

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES  
5<sup>TH</sup> COUNCIL, 33<sup>RD</sup> SESSION

RECOMMENDATION TO  
COUNCIL NO. 2-33

TABLED ON NOVEMBER 15, 1966



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NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL NO. 2-33  
(Second Session, 1966)

*Tabled on November 15, 1966*

SCHOOL BUS TRANSPORTATION IN THE  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

DISPOSITION

Tabled	To Committee	Accepted as Read	Accepted as Amended	Deferred (to Session)	Rejected	Noted not Considered

SCHOOL BUS TRANSPORTATION IN THE  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

I. Purpose of Paper

In a submission to the Council of the Northwest Territories entitled "Matters Related to Education in School Districts", which was considered at the First Session of the Council in 1966, the three school Districts; Yellowknife School District No. 1 of the Northwest Territories, Yellowknife Roman Catholic Separate School District No. 2, and Hay River Roman Catholic Separate School District No. 3, contended that they have to raise extra funds by local taxation to provide bus transportation for pupils residing beyond normal walking distance from their schools. These taxes, paid by the school district ratepayers of the Municipalities of Yellowknife and Hay River, are not levied in other communities of the Northwest Territories, where school bus service is provided by the Federal Government. The Districts requested a grant to meet the full costs of providing needed bus service for their pupils.

Although the Council decided against this proposal it agreed to ask for a study of the whole question of school bus transportation. This paper gives the details of the school bus transportation service now being given in the Northwest Territories, indicates the nature of the problems encountered in providing such services, and makes a recommendation on the request by the School Districts.

II. Problem

It is recognized that school bus transportation is a large and growing item of expense in connection with school operations. Factors which contribute to school bus costs in the north which may seem excessive in relation to other parts of Canada are:

1. The long cold winters which necessitate the provision of school bus service in areas and for distances which might not be required in more moderate climates.
2. The lack of public transportation systems on which pupils could ride.
3. The high cost of owning and operating buses in most northern settlements where there is no use for such vehicles except for school bus service, involving relatively few miles each day.
4. Quickly expanding settlements with housing being located long distances from schools.
5. Because of the small number of potential bus operators, a lack of competitive bidding where routes are put out to tender.

The school districts in Yellowknife and Hay River claim that they are at a financial disadvantage. Where school bus transportation is required by the Federal Schools the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources assumes the cost of transporting the school children either under contract with a private operator or by use of Departmental vehicles. These extra costs are not directly shared with the parents of the children who require this service.

The ratepayers of the school districts claim they pay for their school transportation through direct taxation without assistance from the Territorial Government. The citizens in the other settlements who send their children to the Federal Schools in the Northwest Territories receive this service without being assessed a direct tax. This is the situation regarding all education costs. It must be remembered that both the Territorial and Federal Governments contribute to the support of the School districts through Territorial Government grants direct to the districts or Federal grants in lieu of taxes to the municipality on which the district depends. Also, there is a

Territorial Government tax of 10 mills levied on assessed property where taxes are not being paid in support of a school district. It is collected on property in Fort Simpson and Fort Smith where there are Federal schools. This tax is also collected from Public School supporters in Hay River.

As a uniform assessment of private property becomes possible throughout the Territories, this territorial tax will be collected in the other communities. The proceeds of it will go towards the expenditures of the Territorial Government, including education. A full time assessor has been hired and the collection of the tax will expand as he completes assessment of private property in other communities.

The two operating mines in Yellowknife previously subsidized the school bus system because their location was on the periphery of the settlement and it was important that the employees be provided with transportation for their children. This year, 1965-66, the two mines have adopted a new subsidy policy. They have arrived at the conclusion that they should not pay for the school bus transportation above the normal taxes they are assessed, since they are paying school taxes on their assessed portion of the tax base.

Outside the three School Districts, the Federal Government provides school bus transportation of all pupils, as well as other costs, where it is required. The Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources provides the money for educating Indians and Eskimos. The Government of the Northwest Territories reimburses the Federal Government for other pupils attending the Federal Schools in the amount of \$630 per pupil per Year in both Elementary and Secondary grades. This per pupil rate takes into consideration the school bus costs. The Territorial grant to the school districts of \$210. for each pupil in the elementary grades and \$285 for each pupil in the secondary grades is intended to provide assistance to the school districts in meeting the cost of operating the schools, including the costs of school busing. This grant supplements the taxes raised in the school districts and the combination of the two should cover all normal school operating costs in the school districts. The school districts submit that the Territorial Government should assume 100% of the cost of school bus transportation.

111. Summary of School Bus Transportation Being Provided in Larger Settlements in the Northwest Territories during the School Year 1965-66

1. Yellowknife (School Year 1965-66)

Yellowknife Public School District #1 - One hundred and thirty-five pupils are being transported. The cost to the school board is \$62.50 per day; \$1,250 per average month, or \$12,500 per school year.

Yellowknife Separate School District #2 - One hundred and twenty-nine pupils are being carried. The cost of the school board is \$40.50 per day: \$810.00 per average month, or \$8,100 per school year.

Federal School Yellowknife - Sir John Franklin - Twenty-six pupils are being transported, with the cost to the Federal Government of \$12 per day; \$240 per average month of \$2,400 per school year. The mileage limits for transporting pupils to school extend to children living beyond three-quarters of a mile from their schools, to the municipal boundary limits of the town including the Con and Giant mine areas. Maximum distance is about 3 1/2 miles from the schools. Pupils at Yellowknife are transported by the company which holds the town bus franchise, under contract with the school districts.

