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DATE: 15 April 1999

TO/DEST: Co-ordinator, Transit Services Committee

FROM/EXP: General Manager

SUBJECT/OBJET: **EXPANDING OC TRANSPO SERVICES FOR OTTAWA-CARLETON DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD STUDENTS**

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION

That the Transit Services Committee recommend to the Commission the provision of an additional 4,800 hours of service in 1999, at a cost of approximately \$275,000, to provide transit service to Ottawa-Carleton District School Board students who will no longer be eligible for yellow school buses this fall. Some of these costs are expected to be offset by revenues, depending on the numbers of students who actually switch to OC Transpo.

BACKGROUND

At their meeting towards the end of March 1999, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) took the decision that as of September 1999 grade seven and up students, living within one kilometre of an OC Transpo bus stop, would no longer be eligible for yellow school busing. This decision affects about 4,000 students in the former Carleton Board area; 2,400 in eight high schools and 1,600 in eighteen elementary and middle schools. The School Board revised this decision on 13th April when a motion was approved reinstating yellow school busing for grade 7 and 8 students in the former Carleton Board area, and bringing transportation policies for grade 7 and 8 students into uniformity across the region.

The result is that students attending Colonel By, Gloucester, Merivale, J. S. Woodsworth, A.Y. Jackson, Bell, Sir Guy Carleton and Cairine Wilson High Schools will no longer be eligible for yellow busing in the fall if they live within one kilometre of public transit. The schools and numbers of students affected at each are shown in Exhibit 1.

Staff from OC Transpo and the OCDSB have been working together since early November last year to determine what would be needed to provide the best possible transit service for those students and to ensure a smooth transition. A high level of cooperation between the organizations has made it possible for OC Transpo to respond to the needs of the students. This report outlines the resource requirements and other considerations associated with this.

SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

A preliminary assessment of service requirements was made using information provided by the OCDSB. This included, for each school, the number of students affected and their areas of residence. We were also provided with information on the current yellow bus routings.

The extent to which existing OC Transpo routes would be suitable was then assessed after which new trips were planned for those students who would be faced with unreasonably long travel times. The objective in this process was to provide the best possible transit service to these new riders.

An illustration of the planned approach is the service for Gloucester High School, the largest school for which OC Transpo will be providing new service. In this case, it is proposed to provide twelve special school trips, both at the start and end of the school day: four from Blackburn Hamlet, three from Chapel Hill North, two from Convent Glen North, and one each from Chateaufort Estates/Chapel Hill South, Beausejour/Grey Nuns and Fallingbrook/Queenswood Heights North.

At first pass, it was evident that, because some schools start at around 8:00 a.m., nearly thirty extra buses would have been required to provide the required trips. This is because the commuter rush peaks at around 7:00 to 8:15 a.m., during which time all OC Transpo buses are fully employed.

Discussions with OCDSB staff led to the proposal that, if start times could be moved back at a few key schools, the service could be provided with far fewer additional buses. In fact, bus requirements to provide new service to the eight high schools would drop to around three or four if Colonel By, Gloucester and Merivale High Schools were to move their start times back by one hour and Bell High School were to move its start time back by ten minutes. This would mean start times of 8:45 to 9:00 a.m. for these schools.

The number of students attracted to this service will depend very much on how convenient it is. This will be a tough market since currently these students travel for free. Decisions made when faced with the \$46.75 cost of a bus pass in these circumstances are difficult to predict. There is likely to be some car pooling, either with parents as drivers or the students themselves.

Concerns have been raised about OC Transpo's ability to provide convenient service for these students. In particular, circuitous routings and the need for transfers have been raised. These are being passed over to OC Transpo staff who are answering questions and receiving input from customers during the detailed planning phase for the service.

Another question which has been asked is whether or not OC Transpo would be prepared to run buses onto the school property as the yellow buses do. This will be addressed on an individual school basis. It is certainly the intention to provide as convenient a service as possible and if OC Transpo can access school property without being caught up in parked cars, this will be done. However, in the afternoons the school trips are usually the first trip done by buses which then go on to express routes which means that if they are delayed, service reliability suffers.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

A communication plan is being developed in partnership with OCDSB. It is critical that parents, students and school administrators know what routes will serve individual schools. Students will also need information on how to become safe and confident riders on OC Transpo buses.

As a first step, a series of meetings are being arranged for the beginning of May at which the preliminary plans for service can be discussed with parents and students. Schools in the same area will be grouped together so that all schools can be covered in three meetings.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Overall, thirty to thirty-five trips will be needed in each peak period, for approximately 1,200 additional hours per month at an approximate cost of \$70,000.

Monthly revenue projections of between \$36,000 to \$66,000 are based on take-up rates of between 40% and 70%.

RIDERSHIP IMPLICATIONS

This program for high school students has the potential to attract somewhere in the region of 600,000 additional trips to transit in a full school year. It is assumed that if students buy an OC Transpo pass then, as well as trips to and from school, they will benefit from being able to use the bus pass for their other travels. Currently, on average, student bus passes are used for about sixty trips per month and, if it is assumed that students transferring from yellow busing will make an additional fifty trips on transit, the additional ridership from September to May could be from 430,000 (40% take up) to 780,000 (70% take up).

OTHER ISSUES

Meeting the transportation requirements of these students will be a major challenge for OC Transpo, and one for which we will be highly vulnerable to criticism. Parents of students who previously received free transportation will have a tendency to be critical even if OC Transpo matches the yellow bus service. If small errors occur in the planning or delivery of service, attitudes are likely to be unforgiving. It is important that the Transit Services Committee is fully aware of this before the school year starts. OC Transpo will gear up to respond to unforeseen needs by adjusting service in the first few days of the school year, but nobody should be under any illusion that this will be an easy time.

*Approved by
M.J.E. Sheflin, P.Eng.*

Exhibit 1

Schools and Number of Students No Longer Eligible for Yellow School Busing

HIGH SCHOOL	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
Colonel By	578
Gloucester	776
Merivale	570
J.S. Woodworth	19
A.Y. Jackson	51
Bell	193
Sir Guy Carleton	131
Cairine Wilson	38
Total	2356