



# **Transportation Workgroup** *Summary Report*

Prepared by the Transportation Workgroup of Greenville County Schools Board Advocacy Committee and presented to the Greenville County Schools Board of Trustees on December 5, 2017.

## **Transportation Workgroup Directive**

The Greenville County Schools Board Advocacy Committee requests that the Transportation Workgroup provides a summary of findings relating to buses used to transport public school students within Greenville County (both state and locally owned buses) and the compliance of these vehicles with SC Code of Laws (Section 59-67: Transportation of Pupils; School Buses). The Committee also requests that the Workgroup makes recommendations regarding local or state policy needed to improve the transportation of Greenville County Schools students as a result of these findings.

## **Introduction**

The Greenville County Schools Board of Trustees has been particularly concerned about the increased number of “thermal events” on school buses, that is, times when smoke and/or fire are present. These thermal events pose a significant risk to students and staff. According to the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE), 71% of “thermal events” are connected with the 1995-1996 Type D rear-engine buses operated as a part of the state-owned bus fleet. Thermal events have quadrupled on these buses in the past decade, resulting in an increased likelihood of student and staff injury or death. These non-compliant buses require immediate attention from our elected leaders.

As of December 2017, SCDE calculates a need for \$44 million from the General Assembly to replace these 1995-1996 buses statewide. Further, the SCDE calculates that an additional \$115 million is needed to replace additional outdated buses and bring the state-owned fleet into compliance with state law.

In light of statewide competing funding needs (e.g., pension reform, roads, teacher recruitment and retention, and failed energy investments), this almost insurmountable cost requires local school districts, the SC Department of Education, and the SC General Assembly to review policies and consider changes to improve our state-owned school bus transportation system and empower local districts to tackle this statewide issue with local flexibility.

Unfortunately, while the SC General Assembly appropriated \$20.5 million from lottery funds to escalate bus replacement in FY18, Gov. Henry McMaster vetoed these funds. While we are extremely disappointed in this action and recommend strongly that the General Assembly override this veto, we know that an override of this veto alone will not solve our state's student transportation challenges.

The Workgroup has reviewed *SC Code of Laws Section 59-67: Transportation of Pupils, School Buses* and assessed the state-owned bus fleet allocated to our District for transportation needs for compliance with law, and this report contains recommendations for policy changes to improve the safety and efficiency of our fleet.

In addition, the Transportation Workgroup of The Greenville County Schools Board Advocacy Committee provides a summary of challenges, a list of proposed policy changes to address those challenges (many at little or no additional cost to taxpayers), a detailed narrative for each challenge, and an appendix of existing reports, meeting minutes, interviews, and data points.

Note: While most of this data was collected as part of an assessment of Greenville County Schools' transportation needs, we are confident that the needs, solutions, and data points are relevant to other school districts across the state, and we are eager to share this report with our colleagues.

## Summary of Primary Challenges and Proposed Solutions

When reviewing our state-owned bus system for compliance with *SC Code of Laws Section 59-67: School Buses*, there are three themes that most warrant the attention of South Carolina's leaders:

**Replacement of buses most likely to cause “thermal events.”** Quite simply, any action by the General Assembly that doesn't prioritize the removal of the fire-prone 1995-1996 buses is misguided. There is no action more pressing in improving safety and operational efficiency of our fleet than the elimination of these 1995-1996 buses.

**Improvement of reliable transportation options to improve operational efficiency, reduce operating costs, and ensure fewer late arrivals for students.** Our bus fleet is out of compliance with the SC General Assembly's own mandate of a 15-year replacement cycle. The SC General Assembly and SCDE must reach consensus and annually appropriate adequate funds for the state-mandated bus replacement cycle. Additionally, some policy changes to encourage collaboration between SCDE and local school districts, and between local school districts and regional public transportation providers could save taxpayer dollars through shared services and should be considered.

