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**The Cold and Bumpy Ride:
Busing to School in Rural Saskatchewan
During the 1950s**

**Prepared for
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The Cold and Bumpy Ride: Busing to School in Rural Saskatchewan During the 1950s

1. Introduction

With the passage of *The Larger School Units Act* in 1944, the Saskatchewan Government began the process of consolidating rural school districts into sixty larger units of administration. Once the larger units were established, great distances and sparse population left unit boards with little choice but to rely heavily on bus transportation to convey rural students to centralized schools. This process was hamstrung by the problem of very inadequate roads on which school buses had to travel. During the 1950s, poor winter road conditions in many areas of the province necessitated the use of snowmobiles as a supplementary means to get children to and from school. With improvements in the administrative co-ordination between education and municipal officials, road conditions in the province finally began to improve in the 1960s.

The daily busing of children to school had a profound impact upon farm families in the province. Busing often allowed them to continue to reside on the farm rather than moving to town to gain better access to services. Nevertheless, while parents realized that busing made it possible for their children to receive a good education, they had serious concerns about the impact that long bus rides would have on their children's academic performance, social life and physical health.

2. School Conveyance

The creation of larger school units gradually led to the closure of one-room schoolhouses throughout Saskatchewan. Beginning in the late 1940s, the provincial government provided special grants for school conveyance in districts where the one-room school had been closed. The financial cost of this service was high. In 1950 the government paid one third of the cost of transportation, to a maximum of \$300 annually.¹ This amounted to a total of \$178,850. In 1953-54, 1,451 districts were conveying students, at a cost of slightly over \$1 million, 90 percent of which was spent by larger units. "Centralization of school facilities entails new costs for conveyance and facilities," the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life pointed out, "but at the same time savings are achieved in the costs of instruction and administration. Economies can be gained if two districts can be closed and conveyed for every one room required in a central location."² The table below shows the cost of transporting rural children to school in Saskatchewan over the years.

¹Saskatchewan. Department of Municipal Affairs, *Report of the Committee on Provincial-Municipal Relations, Saskatchewan 1950* (Regina: King's Printer, 1951), 49.

²Saskatchewan. Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life [hereafter called RCARL], "Rural Education: A Summary" (Regina: 1957), 16.

THE COST OF SCHOOL CONVEYANCE IN SASKATCHEWAN

1925	1930	1935	1940	1945	1950	1955	1963	1992
\$ 57,540		\$ 26,283	\$ 45,941	\$ 108,945	\$ 178,850	\$1million+	\$7 million	\$58million

2.1 Buses

In the beginning, unit boards provided parents with remuneration to transport their children to school. It was not long, however, before school buses were in common use in Saskatchewan. Milestone claims to be the first unit in Saskatchewan to own and operate a school bus of its own — a 36-passenger Mercury bus in 1946. In 1952, Milestone bought four more buses (two 20-passenger Emersons, one 16-passenger, and one 37-passenger Superior). Some parents still had to drive in order to get their children to the bus route. Those who had to drive more than one and a half miles were compensated by the unit.³

Unit board administrators had to become transportation experts, familiarizing themselves with vehicles, the maintenance of them, and the procuring of suitable drivers for them. Liability insurance had to be obtained. “Arranging routes was something that needed almost constant attention because the condition of roads was as important as the location of children,” Thorson writes. “Winter travel was a special problem when roads were poor and snowplowing was not common.”⁴

Initially, school boards were inclined to own the buses they needed for the conveyance of students; in later years, the contracting of bus service gained popularity. The selling of school buses to school units was an active business. According to Thorson, “the first out of the starting gate” was the Emerson Bus Company of Lethbridge:

Mr. P.O. Emerson had been a General Motors dealer at Wynyard, Saskatchewan, when he acquired the GM franchise in Lethbridge. He became a familiar figure at SSTA conventions as he sponsored dinners for delegates, complete with speaker and musical entertainment, in 1951, 1952 and 1953. ... School buses on display were commonly parked near the convention hotels, and the company hospitality suites were open as the sales people made their contacts with school trustees looking for transportation equipment.⁵

Local residents were hired as bus drivers. The Herbert School Unit reported in 1952 that “applications for the position of school bus drivers have been sought from reliable men of sober

³Roy Vanstone, “Milestone No. 12 Expands its Transportation Routes,” in *The School Trustee* (Vol IV, No. 1, September 1952, 9-11), 11.

⁴Lyle I. Thorson, *70 Years of the SSTA; A Short History of the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, 1915-1985* (Regina: Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, 1985), 95.

