

Hays CISD Bus Fleet Seatbelt Plan

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BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

On March 22, 2024, the Hays CISD family suffered a tragic loss and a devastating trauma. A concrete pumper truck struck bus #1106 causing unspeakable and irreversible consequences. The lives of so many are forever changed, especially those of the Montoya and Wallace families who lost young, 5-year-old Ulises and a soon-to-be doctoral graduate, Ryan. Many others were injured and affected by this crash and will have very long recovery journeys ahead.

The concrete truck driver, and the company for which he worked, will have to answer charges and calls for accountability stemming from the crash in both the criminal and civil courts. Hays CISD is grateful that the justice system is working swiftly. Additionally, lawmakers and agencies at the local, state, and federal levels are revisiting the rules in place that govern commercial concrete truck drivers to see if changes can be enacted that will prevent the circumstances that led to this crash from ever happening again. Hays CISD is looking at what it can do too.

One item of concern arising from the crash pertains to seatbelts on school buses. Hays CISD is in compliance with the state's laws regarding seatbelts on buses. However, given the justified community concern, the district has committed to accelerating the normal bus replacement cycle to have a bus fleet fully equipped with seatbelts at the absolute soonest possible date. We may never know for sure if a seatbelt on the school bus would have made a difference for Ulises. But, if there is even a chance that it would have done so, Hays CISD must do more than is required. And, we will.

Hays CISD has never shied from addressing safety concerns, nor has the district spared any expense in terms of providing the safest learning environment possible for its students and staff – that includes the school buildings and the buses. Prior to the accident on March 22, 2024, the issue of seatbelts on buses had not surfaced, compared to building security and preventing acts of violence on campus, as one of the top pressing concerns during the district's continuing safety discussions and improvements. Bus accidents with injuries are incredibly rare. No student in Texas died in a school bus accident in 2023; and since 2009, the oldest available data according to the Texas Education Agency Bus Accident Reporting System, most years in Texas see no children die in school bus accidents. School buses are incredibly safe.

Since the crash, the district has heard from parents and community members on the seatbelt matter. Hays CISD is aware of the national debate about whether to equip school buses with seatbelts at all, given that buses are designed differently than passenger cars in terms of crash force absorption and that seatbelts may impede bus evacuations in crashes involving fire or underwater submersion. However, for the district, the debate is moot. In 2017, Texas law changed requiring school buses purchased after that year to be equipped with seatbelts.

With an urgent understanding of the seatbelt concern, a vigilant shared call to action, and a firm understanding that safety is paramount, Hays CISD has developed the following framework that will allow the district, without hesitation, to achieve a completely seatbelt-equipped bus fleet.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE:

ACHIEVE, AT THE SOONEST POSSIBLE DATE, A HAYS CISD SCHOOL BUS FLEET WITH 100% OF THE BUSES IN SERVICE EQUIPPED WITH SEATBELTS

THE CURRENT FLEET AND OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Hays CISD school bus fleet consists of route buses, support buses, and decommissioned buses awaiting auction or disposal.

Route buses are used to transport students to and from school each day. They are also always the first-choice option for field trips and other student transportation needs, so long as those activities do not interfere with the regular route service.

Support buses are held in reserve and are used primarily by coaches for athletics, or occasionally to temporarily replace route buses that are briefly out-of-service for maintenance.

- All Hays CISD special education buses have seatbelts.
- On March 22, 2024, the date of the bus #1106 crash, Hays CISD operated 109 bus routes (72 regular education routes and 37 special education routes).
- On March 22, 2024, all Hays CISD routes were assigned buses with seatbelts, except for 15 of the regular education bus routes.
- The district routinely uses about 40 buses from the support bus fleet on a daily basis.
- In addition to having seatbelts on all route buses, the district also needs to have about 80 buses with seatbelts in the support fleet, based on the current student population and transportation needs.
- As the district grows, the number of routes and the size of the needed support fleet will also grow.
- The current cost of new school buses is about \$160,000 each.
- The current cost of retrofitting buses that are between model years 2012 and 2017 is about \$36,000 each.
- The district is working as fast as it can to purchase, receive, and in-process new buses. In the meantime, buses without seatbelts will still need to be used, but as newer buses are placed into service, the buses without seatbelts will be cycled out of service.
- The district transports about 12,000 students to and from school each day, covering about 2.5 million miles each year.

MEASURING PROGRESS

The district's focus as this plan is implemented will be on the number of buses that are in service rather than the total number of district-owned buses. The total number of district-owned buses will fluctuate during the process. For example, the district will place into service new buses with seatbelts likely before it can auction off older buses without seatbelts. The number that will matter is the number of buses the district is actually using to transport children rather than the number of buses the district owns at any given time during this process.

