



Southwestern Ontario
Student Transportation Services

ANNUAL REPORT TO STAKEHOLDERS

2016-2017 FISCAL YEAR

The summary of service and related activities of Southwestern
Ontario Student Transportation Services



Tel 519 649 1160

201-557 Southdale Road East
London, ON N6E 1A2

www.mybigyellowbus.ca

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To Our Stakeholders

Southwestern Ontario Student Transportation is pleased to present its annual report for the 2016-2017 year.

Since 2008, STS has continually sought to deliver a safe and efficient transportation service to support the education goals of the students within our service area. This report represents an ongoing commitment to improve communications and information sharing with key stakeholders.

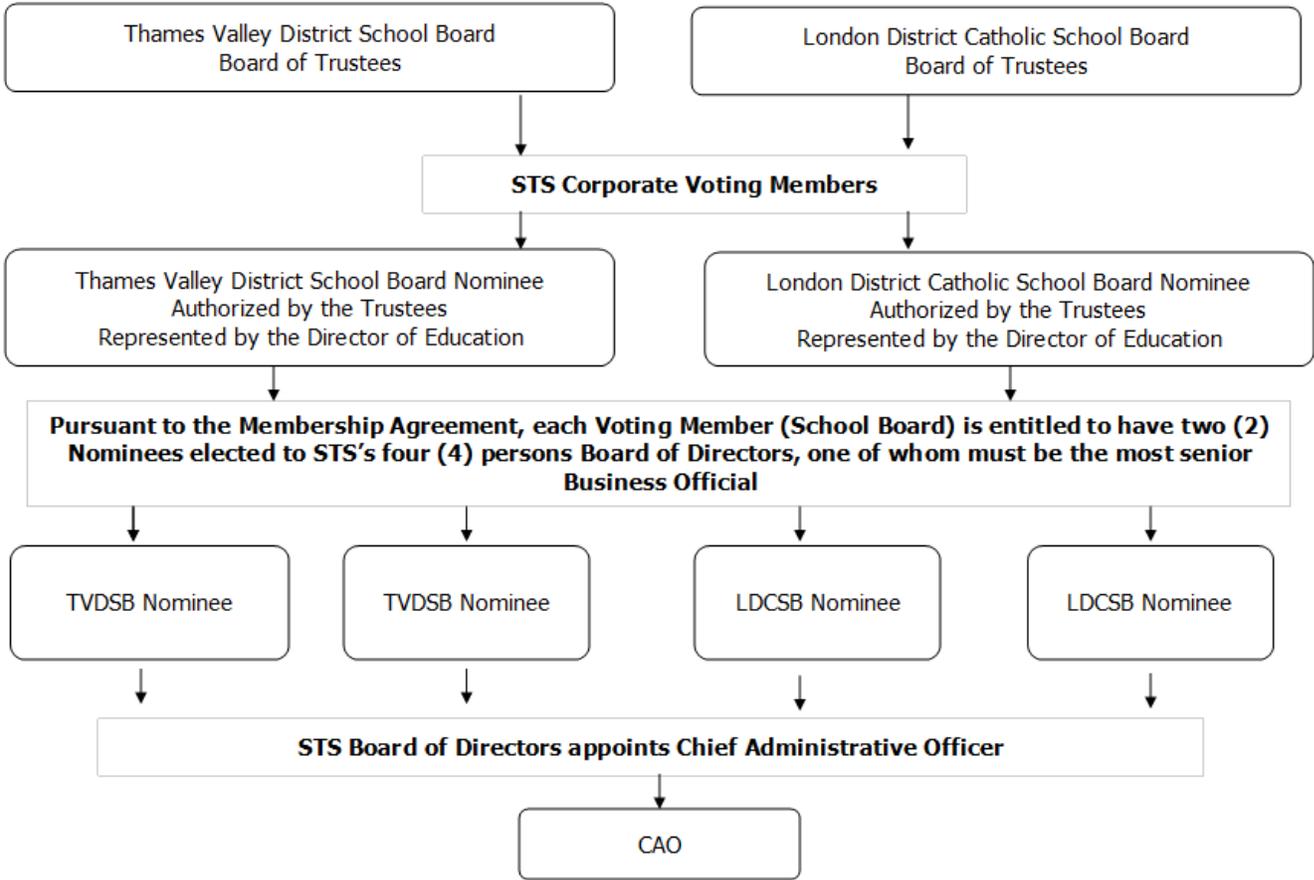


Maureen Cosyn Heath, M.P.A
Chief Administrative Officer
October 23, 2017

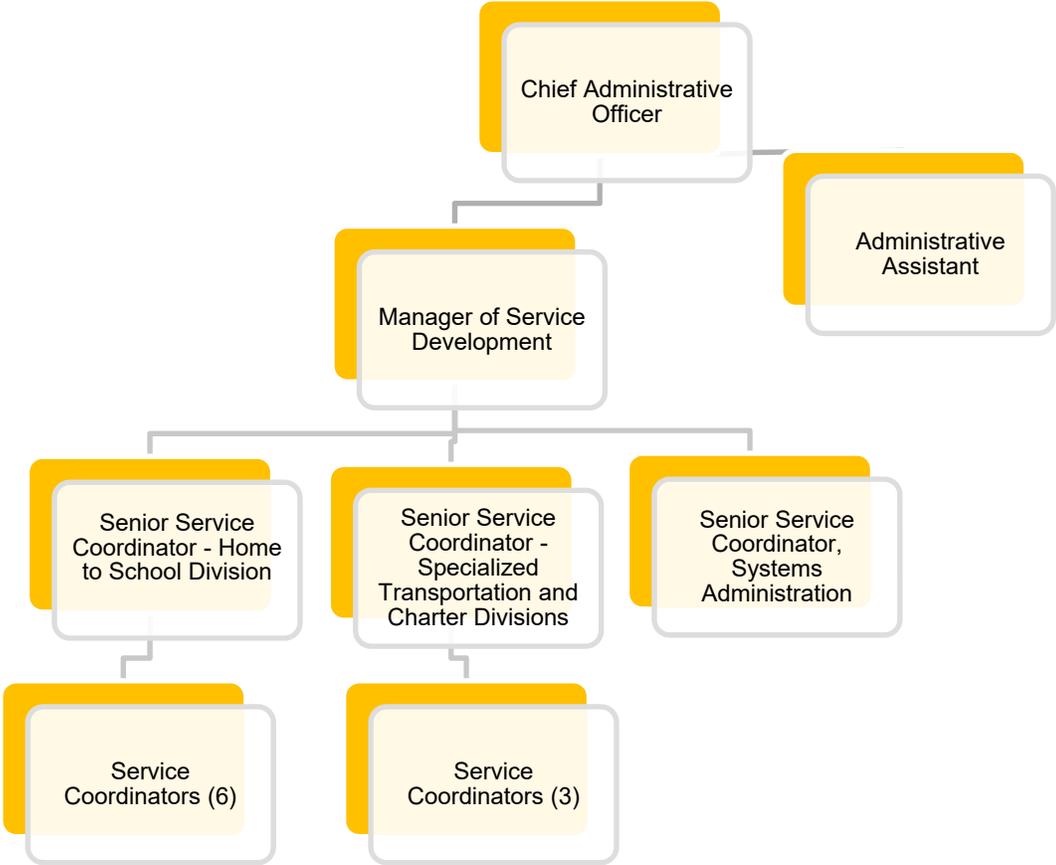
Governance Structure

Southwestern Ontario Student Transportation Services (STS) is the jointly-held transportation consortium acting on behalf of its member school boards, the London District Catholic and Thames Valley District School Boards. Established in 2008 as a result of a mandate from the Ministry of Education, STS is a separate legal entity which operates at an arm's length from the member boards. STS was incorporated under the *Incorporations Act* on September 29, 2008.

