

# ***Spotlight on the Board***

## **Notes from the District 15 School Board Meetings**

### **November 12th, 2008**

### **Transportation Discussion**

#### **Detailed Study – Transportation, Busing and Transportation Benchmarks**

Ref: **Transportation presentation** [www.fcwpta.org/pdf/BOE\\_transportation\\_111208.pdf](http://www.fcwpta.org/pdf/BOE_transportation_111208.pdf)

The presentation was made by **Rebecca Allard, Asst. Superintendent for Business** along with **Walt Doughty, Transportation Director** and **Tom Bramley, Asst. Director of Transportation**. Allard noted that all three of them are new to the district as of July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008. Prior to their arrival, the Board had many conversations about student transportation. At the May 2008 Board meeting, it was requested that the new business/transportation administration report to the BOE in November on the status of student transportation.

#### ***Below are comments on individual slides that generated additional details -***

**Driven Routes – Allard** – The installation of GPS systems on buses was involved with this particular benchmark. That was tied to the (software) upgrade approved at the June Board meeting of the mapping system for the VersaTrans routing software. They just received the disk from the county for the new mapping system so they can now work with VersaTrans to get that loaded and implement it. We have not moved forward in procuring GPSs, are thinking that the best method to do that is through the bid process this year when we determine how many buses we will purchase for next school year for replacement. That will help with determining efficiency and how accountable we are because it is important for the community to understand that the system of transporting students is complex.

**2008-09 School Bell Times – Allard** - It is her understanding that this was defined last year as a modified two-tier system. There are five separate bell times. The difficulty with this system is that the buses used to do the 7:40 a.m. routes support Marion Jordan (8:40 a.m.) and CLA at 9:05 a.m. These buses cannot be used for the 7:55 a.m. or 8:50 a.m. starts because there isn't an efficient turnaround of those buses.

**Difficulties - Allard** – She keeps telling Doughty/Bramley that they have done too good of a job with planning at the beginning of the school year because she thinks that on the surface everyone thinks it is running very efficiently. For those of us that understand the details and mechanics of running a transportation system, we have some concerns. With the modified two-tier plan, there are some routes that have down time between when they drop off at one school & when they start picking up again.

**Options to Explore –Allard** – You can go to a two or three tier starts but then you are looking at bell times on a 3 tier basis of 7:30 a.m., 8:15 a.m. and 9 a.m. Allard said that 7:30 a.m. is a little early to start when you consider that some mornings it is still pretty dark. There are some issues that need to be explored. If we had a 3 tier system, we would require fewer buses. A two- tier start you could go with 7:55 and 8:40 with more buses or we could outsource a portion of that. She remembers listening and hearing on that May board meeting tape – It was Dr. McKanna who said we can solve any problem with enough money and she knows that we don't have enough money to solve all of the problems.

**Average Bus Repair Cost –Dr. Daniel Lukich, Superintendent** – Wanted to address a rumor that this district sells perfectly good buses to other school systems. Usually when a bus leaves this district, it leaves sort of "on its back". **Allard** – That would be true and there is a market for the 10 to 15 year old buses in third world countries. They are loaded on freighters and they are shipped off to other countries to be used. **Lukich** – We don't sell them to any third world school districts?

**Allard** – No, not to her knowledge, we sell them back to a company.

**Board Vice President Keenan** – Wants to make a comment regarding that. Keenan stated that when George Lingel was here (previous Asst. Superintendent for Business) that was not the information that

he gave the Board. **Board member Wendy Rowden** – We were told that when we sell our buses that are over 10 years old, they go to school districts within this state that don't buy new buses. It is very common for them to purchase in southern Illinois the buses from the suburbs that are 11/12 years old. After 10 years, we are being recommended to replace our buses. **Keenan** – When Lingel told us that, we actually asked him to do a report for us on the safety and cost to refurbishing buses vs. buying new buses. She doesn't know if we ever got that report. Lingel absolutely said that we sold our old buses and they were resold to churches and other school districts.

