

## **Transportation Re-Engineering**

There are a number of actions that can be considered to address the operational stress currently being experienced by transportation. These actions are being categorized into three sections – facilities, organization, operations.

### **Facilities**

Problem: Transportation is housed in 3 separate locations. Areas II and III are co-located at Stonecroft. Area I is housed at Virginia Hills. Special education and central administration are located at Lorton Center. Stonecroft is an excellent facility with adequate parking and space for area office staff to work and collaborate, meet and train. Area I is located in a trailer at Virginia Hills that is inadequate and crowded. Special education has inadequate space at Lorton with overcrowding inside the building and many supervisors having to work in a trailer behind the building. Neither special education nor Area I have the ability to easily collaborate with anyone outside of their own organizations. Both require sizable meeting rooms for the large staff.

Recommendation: We need to create a second transportation facility similar in nature to Stonecroft with decent space and adequate parking for buses.

Problem: We have inadequate secure bus parking. Presently, only 600 buses park at the four secure bus parking compounds – Newington garage, West Ox garage, Eleven Oaks and Stonecroft. The balance of our buses park in a variety of locations to include schools, libraries, public streets, fire stations, and driver homes. Beyond the obvious security issues, this situation makes managing the fleet very difficult when buses break down, drivers call in sick, etc. Decentralized bus parking makes it very challenging to quickly provide run coverage as a result of driver absence or bus breakdown. Wildly diverse parking locations make it time-consuming and expensive for mechanics to reach buses with mechanical problems in the early morning hours and require expensive driver hours to transport buses long distances to service facilities.

Recommendation: We need to ensure that the second transportation administrative center includes adequate parking as is the case at Stonecroft. In addition, we need to continue to explore possibilities for additional secure parking, particularly in parts of the county where centralized parking is limited.

### **Organization/Staffing**

Problem: Because special education students and their needs require intense individual attention by transportation staff and supervisors, it is important that the organization dealing with them be of a scale where the specialized attention necessary is not overwhelmed by sheer volume. This is the current situation with special education transportation. They are burdened with very large numbers of student placement changes, significant bus and specific bus equipment management issues, overwhelming radio traffic demands and phone calls, and the supervision of more than 600 drivers and attendants. With the increased demands being placed upon that office, special education transportation will only continue to grow. Because it is the only transportation office at Lorton Center, it is very difficult for them to collaborate with the area transportation offices. Since most special education students actually ride general education buses, this is an unacceptable situation.

Recommendation: Final decisions have not been made but there appear to be two basic choices. These choices assume that adequate facilities will be obtained and supported by additional office and specially trained administrative staff. The first option is to integrate special education supervisors into the general education transportation offices. The second option is to split special education into two regions so that each region is of a more manageable size. Both options have advantages and disadvantages that require careful consideration.

Problem: Transportation operates more than 12 hours each school day with offices opening at 5 a.m. and closing at 5 p.m. or later. In reality, many buses are still on the road until well into the evening. Transportation office staffing, however, is still based on the typical 8 hour work day. Certain critical jobs to include dispatchers and technology support are inadequate to provide the support necessary for an activity that occurs over 12, not 8, hours.

Recommendation: Add a second dispatch position to each transportation office (4 positions). Study the potential need for other additional positions.

## **Operations**

The MPS study completed in November evaluated the following suggested changes to provide some relief to transportation:

1. Elimination of busing for certain out of boundary programs;
2. Consolidation of bus stops;
3. Increasing secondary school walking distance; and
4. Optimizing school attendance boundaries to minimize transportation demands.

Staff believes that it is not realistic to consider elimination of busing gifted and talented programs and thus does not recommend implementing this potential change.

Consolidation of bus stops has been a transportation focus for the past year. Although it usually meets with parental objections, each change is first being carefully assessed for its safety implications before the change is recommended. We intend to continue to make these changes when we believe doing so does not negatively impact student safety.

Increasing the secondary school walking distance is believed to be extremely objectionable to parents and would worsen the safety and traffic congestion problems many schools are experiencing due to the increasing numbers of parents who drive their children to school. We do not recommend that this change be implemented.

Optimizing school attendance boundaries for the purpose of improving transportation operational efficiencies would not provide great benefits compared to the difficulties such changes would cause. We do not recommend consider of boundary changes for transportation purposes but do hope that future boundary changes for programmatic or capacity purposes would give consideration to the transportation implications.

We do believe, however, that the following transportation services might be considered for elimination or modification.

- No longer provide transportation to GT centers for those elementary students whose base school includes a GT program.
- Shorten the time that we provide transportation for students who are grandfathered when school or program boundary changes are made.
- Reconsider the current program of providing transportation for administratively placed students. Two choices include not providing transportation or only placing students in schools very proximate to their base schools. Currently we have students going great distances, often by taxi as there is no bus available to transport them.
- Eliminate the Exception to Ride Program. Transportation receives over 1200 requests a year. Each request requires that transportation evaluate each for space on the bus, availability of an existing bus stop, the safety of the walking route from an existing bus stop to the requesting student's home. This time-consuming process is overwhelming transportation supervisors and transportation staff at a time of the year when they already face great challenges.
- Only provide academy shuttles if there are a minimum of 5 students who ride the bus on a regular basis.
- Eliminate magnet transportation to Bailey's and Hunters Woods elementary schools.
- Modify the middle school GT program either by redrawing current boundaries or by expanding the number of schools with their own GT programs. Both options could reduce transportation demands.