⁵Ibid, 96.

habits, having some mechanical knowledge, and able to get along with children.” Because drivers were only needed on a part-time basis — usually two to three hours per day — Herbert school trustees “expected that they will seek additional employment to augment such salary to provide a comfortable living.” Driving the bus had to be the employees’ first priority, however.⁶

2.2 Snowmobiles

School conveyance during Saskatchewan winters presented special challenges to the larger school units. Many boards purchased snowmobiles to augment their school buses. For the most part, snowmobiles were used only during severe conditions. In 1949 and 1950, Milestone School Unit purchased two Bombardiers to augment its bus. “Where these machines are in operation,” one trustee stated, “there is no need for any farmer to get rid of his stock and move to town.”⁷ In 1950 the Govan School Unit (now Last Mountain) reported in *The School Trustee* that a Bombardier snowmobile had been tried during the previous winter with “great satisfaction.” “It carried forty children with a little overcrowding for the last fifteen minutes in the morning and the first fifteen minutes of the return trip!”⁸

About 400 snowmobiles were used in the school units through the 1950s, but the need disappeared when rural roads were significantly improved in the 1960s. A Department of Education official noted in a 1963 memorandum that there was a reduction in the number of snowmobiles in the last two years, due partly to light snow conditions and to road improvement and an increase in snow plowing. The administrator continued:

Boards are very reluctant to put the snowmobiles into use because the cost of operation is much higher than that of wheeled vehicles and because it takes two snowmobiles to handle the load of most buses. Some units feel that, regardless of further road improvement, some bombardiers will have to be retained to reach isolated families when the snow is heavy. These units are mainly in the very south of the province. ... Others expect to get rid of all or nearly all their snowmobiles if roads continue to be improved.⁹

2.3 Impact of Busing on the Lives of Farm Families

The Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life noted that, in the mid-1950s, more than half of Saskatchewan’s school-age children lived on farms, a long way from adequate school facilities. Distance contributed to a low level of student retention from Grade 6 through to high

⁶E. Shaw, “Operation of School Bus Routes; Herbert School Unit No. 23,” in *The School Trustee* (Vol. III, No. 7, March 1952, 17-19). 17.

⁷Vanstone, 11

⁸Thorson, 95.

⁹SAB, Department of Municipal Affairs, ED-ADD 1, file 5(2), “Correspondence.” Memo from C. Amundrud, Supervisor of School Administration, Department of Education, to H.A. Clampitt, Director of Municipal Road Assistance Authority, Department of Municipal Affairs, November 18, 1963.

school. "If no conveyance is provided," the Commission report stated, "farm families are faced with either maintaining their children in town or permitting them to drop out of school."¹⁰

Many farm families were concerned about the distance that young children could properly travel to school each day. This concern influenced the level of centralization. With a single transportation system for elementary and high school students, centralized schools tended to be located in relatively small centers. The Royal Commission recommended that two levels of centralization be established: "one for elementary students in the village-centered neighbourhood and one for high school students in a larger area of association... ."¹¹

The Royal Commission also reported on the trend away from farm living, with more and more farm families moving to town to be closer to services. There was some debate throughout the 1950s about whether or not the busing of children to school would arrest this trend. Some felt that "the practical difficulties in getting children to early school buses, long rides to and from school, and late returns home all impel to moving to town."¹² Others believed that adequate school bus transportation would allow children and their families to stay on the farm.

Saskatchewan's Minister of Education agreed with the latter opinion. In 1958 W.S. Lloyd announced that more than 24,000 pupils in over 1,700 school districts were being transported in school buses. "The more frequent use of transportation," he said, "will be one of the means of keeping families on the farm."¹³ A report on school conveyance in *The School Trustee* lent credibility to this statement. "Many parents have testified that the bus service has meant their continuing to live in the rural part because the children now get adequate schooling by means of a bus route," C.H. Logie wrote. "A survey in one unit revealed 52 parents out of 70 stated that the bus route influenced them to remain on the farm."¹⁴

While there were disadvantages to school busing, including long days, the discomfort of cold, bumpy rides, and even, according to some, a loss of contact with nature, much had been gained. "It is reasonable to assume that the overall effect of transportation is wholesome since more children are now instructed by qualified teachers and able to enjoy better facilities in larger schools," Logie concluded. "Every unit that has instituted transportation is providing better education than was possible before conveyance." He cited an example:

In one unit, almost two hundred children are now attending high school because of a bus

¹⁰RCARL, "Rural Education," 20.