2. Hay River (School Year 1965-66)

Separate School District #3 - One hundred and forty pupils are being transported. Cost to the school board is \$588 per month, or \$5,880 per school year. A private bus contract is negotiated.

Federal Day School - Two hundred and forty pupils are being transported at a cost of \$1,144 per month or approximately \$11,440 per school year. The same contractor provides this service.

The Federal Government is responsible for busing of pupils from Enterprise and other points on the Mackenzie Highway. Twelve pupils are involved at present. The cost is \$347.50 per month, or \$3,475 for the school year. A total distance of up to 20 miles one way is involved. Other mileage limits are set at one-half mile from the school to the municipal boundary limits of Hay River, and the new townsite located about four miles from the school.

The Hay River Village bus mileage is 66.4 miles per day at .736¢ per pupil mile. The bus mileage from the Indian Village is 30.2 miles per day at 1¢ per pupil mile.

3. Fort Smith (School Year 1965-66)

Three hundred and fifty-four pupils are being transported to and from school each day. The costs to the Federal Government are \$2,152 per month or \$21,520 per school year. This is arranged under a private contract with an operating bus company. Pupils are transported to school from beyond one-half mile from the school to the municipal limits of the village, including the Department of Transport residences which are at the airport, located about four miles from the school.

Total daily mileage on school bus routes is 38 miles per day at a rate of .8¢ per mile.

4. Other Pupil Transportation Situations in the Mackenzie District (School Year 1965-66)

Fort Providence: Six pupils are being transported to school from the furthest distance of 4 1/2 miles, at a cost of \$10 per day, or \$2,000 for the school year; the Federal Government assumes the cost.

Fort Simpson: There was in the past, a small contract for transportation of pupils from the distant ends of Fort Simpson to the school. After the 1963 flood, the Indian Village was moved closer to the centre of the settlement area and no student transportation was then necessary.

Norman Wells: A small contract was considered to transport a few pupils who lived about four miles from the Norman Wells school. The children were taken to residence at Inuvik and the transportation problem was solved.

Tuktoyaktuk: A contract is in effect, at \$20 per day, for transportation to the school for pupils from an island in Tuktoyaktuk harbour, and residences near the Dewline site. No change is foreseen in the near future.

General: At Hay River a boat is required to serve the Indian Village and at Tuktoyaktuk small vessels are used during the Spring and Fall ice free periods of the school year. At Hay River a Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources vessel is used. At Tuktoyaktuk service is provided on a contract basis.

5. ARCTIC DISTRICT (School Year 1965-66)

Frobisher Bay: There are 260 pupils being transported to school at Frobisher Bay: The pupils are transported by buses owned by the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources. This bus transportation is provided only in the winter months, November to April. The minimum distance is one mile from the school and the maximum distance is three miles. All pupils are provided with transportation except the 60 pupils who live close to the school.

6. Financial Implications

It is evident that a great variety of pupil transportation problems exist in the Territories and that arrangements must be made to suit each situation. Comparisons with the provinces lack validity because of the different methods of school administration and varying climatic conditions. In most cases, the provincial governments make grants to school boards based on a complex formula involving distances and mileage costs. The Yukon Territorial Government provides school bus transportation for all settlements requiring it. They also provide funds on a mileage basis, to parents who have to drive their children to school when it is not economical to employ a bus.

The problem of financing the costs of pupil transportation in school districts in the Northwest Territories is not essentially different from financing other operating costs of school districts. The school district is given the responsibility for operating its schools and the power to set its own budget. Funds are provided by local taxation and Territorial Government grants. Up to the present, the Territorial Government has favoured a single per pupil operating grant based on the enrolment of pupils in each school district. This grant is intended to cover a percentage of all costs of operation including school bus transportation. In response to school district requests, however, the Council did make special additional operating grants to assist school boards to subsidize teacher accommodation and school text books. These grants are now to be incorporated into the general operating grant so there will not be a departure from the principle of providing a single per pupil operating grant.

This principle has been accepted as the best and least complex basis for providing financial assistance to the school districts in the Northwest Territories because of the small number of districts and the advisability of permitting school boards the greatest autonomy possible in financial administration. It is recognized that the implementation of specific grants such as a bus grant would involve controls which would involve additional administrative costs both for the school district and the Government. Under the present system, controls are not required. The new Five-year Federal-Territorial Financial Agreement will take into consideration the estimated additional costs for school operation and will aim at providing a fair proportion (approximately 50%) of the costs of school operation (including pupil transportation where required) in the form of an increased per pupil operating grant.

7. Recommendation

Because the acceptance of the proposal by the school districts for a one hundred per cent subsidy of school bus transportation costs would necessitate a complete revision of the principle on which present grant arrangements are based and would lead to imposition of additional administrative controls and expenditures, the Commissioner recommends

that no separate pupil transportation grant be authorized by the Council of the Northwest Territories at this time. This recommendation takes into account the fact that improved per pupil operating grants, higher capital construction grants and assumption by the Territorial Government of the employers' share of costs of a pension plan for school district employees, all of which have been adopted or are under consideration, will help achieve a substantial improvement in the financial capabilities of the school districts of the Northwest Territories to meet their transportation costs.