

**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE  
BILL ANALYSIS**

**Bill Number:** SB 576

**51st Legislature, 1st Session, 2013**

**Tracking Number:** .191427.1

**Short Title:** School Bus GPS Devices

**Sponsor:** Senator Howie C. Morales

**Analyst:** David Craig

**Date:** February 28, 2013

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**FOR THE LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE**

**Bill Summary:**

SB 576 makes an appropriation to the Public Education Department (PED) for the purpose of installing and operating security and global positioning system (GPS) devices in public school buses statewide.

**Fiscal Impact:**

\$565,000 is appropriated from the General Fund to PED for FY 14. Unexpended or unencumbered funds revert to the General Fund.

**Substantive Issues:**

During the 2012 interim, the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) convened a school transportation subcommittee to examine school bus transportation data, funding, and safety issues and to provide recommendations to the full committee prior to the 2013 legislative session.

During the October 2012 subcommittee meeting, members discussed the distribution of available transportation dollars and the need for additional site characteristics used in the current transportation calculation, including transportation in high elevation areas, on different road surfaces, for large land areas, and for charter school students. In order to consider any changes to the formula, however, subcommittee members stated that changes to the site characteristics should be considered only if consistent and accurate data are available for the school transportation program statewide. In response to that concern, PED staff reported that the department used \$966,400 from a 2007 capital outlay appropriation to purchase a statewide GPS that has the capability to determine site characteristics related to mileage by school district; however, the system is currently not funded.

In preparation for the November 2012 LESC Transportation Subcommittee meeting, staff contacted vendors of school transportation GPS for information. Information from one GPS vendor indicates that all school buses in New Mexico currently are formatted with the hardware to use the vendor's service. Another vendor reported doing business with nine districts, one contractor, and one nonprofit organization in the state.

Vendors generally cite benefits of a GPS, such as the following:

- increased efficiency and safety;
- creation of an audit trail;
- improved fleet maintenance; and
- increased data for policymakers.

**Background:**

The LESC has discussed the issue of data to inform school site characteristics since at least 2001. In response to a member’s question during the 2000 interim regarding additional site characteristics that affect school transportation operations, staff from the then State Department of Education (SDE) reported that among site characteristics identified by the department for formula refinements are roadway miles, elevation, and high fuel costs.

Also during the 2000 interim, SDE staff noted that charter schools had an impact on district transportation allocations because charter school transportation costs are provided from the school district’s annual transportation allocation. In most instances, staff reported, the charter school negotiates with the school district for services. However, if the negotiations result in additional bus routes, or if a charter school decides to provide its own transportation services, the school district is faced with providing additional buses. To address these issues, the then State Board of Education requested funding in the 2001 legislative session for a transportation information system that would determine site characteristics by school district.

During the August 2012 LESC Transportation Subcommittee meeting, members heard testimony from Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) staff regarding the findings of a May 2011 LFC School Bus Transportation Program Evaluation. The program evaluation included findings regarding the expenditure of the \$966,400 from a 2007 capital outlay appropriation to purchase a Statewide Public School Bus Global Positioning System that was awarded to Zonar Systems. As part of its contract with Zonar, PED also purchased the ZPass system, which records student ridership. This system was piloted in Deming Public Schools with plans to expand usage for Albuquerque Public Schools, Las Cruces Public Schools, Rio Rancho Public Schools, and Gallup-McKinley County Public Schools as additional pilots using 2010 General Obligation Bond (GOB) funds.

The response to the program evaluation from PED in 2011 said GPS for the state of New Mexico will definitely provide accurate mileage and ridership data which is a fundamental component of the current transportation formula and will require buy-in from the Legislature before the state continues with this service.

Also according to the LFC program evaluation report, there is potential for:

- PED to recapture the annual subscription fee if the data are analyzed and used properly, by:
  - monitoring bus idle time to reduce fuel consumption;
  - reducing administrative costs associated with the need for districts to manually capture and report data; and
  - reducing the amount of time spent verifying ridership while improving security; and

- the GPS-driven system to:
  - significantly increase the division's management of the buses;
  - improve administration of the transportation program;
  - reduce cost; and
  - reduce manpower.

**Committee Referrals:**

SEC/SFC

**Related Bills:**

HB 328 *School Bus Fuel Gross Receipts*

HB 419a *School Transportation Reporting Dates*

\*HB 447 *Transportation Emergency Fund*

HB 603 *School District Bus Rental Fee Times*