Each of its member boards set distance and program based eligibility policy through the Board of Trustees, who are also responsible for appointing the voting members of the corporation. STS is governed by a four-person Board of Directors comprised of two senior officials from each member school board. The Board of Directors provide governance oversight, approve the policies of STS and provide strategic direction to the corporation.



The daily activities of the corporation are under the direction of the Chief Administrative Officer, who reports to the Board of Directors.



Human Resources

Human Resources Plan

STS created its Human Resources Plan in 2012. The framework for the plan sets out the five key items:

- Effective People-Management Strategy
- Leadership and Mentorship
- Performance Feedback Framework
- Learning-Focused Organization
- Flexible and Motivating Work Environment

During the 2016-2017 year, STS undertook the following activities to support the HR plan:

- Hired an additional two Service Coordinators to support the newly created Charter Services division.
- On-boarded 2 new full time employees to replace permanent vacancies and an additional 2 contract personnel to cover position vacancies.
- Provided additional customer service training for all Service Coordinators and Senior Service Coordinators.
- Increased STS participation by 2 additional staff memberships in the Ontario Association of School Business Officials.
- Participated in the annual OASBO Student Transportation Fall Safety Conference, including as presenters.
- Participated in the annual software conference, including as presenters on the newly-created charter services program.

Service Area Profile

Schools Serviced¹

STS coordinated home to school transportation services for 212 schools during the 2016-2017 academic year, comprised of 176 elementary and 36 secondary school sites.

Description	LDCSB Prior Year	LDCSB 2016-2017	TVDSB Prior Year	TVDSB 2016-2017
Elementary Schools	45	45	133	131
Secondary Schools	9	9	27	27
Change		0		-2

Service Area

The service area is expansive, covering a mix of both urban and rural environments. The area covers more than 7,000 square kilometers, making STS one of the largest service areas in southern Ontario.

- City of London
- Elgin County
- Middlesex County
- Oxford County



¹ The following elementary schools closed as of June 30, 2016: Lorne Avenue Public School (TVDSB), West Elgin Senior Elementary (TVDSB)

Service Design

STS is responsible for designing school bus service which is in keeping with policy to ensure that students receive similar service throughout the area regardless of school board affiliation. Transportation eligibility is established by policy. The first governing policy is distance-based as established at the school boards. The remaining policies are established at STS as approved by its Board of Directors.

Transportation Eligibility

Distance-based eligibility is established by policy at the school boards. Under the *Education Act*, school boards are not required to provide transportation to students but have elected to do so. Based on the decision to provide transportation, the boards established a distance-based criterion to establish qualification for school bus service. The distance to qualify for transportation is harmonized, or the same, at both school boards. This is a critical component of equitable and efficient transportation planning.

The distance-based policy applies to all families and students enrolled in a school belonging to the member school boards. Students attending their board-designated school are eligible for transportation based on the following distances:

- Elementary aged students that reside greater than 1.6 kms from the school site
- Secondary aged students that reside greater than 3.2 kms from the school site

While there is no provincial standard for distance-based transportation eligibility, the above distances are in line with the normative distance across the province.

Determination of Transportation Eligibility

The technical determination of whether an address is eligible for transportation is made by STS and is based on a distance computation done by a planning software system to ensure consistency throughout the district. The software uses Geographic Information System (GIS) data provided by the municipalities, including the road and walkway network. The computation determines if an address is eligible based on the location of the perimeter property edges of the address relative to the school address using the shortest travel route.

If a residence does not qualify for transportation based on distance as solely determined by STS, it is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to determine how the student will arrive at and depart from school. Parental concerns with road or pedestrian safety are not considered during distance computations.

Primary Address of Student

STS will coordinate home to school transportation based on the student's primary address to their board-designated school based on the address registered with the school board. A student can only have one primary address.

Transportation eligibility is determined based on the primary address of the student as registered in the school board's Student Information System. This data is provided electronically to STS.

Alternate Addresses

Students who are eligible for transportation may have service based on one additional alternate address, typically used for the purpose of receiving childcare/babysitting. Both the primary address and the alternate address must be within the transportation boundary. A student can have a bus stop based on the primary address and another based on an alternate address within the same travel day, however the schedule must remain consistent Monday through Friday. Under normal circumstances, alternate address transportation must be accommodated on existing bus runs and bus stops.

Secondary Address for Joint Custody

Transportation may be provided to a secondary address based on joint custody arrangements. Because of the safety issues with varying bus schedules, particularly at the elementary level, the policies governing this type of transportation are different based on the student's grade.

Use of a Vacant Seat

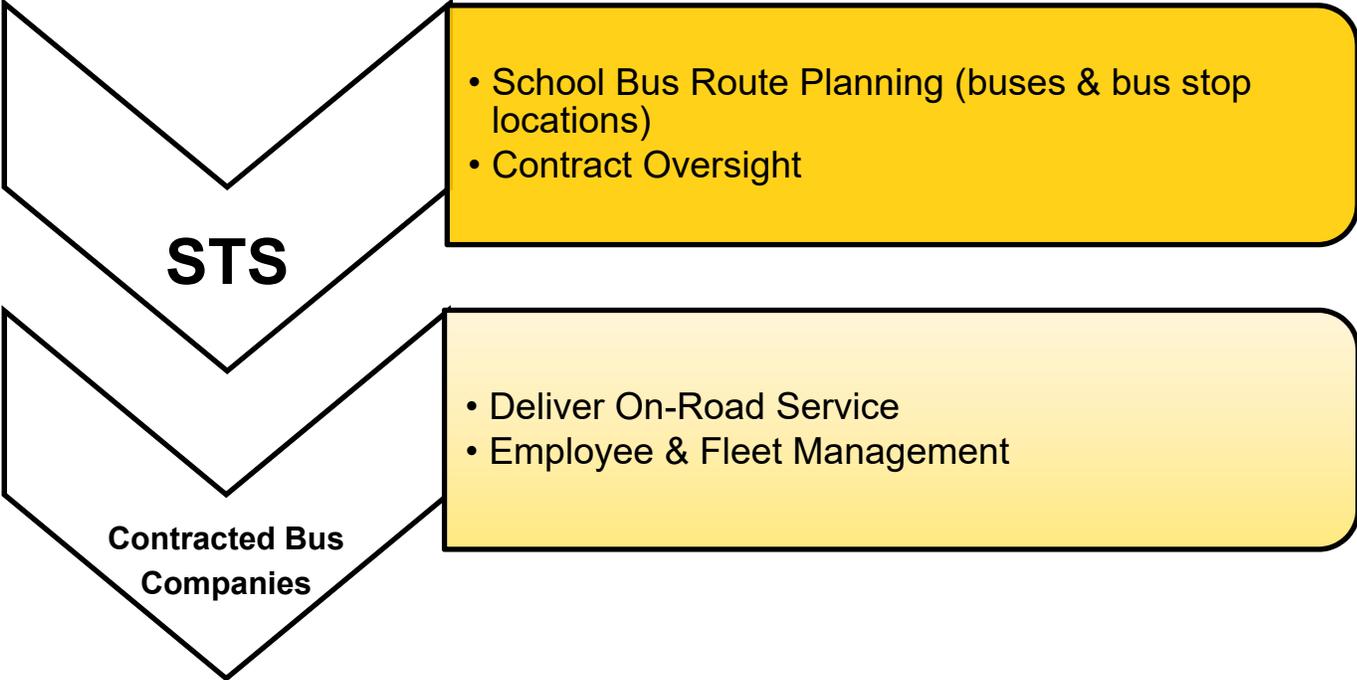
Transportation may be provided to elementary age students who are not eligible for transportation but who attend a daycare facility or home daycare where the daycare address is eligible for transportation.

Choice of School

Students who choose to attend a school other than their board-designated may apply for choice of school transportation. This type of transportation is approved on an exception basis and is not guaranteed; it requires an annual application and there must be an available seat on an existing bus run. Additionally, the student must attend the closest existing bus stop, irrespective of distance from the residence. The service can be revoked from the choice of school student if a student eligible under policy requires the seat. These seats are approved only after all other eligible students have been assigned.