**Adoption of policy changes necessary to allow the SC Board of Education to grant waivers to local school districts from applicable regulations to foster innovative efforts and allow local school districts and SCDE to work collaboratively to address our underfunded transportation system.**

There are some innovative steps that would reduce demand on our fleet, such as:

- *Adjusting regulations on Public School driver credentials to allow a non CDL driver to operate a 14-passenger bus on regular routes*
- *Increasing walkability to schools*
- *Improving electronic bus monitoring systems to support efficiency, increase driver accountability, and improve student monitoring*
- *Encouraging adjustments in bus policy to allow collaboration with local public transportation systems (e.g., Greenlink, CAT)*

## **Summary of Proposed Policy Positions Recommended by the Greenville County Schools Board of Trustees Advocacy Committee Transportation Workgroup**

Policy Positions for State Legislators (*described in detail on the following pages*):

- In accordance with SC Code of Laws 59-67-530, the SC General Assembly must immediately fund the replacement of all 1995-1996 Type D rear-engine buses by overriding Gov. McMaster’s veto and allocating the funds necessary to replace the remainder of the 1995-1996 buses from the state-owned fleet.
- In accordance with SC Code of Laws 59-67-543, the General Assembly should prohibit SCDE from including 1995-1996 buses in allocations made to local school districts. These buses are demonstrably unsafe, and the risk of a thermal event has quadrupled over the past decade. To include these buses in our daily routing is a gamble our legislators should not ask local school districts to take.
- The General Assembly should annually appropriate the necessary funds for a 15-year bus replacement cycle, as required by statute. SCDE’s current estimated cost to achieve this is \$34.1 million per year.
- The SCDE must develop and the General Assembly must fund a formula to add additional buses to the school bus fleet to accommodate student growth.
- The General Assembly should require SCDE to promulgate and publish the “average per pupil operating cost of its state-owned fleet” as required by 59-67-460 to allow local school districts the flexibility to contract out parts of the bus operation system.
- The General Assembly should adopt a proviso allowing SCDE to sell the Halton Road state-owned bus shop and use the proceeds to build a new bus shop facility co-located with GCS’ bus shop at Donaldson Center.
- The State Board of Education (SBE) should amend regulations regarding public school driver credentials to allow non-CDL drivers to operate 14 –passenger buses on regular routes.
- The General Assembly should appropriate the necessary funds to reduce the “hazardous route” zone from 1.5 miles to .5 miles to increase the likelihood that a student could be served by bus transportation in unsafe, dense, urban traffic areas.
- The General Assembly should appropriate the necessary funds to equip all buses with wi-fi and bus driver and passenger monitoring, including GPS tracking, two-way communications, cameras, and microphones.

- Finally, we are aware that there is currently proposed legislation (H.4389) that would turn over control of the bus fleet to local school districts. This workgroup recommends that the General Assembly take no action regarding ownership issues until the General Assembly and SCDE modernize the bus fleet, replacing all buses that are 15 years or older.

### **Policy Positions for Local Elected Leaders (described in detail on the following pages):**

- Greenville County Council and local municipalities should reduce hazardous routes by requiring new residential developments to include pedestrian facilities that connect to the public sidewalk system and by working to ret-rofit existing developments to create safe routes to schools (e.g., multi-use paths, bike paths, sidewalks, signal-ized and non-signalized crosswalks).
- Greenville County Schools staff and board should meet with City of Greenville and Greenville County staffs and councils to explore possible cost savings and system efficiencies of coordinated shared bus services between Greenville County Schools and Greenlink and the policy recommendations necessary to foster these collaborations.

### **Challenge #1: Replacement of Buses Most Likely to Cause Thermal Events**

*“It was an inferno”*

On Tuesday, May 9, 2017, two students riding in the back of a school bus in Duncan, SC, thought they smelled smoke. They notified their bus driver, Teresa Stroble, who immediately pulled over and evacuated all 56 students on board. Within moments, the bus erupted into flames. One bystander, David Porter, shared his experience with Fox Carolina News: “I heard the screaming and when I came outside it was an inferno and I saw no one. There was literally nobody, not on the street, not on the side of the streets, anywhere. It was just a big bus and an inferno and all the screaming had stopped.”



Earlier this year, Teresa Stroble and her 56 passengers experienced what the SC Department of Education describes as a “thermal event”; that is, the presence of fire and/or smoke while the bus is in operation. Their experience is all too common on our state-owned bus fleet. Thankfully, Stroble’s quick action saved the lives of all the students on her bus, and no one was injured. Had Stroble hesitated just 60 seconds, the outcome could have been very different.

