

Written Submission to the Board of Education

Garibaldi Secondary School PAC

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January 18th, 2016

District Education Office  
22225 Brown Avenue  
Maple Ridge, BC  
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Re: School bus service for SD42 Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows

Dear Ms. Meston,

The Garibaldi Secondary School PAC has received several complaints from parents who have children who attend or plan on attending Garibaldi, regarding the recent decision to cancel the school buses in Maple Ridge. We appreciate that the school board trustees have a difficult job in finding the best ways to spend the money they are allotted. We also understand that the distance to school issue only affects a small number of students in the district; however, for those that it does affect, it is of paramount concern. We implore you to reconsider your decision to cancel the school buses and find money to pay for at least a basic school bus service for the remote areas in our community.

Garibaldi Secondary School is located in the most easterly part of District 42 Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows. The catchment it services is the most eastern, south eastern and north eastern parts of Maple Ridge. Some of these areas are extremely rural with no transit service whatsoever and some areas with very limited service. In the 2014/2015 school year there were 202 students who relied on the school bus to get them to and from Garibaldi Secondary School. This represented over 30% of Garibaldi's resident population. Just fewer than 100 were from the Whonnock area and just over 100 were from the North Maple Ridge area.

On page 34 of the proposed preliminary budget 2015/2016-2016/2017 Maple Ridge –Pitt Meadows school district dated April 8th, 2015, and what we believe to have been the final budget, it states that: "The Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows board of education has contacted TransLink to address how the organization could provide either new or increased service to a number of areas in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows". Currently, most of the school district routes have no TransLink service. Other areas have community shuttles that could not handle the number of students currently riding. Therefore, the board is well aware that the only means for these children to get to school would be either by walking or being driven.

Maple Ridge is very much a "bedroom community" with many families having two working parents who are often not at home and available to drive their children the lengthy distance to school. Many parents work in the opposite direction of Garibaldi using Lougheed Highway to go either toward Mission or across the Golden Ears or Pitt River Bridge. The students who use the school bus are too old to qualify for any type of before or after-school care and few, if any, are able to drive themselves. Many of the families who live in and have moved to these areas have done so only after researching and ensuring there was a school bus option for their children to get to and from school. None of these rural areas have the basic necessities of a safe walking area for children such as sidewalks, lights or crosswalks. Many of the areas have a variety of wildlife such as bears, coyotes and cougars. In fact, just a few short years ago and very close to Webster's Corners Elementary School, a horse was killed by a cougar. Webster's Corners is located just a few kilometres from Garibaldi Secondary School. Even if walking was a safe option, which in many cases it is not, the distance to Garibaldi is too great for most - more than 10 kilometres and many more in some cases.

We acknowledge that the school bus ridership went down from 480 in the 2013/2014 school year to 370 in the 2014/2015 school year. Part of the decline in ridership was likely due to the fact that high school

graduates (grade 12 students) were much higher in numbers than the grade 8 students entering high school. There may also have been some people who were able to make other arrangements when the school district implemented a fee to ride the bus. However, for many the school bus is the only means of transportation to and from school. With the expected rise in numbers of grade 8's entering high school in the next few years being higher than the grade 12's leaving school, the number of students requiring a school bus to get to and from school is expected to increase as the majority of school bus riders are in high schools (of the 370 riders in 2014/215 223 riders or 60% of the riders were high school students).

In the district 42 preliminary budget (2015-2016) it states that in the school act there is no specific requirement to provide transportation. It also notes that the provincial government recommended looking at our transportation as an administrative savings area to be considered by school districts in meeting the provincially established administrative savings targets. When the provincial government stated this we do not believe they were suggesting that the school board cut all transportation and leave the students in the most remote parts of the district and those without access to transit to fend for themselves. In regards to there not being a specific requirement to provide transportation, it has been provided for several years and is the only means of transportation for many in the rural parts of Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows. As Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows have grown, the need for school buses has been reduced as a high school was built in the Albion area and transit buses are now available in many areas. There is however, still a desperate need for school buses in a few areas of East Maple Ridge, North Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows where there have not been any new high schools built; the distance to high school remains the same as it has always been and transit is simply not an option.

Lastly, it should be noted that the bus has not been cancelled for the children with special needs. The buses for the children with special needs will still run. We practice inclusion in the class rooms; we should be practicing it on the bus as well.

The School Board Policy #5400 states that "the Board of Education believes it is their responsibility to ensure appropriate transportation for eligible students to their catchments area school". The Garibaldi PAC and many, if not all, of the 262 families in school district 42 who rely on this service agrees with this policy and implores you to find money in the budget to keep, if only a limited number of, buses in these remote areas of Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows. There may not be a large number of students who require this transportation (370 in the 2014/2015 school year) but for those students who do, it is an essential service and one that we feel cannot in good conscience be eliminated.

We look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,



Patricia Kleine  
Garibaldi Secondary School PAC Secretary