



171 Sully's Trail, Pittsford, NY 14534

**STUDENT TRANSPORTATION
EFFICIENCY STUDY**

FINAL REPORT



WYNANTSKILL UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT

October, 2021

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INTRODUCTION

Transportation Advisory Services (TAS) was engaged to perform a review of the student transportation program of the Wynantskill Union Free School District (hereinafter referred to as “District”). The purpose of this Study is to provide a third-party perspective on the efficiency/effectiveness of transportation services.

The District’s liaison for the project was Mary Yodis, Ed.D., Superintendent. The Transportation contact was Mike Goyer, Acting Director. Christopher Andrews served as the Project Consultant for TAS.

STUDY PROFILE

The District operates on a single tier system, transporting approximately 385 students to 1 in-District K-8 campus. Transportation is also provided for 22 students of the North Greenbush Common School District to the Little Red Schoolhouse.

<u>School</u>	<u>Bus Arrival</u>	<u>Bus Departure</u>
Gardner-Dickinson Grades K-8	8:00a.m.	2:30p.m.
Little Red – N. Greenbush Grades K-2	7:30a.m.	2:30p.m.

The District also transports 207 students from both districts to 8 out-of-district public schools, 22 students to 7 non-public schools, and 22 students to 8 Special Education locations. Transportation is also provided for sports and field trips during the school year, as well as summer transportation. The students are transported on 16 District owned and operated route vehicles, for a total 2018-19 transportation operating expenditure of \$804,625 (the last complete year pre-Covid).

We commend the District for their willingness to conduct a third-party review of the program. We often caution districts... “Don’t ask the question if you don’t want to hear the answer”. The District has been willing to be open and cooperative in our review of the District’s transportation services. Throughout this report we have provided insights and opinions based upon our experience and perspectives. Overall it appears that the District is providing a responsive, high quality student transportation service to the community. Everyone involved was extremely cooperative and provided us with everything we requested, despite the challenges faced by the pandemic. We

would like to thank those individuals for their assistance in this study process.

METHODOLOGY

Upon the request of the District, **TAS** submitted a detailed proposal for a Transportation Efficiency Study. Subsequent to the proposal's authorization the following activities were undertaken as part of our analysis:

- 1) **TAS** submitted to the District a request for certain background information and program details in order to form a basis for the review.
- 2) The District provided the requested data via email.
- 3) Due to pandemic safeguards/restrictions, the on-site visit was cancelled, with additional information requested via email surveys and phone conversations. **TAS** consultants have previously visited the District and are familiar with the campus configurations and the community.
- 4) Numerous additional documents and analyses were provided by the District in response to questions raised during the analysis process. Throughout the review process numerous items were discussed or provided via telephone conversations or email.
- 5) This document constitutes our written report to the District. A hard copy with the complete Appendix has been provided, along with a digital copy of the report for submittal to SED. This report is intended to serve as an advisory document and resource for the District, and as such it should be reviewed and evaluated by the District for its applicability to the circumstances at the time of review.
- 6) The following information was utilized as a part of our analysis of the District's transportation program:
 - Routing data
 - Fleet information
 - NYS DOT Bus Operator Profile
 - Lease & Maintenance Contract
 - Contract for transportation of neighboring district students

- Financial reports
- Miscellaneous District-prepared analyses and reports

TAS uses available information and its experience and knowledge to estimate the potential costs and/or savings of particular transportation service arrangements described in this study. Although past experience can be an excellent basis for projections, TAS does not warrant that the costs or savings estimated herein will be realized if implemented. Due to the operational and economic impact related to the Covid19 response, any projections and cost estimates will need to be revisited post-Covid.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As stated in the Introduction section of this report, the comments contained herein pertain to those aspects of the engagement that are within the scope of the study as determined by the District. Within this report we have made recommendations geared towards further improving the effectiveness and/or efficiency of the Transportation Department. Each recommendation ends with a code: “ST” and/or “LT”. ST represents those Short-Term changes that we believe can be made within 90 days, while LT represents those Long-Term changes that will take longer to implement. In some cases, both codes will appear, indicating that there may be some short and long term implementation.

Recommendations pertaining to each section of this report are embodied in those sections. They are also included here in summary for easy reference. For a more definitive discussion of each topic, please refer to the section itself.

Section 5 - FLEET/FACILITY

- Maintain the present spare ratio. **LT**
- Continue with the current replacement cycle. **LT**
- Utilize GPS technology when evaluating routes for efficiency. **LT**
- Encourage police refueling as a precautionary safety measure. **ST**

Section 6 - LABOR

- Utilize the “ABC’s of Driver Recruitment” found in the Appendix to help address the Driver shortage. **ST/LT**
- Customize the “Monthly Maintenance Report” for vendor completion. **ST**
- Seek out additional Driver training programs. **LT**
- Continue to move towards a more equitable allocation of benefit costs. **LT**
- Consider implementing an Attendance Incentive plan to reduce absenteeism. **LT**

**Section 7 –
ROUTING**

- Record actual ridership at least twice per year. **LT**
- If ridership is found to be significantly less, modify routes accordingly. **LT**
- Evaluate the need for so many high school options. **LT**

**Section 8 –
CONTRACTS**

- Clarify District transportation walker/rider policies. **ST**
- Continue lot lease. **LT**
- Continue maintenance contract. **LT**
- Continue lot lease. **LT**

**Section 9 –
MANAGEMENT
OPTIONS**

- Continue transporting North Greenbush students. **ST/LT**
- Continue to operate the program in-house. **LT**

OPERATIONAL/FINANCIAL

OPERATIONAL

Within this report we have made specific recommendations where applicable. In general, we found the District to be sincerely interested in the quality and efficiency of the transportation program, and eager to implement any changes that would improve either of these areas.

