

TRANSPORTATION Q&A FOR SCHOOL YEAR 2010-2011

Q. Why has there been a change in the Transportation system for the Framingham Public Schools?

A. The School Committee had to reduce its FY11 Budget Request to the Town by over \$6 million to meet the Town funding goal for FY11. As a result, over 50 positions were eliminated and substantial reductions in expense budgets had to be made including a \$500,000 reduction in the Transportation Budget. This reduction is possible because the state law regarding student transportation (Ch. 71, Sec. 68) only requires school districts to transport students in grades K-6 who live more than 2 miles from their assigned school. As a result of adopting the state standard, the Transportation Department was able to achieve the \$500,000 reduction by eliminating 10 buses, an 11% reduction in the fleet.

Q. Does the school district intend to have children “walk” two miles to school?

A. No. The school district will classify students as either “eligible” or “ineligible” to receive transportation services based on the distance they live from their assigned school. The district does not classify students as “walkers”. Parents and guardians are the only ones who can determine if they wish their child to walk to school. If the parent or guardian does not feel that their child can walk to school, then they are responsible for finding an alternative method of getting their child to school.

Q. How was the distance measured for eligibility?

A. The Town of Framingham’s Engineering Department uses a GIS system to generate the measurements of distance for the School Department. The distances are measured by using that point in the public roadway nearest to the pupil’s home to the defined bus pick up or drop off point at the school of attendance, and not “as the crow flies” (a straight, two-mile radius around each school). The Town’s GIS system is precise, highly accurate and uses current roadways in Framingham. Commercial programs such as Mapquest and GoogleMaps do not have the same capabilities, nor do they have access to as up-to-date information as does the Town Engineering Department.

Q. Are private ways used in any measurements?

A. No. The School Transportation Department is prohibited from using private ways for either measurement purposes or for the transportation system itself.

Q. Does the GIS system take into consideration the lack of sidewalks or the existence of one way streets?

A. No. The state law does not require the measurement to take anything other than distance into consideration when determining eligibility.

Q. Will there be additional crossing guards posted around the Town?

A. No. The Police Department, who is responsible for crossing guards, does not have the ability to add additional crossing guards due to their budget constraints. However, they will consider redeploying the existing crossing guards if experience indicates that such redeployment would be a more efficient use of these resources.

Q. Will there be additional sidewalk snow plowing throughout the Town?

A. No. The Department of Public Works, who is responsible for sidewalk snow plowing, does not have the ability to add additional sidewalks to their snow plowing plan due to their budget constraints.

Q. What are the plans for handling additional parent pick up and drop off at each school?

A. The School Transportation Department and the School Buildings and Grounds Department met with the Police Department to review the existing parent pick up and drop off areas at each school. The Police Department's Traffic and Safety Division participated in the review of all traffic flows at each school and gave the School officials their recommendations, which have been included in a plan for each school that will be provided to the building Principals for consideration and implementation.

Q. Is there an "appeal" process for any purpose?

A. The only appeal process that is required under state law and the new School Transportation standard is the appeal of the distance that students may be required to walk to a bus stop. Under this process, a student may appeal to the State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education:

"If the distance between a child's residence and the school he is entitled to attend exceeds two miles and the nearest school bus stop is more than one mile from such residence, and the school committee declines to furnish transportation, the department, upon appeal of the parent or guardian of the child, may require the town to furnish transportation for children in grades kindergarten through six for a part or for all of the distance between said child's residence and the school." (MGL Ch. 71, Sec. 68)

Q. Will ineligible students be able to purchase a bus pass for the coming year?

A. Only eligible students (those who live more than 2 miles from their assigned school) in grades 7-12 will be offered the opportunity to purchase a bus pass (\$270 for FY11 with a family maximum of \$540, unchanged from FY10).

Q. Will the Framingham Public Schools consider adding back any buses inside the two mile limit at any time in the future?

A. The Town's financial future continues to look difficult, so we do not see restoring any transportation in the near future, certainly not before next year (2011-2012). However, given the major change in our transportation system, we will assess the impact of these changes and explore possible restoration in the future, most likely through a fee for ineligible students.

Q. Where can parents go for help as they try and adjust to the new transportation policy?

A. The building Principals and PTO Presidents may know of carpooling or other group transportation options being developed by parents at their school. Those options will be organized and managed at the building level. The YMCA program is also operating in six of the eight elementary schools, providing an early drop off and late pick up options from 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM. Stapleton School, which does not have a YMCA program, is considering a parent-run option at this time.

Revised August 10, 2010