



TRANSPORTATION MONITORING REPORT

Presented to the Board of Trustees by Bevan Daverne, Superintendent of Schools

Resource Persons:

Tahra Sabir, Secretary Treasurer

Kelly-Anne McCarry, Transportation Supervisor

Monica Giberson, Transportation Clerk

March 2023

REPORTING PERIOD: September 1, 2021 – August 31, 2022, and September 1, 2023, to current

OVERVIEW:

Alberta Education provides funding to school boards to operate or contract transportation systems for Kindergarten to Grade 12 students.

SUMMARY & IMPLICATIONS:

- Safety is paramount and Golden Hills has made this a priority with success.
- Future Initiatives – Continue to increase efficiency with increased flexibility to support Golden Hills' program initiatives while keeping costs within funding limits.
- Some recent initiatives are:
 - Additional Routes to help reduce Ride Times.
 - Choice Ridership continues to increase.
 - Continued Implementation of cameras on bus.
 - Division wide implementation of school bus passes (move from manual to digital attendance).
 - New recruiting strategies.

Safety - #1 Priority

Golden Hills transports over 2,900 students, 177 days a year over an area of 8,400 square kilometers for a total of 2,400,000 km a year. Safety of transporting students is the number one priority and continues to be successful.

Golden Hills monitors bus routes in a variety of ways which include driver and parent consultation. Golden Hills works with the busing industry to develop a standardized route risk assessment checklist to ensure that all areas of the province are consistently applying best practices concerning the safety of routes and any modifications required due to adverse conditions such as weather and geographical challenges. This government program formalizes the procedures and standardizes the assessments for all routes in Alberta.

Safe Driving Program

For the past few years Golden Hills has met the criteria for an Alberta Transportation approved driving school. A formalized training and evaluation program is in place for all our professional school bus operators. The purpose of this program is to ensure the safety of passengers on Golden Hills buses and that Golden Hills operators are equipped with the skills they need to safely operate a school bus and manage the passengers. We want to elevate the perception of school bus operators with parents and the community. School bus operators are professionals who participate in ongoing training to safely

transport extremely precious cargo. Please refer to **Appendix A** for detailed information on Bus driver training.

Driver Training Hours	GHSD Existing	MELT 2-S (Effective Sept 2022)
Classroom Training	20	19.5 hours
In Yard Training	5	9.5 hours
On Road Training	20 (25 if necessary)	24.5 hours
S Endorsement (Classroom)	17 hours	N/A
Total	62 hours	53.5 hours

*prior to MELT 2-S the “S Endorsement” part was more flexible, and the bus driver had a year to complete. Now it must be completed prior to driving a school bus.

School Bus Operator Evaluations

Golden Hills performs three types of operator evaluations in addition to dexterity testing:

Scheduled Evaluation	<p>Evaluations are scheduled for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probationary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Operators must complete a satisfactory on-road evaluation within three months of employment • Scheduled <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Operators aged under 47: Every 5 years - Operators aged 47-67: Every 2 years - Operators aged over 67: Annually • Remedial, for example <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preventable Collision - Parent Complaint - Unsatisfactory Observation
On-Road Observation	<p>Continuous monitoring involves creating a positive culture for drivers as yellow buses are monitored.</p>

The Transportation department has conducted 15 evaluations during the 2021/2022 school year and has a five year cycle period to evaluate all our drivers.

Bus drivers were introduced to the world of E-Learning as our S Endorsement training and S Endorsement Refresher training took place online using a combination of Google Classroom and Zoom. On road evaluations were conducted using appropriate social distancing and masking.

An evaluation consists of the School Bus Supervisor/ Evaluator riding along on the route and assessing communication with passengers and passenger management as well as the operators’ driving skills and abilities.

Bus Driver Shortage Challenges

- Currently we are experiencing province wide bus driver shortages and recruiting new drivers has continued to be a challenge.
- We have developed some strategies to manage this as follows:
 - Offered free training to those interested in obtaining their bus driver’s license.

- Encourage current drivers who meet criteria to start process of becoming a bus driver trainer.
- Streamlined processes to make bus driver's work more manageable.
- Provide continuous support and training.
- We are using several strategies to advertise for potential drivers:
 - Word of mouth (drivers referring family members, friends, or parents of students)
 - Submitting advertisements to local employment services
 - Advertising online through local employment services
 - Posting on Facebook through local employment services and school Facebook pages

So far this year we have trained seven (7) bus drivers (including Melt S) and we have approximately seven (7) more to train this year.

We also continued with our regular S Endorsement training throughout the year.

