

Good Afternoon, Ms. Bryson,

Minister Jamison's office asked that I reach out to you in response to your email in concern of vehicles passing through flashing red school bus lights. We could not agree more that these incidents are extremely dangerous and even one such incident is one too many.

I can confirm with you that this concern is not unique to your area, or to Prince Edward Island. Literally every jurisdiction tasked with transporting students struggles with this issue, as it hinges on the behavior of the travelling public.

What I can share is that we have adopted a great many of the industry's "best practices" and also have a Ministerial School Bus Safety Task Force that is active in reviewing and making ongoing recommendations to government for the implementation of continued change to enhance safety – including many of the suggestions you reference in your email.

At the Public Schools Branch, our approach to safety regarding this issue focuses on the three chronologic stages of the student drop-off/pick-up process:

1. Actions in Advance of the Stop (Preventative)
2. Actions During the Stop (Mitigation of Risk)
3. Actions Following the Stop (Enforcement and Behaviour Correction)

Actions in advance include:

- All bus stops are reviewed regularly to ensure they are in reasonably safe locations
- All buses are pre-trip inspected before every run to ensure safety features are fully operational
- All school bus drivers are professionally trained
- Safety is continually reinforced with students to ensure they are aware of safety protocol
- Ongoing work continues with community partners to raise awareness with the traveling public
- Working with parents/guardians such as yourselves to address every specific issue and further advocate for ongoing support and enhanced awareness
- Safety campaigns to promote awareness of and adherence to the law
- Continuous upgrades to equipment
- And other

Actions during the stop include:

- Ensuring that bus drivers are implementing proper protocol for safe stops
- Ensure school bus lights, double stop signs, and all equipment are functional and fully engaged
- Encourage students and caretakers to proceed with awareness and caution
- Ensure bus driver is aware of surrounding threats and use all tools available to interact with traveling public to ensure safety

Actions following include

- Ensuring that school bus drivers report every incident, regardless of the amount of detail they may be able to provide
- Ensuring that the PSB files a report with the legal authorities on every incident
- Ensuring the every incident is reviewed and consideration given to recommendations for safety improvement. i.e. additional road signage, re-routing of buses, additional training/education, other.
- Advocacy for strong and consistent judicial follow through for enforcement and public behavior correction

Our goal is obviously to have zero such infractions. Below is a list of some of the upgrades to our equipment and actions we have taken to help with this issue thus far:

- The addition of amber lights (These are exclusively used for alerting drivers that the bus will be stopping for the purpose of loading or unloading students)
- Rapid flashers lenses retrofitted into all school buses
- New and improved reflective taping added to all bus profiles
- Crossing control gates installed on all buses
- Additional stop arm added to the driver's side at rear of bus
- Cameras installed on some buses (also reverse cameras on some of the newer electric buses)
- GPS systems on some buses (present on all new electric buses)
- Ongoing review of modifications and initiatives in other jurisdictions
- Presentations to the legislative assembly and other public bodies
- Public awareness and red light campaigns
- Implementation of School Bus Safety Week in October, annually
- Public distribution of safety materials and information
- Television, radio, and social media campaigns
- Annual reviews with school bus drivers
- Welcome to kindergarten increased focus on safe school bus travel
- And other

As shared above, we take this issue extremely seriously and work every day to do our best to ensure student safety. It has to be our number one priority.

As also shared above, our Island Ministry has implemented a School Bus Safety Task Force that we actively participate in to address issues pertaining to school bus safety. That committee is scheduled to provide their latest recommendations to government on this topic prior to school starting back up in the fall, and I can share that the suggestions in your email are directly in line with the expected recommendations of the committee. Interest and support of parents such as you have expressed will continue to be essential, as every member of the travelling public must make safety their number one priority as well.

In closing, the PSB conducts over 14,000 school bus stops every school day, for which we average approximately 1 such incident reported per. ANY such incident has the potential to be catastrophic, hence our ongoing efforts to address. We are extremely proud of our drivers and team that share in the responsibility of keeping students safe. It is in large part because of their professionalism and the above continued efforts that we have experienced very few incidents resulting in injury. Until the number of red-light violations becomes zero, our team will continue its efforts, again with priority number one being the safety of students.

Dave

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