

Elk Island Public Schools' Student Transportation believes that using the alternately flashing lights and the stop arm to attempt to control traffic in a large urban area is not the safest practice for students.



BACKGROUND

The practice of school buses stopping traffic with flashing red lights was originally intended for use on rural roads only. The reason is that rural roads are usually operated at a higher speed limit with no curbs and gutters, stop signs, signals, crosswalks or other traffic control devices to properly assist pedestrians to cross the road.

The Provincial Government did not allow “school buses” to stop traffic on roadways with a posted speed limit of 50 km/hour or less until 1986. In 1986, the Provincial Government revised the Alberta “Highway Traffic Act” to allow municipalities to regulate school bus flashing lights within their jurisdictions. Alberta Transportation indicates that municipalities were empowered to make this decision due to their expert knowledge of local road networks. The Minister of Transportation at the time also urged Alberta municipalities to incorporate the necessary regulations in their Traffic Bylaws before the revised “Highway Traffic Act” came into effect.

In a letter from then, Transportation Minister, Alan Adair, he was quoted *“In some low speed urban situations, it is better to require students on school buses to use existing traffic controls such as stop signs or signals and crosswalks than to depend on school bus warning lights for protection. Where well marked intersections and roadways are present, it is actually safer to use those markings and devices than use the flashing bus lights. With this in mind, the amendment authorizes....urban centers....to pass a bylaw that exempts school buses from the requirement to use alternately flashing lamps on any street or roadway”*

Recently, several cities across Alberta looked into whether implementing School Bus flashing lights will make their communities safer. The following is a summary of their findings:

- 1) *“Where well marked intersections and roadways are present, it is actually safer to use those markings and devices than to use flashing school bus lights.”*
- 2) *“Allowing school buses to stop randomly mid-block and have children cross the street in front of the school buses is unsafe and increases the pedestrian accident risk.”*
- 3) *Non-compliance with flashing red lights and stop arms is an identified problem in jurisdictions that mandate their use. This puts children at risk for collisions.*
- 4) *Mandating the use of flashing red light and stop arm cannot guarantee students safety during loading-unloading of the school buses; rather this could increase the risk of a collision by providing false sense of security to the students while crossing the road.*

Key Points

- It has been found that the perceived benefits of using the alternating flashing lights and stop arm in urban areas do not outweigh the risks for children and road users.
- The School Bus creates a visibility barrier for students and motorists when students are required to cross in front of the bus. The sight lines for both students and motorists are clearer if students wait in the safety zone and cross the street at an intersection after the bus has departed.
- There are frequent opportunities for safe crossing at marked crosswalks and intersections in an urban setting. Student are educated to cross the street only at intersections.
- In urban areas, Alberta Transportation encourages parents to teach their children the *Point, Pause and Proceed* method to safely cross the street at intersections and marked crosswalks.
- As per the S-Endorsement, when flashing red lights and stop arms are activated in an urban setting, students are directed to cross the street in front of the bus at the mid-block stop rather than at crosswalks and intersections. This does not adhere to the *Point, Pause and Proceed* method.
- Unlike intersections these mid-block areas may not be cleared of snow and students will be climbing over windrows. Students could slip and fall under the bus.
- Non-compliance of flashing red lights and stop arms is an identified problem in jurisdiction that mandate their use. It is very difficult for a bus operators to obtain enough information to convict fly-by offenders.
- Flashing red lights and stop arms provide students with a false sense of security. The assumption is oncoming traffic will stop because the red lights and stop arm has been activated.

