A Legislative Study of

Student Transportation

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Prepared by

Admin Minnesota
DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION

and

The Improve Group

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Executive summary

Recent State legislation required a study to "consider efficiencies that could result from a regional approach to student transportation." The legislation also required that the use of transit for student transportation be considered, and that the study include all geographic areas of the state.

This study resulted in findings and recommendations for making changes to student transportation for efficiencies through collaboration, use of public transit, in contracts and overall transportation management. General findings were also discovered related to making transportation changes.

Collaboration findings and recommendations

Most (61%) school districts and charter schools are already engaged in some type of collaboration on student transportation. But, collaboration rates vary by geography (metro-area vs. Greater Minnesota) and by type of district (traditional vs. charter school). Rates are highest for metro-area traditional districts (80%) and lowest for metro-area charter schools (48%). Collaboration rates also vary by the type of student transported. Rates are highest overall (39%) for students receiving special education services who need specialized transportation.

- 68% of metro-area traditional districts collaborate on the transportation of special education students. In Greater Minnesota, many districts will share transportation to the Minnesota State Academies for the Deaf and Blind in Faribault.
- In the metro area, almost half (49%) of the districts collaborate in transporting students experiencing homelessness. Districts in Greater Minnesota rarely do this.
- Collaboration on providing transportation to extracurricular activities is common in Greater Minnesota but not in the metro area.

Many opportunities exist for districts to collaborate besides the direct provision of student transportation services: sharing administrative positions, routing software, safety training, maintenance and communication systems, and fuel systems are all possibilities. These would not necessarily reduce the number of miles driven, but they can result in decreased expenditures. The relationships that develop through these indirect services could be developed or expanded over time and opportunities for direct service collaboration may become more apparent.

Incentives to promote collaboration may be needed, since under the current funding formula for student transportation districts typically look for internal, not external or collaborative, efficiencies. In particular, incentives would be helpful for doing up-front research and design of collaborative opportunities. Sometimes the costs and effort of these exploratory activities can seem too great, especially if a district's overall transportation spending is good. A grant for neighboring districts and charter schools to do this exploration could yield positive results.

Study Methods

- Interviews and meetings with school transportation experts, including representatives of the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), the Minnesota Department of Transportation, and the Minnesota Department of Public Safety; school transportation contractors; and school district transportation administrators.
- An online survey of school districts, including charter schools. A total of 353 responses from 305 districts and charter schools were received, for an overall statewide response rate of 61%.
- In-depth case studies of three school districts (Marshall, Little Falls and Minneapolis) plus the West Metro Design Team, a regional collaboration of Minneapolis, Hopkins, Osseo and Richfield School Districts.
- Analysis of school transportation data compiled by MDE.
- Studies from other locations in the United States on the potential for improving efficiency in student transportation, either through regional collaboration or the use of transit.
- The approximate cost of preparing this report was $65,000. This represents the value, in terms of salary and benefits, of the time of the Minnesota Department of Administration, MDE, and school district participants as well as consulting efforts to research, survey, interview, and prepare this report.

Transit findings and recommendations

Transit (including taxis and dial-a-ride services) gives school districts flexibility for special situations or until a permanent solution can be found for particular students. It also serves an important goal of equity and inclusion, but it is not necessarily cost-saving.

Overall 27% of districts and charter schools that responded to the survey indicated that they had considered using public transit as a substitute for at least some kind of student transportation in the recent past. Metro and non-metro charter schools were most likely to have implemented use of transit (17% and 12% respectively). Traditional school districts are less likely to be using public transit at this time, with just 10% of metro districts and 6% of non-metro districts doing so.

There is confusion about the legality of using transit for student transportation, particularly in Greater Minnesota. While federal laws limit the use of public transit for student transportation,

there are allowances for mass transit services and for many scenarios of smaller and private services, like dial-a-ride and taxis. Clarification of allowable and unallowable transit use scenarios would be helpful statewide.

Use of transit for student transportation is generally well-accepted by parents where it is in place. When districts have sought input from the community on a proposed use of transit, the feedback has been positive from parents. A perception exists among many districts, however, that parents would be opposed to the use of transit.

Having demonstration projects that describe the planning and coordination procedures, feedback from parents and students, and positive benefits related to access and inclusion, costs and ride times can allay the fears of districts resistance to implementation of transit.

Contracting and management findings and recommendations

If two or more districts share the same contractor they might be able to realize efficiencies. For example, the contractor may identify opportunities for fewer routes or times when buses run empty and then pass those savings along to the districts. Alternatively, districts who share a contractor may be able to negotiate better rates related to adjustments around gas prices.

Collective bargaining issues need to be taken into consideration when changing contracting arrangements. It is important for districts and charter schools to include affected labor unions early and throughout a planned change to student transportation so that current contracts are honored and new contracts can be negotiated that support the goals of the proposed changes.

General findings and recommendations

There are many aspects of student transportation—"regular to-and-from school" transportation is only part of a district's overall transportation expenses. Other expenses include transporting students to extracurricular activities, transporting students for desegregation purposes, and transporting students who are homeless or who have special needs. The various facets of student transportation need to be considered when looking for efficiencies.

Efforts to increase efficiency must be balanced against other student transportation priorities, such as student safety and providing equitable access to education.

Major barriers to changing transportation approaches are bus ride lengths and school start and end times. Past experience has shown that proposing to change either of these, even if transportation costs decreased as a result, will be met with resistance from a variety of stakeholders.

The challenges school districts face around transportation efficiencies or innovations differ by geography.

- Metro-area districts have to deal with transporting homeless students across district boundaries much more than districts in Greater Minnesota.
- Districts in Greater Minnesota have to deal with large distances, long ride lengths, and low student densities.
- Transporting open enrollment students across district boundaries creates transportation inefficiencies in Greater Minnesota. Districts in the metro area generally do not transport open enrollment students across boundaries.

Change takes time, and is best done incrementally. Based on experience around Minnesota, the best approach is to start small, building on and expanding existing efforts rather than trying to find global solutions.

- A clearinghouse of information on strategies to improve transportation efficiency would provide examples of successful efforts that could be copied by other school transportation providers.
- Existing entities such as education districts, service units, and special education cooperatives could serve as the foundation for making regional or collaborative transportation plans, since they already have the systems of communication in place.

Changing a system such as transportation in a school district requires a high-level administrator to take ownership and provide sustained leadership over time. However, superintendents are often, appropriately, fully consumed with the challenges of instructional leadership. It is difficult for high-level administrators to find the time needed for attention and leadership around modifying their transportation system. Another barrier to sustaining momentum and interest for collaboration is that it is hard to pin down cost savings without specific data analysis and comprehensive study, but those studies require time and up-front investment of resources and energy to investigate inefficiencies, conduct research and make plans. If the perception exists that nothing needs fixing, however, there will be no motivation to conduct the studies in the first place.

Motivations for collaboration and for transit have some differences that suggest that efforts to promote the use of transit for transporting students should be developed independently of efforts to promote collaboration between districts. Among the Districts that reported considering using transit, the top motivations were cost efficiency (cited by 55%), time efficiency (47%), and access and inclusion (35%). These were also the top motivations among districts that had engaged in collaborative activities, but the percentages were quite different for collaboration: 82% cited cost efficiency, 34% cited time efficiency, and only 11% cited access and inclusion.

The federal maintenance of effort requirement for special education serves as a barrier to reducing costs associated with transporting special-education students and should be proactively addressed. These requirements state that, in each year, states and school districts spend at least as much on special education as they spent in the previous year. If a school district fails to "maintain effort," MDE is required to penalize them financially, thereby wiping out any cost savings they achieved. The intent of this is to make sure school districts and states do not cut services to students with disabilities, even when times are tough. However, the MOE requirement prevents districts from making changes that cut costs, even when they do not compromise services. As a result, if a strategy to collaborate to provide special transportation works well, and saves districts money, they may be penalized for failing to maintain effort.

The full legislative study on student transportation includes these findings, as well as case study reports of Minneapolis, Little Falls, Marshall and the West Metro Design Team, and an expanded list of individual innovations and suggestions that came out of the survey and interviews.

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Many individuals gave generously of their time and expertise, and it would not have been possible to conduct this study otherwise.

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Over 350 individuals, too numerous to list, participated in the online survey.

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- From Anoka-Hennepin Public Schools: Keith Paulson

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This study was conducted by Deborah Mattila and Stephen J. Smela, Ph.D., from the Improve Group and Cecelia Dodge, Ed.S., from Cecelia Dodge & Assoc., LLC.

Introduction

The 2012 Minnesota Legislature directed the Commissioner of Administration to study the potential for regional or coordinated approaches to student transportation to lead to cost savings and efficiencies. The study is intended to look at collaborative innovations, potential synergies with general transit and address the full geographic area of the state. The Department of Administration contracted with the Improve Group, an independent research and evaluation consulting firm in Saint Paul, MN, to conduct the study.

> *Student transportation study. This study must consider potential efficiencies that could result in employing a regional approach to student transportation. Consideration must be given to potential synergies between general transit and student transportation functions and must include all geographic areas of the state. The student transportation study shall be completed by November 1, 2012. [Laws 2012, Ch. 292, Art. 4, s. 17(2)]*

Through a combination of case studies, interviews, a survey of transportation officials, analysis of state data, and a review of existing research, the current study documents existing practices in Minnesota that increase the efficiency of student transportation. Emphasis is given to efficiencies that result either from collaboration between school districts or from the use of transit to supplement or replace existing modes of student transportation. This study identifies those practices that hold the potential for increased use, either by expanding the scale of the practice to a regional level or by expanding the student populations to which the practice applies. Barriers to the increased use of these practices are also identified.

The following research questions guided the design and conduct of this study.

1. What policies guide or limit transportation options in the State?
2. Where are the opportunities for and potential impacts of reform or change?
3. Who uses different transportation options?
4. What are the current costs associated with different options and how might they change if different assumptions are applied?
5. How have transportation costs changed over time?
6. What changes have districts made to transportation over time?
7. What are the largest current challenges associated with delivering transportation?
8. What opportunities or risks are associated with different options?
9. What are the challenges and benefits of using public transit?
10. What opportunities and challenges exist for shared transportation services?

The following information, definitions and terminology are provided to help the reader develop a common understanding of terms used in the report.

"How much does it cost to transport students?" is an easy question to ask, but answering it requires an understanding of the various types of student transportation and how their costs are accounted for.

The most basic category is *regular to-and-from school* transportation. As the name implies, this is the cost of transporting students to and from school each day. School districts are required to provide transportation to secondary students (grades 7-12) who live more than two miles from school and to elementary students (grades K-6) who live more than one mile from school. These students are referred to as "regular" students. This category also includes *excess* students: secondary students who live between one and two miles from school and elementary students who live less than one mile from school but who receive transportation because of hazards (traffic, drugs or crime) they would encounter if they walked to school.

In this report, when figures are given for "cost per student transported," "cost per mile" and "miles per student per year," they are for this *regular to-and-from-school* transportation due to the way in which data are reported by MDE.

Of course, school districts provide many other transportation services, which may or may not be mandatory. Some of these transportation services are paid for through special funding mechanisms, while others are paid for through general revenue funds. Examples of these other types of student transportation are: transportation for *desegregation*, both within and between districts; for *special education* students; for *extracurricular activities* and field trips; for *summer school*; and for students in the District through *open enrollment*.

It is not uncommon for expenses for these other types of student transportation to make up the majority of a district's transportation expenses. For example, in 2010-11, the Brooklyn Center School District spent more than twice as much on transporting students attending special education programs than it did on regular to-and-from school transportation; its transportation expenses for multi-district integration programs were even higher.

When considering the efficiencies that might be gained through regional collaboration and the use of transit, it is important to keep in mind these various aspects of student transportation, since some of them are more amenable to innovative approaches than others.

Methodology

The researchers conducting this study employed a variety of methods, including gathering input from school transportation experts, an online survey of school district transportation professionals, analysis of school transportation data from MDE, a review of existing research and literature, and in-depth case studies.

Input from school transportation experts

As part of the process of designing this study, the Improve Group staff sought the views of a variety of student transportation experts. These included individuals representing several State departments, particularly Education, Transportation, and Public Safety. The researchers also attended meetings of transportation professionals, including the Department of Public Safety's Office of Pupil Transportation Safety stakeholder's meeting, Sept. 24, 2012, and the Minnesota Association for Pupil Transportation (MAPT) Regional meeting, Oct. 18, 2012, to gain the insights of transportation contractors and school district transportation administrators.

Online survey of school districts

The Improve Group administered an online survey to school district transportation officials between October 9th and November 5th, 2012. Invitations to participate in the survey were sent by email to members of MDE's Transportation Directors listserv, using a contact list provided by the Department. A separate invitation was distributed to school district superintendents via their newsletter.

A total of 353 responses were received from 305 school districts. MDE's contact list contained information for 502 districts (338 traditional districts and 164 charter schools), making the overall response rate 61%.

Responses to the survey are categorized according to whether they are from a traditional school district or a charter school (each charter school was considered to be its own district) and whether the District was in the Twin Cities metropolitan region[1] or in Greater Minnesota. Results are presented for each of these four groups (metro and non-metro traditional districts; and metro and non-metro charter schools). The survey questionnaire and summary data tables appear in the appendices of this report.

[1] Hennepin, Anoka, Washington, Ramsey, Dakota, Scott and Carver Counties.

Analysis of school transportation data

MDE's Data Center provides data files on several aspects of student transportation, including "District Total Mileage, Hours and Routes" and "Expenditures, Pupils Transported, Other Data." Data from these files for fiscal years 2010 and 2011 were used to make basic comparisons between school districts on topics such as cost per student transported and cost per mile. For more detailed analyses, the Department's "Revenue and Expenditure Analysis" spreadsheet for FY2011 was used, supplemented by district-level Data Verification Reports from FY2010 and FY2011.

Review of existing research and literature

The potential for improving efficiency in student transportation, either through regional collaboration or the use of transit, has been studied in a number of locations around the United States. Some of these studies are of programs that have been implemented, while others are projections of what will happen if changes are made.

In-depth case studies

As a way to gain deeper insights into issues around student transportation, this study included case studies of 3 school districts and one group of school districts. For each case study, interviews were conducted with several people involved in making student transportation decisions for the District, including superintendents, transportation directors, consultants and bus contractors. The four case study locations, Little Falls, Marshall, Minneapolis and the West Metro Design Team (a collaboration including Minneapolis and several suburban districts), were selected in consultation with the Departments of Administration and Education, using the following criteria:

- A mix of urban, suburban, and rural districts
- Districts from the Twin Cities metropolitan region and greater Minnesota
- Districts of similar student populations and overall characteristics that differ in their transportation expenditures (Little Falls and Marshall)
- A district that has implemented the use of transit for general student transportation (Minneapolis)
- Districts that are studying the possibility of greater regional collaboration (the West Metro Design Team)

The case studies are included with this report as stand-alone summaries. Key findings from these case studies and potential statewide implications and applications are embedded within the report as applicable. The case studies of the two Greater Minnesota school districts, Little Falls and Marshall, highlight the challenges of transportation in non-metro locations. Their similarities also

provide an opportunity to compare and contrast specific aspects of student transportation. The case study of Minneapolis Public Schools provides a closer look at the challenges urban school districts face in transporting students and highlights their innovative use of public transportation as the primary method of transporting high school students. The case study of the West Metro Design Team, a coalition of school districts in the west metro, describes these districts' strong commitment to collaboration; and highlights the lessons they have learned, and the progress they are making.

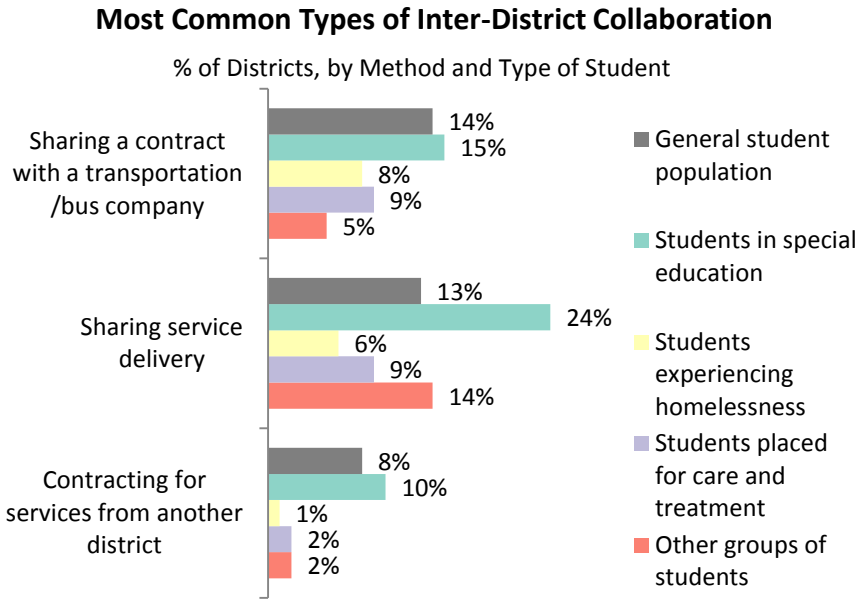
Research findings

This part of the report focuses on three ways in which efficiencies might be achieved in student transportation: increased collaboration between school districts; using public transit; and contract negotiation. The findings combine information obtained from the survey of school districts, the case study interviews, and the literature review conducted for this study. Included in this section are overviews of what Minnesota school districts are currently doing, evidence from other states, and discussions of barriers that might hinder efficiency gains.