**Lukich** – Churches we could probably understand. Other school districts, he would look into.

**Allard** – She is not aware of that happening but knows that there is a market. There are many school districts that buy into the concept of a one or two year buyback program. All that means is that every July, they buy new buses. They buy buses in July, keep them for a year and part of the bid acceptance, they agree to sell those buses back in June to the company for anywhere from 80 to 90% of the value of the buses. The remainder of that cost is of depreciation so they net out to be a cost of about \$2,500. Many school districts do that. There is also a market where they buy them and keep them for two years and sell them to a secondary market where there is a high demand for a reduced cost of a bus.

**Rowden** – How would that be different than leasing? **Allard** – Because you own them outright for the time you have them. **Rowden** - When you sell them back, they guarantee 80% of the cost regardless of its condition? **Allard** – Damages would be fixed, there is a market out there for that.

**Rowden** – What would be the comparison of doing something like that vs. actually leasing? This Board has talked about that and did lease buses last year. Some members have different opinions. How does leasing compare to what you are describing? **Allard** – The first thing that you need to examine, before you go into the program, is if you have the cash upfront to buy these buses? Not every school district has those cash reserves sitting there to buy 60 buses. She brought that program to the Geneva school district when she was there and because there were only 60 buses, there was only one mechanic. The buses were kept one year so the mechanic did simple, almost warranty type work.

**Procurement Methods – Allard – Lease:** If you can financially afford it, you can lease them for X number of years. D15 leased 14 schools buses last January and will have to decide whether to extend that lease or to buy them outright. We just received a proposal that will come before the Board next month of what it could cost to continue that lease. **One year bus buyback program** – Lake Zurich 95 was creative enough to design a program because of the IL state reimbursement, it does not work in other states, is an unique program in IL. **Purchase** – We can purchase outright, length of ownership would be 5 years or less or more. There is a varied timeframe that districts keep buses. She spoke with bus manufacturers and they said that because of the IL reimbursement method, districts tend not to own buses as long as they do in other states. Most districts that own their fleets, it is usually on a ten year rotating system. But because of the one year and two year buyback programs, it probably averages 6 to 7 years in the state of IL.

**What's next –Allard – Fleet** – In December, we will be talking about those 14 buses that we leased last January. We need them to continue our system and hopes to convince the Board of the merits of endorsing a 10 year rotating fleet. Wants to replace 61 buses for the 09/10 school year, bids would be awarded in January and the number of buses is open for discussion. If 44 were replaced, we would have our spare buses be in that 11<sup>th</sup> year. Over the next month, we are getting unit prices for bidding so that a decision can be made between now and January as to the number of buses we actually will purchase. She will ask for unit prices between 1 and 25 buses, 26 to 35 buses.

#### **Discussion after presentation –**

**Lukich** – The leadership team did have a discussion regarding start times. He said that this has been an interesting learning experience because D15 has been through a grand debate over the years. That has been his understanding in listening to/watching BOE tapes regarding transportation. A recommendation wasn't brought to this meeting for those reasons - feels that we are in a state of transition. The district does have a system that is working reasonably well. We had a good start to this school year, some complaints but not nearly the complaints that prior administrators have had in

the district. The administration is prepared, if the Board is ready to consider any and all options including changing tiers, bell times and the purchase and/or lease of enough buses to run the system efficiently. That is all on the table.

**Keenan** – Would love to have a recommendation from the people running the department now bring a suggestion to the Board. We have brought in two people that have transportation backgrounds and would love to have them look at what we have and what we can do better.

**Board member Nancy Lee Carlson** – We have had many concerns about our start times that have been debated. While it is very important for families for after-school and special activities, with the CLA time being late often people can't get their children to special classes. Those are often the routes that are long because they cover such a wide territory vs. the other schools. That is a unique situation that hopefully we can find a remedy for. Safety record is most important and thinks the fact that we have new administrators looking at this will give us a good direction.