Service Delivery Roles

The on-road service delivered to students and their families is planned by STS and delivered daily by contracted school bus companies.



Student Transportation Services

Student Transportation Services manages the contracts with the bus companies who are responsible for delivering the daily service which encompasses all operational matters including employee and fleet management.

Contracted Bus Companies

For the 2016-2017 school year, a total of eight (8) bus companies provided service under the home to school contracts with STS.

Bus Company Name
Badder Bus Lines
First Student Canada
Langs Bus Lines
Murphy Bus Lines
Sharp Bus Lines
STC o/a Elgie Bus Lines
Ravin Coach Lines
Voyageur Transportation Services

School Bus Routes

In 2016-2017, a total of 1,133 school bus routes operated throughout the service area.

Description	Total Routes Prior Year (15-16)	Elgin County	Middlesex County	Oxford County	City of London	Total
Regular Bus Routes	796	194	208	165	245	812
Specialized Bus Routes	335	55	51	70	145	321
Total	1,131	249	259	235	390	1,133

For greater clarity, a school bus run is the loop picking up students for a school (noting more than one school may be served on the same run). A school bus route is the total number of school bus runs serviced by a vehicle. Typically, the first bus run serves a high school and the second bus run serves the elementary school. These two runs combined (both morning and afternoon) equal the total route serviced by one vehicle. STS uses single, double and triple runs where practical to do so.



Kilometers Travelled

A key component of transportation planning is the distance that each bus travels as kilometers are a significant part of route planning and budget forecasting. Bus contracts are paid based on a formula which includes a per kilometer component.

Transportation has two key types of kilometers: planned and actual. Actual kilometers can vary widely from planned kilometers based on student distribution and weather events.

Description	Prior Year (2015-2016)	2016-2017 Year
Total Kilometers	23,359,039	23,175,099

School Purpose Vehicles

Types of Vehicles Used

STS uses a variety of vehicle types to provide effective and efficient student transport while recognizing unique transportation solutions for students with special needs. Vehicle mix can vary from one year to the next based on geographic distribution of students and student needs.

Vehicle Type	Prior Year (2015-2016)	2016-2017 Year
Full Size Passenger Bus	620	625
Mid Size Passenger Bus	67	66
Mini Size Passenger Bus	88	101
Mini Size Passenger Bus – Accessible	107	110
Minivan	249	231

Public Transit

Public transit tickets may be provided to students. The use of public transit tickets is largely restricted to special programs.

Transported Students

Students who are eligible for transportation under policy are assigned to a seat on a vehicle in the morning and afternoon. The majority of students are eligible to their board-designated schools based on distance. Under limited circumstances, bus service may be provided based on “hazard” conditions. In 2014, STS began a periodic review of all legacy hazard designations in the service area, many of which predate the formation of STS.

Total ridership in 2016-2017 was 47,162, compared to 45,548 the previous year. This represents a 4% increase in ridership.

Transportation Eligibility Type	Prior Year (2015-2016)	Current Year (2016-2017)
Eligible (Distance)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular Track 	35,203	36,040
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • French Immersion 	5,728	6,093
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialized Education 	1,572	1,609
Eligible (Distance Based Exemption)	3,045	3,420
Total Transported Students	45,548	47,162

Did you know?

Based on the number of transported students, **STS is the 5th largest consortia** in Ontario, behind Peel Region, Ottawa, Toronto and York Region.

Some transported students require additional service to/from additional addresses or access a vacant seat for childcare purposes. The figures below represent transported students who benefit from the additional services offered by STS.

Additional Services	Prior Year (2015-2016)	Current Year (2016-2017)
Alternate Address	1,848	1,966
Joint Custody - Elementary	148	193
Joint Custody - Secondary	206	263
Vacant Seat	306	381
Choice of School	559	581
Out of District	84	69
Total Transported Students Using Additional Services	3,151	3,453

Traveling to the Bus Stop

Parents/guardians are responsible for their student's safety to, from and at the school bus stop location. This practice is consistent with parental/guardian responsibility for student safety to and from school sites for those who do not qualify for transportation.

Students are required to travel to a community-based bus stop location. The travel distances are:

- Elementary students: up to 800 meters (0.8 kilometers)
- Secondary students: up to 1600 meters (1.6 kilometers)

The travel distances represent half of the distance travelled by students who do not qualify for transportation.

Community bus stop locations are designed to be accessible for a number of students. Typically located at community mailboxes, greenspaces and corners, these stops often remain in the same location year after year. However, bus stops are reviewed annually and may be relocated based on routing changes and student locations. While the policy distance provides for much greater travel to stop distances, the figures below illustrate the average distance students actually travel to meet transportation.

Geographic Area	Elementary Prior Year 2015-2016	Elementary 2016-2017	Secondary Prior Year 2015-2016	Secondary 2016-2017
Elgin County	110 m	110 m	250 m	260 m
Middlesex County	90 m	90 m	230 m	280 m
Oxford County	110 m	120 m	270 m	320 m
City of London	200 m	190 m	400 m	370 m

Kindergarten Students and School Bus Stops

JK/SK students must be accompanied to and met at a bus stop location by a responsible person.

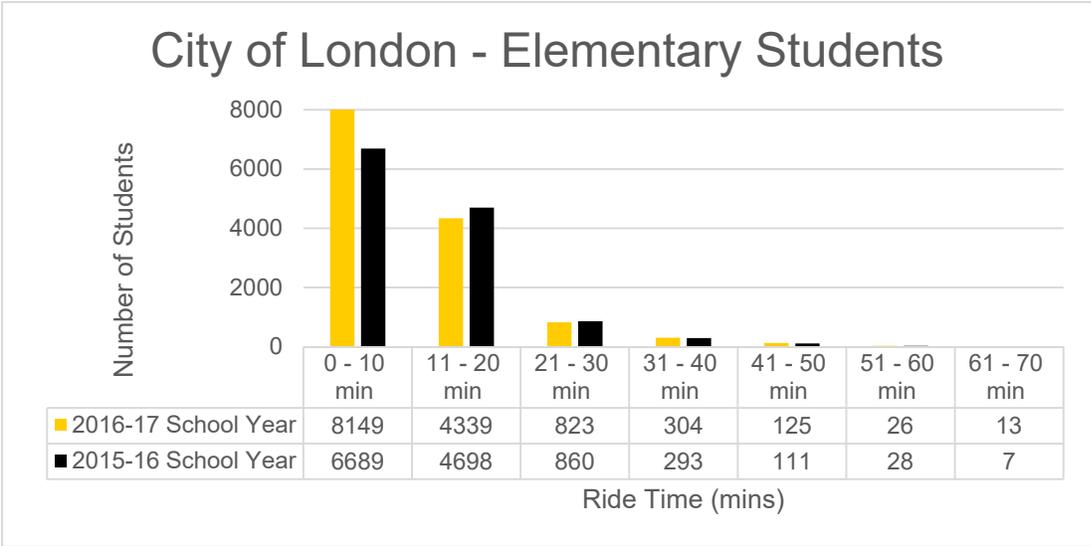
Ride Time on the Vehicle

Students may spend a maximum of 70 minutes one way on the bus. Under certain limited circumstances, based on geography or program choice, this travel time may be exceeded.