Collaboration

Most (61%) of the school districts responding to the survey report that they are currently engaged in some type of collaborative activity with other districts. Their responses, however, indicate that there is substantial variation in how districts are collaborating; efforts to foster further collaboration need to take into account these variations.

For example, collaboration varies with location and type of school district. While 80% of the traditional districts in the metro region engage in some type of collaboration, only 48% of metro-area charter schools do.



Furthermore, rates of collaboration vary according to the type of student transported. At the aggregate level, 35% of the Districts report some type of collaborative activity for transporting the general student population. Collaboration between districts is most common for transporting students with disabilities who require special transportation[2]; 39% of the Districts report some sort of collaboration for these students. Districts report the lowest level of collaboration (15%) for students who are experiencing homelessness. However, once again these aggregate numbers mask significant regional variation; 68% of traditional metropolitan districts engage in collaboration for transporting students with disabilities who require special transportation, and 49% of them collaborate in the transportation of students who are experiencing homelessness.

Finally, rates of collaboration vary by the type of collaborative activity. Almost 40% of the Districts reported collaboration for shared service delivery (providing transportation for another district while transporting its own students, or vice versa);[3] only 4% reported buying gas along with another district.[4]

"The current economic downturn has caused us to review everything in a quest to increase efficiency. The focus of education dollars on educating students is even more critical today than in the past. The pressure to increase student test scores and stay off the AYP list of failing schools is tremendous.

Safety and reliability have always been our strengths as well as our goals. Balancing safety and efficiency is difficult. If we are too efficient, we may sacrifice safety. Being lax on efficiency may cause a high spending budget. Of course, our goal is to keep our students safe without sacrificing efficiency."

-Keith Paulson, Transportation Director, Anoka-Hennepin

These examples highlight the importance of taking into account variations in individual districts' needs when promoting regional collaboration. As mentioned above, over half of the Districts that participated in the survey are already collaborating in some fashion. Many expressed the opinion that they are already doing as much as is feasible, and several were concerned that regional collaboration would be imposed on them.

> I am very concerned this type of legislation would negatively impact charter's ability to make autonomous decisions. Busing is expensive, but the legislature needs to fund schools, not set up collaboratives where the smaller districts lose out to the bigger ones. [A metro-area charter school]

[2] In this report, for ease of reading we will refer to students who receive special education services, and whose disabilities prevent them from utilizing regular school transportation, as *students with disabilities, who require special transportation,* with the understanding that most students who receive special education are transported on the regular bus, with non-disabled peers.
[3] But only 13% of metro-area charter schools reported collaborating in this way.
[4] But 20% of traditional metro-area districts collaborate by buying gas together.

Please do NOT place another state mandate to make regional transportation a requirement. The Northwest Service Cooperative and regional Superintendents are currently looking at cooperating purchasing of fuel and vehicles as a way to lower costs. Rural Minnesota is unique in the distances we have to travel and the road conditions we need to navigate. This is best left up to local districts. [A non-metro district]

Communication is key – with families, changes to transportation, lunch or recess bring out the parents far more than changes in the classroom. There is less duplication of services when you coordinate. Once you really start collaborating to share services you can see the big picture." [A metro-area district]

The Story of WATS

The Wide Area Transportation Services (WATS), originated in 1994, was designed to assist school districts in collaborating to transport students with disabilities who require special transportation. The need for this type of collaboration was a frequent topic at the MDE issues committee meetings around the time of WATS' founding.

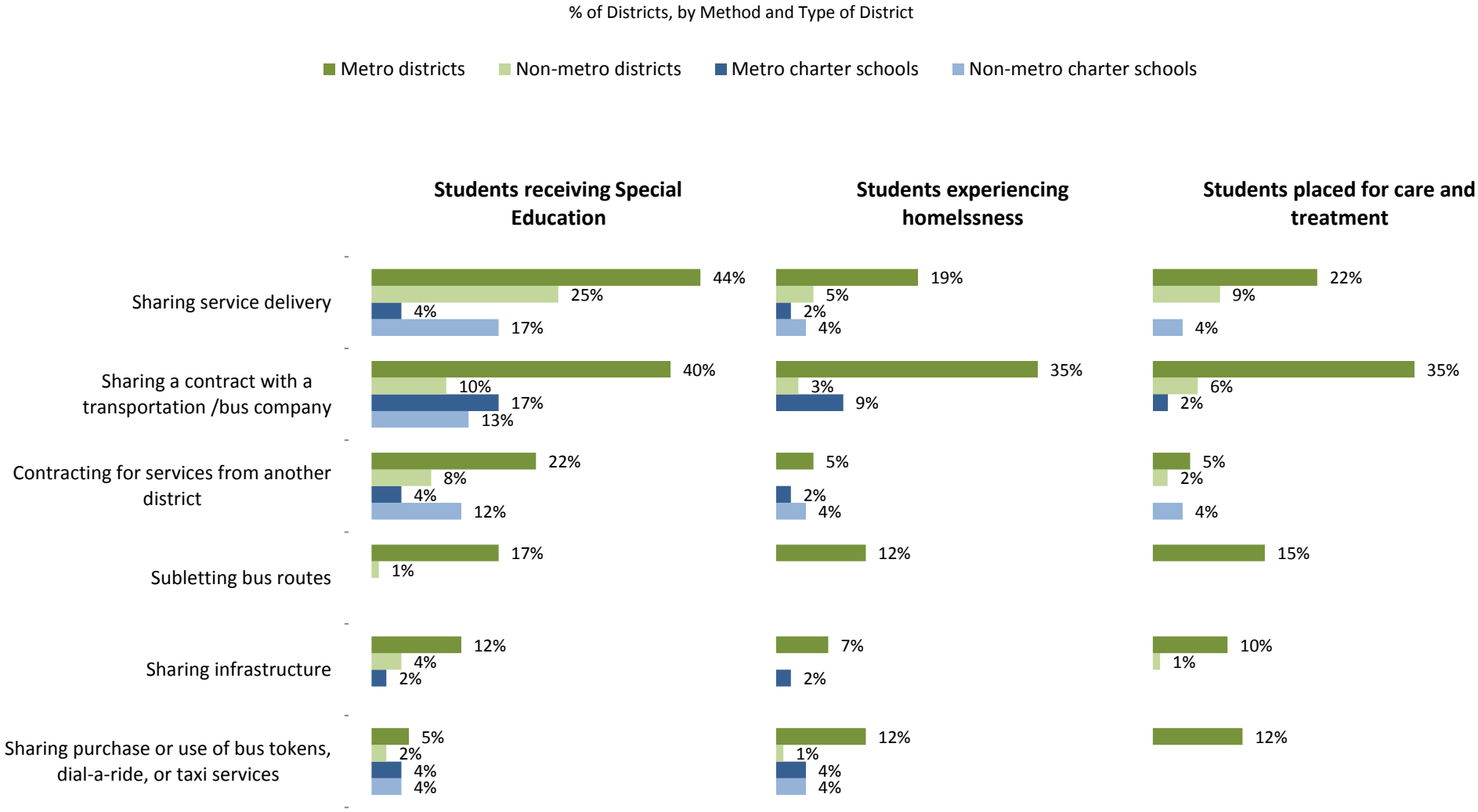
This study found that while many traditional districts and charter schools find efficiency through collaboration around transporting students with disabilities who require special education, a majority (61%) do not, illuminating a need for more sharing of collaboration strategies or facilitated collaboration, such as what WATS can provide.

A challenge to full utilization of WATS has been that school districts will not commit to using WATS unless cost savings are projected; yet transportation vendors cannot offer pricing without a solid student count and geographic service area. WATS still exists, fulfilling its purpose by providing special transportation for a number of suburban school districts, and has evolved to meet other needs, mainly through offering expertise in maximizing the effectiveness of routing software.

As mentioned previously, collaboration rates between districts are highest for **transporting students with disabilities who require special transportation**, with 39% of the Districts reporting some type of collaboration in this area. Collaboration rates are highest for metro-area traditional districts and lowest for metro-area charter schools. The most common ways of collaborating are sharing a contract with a transportation or bus company and sharing service delivery. About a fifth (22%) of traditional metro-area districts also contracted for services to another district.

Some school districts spend more resources transporting students with disabilities who require special transportation, students who are experiencing homelessness and students in care and treatment than they spend on regular to-and-from school transportation. Achieving efficiencies in transporting these special populations could result in significant savings for some districts.

Collaboration for transporting students outside of regular to-and-from school



One of the most-cited ways of collaborating between districts was in the transportation of students to the Minnesota State Academies for the Deaf and Blind in Faribault. While the Academies are residential schools, some students participate as day students and are transported to and from their homes each day, from distances up to an hour and a half each way. All Academies residential students are transported home Friday afternoon for the weekend and back to Faribault on Sunday night or Monday morning. A typical collaboration example is from the Hopkins school district (ISD 270), which works with four other districts transporting students back and forth five days a week to Faribault. Without the collaboration, each district would be bringing a bus back and forth every day.

Most districts were not able to quantify the cost savings that resulted from sharing transportation to Faribault, but they cited the savings nonetheless.

> Cost savings in the Faribault collaboration come from the fact that we don't have to hire a driver to drive to Faribault twice a week. We have a hard time filling positions like that in such a small town. The contracted company also has its own insurance to cover their portion of the route. [A non-metro district]

Interestingly, collaboration among school districts for students with disabilities who require special transportation can sometimes increase transportation costs. In the southeastern part of the state, five districts (Southland, Grand Meadow, LeRoy-Ostrander, Glenville-Emmons, and Lyle) formed a regional consortium. According to Jerry Reshetar, superintendent of both the Grand Meadow and Glenville-Emmons district:

> Each district has a program as their specialty: Lyle has elementary EBD, Grand Meadow has DCD, Southland has HS EBD, LeRoy has autism, and Glenville has early childhood special ed…. Transporting students to the appropriate locations keeps these students in our districts for services. Transportation costs go up, but special education costs go down dramatically….Over the past two years our special education consortium has saved over $200k.

In addition to collaborating for students with disabilities who require special transportation, some school districts also described their efforts to collaborate to meet transportation requirements for **students who are experiencing homelessness** and **students placed in day programs for care and treatment**. Among traditional districts in the metro region, 49% collaborate in the transportation of students who are experiencing homelessness, and 58% report collaborating for transporting students in care and treatment. These rates of collaboration are substantially higher than in the other district types (charter schools and non-metro traditional districts).

One of the unique aspects of transporting students who are experiencing homelessness is that if they move outside of their district but are still homeless the District is still required to provide

transportation so they can continue at the same school. The federal McKinney-Vento Act requires this, as a way to help these children receive the stability of "one child, one school, one year."

Perhaps the greater density of students who are experiencing homelessness in the metropolitan area allows for greater collaboration among districts, as in the following example.

> I have experienced better use of our resources. We will have Minneapolis bring students into Hopkins on their way here. This saves us the time of driving into Minneapolis to pick up our students who are experiencing homelessness from shelters. [A metro-area district]

Even so, many respondents expressed a desire to increase the efficiency of transporting students who are experiencing homelessness.

> It would be nice to share costs for homeless pick-up when shelters are located outside of the District boundary. [A metro-area charter school]

Some of the questions on the survey distinguished between students with disabilities who require special transportation, students who are experiencing homelessness, and students placed for care and treatment. In written comments, however, respondents provided examples of collaboration across student types.

> Wayzata and St Louis Park collaborated with homeless and special education. Wayzata dropped a homeless student off in Burnsville and then picked up a St Louis Park Student in a special education program in Burnsville and dropped them off at home in St Louis Park. St Louis Park saved $100 per day and Wayzata saved $50 per day. This is just one example. [A metro-area district]

Although districts are already collaborating in the transportation of these special populations, their ability to do so depends on knowing what each other's needs are. One survey respondent suggested establishing a website listing transportation needs to foster communication between districts.

While low population densities and large distances to travel inhibit collaboration for day-to-day student transportation among rural school districts, they have the opposite effect of fostering collaboration for extracurricular transportation; non-metro respondents mentioned it numerous times. Many rural districts are not large enough to form sports teams by themselves, so they pair with another district, often sharing transportation. However, collaboration does not always lead to reduced costs.

> When there is an activity involving numerous schools within a region, schools should combine to use one bus, rather than each take their own bus. This saves fuel, wear and tear on the buses, and the need for each school to provide a bus driver. We typically have the school farthest from the event drive, picking up the other students from other districts along the way, whenever possible. [A non-metro district]

> We are paired in sports with another school district. This saves us transportation costs on game days as all athletes from both schools ride together. However it actually ends up costing more money in transportation costs as we have to send a bus each day for practice to the other school district. [A non-metro district]

Context from other states

Existing research about student transportation cooperative efforts, in Minnesota and in other states, shows agreement about the benefits of collaboration to improve efficiency. There are many examples of regional collaborative efforts to streamline various aspects of student transportation. For example, a report was prepared for Intermediate District 287 by the Hanover Research Council that provides an overview of consolidated or cooperative transportation programs to help with the District's planning. This Hanover report quotes the New York state Chancellor of schools describing expected cost savings, statewide, of planned expansion of existing regional transportation initiatives. In the first year of the expansion school districts were expected to save $30 to $60 million; and in the second year, savings would double. All of the regional cooperative efforts described in the report are either saving money or projected to save money.

According to Hanover, most cooperative transportation systems are voluntary. A table containing the basics of some existing cooperative transportation systems is provided below.

Cooperative Unit	Key Program Features	Estimated Cost Savings
Dutchess County Board of Cooperative Services (BOCES), Dutchess County, NY	• Coordinated contracts • Consolidated regular and special education routes	"13 member districts have saved over $3,000,000 over 11 years."
Eastern Suffolk County Board of Cooperative Services (BOCES)	• Special Education route coordination for 51 districts • Specialized equipment and staff are maximized	Saves districts money, similar to carpooling; school districts pay substantially less than they would alone.
State of Rhode Island	• Collaborate to transport students with disabilities, students attending charter schools, private, parochial and vocational-technical schools • Mandated; phasing in.	R.I. school districts are expected to save money under this new plan, with savings for some as high as six figures, annually, and $4 million statewide.
Sussex County Regional Transportation Cooperative, Sussex County, NJ	• Not focused on any particular group of students • Coordinates routes between districts; liaison between contractor and district • Completes some state reporting on students transported	Not provided

Cooperative Unit	Key Program Features	Estimated Cost Savings
Washington-Saratoga-Warren-Hamilton-Essex	• Coordinates common special education routes; districts can provide buses and drivers • Provides route, schedule and data management, and state reporting for five component districts	Not provided

The Hanover report, compiled for Intermediate District 287, indicates that most collaborative transportation systems are formed for the purpose of transporting students with disabilities who require transportation across district lines. Some are also for general student transportation, as well as other specific groups of students. Some transportation cooperatives simply identify and coordinate common routes. The amount of cost savings varies.

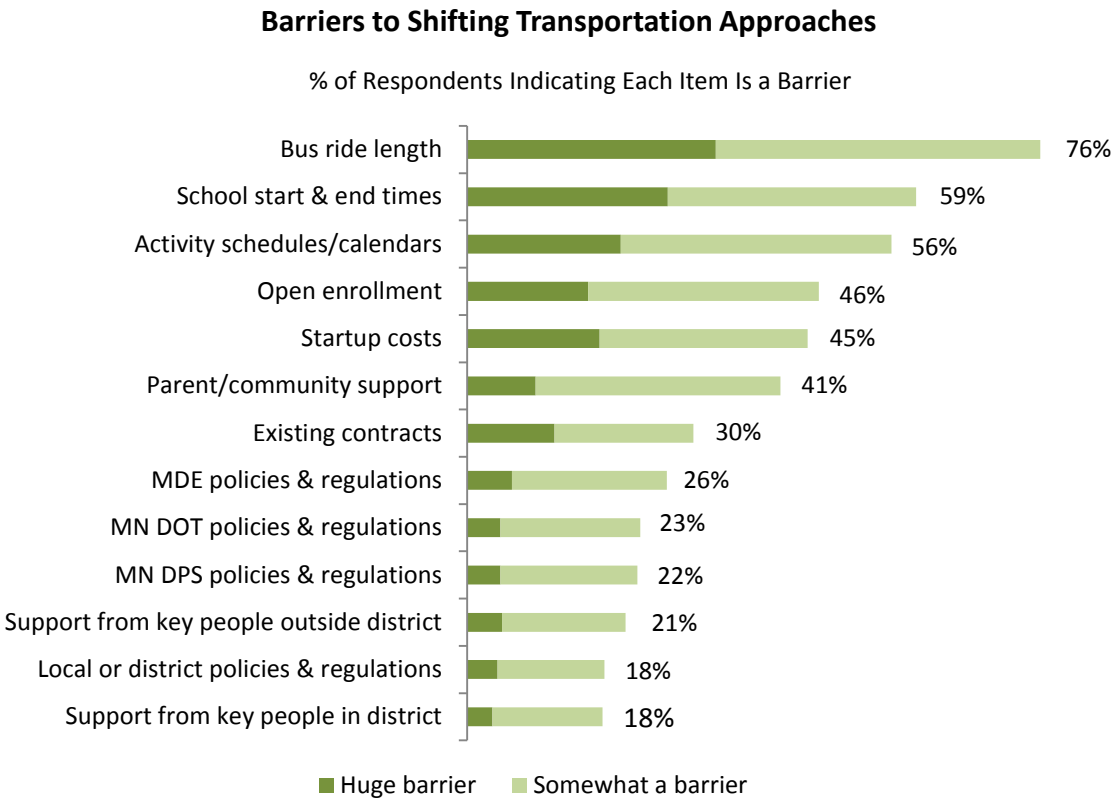
Barriers to collaboration

As discussed, much of the collaboration that is already occurring is taking place outside of regular to-and-from-school student transportation. Several barriers pose challenges to collaborative approaches in getting students to school each day. The survey of school district transportation officials included a question about factors that might pose barriers to shifting the District's approach to student transportation. Although the question was not focused specifically on collaboration, write-in comments on the survey and results from the case-study interviews indicate that barriers are significant impediments to collaboration as well.

