

# Pembina Trails School Division Public Board Report

## Adjustments to School Start and End Times September 2023

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## Executive Summary

Transportation operations within Pembina Trails School Division were severely impacted both during and post-pandemic in terms of driver availability, recruitment, and retention.

Due to these transportation operational constraints and the growth in enrolment in the southern part of the division and, to a lesser extent, in the middle, it became necessary to change school start and end times to permit our buses to make double runs to get all students to their respective schools on time and home again at the end of the day.

The intent was to make the most efficient use of the number of buses we have in the fleet and to address the challenge of not being able to recruit qualified bus drivers. We were also faced with operational limits on storing and maintaining any additional busses as both our transportation sites are at their limit (Loudon and Henlow).

The decision to change school start and end times was met with opposition from parents/caregivers, daycare providers, and to some extent staff. As a result of ongoing discussions and concerns from the community, on December 14, 2023, the Board of Trustees passed the following motion:

*THAT the Board direct the administration to conduct a study of the school start time changes in Wards 2 and 3 which came into effect September 2023, and report back to the Board, the study would include but not be limited to:*

- 1. Student attendance*
- 2. Student performance*
- 3. Parent/family expressions of concerns*
- 4. Problems experienced by schools as a result of the change.*
- 5. Update on availability of increased transportation resources (particularly bus drivers)*
- 6. Any other pertinent factor.*

The following report has been developed in response to the December 14, 2023, Board motion.

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## Background

Transportation operations were severely impacted both during and post-pandemic in terms of driver availability, recruitment, and retention. As our enrolment continues to grow so too will the growth in eligible riders. Operational constraints in transportation prompted the need to effect changes to school start and end times in September 2023. Making the Move, a change in grade level configurations to address both pedagogical beliefs and enrolment concerns is scheduled to take place in September 2024.

On June 29, 2022, the former Superintendent of Pembina Trails School Division informed parents to prepare for changes to transportation involving, in year one (2022-23), walk-outs to common stops and in year two (2023-24), start and end time changes. ([Appendix 1](#))

In the Fall of 2022, the Transportation Department began work on double-routing scenarios, length of routes, operational capacity, and potential impact on start and end times. This information was shared with former trustees (pre-election), and at the September 22, 2022, Committee of the Whole meeting, the plan to change start and end times began to be developed. The Transportation Department, Senior Administration Team, and school administrators began discussions on the potential changes and impact on operations, school functions, and impact to families. The start and end times for Bison Run School, which opened in January 2023 were also considered as part of the development of this plan with a start time of 8:15 am from January to June 2023.

At the December 8, 2022, Committee of the Whole meeting, the newly elected Board of Trustees was updated on the planned changes and provided the Bell Time Changes Update Briefing Notes ([Appendix 2](#)). Further conversations regarding the plan and communication to the community were reviewed at the January 12, 2023, Committee of the Whole meeting. ([Appendix 3](#)) Communication to staff, parents/caregivers and daycares was distributed on January 23, 2023, via School Messenger, and feedback was solicited. ([Appendix 4](#))

Feedback garnered via email, phone call and the delegations were generally negative and fell in the following broad areas (71 respondents charted on spreadsheet in January 2023) plus delegations of February 23, 2023).

- Impact on childcare availability
- Impact on student drop-off and parent work schedules
- Lack of consultation
- Impact on sleep schedules for earlier time schools
- Co-ordination of drop-offs
- Safety Concerns (daylight, traffic)

The feedback was first reviewed at the January 26, 2023, board meeting with ongoing feedback reviewed at subsequent Board meetings on February 9, February 23, March 9, and March 20, 2023. Delegations also presented to the Board on February 23, 2023. [\(Appendix 4\)](#)

Taking into consideration all feedback received from parent/caregivers and daycare providers, the Senior Administration Team and Board of Trustees agreed that an adjustment to the start and end times of 18 schools was necessary to offset operational constraints within the Transportation Department. Effective September 2023, schools beginning at 8:15 a.m.-2:45 p.m. were adjusted to 8:25 a.m.-3:00 p.m., and schools beginning at 9:10 a.m. (9:15 a.m.)-3:45 p.m. were adjusted to 9:20 a.m.-3:55 p.m.