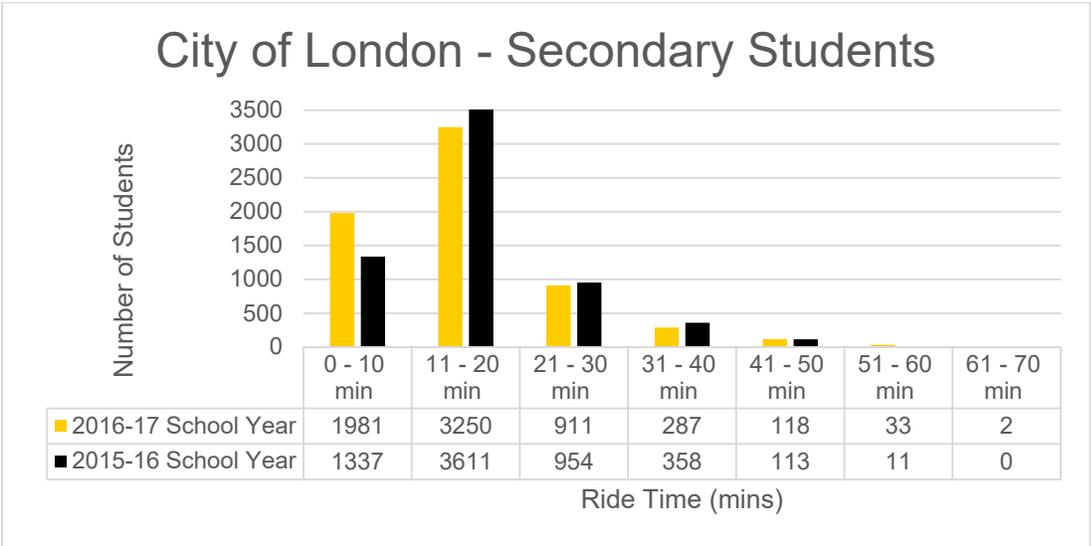
Factors that influence ride time include:

- Geographical location of school
- School boundary
- Student-selected specialty program offerings
- Student location related to geographic location of school
- Number of students assigned to the bus run
- Number of bus stops assigned to the bus run
- Traffic conditions, congestions and construction
- Distance between the house and bus stop location the student is assigned to

Ride times are reviewed annually as part of the planning cycle and periodically throughout the year. Ride times are also addressed, where possible, in response to inquiries.

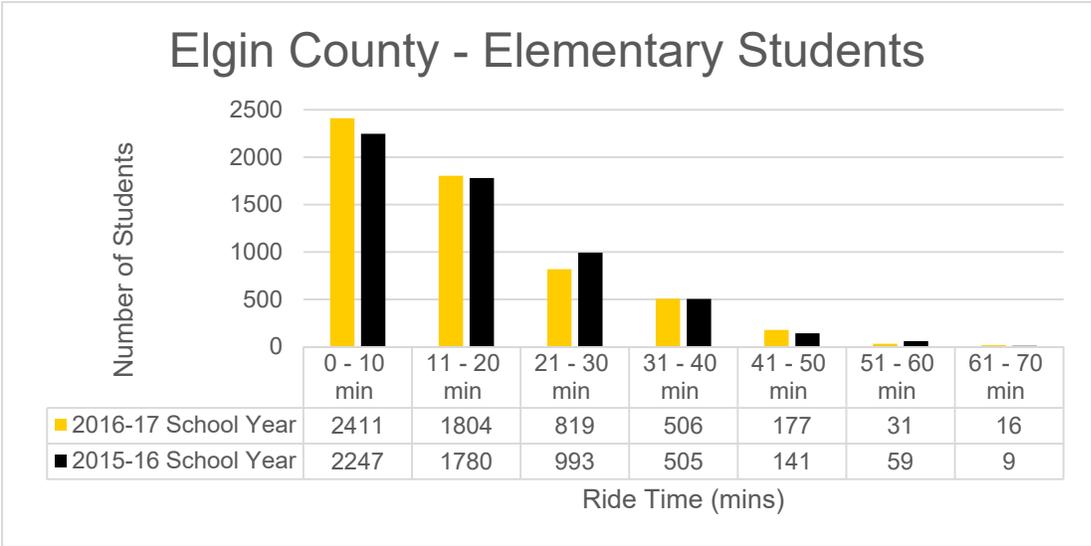


91% of elementary riders are on the bus for 20 minutes or less.

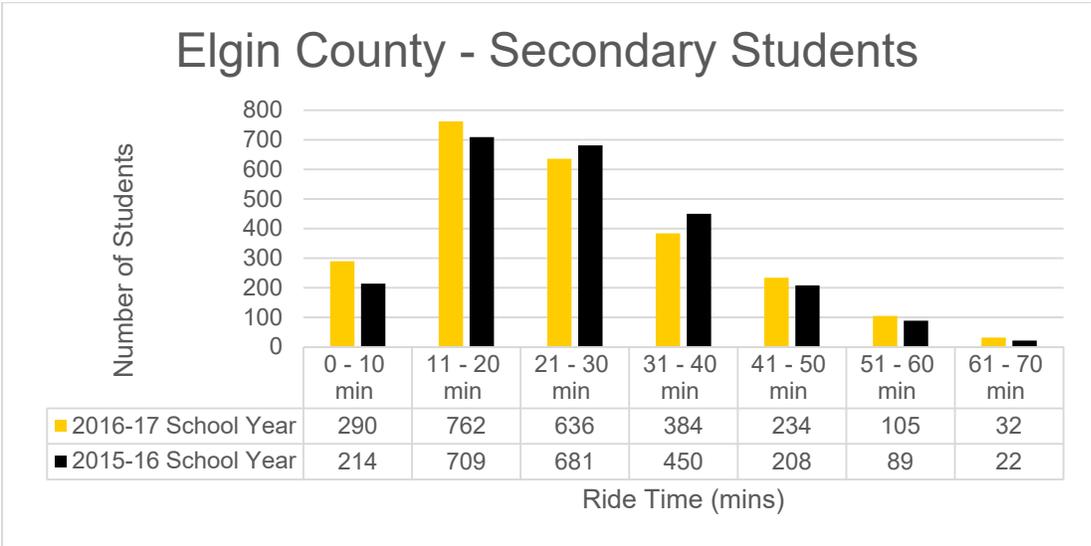


93% of secondary riders are on the bus for 30 minutes or less.

Note:
There are no students in the city of London with scheduled ride times which exceed policy.



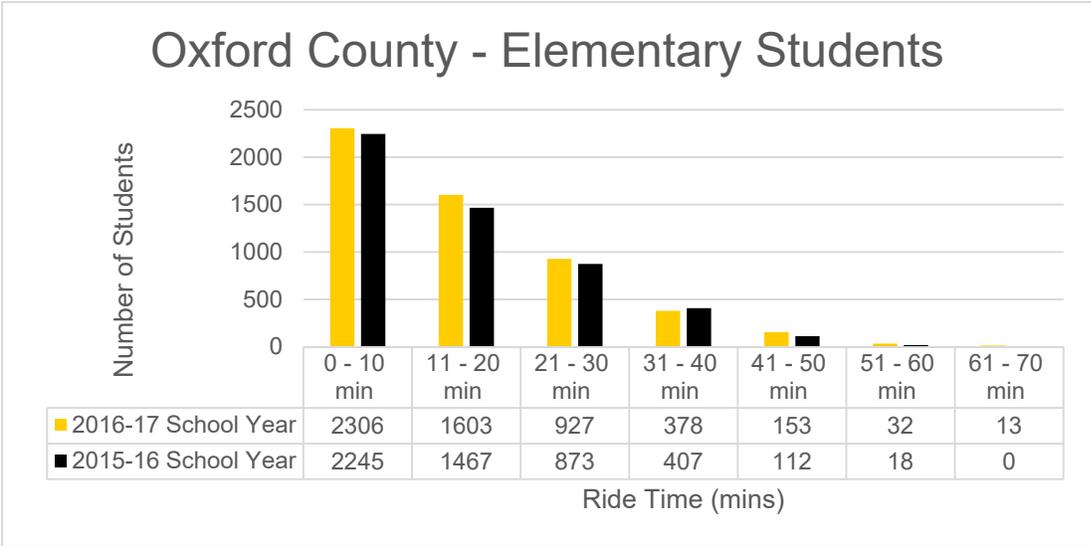
73% of elementary riders are on the bus for 20 minutes or less