**Rowden** – In order to get recommendations, thinks that the Board has to set some parameters. The Board thought they did (last year) but of course we have new administrators. It would help to have someone give them the history. In the four years that she has been on the Board, there have been problems with transportation. Every year, we have heard something different. While it is important to have the administrators giving recommendations because they are the experts – believes it would be helpful if the Board gave parameters. For an example 30 minutes on the bus: Is it an ideal or is it realistic? Is it an average? Is it a mandate? The other issue is efficiency of routes not just in time but the consolidation of bus stops which she has been talking about for two years. Rowden doesn't know if that has yet to be implemented which can reduce time on buses.

**Keenan** – That is part of our question: the Board asked for the bus stops to be spread out and it never happened. Maybe it is because of turnover in the office, we don't get to where we are asking to be. It is frustrating and wonders if the scheduled route is the actual route a lot of the times.

**Allard** – Anxious to get the GPS systems on the buses so they can track that. You often find that when we have a sub driver on a bus, when that permanent driver has deviated from assigned route, we encounter problems because the students are used to X and they are getting Y.

**Board member Sue Quinn** – She does want to hear from them any and all ideas for not only improving efficiencies with routes stops and other ways to get a more efficient operating system. But also cost savings. Ways to do what we do but do it for less money. She agrees that the Board needs to give transportation some direction. One thing that she would not necessarily like to see is to change start times again due to the longer term planning being done where the Board might be consider boundary or program changes. Those will change transportation. Her input would be let's leave that alone (start time) and look at other ways. The Board has asked for more efficiency but thinks it got lost in the transition between old and new staff.

**Rowden** – We do know that kids are getting to school on time right now. We are not having issues with that which is a tremendous change. What we are doing right now is working although she is sure that there are days when it is not. It is not just weather but when the village/county decides to dig up roads. Asked the Board if they recommend we make or set parameters and their ideas?

**Lukich** – One of the reasons for this discussion – is the issue of start times. If the Board would remove that from the table, that is a large piece. Lukich is not advocating for or against that and knows what the Board has been through with start times and doesn't want that revisited.

**Board President Gerald Chapman** – Transportation is a complex issue, has been an issue in terms of efficiencies and quality of service. Agrees that efficiencies can be improved and that is where the focus has been. This study comes right in the mist of another study looking at the quality of our facilities and the location of our facilities relevant to where our students are. Chapman would hate to see us as a Board change parameters relevant to transportation while we are in the middle of another study because one clearly impacts the other. He doesn't believe that this is the most efficient transportation system. What he believes is what we need to do as a Board and community is to determine what our

facilities needs are and what our facilities locations are. Settle that issue and then superimpose the transportation study on top of that.

**Keenan** – If we decide to change the boundaries that is going to take years. She thinks that two years ago our transportation system was much better. The amount of time that children are on the buses is much increased and the amount of buses, drivers, mechanics – we are talking about a lot more money where we could have been lowering class sizes more. The facilities study could take two or three years before there could be a decision to change anything. Are going to have an inefficient system for another 3 or 4 years? **Chapman** – Well, he doesn't know that but he thinks that the two studies should coincide. **Keenan** – The facilities is really a couple of years out and it is not going to be determined by the end of the year. She doesn't want to change start times either but we brought in two professionals to fix our bus system, to give us the best recommendations as they can. Maybe we choose to do what they say or not to because we want to wait a couple of years. But would like to hear what they have to say – that was the point of hiring them.

**Board member Tim Millar** – Would like to mention the historical perspective. We have been down this road before and he is not sure if the Allard/Doughty/Bramley has the same viewpoint/history that the Board has had going through this. The recommendations from VersaTrans were 50 minutes or more between the routes depending on which routes we were running. Efficiencies have to be balanced with delivering the service that the customer wants. Nobody wanted the 7:15 a.m. or 9:15 a.m. start times and that was the reason to change. He wants everyone to understand where we have been, why we changed so we do not go through what we did before. Millar doesn't think that we can wait for the facilities either – it does play into it, but thinks that is really a long way off.

