

Thanks, Keith. Good afternoon, everyone.

Those of you expecting a traditional “sit back and watch”-type PowerPoint presentation are in for a bit of a surprise.

I am going to use Twitter to deliver my content so you can still sit back and watch but it won't be what you are used to seeing.

And for those of you that use Twitter, you have the opportunity to get actively involved. Hop on and follow the National Association for Pupil Transportation - @NAPTHQ. Throughout my presentation I will be ‘tweeting’ and sharing some helpful links and resources, and if you'd like to follow along – and retweet the information to help generate some buzz for this project - please follow @NAPTHQ now.

Please also know that at the end of today's webinar my remarks, including links and resources, will be available on our website – www.napt.org.

So now that you're all following @NAPTHQ on Twitter – right? - let me begin by explaining why I am involved in this event today, or at least why I think I am involved.

I am Executive Director of America's largest and most diverse association of people that are particularly interested in school bus transportation. We have members in more than 1500 individual school systems across the U.S. We provide a wide variety of resources to them and we give national voice to their perspective on 16 core issues.

Most of our members focus primarily on getting students to school on yellow school buses, which shouldn't be surprising since more than half of all the students in America use the yellow school bus to get to school each day

When parents put their children on the school bus, they're trusting school transportation service providers to ensure those children will return to them safe and sound. And every school day, the Yellow School Bus repays that trust over and over again.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) American students are nearly eight times safer riding in a school bus than with their own parents and guardians in cars. In fact, statistically speaking, school buses are the safest form of motorized transportation.

School buses also have environmental benefits.

According to the American School Bus Council, every school bus on the road eliminates approximately 36 cars. For every bus you keep on the road, that's 36 fewer cars clogging the morning commute and 36 fewer cars polluting the atmosphere.

ASBC also estimates that school buses reduce fuel consumption in the United States by at least 2 billion gallons each year.

Perhaps most importantly, school buses play a crucial role in our educational system.

In the most basic sense, they provide access to education. I like to say they are integral to education, and are NOT an ancillary service.

They ensure that students have the ability to safely travel to and from school on a daily basis and they support the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity that is needed in our schools for our children to thrive.

They also provide a way for children that are homeless or have disabilities to get an education.

But school transportation isn't just about school buses. Students are also getting to school by foot, bicycle, car, and public transportation.

According to a 2011 report by the National Center for Safe Routes to School, school bus transportation made up almost the same percentage of K-8 students' travel methods in 1969 as it did in 2009, 40 years later.

In contrast, travel in the family car increased from 12 percent in 1969 to 45 percent in 2009, while walking and bicycling showed the inverse relationship, dropping from 48 percent to 13 percent in the same time frame.

As you all know well, that's problematic for a variety of reasons.

From my perspective, when school transportation departments focus solely on busing, they miss a crucial opportunity to support students and communities.

People involved in the Safe Routes to School movement and people involved in school bus transportation share the same primary goal: getting children to and home from school safely.

It seems to me that these groups of people should be natural partners.

But hasn't always worked out that way.

That needs to change.

And in order for it to change, we need to talk about some fundamental, real-world hurdles on the track.

First, transportation directors have complicated and oftentimes very political jobs.

The typical director of school transportation at the local level is a mid-level manager. He or she typically reports to a supervisor, like a school business official or a director of finance, who reports to a school superintendent, who reports to a board of education.

Even at the state level, a director of pupil transportation services typically reports to a department director or a bureau director or a deputy state superintendent, who reports to the state superintendent or commissioner of education.

Almost all of these upper-level supervisors are elected or appointed, which means their decision-making isn't always objective or even predictable. That's a challenge for everyone, especially mid-level managers.

On the other end of the spectrum, local directors of school transportation are supervisors themselves.

Transportation departments can range in size but the largest have can have more than 1,500 employees. In addition to obvious day-to-day activities like safely transporting hundreds or thousands of students - and sometimes hundreds **of** thousands - and overseeing the related and sometimes multi-million dollar budgets, school transportation directors are also responsible for making decisions about

- Staffing and managing district positions related to transportation, like bus drivers, mechanics, crossing guards, and safety patrols.
- Establishing school bus routes and schedules and Determining the locations of bus stops
- Coordinating the bus transportation for students that attend athletic events, field trips, after school activities, and community engagement events, and, last but not least.
- Planning for and purchasing new buses and their related equipment.

Among the most important of their responsibilities is developing a system to sep-a-rate buses from students and others that are walking, bicycling, or being dropped off at school. It is extremely important to ensure that students are safe in the loading and unloading areas at or near schools. There are twice as many student fatalities outside and around a bus than there are inside.