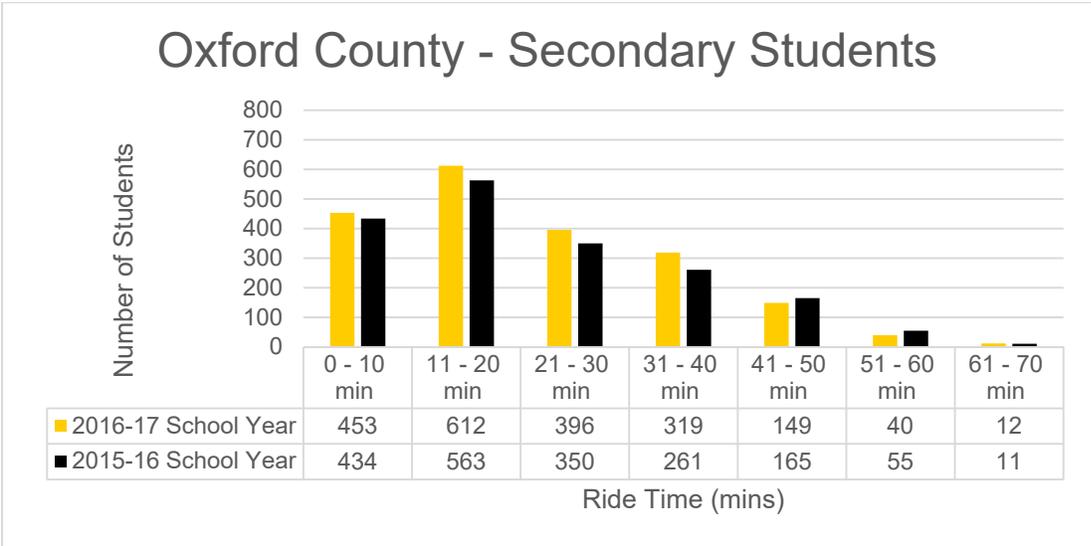
69% of secondary riders are on the bus for 30 minutes or less.

Notes:

- There are a total of 23 students in Elgin County who have scheduled afternoon ride times which exceed policy.
- 4 elementary (4 enrolled in a program of choice and reside, on average, 53 kilometers away from the school site)
 - 19 secondary (5 are enrolled in a program of choice and reside, on average, 37 kilometers away from the school site, 14 who reside, on average, 50 kilometers away from the school site)

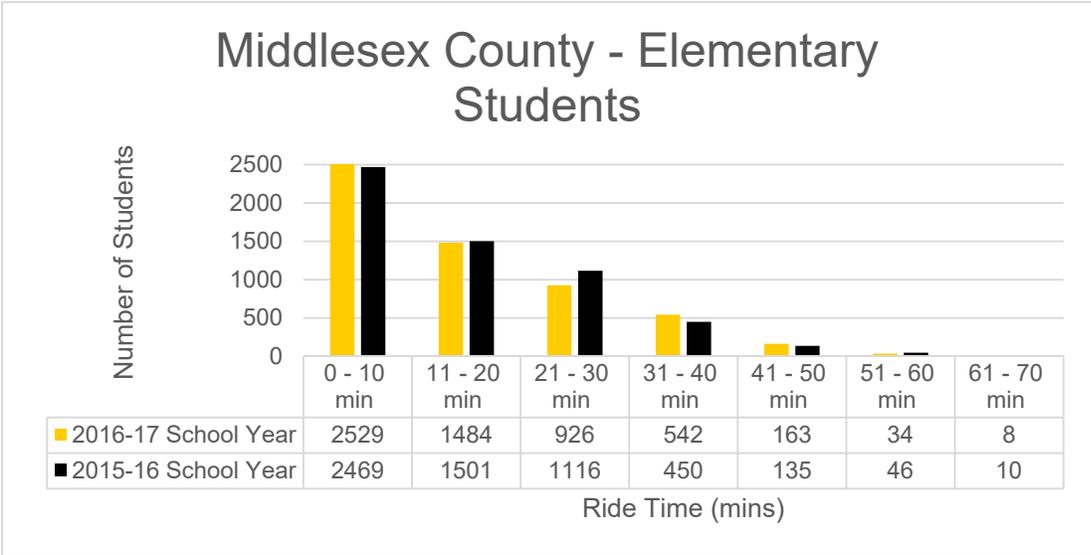


72% of elementary riders are on the bus for 20 minutes or less.

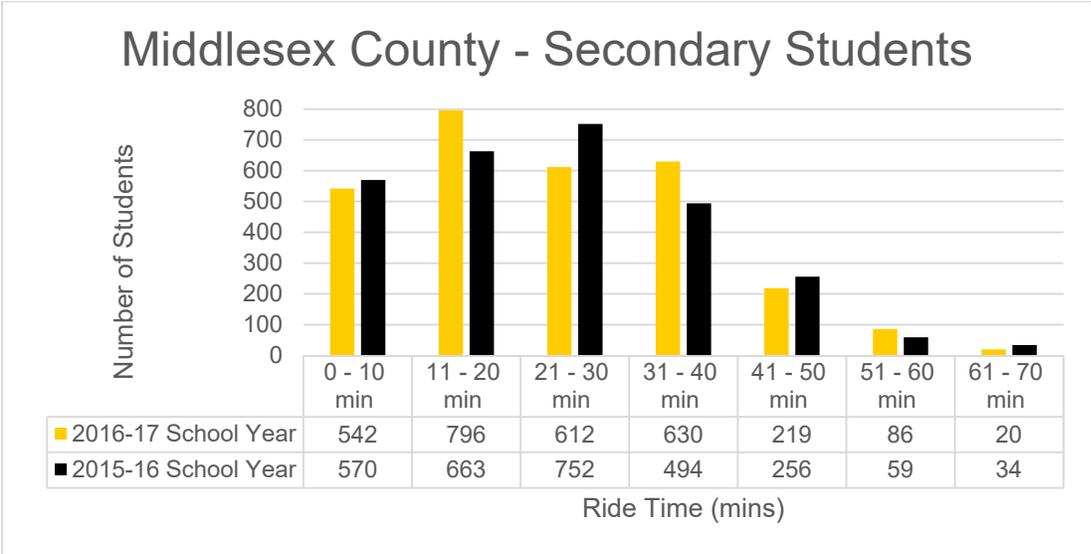


74% of secondary riders are on the bus for 30 minutes or less.

- Notes:
 There are a total of 6 students in Oxford County who have scheduled afternoon ride times which exceed policy.
- 4 elementary (4 enrolled in a program of choice and reside, on average, 32 kilometers away from the school site)
 - 2 secondary (2 who reside, on average, 34 kilometers away from the school site.)



71% of elementary riders are on the bus 20 minutes or less.



