

Pascale Shaw

Imagine for a moment that your place of employment moves, to a location 9.6 kilometres away from your home. You have no access to your car, as it is used by another member of your family and travels in the opposite direction at a different time of day. Transit is not an option as there are no buses close by leaving walking as your only option. Your walk takes you on twisting and winding roads with no lighting, no sidewalks and cars traveling speeds of 80 kilometres and more. The area is also frequented by bears, coyotes and cougar. Now imagine that you are 12 and experiencing this very same thing, only it is not work you are trying to get to, it is school. Our parents need to work, they bought their house knowing there was a school bus...what are they to do?

The preliminary budget 2016-2017 does not include any money for the bussing or typical children. It does however include money for the bussing of children with special needs. We practice inclusion in the classroom, why not on the school buses as well?

Our district received 1.8 million dollars a year from the provincial government to help pay for "transportation and housing" this line items name recently changed to "supplement for geographical factor" or possibly now called "student location factor" Although the board is not tied to spending this money on transportation, the original intent for this line item, when the funding formulas changed in 1989, was to help with transportation. We have a unique geographical factor here in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows, we have rural and remote areas such as Whonnock, Ruskin, Webster's Corners and Parts of Thornhill along with North Pitt Meadows that are not serviced by transit. We also have unique areas such as Rock Ridge and Silver Valley in North Maple Ridge and Albion in East Maple Ridge where housing has exploded over the past 10 years with no infrastructure in place. No sidewalks, no transit, no new schools. Schools in these areas are bursting at the seams. As a result, a few years back some catchments were changed and children in the Albion and Thornhill areas were bussed to the next closest many, many kilometres away, school that had space such as Whonnock and Webster's.

There is hope in sigh, or is there. The new school scheduled for Albion will not be up and running for approximately 4 years and the school board trustees have cancelled the school buses. How will the children get to school?

I request that you take some of the money from either the 1.8 million dollars or some money from the reserve, and spend it on the much needed school buses for not only the children with medical special needs but also those with the special need of transportation.

I along with a few other parents would be happy to sit down with the transportation department and talk about ways to use the transportation money more efficiently. We estimate that the cost should be around 450,000. We did make this offer last year at the transportation meeting but no one was interested in pursuing ways to decrease the cost and therefore be able to keep the bus. Ideas such as making it easier for people to

register, re-aligning routes, removing a bus or two, monthly payments, reviewing the routes so more kids can access the bus bringing in more money to offset this large but vital expense.

There are 252 families and 370 children in our community that need a school bus. Our school population is growing again and there is no new school in site for approximately 4 years. Our children need your help now. Please find a way to bring back at least limited service to help those of us in the rural areas of Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows.

Thank you