"Efficiency" in student transportation can mean many things: minimizing costs and maximizing service are often competing priorities. **Bus ride length** was the top-ranked barrier to trying a new transportation approach among all district types; overall it was rated as a barrier by 76% of all districts. Bus ride length was an issue even for metropolitan districts.

> Students who normally have a very short ride, when you join together with other districts, their ride gets longer. We need to let the parent know we are using our resources efficiently. Most of the time they understand. [A metro-area district]

School districts typically have policies concerning the maximum time a student will be on a bus. (One hour is a common maximum time.) To stay within their limits, many districts have added extra buses, which may result in buses running at less than full capacity. Districts have also used software to optimize their bus routes, and some have moved to systems of neighborhood hubs, thereby limiting the number of pick-up locations.



Among non-metro traditional districts, a collateral factor, **geography,** was the most-cited issue preventing existing collaborative models from being scaled up. The large area and rural nature of many of Minnesota's school districts poses challenges to collaboration for regular, to-and-from school transportation. Parts of Minnesota have "terrain extremes," as described by Tom Watson, Watson Consulting Group: "For example, Grand Rapids Public Schools covers 2,000 square miles, with Lake Winnibigoshish on the west side, and kids on opposite side that are residents of the school district. They have 4,000 kids, and want to keep kids riding no more than 1 hour. This means few kids on the buses." As a representative of a non-metro district wrote:

> Due to the distances involved I am not sure that cost efficiencies would be realized in route and bus use collaboration. It may be possible to [have] some collaboration in the management of a system, and sharing certain kinds of infrastructure (radio, routing services, GPS and management).
>
> As a mostly rural district with potentially long bus rides for some students and having considerable distance to most of the schools in neighboring districts, there does not seem to be many opportunities to share services…. While the School Board would strongly consider any opportunity that could present a cost saving to the District, they are also concerned with the trade-off in service for those cost savings and those service concerns weigh heavily against the savings. [A non-metro district]

Scheduling issues also inhibit collaboration for day-to-day student transportation; school start and end times were the second-ranked barrier overall, cited by 59% of all districts (and 71% of traditional metro districts).

> School start and end times dictate how we can use our transportation system. A time change of as little as 5 minutes can mean the difference of 15 additional buses to the system. [A metro-area district]

With these existing challenges within individual school districts, the task of coordinating school start and end times between districts as part of a regional transportation strategy would be even more difficult.

> We have been unable to agree on a common school start/end time thus reducing the opportunity for collaboration with neighboring schools. [A non-metro district]

In addition to differences in daily schedules, school districts do not follow the same **academic calendars**. While some districts report saving a lot of money on transportation costs after switching to a four-day school week, it would be difficult for them to collaborate with a neighboring district that has a five-day school week. Several respondents suggested that coordination would be facilitated by having a statewide school calendar.

Many respondents (46%) also viewed **open enrollment** as a barrier to shifting their transportation approach. Among traditional school districts, open enrollment was cited as a barrier to transportation innovation by 54% of non-metro districts but only 29% of the metropolitan ones. For charter schools, the situation was reversed: open enrollment was rated as a barrier more by metro schools (42%) than by non-metro schools (21%).

One result of open enrollment is that districts, especially those with declining enrollment, will send buses across district boundaries to pick up students. It is important to understand the dynamic of declining enrollment related to open enrollment. School districts who take in students from other districts under MN's open enrollment statute, §124D.03 are required to provide transportation to these students from their district border, and to provide door-to-door transportation to open-enrolled students whose IEP requires it. Many also provide transportation within the borders of other districts in order to transport open-enrolled students, because transportation becomes a perk to offer parents who are "shopping" for a school outside their own district; and school districts are essentially competing for students, and the funding that follows them.

The perception that neighboring districts are acquiring students from each other can result in decreased cooperation between districts.

Although many districts collaborate in providing transportation to students with disabilities who require special transportation, saving money as a result may run afoul of **federal maintenance of**

effort (MOE) requirements, which state that, in each year, states and school districts spend at least as much on special education as they spent in the previous year. If a school district fails to "maintain effort," MDE is required to penalize them financially, thereby wiping out any cost savings they achieved. The intent of this is to make sure school districts and states do not cut services to students with disabilities, even when times are tough. However, the MOE requirement prevents districts from making changes that cut costs, even when they do not compromise services. As a result, if a strategy to collaborate to provide special transportation works well, and saves districts money, they may be penalized for failing to maintain effort.

In addition to the factors just discussed, the in-depth interviews identified the following barriers to collaboration.

- **Complexity of making changes**—The overall complexity of the student transportation system makes it difficult to determine where collaborative efforts would have the most impact on efficiency. Some of the factors that need to be considered are bus maintenance; bus maintenance facilities; depreciation, operating, and capital expenses; the number of small versus large buses; driver wages and benefits; and fuel costs. Further study would be needed to identify how collaboration around each of these factors contributes to overall efficiency, or what collaborative practices have the biggest bang for the buck.
- **Leadership/ownership**—Changing a system such as transportation in a school district requires a high-level administrator to take ownership and provide sustained leadership over time. The West Metro Design Team is a perfect example. They have been working since 2009 and are just now getting to a place where they have a clear plan for starting to implement shared services. Without sustained leadership, change is unlikely to happen. However, superintendents are often, appropriately, fully consumed with the challenges of instructional leadership. It is difficult for high-level administrators to find the time needed for attention and leadership around modifying their transportation system. According to Tom Watson, this can sometimes lead to quick transportation fixes that might not be the best long-term or cost-effective solution.
- **Perception of risks outweighing benefits of collaboration**—In one meeting of transportation directors, there was consensus that district leaders perceive collaboration to have risks that outweigh the benefits. For example, there can be potential for public scrutiny, public opposition, or risk of losing control to another entity, and the potential efficiencies do not seem worth these risks. Many will say that student transportation does not appear to be broken, so why should they try to fix it? It is hard to pin down cost savings without specific data analysis and comprehensive study, but those studies require time and up-front investment of resources and energy to investigate inefficiencies, conduct research and make plans. If the perception exists that nothing needs to be fixed, however, there will be no motivation to conduct the studies in the first place.

- **Loss of local control**—If a school district wants to collaborate with another to improve efficiency in transportation, it might have to change some bell times, policies or practices. At the level of transportation director and business office, there is fear that collaboration could result in loss of jobs, possibly even their own, or members of their staffs. According to Tom Watson, school districts leaders are accustomed to having their transportation director right down the hall, and they do not want to lose that. "The risk and uncertainty that inevitably accompanies a change of this magnitude, coupled with the actual or perceived relinquishing control over each district's students ("our kids") often trumps the benefits demonstrated by underlying analysis" (Management Partnership Services, Inc., 2012).
- **Fear of Consolidation**—One insight, shared by Brad Lundell, a longtime education lobbyist, is the barrier of an unspoken, but undoubtedly real fear of consolidation. In other words, in non-metro districts, there is a barrier created by an underlying fear that if small districts collaborate to provide transportation, the next obvious question would be, why don't they just consolidate?

Public transit

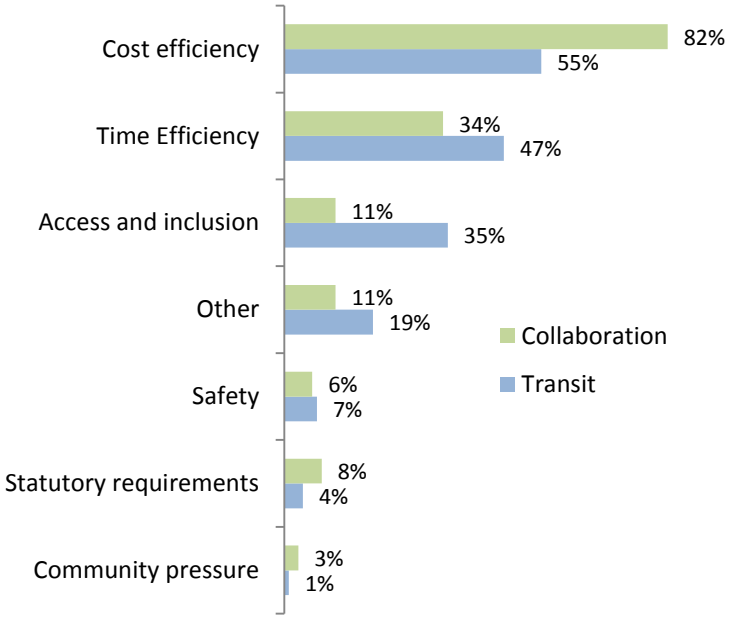
Transit encompasses more modes of transportation than public buses running on fixed routes; it also includes cabs, dial-a-ride services, and light rail. These different modes provide options for school districts to use transit in a variety of ways, and for different student needs.

Overall, 27% of the Districts that responded to the survey indicated that in the recent past they had considered using public transit as a substitute or supplement for student transportation. As with responses to other questions on the survey, there were regional variations in the responses to this question. Only 20% of non-metro districts indicated that they had considered using transit, compared to 38% of metro-area districts. Metro-area charter schools indicated the most interest in exploring transit options (44%).

About 40% of charter schools, both metro and non-metro, that considered using public transit actually made some changes. As a result, the highest rate of transit use adoption was among metro-area charter schools (17%), followed by non-metro charter schools (12%). Among traditional school districts, 10% of those in the metro area implemented changes regarding transit, while just 6% of non-metro districts did.

Motivations for Collaborating vs. Considering Transit

% of districts citing each item as one of its top two motivations



Motivations for collaboration and for transit have some differences that suggest that efforts to promote the use of transit for transporting students should be developed independently of efforts to promote collaboration between districts. Among the Districts that reported considering using transit, the top motivations were cost efficiency (cited by 55%), time efficiency (47%), and access and inclusion (35%). These were also the top motivations among districts that had engaged in collaborative activities, but the percentages were quite different for collaboration: 82% cited cost efficiency, 34% cited time efficiency, and only 11% cited access and inclusion.

Sometimes motivations can overlap for a district, such as this example.

> For us it's an inclusion issue. It is impossible to plan for homeless students who move often. Small on-call vehicles, such as cabs, can help students get to school quicker than times when the District has to find a vehicle on short notice. [A metro-area district]

One of the advantages of using transit is the **flexibility** that it provides school districts, especially for students in special populations (such as those experiencing homelessness or with special needs). Many districts will use transit options until such time as it becomes more cost-effective for them to provide the service themselves.

> Until we can arrange school bus transportation for homeless students, we have utilized a cab to get the student to/from school. However, these students are only utilizing a cab for a few short days, then they are placed on a school bus once we can re-route buses. The [cost] of cabs is much greater than the monthly rate we pay our bus operators for transportation, by contract. This is the reason why students are using cabs for a few short days, until I can arrange bus transportation with our bus operators. [A non-metro district]

Survey respondents gave varying opinions on the **cost-effectiveness** of using transit. The Robbinsdale school district used to use cabs but found them to be very expensive, adding over $250,000 to their costs. On the other hand, one metro-area charter school estimates that it saves around $60,000 a year in staff time by using the GoTo High School bus pass, while another estimates that it saves around $120,000/year, even though its middle-school-aged children do not qualify for the high school discount. Even non-metro districts, with fewer transit options, report savings from the use of transit.

> We use Prairie 5 rides if we have problem with a student riding a bus. With using the Prairie 5 rides it saves us a lot as long as the children are in town. We pay a single driver to drive a van $15 per trip where Prairie 5 charges only 1 or so per trip. [A non-metro district]

In Minneapolis, the use of transit could be structured in such a way as to produce cost savings, but other considerations are deemed more important, like access and inclusion.

> It would be cost efficient except the District decided to give free transit passes to students inside the walk areas of their high schools who were eligible for free/reduced price lunches. That was done so that they could also benefit from the improved access to school before or after classes, to get to work after school, or to visit libraries or other resources that would assist their achievement. … There would be some cost savings if only transportation-eligible students rode transit at our expense, however it is more expensive since the walk zone students also have cards…. Metro Transit costs $300/student/year plus administration expenses, and that is slightly lower than the cost to transport on school buses. [Minneapolis Public Schools]

Finally, with rare exceptions, survey respondents reported that **parents and the community at large** were quite supportive of the use of transit for school transportation. Providing evidence of

previous success can help allay concerns. Saint Paul uses transit for students attending its Area Learning Centers and Alternative Learning Programs, and also for some special transportation. However, concerns that parents would be opposed have kept Saint Paul from expanding its use of transit, and neighbor, Richfield, from considering transit at all.

> [Parent reaction] was generally very favorable. Some parents were worried about interactions with the general public (crime, drugs, inappropriate contact, etc.), concern that students would ride the buses elsewhere to skip school. However, we piloted the program with about 1700 students a couple years ago and had very few troubles, so we were confident that it would run smoothly. [Minneapolis Public Schools]

Barriers to the use of transit

Of course, transit use is not an option in areas where it does not exist. But even where there are transit operators, there may be **reluctance to provide student transportation**.

> The use of public transit never got "off the ground". We were going to use Public Transit to transport a Spec. Ed student living at the far end of the school district. Public Transit didn't wish to get involved in this effort. [A non-metro district]
>
> We have a small public transportation option in [our city]. They say they are too busy busing people to work in the morning to bus our students to school. [A non-metro charter school]

Another barrier is **confusion regarding what is permitted by law**,[5] especially in non-metropolitan areas.

> We used the local transit system for transporting special needs students. The service was available and highly respected—it saved us the cost of vans. The Highway Patrol told us to stop using them. We have never really understood the statute not allowing us to use it. When we stopped some of the parents chose to pay their own way since they were more comfortable with the system/drivers. [A non-metro district]
>
> Parents liked what we did because they were used to using [the local transit system] for medical and other areas. State Patrol informed us that we could not use public transit. [A non-metro district]

[5] Federal laws and regulations (49 CFR Part 605) limit the use of public transit to transport students to and from school and on school-sponsored activities and trips. In particular, public transportation cannot be used if it excludes the general public or competes with private school bus operators. There are further restrictions concerning signage and the location of bus stops. However, "public transportation vehicles can be used to transport students and school personnel if they ride regularly scheduled mass transportation service that is open to the general public" (Federal Transit Administration, 2005).

Key findings from Minneapolis with potential for broader application

Use of Public Transportation to Improve Access and Equity - Minneapolis approached its use of public transportation from a standpoint of increasing access and equity for high school students; and not necessarily from a standpoint of decreasing transportation costs. They were concerned about the persistent achievement gap that largely follows the pattern of students from lower socio-economic status continuing to achieve at significantly lower rates than their peers who come from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Minneapolis school leaders recognized that students from more privileged backgrounds had greater access to learning opportunities that happen beyond the school day and school walls while others' opportunities were limited to only what occurs from the time they arrive at school on the yellow bus to the time they hop onto that same yellow bus to return home. Minneapolis High Schools can offer after school programming for students who need it the most without having to add a second layer of transportation. The GoTo Passes allow the high school students to have unlimited access to public transportation from 5:00 AM to 10:00 PM, seven days per week, allowing greater access to learning opportunities.

Public Transportation to Improve Attendance - Students can board a Metro Transit bus from any bus stop, as opposed to being limited to the time and place of their individual school bus stops. This flexibility helps students get to school, even when they did not sleep at home, are experiencing homelessness, or have jobs before or after school.

Considerations to be taken into account

In interviews with other urban and suburban school districts and in the surveys, some people reported that they would not propose use of transit as a tool because parents would be opposed. Three factors might encourage school districts to reconsider public transportation: (a) Given the realities of a persistent achievement gap, statewide, many school districts would like to consider an extended day option for students who are behind; but they do not because the additional transportation required would be cost-prohibitive; (b) Minneapolis has demonstrated a model for engaging parents, students and school officials in the conversation about use of public transportation, resulting in high levels of stakeholder comfort and satisfaction with the program; (c) increased availability of, and demand for public transportation statewide, combined with the examples of many school districts across the country (and now one in our own back yard) makes it a more viable option.

Context from other states

An article appearing in School District News, November, 2012 lists some of the school districts that use public transportation for high school students. These include Phoenix, AZ; Seattle, WA; Milwaukee, WI; Chicago, IL; New York, NY; Baltimore, MD and now Minneapolis. Of these, Phoenix

has transported high school students on city buses for over four decades. Further research highlights additional cities, where school districts use transit for student transportation, including Toledo, OH; Pittsburgh, PA; Alameda, CA; San Francisco, CA; Merced, CA; and Fresno, CA, to name a few. Two areas, student safety and true cost savings, are consistently debated.

> Opponents of public transit said school districts should not be so willing to move away from the safety of school buses. They cited bus construction, driver training and the potential for stranger danger as concerns. It is the safety of the younger students that concerns student transporters, said Bob Riley, executive director of NASDPTS.
>
> "Certainly I think students are better off on the yellow school bus because of the bus construction and the fact that drivers are trained to deal specifically with kids," Riley said. "Transit drivers are not trained to deal with kids, and you don't know who will be riding with the kids. Conditions on a transit bus are much less controlled from a student's perspective." [School District News]

Contract negotiation and internal efficiencies

About 30% of survey respondents cited existing contracts as a barrier to shifting transportation approaches. However, there was not much offered in terms of solutions for managing existing, renegotiating, or negotiating new contracts with student transportation providers. One respondent indicated that they bid their transportation contract each year, but this has large internal staff costs for the work involved; a couple of respondents said that they have had relationships with the same local vendor for years or decades. Case study interview participants were also asked about contract negotiation as a barrier or mechanism for innovation and efficiency, but not much was revealed. Much of what we have learned in this study related to strategies in contract negotiation and internal efficiencies come from an interview with Tom Watson, a consultant who has worked with a many districts across Minnesota to realize efficiencies.

