responses within question 5 have been separated by age of children, transportation type, and type of programming attended (demographic questions 2-4). Variations were less than 10 per cent for all categories.

5. Everyone who rides the bus should pay the same fee.

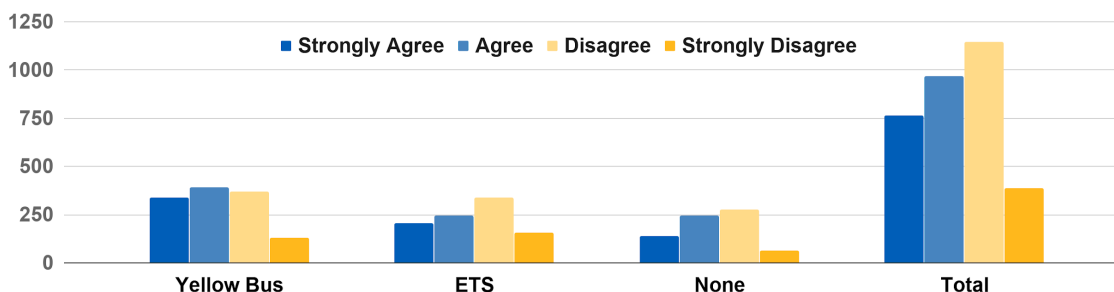
3,266 responses / 64 comments



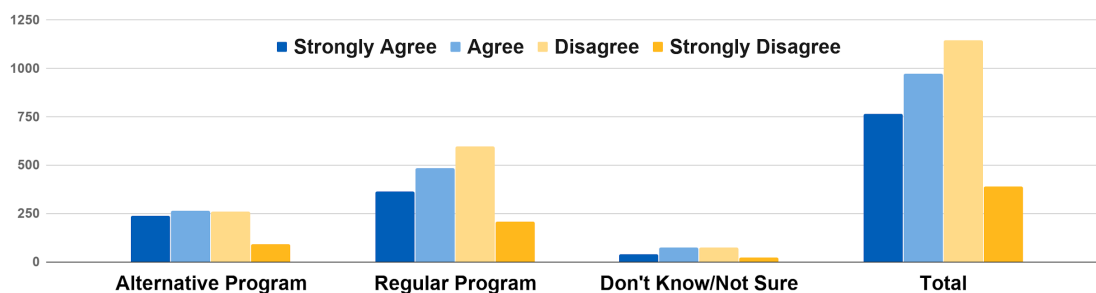
Question 5: Breakdown by age (numbers)



Question 5: Breakdown by transportation type (numbers)



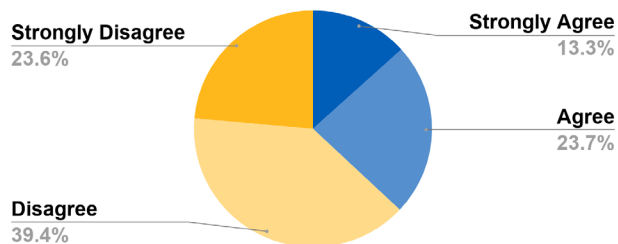
Question 5: Breakdown by programming (numbers)



The variations between identified demographic groups were insignificant (less than 10 per cent) for all questions, therefore, further breakdowns have not been included in this report.

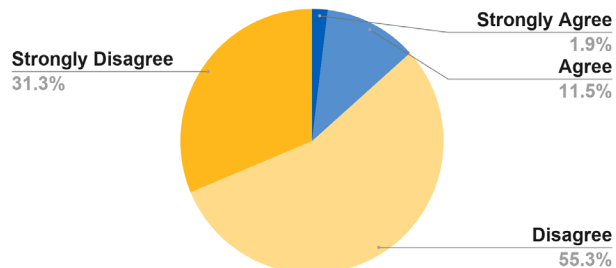
6. Students who choose to attend an alternative program should expect to pay more.