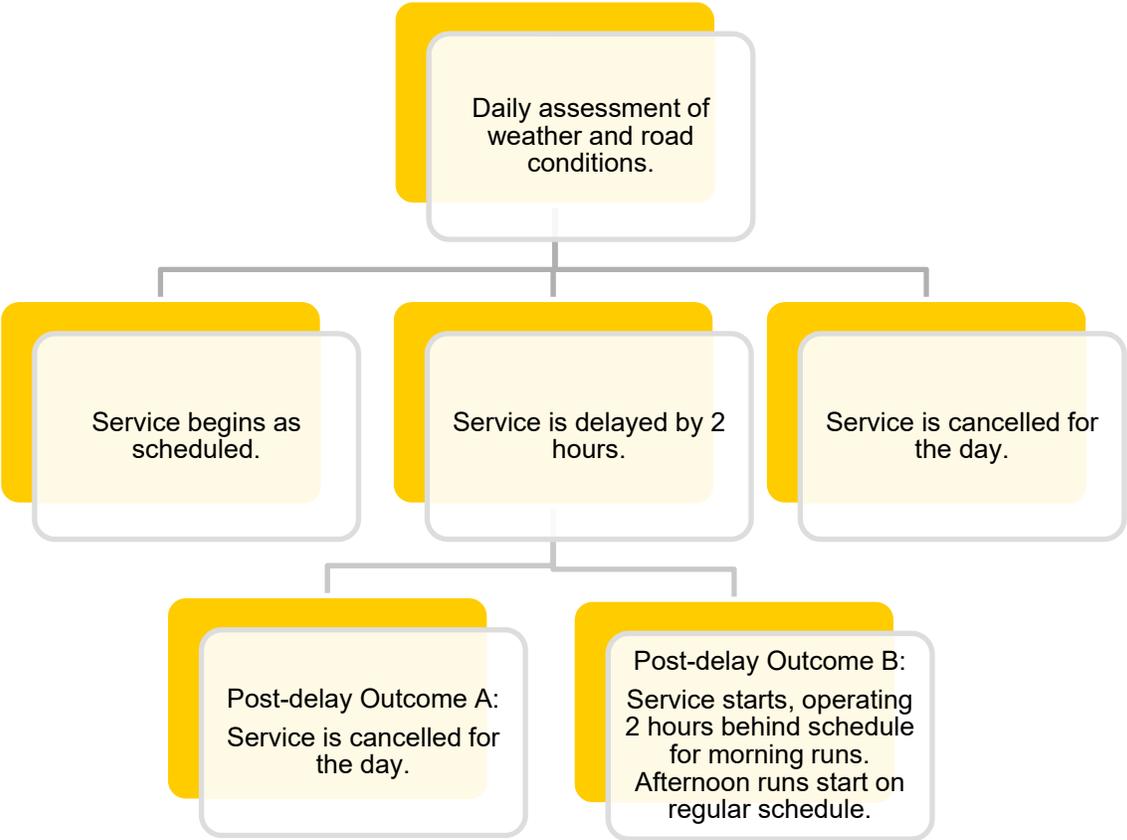
67% of secondary riders are on the bus for 30 minutes or less.

Notes:

- There are a total of 35 students in Middlesex County who have scheduled afternoon ride times which exceed policy.
- 8 elementary (8 enrolled in a program of choice and reside, on average, 38 kilometers away from the school site)
 - 27 secondary (12 enrolled in a program of choice and reside, on average 40 kilometers away from the school site and 15 attend their designated school and reside, on average, 38 km away from the school site)

Inclement Weather

During inclement weather, the bus companies determine whether or not school purpose vehicles operate. When area-wide inclement weather events occur, the following processes occur:



Inclement weather is a disruptive part of the business which has significant impact on family routines. School bus routes and runs are planned to avoid unnecessary disruptions whenever possible, but given the size of the service area and location of programs, bus routes travel many kilometers each day. While the bus companies are responsible for determining if the service operates, during times of inclement weather, parents/guardians are ultimately responsible for deciding if their student will use the service.

The following chart illustrates the inclement weather delay/cancellation events during 2016-2017.

START OF SCHOOL YEAR					
Date	Affected Areas	Delay > GO	Delay > CANCEL	Cancel	Reason
04-Oct-16	Oxford County				Fog
19-Oct-16	Glencoe, West Elgin, Central Elgin				Fog
17-Nov-16	Oxford County				Fog
09-Dec-16	Oxford County, All Ravin Routes				Snow
12-Dec-16	System-Wide Cancel				Snow
15-Dec-16	Middlesex & Oxford				Snow
CHRISTMAS BREAK					
Date	Affected Areas	Delay > GO	Delay > CANCEL	Cancel	Reason
10-Jan-17	Middlesex, Elgin, Oxford, Red Zone				Snow/Freezing Rain
11-Jan-17	Middlesex				Road Conditions
11-Jan-17	Oxford				Road Conditions
17-Jan-17	System-Wide Cancel				Freezing Rain
20-Jan-17	Oxford				Fog/Road Conditions
MARCH BREAK					
27-Mar-17	Oxford				Fog

By contrast, the 2015-2016 year had a total of five partial county cancellations, all of which occurred between January to March of 2016 and only one “delay then go” event due to fog in a county was recorded. System-wide cancellation events, meaning all routes through the entire service area are cancelled, can vary widely too. For example, there were 3 system-wide cancellation events in 2014, none in 2015-2016 and 2 in 2016-2017.

Inclement weather delays and/or cancellations are posted publicly on the website by 6:30 AM on the morning of the weather event. STS also posts notification of area wide disruptions on its social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter) Annual email subscriptions are also available through the Parent Portal or the website.

Safety Programs

STS is pleased to offer a variety of safety programs to students, their families and schools.

First Rider Day (August)

STS hosts a First Rider Day at five locations each year in August. There are two London locations and a location in each of the three counties. Approximately 1,000 students and their families attend this event each year at no cost to attendees. Both full sized yellow and wheelchair accessible vehicles are on site to ensure inclusivity and promote integrated accessibility.

Students and their parents receive a safety lesson, learn how to properly board and de-board and evacuate the bus and be a safe school bus rider. The program session lasts approximately 30 minutes.

STS is proud to collect school supply donations for “Supplies for Students” at First Rider Day and has been supporting this since the inaugural First Rider Day held in 2010.

Kindergarten Bus Tag Program

STS introduced a bus tag program to assist school staff and bus drivers with the management of kindergarten students. The bus tag is a visual cue for school staff who load the buses at dismissal time and for the bus driver to be on the lookout for a responsible person to meet the student at the bus stop.

The tags are brightly colored for visibility and match the bus number sign in the side of the vehicle. STS mails bus tags in late August to all registered kindergarten students.

Replacement tags are available at the school office.

In-School Safety Programs

STS provides annual school bus safety training programs to each elementary school. The programs, developed and delivered by Intertrain Inc. are specifically designed to support student learning through engaging, modern technology and in an interactive environment.

The programs offer both a primary program for students in kindergarten through grade 3 and an intermediate program for students in grade 4 through 8. Most people are familiar with the memorable “Buster the Bus”, the beloved bus who talks and interacts with students through the session. Intertrain is responsible for refreshing program content annually so students never tire of the program.

School Bus Safety Week

School Bus Safety Week is held annually during the third week of October. Supported by news releases and social media campaigns, Wednesday of School Bus Safety Week is School Bus Driver Appreciation day. Parents and schools alike are encouraged to recognize the valuable contributions of school bus drivers and bus monitors on this day.

Transportation consortia across the province use a series of coordinated messages and social media graphics to promote School Bus Safety Week. STS was the lead participant on the Ontario Association of School Business Officials task force that created harmonized materials for province-wide use.



New in 2016-2017

Each year, STS continues its ongoing commitment to process improvement and service enhancements that benefit the community.

Bus Delays and Cancellations Video



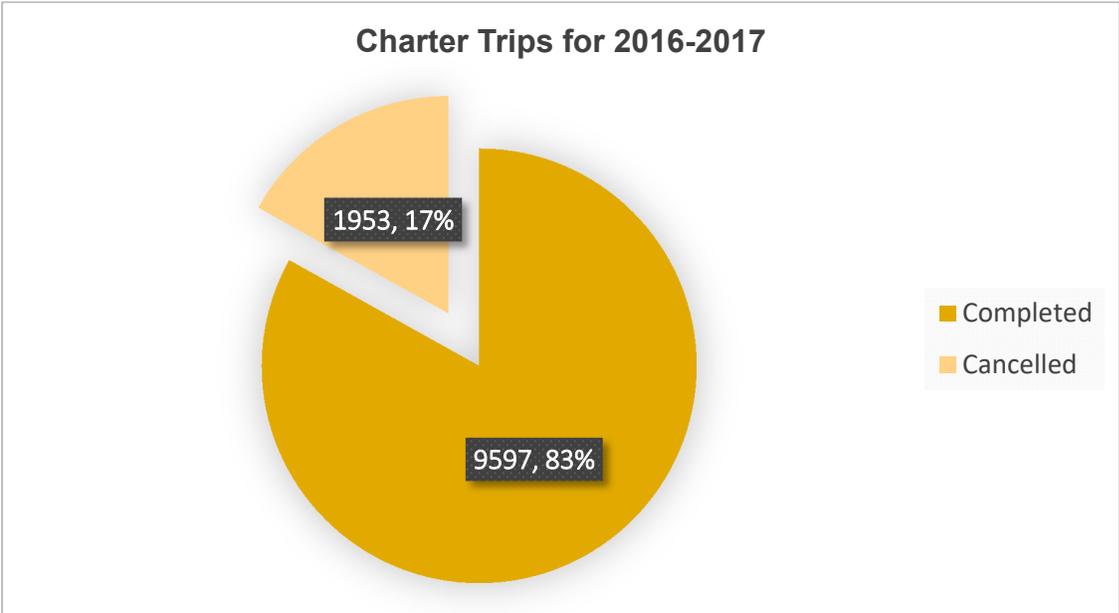
In February of 2017, STS launched a video outlining how decisions are made regarding school bus delays and cancellations due to inclement weather. The video received over 3,000 views within two months of its debut. Moving forward into the new school year, the video link will again be prominently promoted through STS's social media channels and website.