Two important variables of contract negotiation and other efficiency considerations are funding mechanisms and labor laws. The law that outlines school funding changed in 1996. Prior to 1996, student transportation was a dedicated fund; all aid was paid on a cost plus basis. Many school districts are still operating under the legacy of contracts that were created pre-1996 that are carried forward today.

Standing contracts with transportation vendors contribute to many small or considerable challenges to innovative transportation service.

- A question that should be asked, at the state and local level, is, "How many existing transportation contracts have been carried over, year after year, without a thorough examination of cost-effectiveness?" According to Tom Watson, **the history of contracting for transportation**, especially in Greater Minnesota, is that there were many small local bus companies, but often only one in a community. This makes it difficult for school districts to find a competitive alternate to an existing contractor, even though it is required by state statute §123D.52 that districts put work, over a certain amount, out for bids.
- When school districts do decide to change, there can be **collaboration between neighboring districts to negotiate the terms of transportation contracts**. But given the independent nature of MN school districts, it is still advisable for each district to have a separate contract. This is supported by evidence from research of collaborative transportation efforts in other states. For example, cooperative units for school districts in Dutchess County NY and Sussex County NJ (see discussion above) coordinate contracts and act as liaisons between districts and contractors, yet maintain separate contracts for each member district. Changes schools make are difficult for communities. So, Tom Watson advises that even if each district has the same contracts, identical in terms, with the same contractor, it should still be two contracts. Both districts will come out ahead.

- **Age limits on equipment** – Districts can consider making bus age and mileage limits part of the contract. Part of what districts are paying contractors to do is to maintain and replace vehicles. Some contracts call for replacement every 4, 5, or 6 years. For district owner/operator systems the main consideration is the balance between wanting newer buses with newer features, and savings that can be generated by extending bus life. Transportation Director Keith Paulson, Anoka-Hennepin, reports that he saved $500,000 by extending bus life from 10 to 12 years.
- **Driver compensation** – If a school district is in a tough market and having to pay premiums, money can be escrowed in the contract to pay for the wage difference, but the contractor should be required to prove they have tried to find drivers at the regular salary.

Opportunities

One survey respondent pointed out that having the same contractor as another district automatically implies collaboration on gas purchases and infrastructure:

> All collaboration is because we contract with a bussing company. All costs associated with bussing including gas and shared infrastructure inherently are shared with other district that contract with the provider. [A metro-area district]
>
> We currently contract for student transportation. The same bus company holds the contract with Browerville and Long Prairie/Grey Eagle Public Schools. The contract is working on adjusting routes to save both districts transportation dollars. [A non-metro district]

Charter schools:

> We have been able to collaborate with other school districts by tiering our start times. The bus company has agreed on reduced pricing because of this. [A metro-area charter school]

The West Metro Design Team members are looking at what transportation services they can share and how they can more efficiently use the buses they already have on the streets. Every time there are budget cuts, transportation is cut. Team members shared that one commonly used budget reduction strategy is to agree to forgo ordering any new buses for the year. But, the time is running out on this strategy. It used to be common practice to replace ("turnover") buses every 5 years. Now the new normal is to go 15 years before the "turnover." "The game will catch up soon" one member predicted.

Barriers

- **Labor law and collective bargaining considerations** – It is important to understand the role of the Public Employees Labor Regulations Act (PELRA) in any plans to make changes to transportation, as well as other labor laws that regulate how and when changes can be made. It is also important to find ways to work with the labor unions to find common

ground. There is typically, and understandably, concern from labor unions representing bus drivers and others affected by a proposed change. But often, open discussion and a willingness to come to agreement can alleviate this concern. If possible. Tom Watson advises that school districts that are considering changes to their transportation system should consider involving the affected labor unions early in the process and keep them involved and informed, and to make sure no active contracts are potentially breached through whatever transportation changes are being discussed.

- An important consideration for all involved in changes to transportation that affect bus drivers, is that people form **close attachments to bus drivers** and transportation office personnel, whether they are district or vendor employees. People like these employees. When changing vendors or replacing a district operation with contractor, it may be possible to make it a contract requirement for the new vendor to offer jobs to existing employees of the previous employer, within the first 45 days.

Context from case studies

The case studies of transportation in Marshall Public Schools and Little Falls Public Schools provide two different pictures of approaches to contract negotiation. Little Falls described a number of changes they have made in their transportation contracts over the last few years, and has used a consultant to help negotiate specific efficiencies and cost-saving measures into their contracts, while Marshall described an approach that was more focused on customer service and amenities. Examples of specific efficiencies that Little Falls has negotiated into their transportation contracts over time: (a) negotiating a flat fuel cost in its two transportation contracts. Previously, the contracts contained a fuel clause that would increase what they paid for fuel, based on the September fuel price, splitting the increase with the contractor; (b) the contracts used to have Consumer Price Index (CPI) clause, meaning that contracts went up whenever the CPI went up. Now the district only pays for an increase if there is also an increase in the transportation funding formula provided by the state; the percentage increase will be the same as the formula increase. This change alone saved Little Falls $24,000 this past year; (c) conducting a regular survey of the number of students on each route. It believes that conducting this survey may save it from adding new routes unnecessarily.

The comparative analysis of the two districts' transportation revenue and expenditure data below provides some insights into the other variables that affect the cost and the provision of student transportation.

The two districts transported roughly equal numbers of students in 2011—2,248 in Little Falls and 2,264 in Marshall.[6] However, the Little Falls district is over twice the size of Marshall's—382 square miles versus 163. This gives the Little Falls district a student population density (students transported per square mile) less than half that of Marshall's.

Little Falls has three elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. All are centrally located within Little Falls, except for one elementary school, which is in Randall, 16 miles from Little Falls, in the northwest quadrant of the District. Marshall has two elementary schools, one middle school and one high school, all centrally located in Marshall.

Both districts share a similar geography (flat, few lakes), with the notable exception that the Little Falls district is bisected by the Mississippi River, over which there are only two crossing points in the District. Marshall's buildings are in one town, and they use one contractor. Little Falls has schools in two towns and uses two contractors.

Differences in mileage

The total mileage driven to transport students in FY 2011 was 197,715 miles in Little Falls and 169,400 in Marshall. On a per-student basis, this was 88 miles per student transported in Little Falls and 75 miles per student transported in Marshall. Interestingly, even though the student population density of the Little Falls district was about half that in Marshall, the miles driven per student were only 18% higher. Perhaps having one elementary school in Little Falls that is not in the center of the District means that students attending that school have shorter trips to school. Or perhaps the difference is due to the fact that almost a fifth of the students transported in Little Falls are in the "excess" category, who by definition live relatively close to their schools.

Both districts rely mainly on contractors for student transportation. Out of a total of 65 vehicles in the Little Falls district, only 9 were owned by the District. Only 9% of the mileage in Little Falls was incurred by district-owned vehicles. In Marshall, 2 of the 32 vehicles were district-owned, and there was no mileage attributed to district-owned vehicles in 2011.

Differences in revenue and expenses

On both a per-student and per-mile basis, Little Falls received more transportation revenue in 2011 than Marshall did.

[6] Little Falls had 410 "excess category students transported"—students that the District transported even though it was not required to; Marshall had only 6.

Given the differences in square miles and student density, Little Falls received more transportation revenue in 2011 ($1,188,459) than Marshall ($940,969).[7] When divided by the number of students transported, Little Falls received $528.67 per student, compared to Marshall's $415.62—about 27% more.

Revenue per mile driven was only 8% higher in Little Falls--$6.01/mile compared to $5.55 in Marshall, suggesting that, on the whole, the state funding formula seems to be working fairly well in adjusting revenues according to student population density.

The two districts had fairly similar expense profiles. Neither had expenses related to learning year—summer; noon kindergarten transportation; late activities buses; traffic hazards for walkers; and transporting students between public school buildings.[8] Little Falls had higher depreciation expenses, but they were just 1.6% of total expenses, not large enough to affect the overall expense picture.

Expenses in Little Falls, both on a per-student basis and a per-mile basis, were notably higher than in Marshall. On a per-student basis, expenses in Little Falls were $481.54, while in Marshall they were $349.58 (38% higher in Little Falls). On a per-mile basis, expenses in Little Falls were $5.48, compared to $4.67 in Marshall (17% higher in Little Falls).

[7] These revenue figures are the sum of "transportation revenue within general revenue" and "nonpublic to-and-from aid."
[8] Expenses and revenues related to desegregation and students with special needs are not included in this analysis.

Comparison of revenue and expenses

In Little Falls, revenue per student was $528.67, while expenses were $481.54, a surplus of $47.13 per student transported. In Marshall, revenue per student was $415.62 but expenses were just $349.58, resulting in a surplus of $66.04 per student transported.

On per-mile basis, revenues in Little Falls were $6.01, and expenses were $5.48, a surplus of $0.54 per mile. In Marshall, expenses per mile ($4.67) were lower than revenue ($5.55), resulting in a surplus of $0.88 per mile.

While both districts experienced surpluses, on both a per-student and per-mile basis Marshall's surpluses were higher.

2010-2011 "Regular To-and-From School" Transportation Revenue and Expenses

	Little Falls	Marshall
Transportation Revenues	$1,188,459	$940,969
Transportation Expenses	$1,082,494	$791,460
Students Transported	2,248	2,264
Miles Driven	197,715	169,400
Revenue per Student	$528.67	$415.62
Expense per Student	$481.54	$349.58
Revenue per Mile	$6.01	$5.55
Expense per Mile	$5.48	$4.67
Area (sq. mi.)	382	163

Case study summaries

Minneapolis

Two interviews were conducted in Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) in September 2012, regarding K-12 student transportation. The first was conducted with Mark Bollinger, Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), and Robert Johnson, Executive Director of Administration. As part of his duties, Mr. Johnson is responsible for implementation of the GoTo Pass program. The second interview was conducted with a group of MPS officials from the Finance and Transportation Departments: Pamela Blackamore, Executive Director of Student Support Services; Roy Hallanger, Transportation Analyst; Scott James, Director of Transportation; Steven Torgrimson, Executive Director, Finance Services; and Frank Zeman, Assistant Director of Transportation.

General background

The Minneapolis Public School District is Minnesota's third largest school district, with 34,934 students enrolled in the 2010-11 school year in an area of 58.4 square miles. The District includes thirty-six elementary, five middle and seven high schools and an additional twenty-two non-traditional educational programs. There are numerous non-public schools within the District as well.

Enrollments have steadily declined over the past decade; in the 2001-02 school year the District had 48,155 students. In just the 2011-12 school year, 4,348 students left the District via open enrollment, while 884 entered from other districts.

The Minneapolis district is a large, urban district, and 68% of its students are students of color. As a result, the majority of the students the District transports are transported for desegregation purposes. In the 2010-2011 school year, 15,899 students were transported for desegregation; the District provided "regular and excess" transportation to just 8,837 of its own students, plus an additional 2,669 charter and non-public students.

Total "regular and excess" transportation increased slightly from 10,900 in 2009-2010 to 11,506 in 2010-2011, while transportation for desegregation purposes decreased, from 18,347 to 15,899.

Financial analysis

The analysis of the cost of transporting students to school in Minneapolis is complicated by the large proportion of students who are transported for desegregation purposes. As mentioned above, more students are transported for desegregation purposes than for "regular and excess"

transportation, and expenditures for desegregation are more than twice the expenditures for "regular and excess" transportation.

In 2010-2011, the Minneapolis district spent $5,691,544[9] to transport 11,506 "regular and excess" students, for an average cost of $494.96 per student. This amount was a substantial decline from the 2009-2010 school year, when the District spent $6,760,967 to transport 10,900 students ($620.39 per student).

In comparison, the District spent $10,538,099 in 2010-2011 to transport 15,899 students for desegregation purposes, or $662.82 per student.

Methods of providing transportation

MPS uses a combination of owning and operating its own fleet and contracting with 5 different vendors for student transportation service. The ratio of owned to contracted is about one third district to two-thirds contracted. In addition, MPS uses public transportation, and has recently implemented a program whereby high school students receive Metro Transit passes for use in getting to and from school. This new program is called GoTo Student Pass. All high school students are given picture ID cards that allow them to ride Metro Transit buses wherever they go, from the hours of 5:00 AM to 10:00 PM, seven days a week.

MPS also utilizes taxi cabs in some instances to bridge a gap in newly requested homeless transportation. But they do so reluctantly, as they have concerns about the safety of having students transported in these vehicles.

Challenges to collaboration

MPS is a member of the group of west metro school districts calling themselves the West Metro Regional (transportation) Design Team and is interested in working with other districts to improve efficiency in K-12 transportation. In November, 2012, Management Partner Services, Inc. completed a "Collaborative Transportation Implementation Action Plan" for the Design Team. The Design Team is looking forward to finalizing the documents necessary to begin working in collaboration, pending approval by the school boards of the member districts.

Although the final details are not yet worked out, the purpose of this plan is to collaborate on transporting only students who need transportation outside the District where they attend school. As such, this would be a very small percentage of the total enrollment of these districts, yet it would represent the most expensive students to transport. An important understanding is that

[9] These are the "regular to-and-from school" expenses (UFARS finance dimension 720) plus depreciation expenses.

transportation resources would be shared to transport students between districts only when both districts agree to do so. In other words, sharing of resources would occur on a case-by-case basis.

A good example of collaboration among districts is for transportation to the Minnesota Academy for the Blind in Faribault, MN. Due to the long trip and the small number of students, MPS has been working with other school districts for several years to transport these students on one bus, rather than having a separate bus for each school district.

There are a few ongoing concerns about how the challenges can be addressed to make collaboration possible:

- Bell system – MPS has established a tiered system of 6 different bell times (school start and end times) in order to maximize efficient use of buses. They already schedule buses quite efficiently. MPS transportation administrators have a hard time visualizing how to share buses with neighboring districts while maintaining this 6 tiered bell schedule.
- Charter Schools – Charter schools are allowed to choose between the traditional district providing the transportation (funding goes to the traditional school district) or providing their own transportation (funding goes directly to the charter school). When MPS transports charter school students, it receives only $250-$260 per child in transportation revenue from the MN Department of Education. When MPS transports, they determine routes and bus stops for charter school students; and their overall bell system, by default, informs the start and end time of the charter school's day. The charter schools in Minneapolis often opt out because they can offer a more attractive and responsive set of transportation services for their families, and set their own start and end times.
- Policy Differences - each district has different transportation policies that would need to be aligned:
    - 8 light system usage varies from one district to another. In Minneapolis, school buses use 8-way lights and stop arm to stop traffic at residential intersections. On busier "hazard" streets (average daily traffic of over 1500 vehicles) buses use the 4-way hazard warning lights, no stop arm, and students are instructed not to cross the street. Elementary students are assigned to stops where they do not have to cross a hazard street between home and stop.
    - Walk to stop distance – Elementary students walk up to ¼ mile to their bus stop. Middle school students walk up to ½ mile to their stop and high school students still assigned to regular education school buses walk up to 1 mile to their stop.
    - Discipline and consequences for misbehavior on the bus
    - Hazardous streets and areas – MPS designates a street as hazardous when it has average daily traffic of over 1500 vehicles, and elementary students do not cross these streets on the way to or from their assigned bus stop.
    - Busing homeless and highly mobile students, and how quickly transportation resumes for these students, when there's been a change.

Challenges that influence creation of the GoTo Pass program

MPS officials recognize that learning extends well beyond the four walls of the classroom. MPS already had an efficient, successful yellow bus operation, but recognized that student transportation schedules are rigid. Many MPS students do not have access to before and after school events, tutoring, internships, jobs, or programs at local colleges and universities because the school bus is typically the only weekday transportation the student has. This lack of access is an equity issue in MPS. The GoTo Pass program was created as a way to improve access and equity to broader learning opportunities for high school students.

When the idea for GoTo Passes was originally proposed internally at MPS, the primary concerns of the Superintendent, Chief Education Officer, and school board were that schools, communities and families needed adequate time to embrace the change. The original pilot started from an idea from Brenda Cassellius (the current Minnesota Commissioner of Education) when she was an Associate Superintendent in MPS. According to CAO Mark Bollinger, MPS officials knew that "the perceptions didn't line up with facts" when it came to public sentiment about the idea of students riding Metro Transit buses. An original pilot had already started, organized by the Youth Congress, a representative advisory body to MPS, the City of Minneapolis, and other public agencies.

The strategy was to go into schools with an assumption that nobody knew anything about the proposal. Start from the basics, go in confidently, and appropriately respond to faculty and parent questions. Once the plan was set in motion to engage the schools and communities, the biggest thing was to keep engaging parents and schools throughout the planning and implementation stages. Internally, school leaders knew that Metro Transit was safe, reliable, and clean. They spent a lot of time engaging parents around safety and reliability. "Repeatedly reinforce the truth" is the way one official characterized the leadership strategy. In some cases there was push back right up until the first day. But after the first week a lot of the anxieties were squelched because there were very few issues. The Downtown Improvement District, a collaborative of local businesses, was concerned about 4,000 students being downtown each day. School, city and transit officials have been proactive and quick to address concerns, so these concerns also have been largely addressed.

