

The Route of the Problem – Facts & highlights

By the numbers:

Total students in Toronto District and Toronto Catholic District boards: **49,000**
Number with special transportation needs: **10,000**
Number of busing routes in two boards: **1,750**, covering **74,000** kilometres
Number of bus operators: **7**
Toronto Student Transportation Group budget for 2016-2017: Nearly **\$100 million**
Students affected at height of disturbance in September 2016: **2,687**
Number with special transportation needs: **300+**

Calls received by Toronto Student Transportation Group call centre:
7,500+ total September-December 2016; **4,000** in September 2016 alone
Calls answered in September 2016: **54%**

Estimated cost of additional supervision of affected TDSB students: **\$50,000**
Penalties issued by Transportation Group to bus operators: **\$264,077**

Ombudsman investigation – launched **September 26, 2016:**

Complaints prior to launch of investigation: **49**
Complaints received after launch of investigation: **78 (127 total)**
Number of recommendations: **42**
Interviews conducted: **43**
Volume of digital documents reviewed: **20+** gigabytes, including **55,000** emails

Timeline:

- **November 2015:** Request for Proposals issued by Transportation Group for more than 1,700 bus routes, in “bundles,” routes not specified
- **February 2016:** Contracts awarded to operators for six years
- **March 2016:** “Mock routes” issued to operators to assist in driver recruitment
- **April 2016:** Revised mock routes sent to operators
- **June 2:** TCDSB votes to remove 7,000+ students from bus routes
- **June 27:** TCDSB reverses decision; routes had to be revised twice, delaying finalization of routes to August (most are usually ready by end of June)
- **August 18:** Meeting for bus operators – hard copies of routes distributed; several operators complain actual routes differ from earlier “mock routes”
- **August 20-25:** Transportation Group asks operators to provide lists of routes with unassigned drivers, is told nearly 100 are “open,” encourages operators to trade routes amongst themselves, reduces “open” routes to 60
- **August 25:** Transportation Group General Manager emails senior board employees that “it has been a far more stressful and chaotic summer than normal” and “some concern that some companies may not be as prepared as they think they are”
- **August 29 week:** “Dry runs” show some routes are too long and difficult; operators complain about last-minute changes; some drivers quit

- **August 30:** Transportation Group General Manager learns one operator has 42 open routes and another has 16; describes “dire” situation to senior staff
- **August 31:** Transportation Group warns TDSB, “we need to be aware that service could be significantly impacted.
- **September 1 (Thursday before Labour Day weekend):** Transportation Group General Manager emails both boards that some operators are “severely short drivers” and “significant service delivery issues” should be expected; TCDSB associate director emails colleague: “You need to let everyone know!” but no communication is issued by either board
- **September 6 (first day of school):** Thousands of students and parents scramble to get to school; Transportation Group General Manager emails TDSB that the first morning was “not smooth, but no first day is smooth,” and adds at 12:30 p.m. that “tomorrow will be better”; several schools alert Transportation Group that students were not picked up at end of day
- **September 7 (second day of school):** Complaints overwhelm the Transportation Group, both boards and individual schools; boards begin seeking staff to work extended hours to supervise students who haven’t been picked up; boards and Transportation Group teleconference to develop action plan; by afternoon, both boards post information for parents on Twitter, Facebook and their websites, indicating the driver shortage was unanticipated; boards asked schools to contact parents; news media began reporting on the disruption
- **September 8 (third day of school):** TCDSB Director of Education sends letter to parents, saying board “was informed on Sept 7th of a serious shortfall in the number of school bus drivers,” urges them to find transportation for a few weeks
- **September 9:** TDSB Director of Education sends letter to parents saying board was “unexpectedly informed” of the driver shortfall on September 6th, notes situation is beyond the board’s control
- **September 13-16:** Boards send follow-up letters to parents
- **September 15:** All routes are serviced; 1,400 students still affected by delays
- **December 2016:** Transportation Group meets with bus operators to review what happened; factors cited include that operators were given routes in unexpected areas and routes changed frequently
- **January 2017:** 40 routes still do not have permanent drivers but are serviced by spare drivers or taxis
- **May 2017:** Ombudsman’s findings and recommendations provided to boards and Transportation Group for response; TDSB report states new online portal has been developed to provide better information to parents, to launch June 2017
- **June 8:** Boards and operators meet to confirm readiness for September 2017
- **June 30:** Boards and Transportation Group accept Ombudsman’s recommendations, provide update on improvements made for new school year.
- **August 10:** Ombudsman’s report released