

BUSINESS PLAN

2020-2022



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks to the Board of Directors and Staff for making me feel welcome in the summer of 2018 and allowing me to observe, learn, and develop this document as we continue to move forward in meeting the needs of our constituents.

Chuck Seguin
Executive Director
NPSSTS



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MISSION

All eligible students will have safe, reliable, equitable and responsive transportation to/from school at a cost that demonstrates good stewardship of resources.

VISION

The NPSSTS will deliver on its Mission with a student/parent focus, in partnership with its member boards, bus company operators, and all other stakeholders in a manner that reflects our organizational values.

VALUES

**SAFE
RELIABLE
EQUITABLE
RESPONSIVE**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The NPSSTS is nearing its 20th anniversary and has shown its ability to deliver a critical service to its end users – students and parents – on behalf of its four member boards. As Executive Director walking in some 18 months ago, I have been given the opportunity to put a fresh set of eyes on the organization. It has been a most pleasant and eye opening experience. Through ongoing discussions with board members and staff, I have gained a comfortable level of knowledge into the complex world of student transportation. Input from those doing the work and their decades of individual and cumulative experience are critical in assessing our past, current and future direction.

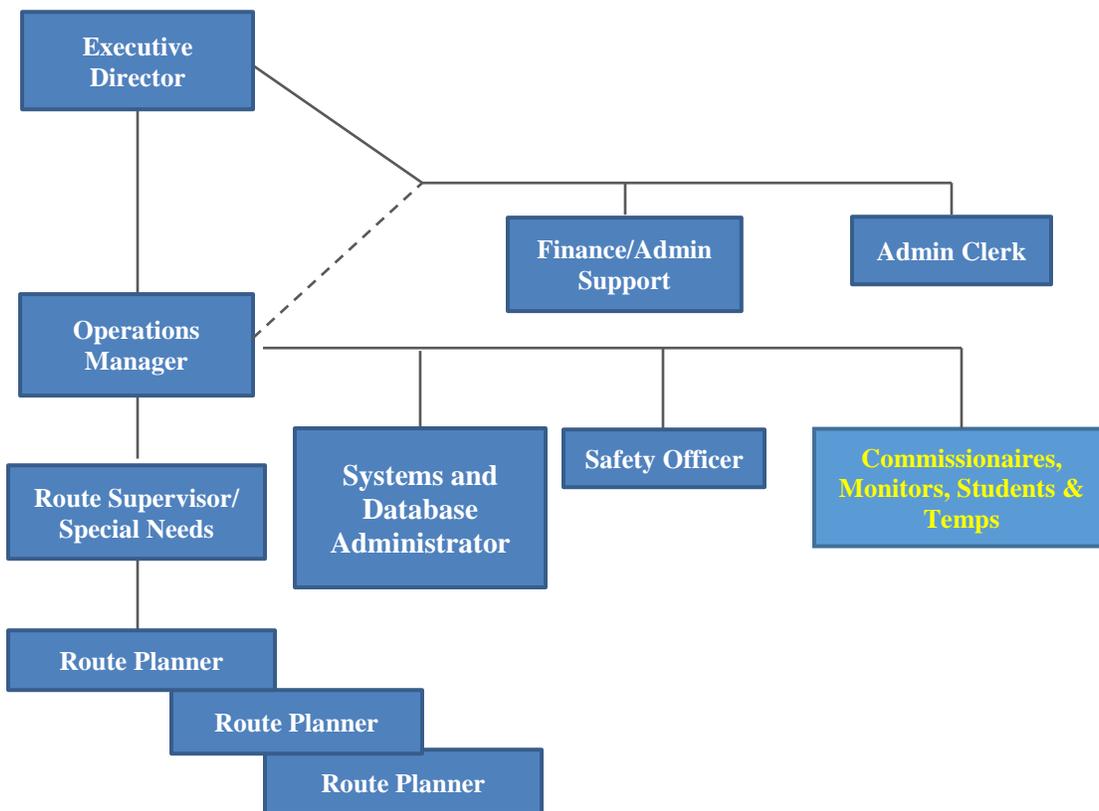
The search for answers has led me down various paths including the analysis of prior years' data from the Ministry's annual Student Transportation Survey. The compilation of the information from a historic perspective along with comparisons to similar data from 33 other consortia in the province provides an opportunity to measure the effectiveness of the steps already taken in finding efficiencies and economies. Furthermore, this review highlights key indicators in best practices used by our colleagues elsewhere to confirm the direction we are on and possibly put us onto new paths.