Under a pilot program, initiated by the Youth Congress, the District started small, with summer school and some alternative high schools, under the direction of longtime summer school administrator, Mary Barrie. The next expansion occurred when the Changing School Options program was initiated in fall of 2010. Current high school students who lived outside the new school bus areas were "grandfathered" and given GoTo Passes instead of school bus routes, until they graduated from that high school. The GoTo Pass program is the result of these pilots. The program is being implemented in 2 Phases. 2012-13 is Phase 1. Phase 2 will be implemented in 2013-14. MPS didn't have the capacity to go district-wide all at once. They started with 5 schools; South and Southwest High Schools will join in Phase 2.

There were a lot of concerns expressed by some parents and staff of Patrick Henry High School. Patrick Henry was originally slated for Phase 2, but was moved into Phase 1 late in the game. Given the push back from this school, and because the Lowry Bridge did not open as planned in August, following reconstruction, the District decided to add 4 yellow buses back in (there had been 11 in the previous year) to satisfy the contingent that was worried. These buses are only operating up to the 2012-13 winter holiday break. Already 50-60% of those yellow bus kids have transitioned to Metro Transit. These students are motivated because they are seeing their friends do it, and the fact that the Metro Transit bus stops are often closer to home than the yellow bus stops. At the time of this interview, only about 40 Patrick Henry students were still riding the yellow buses. MPS Administration had organized teams of folks from the Youth Congress and the District who were actually going to ride the buses to identify the remaining issues.

Due to the current bell schedule and the need to still transport Middle School and Elementary students on yellow buses, only 8 routes were eliminated (a 4.5 % decrease from 176 to 168 regular education routes). Although about 2,800 students were new to GoTo Passes in the 2012-13 school year, regular school bus ridership only declined 3.2%, from 24,593 in the spring to 23,810 in October, 2012.

MPS Administration took advantage of the loss in demand for high school buses to move some schools to more favorable bell times. Ramsey went from a 9:40 start to an 8:40 start at its new location, Folwell School, and they have more time for after school activities now. Pierre Bottineau French Immersion is a new school with an 8:15 bell time. Ramsey Middle School, another new school, got a 9:10 AM bell time, instead of the usual 9:30 bell time for middle schools.

The special education buses still service all high schools. With the bell time changes described above, there is increased demand for these buses at the high school bell times (7:55 or 8:30 AM and 3 PM). As a result of these changes, the number of special education routes increased from 185 to 200 (an 8.1 % increase).

MPS Administration decided to give free GoTo Passes to students inside the high school walk zones who were eligible for free/reduced price lunch, so that they would have access to the same opportunities as the other students. As a result, this is a new cost to transport students who have not been eligible for transportation in the past. As students from the remaining high schools begin using GoTo Passes next year, there is hope of reducing some spending on yellow bus transportation.

Goals and results

As stated earlier, MPS officials recognize that learning extends well beyond the four walls of the classroom. MPS officials make it clear that the main goal of the GoTo Pass program is access and equity, NOT cost savings. Leaders of this initiative managed expectations from early on; this was never designed to be a cost-saving measure. Use of public transportation under the GoTo Pass

program helps with athletics, helps families, and allows students access to more life learning activities. GoTo Passes are good from 5:00 AM to 10:00 PM – to encourage students to go to libraries, museums and after school events.

MPS officials attribute the success of GoTo Pass Program to collaboration and ongoing coordination with key partners. The District worked closely with Metro Transit to set up the program, and continues to work closely with them to monitor and adjust. They repeatedly stressed that the success of the GoTo Pass program is completely due to leadership and commitment from stakeholders to make it work, specifically, the Metro Transit Authority, City Officials, the Youth Congress, Minneapolis Police, Transit Police, and MPS Security. Additionally, MPS uses an innovative service called Check and Connect to help communicate with families regarding GoTo Passes. Check and Connect was originally put in place to address student tardiness and truancy. It is staffed by college students who speak different languages, in partnership with the University of Minnesota. In addition to calling home to check on students and discuss attendance, Check and Connect staff now also help answer questions and trouble-shoot issues with GoTo Passes in parents' primary languages.

Metro Transit provides ridership metrics that are useful to the District. For example, district officials can track the time and location that each student boards the bus. When a MPS student boards the bus, the bus operator's screen flashes "MPS Student." There is a MPS photo I.D. on the back of the card. If a student is not attending school, the GoTo Pass can be taken or deactivated. This is a great tool for addressing truancy, investigating behavioral incidents and helping to locate missing students. Ridership trend data will also be useful in enrollment projections and school budgeting. The District has yet to conduct in-depth attendance comparisons, but anecdotal evidence is that attendance is improved in many cases.

In general, by facilitating high school students' use of public transportation to access education, MPS is helping to assure that students can get to school, despite challenges that might make it difficult do so, and helping to prepare students for success as adults living in an urban environment. If for some reason a MPS high school student spends the night somewhere other than home, he or she can still get to school the next morning. GoTo Passes also help the District comply with the requirements of the McKinney Vento Act. High School students attending any MPS high school who become homeless can still get to their school of origin, even from temporary housing outside the District, by using their GoTo Passes. Two SPAN (special education) programs are using GoTo Passes. A special education program for students ages 18-22 working on life skills needed to transition to adulthood (Transition Plus) will begin using GoTo Passes in Phase 2.

MPS officials have been pleasantly surprised with the results they have achieved as they have addressed logistics and legal requirements. In many instances, the GoTo Passes provide more convenience than the old yellow bus system. When conducting analysis and examining routing

possibilities, Mr. Hallanger was amazed to learn from Metro Transit that a very high percentage of Minneapolis residents live within a quarter mile of the closest bus stop. Metro Transit Authority did make some changes to their routes. They added capacity (more buses) to some bus lines specifically to serve the school bell times. They also altered some routes slightly to allow students to get on and off in front of their school, a couple of blocks off the normal bus route. Students up to 10th grade are required by state law to have training in bus safety and bus evacuation, so MPS had to develop a new way to assure that 9th and 10th graders with GoTo Passes get trained.

Other innovations

Efficiencies and cost savings in contracts and routing – MPS transportation officials noted that it can be a risk to efficiency when some school districts get too close to their vendors. MPS is able to stay at arm's length from its vendors. The District has monthly meetings with contractors to keep them informed. MPS has a unique radio system and contract language that allows them to call individual drivers, without having to go through the vendors' headquarters. The result is a much quicker response time. Other innovative contract language includes: contractors underwrite the salary for two MPS dispatchers; MPS leases the radios and GPS devices to the contractors; and the District has the authority to liquidate damages by requiring the contractor to refund money in those instances.

MPS uses GPS and Edulog routing software to improve efficiency. They can see where the buses are and at what time; software matches up the planned stops with the actual stops. School staff can log into the Transportation website to see when bus stops were made. The contract with bus providers gives MPS a lot of flexibility to change, add or delete bus routes. This is important since many students have changes in their school enrollment or transportation needs over the summer, causing a great deal of changes to be processed in August and September.

During the school year many students move or switch before and after school care providers as well. On a regular basis, MPS works with bus drivers and school staff to clean up the bus runs by deleting unused bus stops so that the time can be used for other stops or runs. The GPS system also helps to detect which stops are no longer used and enables managers to verify driver payroll hours. MPS has worked with its contractors to get agreement that they can inter-mingle MPS stand-alone trips (a trip that cannot fit into other schedules) with the charter schools routes, also resulting in cost-savings.

Optimization - Within MPS the Transportation Department suggests the best bell schedules for each school, based on analysis for efficiency, and presents the costs of various scenarios. It is up to other administrators to make the final decisions. If a principal wants to change a bell time, there is a process to check scenarios. The Transportation Department can run scenarios if given a range of desired times. Their goal is optimizing bus utilization. Bell times still impact optimization; but transportation officials acknowledge that very few scenarios would save them money at this point,

so it's pretty well optimized. Once Phase 2 of the GoTo Passes is in place, they plan to re-adjust, looking closely at bell times and number of buses on the road.

Looking to the future – MPS transportation officials are looking into an innovative way Denver Public Schools is using their yellow buses, based on a presentation they attended at a meeting of The Council of Great City Schools. Denver is piloting a new way of providing K-12 student transportation. Essentially the concept involves running the yellow buses more like public transit. The school buses run in continuous routes, like city buses, with all Denver schools acting as bus stops. Any child who is within walking distance of a school can go to a school, hop on, and get to any other school. The routes and schedules are published. Denver has been able to reduce the number of buses on the road and save money. If MPS decides to try something like this, it would be focused on students in Kindergarten through eighth grade.

911 bus – MPS Transportation Officials have found that they can achieve efficiencies and cost savings by making contingency plans. One example is the 911 bus. Innovative transportation staff gutted a school bus and put in a command center. The 911 bus was inspired by lessons learned from the tornado that devastated North Minneapolis in 2011. In the hours and days following the tornado, MPS was unable to deal effectively with power outages and downed trees, and could not communicate important details about student transportation with drivers, families and schools. The bus has a communication center with positions and equipment for four dispatchers, with necessary radios and servers (the server conducts immediate backup of data). The bus is also equipped with a generator sufficient to power all emergency operations; a stabilizer to keep it from rocking; a conference table and chairs; an awning, an under-bus is storage compartment containing additional tables and chairs; a flat screen TV set up with antenna and cable. In addition to operating as a stand-alone command center in an emergency, the bus can be used for community outreach and mobile registration of students at community events. It has been a popular attraction at events showcasing innovations and trends in Emergency Management Services.

School bus driver academy – MPS operates a school bus driver's academy, in collaboration with Dakota County Technical College, for its own drivers and drivers employed by its contractors. In addition to going deeper into typical driver training subjects, the drivers also learn behavior management strategies, communication skills, and important information about transporting students with disabilities and students who are medically fragile. MPS has an administrator for the program. It is designed to ensure consistency among drivers. This program goes above and beyond the training required in Minnesota for school bus drivers. MPS believes the benefits far outweigh the added expense of operating this program. They see a notable difference between their drivers and those who haven't been trained in this manner in their daily interactions with drivers from outside the District. The academy professionalizes the profession, producing drivers who feel respected and therefore think and act more professionally. One MSP official mentioned the example

that drivers learn to write comprehensible incident reports. MPS bills the contractor one third of the cost of the training. MPS covers two thirds. The contractors are supportive because they see fewer problems and greater job satisfaction among their drivers who complete MPS's program.

Clarity of the work – MPS transportation officials believe that they have achieved substantial cost savings over the years through being very clear and specific about what they do. They are deliberate in their communication with school personnel, the school board, district administration, families and students about "what is and isn't the service level we've agreed to provide." This clarity creates a foundation that prevents pressure to make exceptions and bend rules, allowing the system to operate smoothly and efficiently.

West Metro Design Team

Intermediate District 287 was formed by twelve school districts in the western and southern suburbs of Minneapolis to provide special education, alternative learning, and other services to its member districts. Some of the Intermediate District 287 member participate in the West Metro Design Team, which was formed to study and implement measures to collaborate and improve efficiency in transporting students who live in the region.

Current participants in the West Metro Design Team include District 287 member districts Hopkins, Osseo, and Richfield; Minneapolis Public Schools (not a member of District 287); and District 287 itself.

Members of the transportation staff from 4 of the 5 districts, plus a Superintendent from one of the Districts, were interviewed in September, 2012. Those interviewed were: Carolyn Oakes, Special Transportation, Minneapolis Public Schools; Derrick Agate, Transportation Director, Hopkins Public Schools; Michelle Axell, Special Projects Manager, Intermediate District 287; Rus George, Transportation Director, Richfield Public Schools; Kerry Turrentine, Transportation Secretary, Richfield Public Schools; and Sandra Lewandowski, Superintendent, District 287.

General Background

The following tables present information on the West Metro Regional Design Team member districts as well as members of Intermediate District 287 that are not a part of the Team.

Profile of West Metro Design Team and other Intermediate District 287 member districts, 2010-2011 school year.

District	Enrollment	Enrollment Change Since 2001-02	Schools	Area (sq. mi.)	Open Enrollment	
					Into District	Out of District
West Metro Design Team Members						
Hopkins	7,368	-11%	12	29.5	1,285	900
Osseo	21,053	-4%	29	65.1	1,070	1,986
Richfield	4,194	-1%	10	8.0	324	458
Minneapolis	34,394	-27%	70	58.4	884	4,348
Intermediate District 287 Members Not in West Metro Design Team						
Brooklyn Center	2,361	+37%	4	2.7	1,171	224
Eden Prairie	9,846	-6%	13	34.1	498	353
Edina	8,368	+19%	12	13.2	1,161	78
Minnetonka	8,728	+14%	11	31.6	1,494	183
Orono	2,775	+9%	5	48.6	716	100
Robbinsdale	12,261	-11%	22	29.6	1,108	1,341

District	Enrollment	Enrollment Change Since 2001-02	Schools	Area (sq. mi.)	Open Enrollment	
					Into District	Out of District
Saint Louis Park	4,519	+6%	10	10.6	656	337
Wayzata	10,601	+12%	16	43.5	1,068	410
Westonka	2,254	+1%	5	27.9	247	476

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics (students and schools); Minnesota Department of Education (area and open enrollment).

Transportation data for West Metro Design Team and other Intermediate District 287 member districts.[1]

District	Regular & Excess Students Transported		Students Transported for Integration	District-Owned Vehicles	Contractor-Owned Vehicles	% of Total Miles Driven by Contractors
	2009-10	2010-11				
West Metro Design Team Members						
Hopkins	7,649	7,528	417	0	99	100
Osseo	15,640	15,337	1,349	0	252	100
Richfield	2,361	2,118	163	35	127	18
Minneapolis	10,898	11,499	15,899	123	337	57
Intermediate District 287 Members Not in West Metro Design Team						
Brooklyn Center	940	906	433	15	9	0
Eden Prairie	11,060	10,216	137	81	20	0
Edina	7,594	7,892	203	52	34	31
Minnetonka	4,070	3,761	3	0	77	100
Orono	3,130	3,192	0	0	38	100
Robbinsdale	10,147	6,573	743	99	63	19
Saint Louis Park	3,940	4,119	380	0	49	N/A
Wayzata	10,397	10,986	256	0	132	100
Westonka	2,288	2,305	0	0	42	100

[1]2010-2011 school year unless otherwise indicated.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education.

Transportation expenses for West Metro Design Team and other Intermediate District 287 member districts, 2009-10 and 2010-11.

District	Transportation Expense ($)[1]		Cost per Student Transported ($)		Cost per Mile ($)	
	2009-2010	2010-2011	2009-2010	2010-2011	2009-2010	2010-2011
West Metro Design Team Members						
Hopkins	2,883,220	2,247,872	376.94	298.60	N/A	N/A
Osseo	5,635,754	5,348,912	360.34	348.76	N/A	6.05
Richfield	662,453	923,218	280.58	435.89	4.92	6.03
Minneapolis	6,760,967	5,691,544	620.39	494.96	N/A	N/A
Intermediate District 287 Members Not in West Metro Design Team						
Brooklyn Center	259,592	236,790	276.16	261.36	11.75	8.62
Eden Prairie	2,115,836	2,906,212	191.31	284.48	4.78	4.24
Edina	2,159,407	2,225,582	284.36	282.00	4.34	4.40
Minnetonka	1,345,609	1,487,259	330.62	395.44	N/A	N/A
Orono	905,235	928,906	289.21	291.01	4.82	4.93
Robbinsdale	2,850,508	3,189,094	280.92	485.18	3.35	3.40
Saint Louis Park	1,000,699	884,954	253.98	214.85	4.34	N/A
Wayzata	3,125,819	3,372,384	300.65	306.97	4.20	4.53
Westonka	365,916	442,437	159.93	191.95	3.20	3.97

[1]"Regular to-and-from school transportation" (UFARS finance dimension 720) expenses plus depreciation expenses.
Source: Minnesota Department of Education.

Current methods of providing transportation

The present practice is to have resident districts transport their students to out-of-district programs. Each district provides its service in the way that operationally optimizes its transportation resources usage in conjunction with the other transportation services that the District provides. This results in myriad school buses coming and going from member districts. The magnitude of this is depicted in the video found at. www.district287.org/transportation.

Origin of team and vision

In the winter of 2008, Intermediate District 287 engaged member district business and transportation directors in a conversation about transportation to their District 287 Special Education sites. Intermediate District 287 Superintendent Sandra Lewandowski had heard a presentation by a large special education cooperative district in Michigan at a national conference. The Michigan district presented on their shift to regionalized transportation for transporting students with disabilities to cooperative education programs, and how it was their biggest success ever. The presenter described how this created significant cost savings for themselves and their member districts.

Transportation leaders met on November 12, 2010 with the purpose to design a regional transportation model for Superintendent consideration. The work group attendees developed a purpose statement during the daylong event: "We are committed to collaborate among participating school districts to create a safe and efficient regional transportation model."

The regional transportation study has examined the costs and benefits of a more flexible and/or more regional system that might improve the transportation efficiency in the west metro region. The intention of this project is to explore ways to maintain or improve service, and generate efficiencies or savings for districts through collaborative efforts.

Because regional transportation is a big paradigm shift, it takes a long time to come to a common understanding of how it should look. In June 2011, a core group of transportation directors came forward to say joint planning has viability and thus the West Metro Regional Design Team was formed. The team is convinced of the benefits of collaboration, and now the transportation directors work to communicate this belief to their superintendents and business managers. Further information on the origin of the West Metro Regional Design Team can be found at www.district287.org/transportation.

