

# School Bus Information Letter

## Number School Bus Information Letter

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Dear Colleague:

Enclosed please find a new FTA brochure, "[School Bus Information](#)," developed in response to questions regarding the appropriate use of public transportation buses for school transportation. As you know, Federal transit law places limits on grantees with regard to the provision of school bus service, including buses for school activity trips, in competition with private school bus operators. The brochure explains these limitations, but it is important to understand the circumstances under which a public transit agency is permitted to transport students to school or school activities, as well.

### **Permissible Use of Public Transportation for School Bus Service**

One permissible use of public transportation vehicles for school bus service involves "tripper service" – which is defined as regularly scheduled public transportation service that is open to the public and designed or modified to meet the travel needs of school students and personnel using various fare collection or subsidy systems. We understand that there has been some confusion about the short list of prohibited signage on buses providing "tripper service" that is found in FTA regulations (49 CFR Part 605). Please note that the list is illustrative only; it is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all prohibited signage. Further, in addition to signage, any other indication that the bus may not be open to the general public is prohibited. Further, the provision that "buses may stop only at a grantee's or operator's regular service stop" means that all stops must be accessible to the public and must be clearly marked as public stops (except in the case of traditionally unmarked flag stops).

### **Using Privately-Owned School Buses to Supplement Public Transportation**

While public transit agencies are limited in providing school bus service, it is important to note that you are not prohibited from using privately-owned school buses to supplement your regular public transportation fleet. Many school districts throughout the nation contract with private school bus companies to provide cost-effective supplemental service or full service to students in their communities. Likewise, public transit agencies may find that private school bus companies can help keep their communities safe and mobile, by providing supplemental services to regular public transportation. Working with private school bus operators to provide supplemental public transportation service can help communities make more efficient use of their resources, while increasing mobility for community residents.

As you may know, in many communities, contractor-owned school buses are idle for many hours of the weekday and most of the weekends. This means they could be available for short mid-day and weekend routes, which can serve popular destinations like shopping malls, grocery stores, senior centers, and medical facilities. They can be used to augment demand-response and paratransit service, particularly in communities where public agency resources cannot meet the demand. Privately owned school bus fleets can also be particularly helpful in non-urban areas, where public transportation is limited or, in some cases, non-existent.

All FTA grantees are required to involve the private sector in their planning process, and we recommend that you involve local private school bus companies among those private transportation providers that you include in your annual planning and budgeting processes. They will need, of course, sufficient information to provide informed proposals to assist you in expanding services or avoiding fare increases or service reductions.

Private transportation providers are an important component of our community transportation networks. I know that I can count on you to help ensure that they continue to enhance the mobility of our residents by providing cost-effective transportation options.

Sincerely,

Jennifer L. Dorn