The video can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ud3SmoX1ISw>

Administrative Support for Charter Bus Services

STS began supporting charter bus requests for schools in 2016-2017. This included developing a software platform to manage booking requests and acting as a conduit between schools and the bus companies. Administrative procedures were developed and a number of surveys were completed with schools and bus companies alike to identify areas which required improvement. A number of program changes have been implemented in advance of the 2017-2018 school year.

Close to 12,000 trips were requested during the first year. This represents approximately 50 charter trips per instructional day.



The availability of school buses for hire during “prime time” when the home to school runs are on the road remains an ongoing challenge as there are not separate buses and drivers that exclusively provide charter services. For example, based on 2016-17 data, there are no full-size buses available in the afternoon between 3:30 pm – 4:30 pm as they are all scheduled on elementary runs, as the following table illustrates.

Geographic Area	In Use 2:30 – 3:30 PM	Available 2:30 – 3:30 PM	In Use 3:30 PM – 4:30 PM	Available 3:30 PM – 4:30 PM	In Use 4:00 -4:30 PM	Available 4:00 -4:30 PM
City of London	93%	16	100%	0	39%	138
Oxford County	39%	73	99%	1	31%	82
Elgin County	55%	60	100%	0	19%	109
Middlesex County	64%	51	100%	0	28%	103

Support for Bus Driver Recruitment

Bus driver recruitment and training is the responsibility of the contracted bus companies as the employer. However, as the baby boomers retire from the workforce, the industry is experiencing driver shortages province-wide. To assist in publicizing available positions, STS added a link to the homepage on its website and supported bus company recruitment efforts through its social media channels.

Policy Revisions

STS began a policy review process in 2016 which remains ongoing. During the course of the year, a number of policies were revised and updated. The approved policies are posted online at www.mybigyellowbus.ca

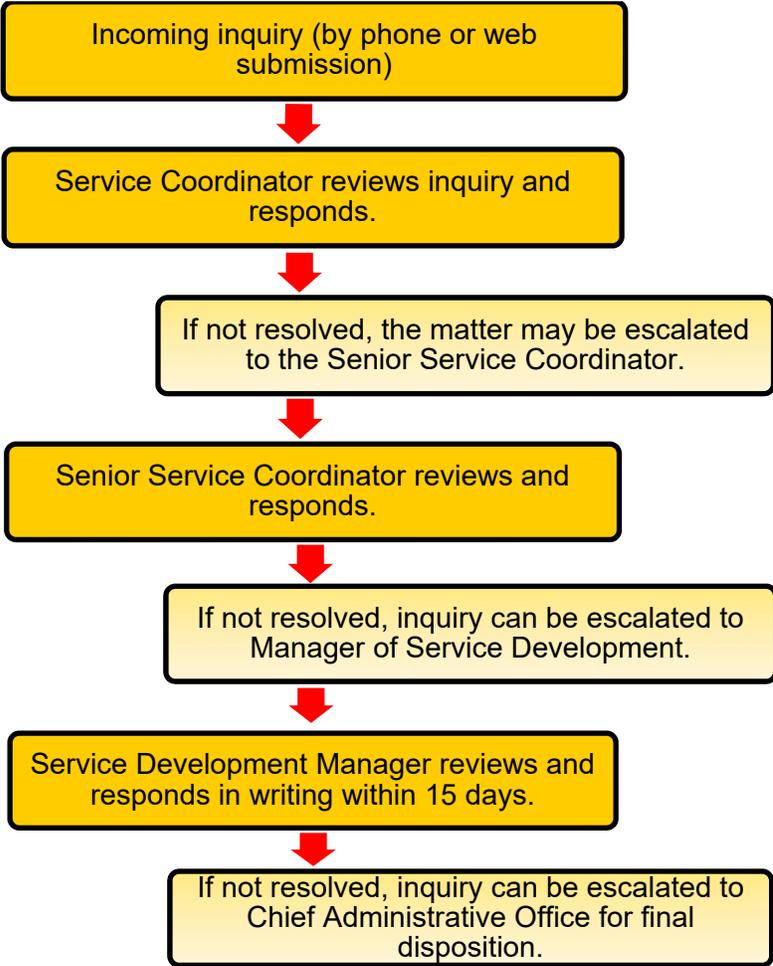
The following policies were updated in 2016-17:

- Exemptions to Distance-Based Transportation Eligibility
- Problem Resolution
- Responsibilities of Parents/Guardians
- Lost or Stolen Items on a School Purpose Vehicle
- Service Design Standards

Periodic reviews are conducted in response to legislative changes or identified items which may require a revision.

Problem Resolution

STS has a robust process for addressing inquiries. Parents/guardians can contact STS by phone or by completing an online form on the website. STS response times are typically within 2 business days. During start-up (mid-August to the end of September) responses are provided within 5 business days due to the volume of inquiries.

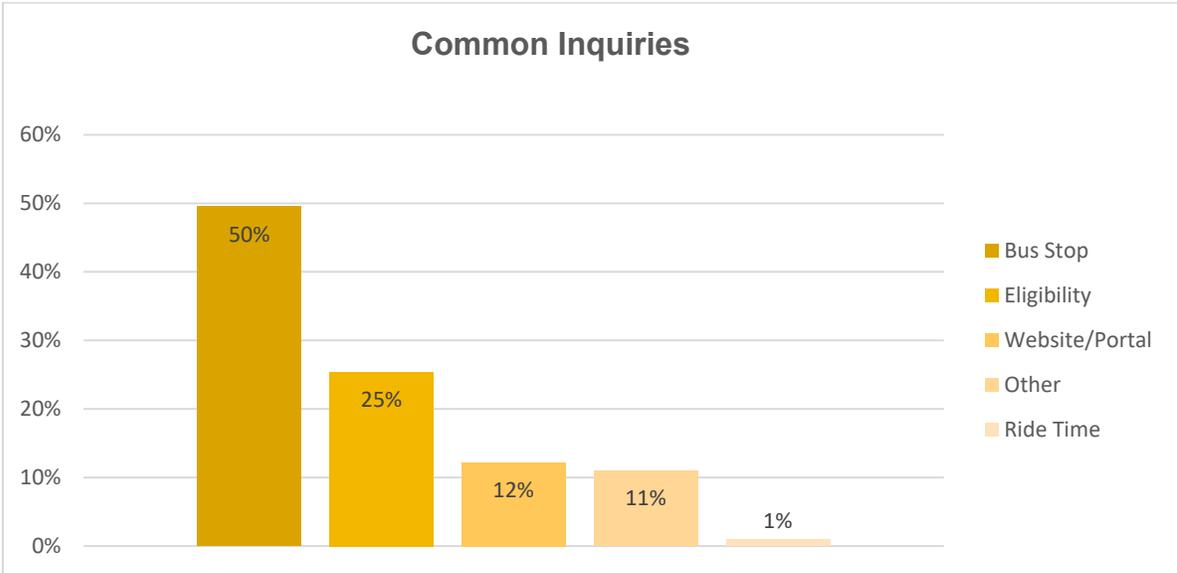


During the 2016-2017 year, a total of nine inquiries were escalated to the Chief Administrative Officer, all of which were related to the exemptions to distance-based transportation eligibility project. By contrast, there were no escalated files in the 2015-2016 year.