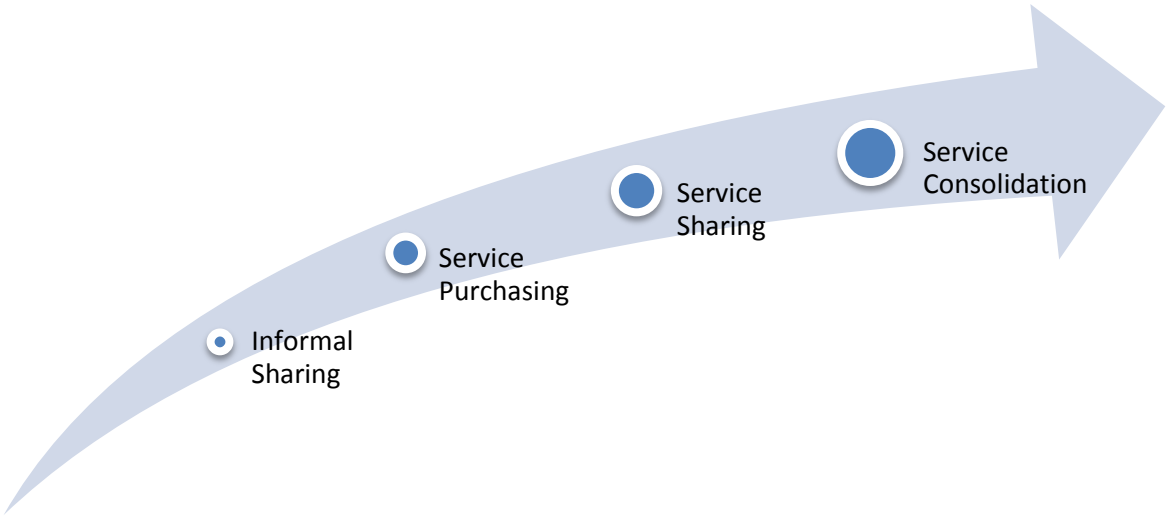
Proposed vision for a regionalized transportation system:

In September, 2011, members of the Regional Design Team heard a presentation called "Shared Transportation Services, A Case Study for Success," given by Tom Platt of Management Partnership Services, Inc. and Carolyn Dias from the Rhode Island Department of Education. The presenters shared lessons learned from large-scale collaborative approaches to student transportation that exist in other nearby places. Three specific systems described were the entire state of Rhode Island, Michigan Special Education, and the Canadian Province of Ontario. The main ideas that team members took away are to follow the steps listed below:

- Define the desired outcome;
- Recognize that the outcome cannot be achieved in one giant step;
- Design incremental steps and objectives;
- Then define what success looks like each step of the way; and
- Measure that success.

The following graphic depicts the continuum that made sense to the team members, as they have moved forward since attending this presentation.

Shared Services Continuum



After listening to this presentation and seeing their years of work summed up so eloquently, one group member said emphatically, "Now we are committed to sharing." The group's main goal is to move from study to implementation. In fall 2012, the Regional Design Team brought in a consultant to help accomplish this goal. The Management Partnership Services, Inc. (MPS) engagement is devoted to the creation of the tools and plans required to carry the initiative forward to implementation with minimal delay. [10]

Challenges to collaboration

Structure of school districts as local educational agencies (LEAs)

The organizational structure of school districts, not to mention their long history as local education agencies (LEAs), is an underlying barrier to any type of cross district collaboration. School districts are by design intended to be "independent". Districts exist to serve their local community, they are loyal to their taxpayers and school boards are elected by local communities. Superintendents are charged to establish and implement policies and procedures to make *their* districts run well. Collaboration across district boundaries (with few exceptions) has never been expected or encouraged; in fact it has been discouraged and lacks incentive.

Parent concerns

When asked about what strategies they use when implementing a change, the team members focused in on what they know about parents' reactions. Parents can be very particular and vocal

10 The West Metro Regional Design Team's implementation plan can be found here:

http://asoft664.accrisoft.com/district287/clientuploads/Transportation/West_Metro_Implementation_Report.pdf

about transportation. "My child has always been picked up by this bus driver. As soon as it is proposed to change, everyone freaks out," one member explained. In most places, even those where contractors are used, the same drivers keep the same routes for years. They get to know the kids, from preschool to adulthood. They get invited to the kids' weddings.

The Hopkins Transportation Director shared, as an example, that he had a parent recently complain due to a pick up time that was just a few minutes earlier than last years' time. Communication is the key. There is always angst with a new bus, new route or new driver. When asked specifically about the possibility of some role for public transit in student transportation, the Hopkins Director was optimistic, "Can't keep doing the same things we've always done if we need to reduce costs." The Richfield director had a different reaction, saying, "We would not even go there. Parents would not be open to it because many Richfield kids have never been on city buses." The Minneapolis schools member, who is responsible for Special Education transportation noted that you have to be so careful when you make any changes in transportation for students with disabilities, sharing that she spends many hours of each day managing parent concerns.

Complexity

"Almost everyone would say there is money to be saved, but getting at a clear number is really hard, because it requires a lot of work and everyone has to bring their data," says Superintendent Lewandowski. There must be a willingness to release student and routing information, which school districts typically have not shared. Each district has its own set of issues, contracting, bus drivers, geography, and enrollment size. The key is when a business director gets involved and can validate that there is real potential of significant cost savings; then the transportation director can help make it work. When the business directors got involved, superintendents become more interested and open to change.

Why is this so hard to put together? Superintendent Lewandowski summed the challenges up this way: "It (transportation) is technically very complex, and we do really operate in silos between and within school districts. They (school districts) have reasons why they think their way is the best way; it's hard for people to think there might be a better way." Since the members of this group have been meeting on the topic since 2009, they have learned a lot of lessons. They have become wise to the political nature of their chosen work. They have learned that the important work must first be done lower than the Board level, by recognizing the tentacles of transportation decisions and getting every decision-maker to the table. In the past they assumed that when they had the transportation director at the table, that district leadership was on board, too. With the newly formed group, they have recognized that to truly take this discussion to the next level, anyone who wants to continue on this path must bring the true decision maker to the table. The business managers and superintendents need to understand the issues involved; otherwise the discussion

will not get to the board level. Each district is different in the latitude given to the transportation person.

The consensus of this group is that the biggest challenge to moving forward with a regionalized transportation system is the paradigm shift that must be made in each participating school district. The second biggest challenge is simple lack of knowledge –you do not know what you do not know. Group members spoke of an epiphany, of sorts, that each member has had over the years. As one member stated, "Once you have your eyes opened to ways collaboration might be better, and more cost effective, you cross a threshold."

Trust and other disincentives

Politically some school business managers look at collaboration as a threat because if school districts can combine forces for transportation, why couldn't it be done for other jobs and functions? So, there is a built-in disincentive to collaborate because of fear of job loss.

Tensions exist among transportation directors, and between them and contractors. This is a disincentive element that is widely observed, as noted by the members of the Regional Design Team who were interviewed. Superintendent Lewandowski agrees. The same element applies to contractors; people get very loyal to their way of doing things. Some members of the group used to be afraid that the result of the work on creating a regionalized model would mean that a single contractor would take over all of the transportation. Some districts had difficulties with particular contractors. Due to some of these tensions, five of the original west metro districts split off from this group and are using a contractor to help them explore ways to collaborate. According to interviewees, this separated group is now seeing the same road blocks: existing contracts with contractors or employees, territorial attitudes, "my kids, my buses, my district."

Superintendent Lewandowski noted that it is hard to incentivize a school district to make *any* change. For substantive changes in transportation to occur, someone in the District with authority would need to "become a believer" and be willing to push others in the District. Team members observed that when certain folks became such believers, they were able to get their superintendents to come on board. Change is almost entirely at the mercy of how much investment each superintendent puts into it. It takes people risking their own reputation and time to make a change like this. Overall, among those interviewed for this case study, there was agreement that it is harder for school districts and parents to consider letting someone else transport their students than it is to consider having someone else educate them.

Innovation

The biggest result of the setback that occurred when the original report was presented to superintendents was that transportation directors shifted their thinking. Rather than approaching this as one giant change that was going to happen, or not happen, all at once, they began to think about collaboration along a continuum (see Shared Services Continuum above). When group members stepped back from the big vision of a regionalized system, and began looking at their current systems, collectively, they began to see the inefficiencies and the ways the contractors were benefiting from inefficiencies. They decided to just start doing as much small-scale, easy to implement collaboration as possible. "We were getting hung up on all the details," one member commented. "We decided, 'Let's just start doing it, and work out details.'"

- Routing efficiencies – The Hopkins transportation director says he has saved the District over a million dollars through routing efficiencies. They have done this by collaborating with other districts, exactly as modeled by the shared services continuum, from the Management Consulting presentation.
- Combining forces for "low incidence transportation"- Hopkins collaborates with five neighboring districts to provide daily low incidence transportation; this includes transportation for students attending the Ann Sullivan School for the Deaf in Minneapolis and the State Academies for the Deaf and Blind in Faribault.
- Minimizing "dead head time"- Dead head time occurs when buses are coming back empty from somewhere. Often one district is already paying the contractor for dead head time and a neighboring district is paying its own driver or a contractor to transport one or a few students in the same area and same time frame, whether it is to and from Intermediate District 287 programs, students in care and treatment, students experiencing homelessness, or other low incidence transportation. Group members have started to communicate with others, and found many ways to share services to minimize payment for dead head time.
- Owning versus contracting - Districts pay varying rates to contractors based on buying power, etc. Richfield has determined that they save money and enjoy more control by hiring their own employees and owning and operating their own buses. Hopkins owns its garage but contracts for the transportation. They estimate that they would need to come up with at least $15 million to switch to being an owner/operator. The cost effectiveness of one method over the other varies from district to district, depending on many circumstances. Members report that Robbinsdale recently switched from owning their own to using contractors. Bloomington switched from contractor to owned 10 years ago. Intermediate District 287 used to own 66 type 3 vans, and required their teachers and paraprofessionals to be trained and take on daily driving duties on top of their regular duties. They found that it did not pay to own all those vans and require their employees to double as drivers. Now District 287 focuses on creating connections between districts and making better use of

member districts' transportation. In addition to this, they have hired their own professional drivers, are now down to owning 16 vans, and are down from 500 employees driving to only 150.

- Driver training program - Minneapolis has a special driver training program. Driving a school bus or van has a big learning curve. Group members explained that driving a school bus is similar to teaching: the first year is very hard, but if you survive the first year it gets so much easier. This program helps new drivers navigate that big learning curve, helps them feel more professional, and provides consistency of practice. Drivers trained in this program have fewer accidents, fewer break downs, fewer discipline issues and more on-time deliveries. Most importantly, the program significantly increases Minneapolis's ability to retain the drivers they have hired. The better trained the drivers are, the longer they stay. Since it typically costs districts or contractors over $7,000 to get each driver hired and trained, Minneapolis feels their driver training program is worth the extra cost, and they save money in the long run. The Hopkins transportation director is considering paying Minneapolis to add their drivers to the program. "It does pay!" was the consensus of the group. See more about this program in the Minneapolis Public Schools Case Study section of this report.

Future innovations

Projections for cost savings from collaboration – This group did a sample projection of cost savings to be gained through collaborating on transportation just for special education. The result: forty fewer buses, with a savings of $48,000 to $65,000 per bus per year – impact and savings varies per district. They know looking at similar collaborative structures for transporting students experiencing homelessness and students placed for care and treatment can lead to even more savings.

Charter schools - Hopkins School District is discussing collaborating with the International School, a popular charter school in the west metro. The plan is that the charter school will choose the option of providing its own transportation, keep the revenue, hire its own drivers, and then do some kind of hybrid where it pays Hopkins for routing. Hopkins will end up transporting some International School students, and the International School will transport some Hopkins students. In addition to cost savings for the District and the charter school, collaboration will shorten students' ride times. These districts are committed to seeing if there are areas to share, and are looking at revenue sharing options with other charter schools.

Marshall

The Marshall School District business manager, Bruce Lamprecht, was interviewed over the phone on Tuesday, October 2. Basic interview questions were emailed to Mr. Lamprecht prior to the interview. Two representatives from Southwest Coaches, the District's contracted transportation provider, Jim and Tom Hey, participated in the phone interview along with Mr. Lamprecht. All three men characterized the relationship between district and contractor as a partnership.

General background

The Marshall Public School District, situated in southwestern Minnesota, has two elementary schools, one middle school and one high school, all centrally located in the city of Marshall. There are also several non-public schools in the city.

The school district enrolled 2,183 students in the 2010-2011 school year. Enrollments were higher than in the previous year (2,146), but they have generally declined since the 2001-2002 academic year, when the District enrolled 2,375 students.

The District provided "regular and excess" transportation to 2,258 students in 2010-2011, up slightly from the year before (2,217). Of these students, 270 attended non-public schools. The District's Data Verification Report for that year listed no students transported for desegregation purposes, but the District did have some modest costs ($9,040) for desegregation transportation, including for extra-curricular events. Through open enrollment, the District enrolled 153 students who lived in other districts; 108 residents of the Marshall district open-enrolled to other districts.

The school district covers 163 square miles, with a density of 14 students transported per square mile. There are no significant geographic barriers to transportation within the District.

The District relies on a contractor to transport its students; while the District owned 2 vehicles in 2010-2011, its contractor owned 30, and all of the miles driven to transport students to school were driven by the contractor.

Methods of providing transportation

The District contracts with an outside provider, Southwest Coaches, to provide transportation. The District also owns and operates three Type 3 busses to supplement the transportation provided by Southwest Coaches. Since Marshall is a college town, there is some public transit available in the community. Marshall Public Schools does not utilize any public transit to transport its students.

Challenges

Mr. Lamprecht opened the interview by stating that some of the biggest cost challenges are outside the District's control. From the standpoint of the contractor, fuel costs, two sets of emission standards, and meeting increased ridership demands while keeping costs down are the challenges. The contractor noted that the two sets of emission standards increases the purchase price of each school bus by $25,000.

In addition to agreeing with the contractors' statements above, the biggest transportation challenges reported by Mr. Lamprecht are meeting increased demands for regular K-12 transportation, especially at the high school level, transporting increasing numbers of students who require specialized transportation, and continuing to provide all the amenities of transportation that the community has come to expect. Regular K-12 ridership has been increasing. Mr. Lamprecht theorizes that the increased demand is attributed to demographic changes, in particular increasing numbers of immigrant families who call Marshall home. Many of these families rely on the school bus. In the past, very few high school students rode the bus, but now many more do. Mr. Lamprecht reported that over the years he has seen an increased number of students receiving Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE), causing the number of ECSE routes to go from 2 to 5 over the last 7 years, and the overall number of students who have significant medical conditions or disabling conditions and require more costly specialized transportation methods has increased as well.

The Contractor said that he is constantly looking at ways to improve, maintain safety, and get most efficiency – it's an on-going process. "We are very cognizant of that," reported Mr. Lamprecht.

> For example, we recently eliminated a route and consolidated the students onto other routes to reduce costs. Then ridership increased; and then we had to put that route back online. It's a conundrum in terms of keeping the budget in line, and keeping the amenities of the services – what people have gotten used to. It's been a losing battle with the transportation portion of the general fund. With a fuel clause – one way or another – the District does have to pay for the increasing costs of diesel fuel. We have considered the two mile threshold but really not too seriously. We would get so much push back. —Mr. Lamprecht

Innovation

When asked about the use of public transit to transport students, the contractor noted concern about legality issues with transit, and that it may not be allowable. District transportation staff replied that they honor their contract and do not consider use of transit. In fact, as after school programs ("Project Success") have been added to improve academic achievement, the District has contracted with Southwest Coaches to provide additional routes to get the participants home.

Some collaboration with neighboring districts occurs for transportation of students with disabilities who need special transportation. Since Marshall is the population center in the area, it is a "hub" for special education services. The District develops pairing agreements with neighboring districts when students with unique needs are enrolled in Marshall's special education programs. Additionally, Marshall and neighboring districts travel in and out of each other's boundaries to transport students who are open enrolled, in order to compete for enrollment.

Rather than cost savings, Marshall seems to be approaching the concept of innovation from a customer service aspect. They utilize a parent notification system that can automatically call all parents or a select group of parents to alert them to urgent news, such as early closure due to weather. They have piloted a program called Blink Spot. This involves the installation of a set of "binoculars" on the bus that scans a student's iris and sends an email to parents tells them the child has been picked up and delivered, at what location, at any given time the child enters or exits the bus. They are also considering installing Wi-Fi on their buses.

Cost analysis

In the 2010-11 school year, the Marshall School District spent $791,460 on student transportation,[11] an increase of over 10% from the expense in the previous year ($715,033). The number of students transported (2,264) was slightly higher than in the year before (2,217); the cost per student transported was $349.58 in 2010-11, an increase from $322.52 in the previous year.

The increase in total miles driven between the two years was directly proportional to the increase in the number of students transported; both increased by 2%. In fact, the miles driven per student increased only slightly, from 74.6 in 2009-2010 to 74.8 in the following year. The expense per mile driven increased from $4.33 to $4.67 over the two years.

[11] These are the "regular to-and-from school" expenses (UFARS finance dimension 720) plus depreciation expenses.

Little Falls

The Little Falls Public Schools Business Manager, Nancy Henderson, and Assistant Business Manager, Shelly Kircher, were interviewed by phone on Monday, October 1. The District contracts with two transportation providers, Palmer Bus Service of Mankato, MN, and Strack Bus Service of Randall, MN. The District utilizes an outside consultant to help them negotiate these transportation contracts, Tom Watson of Watson Consulting Group. Mr. Watson was interviewed on October 8 over the phone.

