



## Joint Release

### **Lethbridge School Division and Holy Spirit Catholic School Division**

*Monday, November 25, 2019*

---

Lethbridge School Division and Holy Spirit Catholic School Division have raised concerns related to the City of Lethbridge's Fiscal and Operational Performance Review, and the recommendation to sever the collaborative relationship currently in place to provide school transportation services.

Both school divisions are proud of the unique relationship developed with the city over a number of years. It is a relationship touted as a model to aspire to provincially, and a model other regions are looking to implement in some capacity.

"Lethbridge could be walking away from the current opportunity to model the 'new standard' in school bus operations being examined by the province," said Lethbridge School Division Supt. Cheryl Gilmore. "We should be proud of being the only jurisdiction in North America that has a collaborative model that benefits the young residents of the city, provides reliable transportation and peace of mind to parents at no additional cost to the taxpayers of the city, including our parents."

Both school divisions have a number of concerns in relation to the operational review itself. The primary issue noted is that costs exceed revenues.

"It certainly came as quite a surprise to hear that the collaboration that we've shared has been burdensome," said Holy Spirit Catholic School Division Supt. Chris Smeaton. "While the partnership has never been about making a profit, it has always been our intent that it operates on a cost-recovery basis. We've never been told that this has not been the case. In fact, we were just informed by the City that the surplus funds from the previous year's operations would help decrease our overall costs for the upcoming year. If this is somehow in error, we are certainly wanting to listen and respond."

Historically, the five decades of joint bussing services has been beneficial to all of the partners involved. For the City, the current fleet is used to its maximum capacity and a culture of ridership is encouraged for future regular transit use. The school divisions are able to operate more efficiently with the shared system, ensuring they have balanced transportation budgets. The result is parents have not been charged a transportation fee for students living 2.4 kilometres or more from their resident school, though Holy Spirit has had to charge a transportation fee of \$20/month for elementary students transported from 1.2-2.4 kilometres.

“Transportation fees are a reality for parents in almost every jurisdiction that contracts for-profit companies to operate school busses,” said Smeaton. “This would be a devastating change for parents in Lethbridge who are used to not having this burden, thanks to the partnership currently in place with the City of Lethbridge and the two school divisions.”

**SCHOOL BUS FACTS AND FIGURES:**

In the 2018/2019 school year, school divisions made payments to the City, which totaled \$3.2 million. This included:

	Lethbridge SD	Holy Spirit CSD	Total
<b>Yellow School Bus Services and Administration</b>	\$1,602,013	\$1,191,444	\$2,793,457
<b>School Bus Charters (Field Trips)</b>	\$39,600	\$27,150	\$66,750
<b>Access-A-Ride</b>	\$142,432	\$31,450	\$173,882
<b>Special Needs Bus Operating costs</b>	\$60,572	n/a	\$60,572
<b>Transit Breeze Passes/tickets</b>	\$115,375	n/a	\$115,375
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$3,210,036</b>

For the 2019/2020 school year, the school divisions anticipate paying approximately \$2.8 million for the following Lethbridge Transit yellow bus service charges: insurance (\$258,300), wages and benefits for the Lethbridge Transit Co-ordinator, bus drivers and other administrative personnel (\$1,523,900), bus maintenance and operating costs (\$804,500) and other overhead and administrative charges (\$228,100). This does not include funds that will pay for Access-A-Ride, School Bus Charters, Special Needs Bus, and Transit Breeze Passes/tickets (note – purchase of Breeze passes financially supports the regular transit system).

“This co-ordinated effort for transportation, in a collaborative relationship, is the model for efficient operations,” said Gilmore. “Further to this, with our agreement with the city, provincial funding for transportation stays in Lethbridge, rather than leaving the city, which would be the case if the divisions are forced to enter into a third-party bussing contract.”

***For more information about this release please contact:***

*Dr. Cheryl Gilmore, Superintendent*  
**Lethbridge School Division**  
 Email: cheryl.gilmore@lethsd.ab.ca  
 Phone: (403) 380-5300

*Chris Smeaton, Superintendent*  
**Holy Spirit Catholic School Division**  
 Email: smeatonc@holyspirit.ab.ca  
 Phone: (403) 327-9555