¹¹RCARL, "Rural Education," 8-9.

¹²RCARL, Report No. 7, "Movement of Farm People" (Regina: 1956), 87.

¹³"Educational facilities in process of reorganization, Lloyd avers," in *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* (April 8, 1958). According to Lloyd, 1001 pupils were being taken to schools in buses in the Prince Albert unit, more than in any other. Willow Bunch was second with some 900.

¹⁴C.H. Logie, "A Report on Conveyance." in *The School Trustee* (Vol. VI, No. 7, March 1955), 10.

system. Without the bus some parents would have to arrange board and room at considerable expense to themselves, and many children would not go to school at all. Even if only one pupil makes good, the effort and cost is indeed worthwhile.¹⁵

3. Impact on Roads

After the Second World War, poor rural roads in Saskatchewan made the provision of school bus transportation difficult. Since 1908, the responsibility for most roads in the province rested with the elected councils of rural municipalities. Local farmers were often hired to help maintain the roads, and keep them clear of snow in the winter. When the Depression hit, all road work in the province came to a halt. Over the decade, road maintenance was deferred to the point that, by 1944 when *The Larger School Unit Act* came into effect, Saskatchewan's roads were described as "the worst roads between here and Minsk and Pinsk."¹⁶ Only a small percentage of farms in the province were located on gravel roads; most were situated on dirt roads.

Following the war, as farms grew in size, as the distance between farms increased, and as farm mechanization intensified, farmers were demanding good roads that were functional all year round. Post-war shortages of road-making machinery, however, delayed road improvement in Saskatchewan until the end of the 1940s. The problem was compounded by the fact that there were fewer farmers to help with the upkeep of roads or to help keep roads open in winter time. Jack Douglas, Minister of Highways for the CCF government in the late 1940s and early 1950s, recognized that good roads were essential for the constantly expanding social and economic life of Saskatchewan. "All the post-war services which we contemplate for the security and happiness of our people, including medical care and hospitals... would be unavailable for the majority of our residents without good roads, roads that are passable for the entire year," Douglas stated in the Legislature in 1945. "In the same way the benefits of our schools and community centres would be lost to many if we do not provide serviceable roads throughout this province."¹⁷

The daily busing of children to centralized schools brought into sharp focus the inadequate roads in rural areas. It soon became clear that there was a complete lack of co-ordination between the larger school units and the rural municipalities which were responsible for looking after the roads. Over the years, the Department of Education received hundreds of letters from exasperated parents who wondered how they were supposed to get their children to school when the roads were impassable. Below is a sampling of these letters:¹⁸

¹⁵Logie, 10.

¹⁶Jean Larmour, "Jack Douglas and Saskatchewan's Highways," in *Saskatchewan History* (Vol. XXXVIII, No. 3, Autumn 1985), 97.

¹⁷Jack Douglas (as quoted in Jean Larmour, 103).

¹⁸SAB, Department of Municipal Affairs, ED-ADD 2, files 5(1) and 5(2), "Correspondence."

Would you be so kind and let me know what to do. I'm supposed to send my child to school and the road is still under water and has not been fixed up. I have to go on other people's land to get to the road and this way it's rather far for me or my child to go to school. I have to go to Hepburn School. Must the municipality look after the road? What must or can I do?

- C.M. Remple, Hepburn, August 27, 1951.

Owing to the bad condition of our road to school we are going to keep the children home from school until the roads are made passable for them. We approached the municipality regarding this road and they will do nothing about it.

- Wenzel Appel, Bangor, June 21, 1952.

"Due to my road my children have to miss a great deal of school not only in the spring but whenever it rains. Even now it is impassable by car and up to a short time ago we had to take the children with the tractor to meet the bus. Hasn't the government some instrument by which the councillor can be forced to do something more than promise to fix it? My children are entitled to an education the same as any other child."

- Paul Muller, Bienfait, May 4, 1956.

We have nine miles of mud road -- no gravel at all. Every time it rains the bus does not go. And the children stay home. And times when it does we wonder if the kids will arrive safely. So please reply at once ... or inform the unit at Melville or the municipality to do something about the roads.

Mrs. Jean Winniski, Ituna, June 12, 1962.

3.1 Administrative Problems

Pressure from parents made education officials and municipal agencies very conscious of the need to improve the roads serving as bus routes. Clearly, an indispensable tool of a centralized school system was a well-planned network of all-weather school bus routes. In the 1950s, however, school authorities had no formal control over road construction and maintenance. Municipal officials, on the other hand, had no direct voice in selecting the location of centralized schools. Integrating these two functions in an effort to plan school bus routes proved to be difficult.

