

REPORT OF THE TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
March 1, 2004

The Transportation Advisory Committee consisted of the following:
School Committee: Michael Houdlette and William Doherty
Finance Committee: Geoff Swett and Patricia Rumney
Parents: Wendy Brogioli, Bob Buchenan, Beth Zahara
School Department: Dr. LaGue, Dr. Collins, and Mr. Netto

The Transportation Advisory Committee has met three evenings to review issues concerning the transportation of students to and from school. The recommendations of this committee can be classified under the following three broad areas of concern:

- I. The mandated replacement of the Carpenter busses has given rise to the re-consideration of privatization of the municipal transportation services. To ascertain whether our current operation was still less costly than privatization, a survey of sixteen other communities was conducted. These communities were selected based on similarity to Wareham and/or the recentness of their bid openings. Wareham's cost to operate a regular education round trip run was \$141 per day or \$25,336 per year. The comparison costs ranged from a low of \$188 per day or \$34,000 per year to a high of \$344 per day or \$61,920 per year. The average cost of this comparison group was \$224 per day or \$40,044 per year.

Recommendation 1: Based upon this evidence, the Advisory Committee finds that our municipally operated transportation department is cost effective and should be continued. However, in order to maintain public confidence in the cost effectiveness of the municipal operation, it is the recommendation that every five years a public bid be solicited for the privatization of the entire operation. The first bid will be scheduled to be opened in February of 2006.

Recommendation 2: The purchase of 12 replacement busses should be approved at the April 2004 Town Meeting. To mitigate the cost of these replacements, it is recommended that approximately 50% of these purchases be used busses, assuming that good used vehicles are available. The balance of the vehicles should be new. A bid will be solicited for the cost of new and used vehicles as soon as possible. The split purchase between new and used vehicles would serve to stagger the time of their eventual replacement. It is the recommendation of this Advisory Committee that capital expenditures be routinely included in the budget for the replacement of vehicles.

II. The charging of bus fees for students in grades 7 through 12 was considered. State law prohibits the charging of fees for students in kindergarten through grade 6, for those who receive free and reduced lunch, and for students who require special needs transportation services. A range in fees was discussed that ran from a minimal fee of \$36 per year to an upper range of \$200 per year. There was discussion of family caps in order to avoid hardships for large families. It was felt that if the minimal fee were charged the amount of money raised would not be worth the expenditure of effort in collecting the fee nor the cost of goodwill in the parent community. If the fee were raised to the upper level, it was felt that there would be considerable resistance and the effort entailed in collecting the fee would be increased perhaps requiring the addition of secretarial staff, which would further reduce the incentive for charging the fee in the first place. It was also feared that a large fee would significantly reduce ridership. In some communities, fees have resulted in a 20% reduction in ridership. If this were to become the case in Wareham, there could be several hundred additional students either driving, or being driven to the high school and middle school. It was felt that this could create a serious safety hazard in that Viking Drive and spill-over traffic onto Marion Road already is at capacity. The Chair of the Finance Committee, Mr. Geoff Swett, had indicated that the fiscal situation the town currently faces, although difficult, would not require serious reductions of services for the town. Accordingly, it was felt that mandatory fees were not advisable at the current time.

Recommendation 3: Although mandatory fees might become a possibility in the future, they are not recommended at the current time. It was suggested that parents be asked to pay a voluntary fee of no specified amount to assist in the approximate \$400 per year cost of transporting children. Any contributions would be deposited in the transportation revolving account.

Recommendation 4: It is also recommended that if room is available on a bus, current walkers be afforded the option of paying a \$150 fee to ride the bus.

III. There was a discussion of using advertising on the busses to raise money to assist in the operation of the fleet. The advisory committee had local businesses surveyed to determine if there was interest in such advertising at the cost of \$500 per bus. Seven local businesses expressed some interest. Each business would be asked to bear an additional charge of approximately \$370 to manufacture and mount the advertisement. At the current time, we have not determined the number of busses that would be involved or finalized any commitment. There was concern expressed that the wording on an advertisement would have to be limited. It is proposed that an advertisement be limited to the name of the company and a logo or advertising device that it uses. This advertising would be accompanied by a phrase that indicates "...supports the education of the children of Wareham", for example. All advertisements would be screened to determine appropriateness. State law specifically prohibits alcohol and tobacco products.

Recommendation 5: It is recommended that the School Committee consider piloting a bus advertising campaign as outlined above.

Transportation Cost Analysis

TOWN	DAILY - 04/05	Annual Per Bus		
Auburn	\$248	\$44,640		
Barnstable	\$244	\$40,320		
Bedford	\$232	\$41,760		
Bourne	\$188	\$34,000		
Dartmouth	\$253	\$45,518		
E. Bridgewater	\$210	\$36,000		
Falmouth	\$197	\$35,406		
Grafton	\$214	\$38,520		
Harvard	\$219	\$39,420		
Sandwich	\$212	\$38,160		
Newton	\$344	\$61,920		
North Attleboro	\$197	\$35,460		
Plymouth	\$211	\$38,101		
Wareham	\$141	\$25,336		
Wellesley	\$235	\$42,300		
Wilmington	\$247	\$44,460		
Winchester	\$219	\$39,420		
Average Daily Cost	\$224			
Average Yearly Cost		\$40,044		