

# St. Marys City Schools



District Service Center  
1445 Celina Road  
St. Marys, OH 45885-1210  
Phone: 419-394-7278  
FAX: 419-394-0019  
<http://www.smriders.net>

Transportation Supervisor  
Dan Grothause  
[Dan.Grothausen@smriders.net](mailto:Dan.Grothausen@smriders.net)

Administrative Assistant  
Pam Tenyak  
[Pam.Tenyak@smriders.net](mailto:Pam.Tenyak@smriders.net)

Mr Chairman and members of the Joint Education Oversight Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the subject of rural school transportation in Ohio.

I am currently the transportation supervisor for the St. Marys City School in Auglaize County and have been in that position since 1995. I began driving bus in 1988 and have worked on school buses since 1982 while attending high school at Fort Jennings. My parents were bus drivers; I rode the “yellow bus” to school, and my son rides the bus in St. Marys. The yellow bus has been a major part of my life and providing safe and efficient transportation is my job and passion.

My knowledge is based on the years of experience with school bus operations. I have talked with districts in my immediate area, roundtable discussions at conferences and information compiled from statewide superintendent email in May 2016.

School transportation in Ohio is big business requiring 14,000 buses to transport 800,000 students daily. These students are our future and most precious cargo, and they are the reason for providing safe and efficient transportation.

Over the years transportation funding has changed; some for the good and some for the not so good. Working with the Joint Education Oversight Committee, our goal is to bring back the good in transportation funding.

On September 22<sup>nd</sup> you heard testimony on the issues facing urban transportation. The issues facing rural transportation are very similar but also unique at the same time. In most of our homes both parents work and rely on the school bus to get their children safely to and from school; most rural districts have buildings located in rural areas with no sidewalks, this requires students to utilize the school bus for safety, distance from home to school can be significant, our population density is low requiring traveling many miles just to pick up a few students.

Our budgets and resources are limited, and we are always looking for ways to increase efficiency and be good stewards of tax payer dollars. We share special education services with neighboring districts, this helps control the education costs but can increase transportation costs. We help neighboring districts with maintenance and share busing when practical. One of our neighboring district shares a fueling system with the county

Interim Superintendent  
Howard Overman  
419-394-4312

Treasurer  
Robin Laman  
419-394-4312

Director of Special  
Education/Student Services  
Cary Roehm  
419-300-1458

Curriculum Director  
Kim Overman  
419-300-1406

Board of Education  
Karl Dammeyer, President  
Travis Kuenning, Vice President  
Brian Little  
Ronda Shelby  
Robert Valentine

garage, and we do multi-tiered routing for efficiency, therefore transporting more students with fewer buses.

In seeking input from districts my superintendent sent out a statewide email last year. Based on that information the priorities for those that responded are:

**Bus Purchase Funding**

Funding for bus purchases was last provided in FY 2010 and had seen significant decreases in the years prior. It would be beneficial if we could implement the 2000 model which saw schools receive 50% for new buses and then 100% for special needs and non-public buses. The basis for replacement could be based on age, mileage and body condition.

In looking at bus cost, we just recently purchased a 84 passenger transit bus at a cost of \$86,800 including trade in and a few options. Base prices from our last bid range from \$73,250 for 54 passenger conventional bus up to \$91,242 for an 84 passenger lift bus. With 100% of the cost being placed on each local district it is easy to see why bus the fleets are aging and maintenance costs are rising.

All buses are maintained in a safe working order and must pass annual and spot inspections by the Ohio State Highway Patrol. The weather in Ohio can be extreme and takes quit a toll on buses particularly to the bodies and undercarriage due to winter road treatments. Rural roads also take a toll on buses. The numbers show that newer buses cost less to maintain, are more fuel efficient while being more environmentally friendly.

As a reference I have provided the numbers on a few buses from the St.Marys City Schools:

Bus #	Model Year	MPG	Maintenance Cost parts only
#7	1999	4.5 mpg	\$5493
#17	2009	5.6 mpg	\$1470
#13	2014	6.6 mpg	\$321
#9	2015	7.4 mpg	\$196

When you look at the difference in mpg and use 10,000 annual miles and fuel cost of \$1.94 per gallon the 1999 bus has fuel cost of \$4310 and the 2015 has fuel cost of \$2620. This is a savings of \$1690 per year, multiplied by the number of buses in the entire state the savings can be substantial.

When you look at maintenance cost vs age and increased fuel economy, there is a noticeable cost savings with new buses.

**Operational Cost Funding**

Beginning in FY 14 the Operational Cost Funding was returned to the per pupil or per mileage formula with supplements for low wealth and low density. This has been an

improvement from years past but still does not fully fund transportation. I am advocating a return to the Transportation Funding formula utilized in FY 10 and FY11. This formula was developed by a team of stakeholders and was designed to be understandable, reward efficiency, promote ridership and accommodate the realities of special logistical circumstances. A line item substantial enough to fully fund all transportation cost would be the goal.

I have included a sampling of our cost per pupil beginning in 2002:

2002 cost per pupil \$282  
2011 cost per pupil \$474  
2015 cost per pupil \$513

Costs are increasing while the state share has decreased from 60% to 50%.

**Other items to consider:**

**Increasing the line item for special needs transportation**

This funding has remained the same since 2009. Special education is mandated and can be a very expensive part of transportation requiring special equipment and lift buses. As a reference we spent \$3299 in 2010 per special needs students which has increased to \$4339 in 2015 with no additional funding.

**Studying ways to synchronize calendars and bell times**

This would increase transportation efficiency to and from nonpublic/community/STEM schools. We are currently required to transport these students to accommodate their calendar and then bell times even if we are not open.

All of these requests have the ability to increase efficiency, safety and reduce overall cost by running newer buses. Any increase in funding for pupil transportation can increase the amount of money spent in the classroom to educate our most precious cargo our students.

In closing, I will advocate and do what is needed to increase the awareness for the need to increase funding for pupil transportation in Ohio.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. If there are any questions, I will be happy to answer to best of my ability.

Thank you,

Dan Grothause  
Transportation Supervisor  
St. Marys City Schools