The relationship between municipal and school areas was confused: each municipal unit represented only a small segment of the larger school unit. In many instances a single municipality was included in two or more larger school units. Overlapping boundaries and the lack of channels for administrative co-ordination stood in the way of effective liaison between these local organizations. A bulletin circulated by the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation in 1956 explains how complex the situation was:

The problem of liaison between Unit Board and Municipal Council is complicated by the

fact that to match 56 units and 4 non-unit areas there are 296, or approximately five Municipal Councils for each School Unit Board. A great number of these municipalities lie partially in two units and a few in more than two. If a Unit Board feels it advisable to confer with the Municipal Councils within its boundaries, it finds it must contact seven or eight municipal offices and usually ends up conferring with only representatives of the various Municipal Councils who are not in a position to commit the Councils as a whole to any proposed course of action.¹⁹

The Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life suggested that, with school bus routes in the province covering more than 7,000 miles of road, co-ordinated planning was necessary in order for these routes to conform to the road system required by normal traffic. In its final report, the Commission recommended that the municipal system be reorganized into a county system, creating common boundaries for municipal and school districts. In addition, the report called for the immediate establishment of a grid market road system in the province.²⁰ The provincial government agreed, and in 1956 set up the Municipal Road Assistance Authority under the jurisdiction of the Department of Municipal Affairs.

The goal of the newly created Grid Road Authority, as it was commonly called, was to construct 12,000 miles of grid road, at a total cost of \$100 million over ten years. The Authority began its task by conducting a survey of existing roads — their location, their physical condition, and their proximity to schools, hospitals and other community services. During the late 1950s, other investigations were carried out by the provincial government to determine the magnitude of the school bus route problem. Meetings were held between representatives of the Department of Education, the SSTA and the Department of Municipal Affairs to discuss the service provided by the grid roads for school buses. By 1960, grants were provided to the Rural Municipalities on the condition that they be expended on the construction or gravelling of main market roads or school bus routes. By the 1960s, road conditions had improved dramatically, providing the population of rural Saskatchewan with a well-graded, all-weather road system.

4. More Recent Issues

A 1976 study of school busing in Saskatchewan states that, with an ever-increasing number of children requiring school bus transportation, the “total length of school bus routes is approaching one-quarter of a million miles per day making school buses by far the largest public transport system in the province.”²¹

¹⁹*The Municipal and School Administration of Saskatchewan and Possible Changes* [series of seven bulletins], Bulletin No.1, “The Present System” (Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Teachers Federation, November 1956).

²⁰RCARL, “Rural Roads and Local Government: A Summary” (Regina: 1956), 25, 36-39.

²¹University of Saskatchewan. Transportation Centre, *A Study of School Bus Safety in Saskatchewan* (Saskatoon: Transportation Centre, University of Saskatchewan, 1976), 1.

Student transportation is big business in Saskatchewan. In 1992, the ratepayers of the province spent in excess of \$58 million for conveying rural students to school. In rural Saskatchewan, boards spend in excess of \$1,000 for every student conveyed.²² According to Jake Volk, author of the *School Busing Handbook*, current geographic and demographic conditions in the province leave few suitable alternatives to bus transportation. "Boards cannot become complacent about their busing operations," Volk writes. "Changes in technology, lifestyles, parental expectations and economic prospects make it imperative for boards to look for improvements in what may have been considered to be a successful busing operation."²³ Volk concludes that parents and students appear to have accepted daily bus transportation as a way of life in rural Saskatchewan. Nevertheless, the effects that daily bus rides have on rural students and their families is still the subject of some debate.

4.1 Long Bus Rides

At one time, the Saskatchewan Department of Education developed guidelines regarding the maximum travelling time to school of one hour per day for elementary school students, and one and a half hours per day for high school students.²⁴ "Saskatchewan" (Regina: March 1, 1961), 31. Today, however, unlike many other provinces, Saskatchewan has no established time limit for bus rides — the decision is left up to the division boards.²⁵

Murray Scharf's 1974 study of the impact of rural depopulation on education examines the issue of the amount of time students spent on buses. Between 1967 and 1973, Scharf reports, the average total mileage per route increased from 73 miles to 82 miles or a student route distance from approximately 24 to 28 miles. "Applying the Department of Education's rule-of-thumb of two minutes per mile," he states, "this yielded an increase in the average maximum student route time from 96 minutes to 112 minutes per day."²⁶ Scharf predicted that the average total mileage per route would grow by 1980 to 103 miles, or a one-way student route of over 34 miles and an average maximum daily student route time of 136 minutes.