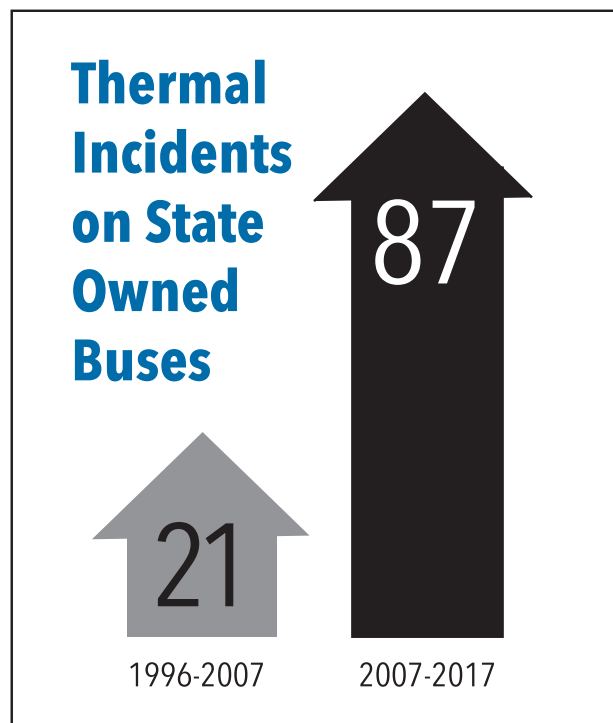
The increased frequency of thermal events is one of the most concerning findings of this Workgroup’s study. According to the SCDE 2016 report, of particular concern are the 1995-1996 Type D rear-engine buses that have a “high proclivity” for thermal events (i.e., catching fire). According to SCDE, 75% of all thermal events that have occurred in past 20 years on state-owned public school buses took place on 1995-1996 Type D rear-engine buses. As of 2016, SCDE still has 775 of these 1995-1996 vehicles in operation. These buses, which exceed the state-mandated 15-year replacement cycle (*Section 59-67-580: Replacement Cycle; funding*), are scattered throughout every school district in South Carolina. As of this report, Greenville County Schools has 40 of these high-risk vehicles in our SCDE bus fleet, many on our roads each day transporting students to school.

### *Thermal events have quadrupled*

The Workgroup reviewed action taken by SCDE staff to reduce the frequency of these events. Significant steps have been taken to help reduce the risk these vehicles pose. SCDE staff, along with the SC General Assembly, have implemented safety improvements for these buses, including manufacturer-recommended changes (e.g., the removal of Racor fuel filter systems, cabling changes, and the installation of Heat Sensors that send a unique alarm/alert to drivers anticipating thermal events).

After reviewing changes made with SCDE transportation staff and local district transportation staff, it is clear, however, that while these short-term fixes are reducing the risk of thermal events, they are not eliminating them.

In fact, according to a 2016 SCDE report, incidents of thermal events have INCREASED.



## *“It is not a matter of **if** these buses catch fire, but **when**”*

Comparing two windows (1996-2006 and 2007-2016), thermal events have quadrupled over the past decade. Our students are four times more likely to be involved in a thermal event today than they were 10 years ago.

A concern that one SCDE transportation employee noted “keeps me up at night” is that these thermal events are not preventable, and, our Workgroup finds, it is a numbers game as to when a bus full of students will be involved in a tragic event. As one SCDE transportation staff member noted, “it is not a matter of if these buses catch fire, but when.”

Additionally, the thermal sensors are providing a false level of comfort for our state. These thermal sensors are designed to notify the driver with an early warning when a bus begins to overheat, allowing time for the driver to pull over and evacuate the bus. (Note: The Duncan bus did not have a thermal sensor; however, all 1995-1996 bus are currently equipped).

When asked if the thermal sensor would make a difference, one SCDE transportation staff member explained, “These sensors give drivers an early warning, but we are talking extra seconds, not minutes.” In fact, on the day our Workgroup toured the Greenville and SCDE bus maintenance centers; there was a thermal event on a bus in Simpsonville. The driver noticed smoke and flames coming from the tailpipe of the vehicle, immediately pulled over, and the bus was sent to the shop. At no time during that bus’s operation did the thermal sensor alert the driver to an issue. A second thermal event occurred in Greenville in November 2017. While the driver safely evacuated the bus, the driver again received no advance warning from the thermal sensor.