To evaluate the program, we first established the operating conditions:

The District operates on a single tier system, transporting approximately 385 students to 1 in-District K-8 campus. Transportation is also provided for 22 students of the North Greenbush Common School District to the Little Red Schoolhouse.

<u>School</u>	<u>Bus Arrival</u>	<u>Bus Departure</u>
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The District also transports 207 students from both districts to 8 out-of-district high schools, 22 students to 7 non-public schools, and 22 students to 8 Special Education locations. Transportation is also provided for sports and field trips during the school year, as well as summer transportation.

To provide these services, the District utilizes 16 District-owned and operated route vehicles. The District-owned fleet is parked at and maintained by a locally owned garage. The vehicles are refueled at the leased parking lot. The Department is staffed with 17 employees:

- 1 Acting Director
- 1 P/T Head Bus Driver/Driver
- 3 F/T Driver/School Aides
- 12 PT Bus Drivers
- 17

FINANCIAL

As part of our study of the District's program, we reviewed the expenditures listed on the *Transportation Aid Output Report (TRA)*

issued by the State Education Department. The report for 2019-2020 reflects expenses incurred during the 2018-2019 school year, the last full year of operation before the pandemic. This detailed report identifies transportation related expenses, and is used as the basis for the calculation of transportation aid to the District.

Transportation aid is payable in the school year following the actual expense. Therefore, the transportation aid payable to the District during the 2019-2020 school year is based on actual expenses occurred the previous school year. A copy of the referenced *TRA* is included in the Appendix to this report.

According to that report, the District had a transportation aid ratio of 71.6%; aid ranges Statewide go from the minimum of 6.5% to the maximum of 90%. This means that “eligible” transportation expenses are reimbursed by the State on the basis of up to ninety cents on the dollar. This reimbursement rate is determined by the State based on either a Resident Wealth Index calculation (line 18 RWADA – 71.6%), a formula based on a multiple of basic operating aid and Adjusted Sharing Aid (line 20 – 62.7%), or the enrollment wealth ratio (line 25 EWR – 69.9%). The District was eligible for 71.6% (Line 32).

Certain expenses are not “eligible” expenses under the reimbursement guidelines and are considered to be local taxpayer costs. For example, common non-allowable transportation expenses include premiums for drivers family health insurance, athletic trips (known as “other purpose” miles), non-educational late buses and services provided to students who reside less than 1.5 miles from school, or are transported more than 15 miles (known as non-allowable miles).

According to the 2019-2020 Transportation Aid Output (TRA) Report (the most current report), the total operating cost (exclusive of vehicle purchases) for the Transportation Department the previous year (it uses previous year data to estimate current year aid) was \$804,625 detailed as follows:

Line 80	Personal Services (labor)	\$351,357
Line 81	Employee Benefits	148,462
Line 82	Supplies/Materials (fuel, etc)	78,719
Line 83	Contractual Expenses (ins, maint, etc)	194,187
Line 145	Transportation Office	<u>31,900</u>
Line 177	Grand Total Trans. Expenses	\$804,625

From this total, the deductions are calculated as follows:

Line 89	Other Purpose Miles (OPM)	\$6,568
Line 93	Non-allowable Pupil Miles	87,112
Line 99	Revenues from Shared Transportation	308,448
Line 155	Trans Office Deduct (31,900-15,169)	<u>16,731</u>
	Total Operating Cost Deductions	\$418,859

By subtracting the deductions of \$418,859 from the expenses of \$804,625 we arrive at Total Non-Capital Expenses Approved for Aid of \$385,766 (Line 157). Applying 71.6% to this number yields Transportation Aid of \$276,208. Dividing that by the Operating Expenses of \$804,625 yields an effective operating aid of 34.3%. While this appears low at first glance, it is offset by the \$308,448 in revenue from N. Greenbush. By adding the aid of \$276,208 to the revenue of \$308,448, and dividing the total of \$584,656 by the expenses of \$804,625 we arrive at effective operating aid/revenue of 72.7%.

Similar calculations are performed for Assumed Capital Expenses Aidable of \$134,293 (Line 158). The two combined totals (Lines 157 & 158) are shown on Line 159 - \$520,059. Applying 71.6% to this number yields your Transportation Aid Eligible of \$372,363 (Line 162), yielding your Total Transportation Aid of \$372,363 (Line 174).