Research reveals what many rural residents already knew: long bus journeys result in students becoming fatigued and irritable. "Some students complain of carsickness, headaches or generally feeling unwell as a result of the bus ride," Lorraine Thompson wrote in her report on the effects of daily bus rides on students. She continues: "School buses may be cold and bumpy.

²²Jake Volk, *School Busing Handbook*, SSTA Research Centre Report No. 92-07 (Regina: Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, 1992), 2, 4.

²³Ibid, 14.

²⁴Saskatchewan. Local Government Continuing Committee, "Local Government in

²⁵Volk, 4.

²⁶M.P. Scharf, *A Report on the Declining Rural Population and the Implications for Rural Education*, Saskatchewan School Trustees Association Research Center, Report No. 17. (Regina: SSTA, March, 1974), 150.

These conditions cause students additional discomfort. ... A long daily bus trip also reduces the amount of free time available to students and may interfere with their home relationships and family life."²⁷

In 1971, Norman France's survey of students showed that they found the bus ride boring and tiring. Students suggested a number of ways to improve conditions on the bus, including radios, air-conditioning, better heating and bigger seats.²⁸

France's research reveals that it is the younger students who suffer most on longer routes. Understandably, many younger children fear soiling themselves on the way to school. Scharf highlights the "bathroom" issue in his report:

Since most children are on the bus [15 minutes after eating], they must hold it. This ability to 'hold it' increases with age. In order to avoid embarrassment the younger child avoids eating. This, in turn, affects their whole school day. When one weighs this against the dubious educational gains achieved through the centralization of Division I [early grade] students, and coupling this with the parents unwillingness to have their small children transported great distances, the conclusion must be that these students should be schooled as close to home as possible.²⁹

Scharf recommends limiting bus time for elementary school students to one and one-half hours per day, or a distance of 20 miles one-way on a normal bus route. "Among the primary problems facing school boards in the area of transportation," he concludes, "was and will be to keep the travelling time down to an acceptable and reasonable level."³⁰

A sample of school board policies on busing is available on the SSTA's web site. The Rosetown School Division's policy on students' daily route time, for example, states: "No route shall be so long that any student will have to board the bus before 7:30 a.m. Where the possibility of a circle route exists, it shall be operated on a first on/first off basis. No bus is to arrive at the school more than ten minutes prior to the start of classes."³¹

²⁷Lorraine Thompson, *The Academic, Social and Physical Effects of Daily Transportation on Pupils*, SSTA Research Centre Report No. 80 (Regina: Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, 1982), 10, 15.

²⁸Norman France, *Student Transportation — Opinions of Teachers, Parents, Students, Trustees and Bus Drivers; A Pilot Investigation*, SSTA Research Centre, Report No. 4 (Regina: Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, 1971), 9.

²⁹Scharf, 156.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Rosetown School Division #43, "Sample School Board Policies: Busing," on Saskatchewan School Trustees Association web site, <www.ssta.sk.ca/research/bus_transportation/43bus.html>, January 2002.

4.2 Impact of Busing on School Performance

Many parents and educators are concerned about the fact that the school day is considerably longer for transported students than for non-transported students. Several research projects have examined the impact that a daily bus journey has on students' academic performance, social adjustment and physical health. While these studies found that busing forces students to miss extra-curricular school activities, they conclude that there are no significant differences in academic achievement between transported and nontransported students. "In the great majority of studies the performance of bused students did not differ from that on nonbused students," Thompson concludes.³² Scharf's work confirmed this finding. He analyzed the variances of Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) scores of students in grades three to eight, classified according to whether students were being bused to school. Scharf concluded that busing children to school had no significant effect on CTBS scores.³³

In 1971 France conducted structured interviews of parents, students, trustees and bus drivers in seven areas of the province. He found that students felt that busing had no effect upon their academic achievement nor did it affect their attitude toward school. "Some students felt they could study and help each other on the bus," France states. "However, most students felt a time limitation for homework because of the bus journey."³⁴ Parents also said that busing had a positive effect on their children's academic progress in that it made possible better educational opportunities. They, too, saw the limitation of homework time due to time spent on the bus, however. "In relation to children's personality development," the report continues, "they felt that the bus journey provided socializing opportunities and opportunities to practise self-discipline."³⁵ France's overall impression at the conclusion of his survey was that students, parents, bus drivers and trustees see busing as a fact of life and a convenience.

