Assessing the impact of a pandemic on school transportation

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Prior to the pandemic ...

• School transportation services were operating well, but at capacity.
• The “old normal”:
  – No extra drivers, few extra buses, and bell schedules were very tight to maximize efficiency
  – Efficiency defined as maximum riders per bus, minimum cost per rider

During the pandemic . . .

• Like everywhere else, change is constant
  – Disruptions abound regarding:
    • Driver’s license renewals
    • Federal Drug & Alcohol tests
    • School bus and driver certificates
    • School bus and van driver physicals
    • Limits on person-to-person contact
  – Driving staff who are “at-risk” for COVID-19
  – Other staff without daycare resources
After the pandemic . . .

• Many scenarios are possible
• Thorough planning requires consideration of all potential changes, including impacts on transportation services for students.
• Any school day changes that do not consider transportation could easily fail.

Potential needs and impacts (1)

• Need to increase social distance in buildings
  – Stagger attendance times, reduce number of students in the building?
  • Affects route times and routing tiers
  • Move to single tier, but that requires more buses and drivers to transport the same number of students

Potential needs and impacts (2)

• If we prioritize routing for one group of students (elementary and special ed?)
  – We may not be able to transport other students (middle school, high school?)
  • What about nonpublic and community school schedules?
  – What about vocational schools?
Potential needs and impacts (3)

- How do we increase social distancing on a school bus?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bus size</th>
<th>30” distance</th>
<th>60” distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>66 passenger</td>
<td>21 riders</td>
<td>10 riders (skip seat behind driver)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72 passenger</td>
<td>23 riders</td>
<td>11 riders (skip seat behind driver)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Currently the average ridership in Ohio is 27/bus, but typically much higher for elementary routes.
- To maintain the same number of transported students, we will need more buses... and drivers!

Potential needs and impacts (4)

- Bus cleaning
  - It is possible buses will need to be cleaned between routes.
  - That requires time to accomplish.
  - Many of the EPA-approved disinfectants require time to kill the virus, adding additional time to cleaning window.
- This reduces bus availability – fewer trips

Potential needs and impacts (5)

- What about our drivers?
  - We may need to consider barriers on the bus
  - Some of our current drivers are in the high-risk group, and it may not be safe for them to come back to work.
  - Others may choose not to return for other reasons
### Potential needs and impacts (6)
- Right now we do not know what we will need to do this fall.
- But . . .
- It certainly appears that any changes that affect transportation will reduce our transportation capacity.
- Someone who is riding now may not be able to ride this fall.

### Management flexibility
- Build a list of options
  - Identify the adjustments required
  - Identify any limitations
  - Be realistic about department capacity to provide service
    - Available routing time
    - Available driving staff

### Make the team all-inclusive
- Planning teams need someone from every discipline at the table.
  - That includes transportation logistics
- We need to be realistic about the difference between what we want to have done, and what we can accomplish.
- "Just get it done" may not be a reality
Homework for the transportation team:

- Calculate your average ridership
  - Elementary routes
  - HS routes
  - MS routes
- Make certain that the rider data is detailed and very accurate
- Get ready for some serious routing work

Start thinking about details

- Driver training
  - How to manage annual in-service
  - What extra training will they need this year?
- Bus and fleet
  - What modifications are needed?
  - How and when will they be sanitized?

More details . . .

- Bus garage / transportation facility
  - Driver room modifications needed
  - Garage / work areas
  - Fueling station
- Sanitizing
  - Cleaning supplies
  - Procedures
And more details

- Routing
  - What is our revised bus capacity?
  - Bus stops (maximum students?)
  - School loading/unloading zones
  - Extra time for sanitizing

We can adopt a new normal . . .

But not without great cooperation, teamwork, and attention to detail
and
The need to be realistic about our resources

Thank you!

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