

Call to Order

Rob McElroy, Executive Director of Teaching and Learning, called the meeting to order at 1:04 pm, welcomed the group and reviewed the agenda for the meeting.

Committee Members present:

Rob McElroy

Simone Sangster

Kurt Gazow

Rae Anne Thon

Patrick Buckley

Kevin Terpstra

Kirsten Wert

Steve Ruthford

Tanya Rowe

Isabela Padilla

Rick Nicholson

Jonah Stinson

Mary E. Anderson

Kim Brown

Richard Drost

Drew Graham

(Lindsay Ahrens, recorder)

Review and Approval of Minutes

Minutes of meeting of April 20, including the appendices, were approved and will be posted to the district's website.

Review of questions from the last meeting

Simone Sangster, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations, led the group through a [presentation](#) that addressed the major themes that emerged from the last meeting. This included information on school bus levies; school bus funding – operating cost (state efficiency), capital cost; and cost of operating a bus.

[Summary](#) of what the district is doing to provide services for homeless students.

Rob McElroy discussed the processes and timelines for new schools and school attendance areas.

Rae Anne Thon, Director of Transportation, explained the need for additional buses with the new bell times and changes in student needs.

Breakout Sessions

The members broke into small groups to discuss special areas of interest that emerged:

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A. Level of Service (to-from) – led by Rae Anne and Richard and included Kirsten, Steve, Kim, Kevin

B. Additional services – led by Rob, joined by transportation staff members Christian Danielson and Kim Remsing, and included Isabela, Rick

C. Fleet Make-up – led by Simone and Richard and included Mary, Patrick

D. Technology Equipment – led by Kurt and included Jonah, Tanya, Drew

Reporting

The members reconvened and groups reported their discussions and recommendations:

Level of Service (to-from):

Discussion	Member Input
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Service area: The group looked at the potential impact on bus service if the walk route were adjusted from a one-mile radius to a one-and-a-half-mile radius or two-mile radius	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider that even if we don't remove a bus, decreasing ridership might help provide other healthy benefits (more students walking and riding bicycles)• Fewer riders means less funding
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Safe walk routes: The group looked at considerations for a route to be determined safe.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The age of the child or family circumstances may mean that for some students walking and biking may not be possible or supported• The safe, walkable distance is different for a 5-year old than a 17-year old
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Level of service criteria: consider The Bellingham Promise and increased programming – Promise K, 21st Century Grant, Skills Center, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the average distance for field trips and can the number of buses needed to fulfill these trips be reduced by encouraging more walking and biking?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Partnering with WTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What would it look like to work more closely with WTA and utilize some of their passes for field trips and other?

Recommendations:

- Keep current level of service
- Keep mileage limits at 1 mile radial for all school levels – changing the radius doesn't seem to decrease the number of buses needed
- Continue to create opportunities for students and families – consider neighborhood culture and socio-economic factors when determining if a walk-route is safe

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- Continue to look for synergies with WTA – especially on field trips
- Consider ways to encourage students’ healthy decisions – provide opportunities for biking and walking, especially for students within the 1 mile radius

Additional Services:

Discussion	Member Input
<p>Extracurricular use of buses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a fleet of quality buses that could accommodate most of the extracurricular activities we currently have • We have barriers to after school programs because of transportation 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courtesy Rides (Boys & Girls Club, for example): 	
<p>Field Trips:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90% of elementary school field trips can be accommodated from 9:30 am-2:30 pm, but all day field trips are more difficult to accommodate • Field trip requests are increasing • Use of Gordon Carter conservation site requires dedicated bus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider that trips could be accommodated with, for example, a fleet of bicycles? • Most field trips are for students too young, or the distances are too far, to consider routine biking or walking
<p>Charter bus use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31 charters were used last year in the district: some overnight and long distances but other reasons are unknown. • Using a charter bus costs a school or program double what it costs to use a district school bus 	

Recommendations:

- Add a middle school activity bus to remove barriers to access
- Add buses to increase services to outside resources (for example, provide bussing to Boys & Girls Club for not just Roosevelt but Sunnyland and Northern Heights as well)
- Add buses to fulfill increasing demand for full day field trips and Gordon Carter conservation site programming
- Learn more about WTA services that could help with field trips and extracurricular through the use of “classroom pass”