Questions we often hear in these studies are “What does it cost to run a bus route?”, or “What does it cost to transport a student?” Although there are many variables that can make answering these questions difficult, we will attempt to clarify a response.

There are fixed costs and variable costs. One of the fixed costs is the cost of the bus. According to the most current State contract price, a 66 passenger diesel bus costs \$110,000. The oldest bus in the District fleet being 13 years old, we can estimate the annual straight line amortization cost at \$8,461 (\$110,000/13), assuming the bus has no value at the end. Another fixed cost is maintenance, assuming no major component replacements. In Section 6 of this report we find that your annual maintenance cost of a bus for the year referenced (2018-19) is \$6,941. Fleet insurance is fixed at \$39,347 or \$1,967/yr for 20 vehicles.

Variable costs are primarily fuel, oil, tires, and labor. A typical diesel bus gets around 8 mpg. If you are paying \$2.40/gal for diesel, you are spending \$.30/mile. In the 2018-19 school year, route mileage was 127,731. Dividing that by 16 route buses yields 7,983 miles per year, per bus, with a fuel cost of \$2,395/bus. Oil and lubricants cost \$11,371 and tires cost \$11,821, together costing \$1,160/bus (\$23,192/20). Drivers earn \$20/hr, plus payroll taxes and retirement, and have health insurance costs running between \$8,400/sgl - \$22,200/fam, which we'll average at \$15,300/yr, reflective of current staff insurance costs. So a driver working the minimum 4 hours/day would cost \$80, plus an estimated \$20 for payroll taxes and retirement. Assuming a 180 day school year, labor costs would be \$18,000 plus health insurance averaging \$15,300, totaling \$33,300 labor costs.

Using these figures, a typical 66p route bus costs \$54,224/yr, or \$301/day for a 180 day school year. This is exclusive of supervisory costs, software/hardware investments, facility overhead, etc., which we consider static costs regardless of the number of buses. The District also operates several smaller school buses, primarily 28p. According to the most current State contract price, a 28 passenger diesel bus costs \$104,000. The oldest bus in the District fleet being 13 years old, we can estimate the annual straight line amortization cost at \$8,000 (\$104,000/13), assuming the bus has no value at the end. All other costs being equal, a typical 28p route bus would cost \$53,783.

Based upon these calculations, if the District totally eliminates a route bus, the estimated savings would be either \$54,224 or \$53,783. This same cost can be used to estimate the cost of providing a dedicated route bus to a neighboring district. Where it gets "muddy" is where a bus performs multiple services on the same day, same route, etc. For example, if a bus transports students on multiple routes, eliminating a route or stop doesn't necessarily reduce costs. This is partially due to the 4 hour minimum guarantee wages per driver, as well as fixed costs noted previously. In the Routing Section we examine this topic more fully.

Although the focus of this study is not just about costs, this information can be useful when attempting to isolate costs of operation. In the remaining sections of this report we will discuss what is driving District costs and what can be done to control them.

FLEET/FACILITY

FLEET

The District reports that it currently has 20 vehicles – 16 on routes, 2 spare buses and 2 spare w/c vehicles. We have included in this section a Fleet Profile which shows the vehicles by age, and the number of vehicles per model year, with the oldest vehicle being 13 years old (2009), the youngest vehicle being 1 year old (2021), and an average fleet age of 6.4 years.

Spare vehicles are used as replacements during maintenance down time, and as supplemental vehicles when additional program demands occur (sports and field trips). Industry standards would typically have a spare ratio of approximately 10% to 20% of the route vehicles (2-4 vehicles). The ratio can vary depending on extra-curricular demands, specialized vehicle requirements (lift equipped), seating capacities, and the age/mileage of the fleet (older/higher mileage fleets need more spare buses due to maintenance issues). The District currently maintains 4 spare vehicles, primarily due to holding onto the w/c vehicles to meet unpredictable demand. **We recommend maintaining this spare ratio.**

FLEET REPLACEMENT

The District has been fairly consistent in its replacement of vehicles, replacing 2-3 vehicles per year. This reduces age “bubbles” that can result in an aging fleet and the need for occasional large fleet purchases. Although there is no written replacement policy in place, the trend appears to be a ten year to a twelve year replacement cycle.

There is no industry formula for replacement; we conducted an informal poll of national contractors several years ago and found that their preference was for replacing vans/small buses every 5 years, and big buses every 8 years, with the reason given that this is when they felt the breakeven point was reached on repairs versus replacement. They also felt that trade-in value diminished quickly after this point.