## **Review of the Impact**

In January of 2024, approximately five months following the implementation of the new start and end times, the Senior Administration Team met with school administrators from the 18 schools to garner feedback on the impact to schools.

School administrators were generally supportive of the changes to start and end times, especially those affected by double-routing and supervision for extended periods of time before and after school in the 2022-23 school year. They also saw the change as an opportunity to do a lot of planning and re-aligning of schedules and timetables between schools to prepare for Making the Move in 2024.

School administrators have expressed ongoing concerns regarding field trips, the École Viscount Alexander bus charter, sporting events, and the impact on professional development which has been a historical challenge due to differing school start and end times. In response to these concerns, financial support has been added to the 2024-25 budget to support contracted field trip providers. In addition, the École Viscount Alexander bus charter will continue to be maintained, and a committee was established to review the sport delivery model affected by the adjusted start and end times as well as grade levels changes as a result of Making the Move 2.0 to be implemented in September 2024.

### [\(Appendix 5\)](#)

The affected schools have indicated that at this point, there is no desire to return to previous start and end times, and concerns regarding 'flip-flopping' and the impacts of that on students, staff and families has been raised.

In February 2024, a survey was sent to families and staff to provide information to senior administration and the Board on the start and end time changes six months into the year. The information reported back in February had more positive feedback compared to last year but still trended more to the negative, with some indicating no impact either way. The feedback (positive or negative) fell into similar categories as last time including:

- Impact on childcare availability
- Impact on student drop-off and parent work schedules
- Lack of consultation
- Impact on sleep schedules for earlier time schools
- Co-ordination of drop-offs
- Safety Concerns (daylight, traffic)

Whether the information shared was positive or negative it remained very specific to individual families or staff and their unique circumstances, even within the same school. There is not a lot of alignment between different schools and/or families or even within the same schools in terms of feedback.

For example, while some reported the later start time worked better for their family and work situation, others reported the change made it harder for the family in terms of work schedules. ([Appendix 6](#))

## **Parent\Caregiver Concerns**

### ***Childcare***

Last winter and spring, by working with our childcare partners, we were able to increase before and after care spots for September 2023 at Whyte Ridge (30), Bairdmore (15), Crane (15), Linden Meadows (15) and Chancellor (15).

Before and After Care wait lists have already been impacted by the advent of \$10/daycare which has vastly increased already huge wait lists. They are also experiencing funding and staffing constraints similar to many sectors, especially for before and after care.

### ***Absences/Late Data***

In reviewing information on the start and end time changes, we also looked at the absence/late data from the 18 schools. Please note that the data was run cumulatively by student/year across the years (same months in 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24) and at this time we do not think it reasonable to attribute any changes (positive or negative) to start and end times changes. ([Appendix 7](#))

The general comments regarding the chronic (10%+) or severely chronic (20%+) absences in these schools are:

- Chronically absent students (10%+) are at comparable levels to 2021-22 and significantly lower than 2022-23.

- Severely absent students (20%+) are at comparable levels to 2021-22 and significantly lower than 2022-23.

Regarding lates, the data indicates that, in general, students are becoming more chronically late in a smaller number of schools than in the previous two years. As in previous years, students in higher grades (7&8) have worse late results than the younger cohorts, whether it is a later start school or earlier start school time. As well, students that were Chronic late (18-35 lates) previously are more likely to stay at the Chronic level versus reducing their late results, no matter the start/end time.

<i>Normal - 0-90% - 0-17 Lates</i>
<i>Chronic - 90-95% - 18-35 Lates</i>
<i>Severe - 95%+ - 36+ Lates</i>

The calculation for each period was run cumulatively by student/year so students appearing in October as 'Chronic' will have had total lates between 18-35 during Sep/Oct by the end of October, and so on. The cumulative totals run from month-to-month as the lates build, and students can move from Normal → Chronic → Severe if their late experience becomes high enough.

Overall, it appears that there are many more students considered 'Chronically' late in both Early/Late start schools, but less 'Severely' late students on both and many less in 'Late' starts.

### ***Student Performance***

Currently, we do not think it reasonable to attribute any changes (positive or negative) in student performance to start and end times changes as there has only been one reporting period at the time of writing of this report. There have been anecdotal comments from families about school readiness being improved, or not, depending on each family's or child's individual experiences.

