

BUS DRIVER SHORTAGE- January 2009

What do we mean when we say there is a driver shortage?

As of March 2007, charter bus carriers have not had enough drivers to complete all of the routes required by the CBE and Calgary Catholic as well as all of the private and charter schools in and around Calgary at their scheduled times. This has resulted in some students being considerably late for school. Carriers are doing what they can to cover all routes, and we appreciate your patience and understanding as they continue to address the situation. This problem has affected both Southland Transportation and First Student Canada, the two main Calgary carriers.

Will my child's bus be impacted?

It may be impacted at some time. We never know when a route will be affected, so we encourage you to develop a contingency plan for your child, in case you haven't done so already. Specifically, Westmount had 3 routes this year that were impacted by the driver shortage between September and December and only recently have all been filled with permanent drivers.

How come you don't know if my route will be affected?

Southland is doing what it can to cover all bus routes, but, like many other industries in Calgary, transportation companies are finding it hard to keep up with the demands of the city. We cannot predict when a driver will not be available to do a route, whether it is because he/she has called in sick or has left the job. There are insufficient numbers of replacement drivers available to fill in when another driver is absent. We are hopeful the situation will improve for the 2009-2010 school year given the recent changes in the economy.

How will I know if my bus is going to be late? Who do I call to find out if my bus is late?

If your bus route does not have a permanent driver assigned to it at any given time, Southland will send out messages twice a day at 6:30 AM and 2:30 PM via our Bus Communication system notifying you of the status of your route. If your bus has a permanent driver assigned to it, the drivers are instructed to send out delay messages after the 10 minute delay threshold set by Westmount. If you are waiting longer than 10 minutes and have not received a delay message you can contact Southland Transportation at 287-1335 to find out the status of your bus. There are many factors which can have an impact on why delay messages are not being sent so it is important that you follow up with Southland after the 10 minute threshold.

When should I resort to the contingency plan? What is recommended as a contingency plan?

Deciding what your contingency plan will be and when you will use it are individual decisions that only you can make for your family. You may want to consider possibilities like car pooling to and from school or dropping and picking up your children at school. We understand that these options are not possibilities for everyone and encourage you to develop a plan that is suitable to your family situation.

Please note that Southland will always provide a bus, regardless of how late it is. For those families that cannot make alternate arrangements to transport their children to and/from school in the event of a delay, Southland will take your name and number and will contact you when the bus is approaching your child's stop. This is very helpful in the situations when the bus is delayed 60 minutes or more as your child can remain in their house until you receive a call from Southland. Similarly, Southland will always send a bus in the afternoon if there are students who cannot otherwise get home.

Are buses more likely to be late in the morning or afternoon?

Buses have been late for both morning and afternoon routes. When you establish a contingency plan, you may want to ensure you have back-up arrangements made for transportation to AND from school.

If in the morning, will my child be marked late?

Students will not be penalized for arriving on a late school bus. They will be issued a "Bus" late slip when they arrive at the school and this will not count against the students' record.

If in the afternoon, what happens to the students?

Schools and parents will be notified if a school bus is going to be substantially late for an afternoon route. The school will determine the most appropriate contingency plan in these situations. All students will remain supervised in the school's atrium until the delayed bus arrives or they are picked up by parents.

What is the Westmount doing about the driver shortage?

The bus driver shortage with Southland Transportation is of great concern to Westmount and we are doing what we can to support our transportation partners.

We have:

1. Reduced the number of bus routes
2. Negotiated for wage increases for our regular drivers
3. Provided other means to recognize the contribution made by our drivers
4. Implemented the Bus Communication system to assist with communication to our parents in the event of a delay