Last year we trained a total of seven (7) drivers. This training is a total of approximately 60 hours for both classroom and on the road training. Additional training time (road and yard work) is provided should a trainee require it.

Once students complete their course, GHSD submits their completed certificate for review and verification by Alberta Transportation. In our experience, the driver training department has been able to complete this process within 24 hours. Once the course completion has been posted, the students will book their on-road evaluation online and it is usually within a week. We have not experienced any issues booking driver evaluators for our trainees. This process is streamlined and trouble free, we have a contact person with registry.

Route Risk Assessments

Route Risk Assessments are conducted at Golden Hills. These assessments are filled out by every driver in the division and then returned to the Transportation Department. Approximately **52%** of the forms returned had no issues. The other **48%** were returned with concerns such as weather conditions, sight distances, traffic volumes, and the need for parent/pedestrian education in bus loops. As drivers are learning more about the risk assessment process, they are better able to assess and prepare for potential risks. Please see **Appendix B** for suggested possible solutions for risks reported by bus drivers.

The bus driver route assessment is an excellent process for all drivers to reassess their route each year. One of the many benefits of this process also facilitates collaboration with the Counties. An example of this would be the request for signage (School Bus Stop Ahead Signs).

Bus Route Inclement Weather - Administrative Procedure (AP) 131

Last year we went through an extensive consultation process which included in person meetings with bus drivers, mechanics, and senior administration. A recommendation was made about temperature. We also discussed Golden Hills emergency rescue plan with drivers. To support this, we have provided cold weather emergency kits and we are currently piloting engine warmers and cabin heaters.

The following change was approved in January 2022.

- ***If road conditions and visibility are not of concern, bus routes will continue regular operation unless ambient temperatures drop below -35C. Below these temperatures, bus drivers of rural routes may make a decision not to operate based on temperatures and other factors along their route.***

This change continues to allow bus operators to use their professional judgement on the safe operation of the bus route.

The AP contains three levels of school closures:

Levels	Description
Green Closure	Due to weather and travel conditions, some buses are not running. School is open and regular classes will be offered.
Yellow Closure	Due to severe weather and travel conditions, no buses are running. School is open but regular classes are not being offered. We encourage parents and students to stay home and avoid the risks of travel.
Red Closure	Due to the severe weather and travel conditions the school is closed. Do not send students to school. Due to the severe weather, we are unable to ensure the school doors will be unlocked, or any staff will be in the building.

- Bus drivers play a primary role in the decision-making process as they are the first to evaluate weather conditions and decide if it is safe to transport students. Bus drivers are to inform administrators, transportation manager and parents/students of any service interruptions/cancellations.
- Administrators will call the Superintendent for approval to declare either a yellow or red closure level.
- Parents, students, and staff are informed as early as 6:30 am. Cancellations are posted to school websites, Facebook pages, and other social media. Messages are also sent by text and phone.
- Golden Hills continues the practice of running an afternoon bus (when the weather conditions have improved significantly, and it is safe to do so) if the morning bus was cancelled due to weather conditions.

AM Bus Cancellations		Bus Ran in PM	
2021/2022	2020/2021	2021/2022	2020/2021
305	313	*72 (24%)	84 (27%)

* For example, 24% of the 305 buses that did not run in the AM did run in the PM.

Between January 9th and February 15, 2023, we have 39 bus cancelations which is in line with 2021/2022.

No Child Left Behind

“No Child Left Behind” is a system that forces the driver to go to the back of the bus before it can be shut off. This prevents students from being left on a bus after a run. Currently all of our route buses have this system. We have two buses that do not have this system in place and are primarily used as spare buses and for field trips.

A two part “post-trip” inspection has been introduced which drivers perform shortly after drop-off at their last stop and then again when the bus is parked at the park-out to ensure that no students or belongings are left on the bus.

Budget / Financial Implications

The Chart below shows the Projected Revenue and Expenses for the Transportation Department for 2022/2023 and provides the 2021/2022 Audited Financial Statements.

Description	Budget 2022/2023	% Of Budget	AFS 2021-2022	% Of Budget
Revenue				
Grants	4,705,315	96%	4,397,028	97%
Fees/Other Sales & Services	190,000	4%	147,327	3%
Total Revenue	4,895,315		4,544,355	
Expenses				
Salaries & Benefits	1,974,635	40%	1,928,993	42%
Supplies & Services	2,220,680	45%	1,990,786	43%
Amortization	700,000	14%	685,345	15%
Total Expenses	4,895,315		4,605,124	
Net Surplus			(60,769)	

Points of Interest

- Alberta Education increased the transportation grant by 5% as the funding model is currently under review.
- Volatile fuel costs.
- Sparsely populated Rural areas impact efficiency.