Hays CISD Bus Fleet on Accident Date of March 22, 2024			
	Route Buses <i>(Special Education and Regular Education)</i>	Support Buses <i>(Special Education and Regular Education)</i>	Decommissioned Buses
Total	109	107	0
Without Seatbelts	15	87	N/A

Hays CISD Bus Fleet Goal at the Soonest Possible Date			
	Route Buses <i>(Special Education and Regular Education)</i>	Support Buses <i>(Special Education and Regular Education)</i>	Decommissioned Buses
Total	115	80	All buses without seatbelts that may happen to still be owned by the district.
Without Seatbelts	0	0	N/A

PLAN FRAMEWORK & PRIMARY COMPONENTS

The following plan framework components will be addressed simultaneously:

COMPONENT 1: IN-PROCESSING EXISTING RECEIVED BUSES

The district is in the final receiving phase of 21 buses that are being outfitted with cameras, decals, numbering, and GPS equipment. These buses are coming online now and through the next couple of weeks. By April 30, 2024, all regular route buses and 6 reserve fleet buses will have seatbelts.

Funding: Included in previously adopted bond measures.

At completion of Component 1	
Route Buses	Total Support Buses with Seatbelts
<i>All buses will have seatbelts.</i>	6

COMPONENT 2: IN-PROCESSING EXISTING BUS ORDERS

The district is awaiting receipt of 8 additional regular education 2023 model buses from the manufacturer. No receipt date is confirmed.

On August 10, 2023, the district ordered 7 regular education 2024 model buses from the manufacturer. No receipt date is confirmed.

The current turn-around time from the purchase of a school bus to receipt of the bus is approximately 12 months. There are only three major manufacturers of school buses in the United States. Some smaller companies make buses, but they are not approved to make school buses that will meet safety requirements to operate in Texas.

Funding: Included in previously adopted bond measures.

At completion of Component 2	
Route Buses	Total Support Buses with Seatbelts
<i>All buses will have seatbelts.</i>	21

COMPONENT 3: RETROFITTING 2016 AND 2017 BUSES WITH SEATBELTS

The district has nine 2017 model buses and four 2016 model buses that can be retrofitted for about \$36,000 each.

The district owns no 2015, 2014, or 2012 model year buses that can be retrofitted. There are two 2013 model year buses in inventory that could be retrofitted, but the recommendation on those buses would be to purchase new buses instead. Because of their age, 2013 model year buses have a limited number of useful service years left.

Retrofitting buses that are model years 2011 and older are more difficult and fiscally impractical. The seats on those buses would need to be replaced, as well as the flooring on each bus, to support seatbelt anchoring. Funding that would be used to retrofit 2011 and older model buses would be better used to purchase new buses instead.

Funding: \$468,000 needed. The source could either be bond interest money or surplus bond funds. No time estimate is confirmed, but this is likely much faster than purchasing new buses.

At completion of Component 3	
Route Buses	Total Support Buses with Seatbelts
<i>All buses will have seatbelts.</i>	34

COMPONENT 4: ACCELERATING THE PURCHASE OF 2025 BUSES

The 2023 Hays CISD bond, which was approved by voters, included approximately \$1.5 million for the purchase of about nine 2025 model buses. The recommendation is to accelerate the purchase of these buses. Additionally, the district proposes using bond interest money or surplus bond money to purchase 21 more buses for a total bus purchase in the batch of 30 buses.

Action item to the Board in either April or May 2024 for authorization to purchase the buses.

Funding: \$4.8 million needed (\$1.5 million from 2023 bond funds + \$3.3 million in bond interest or surplus bond money)

At completion of Component 4	
Route Buses	Total Support Buses with Seatbelts
<i>All buses will have seatbelts.</i>	64

COMPONENT 5: INCLUDING TRANSPORTATION ITEMS IN THE MAY 2025 BOND MEASURE

The Facilities and Bond Oversight Committee (FBOC) will soon be putting items together for potential inclusion in a bond measure that would go to voters in May 2025. The recommendation would be to include at least 16 additional regular education buses to bring the spare bus fleet to the goal of 80, and six more buses to accommodate the anticipated increase in the number of bus routes in Hays CISD because of growth. The minimum total package of new buses for a proposed 2025 bond initiative would be 22 regular education buses.

Additionally, the FBOC may also consider including in the bond special transportation vehicles such as trip buses to further enhance safety for Hays CISD students traveling away on school business.

Funding: At least \$3.6 million, but likely more depending on the final number of buses and special transportation vehicles included in the bond measure.

At completion of Component 5	
Route Buses	Total Support Buses with Seatbelts
<i>All buses will have seatbelts. (Total of 115 routes – an increase from the 109 routes at the time of the creation of this plan).</i>	<i>80</i>

An additional component for consideration is exploring leasing buses with seatbelts until Hays CISD is able to receive from the manufacturer its new buses.