Many local directors work with state officials to coordinate bus inspections or driver training.

Many are also deeply involved in school and community emergency planning.

All of these things take time and many of them have a related financial impact.

I mention the financial impact specifically because transportation to support what we call “regular education” does not receive and has never received any financial support for its operations from the federal government. None. Zip. Zero.

That’s right – America’s largest system of mass transportation – a system that transports 25.2 million students twice a day every school day plus an estimated 5 to 7 million students that participate in school-related activity trips every week – is funded entirely at the state and/or local level.

And we all know what has been going on, especially since 2008, at the local level from a budget perspective. It is not hyperbole to say that most local directors of school transportation have been required to do more with less and for a very long time.

It might surprise you to know that there is another challenge intrinsic to local directors; there are very few federal laws regarding student transportation that apply across states.

The color of a school bus, for example, is not a federal requirement; it is consensus within the industry, first agreed in 1939 and reconsidered every five years at a voluntary congress of representatives from all 50 states.

As another example, consider Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS), baseline regulations specifying design, construction and performance for motor vehicles and their safety-related components.

There are more FMVSS that apply to school buses than any other vehicle.

And every state has the ability to strengthen these performance-based specifications or add their own additional requirements. And do they ever.

As a result, every state manages school transportation differently.

For example,

Some states require school districts to provide transportation to and from school, some do not.

In fact, there are 22 states that do not require school systems to provide transportation for their students.

Some states require school systems to raise revenue through a local property tax, while others allocate funds at the state level. Some do both.

Some states regulate eligibility, approved costs and bus driver training, while others leave all decisions up to the individual districts.

That's why, for example, some school districts have a larger - or smaller - walk radius than neighboring districts.

A common standard requires elementary and middle school students to live a mile to a mile and a half from school for busing, and high school students to live a mile and a half to two miles away.

26 states have some minimum busing distance policy at the state level, but the other 24 have various district level policies that can change from year to year, depending on the political and other needs of those upper-level supervisors I mentioned earlier.

It's complicated and a little confusing too, right?

With all of this as background, think for a minute about what it means - then - to ask or require a local director of school transportation to more comprehensively oversee **all** modes of transportation that students use to get to and from school.

And please think also about how you would feel and what you would do if you were asked or required to do it without ultimate authority, without funding and with little or no experience.

As Sara explained at the start of this webinar, our goals today are to give all of you a better understanding of the current school transportation mindset and encourage you to think about ways Safe Routes to School concepts can be integrated in the traditional system.

So I will close today by offering you the following suggestions:

First, if you have not done so already, read the new report that spawned this webinar.

And if you have read it, read it again.

It is well-done and contains a wealth of information and ideas.

Second, send the report to your local director of school transportation and ask to meet with her or him to learn about ways you may be able to help. If you don't know your director, feel free to contact my office. If he or she is a member of ours, we will gladly provide an introduction for you. If not, we both have a good reason to introduce ourselves.

Third, familiarize yourself with your local school transportation policies. As I mentioned previously, everyone does not do things the same way so it is important for you to understand what your local school system does and why. Once you have a good understanding . . .

Volunteer. Many districts have transportation committees and safety patrols, giving you a great avenue for learning how the policies translate from paper to practice. This also gives you an opportunity to discuss with practical knowledge potential new or revised plans to enhance student safety.

And finally, I mentioned funding as a hurdle. I encourage you to discuss with your local transportation director the specific ways Safe Routes money can be used to support improvements in the local transportation system. He or she may not be aware of the things that can be funded and, by the same token, the things that can be funded may not be a current priority and maybe not even on the radar screen.

If you can collaborate to hire additional staff that will expand services or support growth; or install equipment designed to enhance safety you have created a win-win situation.

Some of you may have already tried to crack this nut and are doubting or at least wondering if these suggestions will actually work. I assure you they will.

Thanks to Sara Zimmerman, I met Eric Bunch earlier this year. Eric is Director of Education for Bike Walk Kansas City. He explained to me several of the projects and programs he and his colleagues have developed in partnership with the local school systems in his area and has agreed to do a workshop for us at our annual conference in November this year and explain his work to transportation directors around the country. He is a tremendous resource and has a wealth of knowledge for those of you looking to successfully collaborate and make a difference in your local area.

And, we are fortunate to have with us **today** Bob Young, a local Director of Transportation and long-time member of NAPT, who will explain his successful experience creating a comprehensive, multi-modal school transportation system for the public schools in Boulder, Colorado.

Again, thank you to those of you who followed me on Twitter today and thank you to all of you for listening to my remarks. My entire presentation, including links and resources, will be available on our website – www.napt.org – later this afternoon. I encourage you to get the information, use it and stay in touch.