Fleet Make Up:

Discussion	Member Input
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no “silver bullet” in terms of one kind of bus to select • Propane is one alternative to diesel fuel but there is not a tremendous advantage • University of Delaware study reports that electric buses are highly successful vs. diesel buses but there is no one in Washington State currently using electric buses even though they are available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electric buses or other alternative sources of energy could be good role modeling about environmental responsibility to students • There are associated costs of training and constructing new facilities with alternative power sources • Pollution as a cost to environment and public health should also be considered

Recommendations:

- Consider a “triple bottom line” for new bus purchases – public health, economics, environment
- Remain open to new technology, but do not require new technology
- Consider grants to help fund alternative technology

Technology Equipment:

Discussion	Member input
Bus location, tracking:	
<p>Ridership visibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with school internal systems to report real-time tracking of students as students enter and exit bus • ‘Missing’ students are reported, especially at the beginning of the school year – this would help solve that communication problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate a ‘swipe card’ as an all-inclusive ID card, library card, etc. • An all-in-one card could be problematic for young students and those who lose things – creates an access or tracking issue if they do not have their card • Vendors can supply driver work-arounds to address cases when a student forgets their card • Student safety and accountability is an important part of the promotion of the levy
On-bus wireless/internet	
<p>Bus cameras:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External cameras that capture license plate images of ‘stop gate runners’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have internal bus cameras now but we need to be sure there are protocols in place to be certain they are consistently on-line and working

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inertia cameras that report an accident to dispatch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognize the tension that could result from the community over external cameras just as red light cameras did a few years ago
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There are purchase costs but also continued operational costs to consider

Recommendations:

- Prioritize features – 1) both bus location tracking and ridership visibility; 2) bus cameras; 3) wireless
- Build a basic platform that allows for features to be added over time

School Bus Levy: [Springboard Proposal](#)

Simone led the group through a presentation of a possible levy proposal. It will be re-worked to include the group’s input from the discussion groups.

Bus Fleet Replacement

Anna Esquibel, Regional Transportation Coordinator at NWESD 189, presented information on bus fleet replacement. This included state perspective on bus replacement schedules, levy measures, and different bus fuel options. She also provided the following input:

- Description of the state bus replacement system.
- Status of our fleet and need to update
- Electric buses – No one in our region currently has electric buses. They are not on the state depreciation yet and Anna could help provide specifications to be included on that schedule. There could be grants from the Department of Ecology or Clean Air Agency for electric buses. Propane buses - Snohomish and Oak Harbor have some propane buses and report that they like them very much. There are more expensive to fuel but they claim there is less maintenance (although fueling infrastructure and extra mechanic training is required).
- Technology:
 - Bus location tracking – many other districts are using this kind of feature. Even without student on/off tracking, system can determine other information such as where and when the bus stopped.
 - On bus wireless – some districts ran pilots for this feature but she is uncertain if they are still in use.
 - Bus camera systems – external cameras that track stop-arm violators are allowed but there can be issues coordinating with law enforcement; without that, the district is just taking pictures of license plates.

Group Q&A, Discussion, Questions

Rob summarized the work of the group today. It is evident that transportation is doing a great job maintaining an aging fleet. We are addressing The Bellingham Promise outcome to develop healthy,

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active individuals. And we are open to being groundbreaking and cutting edge in new technologies, perhaps with the use of grants.

There was some group discussion about how to present to the community the learning that informed the decision-making of the advisory group in order to best convey the need for new buses and increased level of service.

We will consider the group's levy recommendation at our next meeting.

Simone asked for volunteers who are interested in helping write the recommendations (Thursday, May 12; time and location to be confirmed to those interested by email).

Next meeting

May 18 1-5 pm at Transportation - 611 Meador Ave

Closing

Rob McElroy closed the group at 5:00 pm

Attachment A – Parking Lot Questions

These items will help inform future meeting agendas:

- What is the rate of pass/fail for levies in general vs. special elections?