### *Relevant areas where we find SCDE is out of compliance with SC Code of Laws:*

*SC Code of Laws Section 59-67-543: The Department of Transportation shall be responsible for providing all supplies required for the operation of state-owned school buses and for maintaining them in efficient and safe mechanical condition*

*Section 59-67-530- Expense of operation of State and locally owned buses: State Board shall be responsible for all expenses of operation of State-owned buses and for the replacement of obsolete equipment*

It is the finding of this workgroup that these 1995-1996 buses, demonstrably dangerous and outside the 15-year replacement cycle, are not “in safe mechanical condition” and represent “obsolete equipment,” posing a daily safety risk to students, parents, and local school district personnel.

Further, by including these buses within the bus fleet allocated to school districts, The State is forcing local school districts, and their boards and staff, to operate buses with proclivity to fire risks. With 40 of these buses being designated as route buses by SCDE, we are putting 3,120 Greenville County students at risk each day. Gambling on an obsolete, unsafe bus model is an unnecessary risk that state leaders are forcing upon local school districts.

***Recommended State Policy Position:*** *In accordance with SC Code of Laws 59-67-530, the SC General Assembly must immediately fund the replacement of all 1995-1996 Type D rear-engine buses by overriding Gov. McMaster’s veto and allocating the funds necessary to replace the remainder of the 1995-1996 buses from the state-owned fleet.*

***Recommended State Policy Position:*** *In accordance with SC Code of Laws 59-67-543, the General Assembly should prohibit SCDE from including 1995-1996 buses in allocations made to local school districts. These*

*buses are demonstrably unsafe, and the risk of a thermal event has quadrupled over the past decade. To include these buses in our daily routing is a gamble legislators should not ask local school districts to take.*

## **Challenge #2: Improve Reliable Transportation**

Transportation challenges are not limited to these 1995-1996 Type D rear-engine buses. Over half of the state-owned bus fleet is out of compliance with the state mandated 15-year replacement cycle required by SC Code of Laws 59-67-580.

*Section 59-67-580: Replacement Cycle; funding: With funds appropriated by the General Assembly for school bus purchases, the State Board of Education shall implement a school bus replacement cycle to replace approximately one-fifteenth of the fleet each year with new school buses. These funds must not be used for school bus maintenance or fuel.*

While state law requires for 1/15 of the bus fleet to be replaced on an annual basis, the caveat “with funds appropriated by the General Assembly” has thwarted these efforts. Some state leaders have noted that any general funds allocated to SCDE could be used for vehicles, while others note that without a specific line-item designation, undesignated general funds are unavailable for use on buses. This confusion between the SC General Assembly and SCDE should be resolved and remedied.

The General Assembly, in partnership with SCDE, has allocated \$141 million for bus replacement over the past 10 years. Even with this allocation, there are still 3,382 buses (59.7% of the SCDE bus fleet) that are older than 15 years of age. In Greenville County, 163 of the 390 buses allocated by SCDE are 15 years or older (41% of fleet). For a bus system that drives 6.7 million miles annually, this aging fleet poses a significant challenge to local districts.

### *Thermal events are “the tip of the iceberg”*

In an interview with a Greenville County Schools transportation employee, it was noted: “The thermal events are a huge deal. But that’s just the tip of the iceberg. The aging bus fleet is more expensive [to operate], more likely to break down, more likely to cause students to be late to school, and less reliable.”

Since 2015, an average of 20 buses break down daily in the state-owned fleet assigned to Greenville County Schools. Greenville County Schools transportation staff note that “breakdown” applies to any non-drivable bus, which could be a headlamp that won’t turn on, a cracked mirror or windshield, or a mechanical issue causing a bus not to start – “Not all breakdowns are major mechanical issues: Some are challenges that are detected by a routine daily inspection, but most are issues where the age of the bus contributes to its condition.”

When a breakdown occurs, a replacement bus has to be routed, and the likelihood that students are delayed in arriving to school and home increases. An average of 20 buses in the Greenville County Schools state-owned fleet breaks down each day. These 3,600 annual breakdown events translate to over 150,000 late student arrivals annually (with many of these being the same students late to school on a recurring basis).