4.3 School Bus Safety

The issue of greatest concern when it comes to student transportation is safety. School bus-related accidents in Saskatchewan and elsewhere are not uncommon, and fatalities have occurred in this province as a result of such accidents.³⁶

³²Thompson, 15.

³³Scharf, 139.

³⁴France, 10.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶In the years from 1974 to 1976 there were a total of 188 school bus accidents. Three children were killed in three separate incidents during this period — all while crossing a road or highway while loading or unloading onto a school bus. University of Saskatchewan. Transportation Centre, *A Study of School Bus Safety in Saskatchewan* (Saskatoon: Transportation Centre, University of Saskatchewan, 1976). Another fatality occurred on May 26, 1983. Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan Highways and Transportation, *School Bus Safety; Final Report on 1983 Hearings, May 15, 1984*. (Regina: 1984).

One of the earliest safety concerns was an emergency heating system in school buses and other student transportation vehicles. Other safety issues, regularly addressed by school board trustees, included safety standards in school bus construction, safety inspections and certification by the Highway Traffic Board, the exclusive yellow bus color, and stopping at railway crossings.³⁷

While design and construction are important safety factors, school bus safety is dependent on employing well qualified, self-disciplined drivers. The SSTA advocated periodic examinations for both driver health and driving ability, and this led to special operators' licenses.³⁸ The rules governing drivers and buses are provided in *The Highway Traffic Act* and regulations under this Act. The responsibility to police the Act and regulations are placed with the Highway Traffic Board.

The School Bus Driver's Handbook provides the following profile of a good school bus driver:

A good driver is one who operates a vehicle in a safe and courteous manner. To be safe, you must know how to drive well. You must be able to operate a vehicle that is wider and longer than most privately-owned vehicles and that carries an active, unsecured cargo. Most importantly, 'safety' for a school bus driver involves a commitment to doing things the right way every time.³⁹

The greatest risk to the safety of children occurs when they are loading and unloading school buses. The stopping of traffic when buses are loading or unloading has been frequently examined, with reference to flashing lights and stop arms, a public information program and the posting of roadside signs.⁴⁰

A child's death resulting from a school bus accident on May 26, 1983 prompted the provincial government to establish a School Bus Safety Committee mandated to review all aspects of school bus safety. After seven public hearings held throughout Saskatchewan, which concluded on October 18, 1983, the committee made several recommendations, including:

- 1) A new "Stop [for School Bus] When Lights Flashing" sign, introduced October 18, 1983.
- 2) Special school bus driver handbooks prepared by Saskatchewan Highways and Transportation, in consultation with the Department of Education and the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association.
- 3) The creation of special "S" endorsement cards for school bus driver's licenses.
- 4) Guidelines for procedures school bus drivers should follow when a motorist passes a school bus while children are loading or unloading.

³⁷Thorson, 96.

³⁸Thorson, 96

³⁹*The School Bus Driver's Handbook*, as quoted in Volk, 12.

⁴⁰Thorson, 96.

5) Stop Arms attached to the sides of buses.⁴¹

The School Bus Safety Committee stopped short of requiring seatbelts in school buses, however, preferring to wait until the results were in from Transport Canada's school bus crash tests.

In 1985 the highly controversial Canadian School Bus Collision test program undertook to determine the effects of adding lap seat belts to school buses. Three different size buses, each containing belted and unbelted test dummies, were crashed into a rigid barrier at 48 km/h. The major conclusion of the report was: "The use of lap seat belts in any of the three sizes of recent model school bus which were tested may result in more severe head and neck injuries for a belted occupant than for an unbelted one, in a severe frontal collision."⁴²

There continues to be a high level of interest in the issue of seat belts on large school buses; the debate has, in fact, become highly emotional. Members of the general public have a difficult time understanding why seat belts are required in the family car, but not on school buses. The Canadian Safety Council points out that school buses are not built like cars. "Buses are much larger, higher and heavier than other vehicles on the road, so they have body-on-frame design," the Council's web site states. "For seat belts to enhance rider safety, the bus body would have to be completely re-engineered with seat belts integrated at the design stage."⁴³ Bus drivers also have concerns about seat belts in school buses. Some of these are:

- Students can and do use the heavy belt buckles as weapons, injuring other riders.
- It is next to impossible to make sure that all students keep their belts properly fastened, so that they are not injured by the belts in an accident.
- If a bus has to be evacuated in an emergency, such as a fire, panicked or disoriented students might be trapped by their belts.⁴⁴

5. Conclusion

The 1976 study of school busing in Saskatchewan points out the uniqueness of this form of conveyance, stating: "No other transport system is as sensitive to the needs and wishes of its patrons or as much a part of their way of life."⁴⁵ Debates about safety and long bus journeys continue, arising especially after incidents are reported in the media. For example, in 2001, a young Saskatchewan girl spent the night on a school bus after she fell asleep. The bus driver had

⁴¹*School Bus Safety*.