Most school districts we’ve reviewed in the Northeast tend to keep route buses 10-12 years and spares 12-15 years. Those 12-15 year old buses are usually ones that have had major components replaced in the 8-12 year old time frame, and are typically used as route spares when the route bus is in for maintenance. At the current size of the fleet **we recommend that the District continue with the current replacement cycle.**

We typically recommend that districts consider the purchase of alternative fuel buses. However, due to the District not owning a garage or parking area, we don't suggest moving in this direction at the present time. For informational purposes we are providing these resources: as of this writing there is a federal tax subsidy on the cost of propane that makes it even more attractive. *School Transportation News* magazine has an article entitled "Consuming Greens", which can be viewed digitally at www.stnonline.com. *School Bus Fleet Newsline* has also featured a white paper entitled "The Growing Presence of Propane in Pupil Transportation" which can be viewed digitally at www.schoolbusfleet.com. Propane buses have become more cost competitive in recent years. Electric buses are also gaining in popularity but require a bigger initial investment, although the State does aid the purchase at your bus aid ratio provided you don't exceed State contract pricing. Consideration for purchasing these buses should be delayed until such time as more supplemental funding becomes available or they are more compatible in price. When alternative fueled buses are purchased, diesel buses should still be used for out-of-district trips to ensure readily available refueling capability.

Fleet purchases have been standardized to reduce the need for an extensive collection of dedicated parts inventory necessary for a varied fleet. The District has done a good job in this regard. We will discuss associated fleet maintenance issues in the Contract Section.

All vehicles but one are equipped with digital cameras. Having access to digital recordings of bus incidents protects both drivers and innocent students. Be aware that the newer model buses have higher seat backs to meet Federal Standards, which has resulted in the need for multiple camera heads to allow for improved video coverage. GPS devices are gaining in popularity, due to their ability to track engine performance, idling practices, and route adherence. The newer buses/cameras come equipped with GPS, which when tied to your routing software can enhance routing capabilities. **When evaluating routes for efficiency, we recommend that use of this technology be considered.**

FACILITIES

The fleet is maintained at a local garage and parked at land adjacent to the garage. This is convenient as there is no need to shuttle buses to/from the garage for maintenance, which would occur if the District

maintained a separate parking lot on District property. The advantage to a District owned lot would be the ability to secure it, and perhaps have a modular building for the Drivers and office staff.

The fleet is refueled at the parking lot. We're seeing more districts invite State and local law enforcement to fuel their vehicles at district pumps during off-hours to improve security with their presence. **We recommend that the District encourage police refueling as a precaution against theft and/or fleet vandalism.**

WYNANTSKILL FLEET PROFILE

Year	Routes	Spares
2009		1
2010		
2011	1	1
2012	1	
2013	1	
2014	2	1
2015	2	
2016	1	
2017	1	1
2018	2	
2019	3	
2020		
2021	2	
Total	16	4

Route Vehicles	16
Spare Vehicles	<u>4</u>
Total	20

LABOR

As with any District operation, labor plays a vital role in the success or failure of the transportation program. There are three areas of importance – Supervision, Maintenance, and Driving, as detailed below.

SUPERVISION

Given the limited time frame that studies such as this work within, it was not intended that individuals be evaluated, but rather the positions themselves be studied, with recommendations made wherever improvements appeared possible. To that end, positions were reviewed, procedures were evaluated, and individuals were surveyed within the Department, and at the District level.

The transportation office is currently staffed by a Consultant serving as Acting Director, and a Head Bus Driver who also drives a regular route. Routing is performed utilizing Routefinder PLUS by Transfinder. It enables user to audit runs, evaluate stops, and employ “what if” capabilities of the software.

Although there are down times at certain periods throughout the year, for the most part the transportation office is quite busy with routing changes, parent calls, sports and field trip assignments, covering driver absences, training drivers, maintaining driver files, viewing bus camera videos, reports, etc. A useful tool for administrating payroll hours is the use of onboard (the bus) clock-in and clock-out. Information on the technology has been included in the Appendix. Given the challenges of student transportation, the current staffing level is not appropriate. Options to correct this situation are detailed in the Management Options section of this report.

A key component of the operation is proper staffing levels, and it appears that the District has been experiencing the national driver shortage. To address this **we recommend that the District utilize the *ABC's of Driver Recruitment and Retention* provided in the Appendix.** Some of the “ABC’s” may require Board/Administrative funding support, while others simply require a creative mind set. Recruitment is an on-going activity, as opposed to a one-shot endeavor. Many schools are finding success with referral fees and signing bonuses – much like sports teams, but without as many dollars. See the “ABC’s” for more information.

One event quite popular in most schools is the annual safety awards dinner, which is typically sponsored by the company that provides the District fleet insurance. Drivers want to work, and they want to be proud of where they work, so creating this type of work environment will foster improved recruitment/retention.

MAINTENANCE

The most recent NYSDOT Operator Profile indicates that none of the vehicles inspected in the last inspection cycle (4/1/20-3/31/21) were placed out of service, indicating that a commendable 100% of the vehicles passed inspection (copy in the Appendix). The fleet is maintained by a local garage (a copy of the current contract can be found in the Appendix).

The cost of bus repairs during the 2018-19 school year was \$138,828. According to mileage information found on the Transportation Aid Report (copy in the Appendix), the mileage for the same period was 154,230 miles, for a maintenance cost of \$.90 cents per mile, or \$6,941 per vehicle. If the District had its' own shop, you would likely employ a mechanic making at least \$40,000, plus \$18,000 benefits, and a mechanic helper making at least \$25,000, plus \$7,000 in benefits. Parts cost could run \$38,000 (\$.25/mi). An in-house operation could therefore run \$128,000, plus related State retirement costs, workers comp, shop tools and equipment, etc., and you would still need a building.

