

Year in Review

SBO's TOP 2021



Accomplishments for SBO Members

MESSAGE FROM ROB MURPHY, PRESIDENT, SCHOOL BUS ONTARIO

This past year, School Bus Ontario (SBO) has accomplished so much and we are proud to report to you a long list of accomplishments!

SBO has been continuing our lobby efforts with the Progressive Conservative Government on procurement for student transportation. In 2019, the Ministry created the Student Transportation Advisory Group, consisting of School Board Superintendents of Finance, Consortium Managers, Bus Operators and Ministry of Education (known as the stakeholders) of our industry. Due to the Pandemic the committee work has been delayed but many forward-looking discussions were developed:

1. Benchmark Costing Model - results have not been shared.
2. Routing efficiencies.
3. Bell time changes.
4. Driver shortages.

All of these proposals are currently being worked on by the Ministry and SBO is being consulted weekly about any changes.

Further, SBO has retained Jenni-Byrne and Associates, since last June of 2021 to advance our efforts in procurement, minimum wage, driver shortage and public relations. Jenni Byrne is a former senior Conservative government strategist who worked for Premier Ford, Former Prime Minister Stephen Harper and has personal relationships with most, if not all cabinet ministers. Doors are being opened daily! Over the last year, we have had at least four face to face meetings with Minister Lecce, the President of the Treasury board and the Minister of Labour. These efforts could not have happened without members' help with dues and our Boards time commitment, our agreement with Jenni-Byrne is for 6 months and will take us to the Provincial election. Many in the political circles, maintain that now is the time to have our issues at the forefront.

That said, our membership dues are increasing in 2022 – four percent per route increase – which is less than the current CPI. Although we do not like raising our rates at all, the inflationary pressures on SBO coupled with the loss of OTE and some of the PRIDE income makes it a necessity. Our successes are truly remarkable and we couldn't do any of the lobbying without you and your membership. Thank you for trusting in us!

MESSAGE FROM NANCY DAIGNEAULT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SBO

Over the course of the summer and fall of 2021, SBO embarked on an ambitious plan to pressure the Conservative government to improve driver wages, improve procurement and pay attention to our role in the overall education system. One week prior to school going back in September 2021, SBO sent a province wide press release to the media - outlining our concerns with driver wages causing a serious school bus driver shortage which would affect many families in Ontario. Cancellations and delays marked the beginning of the school year as many regions grappled with driver shortages - the media campaign was high-level and did catch the attention of the government. On-going pressure since then has prompted the government to have another look at the Driver Retention Program and we've received word that the DRP will be re-examined, with a potential for an increase due to the surprise announcement of the minimum wage increase. This has yet to be confirmed but we do know that the government is taking a serious look at how they can assist us in this area.

SBO has also established relationships with senior government ministers to ensure our needs are considered whenever issues relating to our sector, or the education sector are discussed. SBO also had success with MPP Mike Harris' bill to move to an amber-red eight lamp system which is to go into effect in fall 2022. To assist our operators retrofit and change to the eight-lamp system, SBO has secured government funding to reimburse our operators for the costs associated with the changes. Details on how the program will be administered are expected in the coming months and SBO has been asked for its input into administering the reimbursements. These talks are on going.

COVID-19 continues to have affected us drastically, and SBO has played a central role in negotiating with the Ministry of Education to ensure we continue to be paid for fixed costs throughout school shutdowns. We have also launched a new monthly podcast called "The Driver's Seat" where we have discussions on school bus related issues with interesting guests. Please give it a listen/watch as it is full of important information.

OTHER SUCCESSES

Ontario ELD Exemption for School Buses: SBO was instrumental in securing an Electronic Logging Device (ELD) exemption for Ontario school bus operations. This exemption will save many members from having to install ELDs in their school buses when the Ontario mandate comes into effect for buses in mid-2023.

Assisting With School Bus Licencing Issues: SBO continues to assist members in navigating various complex steps needed to upgrade and renew school bus drivers' licences. When members encounter issues with medicals, background checks, DriveTest, and/or the Driver Certification Program (DCP), SBO is there to help identify solutions and get drivers on the road

Navigating the End of COVID-19 Licencing Extensions: As the various COVID-19 licencing extensions come to an end (drivers' licences, plates, medicals, etc.), SBO continues to work with members to ensure they understand the various impacts to their operations and drivers.

The Driver's Seat Podcast: This new member podcast is run by SBO President, Rob Murphy and Executive Director, Nancy Daigneault as another way to connect to our members and the bus industry!

Heavy Vehicle Integrated Inspection Program:

SBO continues to work and provide feedback on the development and implementation of the new integrated vehicle inspection program. The implementation will involve a transition to the new emissions testing program in 2022 and the transition of safety inspections to the new program starting in late 2022 and continuing into 2023. SBO will continue to monitor the process and keep members informed of new developments.

Transport Canada Task Force on School Bus Safety:

SBO continues to be an active member in the Transport Canada Task Force on School Bus Safety. SBO's input and feedback helps ensure members have a voice as the Task Force examines the future of school bus safety in Canada.

SBO Spring Webinar Series: As the 2021 Ontario Transportation Expo (OTE) was cancelled due to COVID related restrictions, SBO chose to run a spring webinar series to keep members informed and connected. Topics included media relations, D250 updates, COVID impacts on human resources, and updates from the Ministry of Transportation.