Ref: **VersaTrans – Final Report: Routing Efficiency Study for CCSD15, dated 2/28/07**  
[www.fcwpta.org/pdf/VTRReport\\_part1.pdf](http://www.fcwpta.org/pdf/VTRReport_part1.pdf) [www.fcwpta.org/pdf/VTRReport\\_part2.pdf](http://www.fcwpta.org/pdf/VTRReport_part2.pdf)

**Rowden** – Agrees that the two studies have to coincide. Is what we are doing right now working? It is not ideal for everyone but feels like it is working and yes, it has cost us more money. Changing start times would be a big mistake. She suggests staying with what we have and continue to build efficiencies. Then have a conversation about bus replacement/longevity of buses. While there are recommendations, there may be opinions that we cannot afford to meet that criteria right now in these challenging economic times. We may have to come sort of compromise or be able to figure out exactly what the cost effectiveness will be. Rowden feels that we have an efficient transportation system that is working, can improve it if we did some things like consolidate stops. But to go back to a discussion about changing times, thinks is 50 steps backwards in the wrong direction. We would devote a lot of our time and energy to something that is really not going to help improve the educational process.

**Allard** – Doughty/Bramley did a tremendous job this summer to improve the start of school. She can only imagine the improvements we will see next September even if we don't make any changes to bell times. Regarding consolidating bus stops, they were reduced by about 30% this year.

**Rowden** – That probably enabled us to reduce some bus times. The perception about the amount of time people are on the buses isn't always accurate either. The computer is not accurate. Just because you say you are getting out of that parking lot at 3p.m. doesn't mean you actually do. That means my son is home 10 minutes later not because he was on the bus 10 min longer, because he didn't even get out of the parking lot. As far as giving direction, Rowden would like to take the start times off the table.

**Board member James Ekeberg** – Thinks that if the Board is going to take start times off the table, they have to realize that when they (administration) brought the 3 tier and the two tier proposal last year, the difference in the cost was \$700K. If you are going to take it off, you have to understand that you are buying a more expensive system. That is what it is going to cost you and you are going to have to be willing to defend that, accept it and not cave in at some point and say "oh well, now we are going to save \$700K and we are going to go back to a 3 tier system." It is a huge chunk of money. You are going to have to be willing to bite the bullet and say you are taking that \$700K and spending it. That is what you are doing by taking the 3 tier system change in start times off the table.

Ref: **Proposed Transportation Options for FY2009 presented January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

[www.fcwpta.org/pdf/d15\\_FY09\\_trans\\_options.pdf](http://www.fcwpta.org/pdf/d15_FY09_trans_options.pdf)

**Spotlight on the Board Notes for January 9<sup>th</sup>** [www.fcwpta.org/pdf/d15\\_jan\\_09\\_2008.pdf](http://www.fcwpta.org/pdf/d15_jan_09_2008.pdf)

**Revised: 2008-09 Tiers and Bell Schedule Proposal presented February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

[www.fcwpta.org/pdf/d15\\_FY09\\_bell\\_schedule\\_proposal.pdf](http://www.fcwpta.org/pdf/d15_FY09_bell_schedule_proposal.pdf)

**Spotlight on the Board notes for February 13<sup>th</sup>** [www.fcwpta.org/pdf/d15\\_feb\\_13\\_2008.pdf](http://www.fcwpta.org/pdf/d15_feb_13_2008.pdf)

**Recommended 2008-2009 Bus Schedule presented March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

[www.fcwpta.org/pdf/d15\\_2008\\_09\\_recommended\\_bus\\_schedule.pdf](http://www.fcwpta.org/pdf/d15_2008_09_recommended_bus_schedule.pdf)

**Spotlight on the Board notes for March 12<sup>th</sup>** [www.fcwpta.org/pdf/d15\\_mar\\_12\\_2008.pdf](http://www.fcwpta.org/pdf/d15_mar_12_2008.pdf)

**Keenan** – Agrees and maybe we decide to buy the two tiers and spend \$700K extra for the two-tier system. But without seeing what they (transportation) propose, you don't even know what you are buying or what you are passing up. You did not give them the opportunity to give us something better.