What follows is a brief analysis of hard data and the subsequent primary strategic directions to be undertaken over the next three years. These activities have been identified through subjective and objective processes to merge as priorities for the immediate future. Each will involve a number of stakeholders who will need to be engaged in the change processes. Working plans will then be jointly developed and implemented. At the core of this process will be communication with parents and students as we move toward improved service delivery and exemplary stewardship of resources. This will form the basis for future Annual Reports to Board of Directors.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND MANDATE

The NPSSTS was created in 2001 and incorporated in 2003. The Ontario Ministry of Education has since mandated that student transportation be coordinated through consortia, rather than through individual school boards, as a method of streamlining operations. We are governed by a Board of Directors made up of a representative from each of our four local member school boards (Near North District School Board, Nipissing-Parry Sound Catholic District School Board, Conseil scolaire public du Nord-Est de l'Ontario, and Conseil scolaire catholique Franco-Nord). We arrange transportation services for students of these boards and apply any harmonized guidelines for the provision of services to all students.

As of September 1st, 2019, the NPSSTS was comprised of 10 full-time office staff, and dozens of part-time monitors and commissionaires out in the field during the school year.



The NPSSTS is strategically positioned between its four member boards and transportation providers (operators) in order to effectuate the needs of our enduser, the student and parents, and coordinate the contracting of routes to operators. The fluidity of students moving through the education system requires constant adjustment to routes, stop locations, timetables, transfers and other components that make up this complex transportation network. The only constant in student transportation is “change”.

A key output from the NPSSTS is the route schedule for the upcoming school year. There is a high level of understanding by the staff of the impact that changes to a student’s transportation schedule can have on a family’s home/school/work balance. Throughout the 2018-2019 school year, particular attention has been paid to the business cycle of the NPSSTS and its links to schools, operators and parents. These observations will provide the foundation for the goals and objectives outlined in this plan.



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ANALYSIS

Introduction

The NPSSTS submits a survey of critical data to the Ministry of Education on an annual basis. In reviewing the available data, comparisons can be made not only to our past record but also to where we are positioned with respect to key performance indicators vis-à-vis other consortia in the province. The following analysis looks at the years 2013-2014 through to 2017-2018. As this report is being prepared, we are in the midst of preparing and submitting 2018-2019 data to the Ministry.

WHERE HAVE WE BEEN?

Let's begin at looking at **Student Data**. In reviewing enrolment numbers, we have seen a steady decline over the past five years, with the exception of 2017-2018. With respect to the number and percentage of students transported, a similar decline was noted up to the last year. Table 1 below provides details:

Table 1

Student data			
	Transported	Enrolment	%
2013-2014	11,536	16,560	70%
2014-2015	10,166	16,404	62%
2015-2016	10,089	16,354	62%
2016-2017	9,852	16,029	61%
2017-2018	11,332	16,449	66%

Next, the students who are transported are on Routes. **Routes** contain **Runs**. These are shared amongst the Member Boards wherever possible. Operator contracts allow for a bus to do more than two (home to school and return) runs per route. By increasing the number of runs, commonly referred to as B and C runs, the initial daily rate for that bus is paid only once and the only marginal added cost to the route is a minimal set fee and the mileage in excess of the base 50km daily. Therefore, savings can be achieved by reducing the number of Routes as well as increasing the ratio of runs per route.

As seen in Table 2, there has been a reduction in the number of Routes over the past five years and an increase in the number of Runs, bringing the Run to Route ratio from slightly below 2 to 2.21 in 2017-2018. This provides economies not only to the Member Boards but to Operators as well, as they can then use their equipment in a more effective manner and reduce capital, maintenance, insurance and human resource costs.

