

Committee Members  
Tracy Novick, Chair  
Jermoh Kamara, Vice-Chair  
Susan Mailman

Administrative Representative  
Brian Allen

OFFICE OF THE  
CLERK OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
WORCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
20 IRVING STREET  
WORCESTER, MA 01609

AGENDA #1

The Standing Committee on FINANCE AND OPERATIONS will hold a virtual and/or in-person meeting:

on: January 23 , 2023  
at: 6:30 p.m.  
in: Room 410, Durkin Administration Building

ORDER OF BUSINESS

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ROLL CALL

III. GENERAL BUSINESS

gb 2-241 - Novick (August 23, 2022)

To consider monthly updates on the implementation of district-operated transportation during the 2022-23 school year.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Helen A. Friel, Ed.D.  
Clerk of the School Committee

STANDING COMMITTEE: **FINANCE AND OPERATIONS**

DATE OF MEETING: Monday, January 23, 2023

ITEM:

To consider monthly updates on the implementation of district-operated transportation during the 2022-23 school year.

PRIOR ACTION:

9-1-22 - On a roll call of 7-0, the item was referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Operations.

9-8-22 - STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND OPERATIONS

Mr. Allen presented the September Student Transportation update which included:

- 74 Full-Size Bus Drivers (full size): 17 WPS buses
- 95 Mid-Size Bus Drivers and 12 new buses
- 109 Bus Monitors 42 leased
- 35 Drivers in Training

Additionally, 32 new buses were awaiting registration and inspections.

The number of drivers currently in training are projected to bring the Transportation Department to full budgeted strength. He stated that the district began this school year using the new Versatrans My Stop app and that a few technical issues occurred in particular, double trips do not show on the app, and some adjustments were made.

If there are any questions regarding accessing the app, caregivers can call the Transportation Department at (508) 799-3241.

Mr. Allen also stated that any School Committee policy change including changing start times or changing walk zones for the 2023-24 school year impacting the number of buses needed would have to be voted on as soon as possible in order to place orders for additional buses for next year.

There are 13 buses coming off of lease at the end of this school year, and Mr. Allen provided information of various alternative fuels for those buses that have been explored by the administration; a decision on that would also be needed as soon as possible. Administration recommends that the district plan to use propane for this set of buses, and pilot an electric bus.

The district plans on implementing a transportation registration portal for secondary students to pre-register in order to allow for better load management and planning for 2023-24.

He thanked the whole transportation team including drivers and liaisons for their work during the first two weeks of the school year.

**(continued on Page 2)**

BACKUP: Annex A (2 pages) contains a copy of the Student Transportation Update.

PRIOR ACTION (continued)

9-8-22 - Member Mailman asked if there was any data available from other districts that currently use electric buses. Mr. Allen stated that he and Mr. Hennessey have been attending transportation conferences pertaining to the use of alternative fuel, but due to the fact that electric buses are three times the cost of a regular school bus, and that there are concerns about such buses' with the cold climate, with hills, as well as with the infrastructure needed for their support, the district would prefer to use propane as the alternative fuel choice at this time, piloting an electric bus. Mr. Hennessey provided the following advantages of using propane in the buses rather than gasoline:

- price per gallon is significantly less
- maintenance is significantly lower
- no engine warmup needed for heating
- less oil changes needed
- no hazardous waste

Chair Novick asked if there are plans to provide My Stop access for private and parochial school families and Mr. Freeman stated that it is possible, but will take further data sharing.

Member Mailman asked for more information on the out-of-school providers and Mr. Allen stated that the Administration met with them again in August and provided the current practice which is if a bus is heading in a certain direction and if there is capacity to take on the students. The process has not changed, but it's the number of buses heading in that direction that has changed. Once there are more buses and drivers, there will be greater flexibility. Mr. Hennessey stated that the district started with the same locations that it ended with last year. Mr. Freeman stated that there were other providers such as Ride Rite that were providing transportation but they are also experiencing capacity issues.

Chair Novick stated that the Student Handbook clearly states that the transportation provided is from a student's home to school and school back home. She questioned if the Committee should consider clarifying the language. She also asked if a parent inquired about out of school transportation, they should call the Transportation Department for information. Mr. Allen suggested they could call the provider.