In order to provide the Board and Administration with a monthly recap of transportation maintenance, we **recommend that the shop owner complete a "Monthly Report"** – similar to the sample provided in the Appendix. (It has also been emailed to the District for your customization.)

DRIVERS & AIDES

It is important to note the perspective that we take toward these positions. It is essential that a District employ highly qualified personnel in sufficient numbers to meet the on-going needs of the District. At the same time, it is important that any agreements or procedures provide the District with the flexibility needed to adjust programs to change service levels with an accompanying change in labor costs. Most significantly, any employment agreement should support and facilitate the provision of quality services to the students and the education community.

Student discipline is always an important issue. Most school districts report that discipline is best when the standards are similar for the classroom and the bus. The District is fortunate to have the financial support for cameras on all but one of the buses. To stay on top of training

issues, **we recommend that the District seek out additional training programs** from organizations such as PTSL.org, SchoolBusSafetyCo.com and NHTSA.dot.gov. These programs can be adapted to the on-going driver training program. There is also an affordable DVD training package entitled *The Peaceful Bus Program* available at Hazelden.org.

Although there is no written agreement between the transportation staff and the District we strongly believe that the wage and benefits package needs to be consistent with the goal of providing quality, affordable transportation services, while providing the District's Administration with the flexibility to modify assignments and costs to reflect the realities of program demands, student enrollment, and economic conditions.

1) Health Insurance – this is one of the fastest growing transportation costs in many districts, and Wynantskill is no exception. The District current provides this benefit for employees who work 20 hours or more per week. At the present time the District pays 85% of the premium for health and dental insurance.

Upon retirement the District continues to provide health benefits for a limited number of drivers/spouses. after 15 years of service. The District is fortunate to have community support for these benefits, as dependent health insurance premiums and retiree health insurance premiums are not eligible for transportation aid.

We are seeing a trend nationally where districts are taking the position that there should be a benefit cost allocation based upon hours worked. For example, if a full time position in the District is 8 hours/day, and an 8 hour employee has 80% of his/her premium paid for by the District, then an employee working 6 hours/day would be eligible for 3/4 of that benefit paid for by the District.

Although we understand that benefits are a primary reason many employees work for the District, **we recommend that if/when the driver shortage abates, the District pursue savings in benefit costs, such as moving towards a more equitable allocation of benefits and limits on future costs.**

2) Paid time off - bus driving is essentially a part-time job, in that the majority of transportation services are required less than 8 hours/day, 180 days/year. Driving is a relatively unique function in that an absent employee must be replaced by a sub. This not only creates the incremental cost for the substitute employee, but it impacts the quality of the service, given that the best transportation service has the same

Drivers on the same buses, every day. In this way, they know the students; the students know what to expect from the Drivers; and the Drivers know what looks “right or wrong” along a route or at a stop. Pay for non-worked days is more common among public sector jobs, but not often found in private sector, part-time employment.

As part-time employees, it appears that Drivers are eligible for 12 days annual sick leave. And up to 5 personal days (6 if hired after 3/10/08). With 16 Drivers eligible, this benefit can result in up to 288 paid days off per school year, which requires the use, and extra cost, of substitutes. The District tries to maintain a list of sub’s, hoping they will be available when needed. Unfortunately, this is the most difficult position to fill, resulting in the frequent need for Transportation Office Staff to fill in as Drivers.

To minimize that, **we recommend that the District consider implementing an Attendance Incentive Program.** A typical plan calls for employees who take no days off during a selected period to receive an attendance bonus – typically \$100.00. Districts have informed us that they get more participation if it is paid out twice/year, depending upon participation July 1-December break, and January 1- end of school.

3) Salary Schedule rates – pay rates for Drivers are \$20.00 - \$20.35/hour. Substitute rates are \$18.00/hour. When combined with generous health benefits the District would normally be considered quite competitive, but in the current economy it is having difficulty attracting transportation employees. Part of the problem is the limited workday, and to address that the District recently hired several new full time staff as Driver/School Aides. That should have a bigger impact on recruiting than raising wages. The District could also offer a higher wage rate based on longevity, for example providing a \$1.00/hour increase at five year increments, to reduce turnover.

Regarding extra trips – To entice Drivers to take trips, the District has increased the hourly trip rate to \$24.00/hour. We are also seeing a move nationally towards allowing – even encouraging – Coaches to drive to alleviate the shortage of substitute drivers. The common practice now is to have a Coach ride on the bus with the Driver. In some districts, included in the Coaches job description is a requirement for a CDL, so that they can drive a school bus on sports runs. In some cases they are paid a small stipend to do so, but it is viewed as a budgetary procedure to keep the sports programs alive. In the event some Coaches are not comfortable driving a bus during inclement weather, then Bus Drivers

take the runs. Although some Coaches don't like driving, they do like to keep their bus at the game.