Fuel Costs

	2022	2021	2020
Average Fuel (\$/l)	\$1.27	\$1.11	\$0.97

Average Fuel Cost for this year is \$1.43 (February 15, 2023)

Fee Structure

Golden Hills eliminated all transportation fees as of the 2012/13 school year. We believe this has positively impacted our enrolment.

Fleet

Pursuant Administrative Procedure 555, *Bus Replacement*, it is desirable to replace buses on a timely basis for the safety and efficiency of the operation. Urban buses are replaced within 14 years and rural buses are replaced within 12 years. Golden Hills continues to ensure buses are replaced within the appropriate time periods while taking budget constraints into consideration.

Currently Golden Hills operates 71 routes with 81 runs.

Spare buses (18%) are needed for the fleet to operate efficiently while maintaining the current levels of service. Some of the challenges are:

1. Allowing for optimal amount of wheelchair buses;
2. Having buses available for field trips that overlap regular routes; and
3. Golden Hills is a large geographical area. Spare buses are available locally to allow quick access as needed.
4. Warranty on buses expires after 6 years. Currently 74% of our buses are no longer under warranty.

Age of Bus	2021/2022		2020/2021	
	# of Buses	% of Fleet	# of Buses	% of Fleet
0-2 years	4	5%	4	4%
3-5 years	20	21%	20	21%
6-10 years	59	63%	59	63%
11-17 years	9	10%	10	11%
18+ years	1	1%	1	1%
Total	93	100%	94	100%

Field Trips

Golden Hills Transportation supports all schools in the division with busing for students on field trips and extra-curricular events. The following table shows how many field trips occurred.

	2021/2022	2019/2020
In Town Field Trips	172 (17%)	33 (22%)
Out of Town Field Trips	309 (31%)	57 (38%)
Non GHSD Field Trips *	45 (5%)	15 (10%)
International	89 (9%)	45 (30%)
Alumni	386 (38%)	*
Total Field Trips	1,001	150

* Alumni field trip data not collected for 2019/2020

- We supply both operators and buses for school field trips.

We adjusted the per kilometre rate in the fall of 2019 to \$1.25. As we are currently running a deficit in transportation this will help cover more of the expenses associated with buses supporting field trips. Outside Agencies were charged \$1.50/km and \$30/hr (\$25 plus CPP and EI). Approximately \$7,420 last year was attributed to external contracted work.

Bus Size

A common public misconception is cost savings associated with bus size. Contract routes are paid by the weighted load which means Golden Hills pays the contractor for number of students versus the size of bus. Contractors and Divisions often choose to purchase a bigger bus to maximize their flexibility (change buses from one area to another) and efficiency (schools can hire one bus for a field trip vs. two) and effectiveness (in an emergency evacuation for either a community or school).

The major cost associated with bus routes is the labour. Differential fuel, tire, and insurance costs for a small or larger bus is minimal. The benefit of a larger bus is the flexibility, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Board and Contracted Route Information

Costs

- Cost per kilometer is less for Board than Contracted routes (15 % plus) over the years.

Number of Routes and History of Routes

Year	Total Routes	Total Runs	Board Operated	% Board Operated	Contracted	% Contracted
2021/2022	71	81	71	100%	0	0%
2020/2021	72	84	71	99%	1	1%
2019/2020	72		72	100%	0	0%
2018/2019	75		72	96%	3	4%
2017/2018	73		70	96%	3	4%

- Table above shows how Board owned routes have increased to reduce costs and allow for flexibility. The ability to be flexible has played a crucial role in addressing driver shortages, as it allows us to swiftly adapt our routes and promptly inform parents.
- For 2022/2023 we have added an additional three (3) routes for a total of 74 routes

Staffing

Table below shows the staffing levels (total full time equivalent) in the transportation department.

	2021/2022	2020/2021
Administration	2.0	2.0
Trades	2.8	2.8
Bus Drivers	71.0	72.0
Apprentice/Shop Helper	2.0	2.0
Total	77.8	78.8

Golden Hills has maintenance shops located in Strathmore and Trochu.

As of February 15, 2023 we have added three (3) drivers for a total of 74 drivers and 81 employees

The purpose of the transportation shops is to provide mechanical services to the board owned buses. Regular maintenance continues to be a priority to ensure safety. As per the Commercial Vehicle Program requirements, inspections are performed at a minimum of twice a year. Oil changes are performed every 5,000 km or 10,000 km depending on the type of engine.

Ridership Information

Currently (2022/2023) Golden Hills is transporting 2,955 students which represents 54% of our regular funded student enrolment. Alberta has approximately 600,000 students and about 50% of those students ride the bus on a daily basis.