3,266 responses / 32 comments



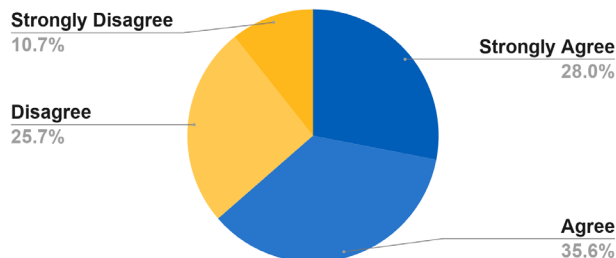
7. Older students should pay more than younger students

3,266 responses / 3 comments



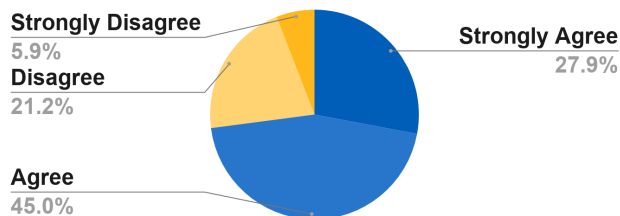
8. Students attending their designated school should pay less.

3,266 responses | 47 comments



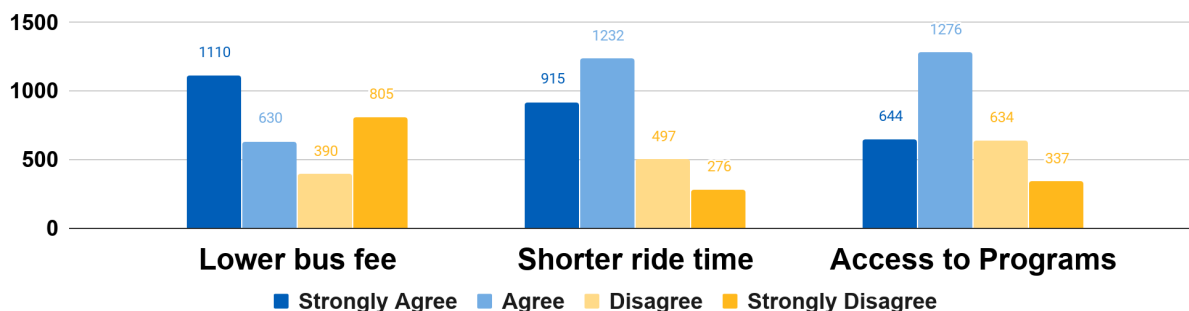
9. Students who attend an alternative program should receive the same level of service as students going to designated schools.

2,959 responses | 3 comments



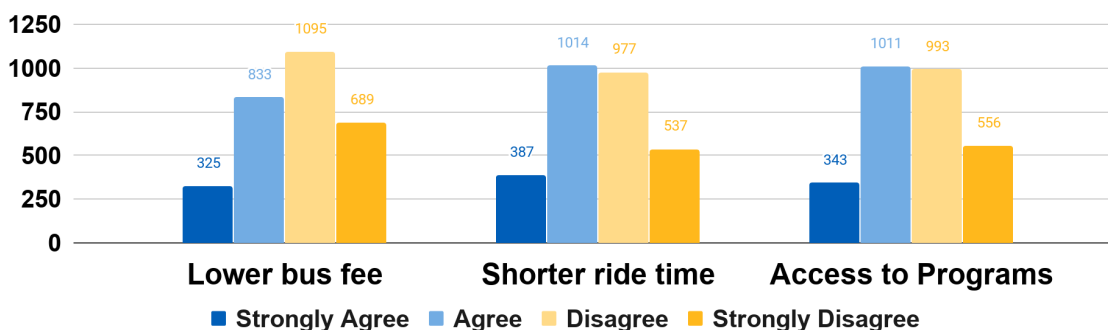
10. I would support an earlier or later start time to the school by up to 45 minutes in order to have:

2,959 responses | 35 comments



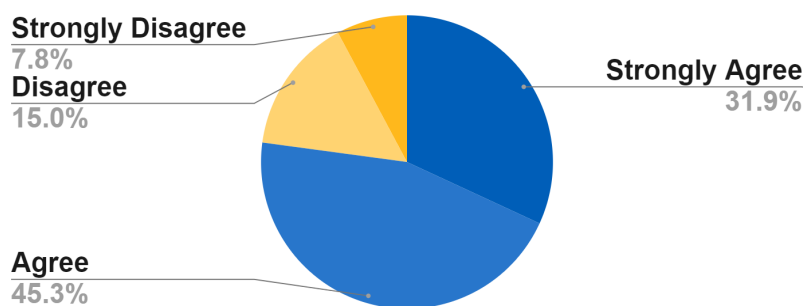
11. I would be willing to have my child walk further to a stop if it meant:

2,959 responses | 36 comments



12. I would support sharing busing with other school divisions.

2,959 responses / 46 comments



Summary: Comments

Stakeholders had the opportunity to provide additional comments to the questions they answered in the survey and 698 respondents provided their comments. Below is a themed summary of those comments.

Bus Fees

1. The fee increase is too much; currently too expensive (105)
2. No cost or less cost for designated school (47)
3. Consider low income households (44)
4. Would not support further walking distance to bus stop (36)
5. If students are in an Alternative Program and not at their designated school, they should pay more (33)
6. A fee based on distance should be considered (20)
7. Consider special need students (17)
8. Family discounts need to be implemented (11)
9. Transportation users should pay full fee; no subsidization (8)
10. There should be no fee for transportation (6)
11. In favour of equal fees for older vs. younger riders (3)

Bus Service

1. Unsatisfied with current yellow bus service (84)
2. For, sharing bussing services (46)
3. For, later start and end time changes (35)
4. Every student deserves bussing (15)
5. School specials need to continue and expand (9)
6. City of Edmonton Transportation Service needs to improve/help (7)

Out of Scope

1. Consider redrawing the school boundaries to support a sustainable transportation model (4)
2. More available Alternative Programs (3)

3. Combine the school boards to save money on all levels (2)
4. Consider the environment when running busses in the winter (2)
5. Working more closely with before and after school care support where yellow or ETS transportation support is reduced
6. "Thank you for your hard work in this seemingly impossible task"

2020-2021 Proposed Student Transportation Fees

	Monthly Fee
Transportation Service	
All students from K to 12 who access ETS	\$60
All students from K to 12 who are eligible to use regular yellow transportation services	\$38
Conditional Riders	\$38
All students from Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 in need of specialized supports and services who are unable to use regular yellow bus transportation services	\$0
Replacement cost (Lost or Stolen)	
Yellow bus	\$6
ETS	\$72.50

Family Maximum Amount

Additional Information

Current Situation

The current family maximum rate is available to families who have at least three children in grades K-6 attending the same program at the same school. Although current family maximum fees apply to both yellow and ETS bus passes, no ETS passes have been distributed in the 2019-2020 school year under a family maximum plan. Currently, students under 12 are able to ride ETS for free when accompanied by a fare paying passenger, including an older sibling.

In February 2020, a total of 161 yellow bus passes were issued to families as part of a family maximum plan:

Students attending	Number of Family Max Passes Issued (Feb 2020)
Designated School	86
Bilingual or Immersion Program	30
Other Alternative Program	45
Grand Total	161

Family maximum fee amounts in 2019-2020:

Students attending	Family Max Monthly Fee	Family Max Annual Fee
Designated School	\$80	\$625
Bilingual or Immersion Program	\$80	\$625
Other Alternative Program	\$150	\$1,250

Additional Considerations

If a family maximum was applied to yellow bus fees as proposed in Attachment III:

- It would be logical to remove the requirements that the family be attending the same program and attending grades K-6. This would be consistent with stakeholder feedback regarding the fee schedule and would increase the number of families that qualify for the family maximum rate.
- If the requirement that children be attending the same school was removed, a new centralized process would need to be developed to support the sale of bus passes, as they are currently sold at the school level.
- Given the above considerations:
 - Families with at least three children attending the same school using the yellow bus would pay a maximum fee of \$95 per month.
 - Family maximum costs could be offset by adding \$1 per month to the monthly yellow bus fee for other riders.