STS uses a tracking system to log contacts received either by telephone or web submission. Generally, most inquiries fall into five broad categories. The most common inquiry received surrounds bus stop locations as most contacts would prefer a closer bus stop as a matter of preference. Other typical inquiries relate to eligibility, use of the online parent portal, address inquiries (alternate address, moving) and ride time.

The vast majority of contacts are informational in nature. To provide faster service, the website has been designed to provide answers to the most common inquiries. A tool is availability on the website to determine if the address qualifies for bus service. A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section addresses the other most common topics.

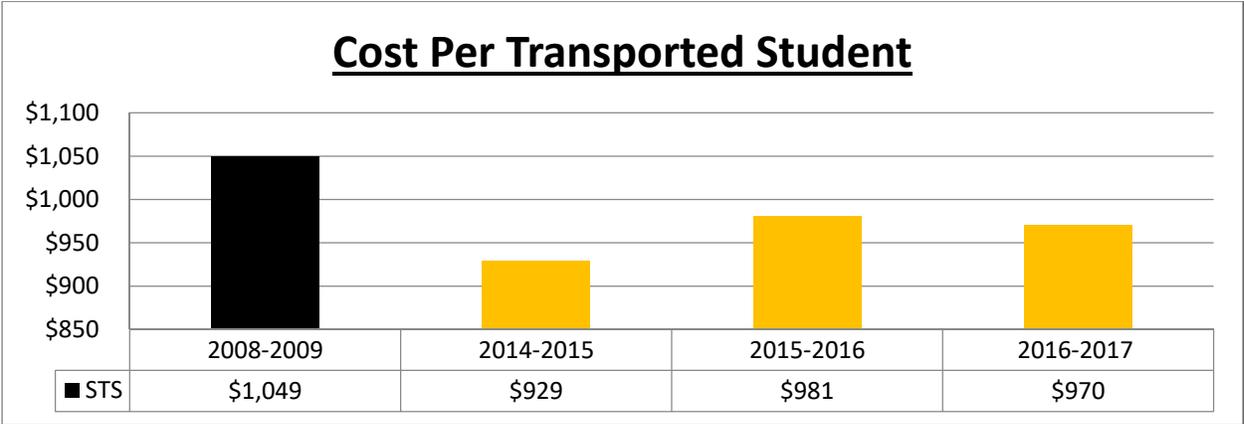
Topic	Inquiry
Bus Stop	Location, time, request a different stop, request a new stop, homeowner concerns.
Eligibility	Expects bus service based on distance or program.
Website/Portal	Technical problems logging on, unknown Student ID.
Other	Inclement weather inquiries, bus tag program, moving/change of address.
Ride Time	Bus ride time is longer than preferable.



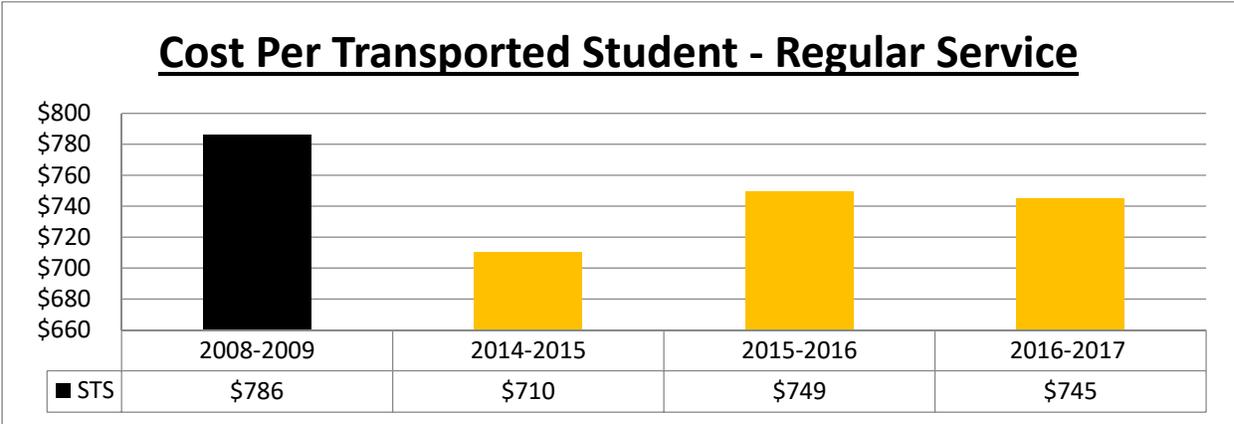
Financial Performance

The main measurement of financial performance for STS is cost per transported student. STS has continued to stay below the original cost per transported student from its first operational year in 2008-2009 while accommodating ridership growth and experiencing contractual for rate increases.

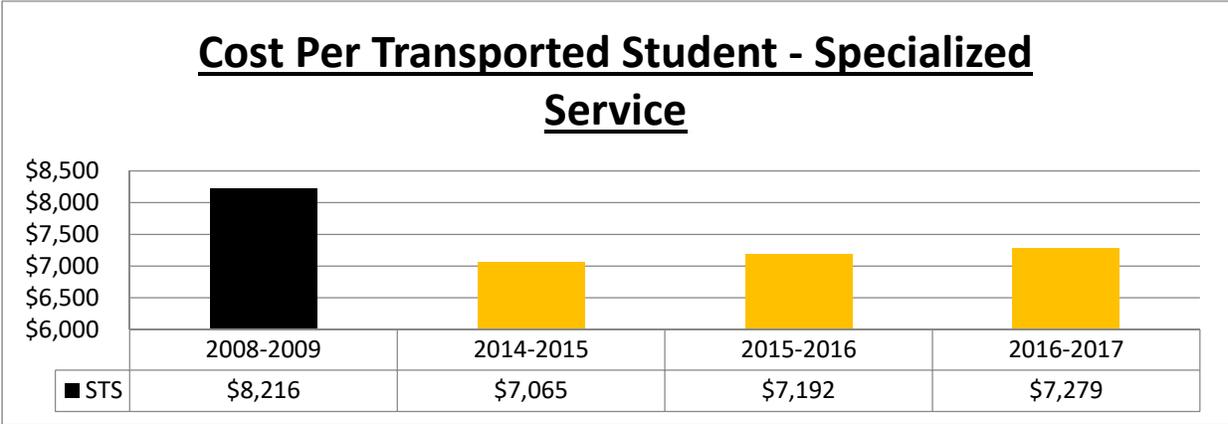
Cost per transported student is calculated based on actual payments and reflects all transported students on any classification of vehicle. Since the 2008-09 benchmark year, the reduction in average cost per transported student is 7.5% compared to 2016-17.



Regular service reflects students who are transported on chrome yellow bus service of any size. Since the 2008-09 benchmark year, the reduction in average cost per transported student is 5.2% compared to 2016-17.



Specialized service reflects service provided to students on chrome yellow wheelchair equipped vehicles or white minivan service. Since the 2008-09 benchmark year, the reduction in average cost per transported student is 11.4% compared to 2016-17.



Financial Statements

STS's fiscal year end is August 31. Accordingly, the year-end process for 2016-2017 is underway and financial statements will be provided at a future date.

Attached are the most recent audited Financial Statements for the 2015-2016 school year as presented by PriceWaterhouseCoopers and approved by the Board of Directors of STS on November 16, 2016. These statements were presented to and approved by the Directors of Education as voting members of the corporation on January 18, 2017.