General background

The Little Falls Public School District (#482) lies in the middle of the state and includes three elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. All are centrally located within the city of Little Falls, except for one elementary school, which is in the northwest quadrant of the District. There are also several non-public schools. In the 2010-11 school year, the District enrolled 2,476 students. Enrollments have been declining steadily over the past decade; in the 2001-02 school year the District enrolled 3,277 students.

In the 2010-11 school year, the District provided "regular and excess" transportation to 2,248 students, slightly more than it had in the previous year (2,238). Of these students, 217 attended non-public schools. The Little Falls School District did not transport any students for desegregation purposes, and 302 of its students walked to school. 120 students attended Little Falls schools through open enrollment, and 292 residents of the District open-enrolled outside of the District.

The School District has an area of 382 square miles, giving it a density of 6 students transported per square mile. It is bisected by the Mississippi River, over which there are only two crossings within the District boundaries. There are no other significant barriers to transportation. The School District is adjacent to Camp Ripley, a National Guard training base, but the area of the camp is not included in the District boundaries.

The District relies on contractors to transport its students; while the District owned 9 vehicles in 2010-2011, its contractors owned 56, and over 90% of the miles driven to transport students to school were driven by contractors.

Methods of providing transportation

The District contracts with two transportation providers, Palmer Bus Service of Mankato, MN, and Strack Bus Service of Randall, MN. The District currently owns two big buses. It keeps one for summer community services, i.e. to take children in community education child care programs out to swimming, to provide transportation for some team sport practices, such as cross country, and to transport shared time students to and from their non-public schools. It also has two smaller activity

buses that are more affordable to operate. A 29 passenger bus, operated by the District, is used to transport students who live in Pierz and are open enrolled to Little Falls.

Challenges

Little Falls public schools reports three challenges to innovation, in no particular order: 1) budget; 2) student safety; and 3) board policy that students are not to be on the bus for more than an hour. Ms. Henderson reports that in reality, the biggest challenge is unhappy parents who call the District, complaining that their students' bus rides are too long; the Board asks that students are not on before 6:30 AM and not riding for more than an hour. The Little Falls School District is geographically huge, and they have a second elementary school in the community of Randall, so transportation time is a significant challenge.

Innovation

Proactively, the District has a standing committee that has been in place for at least 10 years that deals with transportation only. The committee is made up of a representative from each of the two bus companies; Tom Watson, who is the District's transportation consultant; Nancy Henderson, the Business Manager; and 3 members of the School Board. In the past, it has sometimes also included a principal, but not in 2012-13.

Rather than focusing on innovation, the District reports that it takes a conservative approach to transportation. For example, they require coaches and advisors to drive their own activity buses, until the teams get too big for the bus. Staff who must drive their own activity buses go through training that includes a safety test and a physical.

In 2004, the District was in Statutory Operating Debt (SOD) and transportation costs were high. Watson Consulting Group completed a study in 2006-2007 to see if it would be more efficient to maintain contracts or to do their own busing. They were prompted to do the study as they looked at their high transportation costs and continued taking steps to get out of SOD. The study found, overwhelmingly, that it was cheaper to keep contracting. The District has made a number of decisions since then that have saved them money. To save money, they limited transportation to only those students who lived more than 2 miles away from school. But this was only for a year, until the District passed a referendum. In 2012-13 they transport all students, with no minimum radius. Also, there used to be a boundary line, a highway that the two contractors contractually did not cross. Little Falls did away with that, bought a new computer program for routing and assigned a person to do the routing for the whole district, rather than allowing the contractors to do the routing.

Additional cost saving measures Little Falls has implemented include negotiating a flat fuel cost in its two transportation contracts. Previously, the contracts contained a fuel clause that would

increase what they paid for fuel based on the September fuel price, splitting the increase with the contractor. The contracts used to have Consumer Price Index (CPI) clause, meaning that contracts went up whenever the CPI went up. Now the District only pays for an increase if there is also an increase in the transportation funding formula provided by the state; the percentage increase will be the same as the formula increase. This change alone saved Little Falls $24,000 this past year. The District believes it has probably exhausted ways to reduce costs through contractual changes. In the future, it might look at consolidating routes. The District does a regular survey of the number of students on each route. It believes that conducting this survey may save it from adding new routes unnecessarily. Student numbers are finally increasing after many years of declining enrollment.

Ms. Henderson stated that even though the legislature has recommended that districts cooperate, the geographic and demographic challenges often make transportation collaboration difficult for Greater Minnesota school districts. One reason is that districts are in a competitive mode; even though not required, buses are going into districts every day to transport open enrolled kids, because the general education revenue follows the student. Little Falls has calculated that if there are 5 students who open enroll from another district, it pays to send a bus to get them. The Little Falls District has a special route just to go into Pierz. It also has buses that swing into Royalton, Swanville and Upsalla, as part of its daily routes, to pick up and drop off open enrolled students. Conversely, Pierz, Royalton, and Swanville are coming into Little Falls every day to get kids who live in Little Falls but are open enrolled to their districts.

The other barrier to collaboration is the risk of adding time to already-long rides. The District is having a tough time keeping current routes under an hour. The concern is that attempts to pair up with neighboring districts to share transportation responsibilities would add time to routes and add costs to driver time. It does collaborate with neighboring districts to transport students to and from the State Academies for the Deaf and Blind in Faribault. It also collaborates with Brainerd and Saint Cloud to provide some sports, such as Girls Hockey, and share the responsibility for transporting those teams. There has been little to no need for transporting students experiencing homelessness under the McKinney Vento Act. The District officials are hard pressed to visualize additional ways to collaborate.

Financial analysis

In the 2010-2011 school year, the Little Falls school district spent $1,082,493 on transporting students to school,[12] a decrease of around $16,500 from the previous year ($1,099,054). The number of students transported (2,248) was slightly higher than in the year before (2,238); the cost per student transported was $481.54 in 2010-2011, a decrease from $491.09 in the previous year.

[12] These are the "regular to-and-from school" expenses (UFARS finance dimension 720) plus depreciation expenses.

While ridership and total expenses remained relatively constant in the District over the two years, the total miles driven decreased by almost 10%; miles per student transported also decreased by 10%, from 98 to 88. The decrease occurred entirely in the mileage driven by contractors (from 202,593 miles in 2010-2011 to 180,889 in the following year). With costs constant and mileage decreasing, the cost per mile increased from $5.02 to $5.48.

Summary of recommendations

Recommendations for the State of Minnesota

While research for this study primarily focused on ways that school districts and charter schools could change student transportation practices to increase efficiency, some suggestions arose on ways the State of Minnesota could support or be an active agent in those strategies:

- **Provide incentives, support and space for district leadership to make collaborative strategies.** While districts are able to use any money saved on student transportation for other purposes, most of their cost-saving measures are focused internally, not externally. In other words, the incentives to collaborate with other districts are not large enough to overcome the many barriers to collaboration, both real and perceived. The West Metro Design Team has suggested that the state provide funding for regional coordinators to get collaborative efforts going, similar to what was done in the past for WATS, but with the benefit of lessons learned. Providing grants to school districts in partnership could foster some creative and innovating thinking and planning.
- If the **transportation portion of charter schools' general education basic revenue provided by the State** were more competitive, school districts would have an incentive to design an efficient, overall approach to transportation that included all schools within its boundaries, including charter schools. State law requires revenue payment to school districts for transportation of charter students based on a per pupil funding rate which does not take into account the high cost of transporting small groups of students from district-wide attendance areas.
- **Proactively address the federal maintenance of effort (MOE) requirement** for special education, so that school districts that are able to reduce transportation costs through collaboration or other means are not penalized for failing to maintain effort.
- If MDE is required to collect valid and reliable transportation data for future use, it may consider **taking a closer look at the quality of the data, capacity for oversight and analysis, and the factors that influence inaccurate reporting**. Analysis of MDE data for this report revealed inconsistencies in how student transportation data are reported, both between school districts and across years within a single district.
- **Clarify what is and is not permitted regarding use of transit for transporting students**. This study uncovered misunderstanding of laws related to allowable use of transit services and providers.
- **Develop a mechanism for districts to share innovative practices in student transportation**. This could be something as extensive as a clearinghouse for projects and ideas hosted online, or something as simple as a monthly tip distributed by email.

Strategies for districts and schools

This research uncovered many small and large-scale strategies for increasing efficiency or improving the quality of student transportation services through innovation, collaboration, regionalization, coordination with transit, and contract negotiations. The tables below list these strategies, with notes about current application across the state as well as in what settings (metro/non-metro, traditional district/charter school) each strategy would be most beneficial, where relevant. The strategies were identified from the interviews, case studies, survey, and literature review conducted for this study. Since this was a limited study, there are doubtless many more practices not included in the tables.

A general consideration to keep in mind when considering changing student transportation is that change takes time and political will. To affect change, districts should first consider the operational and political realities that currently exist, and then construct a model to assess the feasibility of making a shift. Finally, they should design and plan for the change.

General strategies	Notes on current application or savings	Where it might be most beneficial
Replace buses less frequently	Anoka-Hennepin saved $500,000 by extending bus life from 10 to 12 years	All settings
Contract with parents to provide transportation for students experiencing homelessness	One Greater Minnesota district	All traditional districts
Participate in the MN Fuel Consortium Purchase Program. This can help save money and help make the budget process predictable since districts can lock in a price.	Both metro-area and Greater Minnesota districts.	All traditional districts
Participate in the state bidding process for bus purchases	Both metro-area and Greater Minnesota districts.	All traditional districts
Optimize efficiency of existing routes through consolidation of routes, even within a single district or charter school; install GPS on buses; have neighborhood hubs; and use routing software	All settings	Metro and non-metro districts and charters
Increase length of routes & rides	Both metro-area and Greater Minnesota districts	All settings
Change bell times and/or implement a tiered system of school start and end times.	Statewide	All traditional districts
Develop a registered rider program for students to opt-in to school transportation rather than providing transportation to all students	Both metro-area and Greater Minnesota districts	All settings

General strategies	Notes on current application or savings	Where it might be most beneficial
Have school district staff such as coaches trained to drive buses	Greater Minnesota districts; some charter schools	Greater Minnesota districts and all charter schools
Use engine-block heaters so that buses can be shut off rather than idling when not in use, saving fuel	One mention from a metro-area district	All settings
Charge students for transportation if they live within 2 miles of school	One district charges $150-$175 per student.	All settings
Use automated software system for requesting and coordinating use of buses for after-school activities	Minneapolis	Larger school districts
Providing up-to –the-minute bus stop information on the district's Parent Portal	Minneapolis	Larger school districts
Drop off students at some distance from school as part of federal Safe Routes to School program that encourages more student walking	Minneapolis	All settings
Have a "911 bus" as a mobile command unit for emergency situations	Minneapolis	Larger school districts
Contract for transportation oversight	One metro-area district cites savings of $40,000 annually	Smaller districts and charter schools

School districts and charter schools can collaborate on both the direct provision of student transportation (for example, sharing buses) and on indirect services (such as purchasing fuel together). Collaboration on direct services will frequently require coordination of academic calendars and school start and end times.

Strategies for collaboration	Notes on current application	Where it might be most beneficial
Collaboration on direct services		
Neighboring districts use the same contractor. Efficiencies gained through shared gas purchasing, maintenance, staffing, routing, etc.	Both metro-area and Greater Minnesota districts	All settings
Share responsibility for transporting students who receive special education services in neighboring districts; students, with and without disabilities, who are placed for care and treatment; students who are experiencing homelessness; and students transported for desegregation	Mostly metro-area districts; a few districts in Greater Minnesota. Cost savings cited of $150/day in one example.	All districts

Strategies for collaboration	Notes on current application	Where it might be most beneficial
Share transportation of students to specialized education services outside of the district.	Districts across the state share transportation of students to the State Academies for the Deaf and Blind.	All settings
Share transportation for out-of-district programs (vocational schools, alternative learning centers, etc.)	Used in Greater Minnesota	Greater Minnesota
Shared transportation services for "The choice is yours" and other desegregation efforts.	Used in Edina and Richfield	Metro districts or charters
Collaborate with local government on things like fuel purchases, using buses for community events, providing services to Head Start programs and sharing radio services.	A few districts in both metro area and Greater Minnesota	All settings
Share transportation for extra-curricular activities	Common among Greater Minnesota districts	Greater Minnesota districts and charter schools
Loan buses & drivers between districts as needed on an informal basis	Informal practice in Greater Minnesota	All settings
Shared total transportation services among charter schools (either contracted or self-provided)	Metro-area charter schools. One charter reports savings of $20/bus/day on shared buses.	Metro-area charter schools
Collaboration on indirect services and management		
Attach the coordination role to existing regional entities such as Education Districts, Special Education Service Cooperatives, Service Units, and Intermediate Districts	Suggested by WATS; occurring in Greater Minnesota	Greater Minnesota districts and charters
Share fuel purchases	Used by 20% of metro-area districts and 3% of Greater Minnesota districts	All settings
Purchase buses jointly	Used by 10% of metro-area districts and 3% of Greater Minnesota districts	All settings
Share maintenance, communications systems, driver training, coordination and other indirect services.	Not currently in broad practice, but suggested	All settings
Purchase insurance jointly	Not currently in broad practice, but suggested	All settings

Strategies for collaboration	Notes on current application	Where it might be most beneficial
Share one transportation supervisor	Suggested by Hanover report	Greater Minnesota districts and charter schools
Share one well-trained router, a technical support contract to maximize the effectiveness of routing software, or routing services.	Not currently in broad practice, but suggested. Anecdotal evidence that some districts use routing software more effectively than others.	Smaller districts, any charter schools

The use of transit options (such as public buses, light rail, taxis, and dial-a-ride services) does not necessarily reduce transportation costs. However, many districts and charter schools use them because of the flexibility they provide and as a means to increase access and inclusion in education services.

Strategies for the use of transit	Notes on current application	Where it might be most beneficial
Use local transit providers to transport special-needs students who cannot ride regular school buses	Some Greater Minnesota districts	Districts with low populations of special-needs students
Use taxi services to transport students experiencing homelessness	Both metro-area and Greater Minnesota districts; some charter schools. May not be cost-effective.	All settings
Use transit for Alternative Learning Center students, small non-public high schools, special transportation between buildings, high school students to get home after activities, and some students experiencing homelessness	Several metro-area school districts	Limited settings
Use local bus company for daily transportation of charter school students.	Charter schools in metro area and in larger cities in Greater Minnesota. One school reported savings of $60,000/year, another reported $120,000/year.	Charter schools in metro area and in larger cities in Greater Minnesota

When considering bids or negotiating contracts to find the best value, districts should make sure that the contracts include both all major components and less obvious costs, including buses, personnel, operations, and contractor property taxes. Moreover, the requirements of the Minnesota Public Employees Labor Relations Act (PERLA) should be taken into account as there may be requirements for compensation with a renegotiated, terminated or switched contract.

Contracting strategies	**Notes on current application**	**Where it might be most beneficial**
Include in contract language that contractors underwrite salary for dispatchers	Minneapolis	Metro-area districts A collaborative of charter schools
Include contract language that allows district or school to call individual drivers without going through vendor's HQ	Minneapolis	All settings that use contractors
Negotiate new contract agreements before existing ones expire	Suggestion from case study	All settings that use contractors
Put all routes out for bid annually to get lowest rates from contractors	One metro-area district	All settings that use contractors

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Appendix B: Data tables

The Improve Group administered an online survey to school district transportation officials between October 9th and November 5th, 2012. Invitations to participate in the survey were sent by email to members of MDE's Transportation Directors listserv, using a contact list provided by the Department. A separate invitation was distributed to school district superintendents via their newsletter. Bad email addresses were corrected if possible; when it was not possible to correct them, the Improve Group attempted to contact other employees of the school district with an invitation to participate in the study. Two reminder emails were sent to non-respondents while the survey was active online.

A total of 353 responses were received from 305 school districts. The MDE's contact list contained information for 502 districts (338 traditional districts and 164 charter schools).

Table A1. Survey respondents by region.

Region	Districts Responding	% of Respondents	Districts in Region	Response Rate (%)
Traditional school districts				
Southeast	29	10%	42	69%
South Central	20	7%	27	74%
Southwest	31	10%	54	57%
West Central	22	7%	34	65%
Central	12	4%	22	55%
East Central	32	10%	41	78%
Northeast	20	7%	31	65%
Northwest	26	9%	38	68%
Total non-metro	*192*	*63%*	*289*	*66%*
Metro	42	14%	49	86%
Total traditional districts	*234*	*77%*	*338*	*69%*
Metro charter	46	15%	109	42%
Non-metro charter	25	8%	55	45%
Total	**305**	**100%**	**502**	**61%**

Table A2. Title or role of survey respondents.

Title or Role	Individuals Responding	% of Respondents
Transportation director	75	21%
Transportation coordinator	36	10%
Accountant/Business Manager	91	26%
Superintendent	80	23%
Assistant superintendent	2	1%
Charter school director	30	9%
School principal or administrator	12	3%
Driver	1	<1%
Other transportation staff	15	4%
Other[1]	10	3%
Total	**352**	**100%**

[1]Includes office manager/office staff, MARSS coordinator, bus contractor, and teacher.

Table A3. Percentage of districts that collaborate with other districts in any way, by student type.

	Traditional Districts		Charter Schools		All Districts
	Non-Metro	Metro	Metro	Non-Metro	
General student population	27%	51%	41%	64%	35%
Students in special education	36%	68%	30%	36%	39%
Students experiencing homelessness	7%	49%	20%	8%	15%
Students placed for care and treatment	13%	59%	4%	4%	17%
Other groups of students	28%	37%	7%	0%	24%
Collaborate for any student type	**60%**	**80%**	**48%**	**64%**	**61%**
Respondents	191	41	46	25	303

Table A3.1. Percentage of districts that collaborate with other districts by *sharing a contract with a transportation /bus company*, by district and student types.