Table 2

	Total # of Routes	Total # of Daily Runs	Run/Route Ratio
2013-2014	424	842	1.99
2014-2015	403	871	2.16
2015-2016	381	828	2.17
2016-2017	386	829	2.15
2017-2018	386	854	2.21

Attached to all of this therefore is the cost of transporting the students. The reported **Transportation Expenditures** in the Ministry Survey includes dollars spent to meet the needs of students. The reduction in the number of routes and increase in runs has had a tremendous impact in reducing these costs over the past five years. When these annual figures are adjusted to remove the contractual increases to Operators year to year, the resulting savings from the steps taken become evident.

Table 3

	Transportation Expenditures	% change	% increase in operator contract costs	\$ Adjust for Contract Cost Increase
2013-2014	\$ 16,175,992.00			\$ 16,175,992.00
2014-2015	\$ 16,030,673.00	-0.90%	2.4%	\$ 15,654,954.10
2015-2016	\$ 16,064,646.00	0.21%	2.4%	\$ 15,320,440.29
2016-2017	\$ 16,466,488.00	2.50%	2.5%	\$ 16,064,865.34
2017-2018	\$ 16,438,912.00	-0.17%	2.5%	\$ 14,921,944.71

With respect to the reduction in enrolment, what has the impact been on the distances travelled? The **daily number of kilometers** driven is shown in Table 4 below.

That data shows the following:

- An overall decrease in travelled distance of 1.6%
- a decrease of students transported of 8.6%
- an average ride time of 29 minutes per student consistently over the years

This indicates that we are transporting fewer students but still travelling long distances, taking about the same amount of time year to year. The factors involved include but are not limited to

school closures and amalgamations, centralizing specialized programs, changes in population density and a movement toward rural living.

Table 4

Daily Kilometers	
2013-2014	42,235
2014-2015	40,679
2015-2016	39,698
2016-2017	39,650
2017-2018	41,541

Looking at the data thus far, over the past five years considerable effort has been put forth by NPSSTS staff in reducing costs through more efficient routing, which has resulted in some considerable savings with little to no impact on ride times. Moving forward, a commitment to constant review of key processes including **Bell Time Adjustments** may be warranted as further route reductions through the use of second and third tier runs, is the most effective method of achieving these efficiencies.

However, overall costs have increased at a greater rate than that of the Operator Contracts. In reviewing Safety costs and in particular those associated to **Attendants and Monitors**, there has been a dramatic increase as indicated in Table 5 below:

Table 5

Attendant/Monitors				
	Special Needs Support	Student Behaviour	Total	% increase
2013-2014			\$ 27,054.00	
2014-2015			\$ 105,151.00	288.67%
2015-2016			\$ 183,916.00	74.91%
2016-2017			\$ 243,322.00	32.30%
2017-2018	\$ 174,597.00	\$ 84,224.00	\$ 258,821.00	6.37%

Of notable mention is that 2017-2018 was the first year that the Ministry Survey separated the costs into the two distinct categories seen above. The figure for 2013-2014 is consistent with the previous years. Therefore, the increase of 389% requires some explanation. As the *Accessibility of Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)* took effect January 1st 2014, and that a change in service delivery was implemented to ensure compliance with this legislation.

Transportation for Special Needs is taking on a greater percentage of the overall transportation costs as seen in Table 6.

Table 6

	Transportation Special Needs	% of Overall Student Transportation
2013-2014	\$ 981,264.00	6.1%
2014-2015	\$ 1,257,887.00	7.8%
2015-2016	\$ 1,256,814.00	7.8%
2016-2017	\$ 1,416,048.00	8.6%
2017-2018	\$ 1,375,991.00	8.4%