In 2015, Greenville County Schools reported that 40% of late buses (more than 15 minutes late) were caused by mechanical issues.

### ***Relevant areas where we find SCDE is out of compliance with SC Code of Laws:***

*Section 59-67-240: The driver of each school bus shall cooperate with the teachers in their work in the school to which he is transporting pupils by being on time in the mornings*

We are putting our drivers at a disadvantage by holding them accountable to a state law that mandates they arrive on time, while forcing them to drive 20-30 year-old buses that break down on a regular basis. Driver retention is directly linked to job satisfaction, and nothing is a greater determinant than the condition of the equipment we provide for our employees.

**Summary of late buses as reported by Greenville County Schools**

	<b>2014-2015</b>	<b>2015-2016</b>	<b>2016-2017</b>
Driver-related issues	1,352 (44%)	1,868 (48%)	3,832 (63%)
Student-related issues	96 (3%)	96 (3%)	127 (2%)
Breakdowns/mechanical issues	1,105 (36%)	1,191 (31%)	1,179 (19%)
School-related issues	224 (7%)	260 (7%)	220 (4%)
Unforeseen issues (e.g., traffic, road issues)	166 (5%)	233 (6%)	257 (4%)
Other	117 (4%)	238 (6%)	434 (7%)
Totals	3,060	3,886	6,049

*“We are pouring money down the drain”*

Additionally, buses older than 15 years of age are more than twice as expensive to operate. According to SCDE transportation staff, a 1995 bus costs 49 cents/mile to operate, while a 2013 bus costs 21 cents/mile. In Greenville County Schools, where we have 105 buses older than 2002, and each of these buses travel an average of 13,500 miles annually, this translates to an added annual cost of \$396,600 for taxpayers. “We are pouring money down the drain,” one Greenville County School Board member explained. “How can we, as fiscal conservatives, allow the local school district and the SCDE staff to waste nearly \$400,000 annually on operating outdated equipment?”

In order to bring our bus fleet up to compliance with our 15-year state-mandated replacement cycle, an additional \$159 million is needed. Then, an additional \$34.1 million/year (calculated at 350 buses per year: 1/15 of state owned fleet x \$89,614/bus). It should be noted that the cost of buses will increase over time. Additionally, this allocation does not account for growth that will occur.

**Recommended State Policy Position:** *The General Assembly should annually appropriate the necessary funds for a 15-year bus replacement cycle, as required by statute. SCDE’s current estimated cost to achieve this is \$34.1 million per year.*

**Recommended State Policy Position:** *The SCDE must develop and the General Assembly must fund a formula to add additional buses to the school bus fleet to accommodate student growth.*

*So there are not enough buses. What other options exist to share resources?*

In a multi-stakeholder meeting between Greenville County School Transportation Workgroup members, Greenlink staff, and Piedmont Health Foundation leaders, there was a desire expressed for a collaborative environment, where state transportation resources could be pooled with school district resources and those from the City of Greenville and Greenville County to develop a coordinated, streamlined public transportation system.

“We have buses and are ready to roll,” one stakeholder shared. A collaborative partnership between Greenlink and Greenville County Schools would allow both entities to maximize their bus fleet operations, and, through shared resources, allow for a more streamlined public transportation system. However, currently the SC Code



of Laws has very specific language regarding the types of buses that may be used for student transportation, including color and size. The SC Board of Education should be granted the authority to allow local school districts to request waivers from specific regulations on a case-by-case basis.

*Relevant areas where we find SC DOE is out of compliance with SC Code of Laws:*

*SC Code of Laws 59-67-460- State Aid: The County shall . . . receive aid from the State for pupils thus transported only on the basis of the average per pupil operating cost of State-owned equipment for the current year as determined by the State Board of Education*

Unfortunately, to date, SCDE has failed to calculate and share this per pupil operating cost, despite requests from this Workgroup. Understanding the per pupil operating expenses would provide school districts with critical information needed in pursuing cost-saving collaborative partnerships.

