

Living in the most rural areas of Maple Ridge, many in Whonnock, Albion North Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows we rely on school buses to get our children to both elementary and secondary schools. This is for many reasons including that: the distance to schools is too great to walk; transit is either nonexistent, unreliable, too infrequent, and lacking capacity, there are no sidewalks or safe walking paths; and there are many wild animals. Learning that the school buses were eliminated in the 2016/2017 school year is of enormous concern for families who live in these rural areas of Whonnock, East, North Maple Ridge and rural Pitt Meadows.

The decision to eliminate the buses all happened very quickly with little or no input from the community. April 8th was the public presentation, April 15th the budget committee of the whole, April 22nd the school board meeting.

From: Dorothy Green <mailto:dorth5green@gmail.com>

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To: Mike Murray; Eleanor Palis; Lisa Beare; Susan Carr; Korleen Carreras; Ken Clarkson; David Rempel; superintendent- sylvia_russell@sd42.ca; deputy superintendent- aurie_meston@sd42.ca; director of instruction- shannon_derinzy@sd42.ca; director of instruction David_Vandergugten@sd42.ca

Subject: We need our school bus!

We need our school bus!

Living in the most rural areas of Maple Ridge, many in Whonnock, Albion North Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows we rely on school buses to get our children to both elementary and secondary schools. This is for many reasons including that: the distance to schools is too great to walk; transit is either non-existent, unreliable, too infrequent, and lacks capacity, there are no sidewalks or safe walking paths; and there are many wild animals. Learning that the school buses have been eliminated in the 2016/2017 school year is of enormous concern for families who live in these rural areas of Whonnock, North Maple Ridge and rural Pitt Meadows.

The decision to eliminate the buses all happened very quickly with little time to gather out thoughts. April 8th was the public presentation, April 15th the budget committee of the whole, April 22nd [(A)2(6e-1.15 Tdd(6e-1 [(A) TJ 0 Tc 0 Tw T* [(i)-2(n e)4(l)-2(e)4(m)-2(e)4(nt)-2(a)4(r)-17(y)2 years and is the only means of transportation for many.

The School Boards Policy #5400 states that “the Board of Education ~~is~~ is their responsibility to ensure appropriate transportation for eligible students to their catchments area school” What is the point of a policy, if, with the stroke of a pen, it can be eliminated. When this policy was made it was the belief of the Board. Those beliefs have not changed, why the policy?

How can it just be stricken, like it never existed? And why?

As Maple Ridge has grown and more schools in some parts of east Maple Ridge have been built and transit has become available to more areas, the school bus routes have been understandably reduced. This is not the case for Whonnock, East Maple Ridge, North Maple Ridge and rural Pitt Meadows. When families in these affected communities moved here, many researched the bus routes to ensure there would be a way for their children to get to school. We have lived in these rural areas for years or have moved here knowing that school buses would pick up and drop off our kids from school. Now this service is in jeopardy.

The school buses may not ~~not~~ ~~at~~ a large percentage of the families in district 42, only about 262 families, in fact, but they provide an invaluable service to those 370 students. Children with special needs are not discounted just because they are low in number. We are a special needs community because of our unique challenges as discussed and Whonnock, East Maple Ridge, North Maple Ridge and rural Pitt Meadows families deserve the same sort of support from our school district. After all, we practice inclusion in the classroom, ~~with~~ ~~on~~ the school buses as well?

After attending the information session at Garibaldi, we are more knowledgeable on some of the issues facing the board. We believe that there are some options available that could reduce the cost to the board, and still allow the bus service to be maintained. Some of our ideas include:

- Renegotiating the contract with the bus company so that we have more flexibility regarding rider ship versus bus commitment. Schedule routes to run all of the buses at full capacity. There is no reason for buses to be running half empty. Get rid of the late bus to Garibaldi. It is a luxury we cannot afford.
- Charge a bit more to parents. We realize the bus fees were not happily received by some, but the alternative of no buses would be a much heavier burden. By our calculations the \$215 fee equated to \$1 a day to ride the bus. Parents pay more than that to drive around the corner.
- Consider corporate sponsorship of our buses. Maybe our bus contractor would agree to allow the buses to be wrapped (at the sponsors expense) to cover part of the cost of the buses. The company's considered would of course need to be a positive influence on our youth.
- A significant part of the bus expenses (on a per pupil basis) is being spent on Special Needs busing. Whether a child is special needs in Whonnock, East Maple Ridge, North Maple Ridge or rural Pitt Meadows or not, neither can walk the distance from Whonnock or East and North Maple Ridge to Garibaldi or from rural Pitt Meadows to either high school or elementary school. Inclusion is one of the Boards mandates in regards to Special Needs kids. Can we consider inclusion for bussing as well?
- Both the Province and the School Board talk about green initiatives and using transit instead of the single car ~~approach~~. It appears that getting rid of the busing, where no transit exists, goes completely against any green initiatives and is a huge step in the wrong direction.

In closing, we believe we have come up with many creative ideas on how to better manage our transportation expenditures without canceling this essential bus service. We look forward to talking with you.

Dorothy Green

We know all this will still not be enough and we will try to do more. The Board has and will continue to petition the provincial government for adequate education funding, and it has and will continue to inform local MLAs about the detrimental consequences of ongoing budget cuts. We will share your stories so that government understands the impact that the chronic underfunding of education has on the families in our community.