⁴²"School Bus Collision Summary, Canada, 1989-1997," on Transport Canada's web site, <www.tc.gc.ca/roadsafety/bus/tp13412/en/sbc_le.html>, January 2002.

⁴³"Seat-belts in School Buses?" in Canada Safety Council's web site, <www.safety-

⁴⁴"Seat Belts, School Buses, and Safety," on the National Education Association's web site, <www.nea.org/esp/jobs/seatbelt.html>, January 2002.

⁴⁵*A Study of School Bus Safety in Saskatchewan*, 1.

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neglected to check to make sure no one was left on the bus. Nevertheless, rural residents have come to accept the fact that school buses are likely to remain very much a part of their way of life for many years to come.

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Appendix A: Larger School Unit and School Bus Chronology

1913	Several amalgamations of two or more school districts result in the conveyance of students by horse-drawn or motorized vans.
1921	88 school districts were conveying students.
July 12, 1938	The Liberal provincial government appointed a committee to study and report on school administration and organization in Saskatchewan, chaired by Mr. Justice W.M. Martin (former Premier and Minister of Education). The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation presented a brief to this inquiry outlining its case for the larger unit of administration in August 1938.
March 1940	The Liberal government announced a bill providing for the establishment of Larger Units of School Administration, but, as it was voluntary, it was largely ineffective.
1941	Census showed that 78 percent of all Saskatchewan farmers had eight years of schooling or less.
September 1944	121 Saskatchewan schools, where enrolments were between 5 and 10 students, were closed. School buses (or, in some cases, private vehicles) were utilized to transport the affected students to other schools.
November 1944	<i>The Larger School Units Act</i> was passed by the Saskatchewan Legislature. The Act made provision for the organization of 60 larger units. By the end of the year, 14 larger units had been created.
1946	Milestone was the first school unit in Saskatchewan to own and operate its own school bus — a 36-passenger Mercury.
September 1951	48 larger school units had been established, in which there were nearly 4,400 classrooms in operation.
1950	Govan School Unit No. 29 (now Last Mountain) used a Bombardier snowmobile to transport forty children to school during the winter.
1950s	About 400 snowmobiles were used in school units throughout Saskatchewan. The use of snowmobiles for school conveyance disappeared by the 1960s when rural roads were significantly improved.

- 1950/51 School grants had increased to \$7,184,700 from \$2,765,700 in 1943-44.
- 1953/54 Of more than 5,000 school districts in the province, 1,600 were not operating and approximately 500 others operated with fewer than 10 pupils. 1,451 districts were conveying students, at a cost of slightly over \$1 million, 90 percent of which was spent by larger units. Saskatchewan school bus routes covered more than 7,000 miles of road.
- 1954 Saskatchewan's rural school enrolment declined from a high of 60 percent of the total provincial enrolment in 1941 to 36 percent in 1954, while village and town enrolments both increased approximately 6 percent and city enrolments doubled.
- 1955 The Saskatchewan Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life determined that nearly 60 percent of Saskatchewan's adult population had no high school education. Among urban adults, the proportion was 43 percent, compared to 69 percent of farm adults.
- 1955 There were 600 school bus routes in Saskatchewan with a total of 272 buses transporting 12,724 children.
- 1956 56 larger school units had been created. Only four non-units still operated in the province under the small school district organization.
- March 1957 859 school bus routes serving 400 districts carried 18,000 pupils, including 4,600 high school students, almost double the total in 1954.
- April 1958 More than 24,000 pupils were being transported in school buses, with more than 1,700 school districts being served. In the Prince Albert unit, 1,001 pupils were being taken to schools in buses, more than in any other; Willow Bunch was second with some 900.
- March 1, 1961 The Saskatchewan Local Government Continuing Committee recommended that there should be a maximum travelling time to school of one hour for elementary school students and one and one-half hours for high school students.
- 1962-63 28% of all Saskatchewan students, and 50% of all school unit students rode buses at an average cost of \$112 per student. The public paid \$7,350,000 for school bus service, which represented almost 10% of the total operating cost for all schools under the jurisdiction of the Department of Education that year.