	Traditional Districts		Charter Schools		All Districts
	Non-Metro	Metro	Metro	Non-Metro	
General student population	8%	33%	26%	8%	14%
Students in special education	10%	40%	17%	13%	15%
Students experiencing homelessness	3%	35%	9%	0%	8%
Students placed for care and treatment	6%	35%	2%	0%	9%
Other groups of students	4%	18%	0%	0%	5%
Collaborate for any student type	**16%**	**53%**	**26%**	**17%**	**22%**
Respondents	**187**	**40**	**46**	**24**	**297**

Table A3.2. Percentage of districts that collaborate with other districts by *purchasing buses together*, by district and student types.

	Traditional Districts		Charter Schools		All Districts
	Non-Metro	Metro	Metro	Non-Metro	
General student population	3%	10%	2%	0%	3%
Students in special education	2%	10%	2%	0%	3%
Students experiencing homelessness	0%	5%	0%	0%	1%
Students placed for care and treatment	0%	5%	0%	0%	1%
Other groups of students	1%	7%	0%	0%	1%
Collaborate for any student type	**3%**	**10%**	**2%**	**0%**	**4%**
Respondents	184	41	45	25	295

Table A3.3. Percentage of districts that collaborate with other districts by *purchasing gas together*, by district and student types.

	Traditional Districts		Charter Schools		All Districts
	Non-Metro	Metro	Metro	Non-Metro	
General student population	2%	20%	0%	0%	4%
Students in special education	0%	15%	0%	0%	2%
Students experiencing homelessness	0%	10%	0%	0%	2%
Students placed for care and treatment	0%	10%	0%	0%	2%
Other groups of students	0%	13%	0%	0%	2%
Collaborate for any student type	**3%**	**20%**	**0%**	**0%**	**4%**
Respondents	**183**	**40**	**44**	**24**	**291**

Table A3.4. Percentage of districts that collaborate with other districts by *sharing service delivery*,[13] by district and student types.

	Traditional Districts		Charter Schools		All Districts
	Non-Metro	Metro	Metro	Non-Metro	
General student population	12%	7%	9%	35%	13%
Students in special education	25%	44%	4%	17%	24%
Students experiencing homelessness	5%	19%	2%	4%	6%
Students placed for care and treatment	9%	22%	0%	4%	9%
Other groups of students	18%	12%	2%	0%	14%
Collaborate for any student type	**44%**	**49%**	**13%**	**35%**	**39%**
Respondents	185	41	45	23	294

[13] Providing transportation for another district while transporting its own students, or vice versa.

Table A3.5. Percentage of districts that collaborate with other districts by *subletting bus routes*,[14] by district and student types.

	Traditional Districts		Charter Schools		All Districts
	Non-Metro	Metro	Metro	Non-Metro	
General student population	4%	10%	7%	0%	5%
Students in special education	1%	17%	0%	0%	3%
Students experiencing homelessness	0%	12%	0%	0%	2%
Students placed for care and treatment	0%	15%	0%	0%	2%
Other groups of students	4%	5%	0%	0%	3%
Collaborate for any student type	**8%**	**20%**	**7%**	**0%**	**9%**
Respondents	182	41	45	24	292

Table A3.6. Percentage of districts that collaborate with other districts by *sharing purchase or use of bus tokens, dial-a-ride, or taxi services,* by district and student types.

	Traditional Districts		Charter Schools		All Districts
	Non-Metro	Metro	Metro	Non-Metro	
General student population	1%	5%	5%	12%	3%
Students in special education	2%	5%	4%	4%	3%
Students experiencing homelessness	1%	12%	4%	4%	3%
Students placed for care and treatment	0%	12%	0%	0%	2%
Other groups of students	2%	5%	2%	0%	2%
Collaborate for any student type	**5%**	**15%**	**7%**	**12%**	**7%**
Respondents	184	41	44	25	294

[14] Allowing buses to do other things when not in use or when empty en route to student transport.

Table A3.7. Percentage of districts that collaborate with other districts by *using school buses for non-student transportation,* by district and student types.

	Traditional Districts		Charter Schools		All Districts
	Non-Metro	Metro	Metro	Non-Metro	
General student population	4%	0%	2%	0%	3%
Students in special education	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Students experiencing homelessness	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Students placed for care and treatment	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other groups of students	7%	8%	0%	0%	5%
Collaborate for any student type	10%	8%	2%	0%	8%
Respondents	183	40	45	25	293

Table A3.8. Percentage of districts that collaborate with other districts by *contracting for services from another district,* by district and student types.

	Traditional Districts		Charter Schools		All Districts
	Non-Metro	Metro	Metro	Non-Metro	
General student population	6%	5%	9%	28%	8%
Students in special education	8%	22%	4%	12%	10%
Students experiencing homelessness	0%	5%	2%	4%	1%
Students placed for care and treatment	2%	5%	0%	4%	2%
Other groups of students	2%	3%	0%	0%	2%
Collaborate for any student type	**15%**	**25%**	**11%**	**28%**	**17%**
Respondents	182	40	45	25	292

Table A3.9. Percentage of districts that collaborate with other districts by *sharing infrastructure,* by district and student types.

	Traditional Districts		Charter Schools		All Districts
	Non-Metro	Metro	Metro	Non-Metro	
General student population	7%	8%	2%	4%	6%
Students in special education	4%	12%	2%	0%	4%
Students experiencing homelessness	0%	7%	2%	0%	2%
Students placed for care and treatment	1%	10%	0%	0%	2%
Other groups of students	1%	3%	0%	0%	1%
Collaborate for any student type	**8%**	**13%**	**2%**	**4%**	**7%**
Respondents	183	40	45	24	292

Table A4. Primary motivations for engaging in current inter-district collaboration.
(Percentages of the 186 districts that have some type of inter-district collaboration that chose each item as one of its two primary reasons for collaborating.)

	Traditional Districts		Charter Schools		All Districts
	Non-Metro	Metro	Metro	Non-Metro	
Cost efficiency	81%	91%	73%	87%	82%
Time efficiency	35%	51%	14%	7%	34%
Safety	5%	11%	0%	7%	6%
Community pressure	3%	3%	0%	0%	3%
Statutory requirements	8%	3%	18%	7%	8%
Access and inclusion	10%	11%	5%	33%	11%
Other[1]	13%	6%	9%	7%	11%

[1]Other motivations given by respondents for collaborating include: ability to utilize fellow charter school buses; best practices; business model; case-by-case basis for students receiving special education requiring transportation within another district; combined sports; course offerings; helping out a neighboring district; lack of bus drivers; in response to a request from a neighboring district; and staffing efficiency.

Table A5. Primary motivations for engaging in past inter-district collaboration. *(Percentages of the 38 districts that had some type of discontinued inter-district collaboration that chose each item as one of its two primary reasons for collaborating.)*

	All Districts
Cost efficiency	86%
Time efficiency	51%
Safety	0%
Community pressure	3%
Statutory requirements	0%
Access and inclusion	24%
Other	5%

Table A6. Barriers to shifting transportation approaches. *(Percentages of the respondents from each district type who indicated that the item was "somewhat a barrier" or a "huge barrier.")*

	Traditional Districts		Charter Schools		All Districts
	Non-Metro	Metro	Metro	Non-Metro	
Bus ride length	79%	77%	70%	54%	76%
School start and end times	57%	71%	63%	48%	59%
Activity schedules/calendars	62%	65%	33%	30%	56%
Open enrollment	54%	29%	42%	21%	46%
Startup costs	47%	45%	36%	48%	45%
Parent/community support	45%	52%	24%	21%	41%
Existing contracts	30%	41%	20%	25%	30%
MDE policies and regulations	30%	13%	18%	36%	26%
Minnesota Department of Transportation policies and regulations	28%	13%	7%	32%	23%
Minnesota Department of Public Safety policies and regulations	27%	10%	9%	32%	22%
Support from key people outside district	20%	26%	9%	41%	21%
Local or District policies and regulations	19%	16%	7%	35%	18%
Support from key people within district	19%	22%	9%	14%	18%
Respondents	216	53	46	24	339

Other barriers cited include: geography (large district size, low student population density); the age of students (young students may not be safe on public transportation); lack of funding; being held accountable by parents when the District has no control over training, supervision and performance; and lack comfort between school districts on working together on transportation.

Table A7. Districts' consideration of public transit[15] for student transportation in recent past.

	Traditional Districts		Charter Schools		All Districts
	Non-Metro	Metro	Metro	Non-Metro	
Respondents	191	42	45	24	302
Considered using public transit in recent past	38 (20%)	16 (38%)	20 (44%)	7 (29%)	81 (27%)
Implemented changes regarding transit	12	4	8	3	27

Table A8. Primary motivations for considering or implementing use of transit for student transportation. *(Percentages of the Districts that considered using transit that chose each item as one of its two primary reasons for collaborating.)*

	Traditional Districts		Charter Schools		All Districts
	Non-Metro	Metro	Metro	Non-Metro	
Cost efficiency	60%	56%	41%	57%	55%
Time efficiency	49%	50%	35%	57%	47%
Safety	9%	0%	6%	14%	7%
Community pressure	0%	0%	6%	0%	1%
Statutory requirements	0%	13%	6%	0%	4%
Access and inclusion	31%	31%	35%	57%	35%
Other[1]	20%	25%	18%	0%	19%

[1]Other motivations for considering transit include: providing transportation to open-enrolled students; greater flexibility for students' schedules; a lack of vehicles and/or drivers; homelessness; and environmental considerations.

[15] Buses, cabs, light rail, dial-a-ride, etc.

Appendix C: Data collection instruments

Student Transportation Survey

The purpose of this survey is to gather information on the potential efficiencies that could result from regional or coordinated approaches to student transportation.

This survey is part of a research project being conducted for the Minnesota Department of Administration by the Improve Group, an independent research and evaluation firm in St. Paul, in response to recent legislation. Your input will be a valuable component of the report submitted to the Legislature at the conclusion of this study.

The survey will take about 15-30 minutes. You can navigate forward and backward through the questionnaire and change your responses, but once you click the final "Submit" button your responses will be recorded and you will not be able to change them. Please try to complete the survey in one sitting; if you exit the survey before completing it you will need to start over.

We do not expect that you will be able to respond to every question in the survey. If there is a question that you are unable to answer please just go to the next one. We expect to have more than one response from each district, so if you do not answer a question chances are that someone else from your district will.

If you have any questions about this study, would like to clarify any of your responses, or provide further input, you may contact Steve Smela, Senior Research Analyst at the Improve Group, 651-315-8920, steves@theimprovegroup.com.

We would like to hear from as many people involved with student transportation as possible. If there are others in your District or school who you feel should also respond to this survey, please forward this link to them: www.theimprovegroup.com/surveys/StudentTransportationStudy/districtstaffsurvey.htm.

1. **What is your title or role as it relates to student transportation?**

- ○ Transportation Director
- ○ Transportation Coordinator
- ○ Accountant/Business Manager
- ○ Superintendent
- ○ Assistant Superintendent
- ○ Charter School Director
- ○ School Principal or Administrator
- ○ Driver
- ○ Other Transportation staff
- ○ Other

If other transportation staff or other role, please describe:

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2. **In which School District do you work?** We ask this only to track the reach of this survey. Your individual responses to the survey will remain confidential outside of the independent researchers conducting the study.

If other, please describe

We are interested in different ways you may collaborate with other Districts or schools on student transportation

3. **What are the ways, if any, that you currently collaborate with other Districts or schools on student transportation for each of the following groups?** You may select more than one group on each line.

	We don't collaborate in this way	The general student population	Students in Special Education	Students experiencing homelessness	Students who are placed for care and treatment	Other groups of students
Share a contract with a transportation/bus company	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Go in on bus purchases together	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Purchase gas together	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Share service delivery (provide transportation for another district while transporting your own students, or vice versa)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sublet bus routes (allow buses to do other things when not in use or when empty en route to student transport)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Shared purchase or use of bus tokens, dial-a-ride, taxi services	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Use school buses for non student transportation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Contract for services to another district	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Shared infrastructure (maintenance facilities, radio communication systems, routing software)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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Other

If other, please describe

Comments:

3a. **What was your primary motivation for doing these collaborations?** Select up to two responses.

- Cost efficiency
- Time efficiency
- Safety
- Community pressure
- Statutory requirements
- Access and inclusion
- Other

If other, please describe

Comments:

3b. **Can you envision ways that these collaboration models could be scaled up within your District or regionally, or replicated in other Districts across the State of Minnesota?**

3c. **Have you realized any cost efficiencies or savings from these collaborations? If so please describe.** Indicate which collaboration/s resulted in efficiency and the cost savings in $/student if possible.

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3d. **Have you realized any time efficiencies from these collaborations? If so, please describe.** Indicate which collaboration/s resulted in efficiency and how much time was saved for how many students, if possible.

4. **Are there collaborations on student transportation that you have tried in the past but don't currently do?**

- Yes
- No

4a. **If yes, please describe what the collaboration model or project was and when it happened.**

4b. **What was your motivation for doing these collaborations?** Select up to two responses.

- Cost efficiency
- Time efficiency
- Safety
- Community pressure
- Statutory requirements
- Access and inclusion
- Other

If other, please describe

Comments:

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4c. **Please share why you no longer do these collaborations**

4d. **Have you looked into the cost savings per pupil for any of these that you have tried but don't currently do?**

- Yes
- No

4e. **If yes, what was the projected savings ($/pupil)?**

5. **What kinds of changes have you made related to student transportation that you consider to be innovative?**

6. **To what degree do the following pose a barrier to shifting your student transportation approach?**

	Not a barrier at all	Not too much of a barrier	Somewhat a barrier	Huge barrier
Parent/community support				
Open enrollment				
Bus ride length				
Existing contracts				
Support from key people within my District				
Support from key people outside of my District				
Startup costs				
Local or District policies and regulations				
Minnesota Department of Education policies and regulations				
Minnesota Department of Transportation policies and regulations				
Minnesota Department of Public Safety policies and regulations				
School start and end times				
Activity schedules/calendars				
Other				

If other, please describe:

Comments

7. **What are the ways you manage or deal with these barriers?**

Parent/community support	
Open enrollment	
Bus ride length	
Existing contracts	
Support from key people within my District	
Support from key people outside of my District	
Startup costs	
Local or District policies and regulations	

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If yes, what did the changes look like?

Please describe the successes and challenges with implementing usage of public transit

8.c **What was your motivation for considering or implementing use of public transit to substitute or supplement student transportation?** Select up to two responses.

- ☐ Cost efficiency
- ☐ Time efficiency
- ☐ Safety
- ☐ Community pressure
- ☐ Statuatory requirements
- ☐ Access and inclusion
- ☐ Other

If other, please describe

Comments:

8.d **Have you calculated the cost savings per pupil from use of public transit with your students?**

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Please share the cost savings realized or projected by implemented or considered use of public transit.

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Minnesota Department of Education policies and regulations

Minnesota Department of Transportation policies and regulations

Minnesota Department of Public Safety policies and regulations

School start and end times

Activity schedules/calendars

Other

8. **Has your school or district considered using public transit (buses, cabs, light rail, dial-a-ride, etc.) as a substitute or supplement for student transportation with any student groups (including special education, homelessness, care and treatment, activity runs) in the recent past?**

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

8.a **Did you seek parent/community input on plans or considerations for using public transit?**

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

What input did you hear from parents/the community?

8.b **If you did consider using public transit for student transportation, did you implement any changes?**

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

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8.e Please share the time efficiencies projected or realized by considered or implemented use of public transit.

9. May we use some of your responses as quotes in our report to the State Legislature?

- ○ Yes, you may use my comments and cite them as coming from me
- ○ You may use my comments, but not cite them as coming from me (don't indicate my district or role in the quote)
- ○ No

10. May we contact you if we have further questions about some of your responses?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

11. If you would allow us to either quote your or contact you about your responses, please share your contact information. This is optional.

Name

Title

Organization

Phone Number

Email address

Thank you for completing this survey!

We would like to hear from as many people involved with student transportation as possible. If there are others in your District or school who you feel should also respond to this survey, please forward this link to them: www.theimprovegroup.com/surveys/StudentTransportationStudy/districtstaffsurvey.htm.

If you have any questions about this study, would like to clarify any of your responses, or provide further input, you may contact Steve Smela, Senior Research Analyst at the Improve Group, 651-315-8920, steves@theimprovegroup.com.

Please click on "Submit" below to have your responses recorded.

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Broad Discussion Topics for School District Interviews

Policy/Board	Budget	Innovation	Logistics/Implementation	Community Input
When you seek to implement changes in transportation practices or policy, what are the key factors in getting board approval? What would you share with the legislature about ways to increase efficiencies in transportation?	Describe your biggest challenges in trying to offer high quality transportation services while keeping your costs down. Ways you've been able to reduce costs in transportation; thought process used to consider cost/benefit factors and weigh trade-offs…	What kinds of changes have you made that you consider to be innovative in the world of student transportation? Have you explored ways of collaborating with other districts to increase efficiencies? If so, please describe. Are there ways that you currently collaborate with other school districts to increase efficiencies? Can you envision ways to leverage this collaboration to increase efficiencies in student transportation? Do you utilize public transportation to help with any aspects of student transportation? If so, please describe.	What are the biggest challenges in meeting your obligation to provide student transportation?	Process for seeking parent/community input when making a change or considering a change? Public opinions of recent changes? District's response?
Notes:				

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