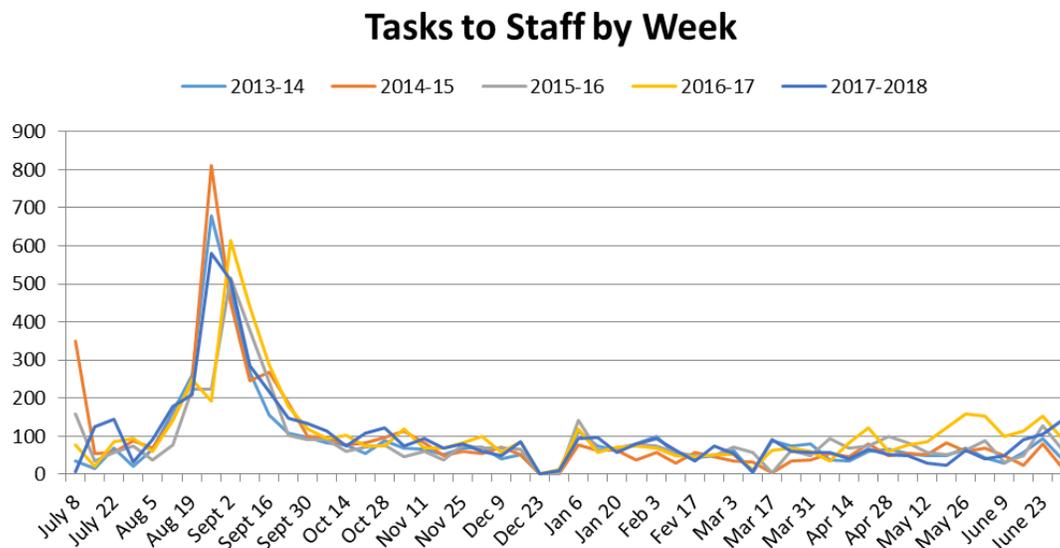
As seen in Table 5, there was more than a 2:1 ratio of monitor and attendant costs attributable to Special Needs Support in 2017-2018. Previous year's data is not available therefore other sources must be examined to determine trends. One such source is a memorandum dated December 1st 2015, which indicates that the number of monitors in 2011 was three versus the 26 in 2015. Other documentation indicates that the split between the reasons for monitors was about 50:50 in 2015-2016. The year to year increase has been tapering off since the initial spike in 2014-2015.

Therefore, there are two forces at work affecting these costs. Compliance with legislation like the AODA is mandatory and has a cost associated to it. Although the transportation costs are up slightly, the strategy used in incorporating mini-busses provides a new resource for integrated transportation that did not exist before: the use of smaller buses to access remote or difficult areas that are impracticable for a large bus. This strategic use of the resource reduces the need for vans and their associated costs in the overall picture. Pupil management is the second matter to be addressed. The increased demand and cost of monitors used to assist drivers in maintaining order is evident. Some work will have to be done in this area which should involve all stakeholders.

Having reviewed two of the three major components of the business, transportation and safety, the next area is administration. At the heart of this element are the people who do the work, and how and when that work is done. The **Business Cycle** of the NPSSTS is intertwined with that of school boards. The NPSSTS will transport over 11,000 students in 2019-2020. Bus route assignments are released to the public in mid-August, allowing parents to view them and submit requests for changes or additions. This results in a spike of tasks for the next eight weeks the workload of staff multiplies by two to eight times the weekly norm, as shown in Figure 1.

This represents approximately 7% of the ridership still looking for final transportation arrangements. The subsequent changes and additions impacts on other riders as pick up and drop off times frequently change and affect their lives, often requiring changes to routines such as childcare arrangements. Therefore, the impact is not only on those parents who are late in making arrangements but also on a broader cross-section of riders and their families. The Ontario Ombudsman's Report The Route of the Problem and its 42 recommendations deals with the investigation into two southern Ontario school boards and their transportation group's operational readiness in 2016-2017. Pursuant to Memorandum 2019:SB08 dated May 24th 2019, consortia management in Ontario will be expected to sign an Attestation Letter indicating that they have implemented the recommendations of that report. Improved, earlier operational readiness is at the heart of that report.

Figure 1



Other business processes are impacted including:

- the timely preparation of financial estimates for the next year,
- timely and accurate accounts payable and receivable processes,
- decision making on courtesy,
- out of zone and out of district transportation, route dry runs and optimization, and
- overall customer service not only to the those waiting for changes once the school year has started but to those affected by the subsequent changes to the route schedule, and those requesting service beyond that offered in Guidelines.