On a roll call of 3-0, gb 9-355, gb 1-101, gb 2-44, gb2-109 and gb 2-205 were filed and gb 2-241 will be the current transportation item and will be held for the next meeting.

9-15 22 - SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

The School Committee approved the action of the Standing Committee as stated.

**(Continued on Page 3)**

PRIOR ACTION (continued)

10-12-22 - Mr. Allen presented the monthly transportation update with the staffing plans for the next school year as of October 5, 2022.

	<b>Full Size Bus Driver</b>	<b>Mid Size Bus Driver</b>	<b>Bus Monitors</b>
Total Employees (or in Process)	<b>73</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>110</b>
Current Routes	<u>74</u>	<u>89</u>	<u>89</u>
Difference between Planned Routes	<b>-1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>21</b>
Total Planned Routes	<u>101</u>	<u>95</u>	<u>95</u>
Difference between Planned Routes	-28	2	15
Budgeted Positions	<u>118</u>	<u>112</u>	<u>112</u>
Difference between Budgeted Positions	-45	-15	-2

**Drivers in Training**

Permitted Drivers	15
Trainees working on Permits	<u>14</u>
	29

In addition, there are 40 additional people in the evening training program.

**School Bus Vehicle Procurement**

<b>Current Vehicle Fleet</b>	<b>Full- Size Bus</b>	<b>Mid Size Bus</b>
WPS Buses	16	63
New Buses	48	0
Leased Buses	<u>49</u>	<u>44</u>
<b>Total Vehicles as of 8/31/22</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>107</b>

Mr. Allen provided an update on electric school buses and stated that there have been a number of meetings over the last month. He was under the assumption that the district was not eligible for some of the federal EPA funding under the infrastructure for some vehicles. He believes that even though the district does not have diesel engines that some of the older combustion gas engines may qualify to be exchanged for electric school buses. If that is the case, it is the district's intention that the next round of funding window will open this month and it will work on an application up to 15 electric school buses to add to the fleet. **(Continued on Page 4)**

**PRIOR ACTION** (continued)

- 10-12-22 - The School Committee last week authorized the district to lease 13 buses for next year, but it is thinking about buying out those leases and keeping them and pursue the electric bus option instead. He will be providing an update at the next meeting on the status of the application. He stated that the WPS is a high priority district for funding consideration but there's a lot to consider including a new infrastructure that would need to be installed. Member Kamara asked for an update on athletic transportation and Mr. Allen stated that in the past, the WEDF provided funds for field trips using AA Transportation and this year, with the district owning its own buses, there has been a \$40,000 savings. Mr. Freeman stated that there has been some compatibility issues with the MyStop app due to drivers using tablets and incurring a break in the GPS connection. IT technicians are working on trying to fix the problem. On a roll call of 3-0 the item was held.
- 10-20-22 - SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING The School Committee approved the action of the Standing Committee as stated.
- 11-9-22 - Mr. Allen presented the monthly transportation update with the staffing plans for the next school year as of November 1, 2022, the staffing plans for the next school year:

	<b>Full Size Bus Driver</b>	<b>Mid Size Bus Driver</b>	<b>Bus Monitors</b>
Total Employees (or in Process)	<b>78</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>109</b>
Current Routes	<u>74</u>	<u>89</u>	<u>89</u>
Difference between Planned Routes	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>
Total Planned Routes	<u>101</u>	<u>95</u>	<u>95</u>
Difference between Planned Routes	-23	5	14
Budgeted Positions	<u>118</u>	<u>112</u>	<u>112</u>
Difference between Budgeted Positions	-40	-12	-3

**Drivers in Training**

Permitted Drivers	19
Trainees working on Permits	<u>10</u>
	29

In addition, there 40 additional people in the evening training program.