Year	Students that ride the bus	% of Total
2022/2023	2,955	54%
2021/2022	2,882	45%
2020/2021	2,279	37%

Urban and Rural

The table below shows the distribution percentage of urban and rural funded students transported by bus for two years. (These numbers do not include Siksika and International students)

Year	Totals	Urban	Rural
2022/2023	2,955	848 (29%)	2,107 (71%)
2021/2022	2,882	882 (31%)	2,000 (69%)
2020/2021	2,279	753 (33%)	1,526 (67%)

Courtesy and Choice

Courtesy Rider - someone who lives less than 2.4 km from their designated school and is meeting an existing route.

The Table below shows the percentage of courtesy riders who are urban and rural.

Courtesy Ridership	2021/2022	Percentage
Urban	238/848	28%
Rural	281/2,107	13%
International	131/246	53%

Please note that included in Courtesy Ridership may be choice ridership as they do not meet the 2.4 km criteria to their designated school, however we would not receive any funding to transport to their school of choice even if it was greater than 2.4 km.

Choice Ridership - someone who is meeting an existing route and is attending a school other than their designated school.

The Table below shows the percentage of choice riders who are urban and rural.

Choice Ridership	2022/2023	Percentage
Urban	391/848	46%
Rural	314/2,107	15%

In summary, there is additional demand to transport students who wish to attend their school of choice.

Special Needs Students

Currently Golden Hills provides transportation for 127 special needs students who are designated to programs unavailable in their attendance area. The following table breaks down the type of transportation provided. Golden Hills incurs the costs and receives the funding.

Type of Transportation	Number of Students		
	2022-2023	2021/2022	2020/2021
Regular School Bus	127	63	93
Taxi or Handicap Bus	6	14	21
Parent Provided	18	16	11
Totals	151	93	125

Riders in Other Districts

Golden Hills School Division has entered into agreements with other school jurisdictions. This allows students to attend a school of another school authority and to allow students who in other school jurisdictions to be enrolled in Golden Hills Schools.

School Division	# of Students Attending GHSD from other Districts		# of GHSD Students going to other Districts that we have information on*	
	2022/2023	2021/2022	2022/2023	2021/2022
Grassland Public School Division	0	0	18	18
Palliser School Division	6	8	0	0
Prairie Land Public School Division	12	22	8	9
Chinook's Edge School Division	25	17	5	5
Totals	43	47	26	32

*Only have student information from other divisions if there is an agreement. There may be other students leaving the division that we do not have any information on.

Affect

Transportation Agreements allows Golden Hills to claim grant money for the students. Transportation grants may not cover all of the expenses; however, the offset is the claim of the education grants and stability for the students attending their school of choice. At the end of the day parents and students are choosing Golden Hills.

Rural Ride Times

Ride Times are monitored, and we try to keep the routes to a minimum taking into consideration geography. In town, ride times are an average of 20 minutes or less.

Three (3) new rural routes were added in 2022/2023 (Strathmore, Three Hills & Wheatland Crossing) and monitoring will continue to reduce student ride time.

One Way Minutes	2022/2023
75+ Minutes	2 %
61-75 Minutes	5 %
46-60 Minutes	13 %
0-45 Minutes	80 %

Communication and Culture

Communication and “customer service” are two priority areas within the Transportation Department. An area of concern is department communication with parents and students, school administration and staff, and division office staff.

With the goal of creating a cohesive and collaborative relationship between all stakeholders, our staff is developing strategies to enhance the customer service experience with our department. Training is ongoing with our department staff (accessing PD opportunities face to face and online) as well as with our bus drivers.

Transportation Department Initiatives			
Date	Issue/Project	Action/Resolution	Date Complete
Sept 2022	School Bus Attendance Software	New student attendance software is being implemented throughout the division. Accurate, real-time attendance reporting is now available to schools and parents. Bus drivers are better able to manage student loading and unloading while remaining aware of traffic patterns and parents/students in school bus loops.	Ongoing
Sept 2022	Bus Status App	Parents may now see bus status (on time, delayed or cancelled) using app that provides notifications when changes are posted to the GHSD web site.	Ongoing
Dec 2021	Headlight Replacement	Installation of higher lumen bulbs on each bus to improve driver experience	Ongoing

Transportation Department Initiatives			
Date	Issue/Project	Action/Resolution	Date Complete
May/June 2021	Demographic Confirmation	All parents of student currently riding buses contacted to confirm/change passenger information for 2021/2022	Ongoing/Annual