## Transportation Update

During the 2022-23 school year, because we were not able to transport all our eligible students without the wait times or supervision being in place until start and end time changes came into effect in September 2023, Whyte Ridge School, Henry G. Izatt School, and later École St. Avila had hundreds of students waiting up to 45-60 minutes before and after school, supervised by Educational Assistants and school administration.

We also had dozens of canceled routes each month as we were impacted by a lack of bus drivers, buses, and storage/maintenance facilities. Due to the increase in permanent spare drivers and the change in start and end times, we were able to increase our operational capacity with double routing between the early and later start and end time schools. As a result, we had no canceled bus routes this year until February 2024.

Pembina Trails School Division is currently engaged in a Transportation Needs Assessment with Morrison Hershfield Limited that will potentially lead to further discussion of another RFP (request for proposal) for an outside company to also engage with Pembina Trails School Division on a new transportation facility review. It is anticipated that this will potentially address current and future transportation needs, as well as operational needs regarding the storage and maintenance of buses.

Last year, the Board supported funding from the accumulated surplus to support the staffing of 8 full-time spare drivers. This funding has been included in the 2024-25 budget to continue to address bus driver shortages and route cancellations. This additional staffing enabled Pembina Trails to operate without any cancellations this school year until February 2024.

Once again, we have begun to experience cancellations as we currently have only 6 of 8 full-time spare positions filled. We are actively recruiting for spare bus drivers and have recently revised the current 4-hour position to a 6-hour position to make recruiting more successful. There continue to be serious constraints in recruitment and retention of bus drivers, in the education sector and across other sectors.

Transportation continues to be impacted by:

- Existing long-term absences
- Non-work-related injuries/surgeries
- An increase in illness and medical appointment absences

As well, we continue to be impacted by the contracted service's incapacity to back-fill their vacancies created by termination, illness, and vacation of their drivers, causing us to use our spares to fill these vacancies.

We now have a bus driver trainer who is in the process of finishing the last segment of their training which helps address the lack of trainers in our system and facilitates the onboarding of new drivers.

As previously mentioned, we hired Morrison Hershfield Limited to perform a transportation needs assessment. Depending on the outcome, this may lead to further engagement with an outside consultant to do a new transportation facility review as our storage and maintenance facilities located at Loudon and Henlow are at maximum capacity for our buses.

We continue to grow transportation capacity for eligible riders by strategically ordering 77-passenger buses when replacing older buses. The net growth in the number of 77-passenger buses will help increase our capacity as required on routes with ever-increasing population density.

We also continue to experience a negative domino effect when hiring new drivers. When a position opens, it is often a contract driver who is the successful candidate, which then causes a vacancy at the contracting agency that they are unable to fill, causing us to use one of our spare drivers.

## **Conclusion**

Most of the information gathered from parents and staff indicates some ongoing concerns regarding the start/end time changes as mentioned previously in the report, although there is significantly more positive feedback than last February. There is also concern that 'flip-flopping' at this point will cause further negative impacts on daycare arrangements, work arrangements and family routines.

The operational constraints that precipitated the move to common 'walk-out' stops and the changes in start/end times are still present and will not be overcome in the short term until we can consistently address driver shortages and increase our capacity for bus storage and maintenance capabilities.

# Appendices

## **Appendix 1**

[Appendix 1 Parent Prep for Bus Stop Walk-Outs and Bell Times.pdf](#)

## **Appendix 2**

[Appendix 2 Bell Time Changes Update Briefing Notes.pdf](#)

## **Appendix 3**

[Appendix 3A Daycare Information Bell Time Changes.pdf](#)

[Appendix 3B Family Information Bell Time Changes.pdf](#)

[Appendix 3C Making the Move Schools and bell times.pdf](#)

## **Appendix 4**

[Appendix 4 Responses to Bell Times Memos January March 2023.xlsx](#)

## **Appendix 5**

[Appendix 5 SOAR feedback for start end time changes January 15 2024.xlsx](#)

## **Appendix 6**

[Appendix 6 Information Request Changes to School Start and End Time.pdf](#)

## **Appendix 7**

[Appendix 7 Division Absent Late Summary.pdf](#)