As in any business, **Technology** is a critical component of operations. It allows us to do many things including performing our day-to-day tasks and communicating worldwide, often in real time. Social media is an integral part of the lives of everyone who has a phone, tablet or computer. The NPSSTS has been moving forward with maintaining critical business systems to meet most of those needs. Moving forward, the use of new functions and applications both

internally for business process and to communicate more effectively with our constituents is critical. Our society has adopted a real time, instant update lifestyle. Available technology that facilitates messaging in a secure manner is one of our next steps. Technology can not only serve to meet people's personal needs and also meet operational demands.



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WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

PRIMARY STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The four identified primary strategic directions identified are:

1. Efficient and effective transportation
2. Pupil management in transportation
3. Business cycle adjustments
4. Enhanced use of technology

GOALS – OBJECTIVES – ACCOUNTABILITY

Goal: To continue to identify further efficiencies.

Objectives	Qualitative/Quantitative Measure	Performance Indicators
Maintain Ride Times to within Guideline specifications	Ride times do not exceed prescribed limits as outlined in Guideline SL-002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of routes where ride times exceed prescribed limits • Average ride time per route
Identify and implement alternate transportation strategies	Identification and implementation of alternate transportation strategies that improve efficiency and effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of strategies identified and implemented • Efficiencies gained through their implementation
Increase the Run/Route ratio	Run/Route ratio is increased to improve the use of resources and develop economies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run/Route Ratio

Accountability: Executive Director – Annual Report at AGM

Goal: To work with all stakeholders in dealing with pupil management in transportation and reduce the demand for monitors on busses.

Objectives	Qualitative/Quantitative Measure	Performance Indicators
Develop a unified plan and resources to deal student discipline issues	The development of a unified strategy and resource for all stakeholders that is consistent with legislative requirements and helps students succeed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide for stakeholders completed and distributed • Education and communication resources for parents and students completed and distributed
Reduce the need for monitors on busses	The number of monitors and duration of assignment to particular routes is reduced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of monitors assigned to routes • Length of time required on the route before being removed

Accountability: Executive Director – Annual Report at AGM

Goal: To adjust the NPSSTS business cycle in order to deliver route information to the consumer earlier and improve operational readiness.

Objectives	Qualitative/Quantitative Measure	Performance Indicators
Deliver route information to consumers prior to June 30 in any given year	Development and implementation of a plan involving all stakeholders to adjust business practices that allows for earlier release of route information to parents and the adoption of a new business cycle and practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a plan involving all stakeholders • Implementation of action items contained in the plan • Route information released to consumers on or before June 30th

Accountability: Executive Director – Annual Report at AGM

Goal: To enhance the use of technology by the NPSSTS for internal and external purposes.

Objectives	Qualitative/Quantitative Measure	Performance Indicators
Expand the use of technology for operational and administrative uses	Make greater use of the current platforms and additions along with training of staff and stakeholders in their use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of enhancements • Number of training opportunities for staff and stakeholders
Enhance the use of technology in communicating with stakeholders	Increase the use of technology in communicating with all stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of enhancements • Number stakeholders being reached

Accountability: Executive Director – Annual Report at AGM

ONGOING STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Notwithstanding the above, there are a number of Ongoing Strategic Directions that are works in progress or ongoing programs. These include items like:

- First Rider Program where the delivery of the program increased in the number communities in which it was made available;
- School Bus Safety Week and safety education;
- Active School Transportation and Walking School Bus;
- Student Bus Patroller Program;
- Updating and enhancing the Annual Communications Plan;
- Review and update of existing Guidelines;
- Identifying gaps in Guidelines and developing appropriate Guidelines;
- Review and update of Human Resource Management processes like Pay Equity and the Performance Review system;
- Professional Development and Succession Planning;
- Delivery of Training to Stakeholders with respect to transportation software use;
- Business Continuity and Emergency Planning.

Accountability: Executive Director – Annual Report at AGM

CONCLUSION

The four areas identified combine elements of our mission and our values. Improving service delivery while creating efficiencies and economies is challenging. These changes also recognize the need to maintain a healthy work environment and balance the workload of NPSSTS staff over longer period of time while achieving a higher degree of operational readiness at an appropriate time prior to the school the year. The projects will involve a number of stakeholders including board and school staff, operators and parents.

As we move forward on these initiatives, each will require its own action plan with timelines, targets and measurable outcomes. I look forward to reporting to the Directors and Board members in the future on the progress being made.