**(Continued on Page 5)**

**School Bus Vehicle Procurement**

<b>Current Vehicle Fleet</b>	<b>Full-Size Bus</b>	<b>Mid Size Bus</b>
WPS Buses	16	63
New Buses	70	0
Leased Buses	45	44
<b>Total Vehicles as of 8/31/22</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>107</b>

Mr. Allen provided an update on the implementation of the district operated transportation. There has been an increase of 5 full-sized bus drivers, 3 midsized bus drivers, with more in the pipeline. With regard to vehicles, Mr. Allen stated that the transition of bringing in the new buses, getting them registered and inspected, and sending the leased buses back is ongoing; the district is up 22 buses from last month. The hope is to have all 100 new full-sized buses on property next month. There is no change in midsized buses. The landlord has received all necessary permits for construction of the fueling station on Pullman Street; the plan is for that to be operational next year.

In response to a question from Vice Chair Kamara, Mr. Allen stated that for the fall season, bus transportation was being provided to athletics only after 4 pm. Winter season is generally night events; it is expected that for the spring season, the increase in drivers and vehicles will allow for athletic transportation at the end of the school day.

Mr Allen stated that administration shares some of the concerns shared during public comment, and that there is ongoing work with schools regarding student behaviors on school buses. He further stated that questions regarding response times can be addressed during the upcoming joint labor-management meeting.

Mr Allen stated that at this time, the administration has decided not to pursue the lease of propane vehicles due to the length of time it is taking for vehicles to arrive. The intent is to purchase the 13 buses coming off of lease; the district also will pursue the upcoming federal grant for 15 electric buses.

Mr. Allen stated that there will be an update on phasing in the new drivers at the December meeting; there is a planned schedule being constructed. Mr. Allen stated that the administration may be asking the School Committee to add training staff further to address the ability to move trainees through the pipeline.

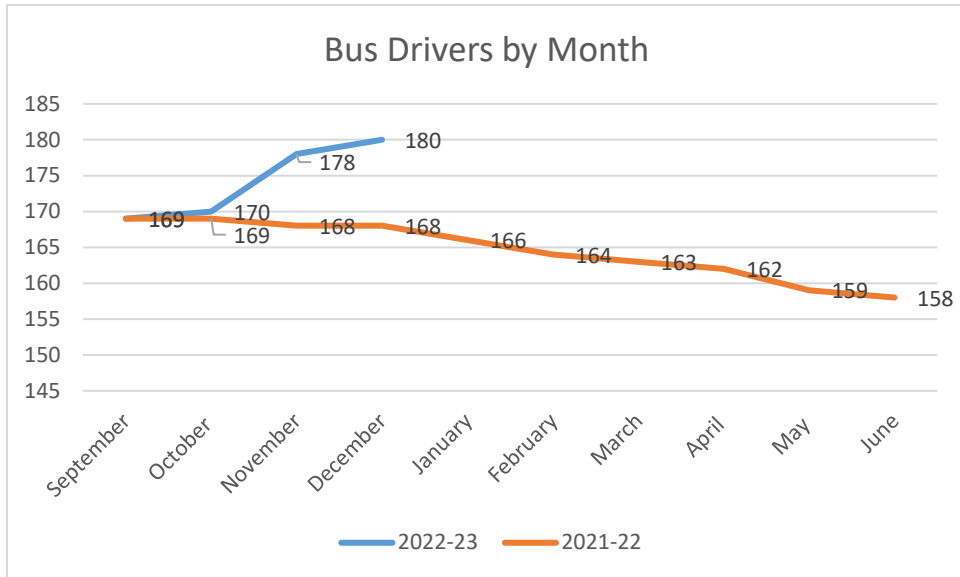
**(Continued on Page 6)**

12-8-22 - Mr. Allen presented the monthly transportation update with the staffing plans for the next school year as of November 29, 2022, the staffing plans for the next school year:

	<b>Full Size Bus Driver</b>	<b>Mid Size Bus Driver</b>	<b>Bus Monitors</b>
Total Employees (or in Process)	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>109</b>
Current Routes	<u>74</u>	<u>89</u>	<u>89</u>
Difference between Planned Routes	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>
Total Planned Routes	<u>101</u>	<u>95</u>	<u>95</u>
Difference between Planned Routes	-21	5	14
Budgeted Positions	<u>118</u>	<u>112</u>	<u>112</u>
Difference between Budgeted Positions	-38	-12	-3