Stakeholder Issues

Issue	Summary	Resolution
Bus Run Times over an hour	Concerns with students (especially K – 1) being on the bus for long periods.	Review routes and whenever possible (when not affected by geography of area) make changes.
Driver Queries	Concerns with drivers	Ongoing professional development regarding student management, explaining behavior expectations and creating a positive climate on the bus. Performed evaluations, provided more training, created development plans for operators.
Bus Operator Communication	Bus operators’ communication with parents.	Drivers now use group text messages and Remind to contact parents.
Child Care Transportation	Transportation from the caregiver’s place of residence is supplied for parents when there is capacity on the bus.	Adjust bus routes to provide transportation for these students.
Red Light Violations	Parents concerned with increasing number of drivers passing busses when red lights are flashing.	Work with Bylaw, Sheriff, County Peace Officers and RCMP to alert them of areas where violations are occurring.

Summary

- Always striving to improve the overall level of information and customer service
- Courtesy and choice are not funded to school of attendance, and we do not charge a fee to parents.

Proposed Areas for Advocacy

The funding model is currently under review and transportation funding has been status quo with a 5% increase.

1. Choice – funding to follow choice principle within reason.
2. Equitable Funding Model – funding for rural areas.
3. Flexibility in funding envelope.

Appendix A

New Operator Training

<p>Dexterity Testing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A series of physical tests to ensure that the driver is physically able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Execute a full pre-trip inspection - Flexibility to move in the seat to minimize blind spots - Maneuver the bus safely - Evacuate the bus in an emergency situation.
<p>Classroom Training MELT 2-S</p>	<p>MELT 2 – S training is now mandatory in Alberta. Required topics for classroom instruction are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Employment in the Busing Industry ✓ Vehicle Component & Inspection Activities ✓ Basic Driving Techniques ✓ Professional Driving Habits ✓ Off-Road Tasks & Maneuvers ✓ Documents, Paperwork & Regulatory Requirements ✓ Hours of Service Compliance ✓ Passenger Management, Loading & Unloading Passengers ✓ Handling Emergencies ✓ 18.5 Hours Required Classroom Training (New Program)
<p>In Yard Training MELT 2-S</p>	<p>In-Yard training covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The Pre-trip Inspection ✓ Yard Procedures ✓ Backing Procedures ✓ Parking Procedures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Health & Safety ✓ Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) ✓ School Bus Inspections and Maintenance ✓ Bus Manoeuvres and Defensive Driving ✓ Emergencies, Bus Evacuations, First Aid, Emergency Equipment and Mechanical Breakdowns ✓ Passengers with Disabilities, Mobility Aids and Child Safety Seats ✓ 11 Hours Required In Yard Training (New Program)
<p>On Road Training</p>	<p>This covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The Pre-trip Inspection ✓ Yard Procedures ✓ Commentary Driving ✓ Backing Procedures ✓ General Driving ✓ Highway Driving ✓ City Driving and Procedures ✓ Town Driving and Procedures ✓ Country Driving and Procedures ✓ Student Pick-Ups and Drop-Offs

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Railroad Crossings ✓ “Turn Around” and various bus maneuvers ✓ Advanced Driving Techniques and the SMITH System (5 Keys): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aim High In Steering 2. Get The Big Picture 3. Keep Your Eyes Moving 4. Leave Yourself An Out 5. Make Sure They See You ✓ The Post Trip Inspection ✓ 24 Hours Required On Road Training
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Appendix B

Issue	Analysis	Recommendation
Weather	Snow drifts, sleet, fog, rain, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage drivers to follow Inclement Weather procedure. • Use the Smith Keys to identify and avoid potential problems. • Attend the Winter Driving training session offered at staff/safety meeting.
Sight Distance	Visit location and review area	<p>Possible options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May change from gate service to yard service or vice versa; or • Installation of signs; or • Route reconfigured to change direction of travel for the bus; or • Re-locate stop to different location. • Encourage homeowners to prune trees, shrubs, etc. to improve line of sight. • Communicate with counties to have trees/bushes on public property pruned. • Use SMITH System to improve skills (Big Picture etc.)
Traffic Volume	Picking up/dropping off on busy highway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warning lights on earlier and for longer periods of time. • Instruct students on safety and danger zones.
Left-Handed Stops	Review safety implications of left-handed stops	<p>Made changes for high traffic routes as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain permission from parents to have bus pick up student in yard, if possible. • Re-route bus route to change from left-handed to right-handed.

School Bus Loops	Review safety practices in bus loop	Work with school administration to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase parent safety awareness• Work with the Town of Strathmore and By-Law Enforcement to make drivers aware of parking zones• Increase supervision in bus loop
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