

DATE: May 14, 2024

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Transportation Fees for 2024–2025

ORIGINATOR: Cliff Richard, Chief Infrastructure and Technology Officer

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

REFERENCE [Student Transportation Task Force: Report to the Minister](#)
[Student Transportation Regulation](#)
[HNB.AR School Fees](#)
[HH.AR Lunch-time Supervision Service for Elementary and Junior High Students](#)

ISSUE

Administration submits proposed student transportation fees to the Board of Trustees for review on an annual basis. Fees were last reviewed by Trustees at the May 16, 2023, Board meeting where Trustees voted to decrease fees. Administration is currently recommending that the current transportation fee schedule be maintained for 2024–2025.

BACKGROUND

Student Transportation is funded from provincial transportation grants and student transportation fees. The structure of 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. A key goal of work around the updated fee schedule was to ensure Student Transportation is not reliant on additional Division funds for operations, which the current fee schedule has helped to achieve.

In February 2023, based on recommendations from the provincial Student Transportation Task Force, a new model for Student Transportation was announced that provides additional funding and changes transportation service delivery parameters. The changes increased funding for Student Transportation by approximately 22.5 per cent for 2023-2024 in order to address many of the challenges the yellow bus transportation industry has been facing related to increased costs, greater demand for service, and a shortage of bus drivers.

Along with these challenges, Student Transportation has also experienced growth in demand for service that has outpaced overall growth in Division enrollment. For example, Student Transportation ridership increased by nearly 16 per cent in 2023-2024 compared to an increase of 4.9 per cent in overall Division enrolment. This growth has been driven by a variety of factors such as the establishment of additional Division Centre classrooms and geographic distribution of students relative to available school space. Growth in ridership is expected to continue as available school space is increasingly distant from where students reside.

Student Transportation staff has been working to implement systems and supports that will be needed in the coming years to serve continued growth while providing families with efficient, reliable and sustainable bus service.

Some initiatives and improvements include:

- Full implementation of the new provincial transportation eligibility guidelines in September 2023, which makes more students eligible for service.
 - Changes (required to be implemented by school jurisdictions no later than September 2025) are that students attending their designated school may be eligible for transportation service if they are in Grades K–6 and reside at least one kilometre away, or are in Grades 7–12 and reside at least two kilometres away.
 - Previously, Edmonton Public Schools determined eligibility with a community based system that fit within a provincial distance of 2.4 kilometres.
- Working with schools to facilitate small changes to school start and end times to enable buses to service multiple schools and for programs to share bus routes.
- Implementing feedback from carriers about supporting drivers by continuing to develop and deliver professional learning opportunities. These sessions enhance the quality of bus service and improve driver retention.
- Sharing routes with Edmonton Catholic Schools through a model that is well-established and creates cost and driver savings for both divisions.
- Text and phone late bus notifications—in September 2023, Student Transportation started piloting text and phone call notification of late buses. This technology is now available to all yellow bus riders.
- Collaboration with the City of Edmonton to sell electronic ETS transit passes (Arc cards) directly to Division families through SchoolZone. This technology provides a number of advantages to both Division staff and students.
- Improvements to information available to parents on epsb.ca and SchoolZone, especially for families new to Edmonton or busing who may not be familiar with our system.

The revised provincial funding model for Student Transportation provided a significant increase in grant funds available for 2023–2024. As a result, the Division was able to decrease transportation fees for families as well as adding routes to help relieve system pressures. Looking forward to 2024–2025, it is not currently anticipated that the Division will need to adjust transportation fees in order to maintain service levels.

RELATED FACTS

- For 2024–2025, Student Transportation is expecting an increase in provincial funding of approximately \$3.4 million (8.5 per cent) in comparison to 2023–2024.
- As of April 2024, Student Transportation had approximately 16,200 yellow bus riders. This represents an increase of 3.8 per cent since September 2023 and 16 per cent compared to 2022–2023.
- To accommodate growth in ridership, Student Transportation has added approximately 15 bus routes to the system since January 2024, for a total of 60 new routes since January 2023.
- Of the routes added since January 2023, approximately two-thirds serve Division centre programs.
- For students transported on ETS, Edmonton Public School Division subsidizes the cost of Edmonton Transit passes. The cost for the Division to purchase ETS passes is expected to remain unchanged in the 2024–2025 school year. On average, monthly ETS ridership has increased approximately 14 per cent in comparison to 2022–2023.
- Administrative regulation HNB.AR outlines the Division’s process for school fee waivers, including transportation fees.

- Administrative regulation HH.AR establishes a relationship between lunch fees and transportation fees. Under this regulation, some parents are exempted from paying lunch supervision fees if they already pay a transportation fee for their child as a yellow bus rider.

RECOMMENDATION

That the 2023–2024 Student Transportation Fee Schedule be maintained for 2024–2025, as outlined in the table below.

Proposed 2024–2025 Transportation Fees

Transportation Service	Monthly Fee
Kindergarten to Grade 12 students taking ETS	\$55
Kindergarten to Grade 12 students taking yellow bus	\$30
Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 students who need additional care or specialized supports when taking yellow bus	\$0

CONSIDERATIONS and ANALYSIS

If the recommendation to maintain Student Transportation fees at current rates is approved, Student Transportation will require the use of approximately \$2.2 million in accumulated transportation surplus funds in order to offset an increase in transportation fees and continue implementing system improvements and initiatives. In making this recommendation, additional considerations include:

- The forecasted balance in accumulated transportation surplus is estimated to be \$4.4 million by September 1, 2024. This would mean that an estimated \$2.2 million in accumulated surplus would be available to offset increases in transportation fees next year.
- The accumulated surplus was generated in recent years as a result of factors such as a reduced market capacity for additional bus routes due to a shortage of yellow bus drivers.
- The provincial School Transportation regulation states that any surplus from transportation fees charged must be used to subsidize the cost of transportation of students in the two school years following the school year in which the surplus was collected.
- Demand for transportation service is expected to continue increasing as a result of anticipated growth in overall Division enrolment and the establishment of additional Division centre classrooms.
- Annually, provincial student transportation funding applications are reviewed and funding is adjusted to reflect actual enrolment. Any downward adjustments to provincial transportation grant funding resulting from this process may result in a request to access additional surplus funds in 2024–2025.

NEXT STEPS

Upon approval of the 2024–2025 fee schedule, a communications plan will be implemented to inform families.

GH:jl