**Drivers in Training**

Permitted Drivers	20
Trainees working on Permits	<u>85</u>
	105



**School Bus Vehicle Procurement**

<b>Current Vehicle Fleet</b>	<b>Full-Size Bus</b>	<b>Mid Size Bus</b>
WPS Buses	16	53
New Buses	72	0
Leased Buses	<u>45</u>	<u>44</u>
<b>Total Vehicles as of 11/28/22</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>97</b>

At no cost, an additional trainer liaison was added.  
 Ford Transits are now available on the market. Bid specifications will be out before the next meeting.  
 An Operation Supervisor was added to the Table of Organization.  
 An additional operations supervisor, 2 part-time liaisons for 7D services and one additional liason dispatcher and all of these positions were paid for out of current savings.  
 The transportation liaisons are fluent in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.



WORCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
STUDENT TRANSPORTATION MONTHLY UPDATE  
January 2023

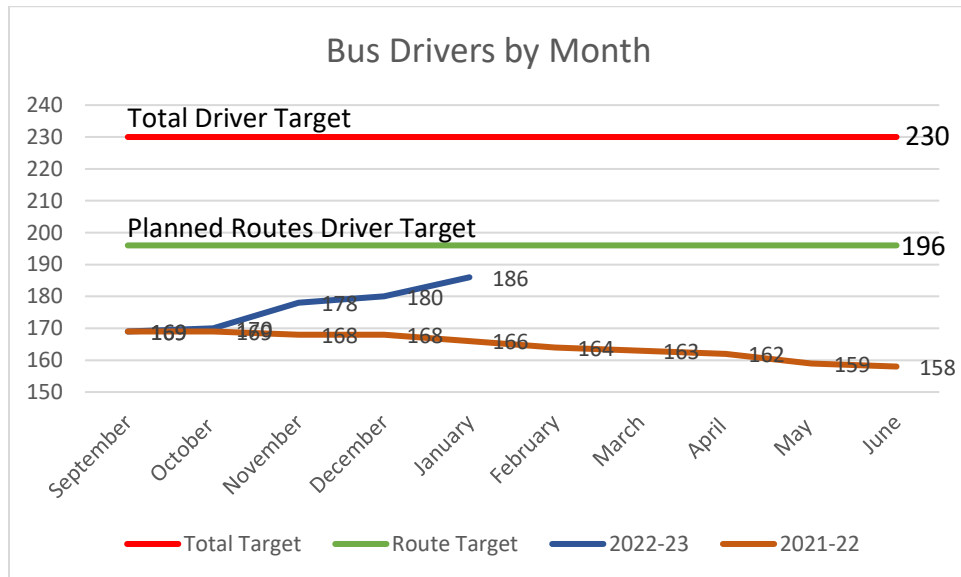
**Bus Driver Hiring and Recruitment**

As of January 17, 2023, the staffing plans for the next school year:

	<b>Full Size Bus Driver</b>	<b>Mid Size Bus Driver</b>	<b>Bus Monitors</b>
Total Employees (or in Process)	<b>86</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>109</b>
Current Routes	<u>74</u>	<u>89</u>	<u>89</u>
Difference between Planned Routes	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>
Total Planned Routes	<u>101</u>	<u>95</u>	<u>95</u>
Difference between Planned Routes	-15	5	14
Budgeted Positions	<u>118</u>	<u>112</u>	<u>112</u>
Difference between Budgeted Positions	-38	-12	-3

**Drivers in Training**

Permitted Drivers	13
Trainees working on Permits	<u>35</u>
	48



## **School Bus Vehicle Procurement**

<b>Current Vehicle Fleet</b>	<b>Full-Size Bus</b>	<b>Mid Size Bus</b>
WPS Buses	16	53
New Buses	88	0
Leased Buses	<u>28</u>	<u>45</u>
<b>Total Vehicles as of 11/28/22</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>98</b>

### **Next Steps & Open Items:**

- **Reduction in the Number of Double Trips:** For the past two years, the district has been running many double-trip bus routes (two trips of the same bus during the same tier schedule) to accommodate the number of riders compared to the number of buses/drivers available. On January 17, 2023, the district began to reduce the number of double-trip bus runs based on actual ridership and availability of drivers. This is the first step in returning to a one-to-one bus to route ratio. As the number of drivers increase, the goal is to eliminate scheduled double-trip bus routes by the end of this year.