***Recommended State Policy Position:*** *The General Assembly should require SCDE to promulgate and publish the “average per pupil operating cost of its state-owned fleet” as required by 59-67-460 to allow local school districts the flexibility to contract out parts of the bus operation system.*

***Recommended Local Policy Position:*** *Greenville County Schools staff and board should meet with City of Greenville and Greenville County staffs and councils to explore possible cost savings and system efficiencies of coordinated shared bus services between Greenville County Schools and Greenlink and the policy recommendations necessary to foster these collaborations.*

### *SCDE should model collaborative efficiencies through co-location of services*

Greenville County has seen remarkable growth over the past 30 years. Areas of the county that were once rural are now crossed by major arteries in a complex transportation network. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Haywood Road/Halton Road area.

When the SC Department of Education acquired the location for the state bus shop on Halton Road, it was a rural, two-lane road. In the five decades since the opening of this shop, Haywood Road’s growth has skyrocketed, spurred by the opening of Haywood Mall in 1980 and the expansion of Haywood Road-based services from 1990-2010. The traffic on adjoining Halton Road has become a continuous issue. In 2016, 15,000 cars passed by the Halton Road bus shop on a daily basis, making it one of the busiest intersections in the area.

During a recent tour of the SCDE bus shop on Halton Road, staff members commented on the challenges an outdated bus shop poses, compounded by the difficulty to drivers in accessing the bus shop because of increased traffic density.

Greenville County Schools has a state-of-the-art bus center in the Donaldson Center, and space was allocated on a neighboring lot for the relocation of the Halton Road facility. This co-location of bus services would serve as a model of state and county collaboration, and would increase the efficiency of our bus fleet by reducing ride times on congested thoroughfares.

Additionally, City of Greenville staff members report that they have received interest from developers regarding purchasing the Halton Road location. The SCDE could use these funds to build a modernized bus maintenance

shop, co-located with Greenville County Schools' bus shop at Donaldson Center. The SC General Assembly approved a request to relocate the services under a prior SCDE administration, but the request was ignored, and action is still needed.

***Recommended State Policy Position:*** *The General Assembly should adopt a proviso allowing SCDE to sell the Halton Road state-owned bus shop and use the proceeds to build a new bus shop facility co-located with GCS' bus shop at Donald-son Center.*

### **Challenge #3: Foster innovative efforts and collaboration to address our underfunded transportation system**

Recognizing that a modernized bus fleet will cost \$34.1 million annually, the Workgroup recommends the following innovative practices that could help reduce local and state transportation burdens while these funds are being secured:

***Innovative Practice 1:*** *Adjusting regulations on public school driver credentials to allow a non-CDL driver to operate a 14-passenger bus on regular routes*

A shortage of drivers, compounded by a shortage of reliable, safe buses, has led the Greenville County Schools Board of Trustees to consider alternative transportation options.

Currently, the majority of Greenville County routes that are greater than 90 minutes are rural routes serving Slater Marietta Elementary School, Travelers Rest High School, and Northwest Middle School. These routes are longer due to the topography of routes (winding roads) and sparse populations. It is the position of District staff that additional full-size buses would not create a significant reduction in ride times because of the distance between stops.

Additionally, magnet school routes are long, because of the non-traditional attendance areas. Some magnet school routes begin as early as 5:30 a.m., and some continue until well after 6:30 p.m.

One of the most significant causes of the driver shortage is the lack of drivers possessing a CDL. As one administrator noted: "Even if the State (SCDE transportation department) sent us a fleet of brand-new buses for every route, we couldn't staff them because we don't have enough eligible drivers." SC Transportation regulations mandate that, regardless of size of bus, any vehicle used for bus routes must be operated by a driver with a valid CDL, even though state transportation laws permit a driver without a CDL to operate a 14-passenger bus outside of the school system.

The adjustment of this regulation would allow districts to purchase 14-passenger buses to reduce wait times and increase the pool of qualified drivers. Additionally, 14-passenger buses are more easily navigated on rural routes. Further, by assigning these smaller buses to high school routes, high school staff members could operate buses (outside of their normal duties), and the buses could remain on site to be used as activity buses.