**Millar** – He was hoping that Allard/Doughty/Bramley would have told us where we are at compared to what we had budgeted in order to know what it is really costing. Agrees that we do not really know where we are at today compared to what we projected. Is the \$700K with reimbursement or without reimbursement? Does it include all of the things that are not reimbursable?

**Allard** – She does need to revamp the budget in January or spring. Salaries and benefits are pretty much on target. There are some line items that will need to be increased just because they were under budgeted and the expenses are there. There will be some modifications to the budget.

**Carlson** – Has been through the 4 tier, 3 tier systems. The VersaTrans study was a very well reasoned study. The Board did not agree with all of it and made modifications. That study may be of benefit to us today. We should see if there is anything in that study that could be used with our present data because it should a fair amount of data that we could use to compare where we are today and come back with some suggestions. Carlson doesn't want to take anything off the table – start times or whatever because you must integrate the facilities and transportation studies. The VersaTrans study could give us a base line of things to discuss? We could look at that and maybe think of implementing some of those features. **Allard** – there was also another study done – TransPar (link below)

**Carlson** – We need to bring back and revisit those studies. There is some information in there that could probably benefit us and maybe we should look at a little more.

Ref: **TransPar Executive Summary** [www.fcwpta.org/pdf/TransPar\\_letter\\_10\\_10\\_07.pdf](http://www.fcwpta.org/pdf/TransPar_letter_10_10_07.pdf)

**TransPar Contract dated 10/10/07** [www.fcwpta.org/pdf/TransPar\\_contract.pdf](http://www.fcwpta.org/pdf/TransPar_contract.pdf)

**Lukich** – Asked if the district was up against any sort of arbitrary timelines regarding changes in start times or purchases of buses? Is there anything that pushes buttons that says this has to be done at this point for next school year? **Allard** – Purchasing of buses. Our schedule is to come back in January and ask for approval in purchasing buses.

**Quinn** – Agrees about looking at the data that we have. She thinks that when the new software is installed it is going to facilitate looking at the data in different ways. She is concerned that changing the bell times is the "big hammer" and wants to at all of the "little hammers" that can be done that might add up to get a significant cost savings. She doesn't want money in transportation that doesn't need to be there. Look at efficiency as well. As far as timing, for those of you who haven't been here, the earlier the better because these things tend to draw out and take a long time. Quinn thinks the Board needs to make a decision sometime soon if it is really going to consider it (start times).

**Rowden** – As well as purchasing buses, we need to make a decision on start times by January or February. The Board has been in the position where we delayed it and delayed it – it really affects

peoples' lives. It affects how the park district sets up CARE, it means switching CARE, and it means so much. It is as much of a priority to decide if we are even going to toy with that as purchasing buses.

**Chapman** – Here is the sense he has gotten from the Board and wants to make sure that they agree. We have had some professional studies done, we have had an awful lot of dialogue, and we have a history. We have had a lot of dialogue at this table about what we can do internally to improve efficiencies including the consolidation of drop off and pick up points. With the experience that you have had (Allard/Doughty/Bramley), what we would like to see coming back at the next meeting is: What have we done that has made our system more efficient because apparently it is working better. Are there other things we can do based on the studies, our knowledge or based on our experiences that can improve that? The second issue that we have is – As a Board, do we want to look at an option that would say, that as Ekeberg indicated, with the information that we had was that going to this bell schedule would cost us \$700K - prior to that we had a 3 tiered system that was significantly less and took fewer buses. Obviously we are talking about buying buses that may impact that if we change the bell system. The question that he has is – We want you to come back and if there is any tweaking that can be done, we would be open to that. The other issue is to compare this system to our former system or something near it and tell us exactly what those costs are projected to be in terms of savings.