ROUTING

CURRENT PROGRAM

Several factors drive transportation costs – labor, which was discussed in the previous section of this report, bell times, and transportation policies.

BELL TIMES

The District operates on single tier system, transporting approximately 385 students to 1 in-District K-8 campus. Transportation is also provided for 22 students of the North Greenbush Common School District to the Little Red Schoolhouse.

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The District also transports 207 students from both districts to 8 out-of-district public schools, 22 students to 7 non-public schools, and 22 students to 8 Special Education locations.

Evaluating the pro’s and con’s of various bell time options is not an easy task for a district to undertake. There are many factors to consider, such as mileage, road conditions, policies, enrollment, riding times, vehicle capacities, population density, location of campuses, contractual agreements, etc. As noted above, the District is single tiered (also referred to as single tripped).

Of the 500+ reviews we’ve conducted over the past thirty-four years, the vast majority of schools are multiple tripped. Smaller districts like Wynantskill are single tripped, freeing up the fleet to make out-of-district runs as opposed to a second in-District run. Difficulty arises if the District bell times coincide with bell times at the other schools be transported to/from. Growth in private, parochial and special education programs can strain the resources of the transportation department.

To analyze routing efficiency, we typically look at the number of seats available per bus and the number of students per bus, per run. For example, a 66 passenger bus may be able to seat 66 elementary grade students (ES), but only 44 secondary grade students (MS/HS), as the

seats are designed for 13” passengers. Although it is technically possible to fill all seats at the elementary level, the common use of backpacks, combined with the current pandemic related concerns of overcrowding, results in most buses being routed at less than capacity. While filling a bus is the goal of efficient routing, it is not always feasible due to these reasons. Further, if ride times are limited, then efficiency is lower, as shorter ride times equates to more buses required. It should also be noted that Pre-school and Kindergarten students can take longer to load and unload, resulting in slower route times, which prevents filling buses to capacity.

When we evaluate different bell time options, we look for efficiency gains in the use of regular route vehicles, not vehicles used for transporting special education students, non-public school students, and out-of-district public schools, as the District has little control over their schedules. Of the District’s 16 route vehicles, 4 buses (66p) are utilized exclusively on regular in-District routes in the morning, with 5 buses (4-66p and 1-28p) utilized exclusively on regular in-District routes in the afternoon, with the remaining vehicles used for a combination of in-District and out-of-district routes. For the calculations that follow we will use 66 passenger capacity buses, as the smaller buses are not typically loaded for efficiency as much as destination driven. Referenced route summary sheets can be found in the Appendix, titled “TRIP ANALYSIS”.

For reasons specified above, many schools aim for 85% capacity on regular school runs. Due to the fact that the buses are transporting both elementary and middle school students, the capacity is rated at 44 students, or two per seat:

$$4 \text{ buses} \times 44\text{p} = 176\text{p} \times .85 = 150\text{p students (37p/bus)}$$

The current in-District exclusive routes look as follows:

Bus #	AM Stu Count	Bus #	PM Stu count
71	30	72	37
80	27	77	43
81	44	81	42
83	39	83	46
Totals	140		168

In the morning, these buses are loaded at 94% capacity (140/150) and in the afternoon the buses are loaded at 112% capacity (168/150). We refer to these bus routes as fully optimized.

Some of the other 66p buses have a combination of in-District and out-of-District routes. Their in-district runs are indicated below:

Bus #	AM Stu Count	Bus #	PM Stu count
68	30	68	52
72	28	77	43
77	44		
82	12		
Totals	114		95

In the morning, these buses are loaded at 76% capacity (114/150) and in the afternoon the buses are loaded at 63% capacity (95/150). Buses that combine runs with out-of-District runs cannot typically be fully optimized because time between runs must be considered when designing the runs, which limits the number of stops they can make.

Routing software creates routes based upon eligibility. **We recommend that actual ridership be audited at least twice per year with routes modified accordingly.**

As referenced above, it is more difficult to measure optimization of our-of-District runs as they are quite often designed to accommodate student needs, destination locations, bell times, and length of run. For example, a bus transporting 3 students to a nonpublic school may be best utilized to transport 4 more students to a nearby public high school. It would be the most efficient run, but not optimized for loading purposes.

We noticed that the District offers transportation to a number of area high schools. Transportation would be more efficient if fewer schools were served. **We recommend evaluating the need for so many choices,** and then consider phasing out the number of options – perhaps based upon distance, bell times, and the cost of education per student.

When designing out-of-District runs, primary consideration is given for the students transported under contract with the North Greenbush Common School District. We will discuss associated costs in the Contract Section of this report.

**POLICIES
&
PRACTICES**

The District's transportation policy is silent on walking/riding eligibility. The transportation of students living less than 1.5 miles from their assigned school is a non-aidable expense, referred to as non-allowable miles. Deductions for these miles in 2018-19 were \$17,226 on fleet purchases and \$87,112 on operations. **We recommend that this policy be clarified.**

To summarize this section, it is our belief that although the current in-District routes are efficient given the current bell time structure, the program may improve efficiency by auditing actual ridership and adjusting bell times and routes accordingly.

