

# Op-Ed

## Legislature funds bus routing system; students' rides to be shorter, cheaper

From the North Carolina General Assembly

Is Johnny spending too much time waiting for a school bus that never seems to come? Is little Jane spending too much time on a school bus that seems to have chosen the long way home? Not to worry: the Legislature has come to their rescue.

The General Assembly recently appropriated \$1.1 million to fund a new tool to help create efficient, practical busing routes, and it's soon to be available to all school units throughout the state.

Called the Transportation Information Management System (TIMS), the tool is a computeriz-

ed mapping system which will take the addresses of the students eligible to ride school buses and electronically combine and re-combine them, drawing maps which make the best use of available drivers and buses.

The system's advanced software allows for electronic "cutting" and "pasting" of possible routes. Similar systems are used in major metropolitan areas to route public transportation and in the private sector to deliver mail, packages, and to pick up garbage.

Twelve school units began using the tool during 1986-87. Twenty-seven additional units have committed to begin the program dur-

ing 1988-89. The system could be in use throughout North Carolina by 1991-92.

With the federally-mandated switch to adult bus drivers and this year's dramatic expansion of remedial summer school programs, public school transportation costs could skyrocket. When added to the uncertainty over Middle East fuel supplies and generally rising fuel costs, cost-effective routes and schedules become all the more critical.

Improved efficiency will result in future savings to the state and to the local units by requiring less fuel, fewer repairs to existing buses and eventually, fewer school buses.



When the TIMS system is in place throughout North Carolina, it could reduce pupil transportation costs by 10 to 20 percent. During the current year, state-funded transportation costs were approximately \$115 million.

In addition, the mapping system should reduce the amount of time students spend on and wait for buses. It also will allow school administrators to be able to create and maintain bus routes more

quickly and more easily than school administrators now can alone.

North Carolina has 13,000 public school buses (the eighth largest fleet in the nation) which travel approximately 660,000 miles every school day and transport more than 700,000 students.

Note: Alamance County is one of the 27 to begin using the TIMS system for the 1988-89 school year.



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