**Rowden** – That sounds good except for one thing, our 3 tier system didn't work. People were not getting to school on time. They need to know what had to be done on an emergency basis twice last year. First before school started and in the middle of the year. There were significant dollar amounts (spent) when we were told that the system would work.

Ref: ***Spotlight on the Board notes for July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2007 Special meeting***  
***Board action taken – Purchase of 10 buses*** [www.fcwpta.org/pdf/july\\_24\\_2007.pdf](http://www.fcwpta.org/pdf/july_24_2007.pdf)

***Spotlight on the Board notes for October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007 Special meeting***  
***Board action taken – Contract with Laidlaw*** [www.fcwpta.org/pdf/d15\\_oct\\_18\\_2007.pdf](http://www.fcwpta.org/pdf/d15_oct_18_2007.pdf)

**Chapman** – That is a good point because he should have extended that to say that if we look at that 3-tier system, we don't want to lose the quality of services that the current system has.

**Millar** – He spent a lot of time actually going over the route times last year and all of the studies. We ran into the problems where those 45 minutes are not really 45 minutes. They are not leaving the school and they have to turn around to get back to the other school to load. It really isn't enough time. The computer said we could do it but we wouldn't do it. We had problems with the afternoon routes.

**Carlson** – The original VersaTrans study talked about the 4 and 3 tier system. Maybe the 4-tier system is better us even though people might not necessarily like it. **Allard** – Perhaps this is a multiyear change where we agree that the bell times don't change for next year but we find enough efficiency in there. And we start talking now about what it might look for in 2010/11.

**Doughty** – Will try to calm some of the fears out there. To answer the question (time between routes), we have to look at a time span in between, add to that the loading time and add to that turnaround time from one tier to the next in order for us to create the system. The studies that you had built the system moving forward, they didn't look at starting them in reverse. With transportation, you have to work in reverse because if you work in reverse, it will always work going forward. If it works in forward, it doesn't always work in reverse as you have found out.

## **Action Item - Transportation – Bus Replacement**

**Quinn** – Understands that Allard was going to break this request down into units by 1 to 25, etc. Quinn would like it phased in because she doesn't like the idea of lumping 61 buses in one year. She conceptually agrees with Allard's suggestion for the core buses that the district functions with each day to have those in general under 10 years old. However, thinks we can get there with a plan that feeds the pipeline at a measured pace. Eventually we would like to have buses roll over that ten year mark every year - replace them, then we bring buses on and have it be a more orderly process. Purchasing

61 buses at once doesn't get us there and introduces a shock into the system. That is a huge chunk of money and they all turn ten at the same time for a future board. Maybe no one on this Board will be here in ten years; doesn't wish that on anyone to have to deal with that then. It is part of what we are dealing with now because that happened ten years ago.

**Millar** – Says the bigger challenge is in the future with budgeting and long term forecasting. What happens is that you load up in these years when you are getting payments in and don't realize that the payments will stop in five years unless you are going to buy every five years. From a budgeting standpoint, it skews your income numbers quite a bit and your expense in the one year. Concerned about doing it all at one time, would like to spread them out so it is an easier budgeting process going further down the line. Also we can bid the leasing companies, have as many as possible. Last year, the busing company was quite higher than our local banks.

**Allard** – What she is looking for tonight is the authority to actually go out and bid for buses. The bid specifications will be to get unit pricing for the purchase of various quantities so the district can actually award the bid in January. **Motion unanimously approved.**

**Spotlight on the Board notes for the remainder of the November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008 meeting can be found at: [www.fcwpta.org/pdf/d15\\_nov\\_12\\_2008.pdf](http://www.fcwpta.org/pdf/d15_nov_12_2008.pdf)**

Posted: Saturday, November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008

Jennifer Mondy  
[fcwnews@comcast.net](mailto:fcwnews@comcast.net)