CONTRACTS

The District has three contracts and/or agreements in place, as follows:

Parking Lot Lease Agreement

The District leases land adjacent to Mulson's Garage for parking the fleet at an annual rate of \$6,000. This fee includes parking lot maintenance, plowing, electric costs for the fuel pumps, and installation and maintenance of the fuel spill pad.

We are of the opinion that this is a reasonable cost and recommend continuing it.

2021-22 Fleet Maintenance Bid awarded on March 22, 2021

Mulson's Garage submitted a successful bid as follows:

Service Description	Price Bid
Preventative Maintenance Inspection	\$85/bus
Cost per DOT Inspection	\$90/bus
Cost per hour of all other service and repairs	\$90/hour
Mark up on actual parts cost	?

Although the rates are not inexpensive, as referenced in the Labor Section we believe that it is less expensive than if the District were to build/lease a facility and run the program in-house. **We recommend continuing this contract as long as prices do not become unreasonable.**

Transportation Agreement to Transport North Greenbush Students

Under the terms of this agreement the District agrees to transport all North Greenbush students for an annual flat fee. In the 2018-19 school year this was \$308,448, and in the 2021-22 school year it is \$319,413.

In any sharing agreement it is important that the terms are favorable to all parties... a win/win agreement. That can be evaluated any of three ways – cost per mile, cost per student, and cost per bus. To do so

it is necessary to utilize the pricing guidelines established in the Operational/Financial Section when looking at the routing structure.

Cost per mile

Although a straightforward cost can be determined overall by dividing the total 2018-19 operating costs of \$804,625 by the reported miles of 154,230 to yield an operating cost of \$5.21/mile, because many of the routes are blended with both schools it is not a useful number for comparison purposes. To factor in fleet replacement costs, we would add the annual amortization costs discussed in Section Four of \$93,071 for the 66p buses (\$8,461 x 11) and \$72,000 for the smaller buses (\$8,000 x 9) for a total of \$165,071, plus the operating costs of \$804,625, yielding overall estimated annual costs of \$969,696, or \$6.29/mile.

Cost per student

The Transportation Department reports having 450 Wynantskill students and 176 North Greenbush students in their database. By subtracting the \$308,448 paid by North Greenbush from the \$804,625 total operating costs, we find that Wynantskill operating costs were \$496,177. When we add the fleet replacement cost of \$165,071, Wynantskill's overall costs rise to \$661,248. When we add the \$60,000 family portion of health insurance premiums not reported on the TRA, Wynantskill's costs rise to \$721,248. Dividing that by 450 students yields a total cost of \$1,603/student. Dividing the cost paid by the reported by North Greenbush for 176 students in the data base (\$308,448/176) yields a cost of \$1,753/student for North Greenbush.

Although management costs are not included, using either operating cost per student, or overall cost per student, this method of analysis leads to the conclusion that the contract rates are fair to both parties. **We recommend continuing this contract.**

Cost per bus

We calculated the cost per bus in Section Four... \$54,224 for a 66p bus and \$53,783 for a 28p bus. This is a useful rate when providing exclusive service, for example, a dedicated AM/PM route bus. It's also useful when comparing District costs to a contract bid cost.

One final calculation that districts often ask about is cost per run. Due to all of the variables noted, it's like hitting a moving target. To operate as efficiently as possible, out-of-District runs for both school districts have been combined. As noted in Section Four, a 66p bus with two AM and two PM runs would cost \$54,224/180days, or \$301/day, or \$75.25/run. But cutting one or two runs off wouldn't save half of that due to the 4 hour minimum, the built in amortization costs, etc. You would just reduce fuel costs. It's only when an entire route day is eliminated, and you sell the excessed bus, that full savings occur.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

Our review of the transportation program includes an analysis of management options available to the District. We have included an evaluation of the pro's and con's of operating alternatives that may be of interest to the District in the years ahead, given the uncertainty of funding being continued at the current level:

1. Continue to operate as is, with suggested changes.
2. Pursue shared management with a neighboring district.
3. Consider contracting - full, management, or partial.

On the following pages, we have described the options that we evaluated in this report, highlighting the results that the District may expect from each decision.

1. CONTINUE TO OPERATE AS IS, WITH SUGGESTED CHANGES.

Under this option, you would either retain the consultant you have on site as a Transportation Supervisor working part-time or hire someone else with similar qualifications and experience.

Qualified transportation supervisors are difficult to find and expensive to keep. With routes in place and staffing levels filled, the current consultant could be engaged for 15-20 hours/week. To make that work he would need either a full time Head Driver that works in the office as well as with the drivers, and a part time office Clerk, or a Head Driver/Driver and a full time office Clerk, perhaps shared with another department but based in the transportation office. Sample job descriptions can be found in the Appendix for the Supervisor and Head Driver. Both should have CDL's with P & S endorsements. There is no job description for the Clerk – he/she should be personable, skilled at Word, Excel and social media, and be a good communicator. Costs for this option could look like \$35,000 for Supervision, \$40,000 for the full time Head Driver with single benefits, \$35,000 for the Clerk with single benefits, all depending upon the full time/part time allocation, for a cost around \$110,000.

