

Ohio Service Profile

Ohio public schools provide home-to-school transportation for nearly 800,000 students daily. Districts use 15,000 buses to accomplish this, travelling 1 million miles per day. The total expenditures by our districts are over 800 million dollars per year. The average cost to keep a bus on the road is \$52,000 for one school year. The cost to purchase a new bus is between 85,000 and 90,000, and the life expectancy of a school bus is 12-15 years.

State funding provided for transportation in FY17 was \$526 million. In FY18 that funding was reduced to \$485 million, with an additional reduction scheduled for FY19. These cost reductions have resulted in new costs to public school districts with no chance of recovery from other sources. Without sufficient local funding to meet the new costs, and limited ability to raise local revenues, districts have resorted to cancelling services that communities depend upon and in some cases reallocating funding that was previously dedicated to educational services.

Ohio public schools are required to provide transportation for students attending nonpublic and community schools located both within their districts and outside of the district, providing that they are located within 30 minutes of their assigned public school. Public schools are obligated to provide transportation service to the above schools on any day they are open, regardless of the public school's calendar, and are also required to meet their attendance times, again regardless of conflicts with the public school attendance times. Because of the limited control public schools have over the times, days, and riders on these buses, the cost is much higher than transporting public school students.

Families and communities in Ohio have come to depend upon school transportation for transportation to not only their neighborhood schools, but also for transportation to school choice programs outside of their local communities. This is a significant benefit for families, but also a remarkable burden upon school districts. As costs have continued to rise and state funding has been reduced, in some cases public schools are finding the need to cancel transportation service for some of their own public school students in order to continue providing the mandated transportation for school choice programs.

Service provided in surrounding states

A review of states surrounding Ohio yields the following information:

State	Pupils transported	State funding	\$/rider	Nonpublic transportation	Community school transportation	Out-of-district service
Pennsylvania	1,378,793	530,936,820	385	Local policy	Local policy	Permissive
Kentucky	393,066	430,390,893	1,094	NP pays district	None	None
Indiana	650,000	720,122,791	1,107	Only if along existing route	Only if along existing route	None
Michigan	636,344	713,844,068	1,121	No transport	No transport	Permissive
Ohio	800,000	485,000,000	606 (FY18) 530 (FY19)	Required	Required	Required

Not all districts have the same capacity to transport students

The cost of transportation for Ohio's schools has been increasing steadily. Not all districts have the same resources available, consequently the transportation provided by all districts is not comparable. In addition to the funding shortage that faces nearly all districts, those with a higher number of students electing to be attend nonpublic or community schools have the additional cost of providing this mandated transportation. This service has a significantly higher cost than the transportation of public school students within normal district boundaries.

In a cost analysis based upon the FY17 school year, the costs for transportation based upon school of choice was determined as follows:

School type	Total cost to transport	Cost per student
Public school students	\$572,599,705	\$ 824
Nonpublic school students	\$122,450,403	\$ 3,740
Charter school students	\$ 48,758,388	\$ 2,618

This difference in cost is explained by a number of factors. The most significant is that there are not as many bus riders attending nonpublic or community schools. This results in the use of a bus that is not heavily loaded. Districts report average ridership on a nonpublic bus of 14 students and on a community school bus of 20 students. As a comparison, districts are able to average 77 students on public school buses-representing a double tier route which is very cost effective.

The increased cost for these school choice programs, for which transportation is mandated, results in an additional resource drain on the district. When funds are limited, the only option the district has to operate within its fiscal capacity is to limit the transportation services for public school students within the district.

Maintaining the bus fleet

The most significant cost factor in providing school transportation is the operating cost of the school bus. As buses age, the operating cost increases due to maintenance and repair costs as well as loss of fuel efficiency. National studies have shown that this class of vehicles loses cost effectiveness after 8 years of service and should be replaced. With a replacement cost of \$85,000, our public schools have not been able to replace vehicles when appropriate and have continued to incur increasing operating cost as the fleet ages.

For many years the state provided a bus purchase subsidy to assist districts with the replacement of school buses. Some of those funds were earmarked for the mandated transportation of special education students and students attending nonpublic schools, with the balance used for assistance to replace the oldest buses. That funding ended in FY09, leaving districts with only their local resources to replace buses.

Since the state funding assistance ended, the rate of bus purchase in Ohio has dropped significantly. The buses used on school routes have increased in age and subsequently the operating cost has

continued to increase. In some cases, buses have only been retired from service when the state patrol inspection teams have informed the district that the vehicle is no longer safe to be used for passenger transport.

School buses are expensive vehicles, both to purchase and operate. When they are evaluated with respect to the number of passengers they carry--they are cost effective. The cost to transport a child for a year on a well-maintained bus with an effective route are less than the cost a parent would incur for transporting their child in the family car. As we add more students to each bus, the cost per student continues to decrease.

Another benefit of the use of buses as a form of mass transit is the reduction in the number of vehicles on the roadway. National study has shown that the average school bus replaces 35 cars on the roadway. Perhaps the most significant benefit of school bus transportation is the safety factor. The Transportation Research Board of the National Research Council reports that students in cars are up to 25 times more likely to be injured or killed when riding in a car than students riding in school buses.

The new state operating budget did approve \$20 million for the purpose of school bus purchase. ODE is assigned the task of determining the method of distribution of these funds. That procedure has not yet been introduced. [If a full cost replacement plan is implemented, this will only fund 222 buses in a fleet of 15,000 route buses.]

Summary

School transportation is a valuable service for students, their families and the communities they live in. The provision of these services by Ohio's public schools and a continuance of the mandated services is dependent upon funding being provided to Ohio's school districts.

Relying on local funds alone is not sufficient. Failing to provide sufficient funding for transportation will result in the need to undertake the difficult process of determining which services should be shed.