- 1963 The number of children conveyed to schools in Saskatchewan had increased from 12,724 in 1955 to 62,725 in 1963, a five fold increase.
- 1968 There were 3,014 bus routes on which 3,144 buses transported 86,153 students.
- 1973 The average total mileage per school bus route was 82 miles, or a student route distance of 28 miles.
- 1974 The total length of school bus routes was almost one-quarter of a million miles per day making school buses by far the largest public transport system in the province.
- May 15, 1984 Saskatchewan Highways and Transportation releases report of the School Bus Safety Committee, *School Bus Safety; Final Report on 1983 Hearings*. The committee was set up as a result of a school bus accident on May 26, 1983 which resulted in a fatality.
- January 1985 Transport Canada released its controversial report on school bus crash tests which recommended against seat belts on school buses.
- 1992 Saskatchewan taxpayers spent in excess of \$58 million for conveying rural students to school.

Appendix C: Notable Quotations on School Busing

"If no conveyance is provided, farm families are faced with either maintaining their children in town or permitting them to drop out of school."

- Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, "Rural Education," 1957.

"Members of the Opposition continually picture the larger unit as an ogre gobbling up the Little Red School House, leaving it dilapidated and ruined, as the children are carried away in a bus to the big bad school in town."

- Woodrow S. Lloyd, Saskatchewan Minister of Education, March 2, 1955.

"The more frequent use of [school bus] transportation will be one of the means of keeping families on the farm."

- Woodrow S. Lloyd, Saskatchewan Minister of Education, April 8, 1958.

"Many parents have testified that the bus service has meant their continuing to live in the rural part because the children now get adequate schooling by means of a bus route."

- C.H. Logie, in *The School Trustee*, March 1955.

"Every unit that has instituted transportation is providing better education than was possible before conveyance."

- C.H. Logie, in *The School Trustee*, March 1955.

"Without the bus some parents would have to arrange board and room at considerable expense to themselves, and many children would not go to school at all. Even if only one pupil makes good, the effort and cost is indeed worthwhile."

- C.H. Logie, in *The School Trustee*, March 1955.

"Applications for the position of school bus drivers have been sought from reliable men of sober habits, having some mechanical knowledge, and able to get along with children."

- E. Shaw, Herbert School Unit No. 23, March 1952.

"Lack of co-ordination between larger units and rural municipalities is a serious deficiency in financing education and in development of school bus routes."

- Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, "Rural Education," 1957.

"Owing to the bad condition of our road to school we are going to keep the children home from school until the roads are made passable for them. We approached the municipality regarding this road and they will do nothing about it."

Letter from Wenzel Appel, Bangor, SK, to Department of Education, June 21, 1952.

"Due to my road my children have to miss a great deal of school not only in the spring but whenever it rains. Even now it is impassable by car and up to a short time ago we had to take the children with the tractor to meet the bus."

- Letter from Paul Muller, Bienfait, SK, to Minister of Education, May 4, 1956.

"The program of centralizing schools is hamstrung in many parts of the province by the very inadequate roads provided by the small municipalities."

- "Bulletin 1 — The Present Systems." N.d. [1956?] Faxed from STF

"We have at all times endeavored to co-operate with school units in the matter of roads used by school buses."

- Administrator with the Department of Municipal Affairs, September 10, 1954.

"The indispensable tool of a centralized school system is a well-planned network of all-weather school bus routes."

- Saskatchewan. Local Government Continuing Committee, "Local Government in Saskatchewan," March 1, 1961.

"We spend \$10,000 for a school bus so the kids won't have to walk, then spend \$100,000 for a gym so they can get some exercise."

- Observed in *The School Trustee*, September 1961.

"There should be a maximum travelling time to school of one hour for elementary school students and one and one-half hours for high school students."

- Saskatchewan Department of Education, as cited in Saskatchewan. Local Government Continuing Committee, "Local Government in Saskatchewan," March 1, 1961.

"... it was the younger students that suffered most on longer routes."

- Study of student transportation by Norman France, cited in Scharf, *A Report on the Declining Rural Population and the Implications for Rural Education*. SSTA, 1974.

"No other transport system is as sensitive to the needs and wishes of its patrons or as much a part of their way of life."

- University of Saskatchewan Transportation Centre, *A Study of School Bus Safety in Saskatchewan*, 1976.

"Transport Canada has determined that seat belts may actually adversely affect the safety of children on school buses."

- Transport Canada, *School Bus Collision Summary*, 1985.

"Student transportation is big business!"

- *School Busing Handbook*, SSTA, 1992.