*Areas of the law where this authority is given to SCDE:*

*Section 59-67-470- Bus drivers: No person shall be authorized to drive a school bus in this state transporting children . . . who has not been certified by the State Board of Education*

*Section 59-67-108B- Training and Certification of drivers: The state department of Education shall establish an appropriate level of driver certification*

**Recommended State Policy Position:** *SBE should amend regulations regarding public school driver credentials to allow non-CDL drivers to operate 14 –passenger buses on regular routes.*

**Innovative Practice 2:** *Increase walkability to schools*

Typically in Greenville County, families in our urban and suburban areas have increased interest in walking to school, which would reduce bus fleet needs. Unfortunately, a lack of consistent policy regarding crosswalks, crossing guards, bike lanes, and sidewalk access create a hodgepodge of walkability concerns. Parents have reported a willingness to walk, if routes were safer. The financial burden of safe, walkable routes could be reduced with more consistent planning. For example, one school requires six crossing guards because of a lack of lighted crosswalks. A consistent policy regarding the importance of connected neighborhood access would improve walking conditions, and foster greater walkability, reducing “hazardous route” demands on local school districts.

**Recommended Local Policy Position:** *Greenville County Council and local municipalities should reduce hazardous routes by requiring new residential developments to include pedestrian facilities that connect to the public sidewalk system and by working to retrofit existing development to create safe routes to schools (e.g., multi-use paths, bike paths, sidewalks, signalized and non-signalized crosswalks).*

**Innovative Practice 3:** *Reduce Hazardous Route zones in urban school districts*

*SC Code of Laws Section 59-67-420- Extent of Transportation to be provided: State . . . assumes no obligation to transport any student to or from school that lives within one and one-half miles of the school he attends*

For parents and families unable to walk to school, but who live less than 1.5 miles from school, the burden of pupil transportation falls to the local school district. In an urban community like Greenville, this translates to \$105,000 in “Hazardous Route” fees owed by a local school district to SCDE for use of their vehicles to pick up students who live within 1.5 miles of their school, but feel it is unsafe to walk within these zones.

It is the position of the Greenville County Schools Board of Trustees that the 1.5-mile range is far too large for an urban setting. In a recent review of school assignment areas, 20,346 students (or 27% of school population) reside less than 1.5 miles from their schools, meaning the SCDE assumes NO ROLE in providing their transportation. Some of our schools have nearly 100% of the school’s attendance area within 1.5 miles.

**Recommended State Policy Position:** *The General Assembly should appropriate the necessary funds to reduce the “hazardous route” zone from 1.5 miles to .5 miles to increase the likelihood that a student could be served by bus transportation in unsafe, dense, urban traffic areas.*

**Innovative Practice 4:** *Improve bus monitoring systems to support efficiency, increase driver accountability, and improve student monitoring*

Many of the challenges in our bus fleet are the result of ineffective monitoring systems. For example, an online GPS tracking system would allow school districts (and SCDE) to receive regular reports of breakdowns, late buses, and driver behaviors to improve efficiencies in the system and to more accurately pinpoint challenges.

*Section 59-67-240- Other duties of the driver: The driver shall be responsible for maintaining good conduct upon his bus, and shall report promptly to the governing head of the school to or from which the pupils are trans-ported any misconduct or violation*

The responsibility of monitoring student conduct is a clear legislatively mandated expectation of the driver. Real-time video monitoring systems of students and drivers during these unstructured times would provide documentation should any unsafe behaviors occur.

The addition of these safety resources would also make it possible for wi-fi to be added to buses, helping students optimize their ride and wait times by using school-provided technology for homework time.

***Recommended State Policy Position:*** *The General Assembly should appropriate the necessary funds to equip all buses with wi-fi and bus driver and passenger monitoring, including GPS tracking, two-way communications, cameras, and microphones.*

## *Thank You*

In preparing this document, the Greenville County School Board Advocacy Committee Transportation Workgroup met with a wide variety of stakeholders. We would like to offer our sincerest thanks to the following individuals who shared their time and talents with us as we studied this important topic. Dr. Burke Royster, Mr. Adam James, Mr. David Poag, Mr. Phillip Davie, and Ms. Betty Farley from Greenville County Schools; Ms. Virgie Chambers, Ms. Emily Heatwole, Mr. Tim Camp and Mr. Mike Bullman from the State Department of Education; Dr. Gregory McCord, Beaufort County Schools; Mr. Jeff Scott, Charleston County Schools; Ms. Katy Smith, Piedmont Heath Foundation; Mr. Gary Shepard and Ms. Nicole McAden, Greenlink; and many other dedicated and interested individuals.