Pro's: You would not have major labor related consequences that may result from option 3. The transition would be smoother with a knowledgeable Supervisor in place. You would retain control over the program.

Con's: The District will spend more money than currently allocated. The District may continue to face budgetary concerns associated with the economy and increasing demands for services.

2. PURSUE SHARED MANAGEMENT WITH A NEIGHBORING DISTRICT

Under this option a neighboring district would assume control of day-to-day operations. The Shared Supervisor would be primarily based in their district but have scheduled time in your District. A Transportation Assistant or Head Driver would be assigned full time to your District, and most likely would have an office clerk. Routing functions would be performed by them, with your approval on any changes. They could oversee the contracted maintenance, or if desired by both parties they could assume the maintenance function. Costs for this option would depend upon how you/they want it structured but would likely be similar to Option 1.

Pro's: You would not have major labor related consequences that may result from option 3. The transition would be smooth with a knowledgeable Supervisor in place. You wouldn't have the headaches of day-to-day operations.

Con's: The District will spend more money than currently allocated. The District may continue to face budgetary concerns associated with the economy and increasing demands for services. The Supervisor may not always be available when you want him/her.

3. CONSIDER CONTRACTING – FULL, MANAGEMENT, OR PARTIAL

Either process can work effectively, provided the specifications clearly define service expectations.

3.1 Full Contracting

Under this option, the District would sell the fleet and terminate employment with the majority of staff members. The contractor(s) would be responsible for providing a fleet, facility, and staff.

Pro's: The District would, relatively speaking, be out of the transportation business. A significant amount of administrative time and effort now devoted to transportation (payroll processing, accounts payable, benefits administration, budgeting, purchasing, etc.) would be eliminated. The District would receive a cash infusion the first year due to the sale of the fleet. A competitive bid environment may result in some savings. Labor related issues such as recruitment and training would become the responsibility of the contractor. Annual contract cost increases would be controlled by market pricing and/or annual price caps.

Con's: The District could expect quite an emotional period of upheaval among the staff, and some members of the community. Day to day operation of the program would be out of District control, which could result in a loss of flexibility. Service levels are often reported to be not as high as those provided in-house, especially early in the conversion. The costs of sports and field trips typically increase faster than the cost of home to school transportation. It is difficult to get back into transportation should the District ever desire to do so.

For cost comparison, a larger district in the region was operating in 2018-19 under a full contract at a daily cost of \$281 per route bus. This compares favorably to your 2018-19 cost of \$301 per route bus.

3.2 Management Contracting

Under this option, the District would continue to own the fleet, but would contract out all labor and maintenance. You would have the option of replacing the vehicles as they age out or rebidding as a full contract.

Pro's: You effectively contract out the most expensive aspect of student transportation – the labor – while you continue to control the assets. This type of bid is attractive to some contractors because a sizeable investment is not involved. Should it become advisable to retake the program in the future, it is much easier because you have retained ownership of the fleet.

Con's: You are still in the transportation business; you must still invest in fleet replacements. While limited savings may be realized they may not equal those of full contracting due to continued ownership of the fleet, which would preclude additional use of the fleet by the contractor. Some contractors may not bid due to the ability of the District to re-take the program.

Bids would need to be compared to your current cost of labor and maintenance contract.

2.3 Partial Contracting

Under this option, a District continues to provide transportation for a portion of the program (Regular-Ed public school transportation only, for example), while contracting out the other parts of the program (Special Needs, Private/Parochial, etc).

Pro's: The District would only need to maintain the fleet and staff necessary to transport a defined student population. Some of the fleet replacement costs in future years could be reduced. Parking issues could be minimized. Competitive bids may result in lower costs. Contract costs are more easily controlled due to your ability to retake some runs if service and/or costs are unsatisfactory. Sports and field trip costs could be contained due to having a District fleet.

Con's: The routing and responsibility for these runs would remain with the District. The cost for such services must be monitored, and the quality of services provided must be watched closely. There may be negative community reaction to transporting a select group of students on contracted vehicles.

These types of bids would have to be evaluated on a route by route basis.

To accurately evaluate potential savings from contracting, bid specifications or RFP's would have to be developed, with prices compared to District costs at that time. Legal advice should be sought regarding privatization laws, regulations, and successor agreement impact before proceeding. It's worth noting that some contractors are not taking on additional work due to the current driver shortage.

Based upon the findings of this report, it is our recommendation that the District should continue to operate the program in-house with suggested changes (Option 1).

APPENDIX

- A DISTRICT PROVIDED DATA
- B TAS PROVIDED FORMS/DATA
- C FLEET LIST
- D ABC'S OF DRIVER RECRUITMENT
- E TRA OUTPUT REPORT
- F BUS ROUTING INFORMATION
- G CONTRACTS

The complete Appendix is on file in the District Business Office.